

The defence force an essential part of society in SA

THE concept of civil-military relations lies at the heart of democracy.

The political culture of civil-military rests on a solid foundation of democracy.

Samuel Huntington, in his classic work titled *The Soldier and the State. The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, defines civil-military relations as a relationship between the military and civilians.

This interface between the armed forces and civilians means that military officers and the rank and file must subject themselves to civilian rule under the banner of civil control.

Since the dawn of democracy, South Africa has developed a good model of civil-military relations that other countries (across the globe) can look up to.

On the whole, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) behaves in a way that is non-partisan.

However, this does not imply that the South African armed forces are perfect.

In countries like Uganda, Egypt, Mali, the Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Somalia, Ethiopia, South and North Sudan, there are major political challenges with regard to civil-military relations.

Interestingly, in some quarters there is scepticism about the role of the military in South Africa.

For instance, during the Fees Must Fall protests some student political activists argued that the money allocated for the SANDF was wasted on the military, simply because the South African military was not involved in conventional wars and military officers were perceived as getting paid for doing nothing.

At face value, this argument sounds valid. However, when one examines it closely one finds some flaws in it.

It must be noted that I do not question the genuine cause of the Fees Must Fall

movement, calling for free education.

Nonetheless, I disagree with the premise of the arguments of some student leaders who want to do away with the armed forces.

First and most important, there is a direct link between security and development.

This means that for development to be promoted, one needs to have a stable political environment.

Among other things, this means that security threats, namely public violence, attacks on civilians and national security, should be avoided or prevented.

This is where the military comes into play by providing security to the country.

Second, the intellectual history of strategy as a concept is rooted in the military.

Strategy is no longer limited to armed forces in this day and age. Strategy is embedded in the thinking of public and private institutions when mapping out their long-term goals and trajectories.

Third, the SANDF has also employed the military as an instrument of fighting against poverty by creating jobs for the South African youth who are unemployed.

Fourth, the South African military plays a central role in promoting peace, stability, development and democracy on the African continent.

From my standpoint, it is contradictory for one to reject the role of the armed forces and yet be passionate about political issues as if the two (the military and politics) can be separated.

Niccolo Machiavelli, in his seminal work titled *The Prince*, has laid out a philosophical basis for the nexus between politics and power.

In my View



Ntsikelelo Breakfast

According to him, "the main foundation of every state, new states as well as ancient or composite ones, are good laws and good arms; and because you cannot have good laws without good arms, where there are good arms good laws inevitably follow."

According to Machiavelli, the military is an expression of power.

This is precisely because the military is an extension of politics.

Suffice to say, the military is not politically neutral.

Carl von Clausewitz, in his scholarly work titled *On War*, reminds us that "if war was meant to achieve a political purpose, everything that entered into war – social and economic preparation, strategic planning, the conduct of operations, the use of violence on all levels – should be determined by this purpose or at least accord with it".

Against this background, the military as an institution manoeuvres in a political terrain and signifies the political power of the state.

Reducing the military capabilities in South Africa will create scope for insecurity, and thereby pose a serious threat to both human and national security.

Military sociologist Professor Lindy Heineken (from Stellenbosch University) argues that there is political apathy among civilians in South Africa on the role of the military in society.

She goes on to say that there are few academic intellectuals in South Africa who are interested in military science, military political science and military sociology.

Effectively, this is an intellectual chal-



MEET THE MILITARY: The military interacts with civil society in events such as Armed Forces Day. In last year's event, held in Port Elizabeth, SANDF helicopters support a military beach landing at Kings Beach

Picture: FREDLIN ADRIAN

lenge as well to the scientific community in South Africa.

A way out of this problem is for both the media and the government of the day to educate the public about the role of the military in consolidating South Africa's democracy.

A number of young people across the

racial divide can be recruited from high schools, universities and colleges voluntarily to join the SANDF.

Last but not least, South African social scientists in institutions of higher learning need to include military science in the realm of social sciences as part of the curriculum in academic disciplines like polit-

ical science, sociology and media studies/journalism.

Most importantly, all these initiatives (proposed here in this piece) have a potential of raising awareness on the role of the armed forces in South Africa.

Dr Ntsikelelo Breakfast is senior lecturer in military political science at the University of Stellenbosch. (He writes at his private capacity.)

