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## **ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS (SONA) 2019: THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS (DODMV)**

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### **1. Introduction**

President C. Ramaphosa delivered his State of the Nation Address (SONA) on 7 February 2019. Renewed efforts to boost economic growth, addressing challenges at state-owned enterprises and broadening the fight against corruption dominated the SONA. With these focal points dominating the address, little emphasis was placed on matters pertaining to the Department of Defence and Department of Military Veterans (DODMV). However, reference was made to the domestic role of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and possible changes to be introduced related to the state's national security planning.

### **2. What is SONA 2019 saying about the sector?**

The 2019 SONA made only one direct reference to the defence portfolio by referencing the role of the SANDF in addressing the sewage crisis in the Vaal River.<sup>1</sup> The SANDF was ordered to assist with the refurbishment of the sewage plants in and around the Emfuleni Municipality in order to address the spillage of raw sewage into the Vaal River system. The 12 month project, which terminates in December 2019, will see more than 200 SANDF members, including specialists engineers, work to rehabilitate the water treatment network in the area.<sup>2</sup>

The president further noted that “steps we will take to reconstitute a professional national intelligence capability will be the re-establishment of the National Security Council chaired by the President in order to ensure better coordination of the intelligence and security related functions of the State”.<sup>3</sup> While the statement had direct

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<sup>1</sup> Ramaphosa (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Phakgadi (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Ramaphosa (2019).



reference to the restructuring of the state's intelligence services, it holds implications for the defence sector. The military will form a crucial part of the National Security Council and the council will likely contribute to the determining of the country's future defence trajectory. This, in turn, will have a significant impact on emerging defence policy and subsequent defence requirements.

Furthermore, the President made brief mention of Operation Phakisa and that since its launch in 2014 the oceans economy has secured investments of nearly R30 billion and created over 7 000 employment opportunities.<sup>4</sup> While no direct reference was made to the role of the SANDF in Operation Phakisa, the SA Navy plays a key role in ensuring South Africa's shipping lanes and maintaining the territorial integrity of the country's exclusive economic zone.

Lastly, South Africa has in 2019 taken up a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council and the President noted that "we will use this position to advance peace on the continent and across the globe, taking forward Nelson Mandela's vision of a peaceful, stable and just world."<sup>5</sup> It can therefore be expected that the SANDF's peacekeeping role in Africa will continue over the medium to long term. The SANDF currently only contributes forces to the UN peacekeeping missions in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). During 2017/18, the SANDF deployed, on average, 1 145 members as part external peacekeeping operations in the DRC.<sup>6</sup> The SA Navy also takes part in external operations in the Mozambican channel to deter piracy and improve general maritime safeguarding.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. What has changed between SONA 2018 and SONA 2019?**

There was no apparent shift in the 2019 SONA relating to Defence. The most significant shift relates to the decreased reference to the military in particular and no direct reference to programmes related to military veterans. No specific reference was made of South Africa's current military deployments as in previous years. This is likely in line with the general reduction of deployments in recent years. Operation Phakisa was mentioned in 2018 and 2019 and although the SANDF's role in this regard is not directly stated, it continues to play an important role in securitising South African waters. Any further expansion of Operation Phakisa will therefore include a role for the SANDF, notably the SA Navy and SA Air Force. Finally, the reference to the National Security Committee in 2019 possibly signifies a new direction for security planning in South Africa. The specific role that the SANDF will play will most likely be determined by such a committee and subsequent policy development will be impacted. Parliament's role in monitoring such policy developments will be essential.

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<sup>4</sup> Ramaphosa (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Ramaphosa (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Department of Defence (2016). p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> DOD (2018). p. 65.



#### **4. Are these strategic objectives aligned with the National Development Plan and the 2014-19 Medium Term Strategic Framework?**

Chapter 7 of the NDP notes that, in global terms, South Africa's foreign policy must be shaped by the interplay between Diplomatic, political, security, environmental, economic and regional co-operative dynamics that define early 21st century international relations. The SANDF's continued participation in peace missions and the utilisation of the military as a foreign policy tool is thus in line with this vision of the NDP.

Section 2.1 of the MTSF notes the need to "open new areas of economic growth such as the oceans economy." This was again highlighted in the 2019 SONA through reference to Operation Phakisa. The SA Navy's likely role in this operation is thus in line with Government efforts to ensure the realisation of radical economic transformation through opening the oceans economy.

#### **5. What are the implications of these priorities for service delivery in the sector?**

Two indirect implications that may affect the SANDF should be considered. Firstly, President Ramaphosa identified the need to accelerate economic growth in South Africa.<sup>8</sup> The current slow rate of economic growth will continue to impact on military capacity in South Africa. Spending on personnel in the SANDF is significantly higher than the desired norm. While the 2015 Defence Review noted that personnel spending should be brought to 40%, the DOD spent 57.25% of its budget on personnel in 2017/18.<sup>9</sup> This significantly impacts on the ability of the military to procure new equipment and to appropriately fund operations. Secondly, in his reference to the SANDF operations in the Emfuleni Municipality, President Ramaphosa also noted that "we will call on all the capabilities of the state and the private sector to address infrastructure challenges." This may signify a continued and perhaps increased role for the SANDF in assisting with infrastructure challenges around the country. While a limited form of assistance in terms of such challenges may aid service delivery, it is debatable whether this represents the true function of the SANDF.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Given the focus on economic challenges and corruption, it is unsurprising that the SONA's defence focus was limited. Nonetheless, there are factors that Members can monitor. Most importantly, Members may consider the increased use of the military for domestic purposes such as assistance with infrastructure challenges. Members may inquire whether this is feasible and desirable in the long-term. Furthermore, the ongoing economic constraints will likely continue to impact on the SANDF budget and Members should continue, through oversight, to ensure thorough financial planning within the DODMV.

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<sup>8</sup> Ramaphosa (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Janse van Rensburg. (2018)



## References

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