

A critical analysis of the relationship between the South
African Defence Force and the South African Media from
1975-83

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Abstract

The main focus of this thesis is to show the nature of the relationship between the South African Defence Force and the local media from 1975-83. The thesis will analyse issues specifically relating to the nature of the relationship and show how and why they are relevant to understanding the authoritarianism of the apartheid state. The nature of the relationship will be conceptualised by way of the analogy of a marriage. The thesis will show that for the SADF the relationship was “a marriage of convenience” whereas for the media it was a “marriage of necessity”. This relationship operated within the context of a highly militarised society that has been termed a “Garrison State”. The apartheid government introduced legislation governing reporting of defence matters and the media (namely the South African Defence Act 1957 including amendments made up until 1980) that imposed legal constraints within which defence correspondents had to operate. Moreover, the MID’s secret monitoring of the local media reveals the extent to which the military distrusted the media. A sampling of the coverage of defence matters in a selection of newspapers will reveal how their editorial staffs and reporters operated in a situation where the flow of information was controlled by the military. This will also show that certain defence correspondents cultivated close relations with SADF personnel to ensure that they were kept informed. The thesis will also show how the SADF reacted to the international media exposure of Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer and how the SADF sought to limit the damage to its reputation by clamping down on the local media. The creation of two media commissions both headed by Justice MT Steyn, set out to investigate the manner in which local media reported on security issues in an environment in which the media and the public were confronted by the “Total Strategy” discourse of the apartheid government. The working relationship between the SADF and the media encapsulated in the thesis can be described as highly complex and the use of the “marriage” analogy assists in understanding this relationship.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANC – African National Congress

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BOSS – Bureau Of State Security

DOD – Department of Defence

FAPLA – People’s Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola

FNLA – National Liberation Front of Angola

JMCs – Joint Management Centres

MID – Military Intelligence Department

MPLA - Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola

NIS – National Intelligence Service

NSMS – National Security Management System

NP – National Party

NPU – Newspaper Press Union

NPU – National Press Union

PAC – Pan African Congress

POW – Prisoners Of War

PRO – Public Relations Officer

PR – Public Relations

SABC – South African Broadcasting Corporation

SADF – South African Defence Force

SANDEF – South African National Defence Force

SAPA – South African Press Association

SSC – State Security Council

SWAPO – South West Africa People’s Organisation

UDF – Union Defence Force

UK – United Kingdom

UNITA – National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

US – United States of America

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Introduction

It is the purpose of this thesis to analyse the relationship between the South African Defence Force and the media between 1975 and 1983. The thesis will commence with an account of South African media commissions since the Second World War and legislation governing the reporting of defence matters and the media with specific reference to the South African Defence Act of 1957 (including amendments made up until 1980). Mechanisms for controlling reporting on security matters such as censorship, the Press Code, the Newspaper Press Union/South African Defence Force Agreement and other strictures that defined the relationship between the apartheid government and the media will then be analysed. The thesis will then proceed to analyse Beaufre's "Total Strategy" and the Department of Defence's White Paper of 1977 "Total Onslaught" discourse. It will be suggested that such discourse insinuated itself into South African society which will be shown to be a "Garrison State". To strengthen the argument that apartheid South Africa was a "Garrison State", the thesis will analyse measures taken to manipulate and monitor the media. These include the Military Intelligence Department's secret media reports that reveal how it monitored press coverage relating to the SADF and Prime Minister PW Botha. The thesis will also scrutinize the relationship between the South African media and the Department of Defence as well as how they interacted with regard to the coverage of defence matters. The possibility that Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer were public relations disasters will be investigated by the thesis. The political fall-out of these PR disasters of Operations Savannah and Reindeer as well as the roles played by the Department of Defence and international media stemmed from international coverage of events to which local media were not granted access thereby increasing the tensions between the latter and the SADF. Finally, the thesis will show how the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding the South African Defence Force and the South African Police as well as the Report of The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media, made significant recommendations with regards to the reinforcement of the status quo in terms of reporting on security matters.

It should be stressed that very little research has been done previously regarding this field of study. This research will seek to fill that gap that exists in the body of knowledge. The research project spans the fields of History and Journalism. More specifically, it borrows insights from the sub-disciplines of military history and media studies. Although the thesis emphasises the role of the press, the term “media” is used interchangeably with “the press” as the thesis does mention other types of media (magazines, television etc.) besides the press. Also, the thesis makes a distinction between the use of the terms “SADF” and “South African military”. When the term “South African Military” is used, both SADF and the Department of Defence are being referred to. The research is undertaken within a specific historical time frame (1975-83) as it was a very tumultuous time in the relationship between the media and the SADF. The time period coincides with the height of apartheid South Africa as a “Garrison State” with censorship laws and a culture of secrecy creating an incredibly difficult environment for the media to operate within. Also, the time frame was chosen for pragmatic reasons, as the nature of the relationship between the media and the SADF was particularly strained between 1975 and 1983.

The central task of social research is that the production of knowledge is prioritised.¹ The manner in which the research was undertaken was via analysis of documentation and media coverage of historical events dating mainly between 1975 and 1983. The methodology was, firstly, to identify relevant material which sheds light on the relationship between the SADF and the media. This was done by searching for relevant material from Cory Library at Rhodes University. Then, secondly, the relevant material and necessary documents were located in and obtained from the appropriate repositories. Lastly, a critical analysis of these documents was undertaken to show what light they shed on the main issues involving the topic of research. Critical, in the sense that the word is used in this thesis, does not necessarily mean a negative view, but rather involves a reading of the documents in such a way as to evaluate what light they shed on the relationship between the SADF and the media.

It should be noted that all primary sources, except the Military Intelligence Department’s media reports, as well as material relating to P.W. Botha, were obtained from the Cory

¹ U. Flick, *Introducing research methodology: a beginner's guide to doing a research project* (Los Angeles, 2011), p.7.

Library at Rhodes University. The MID media reports were obtained from the SANDF Archives in Pretoria and are analysed to illustrate what newspaper coverage MID deemed important and what subjects it monitored. Material relating to P.W. Botha was sourced from the Centre for Contemporary History at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. Newspapers, obtained from the Cory Library provided coverage of defence matters that afforded insights into the relationship between the SADF and the media. Newspaper samples from 1975-83 of *Die Burger*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Cape Times*, *Die Afrikaner*, *EP Herald* and *Daily Dispatch*, were consulted so as to provide evidence of how defence force matters were covered by a range of newspapers. *Die Burger* should be viewed as an example of a pro-government publication whereas the *Rand Daily Mail* was more critical. It should be noted that the thesis deliberately sampled mainstream media publications so as to capture a narrow spectrum of reporting on the military from 1975 to 1983. Also, availability of newspapers played a role in this selection process. The spectrum which the thesis identified was representative of what the (mainly) white public was reading at the time. The importance of language should also be mentioned in that English and Afrikaans readers shared some perceptions about matters relating to the military, but not all. It should be noted that not all media institutions were critical of the SADF, and that conservative media institutions tended to support the activities of the SADF. Thus the use of newspapers as primary sources is important to the project of the thesis as it sheds light on the range of opinion expressed by the press on military matters.

The Defence Act of 1957 (with amendments up until 1980) is another primary source utilised in the thesis. It is analysed as an example of legislation instituted by the apartheid government to ensure that it had almost complete control of defence reporting and access to information regarding security matters. Other primary sources such as the Department of Defence White Paper of 1977 was consulted to show where the “Total Strategy”/ “Total Onslaught” discourse which gained currency in apartheid South Africa during the 1970s and 80s originated from. This discourse was employed not only by the apartheid government but also by the media. Thus this discourse became common currency as it was circulated the public sphere. The media commissions headed by Justice MT Steyn, namely The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding the South African Defence Force and the South African Police (1980), and The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Mass Media (1983) are analysed specifically to show how the apartheid

Government sought to redefine the local media environment following the damage caused to the reputation of the SADF by international media coverage of Operations Savannah and Reindeer.

During the process of producing the thesis, various problem areas were encountered. The unavailability of resources such as the *in camera* submissions made to both Steyn Commissions, not only hampered the research phase, but also the writing process. Unfortunately, no trace could be found of the *in camera* submissions made to both Steyn Commissions and thus the thesis had to make do without them. Language issues were also encountered. A fair amount of the resource material was published in Afrikaans, and thus had to be translated into English. *Die Burger*, for example, is an Afrikaans newspaper and its reports are widely quoted in the thesis. Difficulty with translating these reports were experienced as the reports generally used colloquial Afrikaans which could not always be directly translated as there existed a risk that the meaning and emphasis of the reports would be lost.

The thesis has referenced numerous published works. Books, journal articles and theses were consulted. One of the main secondary sources used is a M.A. thesis in Journalism by Graeme Addison entitled *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (MA Thesis: Rhodes University, 1980). Addison provides an account of how the military attempted to censor local media coverage of Operation Savannah when the story was broken by the international press. This thesis forms the basis for understanding the censorship of security information and how this influenced defence correspondents. Defence correspondents played a crucial role in the relationship between the SADF and the media and the nature of this relationship depended on the access to security information granted to defence correspondents and how they treated that information. Thus Addison's work informs my framing of the relationship between the SADF and the media. However, this thesis builds upon Addison's work by extending the time frame and drawing upon other published literature.

Apartheid South Africa's status as a "Garrison State" forms a key component of the argument of the thesis. In order to understand the concept of a "Garrison State" (phrase coined by Harold Lasswell in 1941²) more profoundly within the context of apartheid South Africa, various secondary sources were consulted. P. Frankel's *Pretoria's Praetorians: Civil-Military Relations in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1984) as well as B. Magubane's *From Detente to the Rise of the Garrison State* (Chapter 2 in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, Pretoria, 2006) specifically analyse the notion of the "Garrison State" with respect to apartheid South Africa. The reason for employing the notion of the "Garrison State" is to explain how apartheid South Africa conducted its relationship with the media and more specifically how it treated the print media. The relationship between the media and the South African military during the 1970s and 80s was extremely intricate and consisted of a fragile balance between self-censorship practised by the media and legislation ensuring that the media did not expose any of the activities of the South African military, unless the military gave them permission to do so.

A "Garrison State" can be characterised as a society in which the most powerful people are members of the defence establishment or are individuals closely linked with the military.³ This was true of apartheid South Africa from 1975 – 83. Hence, the media, and more specifically defence correspondents were expected to operate within a very secretive environment. The thesis will show how the MID 'screened' information about military matters for public consumption and frequently misinformed the public. The thesis will then proceed to look at the history of censorship in South Africa and how tensions between government and the media have many different sources. The thesis will show how the history of censorship in South Africa and the many varied sources of tension between the government and the media informed the relationship between the SADF and the media.

In order to analyse the relationship between the SADF and the media, the discussion has to be situated within a wider media context. The relationship between the SADF and the media was

² HD. Lasswell, "The Garrison State", *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46, 4, 1941, p.455.

³ *Ibid.*,

a microcosm of a broader relationship between the media and the apartheid government. The apartheid government had invested heavily into getting its opinion into the public domain. It had practical difficulties in controlling the alternative media, which operated outside of the focus of mainstream media publications. The mainstream, commercial media was frequently criticised for applying a policy of self-censorship based on uncertainty about the apartheid government's intentions as well as feeling intimidated by the apartheid government.⁴ Under the circumstances, editors invoked the sarcastic slogan describing how the media operated: "when in doubt, leave out".⁵ The mainstream media in apartheid South Africa could be split into two language groups, namely English and Afrikaans. While the Afrikaans media supported the ruling political class, the English media (owned and controlled by big finance houses) was more neutral, although they still did not criticise the apartheid government extensively on security matters.⁶ The apartheid government also had its own media organisation namely the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). According to Christopher Merrett, the SABC was a mouthpiece for the apartheid government and it left white South Africans in complacent ignorance.⁷ The SABC saw its role as fostering economic and military preparedness and a spirit of optimism about the future which meant that it reflected National Party pragmatism.⁸ The apartheid government also had two front media organisations, the *Citizen* and *To The Point*. These were secretly state sponsored which proves how far the apartheid government was willing to go to gain influence in the public sphere. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission contextualised the relationship between the apartheid government and the media as follows: "Thus, even though some of the media may have opposed the government, the social and political system created by apartheid was sanctioned by the media. The media analysed society from inside that system and did not provide alternative perspectives and discourses from the outside."⁹

The manner in which other scholars characterise the relationship between the military and the media provides a point of departure for this thesis. Leopold Scholtz argues that the military

⁴ Merrett. C., *Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994),p.86.

⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶ Hepple. A., *Press Under Apartheid* (London, 19774),p.58.

⁷ Merrett, *Culture*, p.91.

⁸ *Ibid.*,p.90.

⁹ The Report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, Volume 4, p.186.

and the media are not only adversaries, but they are also independent allies, each with their own agenda.¹⁰ Thus for Scholtz, the media and the military can be both adversaries and allies depending on the situation. It is true that there can be overlap and/or contrasting interests regarding the respective agendas of the military and the media. However, one should tread carefully as characterising the military and the media as either “allies” or “adversaries” is an oversimplification of the nature of the relationship and does not make allowance for nuanced analysis.

Militaries have always had challenging and complex relationships with the media. The relationship between the military and the media, though unequal, can also be mutually beneficial. Thus it is important to place the relationship between the SADF and the South African media in a specific context. This context can be viewed as a typical relationship experienced between all militaries and the media. There exists certain general characteristics which can be found in any military/media relationship which needs to be recognised before the unique traits of the SADF/South African media can be analysed. These general characteristics also apply to the SADF/South African media relationship. It is important to note these general characteristics as they inform our understanding of what a relationship between the military and the media tends to look like. For example, all militaries attempt to control the flow of information regarding its activities as well as monitor what is being reported about them in the media. There also exists a trend amongst militaries to draw a distinction between different defence correspondents they consider part of the “in-group” and “out-group” (case studies of different defence correspondents will be analysed in chapter 4 of the thesis). It is important to note these shared relationship traits are broad in scope and thus the more specific and unique characteristics which defined the SADF/South African media relationship is of greater importance to the goals of the thesis.

Abel Esterhuyse describes the relationship between the SANDF (the successor of the SADF) and the media as a potential “difficult marriage”.¹¹ This same analogy can be applied to the relationship between the SADF and the media, with some qualification. With regards to the

¹⁰ L. Scholtz, *The media and the military: Allies or adversaries?* Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies, Vol 28, 2, 1998, p.251.

¹¹ A. Esterhuyse, *The South African armed forces and the media: a difficult marriage?* (2004) in *War, Military and the Media from Gutenberg to today*, ME Ionescu (ed.), (Bucharest: Military Publishing House), p.143.

relationship between the SADF and the media, it has to be noted that the relationship was never equal. The media was always reliant on the SADF to provide it with information regarding security matters via press statements issued by the SADF. This reliance caused the media to become compliant and dependent on the SADF. Also, due to the arsenal of legislation regarding the publication of information deemed to be secret, the local media very rarely strayed from the process of self-censorship. Thus if the relationship between the SADF and the media is characterised as a “difficult marriage” it most certainly was a lopsided relationship favouring the interests of the SADF. The local media was muzzled to a great extent from ever truly criticising the SADF. However frustrating this was for media institutions, they could not simply “divorce” themselves from this “difficult marriage” due to the reliance on the SADF for information. Thus recognition of the status of the SADF as a primary gatekeeper of security information is crucial when attempting to characterise the relationship between the SADF and the local media. The SADF did use the media almost as a mouthpiece for conveying its press statements, however it could be argued that the SADF (due to its massive budget and support from the apartheid government) could have accomplished this on its own, and thus it did not really need the media for this task. The SADF had its own mouthpiece, *Paratus*, which was a monthly publication targeted at primarily SADF soldiers but it was also available to the general public. *Paratus* focused on issues pertaining to the SADF. Thus the SADF propagated its views through its own media as well as using the private media to do so. The readership of government and SADF-sponsored publications was limited, thus they wanted to reach as large an audience as possible and this necessitated the use of the mainstream press. Shanker describes the relationship between the US military and the media as a “dysfunctional marriage”.¹² This formulation, along with Esterhuysen’s “difficult marriage” analogy is useful as it assists in understanding the relationship between the SADF and the media.

The thesis uses analogies because analogies are linguistic/heuristic tools used to compare things we know with that which is relatively unknown and thus aids our understanding. Therefore, the relationship between the media and the SADF can be characterised differently

¹² T. Shanker, *The Military-Media Relationship. A Dysfunctional Marriage?* (Interview with Major General Mark Hertling, U.S. Army), *Military Review*, 2009, p.2. sourced from: http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/shanker_mil_media.pdf

from the perspective of either side. For the SADF, its relationship with the media can be seen as a “convenient marriage”. Interacting with the media when it was necessary for the SADF was convenient as the SADF could use the media as its mouthpiece when it chose to do so. For the media, the relationship can be characterised as a “marriage out of necessity”. The media was dependant on the SADF as a supplier of defence information and thus its “marriage” with the SADF was one of necessity for it depended on the SADF for almost all of its information. Had the SADF taken the media into its trust, they might have created a mutually beneficial relationship. However the distrusting nature of the SADF towards the media lead to it only utilising it when it saw a convenient need to do so.

Chapter Synopsis

Legislation governing military reporting played a vital role in the relationship between the South African military and the media. Chapter 2 will provide an account of the legal context and background with regards to the environment in which defence reporters operated. The thesis will show how this legislation was crucial in shaping the nature of the reporting regarding defence matters. The main legislation referenced in the thesis is the Defence Act of 1957 (and its amendments up until 1980). According to the Act, the task of the SADF was fourfold. It involved defending the Republic, preventing and suppressing terrorism, acting to preserve life, and undertaking duties prescribed by the civil authorities of the country. During the Angolan War, whilst South African troops were actively engaged on the side of the Unita/FNLA alliance, the local media was prohibited from publishing any or disclosing information about the country’s role in the conflict which was not predetermined by the SADF.¹³ Under Section 118 of the Defence Act of 1957 (as amended in 1967), no information regarding SADF troop movement could be published without the permission of the Minister of Defence or his nominees.¹⁴ The thesis will show how this type of legislation influenced the relationship between the SADF and the media and the legislation almost always favoured the SADF at the expense of the public’s right to know.

¹³ Addison. G., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (MA Thesis: Rhodes University, 1980), p.1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

Chapter 3 will investigate the notion of “Total Strategy”. The term 'total strategy' is taken directly from the French military theorist Andre Beaufre's *An Introduction to Strategy*.¹⁵ “Total Strategy” attributed the internal problems of South Africa to external manipulation and, where it was unable to find persuasive evidence of “Total Onslaught” on South Africa, it fell back on fabricated threats.¹⁶ Following Frankel, the thesis will show that the logical conclusion of “Total Strategy” is a more perfectly defined and streamlined version of what was South Africa's already authoritarian climate.¹⁷ “Total Strategy” legitimized the development of apartheid South Africa turning into a “Garrison State”.¹⁸ It is important to note that the apartheid government used the notion of “Total Strategy” as a response to the perceived threat of “Total Onslaught” by its enemies. “Total Onslaught” was seen as the manner in which apartheid South Africa was being targeted on all fronts, and the only effective response to this would be a “Total Strategy” to repel the “Total Onslaught”. The thesis will also show how the SADF attitude towards to media was framed by these doctrines and discourses.

The highly secretive and militarised nature of apartheid South Africa played a key role in understanding the nature of the relationship between the SADF and the media. As the thesis will show, the militarization of apartheid South Africa cannot be understood when it is considered apart from the enormous military bureaucracy which existed during the 1970s and 80s. It will be argued that the fact that the Department of Defence was analysing and capturing information regarding media reporting strengthens the argument that apartheid South Africa was a “Garrison State”. The Military Intelligence Division was an important functionary within the “Garrison State”. It was the bureaucratic arm which collected intelligence for the Department of Defence. The thesis will show that from 1970 onwards South Africa assumed many of the institutional features of the so-called “Garrison State”.

Chapter 4 will analyse the political fallout of Operations Savannah and Reindeer. The thesis will ask whether they were PR debacles. The SADF and the Department of Defence

¹⁵ P. Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians Civil-Military Relations in South Africa*, (Cambridge,1984), p.46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,p.69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,p.70.

unsuccessfully attempted to cover up inconvenient truths regarding their activities in Angola. The Department of Defence played a key role in keeping the South African public in the dark about the operations themselves, as well as the aftermath of these military operations. The fact that the Department of Defence instituted a blanket censorship over defence reporting was never done in the interest of national security as the Department of Defence claimed it was; it was to protect the image and reputation of the SADF, the Department of Defence and the apartheid state. It was also instituted to ensure that no embarrassing or unwanted information about the SADF or the Department of Defence was published. Ironically, it was this policy of secrecy that added to the magnitude of the fall out regarding Operations Savannah and Reindeer. The thesis will show how the consistent reply of “no comment” by the Department of Defence and the SADF had a negative effect on the relationship between the SADF and the local media because it hampered communication between the two parties and thus failed to build mutual trust.

Chapter 5 will investigate and analyse both Steyn Commissions and discuss the nature, role and purpose of these commissions. The thesis will also show what they entailed and how they pronounced upon the relationship between the media and the SADF. The findings of both Steyn Commissions regarding media freedom will also be analysed. Newspaper articles on the Steyn Commissions will also be investigated to show the response of the press to its findings. It is important to note that the historical context within which the two Steyn Commissions took place is vital to the analysis of the Commissions themselves. At times, the Commissions attempted to directly address questions relevant to the then current political situation in apartheid South Africa. Thus for both Steyn Commissions, the role of the local media was to form part of apartheid South Africa’s “Total Strategy” against the “Total Onslaught” posed by the enemies of South Africa. Thus it was of crucial importance for the apartheid Government that the Steyn Commissions investigate the effectiveness of the relevant legislation governing the media to ascertain whether or not it was serving this purpose. Their recommendations only served to redefine (or fine tune) the strictures under which the media operated in reporting on defence matters.

Chapter 2

Introduction

It is the purpose of this Chapter to analyse the relationship between the SADF and the media. The interactions between the apartheid government and the media will also be of relevance due to the intertwined relationship between the SADF and the apartheid government. It will also discuss the media commissions since the Second World War and what they entailed, the legislation that governed reporting of defence matters and the media as a whole as well as the mechanisms that the apartheid government used to control security intelligence. All of these facets tie into the relationship between the SADF and the media and will provide insight into the nature of this relationship. Using the liaison machinery that was set up, the apartheid government had succeeded very largely in putting across a one-sided definition of the military situation which suited its objectives in foreign and domestic policy.¹ Censorship is such a prevalent accompaniment of an authoritarian state like apartheid South Africa. Thus it is important to explore the relationship that the government and the military had with the press. Without a sufficient analysis of the intricacies regarding the relationship between the SADF and the media, the relationship between the SADF and the media itself cannot be fully understood.

Relationship between Government/SADF and the media

Before the relationship between the apartheid government/SADF and the media can be analysed and understood, the relationship between the apartheid government and the SADF has to be unpacked. Various arguments surrounding the role of the SADF in apartheid South Africa exist. It can be argued that two main sides regarding this issue exist. Firstly, that the SADF cannot be held accountable for the crimes of the apartheid government, and that it was just another state institution following the orders given to them by the government of the day. The other argument states that the SADF was implicit in defending white privilege and helped insure the foothold gained by the apartheid government. Thus it has to be asked whether the SADF was simply doing their duty in defending their country from a foreign threat or was it complicit in keeping an oppressive government in power.

The legitimacy of the National Party government has to be very carefully scrutinized when dealing

¹ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (Grahamstown, 1980) p.3.

with issues of complicity. The characteristics of the National Party government then comes into question. Thus it is important to first establish some of the characteristics of the apartheid government under the National Party. It was a government that was not elected into power by the majority of the people of South Africa, it was highly authoritarian and oppressive, extremely militaristic and allowed its citizens very few freedoms. It was also implicit in various forms and instances of human rights abuses. It is then fair to say that the National Party government was not a legitimate government, thus implicating the SADF in being part of an oppressive system due to the close ties that existed between the government and the SADF at that time. The highly militarised nature of South African society during the 70s and 80s can then be explained by looking at the close ties between the South African government and the SADF. A very strong argument can hence be made that the SADF is guilty of defending the apartheid government. Thus the relationship between the apartheid government and the press, and the relationship between the SADF and the press, can almost be seen as two separate yet intricately intertwined relationships that worked parallel to each other.

The different actors involved in the relationship between the government/SADF and the press can be placed into two main categories. These two main categories consisted of defence correspondents on the one hand and the military public relations officers on the other.² The military public relations officers can be labelled as external primary gatekeepers.³ The phrase “external primary gatekeepers” should be viewed in terms of access to information. Thus a “gatekeeper” in the context of this thesis relates to an individual exerting control over the access to information. The military public relations officers was a monopoly source who used its unique access to information as a means of inducing co-operation from journalists.⁴ Thus military public relations officers could manipulate the media by using its status as a gatekeeper. In the symbiotic relationship between reporters and sources, the sources gives or withholds information to reward or punish compliance or non-compliance with its demands.⁵ If the only source was a military public relations officer, then the monopoly on information that the SADF had was only further entrenched. The SADF as a source needed the media to carry its message to a broader public but demanded that its communication goals be given more attention than those of the media.⁶ What these goals were and how they were projected in the South African defence context is very important.⁷ When the SADF succeeded in blackmailing the media to carry its message the way it wanted the message carried, the

² *Ibid.*,p.133.

³ *Ibid.*,

⁴ *Ibid.*,p.134.

⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁷ *Ibid.*,

apparent independence of news organisations masked the real official control of the media that occurred.⁸ The SADF's success in this regard would then always be detrimental towards the freedom of the media to report on defence matters unhindered.

It should be noted that whenever different media organisations were in competition for information, the power of the SADF as a primary gatekeeper of information increased.⁹ This in turn entrenched the SADF's monopoly on access to information regarding defence matters. Therefore the two divergent goals of news coverage, the need for exclusive scoops and the need for stories matching those carried out by the opposition, both added to the manipulative power of the SADF regarding defence reporting.¹⁰ The SADF used this manipulative power to ensure that the media complied with its demands. With the one and only source of major defence news in Pretoria, editors felt it was obligatory to cover whatever briefings were given or tours arranged for their correspondents.¹¹ This naturally aided the centralisation and standardisation of the news around official definitions.¹² At the same time, by feeding titbits of news to favoured media organisations, the SADF let it be known that a co-operative attitude amongst the press would pay off.¹³ This resulted in a situation whereby all news relating to defence matters had been influenced by the SADF. The SADF became the only source for the media regarding defence matters. Thus compliance from the press would be the result most often than not.

It is also important to examine the relationship between the SADF/government and the media with specific reference to the Angolan War and apartheid South Africa's involvement in it. During the Angolan War there was little doubt in the official mind what news policy amounted to.¹⁴ The Minister of Defence's rulings had made it absolutely clear that there was to be no news of South African involvement and there was to be a loyal press.¹⁵ Being "disloyal" would lead to sanctions being imposed such as exclusion from access to information given to other media organisations. Thus the SADF used its gatekeeper role to directly affect what was being reported in the media regarding the Angolan War. At intervals during the Angolan War the Minister of Defence issued confidential directives to the media via SAPA (South African Press Association) banning reports or speculation concerning South African troop movements and activities.¹⁶ Editors were warned that

⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹ *Ibid.*,p.135.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹¹ *Ibid.*,

¹² *Ibid.*,

¹³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,p.137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

unauthorised publication would result in the Defence Act of 1957 being invoked.¹⁷ This ensured that editors kept to the official narrative that the government/SADF gave them. As a general rule, the major goals of a military's communications policy in wartime are to protect security secrets and to raise morale while undermining that of the enemy.¹⁸ From a military viewpoint it is imperative to maintain secrecy where the enemy could benefit from news of the deployment of armed forces, details of their weaponry and their planned actions.¹⁹ Thus from a militaristic standpoint, it made absolute sense for the SADF to impose censorship on the media regarding its involvement in Angola. Another motive for censorship can be to maintain morale, the morale of the soldiers and that of the public.²⁰ The short term censorship of "bad news", of military defeats or setbacks can prevent morale from plunging and prevent panic at home.²¹ Thus for the SADF it was crucial to be in control of what was being reported regarding the Angolan War. It is important to note that once military news ceases to be credible it becomes damaging and could contribute to defeat.²² However this will only be a consequence if it is made public that military news is not credible.

The SADF was of the opinion that in time of war, the mass media should be regimented to instil a warlike spirit and imbue the foe with terror or win him over.²³ This ties in with the idea of the importance of having a loyal press. The SADF had a programme to ensure that its goals were placed before anything else within the media. The truth was strictly secondary in this programme but important nonetheless for reasons of credibility and therefore also morale.²⁴ The SADF was also discriminatory towards different media.²⁵ A kind of hierarchy of favouritism came into being before the war and was refined during and after it.²⁶ Loyalty towards the SADF would result in favouritism. The SADF gave preferences to pro-government over anti-government media, The SABC over the press as a whole, and Afrikaans over English newspapers.²⁷ They were also accused of catering more for daily than weekly papers and more for the Reef and Pretoria media than others.²⁸ This blatant form of favouritism can be seen as censorship in itself because it forced the un-favoured press to conform. Sanctioned media organisations could thus not compete with those favoured by the SADF on the defence reporting front. This form of patronage helped the SADF to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,p.140.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

²⁰ *Ibid.*,

²¹ *Ibid.*,

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ *Ibid.*,p.141.

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

²⁵ *Ibid.*,p.156.

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ *Ibid.*,

²⁸ *Ibid.*,

cement its gatekeeper status regarding access to information relating to defence matters.

It is important to note the attitude of the SADF/government regarding the media and the type of reporting it was doing at the time. The SADF/government thought that reports of malpractice could only cause the country “intense embarrassment” and could “jeopardise the security situation”.²⁹ The media, said Mr Botha, had an indispensable role to play in upholding the country's security.³⁰ This role was to dispense apartheid government propaganda. To threaten press freedom in the name of national security was nothing new for Nationalist Prime Ministers, but Mr Botha was going further than his predecessors.³¹ The press was to be subsumed under a Grand National plan.³² As Minister of Defence, Mr Botha had painstakingly devised ways of co-opting the press to serve the ends of the SADF.³³ He had made it clear in a number of pronouncements over the years that he expected the country's newspapers to contribute to “total strategy” of defence against South Africa's enemies.³⁴ This entailed using techniques of mass persuasion to gain support for a Government embattled against external and internal foes.³⁵ To a very large extent, in the military field at least, Mr Botha's arrangements for the dissemination of news and opinion had succeeded in warping standards of a press otherwise jealous of its right to choose its own news and hold its own opinions.³⁶ Botha's strategy with dealing with the press was highly manipulative, which is most likely why it was so effective.

In September 1973 the South African Prime Minister, B.J. Vorster, declared his intention to take action against the press in 1974.³⁷ He said he would give “certain press chiefs” until January 1974 “to put their house in order” and warned them that if they were seeking a confrontation with the government they would get it.³⁸ At the Cape Congress of the Nationalist party on 5 September 1973 Vorster said some newspapers, individuals and organisations were doing everything in their power to bring about a confrontation between white and black and he asserted that some of these bodies would stand against the white populace if such a confrontation should occur.³⁹ A fortnight later, at the party's Orange Free State congress, he directly attacked the *Rand Daily Mail*, saying that the

²⁹ *Ibid.*,p.30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*,

³¹ *Ibid.*,

³² *Ibid.*,

³³ *Ibid.*,

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ *Ibid.*,

³⁷ Hepple. A., *Press Under Apartheid* (London, 19774),p.5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

³⁹ *Ibid.*,

newspaper had told him it would refuse to subject itself to self-censorship.⁴⁰ This, he said, was clearly seeking a confrontation, and was what the *Rand Daily Mail* would surely get and he would close down the newspaper.⁴¹ The *Rand Daily Mail* would in fact close later on, however due to financial reasons. The hostility towards the newspaper came as a result of the *Rand Daily Mail's* liberal form of journalism and anti-apartheid editorial stance. Even though the *Rand Daily Mail* did close due to financial reasons, it is a very clear example of the apartheid government targeting non-conformist newspapers.

Various other Sources of tension between government and the media also existed. These included the National Key Points Act of 1980 which was promulgated in the aftermath of the sabotage attempt on the Sasol refinery.⁴² The tension generated related to those clauses prohibiting the publication without permission of matters concerning key points, more specifically the interpretations of the relevant clause and the ambit of the prohibition.⁴³ Also the appointment of the Steyn Commission caused tension. It is apparent that the appointment of the Commission in June 1980 also contributed to heightening the perception of a clamp-down by Government in certain sectors of the media.⁴⁴ Closure of the newspaper *Post* was another source of tension. The forced closure of *Post*, a newspaper with a black readership early in 1981.⁴⁵ It was closed by its owners, the Argus Printing and Publishing Company, due to Government indicating its unwillingness to re-register the newspaper in terms of the provisions of the Newspaper and Imprint Registration Act of 1971.⁴⁶ One of the main factors which contributed to the state of tension was the political, cultural and historically based dichotomy that existed between the English-language and Afrikaans-language press.⁴⁷ The media itself was also a source of tension. A move from a healthy abrasive to unhealthy adversary relationship caused plenty of tension.⁴⁸ Media non-accountability was probably also an important contributor to the existing state of tension.⁴⁹ And finally the government, with all of its laws and regulations and unwillingness to work with the media.

From this it clear that the apartheid government had a very hostile attitude towards the press, especially if the press did not act in a manner that the apartheid government found appropriate. However the apartheid government did realise that the media was a valuable resource if utilised

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

⁴² Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media, (Pretoria, 1983), p.4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

properly. The relationship between the government and the media could be described as a balancing act in terms of the government attempting to uphold the illusion of a free press within a free society and still keeping potentially sensitive information secret. When considering the relationship between the government and the media, it is important to understand the socio-political environment in which this relationship was taking place. A free press cannot function in a society which is not free. Apartheid South Africa was not a free society. Thus in order to create the illusion that apartheid South Africa was indeed a free society with a free press it had to make certain concessions in favour of the press. It should be noted that apartheid South Africa was an authoritarian state, not a totalitarian one, thus certain sectors of the press did in fact gain access to information that was sensitive if they played by the rules that were set forth by the apartheid government.

South African media commissions since the Second World War.

South African media commissions between the Second World War and the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting Of Security Matters Regarding the South African Defence Force And The South African Police (Steyn Commission 1979-80) commencing were few and far between. Only one commission on the press was appointed in this time period.⁵⁰ This commission was the Van Zijl Commission.⁵¹

The Press Commission, known by the name of its chairperson, J.W. Van Zyl, was set up in November 1950.⁵² Its terms of reference included an investigation of the control and monopoly tendencies, the activities of foreign correspondents and stringers, the accuracy, responsibility and patriotism of South African journalists, restraints on the founding of new newspapers, the incidence of sensationalism and triviality, and the general health of the free press.⁵³ Some of these were later abandoned as subject of investigation, and they strike a note of hypocrisy, since the government had already by that time declared its intention to ban publications it deemed communist.⁵⁴ The apartheid government wanted to keep the suggestion alive that South Africa possessed a free press whilst still being able to ban unwanted publications.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

⁵² Merrett. C., *Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994),p.36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,

The appointment of the press commission in 1950 brought no slacking of the Nationalist campaign against the press.⁵⁵ Throughout the twelve years that the commission was busy with its investigations the ruling party continued to thunder against editors and journalists, blaming them for the rising vociferousness of black protest against the many steps being taken by the government to implement its policy of separate development.⁵⁶ It is important to note that the commission did not mention any issues regarding defence reporting. This could be due to the fact that at the time of the commission's inception, South Africa was not at war, nor was the possibility of going to war very likely. Thus defence reporting simply was not an issue at that time.

Legislation governing reporting of defence matters and the media – South African Defence Act 1957 (including amendments made up until 1980)

Numerous Acts, laws and different legislation was enacted during the apartheid years to ensure that public criticism of the regime was either non-existent or so minuscule that it made no real impact on the lives of South Africans. However this was not the only function of this legislation. It also served to protect state secrets, and ensure the militarisation of South African society at the time. It also helped block journalists who were deemed to be “unpatriotic” by the apartheid government from gaining access to information other “patriotic” journalists were given access to. These different Acts were sinister weapons used to control and manipulate society and ensure that public opinion especially amongst the white populace was on the side of government. These laws helped entrench the “Garrison State” and moulded South African society (with specific reference to the white population) into an easily coerced group of people. The Defence Act, Newspaper Bill, Protection of Information Act and Publications Act were all pieces of legislation specially crafted to ensure that opposing opinions and sensitive information did not receive the attention it deserved. Many journalists and editors were frustrated by this and rebelled against these censorship laws, however others played along, such as military correspondents not wanting to lose their accreditation for reporting on defence matters.

A year after the enactment of the Official Secrets Act, the government introduced a revised and consolidated Defence Act to replace the old Act of 1912.⁵⁷ The new law considerably extended the

⁵⁵ Hepple. A., *Press Under Apartheid* (London, 19774),p.11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁷ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation*

editorial provisions in force in the past.⁵⁸ The old law and its amendments had allowed for direct censorship in time of war of newspapers, magazines, books and other such materials.⁵⁹ Provisions were made for censorship of all types of postal telegraphic, telephonic, and photographic and radio communications, and recorded material in time of war.⁶⁰ Moreover, emergency regulations could be promulgated, making it possible for the authorities to suppress a newspaper or periodical for a specified period.⁶¹ The new Act once again made it an offence for any member of the Defence Force or of the civil service to reveal information in connection with the defence of the country unless authorised to do so by the Minister of Defence or under his authority.⁶² It forbade the taking of photographs or sketches of any classified military area.⁶³ However, it did not prohibit the publication of news items about the Defence Force in peacetime.⁶⁴ The activities of SADF personnel, their weaponry and their movements could be reported so long as this did not contravene other sections of the Act or other security legislation.⁶⁵ Naturally, in wartime this would not be the case and the government would invoke its powers to institute censorship of the press regarding these issues.⁶⁶

The Defence Act of 1957 was a ground breaking piece of legislation with regards to reporting on defence matters. The Act which was mostly concerned with defence matters, also makes special room for censorship issues as well as the disclosure of information with regards to defence matters. The Act not only looks to censor publications, but also Defence Force members and public servants as well. Under the Subheading “Censorship”, the Act states:

“In time of war the Governor-General may establish and do all things necessary to enforce a censorship over all or any description of postal, telegraphic, telephonic or radio matter or communications passing within, into or from the Union, and over all or any description of letters, written or printed matter, parcels, pictures, drawings, sketches, photographs or gramophone records (including any article, apparatus or device upon which or by means of which intelligence or sounds of any kind have been recorded and can be reproduced) addressed or intended to be delivered or conveyed to any person, and prescribe the conditions under which the postal,

and Suppression (Grahamstown, 1980),p.93.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

⁶² *Ibid.*,

⁶³ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

telegraph, telephone or radio service may be used. Any person who contravenes or fails to comply with any regulation, order or instruction issued in terms of this section shall be guilty of an offence (section 101).”⁶⁷

Under the “Improper Disclosure of Information” section within the Act, publications were specifically targeted in order to ensure that they cannot print or publish any information that was deemed by the Union Defence Force (to be renamed in 1961 to the South African Defence Force or SADF) to be secret/confidential or sensitive in nature. This gave the UDF and later the SADF an iron-grip on the flow of information regarding defence issues. The Act states that, “In any proceedings it shall be presumed until the contrary is proven that any information relating to the defence force of the Union is secret or confidential.”⁶⁸ This gave the SADF carte blanche to target any publishing of information that was not pre-approved by the SADF themselves. Thus the SADF could control all information published about it in the public domain. The Act goes on to make further provisions:

“No person shall in time of war publish in any newspaper, magazine, book or pamphlet or by radio any other means, any information relating to the movements or dispositions of the SADF or any force of a country which is allied to the Union, or of any South African or allied ships or aircraft or any statement, comment or suggestion calculated directly or indirectly to convey such information, except when the information has been furnished or the publication thereof has been authorised by the Minister or under his authority.

No person shall at any time publish in any manner whatsoever any secret or confidential information relating to the defence of the Union, or any information relating to any works proposed, undertaken or completed for or connected with the fortification or defence of the Union except where the information has been furnished or the publication thereof has been authorised by the Minister or under his authority.

Any proprietor, printer, publisher or editor of any newspaper, magazine, book or pamphlet in which any such information as aforesaid is published, and any person responsible for the publication of such information by such or any other means, shall

⁶⁷ Defence Act, (Pretoria,1957) p.592

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,p.608.

be guilty of an offence, and proceedings in respect thereof may be taken against all or any of such persons.

Any person who discloses to any other person any secret or confidential information relating to the defence of the Union which came to his knowledge by reason of his membership of the SADF or by reason of his employment in the public service of the Union or in any other office, post, appointment or capacity under the Government or by reason of any contract relating to the defence of the Union or

Any employment by a contractor under such a contract, or which was given to him in confidence by any other person who was authorised or whose duty it was to give him such information, shall be guilty of an offence, unless such a disclosure was authorised by the Minister or under his authority or by order of a competent court or if it was the duty of such person in the interest of the State to disclose such information to such other person (section 118).⁶⁹

In 1967 the principle of pre-publication censorship of military news in time of peace (or undeclared war) was written into law.⁷⁰ Section 118 (as seen above) now stipulated that information about the SADF, their equipment and installations could only be published with the permission of the Minister of Defence or someone delegated by him.⁷¹ The prohibited information included not only the composition, movement and disposition of the SADF and its auxiliary services (including nursing auxiliaries) but also those of “any force a country which is allied to the Republic”.⁷² The implications were far-reaching for a country entering an era of regional strife in which alliances would be concealed and military campaigns waged in secret.⁷³ Section 118 also prohibited the publication of “any statement, comment or rumour” about South African troops “or any force of a foreign country calculated to prejudice or embarrass the government in its foreign relations or to alarm or depress members of the public.”⁷⁴ Speculation, as well as hard fact, could disappear from the public arena.⁷⁵ The penalty for contravening the Act could lead to a fine of up to R1000 or imprisonment for 5 years or both regarding the nature of the offence.⁷⁶ This section of the Act

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.606-608.

⁷⁰ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (Grahamstown, 1980),p.93.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*,

⁷² *Ibid.*,

⁷³ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,

ensured that the SADF could continue its mandate given by the apartheid government without having to be constantly concerned with being exposed in the public domain. Any activities or inner mechanisms of the SADF which it wanted secret would be kept secret. However if information deemed to be secret is published in the public domain, the SADF would have had the ability to penalise the offender(s) due to this section of the Act.

Opposition spokesmen expressed support for the government regarding the issue of national security but strongly disagreed with the very wide terms of the censorship clause.⁷⁷ Minister of Defence at the time, P.W. Botha's reply was intended to be reassuring.⁷⁸ He said he did not want to be a “small dictator over the press” although he appreciated that he was accepting tremendous responsibility in passing this “drastic measure”.⁷⁹ The authorities would not, according to Botha, try to create “absurdities” of censorship.⁸⁰ This reassurance unfortunately had no legal standing.⁸¹

The Newspaper Bill was another piece of legislation that helped enforce censorship specifically among newspapers. When the Publications and Entertainment Act, 1963, was passed, newspapers published by publishers belonging to the Press Union of South Africa were excluded from the provisions of that Act because this body undertook to establish its own disciplinary body, the Press Council, for investigating and deciding on complaints concerning matter published in newspapers.⁸² When the Act was superseded in 1974 by the Publications Act, 1974, the above mentioned newspapers were also excluded from the provisions of the 1974 Act.⁸³ Notwithstanding this provision, complaints from the public and bodies were continually received that matter published in newspapers is offensive to their moral standards, or is detrimental to public welfare or is harmful to good relations between the population groups in South Africa.⁸⁴ Under these circumstances it was decided to make legislative provision for a press code with which reporting and other matter in newspapers must comply, and for establishing a press council for the investigation of complaints of non-compliance with the press code, for deciding thereon, and where guilt is determined, for the reprimanding and punishing of the guilty parties.⁸⁵ The difference between this bill and other pieces of legislation was that this bill specifically targeted a specific form of publishing, whereas other pieces of legislation would be more general. It is important to note that the Newspaper Bill does not

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.95.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.96.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁸¹ *Ibid.*,

⁸² Newspaper Bill, p.3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

include or mention any aspects regarding defence reporting. This is because defence reporting is covered in other pieces of legislation. However the Newspaper Bill is still important because it is in fact a piece of censorship legislation and had an effect on the relationship between the government/SADF and the media.

The Protection of Information Act, or as it is formally known, to provide for the protection from disclosure of certain information, and to provide for matters connected therewith. The Act itself was incredibly broad and this was done with a specific purpose to ensure that maximum secrecy could be maintained. The Act places a large emphasis on the prohibition of obtaining and disclosure of information such as any official secret code, passwords, documents, models, articles or information used or kept, made or obtained in any prohibited area.⁸⁶ The Act also prohibits the possession or control of such information, and assisting any other agent from also gaining access or control of such information.⁸⁷ The “agent” referred to can be any hostile threat, be it an individual, organisation or a foreign state.⁸⁸

Mechanisms for controlling Security Matters

Apartheid South Africa had various mechanisms to control the flow of information regarding security matters. These mechanisms ensured a tight grip on security intelligence. It can be argued that three main mechanisms existed with regards to the control of security matters. Formal Censorship, the Press Code and lastly the Agreement between SADF and the National Press Union. These three mechanisms created a society where access to factual information regarding security matters was almost non-existent. Restrictions on reporting the activities of the SADF resulted in the death of information about the intervention of the SADF in Angola.⁸⁹ Thus real consequences existed due to these mechanisms. The apartheid government's deception and denial regarding almost all of its abuses would be assisted by these mechanisms.

Censorship

Censorship has many faces including banning of individuals, house arrest and restriction of movement. Censorship is a form of surveillance, a mechanism for gathering intelligence that the

⁸⁶ Protection of Information Act (Pretoria,1982), p.5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*,p.9.

⁸⁹ Merrett. C., *Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994),p.104.

powerful can use to tighten control over people or ideas that threaten to disrupt established systems of order.⁹⁰ Censorship controlled by state or religious authorities remains the norm in many parts of the world.⁹¹ A censor is an official in some countries whose duty it is to inspect all books, journals dramatic pieces, etc. before publication, to ensure that they shall contain nothing immoral, heretical, or offensive to the government.⁹² Censorship in the context of apartheid South Africa focussed heavily on any information criticizing the apartheid government's policies regarding racial separation. An obsession communism was also one of the defining features of South African censorship during apartheid. Apartheid South Africa was a very socially conservative place, thus any information deemed explicit or immoral by a censor would immediately be banned. Extremely tight controls with regards to the flow of information within the public sphere was the order of the day.

One of the most important characteristics of the South African censorship system has been its longevity.⁹³ The roots of widespread, systematic state censorship can be found in the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950.⁹⁴ Censorship in South Africa prior to 1950 comprised three related strands.⁹⁵ Firstly, the political economy of colonialism and its attendant social mores, secondly, specific legislation designed to control area where Africans lived, and thirdly, repression directed at the trade union movements and communists.⁹⁶ The history of South Africa after 1950 was characterised by an avalanche of security legislation which among other effects, created a massive structure of censorship and self-censorship.⁹⁷ The nature of this avalanche of security legislation was highly militaristic, for example the Defence Act of 1957 which set the tone for the development of a highly militarised society.

Pressure from the apartheid government intensified on the press in the 1960s and in the 1970s.⁹⁸ In 1974, Prime Minister BJ Vorster suggested an amended Press Code, granting power to penalise editors and journalists with fines.⁹⁹ The Press Code was established in 1960 when it was chosen instead of a Publications and Entertainments Bill. To a large extent formal control was not necessary because censorship was achieved through various informal means.¹⁰⁰ There was an

⁹⁰ S. Jansen., *Censorship the Knot that Binds Power and Knowledge* (Oxford, 1991) p.14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*,

⁹² *Ibid.*,

⁹³ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media, (Pretoria, 1983),p.2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁵ Merrett. C., *Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994), p.9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.84

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*,

instinctive reaction to accept and print anything from the side of the authorities, including security police propaganda.¹⁰¹ The structure of the commercial press reinforced social and political tendencies in South African society.¹⁰²

Formal censorship was suggested in 1937, when Hertzog had threatened to restrict the press because of attacks on Hitler and Mussolini, in particular by means of restrictions on imported newspapers.¹⁰³ One of the characteristics of a proposed South African republic was to be the elimination of “anti” and “un” national elements of the press, together with a disciplined radio service.¹⁰⁴ The fact that most whites did not see negotiation and the dismantling of discrimination as according with their interests in part explains the need for the following four decades of repression and censorship.¹⁰⁵ The hopes of the late 1940s proved transitory and illusory, the war years providing both psychological and legal preparation for later types of censorship in a process of repression that in retrospect appears seamless.¹⁰⁶

The closed mind of South Africa society between World War One and World War Two is revealed in the provisions of the Entertainment (Censorship) Act.¹⁰⁷ This regulated the control of films and public entertainment through a Board Censors and allowed the banning of films or published pictures that showed a range of topics in a way considered “offensive”.¹⁰⁸ Censorship of the pre-war years was aided by an informal and unofficial system of social conformity and silence.¹⁰⁹

Unconventional white writers were ostracised and their work was suppressed by the refusal of bookshops to stock it.¹¹⁰ The white press virtually ignored African opinion, although liberals promoted those views they perceived as moderate and perpetuated a climate of trusteeship.¹¹¹

As previously stated, the history of South Africa after 1950 was characterised by an avalanche of security legislation which, among other effects, created a massive structure of censorship and self-censorship.¹¹² This trend was set in motion by the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950.¹¹³ It

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.85.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*,p.16.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,p.19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*,p.9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*,p.21.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*,

defined communism as the doctrine of Marxian socialism expounded by Lenin, Trotsky, the Comintern or Cominform or any related political philosophy which aimed at dictatorship of the proletariat, the use of disorder or foreign assistance to effect socio-economic change, or the creation of inter-racial hostility.¹¹⁴

The harassment of editors and journalists placed severe strains on publication of anti-apartheid periodicals.¹¹⁵ The Suppression of Communism Act allowed banning for possession of publications deemed to be promoting communism, and by 1960 two newspapers had been banned (*Guardian* 1952 and *Advance* 1954).¹¹⁶ The apartheid state interfered with the mail, had confiscation powers over required evidence in the name of state security, and banned the publication of certain statements.¹¹⁷ A climate of self-censorship was encouraged by government statements of intent and a long drawn out process of investigation into undesirable publications and the press.¹¹⁸ The Commission of Enquiry in Regard to Undesirable Publications (Cronje Commission) reported in September 1957.¹¹⁹ It was particularly sensitive to inter-group relations and the propagation of communism, but failed to define publications which promote it.¹²⁰ Publications such as the *African Communist* which was deemed to be an illegal publication under the suppression of communism act were banned as well.

During the 1950s sections of the press were subjected to threat and intimidation as the policy of apartheid became better known to the international community.¹²¹ The press was feared as an Anglicising influence and for its potential links to critical overseas opinion.¹²² Although most of the English-language press was closely connected to and influenced by big capital, which was hostile to the Congress movement, it failed to live up to the requirements of the National Party, which thought of the press as part of the National Party's party machinery.¹²³

In 1960 P.W. Botha, then Deputy Minister of the Interior, introduced a Publications and Entertainments Bill which provided for pre-publication censorship.¹²⁴ As previously stated it was

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*,p.35.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹²¹ *Ibid.*,p.37.

¹²² *Ibid.*,

¹²³ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*,p.60.

dropped in favour of a Press Code which was amended in 1974.¹²⁵ Under the Customs Act, from 1956 to 1 November 1963, 8629 publications had been banned.¹²⁶ Refusal by journalists to reveal sources to the police in terms of the Criminal Procedure Act was a long standing problem and led to the jailing of two journalists in 1960.¹²⁷ Action against anti-apartheid newspapers was extended in 1962. It became impossible to register a publication under more than one name, a method used to counter banning.¹²⁸

Press Code

The apartheid government intensified the pressure on the press during the 1970s.¹²⁹ As before the 1960s, it was not covered by publications legislation necessarily but was continually threatened by National Party politicians.¹³⁰ In 1974, B.J. Vorster suggested an amended Press Code, granting power to penalise editors and journalists with fines.¹³¹ To a large extent, formal control was not necessary because censorship was achieved through various informal means.¹³² Thus the Press Code itself was a form of censorship, because it manipulated the press to perform self-censorship.

The monopolistic structure of South Africa's press during the 70s and 80s facilitated contact at the highest level between newspaper management and the state.¹³³ Since the early sixties the Newspaper Press Union (NPU) had adopted a policy of appeasement towards the government.¹³⁴ To forestall the threat of direct censorship of the press under the Publications and Entertainment Control Act of 1963, the NPU had instituted self-censorship governed by a Press Code and enforced by a non-statutory Press Council.¹³⁵ Initially the Press Council had few real powers and in many of its adjudications came down on the side of newspapers against official and non-official complaints.¹³⁶ In response to further threats of legislative censorship the NPU increased the powers of the Press Council and broadened the scope of the Press Code.¹³⁷ This process was dubbed “surrender by instalment” by the *Rand Daily Mail* expressing the view that the press should not do

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*,p.61.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*,p.64.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁹ Merrett. C., *Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994),p.84.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹³¹ *Ibid.*,

¹³² *Ibid.*,

¹³³ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (Grahamstown, 1980),p.100.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*,

the government's censorship for it.¹³⁸

NPU/SADF Agreement

An integral part of the relationship between the apartheid government and the media was the various agreements that were made and signed between them. These agreements were important to both sides. It was important for the government because the government knew it was impossible to create legislation prohibiting the publishing of everything it deemed to be harmful. The agreement was also important for the press because it helped facilitate the relationship and it kept the relationship functioning. An agreement between the Minister of Defence and the Newspaper Press Union was reached on 11 January 1967, with the latest amendment on 26 January 1979.¹³⁹ The aim was to create a work and liaison mechanism between the Directorate for Public Relations of the SADF and the Press Union.¹⁴⁰ In accordance with the agreement, a liaison committee was established with the purpose of discussing matters of policy as well as matters of principle on a regular basis, and indeed, as often as necessary.¹⁴¹ It should, however, be noted that the main aim of the agreement is stated as follows “The release to the press of as much information as may be released within the framework of security and with the least possible delay” (clause 2).¹⁴² An agreement between the SADF and the media was also signed as well as between the SADF and the Newspaper Press Union. A SADF/NPU Liaison Committee was also established.

As previously stated, on 11 January 1967 the Minister of Defence had summoned representatives of the NPU and had explained to them the need for control of security information.¹⁴³ In a circular to all its members in April the NPU gave a summary of what had been agreed.¹⁴⁴ The Minister said the SADF would be appointing a full-time public relations officer who would answer “factual questions” on behalf of the SADF but would not be able to make statements or answer questions on policy.¹⁴⁵ Newspapers could take up with the Minister any rulings by the PRO.¹⁴⁶ As a special concession, newspapers were to be allowed to publish any items originating abroad without

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁹ Report of the Commission Of Inquiry into Reporting Of Security Matters Regarding The South African Defence Force And The South African Police (Pretoria,1980), p.101

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*,

¹⁴³ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (Grahamstown, 1980),p.102.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

clearance – provided that “the impression is not created that the contents of the news item be accepted as factual”.¹⁴⁷ However the Minister could ask newspapers to play down certain overseas news items.¹⁴⁸ This limiting the impact any revelation from foreign media would have on South African society.

This aspect of the Agreement, as worded in the circular previously mentioned, became fixed in the later written Agreement and proved to be a stumbling block to the press during the Angolan War.¹⁴⁹ The circular appealed to newspaper managements to ensure that there was “no misunderstanding” in editorial departments concerning defence reporting.¹⁵⁰ The Defence Act of 1957 and the Official Secrets Act had evidently caused editors problems.¹⁵¹ In April 1969, a second meeting between the Minister and an NPU delegation was held to clarify certain problems under the Defence Act.¹⁵² The outcome was a written agreement, approved by the Minister, and circulated to all NPU members.¹⁵³ The written agreement of 1969 was a relatively brief two page document.¹⁵⁴ It specifically agreed that the SADF would have a public relations service “available to the press at all times”.¹⁵⁵ This would be expanded and improved upon.¹⁵⁶ As far as internal military matters were concerned, the PRO of the SADF as well as Chiefs of Staff could be approached for information and clearance.¹⁵⁷ The 1969 agreement remained in force throughout the Angolan War.¹⁵⁸ Thus once more limiting the scope and context from which defence correspondents could report.

Effectively the Agreement gave an interpretation to the Defence Act suiting the needs of the military and political authorities.¹⁵⁹ In some ways it even added to the Act's scope.¹⁶⁰ The Act did not provide specifically for the appointment of military PRO's or the creation of the Directorate of Public Relations nor did it suggest that the Minister or his representatives could tender “advice” to the media.¹⁶¹ The stipulation that Ministerial requests be treated as directives was nowhere in the statute.¹⁶² The fact that defence related statements originating from unnamed or non-governmental

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,p.103.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵² *Ibid.*,

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,p.104.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,p.105.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,p.107.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶² *Ibid.*,

sources abroad had to be cleared by the SADF meant that even foreign news fell under censorship.¹⁶³ The mere fact that the Agreement existed gave the Minister ready access to the NPU, with predictable consequences.¹⁶⁴ Minister Botha used the Agreement to discipline newspapers.¹⁶⁵ For its part, the NPU sometimes acted in defence of newspapers which were accused of breaking the Agreement or contravening the Defence Act.¹⁶⁶ At times it had been necessary for the NPU to warn certain newspapers that they had broken the Agreement and to apologise on its behalf to the Minister.¹⁶⁷ This being just another example of how influential Botha became with regards to the press reporting on defence matters.

Conclusion

The apartheid government was happy for criticism from the press as long as it took place within a framework consistent with unquestioned white domination.¹⁶⁸ This can be seen as an example of repressive tolerance.¹⁶⁹ The vagueness of much of the legislation controlling public information gave the press the impression it was also on the edge of breaking the law.¹⁷⁰ Thus the press would constantly be trying to anticipate what would upset the government.¹⁷¹ Caution would generally be the result.¹⁷² This was the system of self-censorship that the apartheid government was seeking.¹⁷³ Government policy towards the English-language press was paranoiac at best.¹⁷⁴ The English-language press was frozen out of the information flow surrounding parliament and was subjected to government/SADF misinformation tactics.¹⁷⁵ Control of official information became tighter.¹⁷⁶ The range expanded to include any security or police matter, any military matter, and any statement or rumour which might cause alarm or prejudice foreign relations and embarrassment to the government, regardless of whether the country was at war.¹⁷⁷ The Minister of Defence was given power to suppress certain court evidence if in his opinion it threatened national security.¹⁷⁸

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁸ Merrett. C., *Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994),p.68.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷² *Ibid.*,

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,p.71.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,

Government in general became more secretive.¹⁷⁹ These measures were employed to inhibit the press.¹⁸⁰ It should be noted that the apartheid government was very precise and tactical with regards to their policy towards the press. The balance between controlling the press and still have the illusion of a free press exist was the ultimate goal of the apartheid government.

The numerous laws and regulations which muzzled or inhibited the South African press during apartheid were products of the country's political system, a political system that allowed a minority of the population to hold sway over the greater majority of the population.¹⁸¹ Against this background it can be seen that South African press had a particular responsibility. Its role was to both provide news and disseminate the opinions of the ruling class.¹⁸² The enforcement of apartheid would have been much easier with a silent and passive press that worked with the National government and not against it. Journalists and editors were placed under an enormous amount of pressure and any attempt to push back against the system was met with abuse and scorn from both the majority of the white population and the apartheid government. This enabled the security forces to have almost complete control of what information and opinions were being published about them. This only served to further entrench the militarisation of South African society during apartheid. This militarisation will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸¹ Hepple. A., *Press Under Apartheid* (London, 19774), p.61.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*,p.62.

Chapter 3: The Militarisation of South African Society

Introduction

It is the purpose of this chapter to analyse the militarisation of the South African society from 1975-83. Militarisation can be defined as primarily a process of socialisation achieved through reinforcing militaristic values in homes, schools, churches, and the military itself. This chapter will show how this process shaped apartheid South Africa. This chapter will discuss Andre Beaufre's "Total Strategy" and how the Department of Defence adopted this notion of "Total Strategy" and wrote it into the Department of Defence White Paper of 1977. The "Total Onslaught" discourse within the White Paper will also be discussed. This Chapter will also analyse apartheid South Africa's war economy and how the manufacturing of arms became a large part of its economy. The notion of the "Garrison State" and the role played by the National Security Management System in ensuring that apartheid South Africa remained a "Garrison State" subject to the influence of security forces will also be discussed. The chapter will show how the "Garrison State" was a result of the militarisation of the South African society. Lastly, the monitoring of the media by the Military Intelligence Department will be investigated along with the roles played by P.W. Botha and the SADF in militarising South African society.

During the process of militarisation of the South African society, strategy became a very important focal point. Strategy consists of making choices, devising a scheme and selecting means to support policy.¹ It is a process in which practitioners are conscious of the requirements of the objective.² Broadly speaking, the agents responsible for the militarisation of apartheid South Africa were the SADF and the Department of Defence. They created the environment in which it was possible to manipulate South African society. It is possible to argue that P.W. Botha was the most important playmaker in the militarisation of apartheid South Africa. He was Minister of Defence (1966 – 1980) and later on Prime Minister (1978 – 1984) as well as the executive State President (1984 – 1989) of the country whilst it was undergoing its militarisation. It is an overly simplified statement to say that Botha was the sole agent responsible for the militarisation of apartheid South Africa, however his contribution and influence should not be underestimated.

P.W. Botha became an avid reader of Beaufre's work, and it made a particularly strong impact upon

¹ J. Roherty, *State Security in South Africa Civil-Military Relations Under PW Botha*, (New York, 1992), p.41.

² *Ibid.*,

him.³ According to Alden, the SADF used Beaufre's work as a starting point, and developed a comprehensive strategic doctrine embodied in the 1977 White Paper on Defence.⁴ This doctrine called for the marshalling of all state resources to combat revolutionary warfare.⁵ The strategic writings of Beaufre, drawn from France's experience in colonial Algeria and Indochina, provided South Africa with a comprehensive prescription for countering revolutionary warfare.⁶ Beaufre states, in his definition of strategy, focussing attention on the interaction between belligerents: "the art of the dialect of two opposing wills using force to resolve their dispute."⁷ Thus apartheid South Africa used various strategies to confront revolutionary activity according to Beaufre's prescription. The SADF turned towards Beaufre's theoretical work in formulating a response to the "Total Onslaught" the country was facing.⁸ Beaufre's influence will be discussed in more depth later on in the following section of this chapter. Alden believes that the 1977 White Paper on Defence still stands as the most explicit summation of "Total Strategy".⁹ With the publication of the 1977 White Paper on Defence, the SADF had firmly committed itself to the concept of "Total Onslaught", for which the solution would take the form of "Total Strategy" (to be discussed below).¹⁰ Botha presided over the establishment of a comprehensive state apparatus for the management and coordination of government policy in the event of a national emergency, called the National Security Management system (NSMS).¹¹ The NSMS implemented in conjunction with the host of bureaucratic reforms represented the security side of Botha's approach to reform.¹²

Beaufre's "Total Strategy" and the Department of Defence White Paper – 1977 "Total Onslaught Discourse"

F.W. de Klerk noted Botha's influence on "Total Strategy" in his autobiography. According to de Klerk it has become fashionable over the years to ridicule PW Botha's view that there was a "Total Onslaught" against South Africa.¹³ However, even retrospectively, de Klerk believes, during the

³ C. Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State*, (New York, 1996), p.45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁷ A. Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy: With Particular Reference to the Problems of Defence, Politics, Economics, Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*, (London, 1965), p.22.

⁸ Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, p.42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹³ F.W. de Klerk, *The Last Trek: A New Beginning*, (London, 1998), p.114.

1980s the intelligence that was received in briefings in the State Security Council underlined the grave situation that confronted the country.¹⁴ There was a strong belief that, not only internal but also external threats existed.¹⁵ And it was in response to these perceived threats that Botha and his security advisers developed the concept of “Total Strategy”.¹⁶ The vehicle that Botha chose to implement his governments “Total Strategy” and to coordinate all its activities in response to what was viewed as a “Total Onslaught” on the country was the State Security Council.¹⁷ The Council was established in 1972 during the premiership of John Vorster, but was seldom convened by him.¹⁸ However de Klerk believes that under Botha it was given a far more important central position within the apartheid government.¹⁹ The State Security Council presided over an intrusive bureaucratic system, known as the National Security Management System which was previously mentioned and will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter.²⁰

It is important to note that the Apartheid government used the notion of “Total Strategy” as a response to the perceived threat of “Total Onslaught” by its enemies. The Apartheid government had a wide range of both real, and perceived enemies. These enemies ranged from the Soviet Union and liberation forces such as SWAPO, to internal threats such as the ANC, PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement. All of these threats were perceived by the Apartheid government as agents of the “Total Onslaught” on the country. “Total Onslaught” was seen as the manner in which apartheid South Africa was being targeted on all fronts, and the only effective response to this would be a “Total Strategy” to repel the “Total Onslaught”. The SADF attitude towards to media was framed by these doctrines. These doctrines would become key tools with regards to legitimating the militarisation of apartheid South Africa as well as the strict controls surrounding reporting on security matters.

“Total Strategy” draws inspiration from a wide variety of historical and cultural sources.²¹ In tracing the intellectual origins of “Total Strategy” it is readily apparent that South African military leaders had learnt from the counter-revolutionary experiences of the US in Vietnam, of the British in Malaya and the French in both Algeria and Indo-China.²² At the same time, the ideological and strategic spirit of the South African military had been particularly and peculiarly Francophile in

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,p.115.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

²⁰ *Ibid.*,

²¹ P. Frankel., *Pretoria's Praetorians Civil-Military Relations in South Africa*, (Cambridge,1984),p.46.

²² *Ibid.*,

character.²³ The single figure whose writings had such an immense effect on the Defence Force leaders of the 1970s and 1980s on how they perceive the world of counter-insurgency was undoubtedly Andre Beaufre, the French military general.²⁴ Beaufre, whose various works were the basis of virtually every lecture at the Joint Defence College, the primary institution for socializing South Africa's military elite, one of the main contact points for communication between government, the private sector and the state security apparatus, and, since the early seventies, the think-tank for the formation and development of South Africa's total strategy.²⁵ The term “Total Strategy” is taken directly from Beaufre's “An Introduction to Strategy” described by the distinguished military historian Liddell Hart as ‘the most comprehensive and carefully formulated treatise on strategy ... that has appeared in this generation.’²⁶ Beaufre was predominantly writing during the 1960s and 1970s which was also during the peak of the Cold War. Thus it is important to frame his work within this historical context.

In the books *Introduction a la Strategie* (published in 1963) and *Dissuasion et Strategie* (published in 1964) the concept of “Total Strategy” has to be seen against the background of nuclear deterrence and the constraint this had in pursuing political aims with violent means.²⁷ It should be noted that this was not necessarily the case with either France or apartheid South Africa, however apartheid South Africa did start research and development into nuclear weapons during the 1960s and continued its nuclear programme until the early 1990s when it was halted. At first, Beaufre's understanding of “Total Strategy” was limited to its traditional sense.²⁸ Beaufre emphasises that in the context of the Cold War, in armed conflicts means other than military force become more important in order to compel the opponent to do one's will. Beaufre's definition of “Total Strategy” changes therefore, from “the art of the dialectic of two opposing wills using force to resolve their dispute” to “choice of means likely to achieve the ends laid down by policy”.²⁹ Beaufre's strategic thought represents the synthesis of Western thought on the art of war since the French Revolution. Beaufre's formulation of the concept of “Total Strategy” did not only broaden the sense of strategy, or only open the application of strategic thinking to any form of conflict resolution, it has also been a first step in the formulation of a methodology that provides the strategist with a tool to evaluate different scenarios allowing them to come up with different alternative short term courses of action

²³ *Ibid.*,

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

²⁵ *Ibid.*,

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ C.M.V. Abegglen., *Clausewitz and Beaufre – The Relationship of Politics and War*, (King's College London, 2013),p.1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*,p.5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*,p.6.

which will be coherent with long term political aims.³⁰ Thus it is very important to understand “Total Strategy” in theory, as well as the history of the phrase, before its implementation is analysed within the context of apartheid South Africa.

“Total Strategy” had the ability to mystify and obscure reality in a manner entirely appropriate to what the ideologue terms “false consciousness”.³¹ It wrote off the internal problems of South Africa as external manipulation and, where it was unable to find persuasive evidence of the “Total Onslaught” on South Africa, it fell back on the fabricated series of perils historically so effective in advancing the white laager mentality – the old “black peril” or “red peril”.³² Thus Total Strategy attempted to ensure that apartheid South Africa could never be identified as the wrongdoer as it always shifted the blame regarding the crimes it committed away from government agencies. In essence, the logical conclusion of “Total Strategy” is a more perfectly defined and streamlined version of what was apartheid South Africa's already authoritarian climate.³³ “Total Strategy” legitimized this development, it created the psychological and institutional atmosphere conducive to the growth of a “Garrison State” and, through a series of mechanisms, brought the idea of such a state into operation.³⁴ “Total Strategy” became the blueprint of the apartheid government to justify and legitimise all of its actions in the name of state security.

“Total Strategy” was designed to address the multiple problems that the integration of black labour as a permanent feature of apartheid South Africa posed in the context of the advances of the frontiers of independent Africa to the borders of apartheid South Africa.³⁵ The “Total Strategy” doctrine was first outlined in 1977 in a White Paper on Defence, under the heading 'National Security'.³⁶ The White Paper defined the threat that faced white South Africa in typical Cold War terms.³⁷ It claimed:

“Russia has maintained a multi-dimensional campaign against the West since World War II. Consequently we are today involved in a war, whether we wish to accept it or not. It is therefore essential that a Total National Strategy be formulated at the highest level. The defence of the Republic of South Africa is not solely the responsibility of the Department of

³⁰ *Ibid.*,p.7.

³¹ P. Frankel., *Pretoria's Praetorians Civil-Military Relations in South Africa*, (Cambridge,1984),p.69.

³² *Ibid.*,

³³ *Ibid.*,p.70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ B. Magubane, *From Detente to the Rise of the Garrison State*, Chapter 2 in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, (Pretoria, 2006),p.40.

³⁶ *Ibid.*,

³⁷ *Ibid.*,

Defence. On the contrary, it is the combined responsibility of all government departments. This can be taken further – it is the responsibility of the entire population, the nation and every population group.”³⁸

This can be seen as a prime example of how “Total Strategy” was implemented. A perceived foreign threat is identified (primarily the USSR), the external threat is blamed for the internal upheaval in South Africa caused by oppressive apartheid legislation, and then a call to arms on all fronts of the society is made in order to repel this external threat.

The most prominent of the “Total Strategy” advocates in the SADF was General Magnus Malan, then Chief of the SADF.³⁹ General Malan and other Military officers such as Charles ‘Pop’ Fraser, influenced by their overseas training and contact, adapted the military/strategic doctrine of “Total Strategy”, particularly the Beaufre variant, and applied it to the South African conditions.⁴⁰ By 1977, under the intense pressure of the Soweto uprisings and the international isolation that followed the Angolan invasion, the SADF had codified its new strategic doctrine.⁴¹ The Defence White Paper presented to parliament on 29 March that year, spelt out the concept of a unified National Security doctrine in some detail for the first time.⁴² In the introduction to the White Paper, P.W. Botha explained that Pretoria's strategic situation had to be seen in the context of a perceived global East/West conflict in which South Africa was a major battlefield.⁴³ As stated earlier, the Soviet Union was one of apartheid South Africa's perceived enemies. In that context, military strategy formed part of a broader national strategy to ensure the survival of a society in which the principle of the right of self-determination of the white nation must not be regarded as being negotiable.⁴⁴ Thus the basic purpose of this strategy was to ensure that the country/government would not succumb to pressure to dismantle apartheid. The White Paper continued: “The resolution of a conflict in the times in which we now live demands interdependent and co-ordinated action in all fields – military, psychological, economic, political, sociological, technological, diplomatic, ideological, cultural etc.”⁴⁵ This was one of the key characteristics of “Total Strategy”, its ideal that all facets of society should work together in combating a “Total Onslaught” on the way of life of white society.

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

³⁹ G. Cawthra., *Brutal Force The Apartheid War Machine*, (London, 1986),p.29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

⁴² *Ibid.*,

⁴³ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

The basic premise of the SADF's doctrine, that there was a communist “Total Onslaught” in all spheres against the security of the state, was a product of Cold War thinking which gradually established itself in the minds of apartheid security planners during the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁶ The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, for example, defined 'communism' in the broadest possible terms.⁴⁷ The notion of a “Total Onslaught” became particularly prevalent in the SADF officer corps.⁴⁸ By the time P.W. Botha took up the post of Defence Minister in 1966 he was well versed in these concepts, and many of his speeches in the first few years of his ministership reflected his conviction that the state was facing a “Total Onslaught”.⁴⁹ The development of a total response to this perceived “Total Onslaught” took somewhat longer to materialise.⁵⁰ Probably the first concrete indication of a movement towards a unified state security doctrine was the report in 1970 of the Potgieter Commission of Inquiry which argued the case for the establishment of a centralised intelligence agency, BOSS (Bureau of State Security).⁵¹ This first step in building a security network in total response to the “Total Onslaught” being waged against apartheid South Africa would eventually become “Total Strategy”.

While the White Paper advanced a working framework for the implementation of a comprehensive security strategy, it did not specify the content of the social, political, and organisational modifications called for.⁵² Owing to the continuing struggle in the National Party, the SADF was not yet in a position to oversee the implementation of a unified doctrine on all the necessary levels.⁵³ But the military's strategy, with its promise of far reaching reforms and increased security efficiency, gained powerful adherents in top industrial and financial circles and amongst strategic analysts and economic partners.⁵⁴ The development of apartheid South Africa's war economy can be viewed in terms of it being a facet of the “Total Strategy” doctrine.

Apartheid South Africa's War Economy

Apartheid South Africa's economy during the period of militarisation and “Total Strategy” had come under massive strain. The result of this was the creation of a war economy. Apartheid South

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,p.26-27

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

⁵² *Ibid.*,p.30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,

Africa's war economy also ties in with its status as a “Garrison State” as the budget of the country as tilted heavily towards the military. The following section will show how defence expenditure changed the make-up of the economy of apartheid South Africa, and also how this in turn furthered the process of militarisation of South African society at the time. The history of apartheid South Africa's defence expenditure provides the necessary context for showing how the country was a “Garrison State”. After World War II, while other nations began progressively modernizing their defence forces, the SADF was maintained on a very small scale.⁵⁵ The Defence budget in 1961/62 amounted to only R61 million.⁵⁶ Changes in Africa such as decolonisation and the fact that apartheid South Africa at that time no longer had any important defence ties with any other countries made the development of self-sufficiency in this field essential.⁵⁷ The Defence budget consequently doubled the following year and doubled again in 1964/65.⁵⁸ At this stage the Defence budget represented 21% of state expenditure.⁵⁹ Following the initial increase, Defence spending was restricted to the absolute minimum for the next nine years in order to help fight inflation.⁶⁰

Both the real and perceived threats against apartheid South Africa at the time were escalating and consequently the need arose to strive for full military preparedness at an increased rate.⁶¹ In view of long lead times of up to five years from initiation to acceptance into service of major equipment, a five year expansion programme for the Defence Force was approved and immediately launched.⁶² This resulted in a sharp increase in Defence expenditure to R700 million in 1974/75 and advanced liabilities of R1000 million in subsequent years.⁶³

Almost immediately after acceptance of this expansion programme, it was drastically affected by certain developments.⁶⁴ Portugal and her colonies collapsed unexpectedly thereby rendering their support to apartheid South Africa useless.⁶⁵ Worldwide inflation led to abnormal increase in military costs and this meant that commitments incurred at 1975 price levels had to be adjusted by at least 15% per annum.⁶⁶ Devaluation further increased existing long-term commitments by an average of 12% and also the SADF became involved in Angola and consequently had to maintain a drastically

⁵⁵ *Department of Defence White Paper - 1977* p.11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

⁶² *Ibid.*,

⁶³ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,p.12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

increased level of operations on the Namibia/Angola border.⁶⁷ The effect of these events was, therefore, an accumulation of expenditure from 1975/76 due to price increases and military threats as seen by the apartheid government.⁶⁸

In public, the SADF supported the apartheid government's campaign against inflation and it was also supportive of the campaign to ensure higher productivity and financial savings.⁶⁹ However in reality wasteful expenditure was the order of the day. The SADF's economic campaign was launched during 1976 to encourage economy in the SADF and to cultivate awareness of thrift among its members.⁷⁰ In this way the apartheid government could maximise its defence spending.⁷¹ National Defence Bonds were also issued for the partial financing of Defence expenditure.⁷² Subscription lists opened on 1 July 1976.⁷³ In August 1976 the SADF undertook to promote the sale of bonds amongst its own personnel by appealing to their sense of patriotism and by stressing sound financial investment.⁷⁴ By the end of January 1977 applications to the amount of R100 million had been received.⁷⁵ This suggests that the levels of support that the SADF were receiving were very high especially amongst patriotic sectors of society namely white NP supporters. Financial backing from the public in the form of sales of bonds was a massive boost for the SADF.

The production of arms also became a large part of apartheid South Africa's war economy.⁷⁶ It was announced towards the middle of 1976 that the Armaments Board and the Armaments Development and Production Corporation would merge to form a single organisation namely the Armaments Corporation of South Africa Limited (ARMSCOR).⁷⁷ A practical merger had already taken place on 11 August 1976, while formal conditions were laid down in legislation during the 1977 Session of Parliament.⁷⁸ Considerable effort was made to make apartheid South Africa self-sufficient when it came to armaments production.⁷⁹ Apartheid South Africa made progress in armaments manufacturing during the late 1970s.⁸⁰ Manufacturing of small-arms and heavy ordnance artillery showed an increase varying from 300% to 500%.⁸¹ Progress was made with the building of

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,p.14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁷¹ *Ibid.*,

⁷² *Ibid.*,

⁷³ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,p.26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,p.27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*,

maritime assault vessels.⁸² The infantry combat vehicle, the “Ratel”, was successfully industrialised and manufactured.⁸³ A locally designed missile was successfully developed.⁸⁴ And lastly large scale utilization of the private sector for the maintenance, upgrading and modernisation of existing armaments of the SADF was also highly successful.⁸⁵

The South African war economy had various effects on society. The diversion of resources to ensure a properly resourced and prepared SADF came at a cost. Resources that were usually spent on, or could have been spent on, public utilities, education or healthcare were directed towards the SADF. Thus military readiness was placed ahead of society's basic needs. Due to the arms embargo and isolation that was placed on apartheid South Africa, more money than usual was needed and spent on researching new military technologies which in turn had a negative effect on the economy in the form of unnecessary expenditure although this did create more jobs. The systematic increase in the periods of national service also had a draining effect on the economy. Conscription in South Africa started in 1967, taking the form of service for all white males aged between seventeen and sixty-five for nine months. In 1972 it was increased to one year. By 1977 it had increased to two years. This had a negative effect on the economy because all of those conscripts were being forced into the military instead of contributing to the economy. Conscription depleted the human resources the economy needed to thrive. This was due to conscripts being removed from the workplace for extended periods of national service and subsequent camps. Thus apartheid South Africa's war economy contributed to the militarisation of its society.

State Security and The “Garrison State”

It is the purpose of this section to consider the notion “Garrison State” and how apartheid South Africa could be described as a “Garrison State”. Nearly two-thirds of a century has passed since the late Harold Lasswell’s (1941) seminal work, “The Garrison State,” was published in the *American Journal of Sociology*.⁸⁶ His thesis provided a “developmental construct” that has proven useful in the scientific study of world politics for several generations.⁸⁷ Influenced by political and military events in Germany and Soviet Russia during the Second World War, and especially the advent of

⁸² *Ibid.*,

⁸³ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁶ R. Dains, *Lasswell's “Garrison State” reconsidered: Exploring a Paradigm shift in US Civil-Military Relations*, (Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA),2004,p.11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*,

aerial bombardment, Lasswell's thesis was that trends of the time pointed toward "a world in which the specialists on violence [read soldiers] are the most powerful group in society".⁸⁸ Arguably, the contextual basis of Lasswell's claim is the underlying premise for contemporary conceptualization of a military state, one reflecting Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union.⁸⁹ This notion was developed in the context of a body of literature that stated Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union were totalitarian states and had much in common.

Lasswell states:

The Garrison State is a "developmental construct" about the future course of world-politics, whose function is to stimulate the individual specialist to clarify for himself his expectations about the future as a guide to the timing of scientific work. The trend of the time is away from the dominance of the specialist on bargaining, who is the businessman, and toward the supremacy of the specialist on violence, the soldier. It is probable that the ruling elite of the Garrison State will acquire most of the skill that we have come to accept as part of modern civilian management. Particularly prominent will be skill in the manipulation of symbols in the interest of morale and public relations. Internal violence will be directed principally against unskilled manual workers and counter elite elements who have come under suspicion. The practice will be to recruit the elite according to ability, authority will be dictatorial, governmentalized, centralized, integrated. The power pyramid will be steep, but the distribution of safety will be equalized.⁹⁰

How then can the notion "Garrison State" then be defined for the purposes of this thesis? We start with the word *Garrison*: The noun form means "troops stationed in a fort or fortified town."⁹¹ The verb form means "to provide with or occupy as a garrison."⁹² It seems that Lasswell exercised literary license in using "garrison" as an adjective to modify the noun "state."⁹³ Used in combination, "Garrison State" simply refers to a society in which the most powerful people are

⁸⁸ H. Lasswell, *The Garrison State*, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Jan., 1941), p.455.

⁸⁹ R. Dains, *Lasswell's "Garrison State" reconsidered: Exploring a Paradigm shift in US Civil-Military Relations*, (Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA),2004

⁹⁰ H. Lasswell, *The Garrison State*, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Jan., 1941), p.455.

⁹¹ R. Dains, *Lasswell's "Garrison State" reconsidered: Exploring a Paradigm shift in US Civil-Military Relations*, (Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of The University of Alabama TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA),2004,p.21.

⁹² *Ibid.*,

⁹³ *Ibid.*,

members of the defence establishment or are individuals closely linked with the military.⁹⁴ It should be noted that this does not include the entire security apparatus of apartheid South Africa. Samuel Huntington points out that Lasswell often used “garrison-police state” or “garrison prison state” interchangeably with “garrison state” in order to emphasize that all specialists in violence are included in the concept.⁹⁵ For the purpose of this thesis only the military, as defined above, is considered.⁹⁶

By the time the information scandal finally forced Vorster to leave office, the whole country was in the grips of 'war psychosis'.⁹⁷ An article in the Financial Mail entitled 'The March of Militarism' captured the mood of the times and deserves citing at some length.

It begins:

A bakery in central Johannesburg displays in its window a birthday cake in the shape of an army tank.⁹⁸ A few blocks away a toy shop reports that sales of 'war games', bearing names like Attack on Moscow, have jumped fivefold in the past year.⁹⁹ A Defence Force appeal to the public to give dogs to the army for border-patrol duty elicited more than 200 offers.¹⁰⁰

For the Financial Mail, this indicated a growing 'march to militarism' and was evidence that 'psychologically and in practice South Africa was being prepared for the gathering storm.'¹⁰¹ Gone were the heady days of detente and outward-looking policy.¹⁰² The military had become one of South Africa's biggest employers.¹⁰³ Nearly 60 000 civilians were called up for military duty in 1977, while applications to join the permanent force had leapt by 80% from 1976 to June 1978.¹⁰⁴ More disturbing for the Financial Mail was the increasing militarisation of schools with the Cadet programme.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁷ Magubane, *From Detente to the Rise of the Garrison State*, Chapter 2 in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, (Pretoria, 2006),p.82.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰² *Ibid.*,

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,

What the Angolan adventure demonstrated was the growing influence of the military on a society girding itself for what the generals described as 'total war'.¹⁰⁶ The generals were already advocating some form of military regime.¹⁰⁷ Major General N. Webster contended at the time that a strong defence force would underwrite political stability and economic potential and would 'allow necessary changes to come about in an orderly and secure manner.'¹⁰⁸ The army chief, General Magnus Malan, was only a little less vague when he talked of the 'conflicting requirements of a total strategy and a democratic system of government.'¹⁰⁹ Since the generals were advocating preparations for a 'total war', the natural assumption was that where this conflicted 'with a democratic system', the former must prevail.¹¹⁰ The number of military parades, fly-pasts and television shows featuring the army's strength increased dramatically, as did those covering weapons and troops on manoeuvres.¹¹¹ This show of strength by the SADF can be seen as another trait of a "Garrison State".

The scope of operations of the South African Defence Force had been spelled out as early as 1957, in the Defence Act and its subsequent amendments (1977), which extended powers previously granted to the regime in time of war to apply in situations defined as 'operations in defence of the Republic or for the prevention or suppression of internal disorder in the Republic or in the neighbouring countries in the region'.¹¹² The Act itself gave the SADF extremely wide parameters permitting it to undertake a wide range of operations inside and outside South Africa's borders without the need for parliamentary authorisation.¹¹³

The militarization of apartheid South Africa cannot be understood without considering the enormous changes in the country's internal and international situation since the accession of the National Party in 1948.¹¹⁴ From 1948 onwards South Africa took on many of the institutional and psychological features of the so-called "Garrison State".¹¹⁵ At the material level the long period of National Party rule witnessed the transformation of apartheid from a crude and loosely articulated doctrine of racial repression to a highly sophisticated programme for the design and development of authoritarian state structures.¹¹⁶ The result was a social network which, if not entirely authoritarian, was still sufficient, in its centralised power structures and denial of popular aspirations, to support

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.69.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*,p.84.

¹¹² *Ibid.*,p.87-88.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁴ P. Frankel., *Pretoria's Praetorians Civil-Military Relations in South Africa*, (Cambridge,1984),p.29

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

systems of military influence and political organisation.¹¹⁷ The extensive reliance on conscripted manpower had two important implications.¹¹⁸ Firstly, the perennial infusion of civilian influence into military institutions and the subsequent circulation of personnel between the civil and military sectors of society.¹¹⁹ Secondly, the extensive national service system provided channels through which military influences could be projected into civil society.¹²⁰

Without destroying at least the appearance of press freedom the apartheid government had for several years been engaged in tightening the leash around the media, adding new pieces of legislation to the more than one hundred laws restricting press reporting in South Africa.¹²¹ The bulk of these restrictions were only concerned with 'security' matters, with several broad pieces of legislations overlapping to make effective reporting on police and military issues almost impossible.¹²² The single most powerful restriction was introduced in 1975 as an amendment to the Defence Act.¹²³

This empowered the regime to prohibit the publication of any information relating to the composition, movement or disposition of the SADF.¹²⁴ Thus any breach of this prohibition would be met with sanction. The Act was used to considerable effect during the 1975/76 invasion of Angola, when a complete blackout on news was imposed for several months.¹²⁵ Thus the obscuring of the SADF's movements were of paramount importance to the apartheid government. The clamp-down was so effective that a crisis of confidence began to build up in the white community when news of South African actions leaked out through international press and radio.¹²⁶ As a result, the press was later given permission to record reports covered in overseas newspapers, provided the SADF was approached for comment first.¹²⁷ The regime never again attempted a complete blackout, preferring to make arrangements with the press for the release of pre-censored information.¹²⁸ The argument could also be made that the military changed its strategy from imposing a complete "blackout" to one in which they tried to control the flow of information. This "lesson" drawn from the Angolan debacle did not necessarily result in a "concession" to the media nor reduce the influence of the military in matters of governance.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*,p.12.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹²¹ *Ibid.*,p.48.

¹²² *Ibid.*,

¹²³ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*,p.49.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*,

Lastly, the rise to power of F.W. de Klerk has to be acknowledged. F.W. de Klerk inherited the “Garrison State” from his predecessors (most notably P.W. Botha). It would seem that de Klerk’s rise to power might undermine the idea that apartheid South Africa was a “Garrison State”. For a country to qualify as a “Garrison State”, the most powerful members of its society (i.e. the political elite) must be part of the military establishment. It is so that de Klerk was never part of the military establishment of apartheid South Africa, but this does not diminish the argument that the country was a “Garrison State”. The argument cannot be made that de Klerk was voted into power as a great reformer. If anything the opposite is true. de Klerk always held strong conservative views and it was on this basis that he was voted into power. The widespread reforms which characterised his time in office was not part of his presidential campaign. Even to this day de Klerk has gone as far as defending certain apartheid policies and saying that apartheid was never a crime against humanity. Thus it is not convincing to argue that F.W. de Klerk coming to power means that apartheid South Africa was never a “Garrison State”. The question has to be asked that if apartheid South Africa was never a “Garrison State” in the first place, why was it necessary for de Klerk to dismantle such a massive and entrenched military bureaucracy in order to help bring about a new democratic dispensation? It is also important to note that the main focus of this thesis lies within the time period of 1975 to 1983 and that the widespread reforms and the dismantling of the “Garrison State” which was mainly spearheaded by de Klerk falls outside of the focus of this thesis and will not be discussed further.

The National Security Management System

The key to understanding the National Security Management System within the realms of apartheid South Africa’s “Garrison State” is that the military usurped executive and legislative powers by taking decisions and shaping policies without consulting elected officials. This formed the basis of apartheid South Africa’s “Garrison State” in that those individuals who formed part of the security establishment of the country (and who were not elected by the citizenry) was given the ability to influence the country in a substantial manner. The State Security Council (SSC) should also be noted as it presided over the National Security Management System (NSMS) of President Botha's apartheid government. Its function was to advise the government on formulating and executing policy regarding national security. Botha himself chaired the SSC. The following persons formed members of the State Security Council: Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Justice, Minister of Police, Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of the South

African Police, Director-General of Bureau for State Security (BOSS) (later National Intelligence Service (NIS)), Secretary of Foreign Affairs Secretary of Justice and anyone one else required to aid the discussions.¹²⁹ It is very important to note that all of the above mentioned members formed part of the security establishment of the country. The fact that the members of the security establishment received such an elevated status within the Botha regime shows that apartheid South Africa was indeed a “Garrison State”. It also went further than this with Botha placing his trust in the military/security establishment that he had cultivated, and he had more faith in their intelligence gathering than any other state agencies. At the same time that the rest of the government was undergoing reorganisation, the NSMS was officially established by the Cabinet on 16 August 1979.¹³⁰ Utilising the outline already presented by committees and commissions, the Botha administration established a five-tier structure for the management and coordination of national security.¹³¹ At the executive level, it consisted of the State Security Council (SSC), the Work Committee of the SSC, the Secretariat of the SSC, and the Interdepartmental Committees.¹³² Working in tandem with the executive level was a national system of regional management committees, or JMCs, that were further subdivided into local management committees.¹³³

When P.W. Botha assumed the office of Prime Minister in 1978, he believed that he was inheriting a country under siege and that it was being attacked from various different fronts.¹³⁴ This is key in understanding Botha’s decision making processes regarding the security of the country and his “hawkish” outlook on foreign policy. Moving to address the crisis, Botha initially turned for guidance to the institution to which he had devoted over a decade of service as its chief minister, namely the South African military.¹³⁵ The Bureau of State Security (BOSS) was eliminated and replaced by the National Intelligence Service (NIS).¹³⁶ Coupled with this was the institutionalization of an extensive internal security apparatus, namely the NSMS, to be activated in emergency situations.¹³⁷ The Joint Management Centres (JMCs), a national system of regional and local management committees supporting the executive of the NSMS, were said to be inspired by the example of the French national security system.¹³⁸ Botha wanted to increase the role that the security establishment had to play within the country. The securocrats of the country started to

¹²⁹ K. O'Brien, *The South African Intelligence Services: From Apartheid to Democracy, 1948-2005*, (London, 2011)

¹³⁰ Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, p.72.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*,

¹³² *Ibid.*,

¹³³ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*,p.51.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*,p.65.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*,p.69.

become the most powerful and influential members of society under Botha's leadership, and this, as is emphasised throughout the thesis, is a key characteristic of a "Garrison State".

Belief in an onslaught against South Africa encouraged reliance on militaristic measures, about which the military personnel of the SSC had the best advice and plans.¹³⁹ Even if this belief were not shared by top politicians, Botha was an ardent believer and he chaired the meetings of the SSC, which preceded cabinet meetings.¹⁴⁰ Under his leadership, deliberations of the SSC generated a decision making momentum that was hard for the cabinet to stop.¹⁴¹ The SSC's initial form and functions were to advise in the manner of a national security agency, but later inquiries showed it lacked the administrative means to perform tasks.¹⁴² By the late 1970s, the SSC became caught up with the larger cause of improving administrative efficiency, which was directed by the then Prime Minister, it became the pinnacle of the National Security Management System (NSMS), in effect from August 1979, which was designed to co-ordinate government's executive functions better.¹⁴³ The NSMS took powers of presidential executive discretion to previously unknown heights.¹⁴⁴ At the upper levels of the NSMS, the SSC was strengthened by adding a staff and secretariat.¹⁴⁵ In addition, 15 interdepartmental committees and a working committee were created to pool efforts.¹⁴⁶

The administrative headquarters of the NSMS was located in Pretoria and, later on in 1986 it acquired operational headquarters chaired by the Deputy Minister of Law and Order.¹⁴⁷ The NSMS was intended to shorten and simplify the bureaucratic chain of command.¹⁴⁸ Each NSMS entity had four committees.¹⁴⁹ A committee for security (known by its Afrikaans acronym *Veikom*) required participation by the Department of Defence, the national intelligence service, the SADF, the South African Police, and the chief civil defence officer of the given region.¹⁵⁰ Every government institution had to participate in one or other committee of the NSMS on national, regional and municipal levels.¹⁵¹ The individuals on the committees varied, but official representation by the

¹³⁹ A. Seegers, *The Head of Government and the Executive* in R. Schrire (ed.), *Malan to De Klerk: Leadership in the Apartheid State*, (London, 1994), p.62.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*,

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.63.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

most senior bureaucrat or her/his delegate was required.¹⁵² NSMS entities liaised with developmental associations.¹⁵³ Interpretations of the significance of the NSMS regarding civil – military relations have undoubtedly varied.¹⁵⁴ Others argued that it represented a creeping military coup because it involved military ideas and men.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, others were concerned about the decision making powers of the NSMS, which usurped those of parliament and other elected bodies.¹⁵⁶

The NSMS' design came from the President's office in the late 1970s.¹⁵⁷ A vast array of bodies were subsequently created to act as special overseers of administration. This was done via a specific interpretation of the law which had created the SSC and which suited the apartheid government. The President (then Prime Minister) also took over the portfolio dealing with the public service.¹⁵⁸ Although the chain of command led to the cabinet, it first passed through the SSC, which was chaired by the President.¹⁵⁹ In less than a decade the NSMS developed from the basics mechanism that characterised the newly established SSC in the early 70s to the complex interlocking committee structure that managed the state of emergency in the late 80s.¹⁶⁰ The expansion of its scope was similar to the perception within the Botha administration that government reform might cause revolutionary reaction.¹⁶¹ Combining the security and welfare functions called for by counter-revolutionary theorists, the NSMS was to be Botha's answer to any outbreak of violence that threatened his control.¹⁶²

MID and the Monitoring of the Media

It is important to note the role that MID played within the apartheid security apparatus. MID only started to play a major role within the state security spheres after P.W. Botha came to power in 1978. Under Botha's control, and military departments assumed the duties of civil departments. It is important to understand the history of MID and how it became so influential. The Bureau of State Security's (BOSS) attempts to exert influence over MID (as well as the Security Police) created

¹⁵² *Ibid.*,

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,p.64.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,p.65.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁰ Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, p.78.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶² *Ibid.*,

problems from early on in their relationship.¹⁶³ The tension between the two organisations appears to have been based on the downgrading of MID's intelligence capacity.¹⁶⁴ The relationship would deteriorate further following the failure of the security forces to curtail the urban rioting in 1976.¹⁶⁵ In early 1977 PW Botha offered his resignation to John Vorster after Botha discovered that his telephone had been tapped by BOSS.¹⁶⁶ Vorster's decision to keep Botha on and the latter's ascent to power and his curbing of BOSS's powers lead to the rise of MID. This also led to the subsequent close collaboration between MID and PW Botha. The struggle between BOSS and MID was essentially a bureaucratic war.¹⁶⁷ The argument over who should be responsible for the defence of South Africa stretched as far back as the early 1960s.¹⁶⁸ General Hendrik van den Bergh (former head of BOSS) spoke later in life against PW Botha's total onslaught strategy on public platforms and Botha's use of MID to gain intelligence information.¹⁶⁹ With Botha's victory, the MID was given an extremely prominent role in the South African intelligence community after years out in the cold.¹⁷⁰ The fortunes of MID had risen with Mr PW Botha.¹⁷¹ In the past, General van den Bergh had always supported Prime Minister BJ Vorster, leading to BOSS being the prominent intelligence department in apartheid South Africa.¹⁷² However this would change when Vorster stepped down. PW Botha consolidated his own control of the intelligence services after appointing Kobie Coetsee as Deputy Defence Minister and of National Security.¹⁷³ Coetsee was a National Party MP and a Botha loyalist. This brought the MID under Botha's control.¹⁷⁴ The Department of National Security was also relocated to the Armscor building.¹⁷⁵ The fact that the civilian intelligence agency was housed within the state's arms development and procurement capacity symbolised the dominance PW Botha and his military Generals who were loyal to him.¹⁷⁶

A sign of MID's influence was that it had engineered a masterful spin operation in South Africa which had managed to convince the white population that the invasion of Angola would have been a success if the SADF was not let down by the unreliable CIA.¹⁷⁷ Another sign of the growing power of the South African armed forces, and by extension of the MID, was the extraordinary growth in

¹⁶³ J. Sanders, *Apartheid's Friends, The Rise and Fall of South Africa's Secret Service*, (Great Britain, 2006), p.48.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.118.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.123.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷² *Ibid.*,

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,

the annual defence budget.¹⁷⁸ By 1986-87 around R6.7 billion was allocated for defence.¹⁷⁹ It is also important to note that in 1972 1 Reconnaissance Commando was established in Oudtshoorn under the command of Commandant Jan Breytenbach.¹⁸⁰ 1 Recce was placed under the control of MID shortly after its foundation, thus giving MID influence within the SADF. The MID, however, was never credited with the mythical power that observers attributed to Hendrik van den Bergh and BOSS during the 1970s.¹⁸¹ One reason for the lack of spook mythology was that MID did not seek publicity and has so far managed to avoid being held accountable for its actions.¹⁸² The MID believed that it handled real power in South Africa.¹⁸³ Apartheid had been engaged in an ideological retreat since the revolts of 1976 but it was forced to face the very real prospect that the security forces had lost control of the insurrection which started in September 1984 and persisted until the end of 1986.¹⁸⁴ The inability of BOSS and the police to contain the unrest in 1976 had led inexorable to van den Bergh's fall in 1978.¹⁸⁵ P.W. Botha remained in thrall to the MID solution of extreme repression, military efficiency and regional control.¹⁸⁶ It is important to note the role that the Military Intelligence Department played. It was a functionary of the "Garrison State" and performed important duties for the apartheid security apparatus. The scale of the bureaucratic power of MID added another level of control and influence to P.W. Botha's already substantial arsenal. It should be noted that the media reporting on the SADF and P.W. Botha comprised the two main themes covered by the MID media analysis reports.

The media analysis reports examined how the SADF was being portrayed and reported on in the local media. These reports contained a section which laid out the implications of media reporting. The implications were stated as the following:

"It seems that the media gave the SADF publicity when the SADF is active rather than demonstrative. Thus the invasion of Angola and the uplifting programs for black people in SWA got more attention than a show of force. The military has to clearly separate its target groups and what it hopes to accomplish. South Africa is a country with plenty of diversity and it is impossible to reach everyone at once in the intended manner. If the SADF wants to portray its clout and ability in the

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.150.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.159.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸² *Ibid.*,

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.227.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.242.

public sphere, then that is what should happen. If this is the only manner in which the SADF can reach its goal is still to be decided.”¹⁸⁷

This section will show which aspects of media reporting regarding the SADF was analysed and focussed on by the MID reports.

The 13 December 1979 report analysed the following news report regarding the SADF. The issue of the SADF shooting game and Botha criticising the media for reporting the matter was highlighted in the report. *The Daily News* reported on the matter on 27 November 1979 with an article entitled: “Ungrateful!” referring to Prime Minister PW Botha in his capacity as Minister of Defence admonishing the media for publishing reports that discredited the SADF even though it was the media who initiated the investigation into the incident by reporting on it.¹⁸⁸ The 14 May 1980 report noted that Parents of Conscripts felt bitter due to secrecy of SADF regarding its activities. *The Star* reported on 21 April 1980 with an article entitled “Mother Horrified by army attitude” which was in relation to her son being missing yet the SADF remained silent and unwilling to break its secrecy.¹⁸⁹ Another issue which was picked up on in the report was that conscripts felt that they were not being paid enough. This was reported by the *Sunday Express* on 13 April 1980 in an article entitled: “Could you live on Army pay?”¹⁹⁰ And lastly, Willem Steenkamp invited conscripts to comment on medal awards in his editorial “On Parade” so that they too could have a voice.

The 6 June 1980 report noted that conscripts with a degree in engineering felt that the SADF was not utilising them appropriately, and transport of conscripts from basecamp remained an issue. The report also contained a section which laid out the implications of the media reporting. The implications were stated as follows: It became clear via the report that the media, especially the English media’s attitude and opinion regarding the SADF was highly variable. Even though some anti-government newspapers found it difficult to demonstrate positive criticism of the government, the same cannot be said in relation to the SADF. The positive reaction amongst the English media should be noted with the debut of new weapons for the SADF. The article by the *Rand Daily Mail* published 7 May 1980 entitled “Navy blasts into the missile era” was used as an example.¹⁹¹

The 15 August 1980 report highlighted the following issues as the major events being reported on in

¹⁸⁷ Media Analysis Report, Volume 22, 11 July 1980, Copy number 1

¹⁸⁸ *The Star*, 21 April 1980

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹⁰ *Sunday Express*, 13 April 1980

¹⁹¹ Media Analysis Report, Volume 22, 6 June 1980, Copy number 1

the local media: Students who completed their compulsory military training were being called up during exams and this was interfering with their ability to study and prepare therefor. The SADF was required to help the police with some of their duties. Border duty had to be spread evenly so that everyone received an opportunity to render such service. And lastly why were immigrants who lived in SA for years not forced to become conscripts? It should be noted that legislation was introduced later on to compel naturalised South Africans to become conscripts. Alternatively they could choose to emigrate. *Die Oosterlig* reported on 10 July 1980 that an Irish citizen went to court over conscription in South Africa.¹⁹² His name was Liam Keeley, and he felt that he should not be compelled to do military duty.¹⁹³

The reports summarised that the SADF received plenty of negative criticism, especially from English media that objected to its “no comment” replies. The SADF’s policy of secrecy was harming its image. The balance between positive and negative reporting was very good. MID believed that the Afrikaans media’s positive attitude towards the SADF neutralised the slightly negative attitude of the English media.

The MID’s media analysis reports also focussed on how the local media reporting and represented P.W. Botha. When the focus on Botha is taken into account, it becomes important to note his political background. This would in turn help answer the question as to why so much focus was placed on Botha by the MID’s media analysis reports. P.W. Botha was elected Prime Minister of South Africa on 28 September 1978 after a struggle of various personalities within the National Party.¹⁹⁴ In his first decade as Prime Minister he presided over sweeping changes in politics, the economy and society.¹⁹⁵ In some cases he initiated reforms and in others merely responded.¹⁹⁶ He was the first Afrikaner Nationalist leader to publicly admit the inherent flaws of apartheid, and challenged his supporters to accept limited power sharing with people of other races. This was a move that split his party and the Afrikaner people.¹⁹⁷ But the promise shown by Botha in his early years were not met in his first decade in office.¹⁹⁸ His programme of adaptive change became increasingly erratic, confused and ineffective.¹⁹⁹ Security concerns became paramount to Botha and he was no longer a “reformist” president. By early 1978 the National Party Government was

¹⁹² *Die Oosterlig*, 10 July 1980

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹⁴ B. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency PW Botha the first 10 years*, (Johannesburg, 1988), *Introduction*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*,

paralysed by factionalism.²⁰⁰ Prime Minister Vorster was an ill man and did not seem effective in terms of handling domestic and international problems.²⁰¹ Then came the succession struggle after Vorster's reputation was tarnished due to what was called the "Information Scandal".²⁰² As the ramifications of the scandal were revealed piecemeal through relentless investigative journalism, judicial inquiry and leaks, it was primarily presented as a tale of corruption, mismanagement and political misdirection by National Party MP's.²⁰³ The Information Scandal enthralled the South African public from 1977 to 1980.²⁰⁴ P.W. Botha, as Minister of Defence, was asked to allocate chunks of his budget, for which he was responsible to Parliament, to the Department of Information, with no say in its use or knowledge of its purpose.²⁰⁵ Botha only did this under protest. It became clear that Vorster would have to resign when these actions became public, and so he did.²⁰⁶ Then there was four immediate candidates for the Office of Prime Minister.²⁰⁷ Fanie Botha the Minister of Labour, Pik Botha the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Connie Mulder (heavily implicated in the Information Scandal) the Minister of Information, Social Welfare and Pensions, and of Immigration. P.W. Botha, then Minister of Defence, was the fourth.²⁰⁸ P.W. Botha won the close contest and became Prime Minister after a National Party caucus vote on 28 September 1978.²⁰⁹ Having consolidated his hold on power, Botha was able to rely on the generals and the military bureaucracy. Botha reached the pinnacle of his power between November 1983 and September 1984.²¹⁰

The unravelling of Vorster's position in the wake of the Information Scandal in 1977, an episode which further discredited his administration, gave Botha an opportunity to make a bid for the premiership.²¹¹ Narrowly selected to replace Vorster by the NP caucus in October 1978, Botha found himself in a position to activate the Beaufeian prescriptions of "Total Strategy".²¹² Botha's service as a cabinet member from 1961 onwards spanned much of Verwoerd's and all of Vorster's premiership.²¹³ When he became Prime Minister in September 1978 he had held the defence portfolio for over 12 years.²¹⁴ According to David Welsh, Botha had a hawkish stance and a true

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

²⁰² *Ibid.*,

²⁰³ *Ibid.*,

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.9.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.11-12.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,

²¹⁰ H. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders, The Supreme Test of Power* (Cape Town, 2012), p.175.

²¹¹ Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, p.50.

²¹² *Ibid.*,

²¹³ D. Welsh, *The Executive and the African Population* in R. Schrire (ed.), *Malan to De Klerk: Leadership in the Apartheid State*, (London, 1994), p.178.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

belief in the so-called “Total Onslaught” theory.²¹⁵ It is the opinion of Herman Giliomee that the route to power of the first President of apartheid South Africa, P.W. Botha, passed through the ministry of Defence.²¹⁶ Giliomee believes that this strengthened Botha’s personal inclination towards authoritarian leadership which was coupled with administrative teamwork.²¹⁷

The MID reports regarding media analysis focussed heavily on Botha’s interactions with the public, and how they were reported and portrayed in the local media. Lastly the report also mentions the fact that PW Botha displaced many leaders, and that he had been warned against this.²¹⁸ The report also contained a section which would give perspective regarding all of the reports pertaining to Botha. Thus the positive and negative criticism which he received in the media would be summarised. The leadership shown by Botha as well as his reception of the opinions and advice of others was praised.²¹⁹ Negative criticism was that Botha’s temper was highlighted at times and criticised.²²⁰ The 20 July 1979 edition of *Die Afrikaner* newspaper contained a report with the heading “P.W. makes adjustments for dramatic changes” which accused him of appointing “left-wing” individuals in key areas and keeping right-wing individuals away from positions pertaining to the racial policies of the country.²²¹ It should be noted that the term left-wing is of course a relative term and that in this instance it was a conservative Afrikaans newspaper using the term and thus it was not used in the generally accepted sense of the word.

Botha received the most attention as an individual in media, and according to the MID’s media analysis reports, there existed a growing neutrality towards him regarding reporting about him. Botha also concerned himself with the media in various ways. P.W. Botha’s major effort to find a lever was through the mechanism of the “Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media”, usually called the Steyn Commission, which held hearings from November 1980 to April 1981 and issues its final report to Parliament on February 1982.²²² The Steyn Commission was one of several established by P.W. Botha that concerned themselves in one way or another with the media.²²³ Opponents of the apartheid government regarded such commissions as PR gimmicks.²²⁴ This will be discussed in greater length later on in the thesis.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

²¹⁶ H. Giliomee, *The Leader and the Citizenry* in R. Schrire (ed.), *Malan to De Klerk: Leadership in the Apartheid State*, (London, 1994) p.126.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

²¹⁸ *Die Afrikaner* 20 July 1979

²¹⁹ Media Analysis Report, Volume 22, 16 August 1979, Copy number 1

²²⁰ *Ibid.*,

²²¹ *Die Afrikaner* 20 July 1979

²²² W.A. Hachten & C.A. Giffard, *Total Onslaught: The South African Press Under Attack* (Johannesburg, 1984),p.76.

²²³ *Ibid.*,

²²⁴ *Ibid.*,p.77.

Botha accumulated massive power, with no realistic chance of being voted out.²²⁵ He attempted to govern without meaningful internal reforms and, in an attempt to deflect pressure, pursued détente with the rest of Africa, which ultimately failed.²²⁶ Botha also made fatal errors.²²⁷ He was unable to move beyond the homeland policy in meeting black demands.²²⁸ Also, for too long he bought into the military's perspective that the Communist threat rather than black political exclusion and widespread poverty caused instability in the country.²²⁹ Lastly, he also kept Nelson Mandela in jail after he had already long been a symbol of the struggle for freedom and also apartheid's inhumanity.²³⁰

Monitoring of the Media: MID's Analysis of the roles of the SADF/Prime Minister

The notion of the "Garrison State" and how it is linked with capturing media information will now be discussed. As a "Garrison State", apartheid South Africa not only sought to control the media, but also scrutinize its depiction of its agencies such as the SADF. The collection of media information and analysis regarding the SADF was a major part of the then secret inner workings of the Department of Defence's Military Intelligence Department. The Department of Defence put a lot of effort and resources into capturing information. The information they focussed on was media reports regarding the workings of the apartheid government. The information would then be analysed and compiled into a report which would then be handed over to relevant parties such as the office of the Prime Minister or the head of the SADF. The reports themselves were "secret" and were only declassified in 2009.

It should be noted that these are samples from the archive and that only select reports were analysed which specifically focussed on the SADF and P.W. Botha between 1979 and 1980. The thesis will not only look to analyse the specific content noted by the reports, but also the Department of Defence's own analysis of the information it captured regarding media reporting. Another important fact to note is that these reports are not uniform. They differ from report to report, focussing on different aspects of media reports regarding The SADF and P.W. Botha. Some are more focussed on

²²⁵ Giliomee, *Last Afrikaner*, p.419.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.420.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*,

²²⁹ *Ibid.*,

²³⁰ *Ibid.*,

statistical information whereas others are more concerned with issues being reported on and the related content. Special attention is paid to how P.W. Botha in his role as Prime Minister and the SADF is portrayed. All reports were however judged according to the same criteria: “Reaching strategic and tactical ends especially reflected via the symbolic and sentimental meaning of the SADF for all racial groups: the acceptance of a common enemy: and the positive attitude of foreign military forces with regards to South Africa’s interests.”²³¹ Thus any report criticising the SADF or its influence within apartheid society was flagged as potentially dangerous. Also, a summary of a version of only the articles that were of consequence in terms of the previously mentioned criteria, were analysed by the Department of Defence. It should be noted that not all reports which fit the criteria were analysed and included in the report. Attention was limited to the nature of “normal reporting” (MID reports do not specifically state what was meant by “normal reporting”) of newsworthy events of other authorities. Attention was also only given to local media institutions.

With regards to the case of militarisation of South African society, certain issues have to be mentioned in this context. In an environment in which it was possible to manipulate information, the Department of Defence thrived. The ability to keep tabs on the media and to capture and analyse its reporting was highly advantageous for the Department of Defence. The militarization of apartheid South Africa cannot be understood when it is considered apart from the enormous military bureaucracy which existed during the 1970s and 80s. It was the bureaucratic arm which collected intelligence for the Department of Defence.

Changes in the country’s internal and international relations, as well as issues relating to media freedom made the apartheid government concerned not only about perceived threats, but also how those threats were being portrayed in the media. The fact that only local media institutions were being focussed on in the reports and that only local media institutions were having their content and reporting analysed by the Department of Defence shows two things. Firstly that the Department of Defence did not trust the local media to be loyal towards state institutions such as the SADF and that negative reporting was a reality. And, secondly, it further strengthens the argument that apartheid South Africa was indeed a “Garrison State” as it is not necessarily customary for free and democratic countries to have its Department of Defence secretly analysing said country’s local media. In countries such as the United State or the United Kingdom such practices are conducted by civil agencies such as the National Security Agency (NSA) in the USA or MI5 in the UK. Thus the fact that a military agency such as MID conducted aforementioned practices in apartheid South Africa, strengthens the argument that the country was a “Garrison State”. From 1948 onwards South

²³¹ Media Analysis Report, Volume 22, 15 August 1980, Copy number 1

Africa took on many of the institutional features of the so-called “Garrison State”. It was not only the overt actions which confirms the “Garrison State” status of apartheid South Africa, but also the secret covert actions taken subtly behind the scenes and away from public scrutiny.

The reports examined cover the period from 1979-80. Each report has a front page with the title “Media analysis in connection with the Prime Minister” or “Media analysis in connection with the SADF” depending on which subject was the prime focus of the report. However in general all of the reports attempted to achieve the same goal which was to capture information reported by the media relating to important persons or events, and then analyse the manner in which the reporting was done. The tone of the media reports was also analysed and categorised as either a positive, negative or a neutral report. Each report that was used as a sample for this thesis will be analysed individually according to the date it was compiled. The label “secret” implied that the contents of the report could only be shared by a small circle of functionaries and politicians; an inner sanctum of the apartheid state. Thus the secrecy of the reports was constantly emphasised. The handling of the reports were also subject to the rules of the SADF security instructions. Each report came with the following sentence: “If it is needed to destroy these documents, proper procedure should be followed as outlined by SADF security instructions.”²³² Thus it should be noted that the Department of Defence was so secretive regarding these reports that measures were put in place to ensure that they would be destroyed according to protocol if need be. Each report also came with its own definitions. Positive reporting meant positive criticism regarding military preparedness and military clout. Neutral reporting meant simply a factual reporting of events related to the SADF or relevant parties. And lastly, negative reporting was seen as any attempt to discredit the SADF or relevant party, to place it in a bad light, or to criticise its state of preparedness or strength. Both English and Afrikaans newspapers were analysed.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above mentioned information and reports that the military apparatus of apartheid South Africa placed considerable emphasis on monitoring the local media to assess whether it was harming the image of the country within the court of public opinion. Special attention was paid in these reports to the manner in which the media reported on political issues such as apartheid laws. Attention was also given to the manner in which P.W. Botha was represented in the local media along with the SADF. In handwritten notes of Botha obtained from the Archive of Contemporary

²³² *Ibid.*,

Affaaires Botha refers to a *Cape Times* article as a lie (unfortunately he does not specify which article) thus it can be deduced that criticism lodged against Botha was always noted by the establishment.²³³ The manner in which detailed reports were compiled with the emphasis on capturing reporting done by the media shows how far the apartheid government was willing to go to monitor the local media and to thus ensure that it was “loyal” and “patriotic” and that it subscribed to the “Total Strategy” doctrine. These reports can be seen as providing a significant insight into the relationship between the SADF and the media. The activities of the security apparatus of apartheid South Africa only strengthens the argument that apartheid South Africa was indeed a “Garrison State”. The fact that state resources were used to monitor private media institutions proves that the apartheid government wished to uphold the idea that a free and independent press existed in apartheid South Africa even though the greater majority of its actions went towards curtailing the independence of media institutions. These reports form part of the evidence that the apartheid government did not trust, nor did it fully understand how to control the local media without harming the idea that a free press existed in the country. This lends weight to the argument which is made throughout this thesis that the relationship between the media and the SADF was highly complex especially when it is taken into account that the media’s activities in terms of how it was reporting certain issues was being monitored by the security apparatus of apartheid South Africa. Apartheid South Africa was a “Garrison State”, and it allocated a multitude of state resources into a bureaucratic arm of the security apparatus (the MID) of the country to investigate the local media’s perception and reporting regarding the SADF and PW Botha.

It is important to note that “Total Strategy” as the apartheid government used it help further entrench apartheid South Africa's “Garrison State” status. The relationship between the apartheid government/SADF and the media became ever more complex due to the highly militarised nature of apartheid South Africa. How effective “Total Strategy” was is debatable, as apartheid did come to an end as did the “Garrison State”. However “Total Strategy” did set the tone for further entrenching the “Garrison State” and thus making access to security information very limited. The notion of apartheid South Africa being a “Garrison State” along with Botha's “Total Strategy” needs to be seen as the background with regards to the relationship between the apartheid government/SADF and the media. Without understanding apartheid South Africa's “Garrison State” status and its use of “Total Strategy” it would not be possible to understand the relationship between the apartheid government/SADF and the media. Lastly, it is also important to note the role that the NSMS played. The NSMS gave structure to the security establishment of apartheid South Africa. It formed part of Botha’s Beaufre inspired “Total Strategy” and helped to further entrench the

²³³ Archive for Contemporary Affairs – document number: PV 203 1.P.2.2. Press

“Garrison State”. The NSMS functionaries were securocrats and as previously stated came from the office of the President during the 1970s. The NSMS tightened the hold Botha had and increased the role that the security establishment played within the country. The NSMS assisted in creating a militarised environment which the South African media had to operate in. The experiences of the South African media within the “Garrison State” will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: The Media and Case Studies

Introduction

Taking into account the scope of strict legislation regarding defence reporting, as well as the highly militarised nature of South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, it should be noted that the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media was very complex in nature. Apartheid South Africa's "Total Strategy" gave the Department of Defence the framework it needed for controlling the press. The scope of strict legislation as shown in chapter 2 provided the measures the Department of Defence needed to ensure that it had control over defence reporting. It is the purpose of this chapter to analyse the relationship between the media and the Department of Defence and how journalists interacted with the Department of Defence regarding the coverage of defence matters.

The chapter will also analyse the public relations disasters of Operations Savannah and Reindeer and show what the role of the Department of Defence and military intelligence, as well as how the international media reacted towards the two military Operations. It is important to note how the relationship between the South African media at the time and the Department of Defence heavily impacted on the South African media's coverage of Operations Savannah and Reindeer. The strict legislation as well as an environment in which national security was placed ahead of public interest made it almost impossible for the South African media to report on the PR disasters of Operations Savannah and Reindeer. Thus it is the combination of the environment dominated by secrecy in which the media had to report as well as the PR disasters of Operations Savannah and Reindeer that is key to understanding the relationship between the Department of Defence and the South African media, as well as understanding why it was the international media that "broke" the story on Operations Savannah and Reindeer. The manner in which journalists interacted with the Department of Defence regarding coverage of defence matters then also becomes very important with regards to defining the broader relationship between the Department of Defence and the media.

Under apartheid, practicing journalism in South Africa had been incredibly difficult. Journalists or any individual/group who operated independently from state or NP media, and who expressed any serious criticism of apartheid were persecuted and harassed. A number of journalists had been the victims of attempted assassinations, detentions, and prosecutions. It is important to not only look specifically at defence correspondents but also the experiences of all journalists working during

apartheid. The plight and difficulty in which famous anti-apartheid journalists such as Ruth First, Donald Woods, Allister Sparks, Percy Qoboza and Schalk Pienaar operated has to be acknowledged in order to understand the relationship between the apartheid government/SADF and the media. Government intolerance and hostility toward opposition media, which was already widespread in the late 1970s and early 1980s, intensified as the decade unfolded.¹ It was not only government intolerance and hostilities which the journalism industry had to deal with during apartheid, but there was also the matter of their readership. The public was not always necessarily interested in the message of dissent being pushed by the media.² Thus journalists had to operate within an extremely hostile environment, whilst at the same time attempting to sell stories that will keep a readership interested. It took a careful balancing act from apartheid journalists to ensure that they do not alienate their readers whilst still trying to combat apartheid without being prosecuted for dissent.

The most important tension that a defence correspondent of the 1970s and 1980s had to juggle when reporting defence matters lay between adopting what can be called an “independent-newsman” stance and a “military-supportive” one.³ This choice became increasingly difficult for defence correspondents to make as the Department of Defence tightened its grip on defence information and continued its policy of blatant favouritism towards journalists supportive of the apartheid government. However these choices were never really separated in reality because defence correspondents viewed their roles differently in different circumstances. However there also existed a moral dilemma that defence correspondents increasingly had to face, which was whether to consciously be an active opponent of the apartheid government and the Department of Defence, or to support these institutions and gain access to information regarding defence matters which one's opposition newspapers did not have. The media's “marriage out of necessity” played a role as it was dependent on the military for supplying it with defence information to report on. Another restraint was the policy of secrecy which the Department of Defence vigorously imposed at times. The consistent reply of “no comment” added another dimension to the already overly complex relationship between the media and the Department of Defence. Thus, as will be shown throughout this chapter, the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media was multi-pronged and highly complex.

¹ G. Jackson, *Breaking Story The South African Press*, (Oxford, 1993),p.7.

² *Ibid.*,p.9.

³ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (Grahamstown, 1980),p.149.

Relationship between Media and Department of Defence as well as their interaction and coverage of defence matters

The relationship between the Department of Defence and the media has always been complex due to the Department of Defence being the primary gatekeeper of information regarding security matters, and because the Department of Defence and the media not always sharing the same goals with regards to defence reporting. The nature of the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media was also strained in certain instances. The strict legislation regarding defence reporting referred to in chapter 2 that the media had to negotiate, as well as the Department of Defence being extraordinarily cautious about the information it made available to the media made defence reporting extremely frustrating at times for defence correspondents. In this chapter it will be shown that the Department of Defence practiced blatant favouritism regarding the media. The blatant favouritism by the Department of Defence as well as “Total Strategy” doctrine within which the media were expected to operate created a very circumscribed environment. The blatant favouritism by the Department of Defence in terms of favouring one media organisation over another sent a clear message that compliance was the only way to receive information for defence reporting from the Department of Defence. Also, the media was only utilised when it was deemed convenient to do so. Thus giving credence to the “convenient marriage” analogy.

It is important to note that there were two media groups, namely the South African Press Association and the Newspaper Press Union that operated in apartheid South Africa. The South African Press Association or SAPA as it is commonly known, was and is still an independent, non-governmental news agency, registered as a Section 21 not-for-gain company, dedicated to providing the media industry with material.⁴ The Newspaper Press Union (mentioned briefly in Chapter 2 of the thesis regarding its agreement with the SADF) represented the owners and managements of the main press groups.⁵ These bodies were intermediaries with regards to the relationship between the media and the Department of Defence. The NPU (as shown in Chapter 2 with regards to the negotiations with the SADF) negotiated on behalf of the media groups it was representing. SAPA was used as a platform via which media groups could gain quick access to directives issued by the Department of Defence.

Having a working relationship with the military liaison officials was also very important. Journalists

⁴ <http://www.sapa.co.za/>

⁵ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (Grahamstown, 1980),p.36.

acting as defence correspondents for their respective newspapers firstly had to receive accreditation from the Directorate of Public Relations of the Department of Defence before they could be attested as defence correspondents. Then they also had to have news items cleared before publishing. Also due to the agreement between the Newspaper Press Union and the Minister of Defence at the time, P.W. Botha, newspapers were not allowed to print news covered by the international press regarding the SADF.⁶ Thus the defence correspondents had to rely on the liaison officials of the Department of Defence for information regarding defence reporting, and were at the mercy so to speak of these officials to quite a large extent. This constrained the local media from reporting “breaking news” regarding important military events which the SADF was part of. This blockade of defence information led to the South African public being kept in the dark regarding the activities of the SADF. Thus when news broke of SADF activities in Angola via the international media, the local media felt as if it was not being utilised properly by the Department of Defence and it was being purposely kept out of the loop. For example when the international media broke the story on events surrounding Operation Savannah and Reindeer which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The Department of Defence fed titbits of information to some defence correspondents and not to others proving that they favoured compliance and emphasising how compliance would lead to access to some information that may not have been included in the official statement made by the liaison officials of the Department of Defence. The majority of defence correspondents complied and were granted access to some information by insiders within the Department of Defence. And thus for the majority of the time the system functioned relatively smoothly. However some newspapers and defence correspondents did not comply with the strict environment in which defence reporting at the time was taking place. As a general summary the communication goals of the Department of Defence can be seen as the message containing specific information which the Department of Defence was willing to make public at that time. Thus only the information it wished to convey formed part of the communication goals, which is why it was so important for the Department of Defence that defence correspondents complied with its rules. As soon as a defence correspondent stepped outside the boundaries of these goals and became critical, the defence correspondent, for example Bob Hitchcock, would have lost his accreditation as a defence correspondent. This was very important leverage that the Department of Defence exercised over defence correspondents.

Newspapers such as the *Rand Daily Mail* still remained critical of the apartheid government and

⁶ The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding The South African Defence Force And The South African Police, (Pretoria, 1980),p.101.

more specifically the Department of Defence for keeping such a tight grip on the access to defence information. *The Rand Daily Mail* openly criticised the Department of Defence and protested military censorship vehemently. The most sensational protest against censorship during the Angolan war came from the *Rand Daily Mail*, which twice in a matter of four days carried blank spaces on its front page.⁷ The protest was prompted by government censorship but also a decision made by the Directorate of Public Relations to give another newspaper, *The Star*, the initial break on information relating to a defence news item.⁸ This decision was never officially explained by the Department of Defence and one can only speculate that *The Star* was the first paper to request clearance and thus it was favoured.⁹ The first blank space appeared in an issue of the *Rand Daily Mail* on Saturday 15 November 1975. In a small white box below the main story about the Soviet Union backing the MPLA, the newspaper stated the following regarding the previously mentioned news item, “which would have occupied this space has not been published because permission which is required in terms of the law for such publication has not been granted.”¹⁰ The item being referred to was the report of British Independent Television showing South African troops and armoured cars in Angola.¹¹ *The Rand Daily Mail* did not specifically say which law was involved neither what the nature of the news item was. Thus the protest was not explicitly against the military censorship, but rather against censorship as a whole.

By Tuesday of the following week the *Rand Daily Mail's* had decided not to comply with regulations regarding defence reporting any further.¹² The front page lead, headed: “More servicemen killed in action” began with a 15cm double-column blank space in which appeared the following paragraph:

For reasons totally unrelated to the military considerations or the security of the state, an announcement of the death in action last Thursday of South African servicemen has been delayed by the Defence authorities. This information, of vital concern to the country, will only be released officially for publication this afternoon, although the Minister of Defence approved it for publication yesterday.¹³

⁷ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press*, p.182.

⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 November 1975

¹¹ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press*, p.183.

¹² *Ibid.*,

¹³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 November 1975

It is important to note that it was not only the *Rand Daily Mail's* management that protested military censorship. The *Rand Daily Mail's* defence correspondent, Bob Hitchcock, was also very outspoken and criticised the Department of Defence for its military censorship. The relationship between Bob Hitchcock as a defence correspondent for the *Rand Daily Mail* and the Department of Defence can be seen as an example of how the Department of Defence abused its control over the media. The de-accreditation of Bob Hitchcock as a defence correspondent for the *Rand Daily Mail* should be seen as a highly significant incident in terms of the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media.¹⁴ This happened in March 1976, not long after the official list of accreditations had been drawn up and ratified, though by that time Hitchcock had been the defence correspondent for the *Rand Daily Mail* for some years.¹⁵ Hitchcock was one of the very few defence correspondents to be publicly critical of news censorship during the Angolan War. He also carried his watchdog function on the SADF further than most defence correspondents did at the time.¹⁶ On the question of censorship, he felt there was a definite political agenda and that the Department of Defence had been managing the news to its own advantage. He could accept censorship if it were fairly done and necessary for strategic reasons, which he thought had been the case when he reported the Yom Kippur War.¹⁷ Hitchcock's general point was made in an article he wrote at the time of the Angolan War, arguing against too restrictive censorship, which he said left people suspicious of every official statement issued.

In the article in the *Rand Daily Mail* dated 22 November 1975 Hitchcock stated:

Rational military censorship is not easy to achieve. It takes experience and a talent for balanced and imaginative thinking on the part of the military authorities. This is no reflection on the efficiency on South Africa's war machine, which is strong and runs smoothly. Though the censorship issue, unless solved, could soon affect the performance of the machine.¹⁸

Thus from this statement it is clear that Hitchcock was not necessarily irrevocably opposed to the Department of Defence and the SADF. Hitchcock's attempted criticism was meant to be constructive. Hitchcock wanted to streamline the system and make it more efficient and transparent. This was a very different approach to what other defence correspondents such as Willem Steenkamp, for example, took. Willem Steenkamp was a part time soldier and an officer in the Cape

¹⁴ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press*, p.164.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸ *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 November 1975

Town Highlanders who worked as a defence correspondent for the *Cape Times*.¹⁹ He started working for the Cape Times in 1973 as a military correspondent and subsequently witnessed the Border War both as a reservist and a journalist.²⁰ As a reservist of the Citizen Force he spent three months as an infantryman in Angola on call-up during Operation Savannah.²¹ He also made many trips to the operational area as a journalist and accompanied strike forces on extensive cross-border operations.²² Steenkamp's reporting should be seen as part of the spectrum of reporting on the Border War. What is meant by the "spectrum of reporting" is that media organisations and their subsequent defence correspondents of the 70s and 80s can be classified according to whether they supported the apartheid government or not. Thus conservative defence correspondents like Gideon Joubert of *Die Burger* for example could be placed at one end of the spectrum whilst more critical defence correspondents like Hitchcock of the *Rand Daily Mail* could be placed more towards the other end of the spectrum. It should be noted that Hitchcock and Steenkamp were not necessarily at opposing ends of the spectrum as both did not always criticise the apartheid government. Steenkamp's role and importance will be discussed later on in this chapter.

It has to be emphasised that openly criticising the Department of Defence was not the norm during the 1970s and 1980s. Hitchcock did not flinch from exposing the weak links within the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media. As an example of the weak links in the relationship between the media and the Department of Defence, Hitchcock said it had taken the Department of Defence five days to release to the media the names of four soldiers killed in action on the South West African border (with the benefit of hindsight we now know that those soldiers were in fact killed in Angola).²³ This had the potential to amount to misinformation as the public still did not know the numbers of wounded in those military operations nor the names of the wounded.²⁴ He suggested that a team of military censors who had the knowledge should be appointed to work in shifts serving morning, evening and Sunday newspapers.²⁵ They should be instructed to cut only specific details of men and military hardware operating in war zones.²⁶ The SADF did not entertain his suggestions.

In the same article mentioned above (*Rand Daily Mail* 22 November 1975), Hitchcock went on to say:

¹⁹ G. Shaw., *The Cape Times An Informal History*, (Cape Town, 1999), p.267.

²⁰ W. Steenkamp., *Borderstrike! South Africa into Angola*, (Durban, 1983), about the author.

²¹ *Ibid.*,

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press*, p.165.

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

²⁵ *Ibid.*,

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

There are few other considerations involving security and reporting on activities in operational areas. But keeping from one's own population information that the world has access to is not one of them.²⁷

This statement amounted to criticism that summarized the pitfalls of military censorship in apartheid South Africa perfectly. The lack of access to information regarding defence reporting could not be justified for Hitchcock, especially taking into account the fact that the international media had access to the same information. The fact that the Department of Defence kept the South African public in the dark was something that Hitchcock felt compelled to criticise. It is important to note that Hitchcock did not back away from politicising the issue, but he was to pay the price for not being cooperative and compliant with the regulations that the Department of Defence had set out regarding defence reporting and military censorship as set out in chapter 2. Hitchcock received a telephone call from the Directorate of Public Relations telling him that his accreditation as a defence correspondent for the *Rand Daily Mail* had been withdrawn.²⁸ The decision was never explained but Hitchcock figured that he had been too independently critical of the Department of Defence to be tolerated any longer. His non-compliance with the status quo had cost him his accreditation. An event which most likely figured in the decision regarding him losing his accreditation concerned something he had written about lax security precautions at a SADF briefing at a military camp in Cape Town which he attended. He described how early in 1975 he had attended a top-level briefing for military correspondents on arms manufacturing and distribution.²⁹ He entered the camp and then the briefing room without an identity check or a search for concealed weapons.³⁰ In the room were the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff, and according to Hitchcock they were unguarded.³¹

On 10 December 1975 Hitchcock wrote a piece in the *Rand Daily Mail* stating:

That morning, had I been bent on assassination, I could have eliminated, with two sharp bursts from a hidden weapon, the entire top strata of South Africa's Defence system.³²

Hitchcock explained that this article, like most of his previous articles, had been written in a spirit of constructive criticism to persuade the army that electronic devices and more vigilance were

²⁷ *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 November 1975

²⁸ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press*, p.165.

²⁹ *Ibid.*,

³⁰ *Ibid.*,

³¹ *Ibid.*,

³² *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 December 1975

needed to strengthen the security set-up especially to protect the top strata of South Africa's Defence system.³³ The article had been cleared by him personally with the Directorate of Public Relations and after it was published a number of senior officers congratulated him on doing it. Another item which may have played a role with Hitchcock's de-accreditation was a news report Hitchcock had written on the possibility of the SA Air Force using its Mirage Jets to do battle with the Russian MiGs coming into Luanda.³⁴ This had been discussed in the international media.³⁵ Hitchcock questioned a senior Air Force spokesman about the issue, and as Hitchcock states, “and at no time as far as I was concerned, was that conversation off the record.”³⁶ And thus he continued with a speculative piece which appeared early in February 1976. He predicted the likelihood of aerial combat becoming a new dimension of the war in Angola. Later he heard that the military authorities thought this story had embarrassed South Africa.³⁷ An argument can be made that Hitchcock had crossed a line with this article. It is important to note that this line was determined by the Department of Defence and that it was variable in nature. This variability was due to the fact that it was never spelled out to the defence correspondents. It was something that was vaguely insinuated or more often left unsaid. Hitchcock speculating about the war machinery that the SADF would use certainly did not sit well with the Department of Defence. This undoubtedly only added to the case being built against Hitchcock and the necessity and timing of the article can also be questioned.

Certain of Hitchcock's own colleagues in the media had felt that at the time he had gone too far.³⁸ Several felt that Hitchcock, though supportive of the military and loyal to the country, had overstepped the consensus of “correct” journalism and respect for the military.³⁹ This consensus was reproduced and imitated throughout the media industry. It was felt that issues like the lack of security at military camps should be brought to the Department of Defence attention privately.⁴⁰ One journalist remarked that Hitchcock could not have been of much account as a military specialist if the Department of Defence felt they could get rid of him with as little effort as they did.⁴¹ Hitchcock had been a “thorn in the flesh” of the system, and for that his punishment would be de-accreditation as a defence correspondent. According to the editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* at the time, Raymond Louw, attempts to obtain a statement of specific reasons for Hitchcock's de-accreditation all failed.⁴² After personally approaching the Department of Defence, Raymond Louw

³³ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press*, p.166.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ *Ibid.*,

³⁷ *Ibid.*,

³⁸ *Ibid.*,p.167.

³⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

⁴² *Ibid.*,

put his queries through the National Press Union.⁴³ The National Press Union discussed the case at a meeting but declined to take it up officially.⁴⁴ The General Secretary of the NPU told the author that matters like this were usually left to the newspaper proprietor concerned, but in any event it was not the Department of Defence's normal practice to give reasons for its rulings.⁴⁵ Later word got back to Hitchcock that he was regarded as a security risk and he immediately offered to resign from the *Rand Daily Mail* in order not to embarrass the paper.⁴⁶ Louw refused the resignation, and Hitchcock got reassigned to the race relations beat while another *Rand Daily Mail* staff member, Don Marshall, took over as defence correspondent for the paper.⁴⁷

The Hitchcock saga illuminates the dysfunctionality of the relationship between the media and the Department of Defence. Bob Hitchcock, as a representative of the media, had a unique and awkward relationship with the Department of Defence. The interactions between Hitchcock and the Department of Defence occurred in an environment where defence reporting was extremely frustrating for defence correspondents. Hitchcock can be seen as an example of a defence correspondent who did not comply with the status quo. Even though Hitchcock claimed to be patriotic and supportive of the Department of Defence (some of his peers concurred with this view), he was still seen as a disruptive influence in the public domain. His open and independent criticism of the defence establishment and subsequent de-accreditation due to this behaviour proves that the Department of Defence did not tolerate any dissent. The only interaction(s) which the Department of Defence did in fact tolerate was if the journalist(s) were compliant and willing to fit into the system that the Department of Defence had created. The media, and more specifically defence correspondents, had a specific role to play for the Department of Defence regarding its communication goals. It is important to note that the communication goals of the Department of Defence varied from event to event.

When analysing the interactions and the relationship between the Department of Defence and defence correspondents, it is important to also look at a range of examples regarding the spectrum of defence correspondents. Many more defence correspondents were compliant than non-compliant with regards to the rules and regulations regarding defence reporting that the Department of Defence had drawn up. Thus it is important not to only view Hitchcock's interactions with the Department of Defence as the only manner in which defence correspondents interacted with the Department of Defence. Willem Steenkamp was not necessarily the complete opposite of Bob

⁴³ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

Hitchcock with regards to how he played his part in ensuring the communication goals of the defence establishment was met. However there were differences. Unlike Hitchcock, Steenkamp was compliant, part of the system, and did not question or openly criticise the Department of Defence or the SADF. He appreciated the communication goals of the Department of Defence and abided by the rules and regulations. He never truly looked to be controversial in any sense. However, like Hitchcock, he was also supportive and patriotic. Other than those characteristics, there were very few similarities between Hitchcock and Steenkamp as defence correspondents. Also, their experiences as defence correspondents were significantly different. This can possibly be attributed to the difference in attitude towards the defence establishment. Steenkamp was willing to be more compliant, whereas Hitchcock wanted to be more independent and critical. Steenkamp should be seen as an example on the spectrum regarding the interaction and relationship between defence correspondents and the Department of Defence. However it is of more significance in terms of showing how the Department of Defence treated compliant defence correspondents and what they expected defence correspondents to do in terms of meeting the communication goals of the Department of Defence.

Willem Steenkamp was most definitely a staunch supporter of the SADF. He worked as an intelligence officer with a Cape Town regiment, and then went into Angola in January 1976 and remained there until the South African withdrawal in March. Before his call-up Steenkamp monitored the Angolan situation carefully and kept his editor at the *Cape Times* briefed.⁴⁸ This is important to note because it shows how Steenkamp was both a military officer and a defence correspondent and how these roles overlapped at times. Steenkamp had thus positioned himself brilliantly in both camps. Being part of the military establishment gave him insight other defence correspondents did not have, and as a defence correspondent, he could act as a mouthpiece for the Department of Defence. As part of the military establishment, Steenkamp was trusted more than defence correspondents who were civilians at the time. And because he was a defence correspondent with a fairly large newspaper it allowed him more leverage within the Department of Defence itself for information pertaining to defence matters. Steenkamp's military background gave him the edge over his competitors. It should be noted that the newspaper which he worked for as a defence correspondent, the *Cape Times*, was outspoken against censorship (similar to all other South African newspapers at the time barring those publications which supported the apartheid government and the National Party). Steenkamp personally enjoyed excellent contacts with the SADF and the Department of Defence due to his willingness to comply with rules and regulations as well as his military background. With his military background he regarded himself as one of the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,p.159.

few properly equipped specialists on the subject of defence reporting. It can also be argued that Steenkamp was the most conservative reporter working for the *Cape Times* at that time.

The relationship between the *Cape Times* and the SADF thus became very strained during the 1970s and 1980s. According to Gerald Shaw, a former assistant editor of the *Cape Times*, the fact that communication between the newspaper and the military did not break down entirely was largely due to Willem Steenkamp.⁴⁹ Steenkamp wrote a regular column on military topics, paying special attention to the welfare and interests of the “troopies”, the thousands of young conscripts, most of them just out of school, who bore the brunt of the combat in Namibia and Angola.⁵⁰ It should be noted that Shaw speaks very highly of Steenkamp, stating that he championed the cause of the “troopies” with the SADF high command and that this was greatly appreciated by their families.⁵¹ Although the argument could be made that Shaw's opinion of Steenkamp is biased due to the fact that they were colleagues for a long time. Still, there is no doubt that Steenkamp had a genuine interest in the welfare of the so-called “troopies”.

Steenkamp in general agreed with the strategic outlook of the Department of Defence and therefore his criticism of the Department of Defence was very mild and took place within the legal parameters (see chapter 2). However, as Steenkamp was conservative, those parameters were also self-defined at times. The only real criticism Steenkamp made of the Department of Defence was that the Angolan War had opened up a credibility gap between newspapers and the public because the public started to realise that they had been misinformed. This lack of trust was due to the Department of Defence hiding information from the South African public. Certain pro-government newspapers assisted the Department of Defence by not reporting on defence matters. Even anti-government newspapers did not publish certain defence information due to fear of being reprimanded by the Department of Defence. Thus the South African public was kept in the dark. Rumours and speculation then became the order of the day. For Steenkamp, the best form of counter information was hard fact and the apartheid government had erred during the Angolan War because it did not understand this.⁵² Steenkamp thought that this gap between newspapers producing defence information for the public and obtaining this information from the Department of Defence should be filled by defence correspondents, who like Steenkamp had a military background, and were specialists in the field. To Steenkamp the press was as much at fault as the Department of Defence for not employing specialists as defence correspondents who could put facts clearly before the

⁴⁹ G. Shaw., *The Cape Times An Informal History*, (Cape Town, 1999,p.267.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

⁵² *Ibid.*,

public and interpret them correctly.⁵³ Thus Steenkamp favoured defence correspondents, who like himself, wanted to protect the Department of Defence in the public domain and assist the Department of Defence with their communication goals. It can then be argued that Steenkamp was toeing the government lines by protecting the Department of Defence in the court of public opinion. It should be noted that Steenkamp did not represent Cape Times reporting during the 70s and 80s.

Willem Steenkamp's technique in obtaining information was to keep up a stream of inquiries in order to get results. Based on what he learnt from his military background and the SADF's background briefings, he knew when a report from an agency or some other non-military source verged on sensitive areas and thus he would not publish anything about it.⁵⁴ Like all journalists on specialised beats, defence correspondents tried to cultivate friendly "inside" contacts in the SADF and also relied on tip-offs to local news stories, agency copy, and so forth for leads on newsworthy items.⁵⁵ Thus due to different approaches, Steenkamp and Hitchcock had dramatically different interactions with the Department of Defence, and thus they had rather different relationships.

Apart from Steenkamp and Hitchcock, *Die Burger* also had a defence correspondent who should be viewed in terms of the spectrum of reporting on the Border War. The Defence correspondent of *Die Burger*, Gideon Joubert, drew a distinction between the military and political aspects of intervention in Angola.⁵⁶ Joubert served as an officer for the South African Navy from 1951 and after 16 years of service retired with the rank of commander and then started working for *Die Burger*.⁵⁷ He said a newspaper should back the country's armed forces "100 percent" and "try to keep the morale of the people high"⁵⁸ He also noted that it had been unfortunate and "a bit unfair" on parents that they sent their sons to fight in a war they did not know about, but it was an extremely delicate diplomatic issue at the time and the government "had no option in this thing".⁵⁹ Thus from these quotes it is clear that Joubert had a pro-government stance with regards to military intervention in Angola. His military background, much like the case of Steenkamp, could be seen as the reason for his conservative stance on the matter. Being pro-government generally lead to rumours of favouritism. Joubert denied being fed news tips by the Minister of Defence or the National Party.⁶⁰ Joubert said that on occasion he had approached the Minister as a journalist for information or comment, and once or twice *Die Burger's* political staff had been asked to persuade the Minister to release some

⁵³ *Ibid.*,p.176.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,p.168.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,p.161.

⁵⁷ <http://www.stellenboschwriters.com/joubertg.html> about the author, information supplied by Gideon Joubert.

⁵⁸ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press*, p.161

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,p.169

item – the outcome being either a refusal or a press statement.⁶¹ Other journalists thought this showed what an unfair advantage *Die Burger* had over competitors.⁶² Later on in this chapter it will be shown how pro-government Joubert and *Die Burger* was via their reports on Operations Savannah and Reindeer.

As previously stated in Chapter 2, the military should be viewed as primary gatekeepers within the system of disseminating official information regarding defence matters. Defence Correspondents then become the secondary gatekeepers of this information. Some defence correspondents, as secondary gatekeepers in the system of official information dissemination were not just cogs in a machine, but actively took real decisions which affected the form and content of defence reporting.⁶³ This gave them the power to negotiate with the primary gatekeepers, namely the Department of Defence, whose communication goals could not be realised without some co-operation from the media. Thus the media did indeed have some leverage when negotiating with the Department of Defence. Defence correspondents, during this time, were already professionally entrenched within media organisations, unlike the official press liaison personnel who stood outside of these organisations.⁶⁴ It has to be acknowledged that every news organisation at the time, whether private or state-owned, had its particular prejudice or policy norms incorporating the beliefs of the management, editors and audiences. Media policy was carried out by editorial staff whether or not there is any overt statement of policy or mechanism designed to put it into effect. News regarding defence issues from whatever source was adapted to conform to the overall pattern of news selection and presentation as long as it did not over step the boundaries set out by the Department of Defence.⁶⁵ This adaptation of the news to conform with the will of the Department of Defence, resulted in many news organisations only publishing official briefs given by the Department of Defence. Thus editors became the interlocutor between the Department of Defence releasing official briefs, and newspapers being the unofficial mouthpiece of the military.

However this system of forced compliance with the communication goals of the Department of Defence complicated the relationship between the media and the Department of Defence. The influence that the Department of Defence had within the media became increasingly negative. The issue of external influence upon the media is that it was not regulated. The Department of Defence could basically do as it pleased and if anyone objected it could make the argument that what the Department of Defence was doing was in the interest of national security and part of South Africa's

⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

⁶² *Ibid.*,

⁶³ *Ibid.*,p.145.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

“Total Strategy”. Far too often, to their own disadvantage, the press liaison officials failed to pay due respect to the autonomy (the little autonomy that was left) of defence correspondents and tried, instead, to impose their will by dictating how reporting regarding defence issues should have been conducted.⁶⁶ This was especially easy to discern during the Angolan War, and it was deeply resented by the media. Defence correspondents did not want to have their choices and judgement prescribed by outside agencies such as the Department of Defence any longer. Thus the Department of Defence had to employ sanctions against defence correspondents who did not ensure that the communication goals of the Department of Defence were met. De-accreditation and ostracism of defence correspondents were the order of the day to ensure compliance. The discretion of defence correspondents were severely inhibited by the Department of Defence and the little leverage that they had was not nearly enough to compete with the overwhelming influence that the Department of Defence had over the media. The cases of Hitchcock and Steenkamp exemplify how the Department of Defence would react towards compliant and non-compliant defence correspondents.

It is important to note that defence correspondents working for commercial media were naturally inclined to see the system of publishing on defence matters as a competitive one in which competing media organisations strived to maximise publicity and profits and that each did this for themselves. This same concept can also apply to political parties, businesses, the media and even government departments, with the exception of the Department of Defence. Only when the military is used to serve a sectional interest is the national interest forfeited. What also happened during the Angolan War was that defence correspondents fell back on concepts of the public interest as distinct from the government's interest.⁶⁷ This tension between the interests of the public and those of the government can be seen in the manner in which the Department of Defence supplied information regarding SADF activities to the media. It will be shown later on in this chapter how the Department of Defence squandered numerous opportunities to convey defence information to the public via the media. Instead of commenting on events, the Department of Defence would simply give a reply of “no comment” which in no way helped to advance their communication goals.

There were occasions on which the Department of Defence and the media shared common ground. However this only existed within the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media when situations existed which suited both parties. The institutional needs of the media and the Department of Defence were better satisfied when there was no conflict between the Department of Defence as the primary gatekeeper of the news and the defence correspondent

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,p.146.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,p.149.

receiving the news.⁶⁸ Defence correspondents soon discovered that there were types of news that suited both institutional and communicational goals of the media and the Department of Defence. The possibility existed that news regarding defence issues could be produced by cultivating good relationships and joint participation in public relations campaigns.⁶⁹ Thus both parties could in fact gain something, although inevitably the Department of Defence would always gain more. This was due to the fact that the Department of Defence was in control of the security information and thus it could manipulate the media. This cooperation by the media with the Department of Defence involved, knowing or unknowingly, complying with secrecy, suppression, news “stops”, smokescreens, and smears.⁷⁰ The independent news organisations which did not take part in these tactics then generally found themselves frozen out specifically due to their lack of co-operation. Some defence correspondents, like their editors, recognised the political dimensions of military secrecy but as a rule they were more concerned with the everyday difficulties of finding something to write.⁷¹ At the liaison level there was a strong tendency to depoliticise the issue for sake of improved communications.⁷² The clear tension between the media's desire to print as much as possible about defence matters, and the Department of Defence's policy of allowing nothing on that subject to appear without prior clearance, created a conflicted situation.

It should be emphasised that the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media was highly complex and shifting] in nature. A singular analysis of the relationship cannot fully explain the different facets and dimensions. Thus when attempting to understand this relationship as a whole it is important to analyse examples of specific relationships and how defence correspondents interacted with the Department of Defence. The manner in which defence correspondents handled their interactions with the Department of Defence caused the relationship between the two parties to either progress and develop or stagnate. It should be noted that the environment in which defence correspondents was working in was not conducive to accurate journalism. Thus the media had to do its best under difficult circumstances. Not all defence correspondents and news organisations placed the same emphasis on supplying the public with accurate information. However, the media itself achieved a consensus that the majority of defence correspondents did their best under difficult circumstances.⁷³ While there was no consensus in the media as a whole over whether official policy was right or wrong, it was generally understood that

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,p.150.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁷¹ *Ibid.*,p.158.

⁷² *Ibid.*,

⁷³ *Ibid.*,p.178.

defence correspondents obtained all the information that was officially fit to be printed.⁷⁴ Therefore it can be argued that the bulk of the media was easily satisfied with being “partners” with the Department of Defence rather than being critical of it. There was also a consensus that news regarding defence matters was important to the national interest, and thus had to be carried irrespective of any alleged prejudice compelled newspapers to co-operate with the Department of Defence.⁷⁵

With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that the Department of Defence wanted to establish and promote an environment where respect for the SADF within the general public existed. The Department of Defence was concerned that if this respect did not exist, the ability of the SADF to carry out its functions would be severely affected. For this to be successful, the Department of Defence needed the help of the media and specifically defence correspondents. However the role of the media in meeting the communication goals of the Department of Defence stretches further than just ensuring respect for the SADF. The Department of Defence wanted to create an environment whereby it had strict control of all information pertaining to defence matters, and that access to information regarding defence matters had to be granted by the Department of Defence first.

Therefore without prior clearance from the Department of Defence, no information regarding defence matters would be allowed in the public domain. It is therefore clear that secrecy was one of the major guiding principles of the Department of Defence. Obtaining this goal would have been impossible for the Department of Defence without engaging in a relationship with the media. The relationship between the Department of Defence and the media, and more specifically defence correspondents, became a system of integrated communications policies with authoritarian overtones. These authoritarian overtones were at their most evident when the interactions between the Department of Defence and defence correspondents are analysed. Over sensitivity by press liaison officials towards criticism led to the unnecessary suppression of information regarding security matters. A partnership entailing mutual trust and respect most likely would have served the Department of Defence better, however their obsession with control did not allow for this possibility. By exposing administrative malpractice, corruption, neglect and dishonesty, the media was not being disloyal. On the contrary, it was facilitating effectiveness and promoting a sound relationship between the public and the SADF. The media did this and could have done this without having to publish sensitive facts about operational methods, equipment or actions of the security forces, which had to remain secret in any case. However the Department of Defence did not view the situation in this manner thus a policy of secrecy and censorship was the order of the day.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,p.179.

Public Relations disasters of Operations Savannah and Reindeer as well as the roles played by the Department of Defence and International Media

Operations Savannah and Reindeer took place during a time when the political environment enabled secrecy and manipulation of military intelligence to take place. The Department of Defence managed the flow of information regarding the SADF and military matters very carefully and with a methodical approach. The Department of Defence also carefully managed the image of the SADF. The Department of Defence wanted to ensure that the reputation of the SADF remained untarnished in the eyes of white South Africans. In this section it will be shown that the Department of Defence was not successful in managing the reputation of not only the SADF as an extremely competent organisation but also of apartheid South Africa as a legitimate state. The public relations disasters of Operations Savannah and Reindeer caused massive damage to the image of the SADF, the Department of Defence and apartheid South Africa. When it became known to the public that the Department of Defence ensued directives to the South African media before the debacles of Reindeer and Savannah, it made the 'fall out' of these events even worse. The fact that Operations Savannah and Reindeer were undertaken in secret without the knowledge of the public, and that subsequent events relating to these Operations were also kept from the public, gives a strong indication of how influential the Department of Defence was with regards to its relationship with the media. The fact that the international media made the stories of both Reindeer and Savannah public also creates the impression that the Department of Defence was only concerned with the South African public being kept in the dark. However the stories leaked to the local media and thus causing the PR debacles.

It has to be said that it was relatively easy for the SADF to undertake Savannah and Reindeer in secret. The highly militarised nature of South African society at the time, combined with apartheid South Africa's "Total Strategy" as well as its "Garrison State" status, created an environment whereby the SADF was never fully questioned regarding its actions. This especially never occurred in the public domain due to the censorship laws and regulations in place, as well as the influence that the Department of Defence had on the media. This section will look at two military operations undertaken by the SADF, namely Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer as examples of PR disasters not only for the country as a whole, but also more specifically the Department of Defence and the SADF. These military operations were PR disasters because the apartheid government's reputation and credibility was severely tainted by them. The apartheid government had to engage in "damage control" enforcing the ideas that the general public did not have a "right to know" and that

it was a matter of “national security”. This section will look at what these operations entailed and why they were deemed to be so disastrous for the Department of Defence, SADF and the apartheid government. This section will also show how the South African media engaged with the PR debacles in belatedly publishing them.

Firstly, it is important to provide context with regards to the historical period in which these Operations took place. Both Savannah and Reindeer were military Operations undertaken during the Border War. In 1974, the SADF assumed responsibilities from the South African Police for defending the border and undertaking covert operations.⁷⁶ As previously stated, by this time the length of conscription had increased to one year thus the SADF would have had the capacity required for the takeover. It should also be noted that apartheid South Africa's involvement in the Angolan War increased dramatically once the SADF took over responsibilities from the Police Force and the scope within which the media was allowed to report was also dramatically limited. Thus between 1975 and 1978 apartheid South Africa launched two major military operations in Angola. These covert military operation (as previously stated codenamed Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer) were the first major military interventions made by the SADF.

Operation Savannah, the code name for the SADF's invasion of Angola in 1975-6, had massive consequences for the apartheid government. Operation Savannah was conducted under a veil of secrecy and involved the Department of Defence manipulating and suppressing information relating to this military Operation. As stated by Rodney Warwick, Operation Savannah was “Authorised amidst debilitating secrecy by a miscalculating South African government, Savannah demonstrated significant South African military equipment inadequacies, particularly in terms of artillery, armour and the need for an infantry combat vehicle.”⁷⁷ Operation Savannah not only highlighted military hardware inadequacies as stated by Warwick, but it also highlighted PR inadequacies by the SADF. It should be noted that the English journalist, Fred Bridgland, first exposed the news that South African troops had secretly invaded Angola and were fighting alongside Savimbi's Maoist guerrillas. This was an embarrassment to the local media as it showed that it the SADF did not take the local media into its confidence. The local media was effectively shut out in terms of access to information and this in turn showed that the SADF did not trust the local media. This was in stark contrast with the international media as they had access to everything the local media did not have access to. The Fred Bridgland saga was a complete PR failure for the apartheid government as it did

⁷⁶ L. Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War 1966-1989*, (Cape Town, 2013), p.7.

⁷⁷ R. Warwick, “Operation Savannah: A Measure of SADF Decline, Resourcefulness and Modernisation” *Scientia Militaria, The South African Journal of Military Studies*, 354, 40, 3, 2012

not want information to make its way into the public arena. The apartheid government attempted to suppress accounts relating to Operation Savannah for fear of the political 'fall out' that coverage of the matter might have caused amongst the white electorate.⁷⁸ This fear of political 'fall out' was due to the fact that nine South African soldiers were captured during and shortly after Operation Savannah. Eight of these soldiers were captured in Angola in three separate incidents by Angolan and/or Cuban forces, with the ninth and last captured in northern Namibia by SWAPO forces.⁷⁹ Thus coverage of the POW situation, besides causing political 'fall out', could also have jeopardised negotiations for the release of the captured soldiers. The capturing of these soldiers were not a military victory of any real consequences, but rather a massive PR victory for the Angolan forces. It is also important to note that the political 'fall out' also stemmed from other factors such as the fact that the military intervention itself was adjudged to be a debacle. Also, questions were raised regarding what was achieved with Operation Savannah. And why was it undertaken in the first place as the negative outcome far outweighed the potential gains.

The Angolans scored another PR victory when two of the captured soldiers were displayed at a press briefing in Lagos, Nigeria on 18 December 1975.⁸⁰ Subsequently, images of two handcuffed white SADF soldiers were widely syndicated and published in newspapers around the world.⁸¹ The photograph of the two soldiers and details of interviews with the captives were prominently reported in the South African media which served to expose the fraudulent nature of Pretoria's previous denials that its forces were involved in Angola.⁸² The photograph appeared on the front page of the *Rand Daily Mail* on 19 December 1975, with the following comment:

A single photograph ... brought home, perhaps more than anything else so far, the implications of the country's involvement in the Angolan conflict ... Here were the first South African soldiers in a quarter of a century to be taken prisoner of war – two bewildered youngsters enduring public humiliation paraded before an international audience by their MPLA captors ...⁸³

The Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Burger*, also reported on the South African soldiers taken captive. However the manner in which *Die Burger* went about reporting the incident was different from that of the *Rand Daily Mail*. The *Rand Daily Mail* criticised the Department of Defence, whereas *Die Burger*

⁷⁸ G. Baines, "The Saga of South African POWs In Angola, 1975-82" *Scientia Militaria, The South African Journal of Military Studies*, 102, 40, 2, 2012

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.107.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.108.

⁸² *Ibid.*,

⁸³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 December 1975

reported the events in a more neutral fashion. This can be seen in an article published on 2 December 1975 on the front page of *Die Burger* with the headline “3 South Africans missing on Border”⁸⁴. The article went on to say that three South African soldiers went missing on the Angola border after a mission and that they have been presumed to be dead.⁸⁵ The article did not seek to criticise the Department of Defence or hold them responsible for the missing soldiers. Then on 14 January 1976, *Die Burger* published a photo on the front page with the following caption: “Three South African and two Portuguese soldiers have been taken captive were displayed yesterday in Addis Ababa by the MPLA's Minister of Foreign Affairs to the representatives of the press core.”⁸⁶ Again the newspaper persisted with its impartial style of reporting on the matter, employing neutral language. The following day, 15 January 1976, *Die Burger* once more kept with its neutral stance and published a photo on the front page with the caption: “With shackled hands, three South African conscripts held captive by the MPLA are displayed to the media in Addis Ababa.”⁸⁷ It should be noted that these were the same 3 soldiers shown the previous day and that another photo of them appeared on page two of the 15 January 1976 edition. Thus *Die Burger* can be seen as an example of a newspaper that was fairly loyal towards the boundaries set by the Department of Defence regarding reporting on military issues. Even though *Die Burger* did in fact report on the matter, it never attempted to break free from the restrictions imposed by the Department of Defence.

When a comparison is made it should be noted that the coverage of Operation Savannah (as well as the subsequent POW crisis) by the *EP Herald* was far more substantial than that of the *Die Burger*. The *EP Herald* first reported on 2 December 1975 that three South African soldiers were lost after a flight on the border between Angola and Namibia.⁸⁸ This was on the front page and it was a Sapa report similar to the report of *Die Burger*. Then on 8 December 1975 there appeared an article in the *EP Herald* with the heading: “Muller watches Angola closely”⁸⁹ The article states that the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hilgard Muller, categorically denied that SA troops were in Angola.⁹⁰ This article was placed on the front page right next to an article by Richard Walker reporting from UN General Assembly in which a motion to vote condemning SA military involvement in Angola was put forward.⁹¹ Five days later, on 12 December 1975, Walker reported that the motion had failed.⁹² The article appeared on the front page with the heading: “Delight as anti-SA attack

⁸⁴ *Die Burger*, 2 December 1975

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁶ *Die Burger*, 14 January 1976

⁸⁷ *Die Burger*, 15 January 1976

⁸⁸ *EP Herald*, 2 December 1975

⁸⁹ *EP Herald*, 8 December 1975

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁹¹ *Ibid.*,

⁹² *EP Herald*, 12 December 1975

crumbles”⁹³ On 18 December 1975 the *EP Herald* reported in an article which appeared on the front page titled: “Two men missing in Angola”⁹⁴ The article reported that it is believed two SA soldiers have been captured by the MPLA.⁹⁵ These suspicions proved to be correct as the newspaper reported on 19 December 1975 on the front page that “SA soldiers put on display in Lagos” at an MPLA news conference.⁹⁶ The article was accompanied with the sub-heading “Two SA soldiers captured in Angola by forces of the MPLA were put on display here yesterday as evidence of South African involvement in the strife torn country.”⁹⁷ Then on 9 January 1976 as well as 14 January 1976 the *EP Herald* published small photographs of the captured soldiers being paraded in front of the media by the MPLA.⁹⁸ On the front page of the 16 January 1976 edition of the *EP Herald* an article appeared regarding the SA soldiers held captive by the MPLA.⁹⁹ The article was titled: “Assurances on Captured Soldiers.”¹⁰⁰ The article was in regards to the Red Cross assuring the families of the SA troops held captive by MPLA that the SA troops will receive normal POW treatment.¹⁰¹

During the middle of January 1976 the *Daily Dispatch* also made reference to the SA soldiers held captive by the MPLA. Although it should be noted that their coverage of the matter was not nearly as in depth as that of the *EP Herald*. On the front page of the 14 January 1976 edition of the *Daily Dispatch* a photo was published of the captured SA soldiers being displayed to the media by the MPLA in Addis Ababa.¹⁰² Also on the front page of that same edition, an article appeared entitled: “Captives may be exchanged” with the sub-heading “The Marxist MPLA might be willing to exchange its South African captives for Cubans held by FNLA and UNITA – meanwhile captives would continue to be used for propaganda purposes.”¹⁰³ The *Daily Dispatch* also published a full page of pictures showing SADF soldiers getting ready to go to war.¹⁰⁴ It was published on 17 January 1976 on page five with the title “Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye”¹⁰⁵

The Cape Times limited its coverage of Operation Savannah and the subsequent POW saga. When Angola became independent on 11 November 1975, the *Cape Times* viewed the situation as

⁹³ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁴ *EP Herald*, 18 December 1975

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁶ *EP Herald*, 19 December 1975

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁸ *EP Herald*, 9 January 1976 + 14 January 1976

⁹⁹ *EP Herald*, 16 January 1976

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰² *Daily Dispatch*, 14 January 1976

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Dispatch*, 17 January 1976

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,

ominous, arguing that the only wise course was to avoid involvement in the Angolan Civil War.¹⁰⁶ This was to be the paper's consistent theme in the weeks ahead.¹⁰⁷ On the front page on 17 November 1975, the *Cape Times* published a statement headed:

The Department of Defence last night prohibited publication of a dispatch by the *Cape Times* London correspondent which reported British Sunday newspaper accounts alleged developments in the Angolan civil war. The newspapers were the *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Observer* and the *Sunday Times*. This action, which deprives South African readers of information available to millions of people abroad, was taken in terms of the Defence Act.¹⁰⁸

It was easy enough to discern what the story emanated from the dispatches received in the *Cape Times* office from London.¹⁰⁹ The *Observer's* report, headed "South African Troops Join Angolan Civil War", made it clear that South African troops had gone into Angola and were fighting on the side of Unita.¹¹⁰ The prohibition of publication in South Africa of the British newspaper reports was denounced by the *Cape Times* as inexplicable.¹¹¹

On 16 February 1976, the SADF issued a directive to the media in which the Minister of Defence requested that no further photographs of South African soldiers being held captive by the MPLA be published.¹¹² An explanatory note added: "Defence HQ say they and the Minister [are] being flooded by objections from relatives to publication of such pictures".¹¹³ The directive was sent to all newspapers via the South African Press Association (SAPA) announcing that a ban on reports about the POWs would take effect from 27 February.¹¹⁴ Thus the Department of Defence was trying to ensure that no further evidence of its failings could be published. The attempt at damage control was too late, and not nearly effective enough. The carefully crafted public image of the SADF and the Department of Defence could not be retroactively repaired. It should be noted that it was not so much the actual military Operation itself that caused the uproar and PR debacle, but rather the capturing of the soldiers which is seen as the aftermath of Savannah. The publication of the photographs of captive SADF soldiers dealt a heavy PR blow to the Department of Defence. It

¹⁰⁶ G. Shaw., *The Cape Times An Informal History*, (Cape Town, 1999),p.264.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁸ *Cape Times*, 17 November 1975

¹⁰⁹ Shaw, *Cape Times*, p.264.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*,p.265.

¹¹² G. Baines, "POWS", p.110.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*,

created doubt within South Africa itself about the nature of the involvement of the SADF within the Angolan War. The publication of those photographs also dealt a psychological blow to a specific section of the South African public who believed that the SADF and the Department of Defence were invincible. The subsequent doubt that was created in the minds of the South African public by the photographs was exactly the result the Cuban and Angolan forces needed. The photographs also produced a propaganda coup for the Cuban and Angolan forces on the international stage. Thus the capturing of the SADF soldiers during the aftermath of Operation Savannah resulted in a massive defeat for the Department of Defence on a propaganda and PR level. This defeat resulted in the Department of Defence reassessing its relationship with the media in terms of what the media could and could not report on regarding defence matters.

The Department of Defence attempted to enforce its blanket censorship on media reports pertaining to the captivity of POWs.¹¹⁵ This blanket censorship was an attempt by the Department of Defence to create breathing space in order to address the problems it was facing without the added stress of having to deal with its 'dirty laundry' being published. The Department of Defence threatened to invoke the Defence Act (No. 44 of 1957) to prevent the media from reporting further on the POWs.¹¹⁶ The Defence Act would effectively nullify any rights the media had to report on events it deemed relevant. The Department of Defence insisted that any publicity would hamper negotiations to free the POWs, and that this adversely affected the relatives of the POWs.¹¹⁷ This was the reason proposed by the Department of Defence, however when analysing the actions of the Department of Defence it becomes clear that they wanted to keep its mistakes a secret. The authorities were prompted to act after an unsubstantiated report that the POWs had been shot apparently caused considerable anxiety amongst the latter's next of kin.¹¹⁸ The Department of Defence expressed concern that such reports would be detrimental to the POWs' families and circulated a confidential note to the press in which it "pointed out that any publication of reports and photos ... will definitely be detrimental to the cause and safety of the POWs".¹¹⁹ It should be noted that certain sectors of the media complied with the requests from the Department of Defence. Whilst the mainstream media refrained from mentioning the POWs for a year, the Department of Defence was unable to keep the issue out of the public domain completely.¹²⁰ Some of the members of the Newspaper Press Union (NPU) were not prepared to comply with government's wishes to keep these matters under wraps. For example, *Die Afrikaner* published 18 major articles and letters on

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.114.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*,

the subject between 6 February 1976 and 15 September 1978.¹²¹ The Department of Defence did little to suppress these articles. However they did take action at times. It could be argued that the reason as to why the apartheid government did not act against *Die Afrikaner* was for fear of alienating far-right support. *Die Afrikaner* was after all a very conservative right-wing publication and thus taking action against it would be alienating its readership.

Operation Savannah tactically left apartheid South Africa in a very difficult position. South Africa still wanted to intervene in Angolan without any of the media backlash. The capturing of 9 SADF troops severely dented the confidence which the public had in the Department of Defence's ability to stage major military operations with minimal casualties. Also the public began to question why the SADF was fighting in Angola in the first place. Any additional PR debacle(s) would be disastrous for the Department of Defence and the image of apartheid South Africa as a whole. It should also be noted that the collapse of detente with black Africa also served to place further stress on apartheid South Africa. Thus the PR debacle of the aftermath of Operation Savannah came at a time when the South African government was already losing allies and was also under immense international pressure. The media coverage of the capturing of the SADF troops created further tension between the Department of Defence and the media. It can be argued that the status quo of the relationship between the Department of Defence and the media of the 1970s could have survived and continued into the 1980s if only a single PR debacle (Operation Savannah) had occurred. However another PR debacle, namely the aftermath of Operation Reindeer, caused the Department of Defence to completely reassess its relationship with the media, and thus any opportunity for lifting heavy censorship laws during the 1980s was completely destroyed.

By the middle-to-late 1970s apartheid South Africa was in deep trouble with regards to a number of issues. In 1976 the Soweto uprisings took place as a response to Bantu Education imposed on black South Africans by the apartheid Government. And in 1977 the United Nations had imposed an arms embargo on the country, blocking South Africa from being able to acquire state of the art weapons. The Vorster government attempt at reaching out to black African states had been shattered by the Savannah debacle.¹²² Under these circumstances, the influence of the securocrats such as Minister of Defence PW Botha (he was only elected Prime Minister in 1978) increased. This led to more aggressive strategies, which resulted in a whole series of large and small cross border operations into Angola.¹²³ Within a decade South Africa would find itself teetering on the brink of an all-out

¹²¹ *Ibid.*,

¹²² L. Scholtz, *The SADF*, p.13.

¹²³ *Ibid.*,

war with Cuba and Angola.¹²⁴ In this war, the role of the media became ever more present, especially during Operation Reindeer and its aftermath. It should be noted from the start and throughout that Operation Reindeer can be viewed as a military victory for the SADF, but it should also be viewed as a massive propaganda and PR victory for SWAPO. Botha deemed South Africa's involvement in the Angolan War as insufficient. Thus the only existing manner to recapture the strategic initiative was via more aggressive strategies. Thus, South Africa escalated its involvement in the Angolan War even though it was still dealing with the ramifications of Operation Savannah and the POW crisis. The Department of Defence took a gamble in so far as their previous major military operation did not produce the required PR effect as it created a negative image of the SADF even though it was a military success. However it should be noted that Operation Reindeer was not launched for PR reasons, but rather it was an operation with the military goal of destroying a SWAPO stronghold. It can be argued that the Department of Defence was concerned with the media image of the SADF especially at a local level as it went to great lengths to withhold the general public from gaining negative information regarding the SADF.

Thus by April 1978, it was decided to attack Cassinga, a mining town 260km north of the border.¹²⁵ This attack would be code-named Operation Reindeer. To operatives Cassinga was codenamed "Moscow".¹²⁶ Unlike Savannah, which was an intervention in the Angolan civil war, Operation Reindeer and those that followed it was aimed primarily at SWAPO.¹²⁷ If FAPLA or the Cubans placed themselves in the line of the South African fire, then it would be construed as collateral damage.¹²⁸ It can be argued that the attack on Cassinga was undoubtedly the single most controversial battle of the entire Border War.¹²⁹ The role that the media played in reporting what took place during Operation Reindeer, as well as reporting on the aftermath of it, was very important. Had the media not played the role it did, the controversy surrounding Operation Reindeer might never have allowed. Subsequent to the battle, major controversy developed around the nature of the camp at Cassinga.¹³⁰ Was it, as SWAPO claimed, a refugee camp housing hundreds of civilians (mainly women and children who had fled, in SWAPO's view, cruel colonial oppression), or was it, as the SADF said, a military planning, logistics and training base?¹³¹ The fact that about 600 people died in the attack made it, whatever the truth, an excellent opportunity for propaganda

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*,p.82

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹³¹ *Ibid.*,

for both sides.¹³² The possibility existed for the SADF to emphasise Cassinga as a military victory against a 'terrorist force' thus helping with troop morale and creating the impression back home that the SADF was successful and efficient. For SWAPO, the possibility existed to emphasise the assertion that the victims of Cassinga were women and children, and thus creating an even more sinister image of apartheid South Africa. This sinister image would no doubt lead to increased foreign support for SWAPO. Thus the post-Cassinga situation became a PR or propaganda battle between SWAPO and the SADF, a PR battle which the SADF and Department of Defence subsequently lost by some margin.

The international media was the first to report on Cassinga. A few days after Operation Reindeer had taken place, SWAPO flew in a number of journalists to view the results of what had happened at Cassinga.¹³³ This was a very important action taken by SWAPO, as it gave them a PR advantage ahead of the Department of Defence. This advantage would allow SWAPO to strike the first propaganda blow on the international stage, something that the Department of Defence did not anticipate. The international media was subsequently allowed to view the scene. One mass grave was already covered, but another was still littered with bodies.¹³⁴ Jane Bergerol reported for the BBC and *The Guardian* with the following:

First we saw gaily coloured frocks, blue jeans, shirts and a few uniforms. Then there was the sight of the bodies inside them. Swollen, blood-stained, they were the bodies of young girls, young men, a few older adults, some young children, all apparently recent arrivals from Namibia.¹³⁵

Sara Rodriguez from the *Guardian*, a left-wing New York publication, who was also in the party used similar words to describe the "brightly coloured cotton frocks of young girls, jeans, checkered shirts of the boys, a few khaki uniforms and the swollen bodies of the dead. The victims mostly very young and had no defence."¹³⁶ These quotations set the tone of subsequent coverage and became the primary sources for many of the allegations of brutality against the SADF.¹³⁷ Many other allegations were added later, such as that the SAAF dropped poisoned gas on all inhabitants of Cassinga, and that the paratroopers indiscriminately bayoneted innocent old people, women and

¹³² *Ibid.*,

¹³³ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*,

children, even raping women before killing them.¹³⁸ The left-wing activist Randolph Vigne wrote: “There was no battle. Botha's troops parachuted in on May 4, slaughtering 600, the great majority of 'other followers' being women and children as revealed by photographs of the great mass graves taken by international media flown in on May 8”.¹³⁹ It can be argued that SWAPO had gained the upper hand with regards to the PR battle. Apartheid South Africa had already had a negative image on the global arena, and with the events of Cassinga this image would only become worse. The incident was received in a very negative light internationally, however locally the response was neutral as the media was restricted in terms of what it was allowed to say.

South African participants in the attack indignantly denied any wrongdoing.¹⁴⁰ Cassinga was a legitimate military target, populated by PLAN fighters who bravely defended the base, they contended.¹⁴¹ Lieutenant General Constand Viljoen stated in an interview that Cassinga was “a huge logistics support base” from which it was suspected SWAPO was gathering its forces for an infiltration into South West Africa to upset the Turnhalle talks (held between the internal South West Africa parties to discuss the territory's future).¹⁴² Colonel Jan Breytenbach later wrote a book fiercely defending his men from the charges of wanton cruelty and murder.¹⁴³ He found “no or very few” refugees at the base.¹⁴⁴ As far as the war was concerned the civilians comprised mostly abductees who were forcibly “plucked from their neighbourhoods to fill the role of refugees”.¹⁴⁵ Even so, the PR damage had been done, and SWAPO had most definitely won a PR battle against the SADF. The SADF lost the PR battle due to the fact that it had not envisioned the manner in which the international media portrayed its role in Cassinga. SWAPO was portrayed as the victims of an attack which resulted in the massacre of civilians by the military force of an illegitimate government.

The local media had initially only reported on the Operation itself, which was primarily in the form of press releases from the Department of Defence. The *Rand Daily Mail* also reported had a report on Operation Reindeer. The May 6 1978 issue of the newspaper had the following front page headline: “Five SA Men Die in Angola”¹⁴⁶ It was written by Gerald Reilly, a journalist working for the Pretoria bureau of the *Rand Daily Mail*, and was accompanied by an aerial photo of “Moscow”

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.83.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*,

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 May 1978

as the Cassinga base was known. The article made mention of the press conference held by the Department of Defence at Defence HQ in Pretoria and calling the Operation a “total success”. The article also mentioned that no MPLA or Cuban forces were encountered. The sub-heading of the article was the following: “The SA Army and SA Air Force in a combined operation moved into southern Angola early on Thursday (4th) morning and destroyed SWAPO headquarters base codenamed 'Moscow' and other bases”¹⁴⁷ Only two days later, on May 8, Gerald Reilly wrote another piece on Operation Reindeer claiming “SADF mum on SWAPO losses”¹⁴⁸ thus referring to the fact that the SADF as well as the Department of Defence had not released any statements specifically detailing SWAPO losses during Operation Reindeer. The following day, on May 9, The *Rand Daily Mail* ran with an article on page four with the headline: “SWAPO to assess Angola raid toll”¹⁴⁹ The article mentioned SWAPO's Information and Publicity Secretary, Mr Katjavivi, being quoted as saying that Operation Reindeer was a “mass killing of Namibian refugees”¹⁵⁰ On Wednesday May 10, 1978, a PR bombshell was dropped on the South African population. Bernard Cazaux, acting as a special correspondent for the *Rand Daily Mail*, wrote the article that would finally sink the image of the Department of Defence and ensure a propaganda victory for SWAPO. The newspaper was published with the headline: “Foreign Journalists Shown Mass Grave”¹⁵¹ on the front page. The article was accompanied by the following sub-heading: “Cassinga – Foreign journalists saw an open mass grave packed with bodies of 460 people whom Angolan authorities said were 'massacred' by SA troops during attack last week”¹⁵² The article made mention of brightly coloured dresses within the mass grave as well as an additional 122 Namibian bodies. What damaged the image of the Department of Defence even further was that it did not comment on the article when given the chance to do so. It stuck with its traditional “no comment” reply and kept with its policy of silence which only seemed to further incriminate them.

Conversely, *Die Burger* reported very differently on Operation Reindeer. On 6 May 1978 on the front page of *Die Burger* the headline read: “'Moscow' demolished!” in large bold letters with the sub-heading stating: “Many terrorists shot and killed” accompanied by an aerial photo of the base burning.¹⁵³ The destruction of “Moscow” (as previously stated the codename for Cassinga) was reported as a triumph for the SADF and a victory for South Africa by *Die Burger*. This is in sharp contrast to other newspapers who reported that Operation Reindeer was a war crime that was

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁸ *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 May 1978

¹⁴⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 May 1978

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵¹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 May 1978

¹⁵² *Ibid.*,

¹⁵³ *Die Burger*, 6 May 1978

committed by the SADF. On page two of the 6 May 1978 edition an article with the heading: “Celebratory Fires burning high in South West Africa” which continued to emphasize the SWAPO defeat and the SADF victory and how that situation was a victory for South Africa.¹⁵⁴ *Die Burger* also reported on potential POW exchanges. On the front page of the 6 May 1978 edition of *Die Burger* there was an article with the heading: “SWAPO wants to trade SA soldier.”¹⁵⁵ This was a reference to the SWAPO Secretary of Information saying they would be willing to trade a South African soldier, Johan van der Mescht, for SWAPO captives.¹⁵⁶ The *Die Burger's* 11 May 1978 edition contained a follow up article to the van der Mescht story. The heading was: “SA captive “confess” in front of SWAPO guns”¹⁵⁷ The article was in relation to van der Mescht being interviewed by the BBC whilst still a captive of SWAPO.¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that *Die Burger* saw the interview as anti-South Africa propaganda as the interview placed a very negative light on South Africa. What van der Mescht “confessed” to was that since being held captive, he has come to understand that the SADF should withdraw its troops and that apartheid is wrong and that he will never be part of the SADF again. The validity of this “confession” has to be questioned as it was made at SWAPO gun point.

The *EP Herald* reported the events of Operation Reindeer as well. The 6 May 1978 edition contained an article on the front page titled: “SA forces destroyed SWAPO HQ in Angola.”¹⁵⁹ The article also mentions the code-name (“Moscow”) for the base.¹⁶⁰ The *EP Herald* was also one of the few newspapers to report on the mass graves found at Cassinga after Operation Reindeer. The front page of the 10 May 1978 edition had an article titled: “Open Grave at Cassinga.” with a subsequent subheading “Foreign journalists shown mass grave”.¹⁶¹ The article continues on page three of the edition and states that enquiries made to the SADF were met by a reply of “no comment” as was the case with other newspapers.¹⁶² Again, the “no comment” reply by the SADF only harmed their cause further. The SADF had a prime opportunity to respond to allegations that they were guilty of a massacre, yet they failed to do so.

The *Daily Dispatch* also reported on the events of Operation Reindeer. On 6 May 1978 the newspaper reported on the front page “Main SWAPO base was target” along with a sub-heading

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁷ *Die Burger*, 11 May 1978

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁹ *EP Herald*, 6 May 1978

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶¹ *EP Herald*, 10 May 1978

¹⁶² *Ibid.*,

“South African forces destroyed two SWAPO terrorist bases – including SWAPO HQ codenamed Moscow”.¹⁶³ The article also included a photo of “Moscow” and was placed next to an article titled “West Dismayed by SA Raid” which reported that countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom being disappointed due to the fact that South Africa chose to go ahead with Operation Reindeer.¹⁶⁴ This disappointment came from the belief that Operation Reindeer undermined the peace talks. Placing these two articles next to each other could be seen as a form of subdued criticism of the SADF by the *Daily Dispatch*. On 10 May 1978 the *Daily Dispatch* reported on its front page “Desolation reigns as SWAPO buries dead”.¹⁶⁵ This article continued with the narrative of foreign journalists being shown mass grave containing bodies of women and children with brightly coloured dresses on.¹⁶⁶ Thus the *Daily Dispatch* joined a select few newspapers who chose to report this story. On 11 May 1978 the *Daily Dispatch* reported on the BBC interview with the South African soldier, Johan van der Mescht (previously mentioned in an article by *Die Burger*), on page eleven of that edition with the article titled “SA Sapper shown in pathetic plight”.¹⁶⁷ The article also included a photo of van der Mescht.¹⁶⁸ It should also be noted that in exact similar fashion as the case with the reports of mass graves at Cassinga a “no comment” reply was made by the SADF.¹⁶⁹ As previously stated the “no comment” reply by the SADF only damaged the image of the SADF further. The SADF had numerous opportunities to convey their version of the events at Cassinga, with every newspaper asking for a statement. Yet short-sightedness was the order of the day unless the newspaper at hand was part of the group that was among the favourites and thus given access to information other newspapers did not have. However this does not mean that there were newspapers that were guaranteed a comment.

When an analysis is done with regards to the newspaper reporting on Operation Reindeer, the *Cape Times* reported information which none of the other newspapers reported. It should be noted that the bulk of the information was similar, however the *Cape Times* published details other newspapers knew nothing of or they would have published those details themselves. In very similar fashion as to the other newspapers sampled, the *Cape Times* published an article on 6 May 1978 on its front page with the title “SA loses five in raid on SWAPO.”¹⁷⁰ It contained the general narrative found in other newspapers regarding the SADF raid on Cassinga, however also on the front page a continuation article can be found. Within this continuation article information is given regarding

¹⁶³ *Daily Dispatch*, 6 May 1978

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁵ *Daily Dispatch*, 10 May 1978

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁷ *Daily Dispatch*, 11 May 1978

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁰ *Cape Times*, 6 May 1978

female soldiers that were encountered at Cassinga.¹⁷¹ The article speaks of “women in terrorist’ tunics” and that female SWAPO soldiers were encountered.¹⁷² It is also mentioned in the article that SADF General, General Dutton, supplied the information to the newspaper.¹⁷³ It must be noted and emphasised that other newspapers did not report this. This strengthens the argument that the SADF in fact did feed tid bits of information to certain defence correspondents like Willem Steenkamp who was willing to cooperate. The reasons as to why these specific details were given to the *Cape Times* remains open to speculation. It could have been an attempt at enforcing the patronage system that existed between the Department of Defence and the media, and thus it was simply rewarding the *Cape Times* for being loyal towards the Department of Defence and the SADF. It is also possible that Willem Steenkamp's military background gave him access to information other defence correspondents did not have. A final possibility is that the SADF wanted to provide an alibi for the mass graves containing the bodies of women.

On the propaganda front, Operation Reindeer was a disaster for South Africa. An SADF analysis of media reporting post-Reindeer found that initial reporting was mainly neutral, however as time progressed and more information became available to the South African media via the international media the reporting became increasingly negative.¹⁷⁴ This was partly due to the fact that South Africa allowed SWAPO and Angola to capture the propaganda high ground by speaking to the media first and announcing that Cassinga was a refugee camp.¹⁷⁵ The analysis previously mentioned recommended that the SADF should have engaged the media first with regards to the allegations made against the SADF.¹⁷⁶ Luanda's first words to the world was that South Africa had attacked a refugee camp.¹⁷⁷ This is the version that was generally accepted by the international media.¹⁷⁸ It then becomes evident that with propaganda, it is perception rather than reality that matters, and public perceptions of Cassinga was shaped not by the referential but the symbolic value of the mass grave imagery.¹⁷⁹ The assertion can then be made that the mass grave imagery was crucial with regards to shaping public perception regarding the events surrounding Cassinga. With regards to the events surrounding Cassinga it can be said that the exploitation of the social dimension of the conflict was used in order to gain political ground to debase the military action which took place.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷² *Ibid.*,

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁴ L. Scholtz, *The SADF*, p.96.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁹ G. Baines, *A Battle for Perceptions: Revisiting The Cassinga Controversy in Southern Africa*, in P. Dwyer & L. Ryan (eds.) *Theatres of Violence, Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity throughout History*, (New York, 2012), p.235.

¹⁸⁰ M. Alexander, *The Cassinga Raid*, (MA Thesis: University of South Africa, 2003), p.159.

Operations Savannah and Reindeer were PR debacles because they were examples of how the SADF and the Department of Defence unsuccessfully attempted to cover up inconvenient truths regarding their activities in Angola. They were not only embarrassments on an international front, but also proof that information was being kept from the South African public, and that this same information was readily available in other countries. When analysing the PR debacles of Operations Savannah and Reindeer it is important to note the role that the Department of Defence played especially with regards to not only keeping the South African public in the dark about the Operations themselves, but also about the aftermath of these military Operations. The fact that the Department of Defence instituted a blanket censorship over defence reporting was never done in the interest of national security as the Department of Defence claimed it was. It was to protect the image and reputation of the SADF, the Department of Defence and the apartheid state. It was also instituted to ensure that no embarrassing or unwanted information about the SADF or the Department of Defence was published. Ironically, it was this policy of secrecy that added to the magnitude of the fall out regarding Operations Savannah and Reindeer. The consistent reply of “no comment” by the Department of Defence regarding SADF activities within Angola was part of this policy of secrecy. Thus the relationship between the Department of Defence and the local media provided the almost perfect environment for a PR debacle because the SADF and the Department of Defence never paid sufficient attention to the international media. Foreign correspondents had direct access to Angola and could report what they saw without any restrictions. It was extremely short-sighted of the Department of Defence to come to the conclusion that they could contain information regarding SADF activities in Angola.

Conclusion

Thus the negative press that was caused by both Operations Savannah and Reindeer caused the apartheid government to further stem the flow of security information. This caused the media to become more dependent on the military for defence information to report on. This gives credence to the analogy that for the media, its “marriage” with the SADF was a “marriage out of necessity”. Stemming the flow of security information meant that, for the SADF, its “marriage” with the media would be a “convenient marriage”. The militarised nature of the South African society, along with the pre-existing censorship structures and mechanisms, made it relatively easy for the apartheid government to further enhance its control of security information. The PR debacles of Reindeer and

Savannah taught the apartheid government harsh lessons with regards to propaganda and the importance of foreign media. Reindeer and Savannah also led to the formation of the Commission Of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding The South African Defence Force and The South African Police (commonly referred to as the Steyn Commission -1980) to investigate issues surrounding defence reporting. It also lead to the formation of The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media (second Steyn Commission - 1983). Both of these will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: The Steyn Commissions of Inquiry

Introduction

After the PR debacles of Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer, the military/SADF was forced to re-evaluate its relationship with the media. The growing trend of militarisation, along with the “Total Strategy” doctrine as well as the war economy of apartheid South Africa created a society within which authoritarianism thrived. However, the apartheid government still wanted to create the impression of a free press. The main concern that the apartheid government had with the media was in respect of the publication of matters relating to the security of the country. This concern could be seen as the reason why the apartheid government rarely took the media into its confidence. It became clear that the apartheid government did not trust the media. Proof of this can be found in the fact that the international media broke the story on Operation Savannah and yet the South African media, let alone the South African public, could at best suspect that a major South African troop deployment had taken place. The fact that Operation Reindeer was also labelled a “massacre” by the international media forced the apartheid government to reconsider its relationship with the media of South Africa.¹ They only reported that which was shown to the international media, and the “no comment” reply by the SADF.

The apartheid government wanted the media to form part of, or at least lend support to its “Total Strategy” doctrine and safeguard certain information relating to security matters of the country. It wanted to control the media with regards to the type of information it was reporting on. The apartheid government wanted strict control over reporting on security matters whilst at the same time championing the notion that apartheid South Africa had a free press. Defence reporting was especially restricted as the apartheid government safeguarded information regarding the SADF. What follows in this chapter, is an analysis of the manner in which the apartheid government reacted towards the media in the aftermath of the PR debacles of Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer. The apartheid government set up commissions not only to investigate its relationship with the media, but also to legitimise its censorship of defence reporting. This tight grip on information regarding security matters and

¹ It should be noted that the South African newspapers sampled for this thesis did not refer to Operation Reindeer as a “massacre” unless they were quoting SWAPO.

defence reporting can be seen as a common feature of a “Garrison State”. It is also a process that was validated by the “Total Strategy” doctrine. This chapter will show how the findings of these commissions assisted the apartheid government in ensuring that the media would fulfil its wishes. Another important aspect was that the commissions should not portray the apartheid government in an authoritarian light.

The apartheid government set up two commissions to investigate issues surrounding its relationship with the media as well as issues relating to defence reporting. Both were also tasked to investigate the local media environment. It should be noted that the two separate commissions have both been commonly referred to as the “Steyn Commission”. Both Commissions were headed by Chief Justice M.T. Steyn, however as previously stated these were separate commissions. The first commission was the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding the South African Defence Force and the South African Police. This chapter will not focus on the section relating to the South African Police Force. This Commission was tasked in 1979 and its report was published in 1980. The Second commission was titled The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media and was published in 1983. The Chapter will discuss the appointment, primary task and recommendations of each Commission. It is important to note that both commissions made recommendations directly related to the relationship between the media and the SADF.

MT Steyn, the chairman of both Steyn Commissions, was a highly ranked government official chosen to lead both Commissions. Steyn was born into a highly politicised and notable family within South African history. Steyn’s father, Colin Fraser Steyn (1887–1959) was a lawyer and a politician of South Africa, Member of the House of Assembly, Senator, and Cabinet Minister in the government of Jan Smuts.² He practiced as a lawyer in Pretoria and then in Bloemfontein, where he was elected as deputy leader of the National Party.³ He served in the Department of Justice from 1915 to 1928, under Tielman Roos.⁴ He was appointed as the Minister of Justice from 1939 till 1945, and then served as Minister of Employment from 1946 till 1948, in the government of Jan Smuts.⁵ Steyn’s grandfather was President MT Steyn of the Orange Free State. Steyn himself was the Administer General of

² www.geni.com/surnames/steyn (information supplied by Steyn family, specifically LC Steyn, son of MT Steyn (Judge) and great-grandson of MT Steyn (president of Orange Free State))

³ *Ibid.*,

⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁵ *Ibid.*,

South West Africa from 1977-1979.⁶ Steyn's career as a public servant was also filled with controversy at times. Criticised by Edwin Cameron, then a fellow lawyer, for not being impartial, and being too pro government, there were calls on Steyn to resign.⁷ On April 25 1978 Steyn announced that nine persons who were "promoting the commission of violence and intimidation" had been detained under the emergency regulations.⁸ All nine were members of the 13-member executive committee of SWAPO's internal wing.⁹ In a booklet entitled *Torture-a Cancer in our society*, compiled by Father Heinz Hunke, a Roman Catholic priest and Mr Justin Ellis, an Anglican worker at the Christian centre in Windhoek, and published on 18 January 1978, it was alleged that "institutionalised torture" was proliferating in the territory despite a statement made by Steyn that it was not.¹⁰ Steyn also decided not to appoint a commission of inquiry into torture allegations.¹¹ Steyn's lengthy career as a public servant made him a suitable candidate to head the commissions. The government presumably reckoned that it could rely on his loyalty to the Nationalist Party's political agenda.

The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding The South African Defence Force And The South African Police

For purposes of this chapter, The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding the South African Defence Force and the South African Police will be referred to as the Steyn Commission (1980).

The Commission was set up by the State President, Marais Viljoen, and the report was also handed over to him.¹² The official primary task of the Steyn Commission (1980) was to investigate and report on issues relating to reporting on security matters with special references to the SADF and the SAP. It investigated the nature and composition of the South African state and community in order to contextualise the analysis of the security situation of

⁶ Keesing's Record of World Events, XXIV, June 1978, Namibia, p.29039.

⁷ *Weekly Mail* 7 August 1987

⁸ Keesing's Record of World Events, XXIV, June 1978, Namibia, p.29039.

⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹¹ *Ibid.*,

¹² *Ibid.*,

the country. Its mandate also included the stipulation that it should investigate current conflict situations in which apartheid South Africa was involved. The nature and role of the South African news media at the time was also subject to investigation. The Commission also had to analyse the effectiveness of legislation regarding the media and defence reporting. A very important aspect of the task of the Commission was that it had to make recommendations regarding all these matters. The fact that the Commission was asked to make recommendations shows that it had some authority, however there existed no legal imperative to write these recommendations into law. An argument can be made that the Steyn Commission (1980) had an unofficial mandate which was to conserve the status quo with regards to the relationship between the media and the apartheid government and to ensure that the notion of protecting defence information which the government deemed to be confidential was upheld.

With regards to media control agreements, the Steyn Commission admitted that measured against western standards, the media situation in South Africa did not merit the description “free”. Tension built up between the government and the press especially towards the second half of 1977 on the issues of security and suggested the possible introduction of further measures to control the press.¹³ This dispute dominated the political scene in 1978 and in 1979 a heated debate followed on the proposal to institute legislation in order to create a “more disciplined press”.¹⁴ Apartheid South Africa already possessed a formidable arsenal of legislation controlling reporting relating to national security.¹⁵ The Commission's main concern in its evaluation of the media lay with the concept of the gatekeeper, or the journalist who occupies this incredibly important position between what reality actually is and the presentation of reality.¹⁶ From the Commission's own findings on media effects it seems that non-media mediators and opinion leaders have a more powerful influence on the minds of the public than the media itself.¹⁷ The Steyn Commission (1980) did not in any way assist the media with their strained relationship with the SADF/apartheid government. It supported the wants and needs of the privacy concerns that the SADF/apartheid government had regarding reporting on security matters. The idea of a loyal media was a common theme throughout the

¹³ G. Addison., *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (Grahamstown, 1980), p.141.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*,p.141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,p.142.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

Report on the Commission, enforcing ideas put forth by the apartheid government's "Total Strategy".

M.T. Steyn, D.A.S. Herbst, N.N. Venter, K.P.C.O von Lieres und Wilkau, L.C. Masterson and K.H. Fisher were appointed in terms of Proclamation No 302 of 14 December 1979 as a commission to investigate and report upon news media reporting of defence matters and other related matters.¹⁸ The Commission was directed to submit its report before 15 March 1980.¹⁹ In terms of the same Proclamation, the provisions of the Commissions Act, No 8 of 1947, were made applicable to the Commission and, in terms of Proclamation 14 of January 1980, regulations were issued that, inter alia, empowered the Commission to appoint one or more committees, each consisting of at least two of its members, to hear evidence and representations concerning any particular aspect of its terms of reference.²⁰ In accordance with a decision taken on 12 December 1979, at the first meeting of the Commission, all interested parties, were notified, by means of the media and letters directed by the Secretary of the Commission to various bodies and persons.²¹ The first public sitting of the Commission was held in Pretoria on 14 January 1980.²²

During the period between 14 January 1980 to 7 March 1980, evidence and submissions were heard.²³ The 45 bodies and persons of interest that presented evidence and submissions were heard in Pretoria except during the periods from 29 January to 1 February 1980 and from 3 March to 7 March 1980 when the Commission sat in Cape Town.²⁴ In addition a number of memoranda were received from other interested parties. In terms of Section 4 of the Commissions Act of 1947, the hearing of evidence, representations and submissions took place in public, with the exception of those aspects which the Chairman determined were to take place behind closed doors due to the sensitive and thus confidential nature thereof.²⁵ All oral statements were recorded on tape and typed in such a way that the public and

¹⁸ The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding The South African Defence Force And The South African Police, (Pretoria, 1980) p.1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

²⁰ *Ibid.*,

²¹ *Ibid.*,p.3.

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ *Ibid.*,

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

²⁵ *Ibid.*,

confidential parts were easily separated from each other.²⁶ The Commission recommended that the confidential evidence and submissions not be made public.

The press reported on certain events regarding the Steyn Commission (1980), however, a number of activities undertaken by the Commission were conducted *in camera*, and thus the public and the media did not have access to these activities. The Commission could not keep out all of the damning evidence and witness testimonials against the military censorship from public view. For example, even *Die Burger*, which was widely known as a pro-government publication during the 1970s and 80s, published articles criticising the military and governmental institutions of apartheid South Africa. On Friday 1 February 1980, *Die Burger* led with a story with the heading “Military leads media in illusion regarding war”.²⁷ In the article, Johan Coetzee, a defence correspondent for the *Huisgenoot* and an officer in the Citizen Force, who was a witness at the Steyn Commission (1980) and delivered testimony, was quoted as saying “SA is involved in a war. As a soldier I am aware of this. As a defence correspondent it does not feel like it”.²⁸ This speaks to the credibility gap that existed between the military and the public. The military did not trust the media to report on issues relating to defence matters, and thus proceeded to shut out the local media. On Tuesday 15 April 1980 *Die Burger* reported on the Steyn Commission once more with an article with the heading “Control requested over foreign propaganda”.²⁹ The article reported that legislation which grants the apartheid government comprehensive control over all propaganda and intelligence monitoring, was recommended by the Steyn Commission (1980).³⁰ Contained within the same edition, was another report regarding the Steyn Commission (1980). The article was headed “Military would ban all” and stated that the official SADF delegation at the Steyn Commission (1980) asked for an overall ban on all publications related to the SADF itself and that no information regarding the SADF should be published.³¹ However, on the following day, Wednesday 16 April 1980, *Die Burger* reverted back to its support of the apartheid government in an article under the byline *Dawie* saying that the Steyn Commission (1980) made a significant contribution to the potential of a fertile relationship between the media and the government of the day. This article went completely against the grain of what

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ *Die Burger*, 1 February 1980

²⁸ *Ibid.*,

²⁹ *Die Burger*, 15 April 1980

³⁰ *Ibid.*,

³¹ *Ibid.*,

Die Burger had been reporting previously regarding the Steyn Commission (1980) and the relationship between the government and the media. One can only speculate as to why *Die Burger* made such a drastic change regarding its view of the Steyn Commission. It is possible that *Die Burger* did not want to alienate its conservative readership or its allies in government. *Dawie* (which is an anonymous editorial published in *Die Burger* and still in existence today) could have also been used as a foil to create controversy in the court of public opinion.

The Commission defined its general scope as any interests within apartheid South Africa, with regards to freedom of speech and disclosure of information on the one hand, and national security and keeping secret or confidential facts on the other. For the Commission, this was in essence a value judgement that could be properly made only against the background of the political nature of apartheid South Africa, and in the context of the prevailing circumstances in which the country found itself.³² The same holds true of the terms of reference as regards the effectiveness of legal provisions and the possible amendment thereof.³³ For this reason, the Commission considered it necessary to hear a wide range of evidence and to gather information regarding the nature and extent of the conflict situation. The Commission saw the “threat” confronting apartheid South Africa as something which it probably would have had to be prepared to counter during the coming decades.³⁴ The political nature and composition of the peoples of apartheid South Africa were also examined and considered in relation to the prevailing circumstances, the requirements with regard to delimitation, and other relevant issues.³⁵ Consequently, the nature and scope of the whole conflict situation within which the delimitation of interests (boundaries within which the Commission worked) occurred, and the other terms of references carried out by the Commission, were reported on.³⁶

When analysing the general scope set out by the Commission itself, strong emphasis was placed on the political situation in South Africa at the time. Also, the phrase “conflict situation” is used throughout the report as a means of justifying the recommendations made

³² *Ibid.*,

³³ *Ibid.*,

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ *Ibid.*,p.4.

by the Commission. When referring to the “conflict situation” the Commission was referring to the perceived “Total Onslaught” being carried out on South Africa. Thus for the Commission to adequately investigate issues surrounding defence reporting, it also had to analyse the political context within which these events were taking place. It has to be emphasised that the Commission never truly sought to criticise the apartheid government, and thus its analysis of the “conflict situation” the country was facing was merely a means to endorse the apartheid government’s threat perceptions. For if the Commission found that the actions of the apartheid government were valid, it could then be argued that those actions were valid within a specific political context the country found itself in. This argument could then be the loophole that the Commission needed to justify oppressive regulations set out by the apartheid government limiting press freedom. Thus the “conflict situation” as referred to by the Commission, provides an excuse for supporting the actions of the apartheid government. The balance between freedom of speech and access to information regarding security matters and keeping confidential facts from the public was seen as a “value judgement” by the Commission and could not be accurately explained without evaluating the political circumstances of apartheid South Africa perceived threats to the country. Thus the Commission always had the “conflict situation” and threats to the country as background for its analysis. This leads to the conclusion that either the Commission was tainted and biased from the start, or it simply framed its report within the hegemonic apartheid discourse of the time.

The Report itself was divided into six sections. Namely: (1) The present South African political and social dispensation and state of affairs, including the factors giving rise to the prevailing conflict situation; (2) The nature and scope of that conflict situation, and the probable unfolding and development thereof during the eighties; (3) The nature of the news media and their role in effective and successful support of the South African “developmental dynamism” and in countering the danger facing the country and its peoples; (4) The delimitation of interests as set out in the terms of reference and the reconciliation of the interests thus delimited; (5) The investigation of, and recommendations concerning, the effectiveness of the relevant statutory provisions and the necessity and equitability of amending and/or supplementing existing legislation should the present provisions appear ineffective, as well as the suggested amendments and/or supplementary legislation, if deemed essential and equitable. And lastly a Summary and Recommendations section.

The Steyn Commission made a myriad of recommendations regarding the relationship between the SADF and the media. The following is a summary of these recommendations. It recommended that: first, the SADF should give attention to the improvement of internal liaison and to methods of improving the liaison work with the media, by way of a higher level of professionalism as well as efficient and timely liaison centres away from Pretoria.³⁷ Second, meaningful briefings and dialogue between the media and the SADF be expanded.³⁸ Third, that the media give urgent attention to the improved professionalisation of journalism and that in any event only senior journalists be assigned to handle SADF affairs.³⁹ Fourth, that a system of registration of foreign journalists who work in the RSA be instituted.⁴⁰ Fifth, that a clearly formulated communication policy and plan for the RSA be developed as an additional aspect of the national strategy.⁴¹ The Official Secrets Act of 1956 should be revised so as to restrict its ambit (it was repealed and replaced with the Protection of Information Act of 1982).⁴² The committee added that it had to be borne in mind, that the processes of Government became more sophisticated and increasingly affected the affairs of all citizens because the dangers to the state changed in character and became more complex.⁴³

The Commission made specific recommendations regarding the Defence Act 1957. In section 104(5) it is stated that in order to blunt the spear-point of possible enemy propaganda based upon unpunished misdeeds which become unpunishable due to miscreants leaving the security forces or who for other reasons are no longer subject to their jurisdiction, it was recommended that in respect of the SADF Section 104(5) be amended.⁴⁴ This was a reference to security leaks that were taking place. Members of the security forces were supplying apartheid South Africa's enemies with vital information pertaining to national security. Such an example was that of Commodore Dieter Gerhardt who would be exposed as a spy. Through his father's influence he joined the navy.⁴⁵ In recognition of his leadership potential, Gerhardt went overseas on several occasions for training course in the British navy.⁴⁶ This

³⁷ *Ibid.*,

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

³⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

⁴² *Ibid.*,

⁴³ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁵ South African History Archives, interview with General Herman Stadler, 31 August 2009

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

was during a time when the British navy still acted like a mentor for the South African navy.⁴⁷ While overseas again he decided he wanted to make extra money.⁴⁸ He first approached the American consulate, but they rejected him.⁴⁹ He then went to the Soviet embassy.⁵⁰ After a while he copied documents from the British navy and took it to them and told them that he wanted to work for them.⁵¹ They then started training him specifically in photography and photographic related skills.⁵² He worked for a period of 30 years, from 1963 to 1983, for the Soviet Union.⁵³ He severely compromised the defence force, in particular the navy.⁵⁴ Gerhardt was able to exploit the confidence placed in him as commanding officer of Simonstown naval base. He, and his second wife Ruth Gerhardt, were sentenced to life imprisonment and ten years' imprisonment respectively, being found guilty of high treason on charges of spying for the Soviet Union.⁵⁵

The media was quick to report on the Gerhardt saga (even though it only became public knowledge after the first Steyn Commission). On 27 January 1983, one day after the press conference made by the South African government regarding Gerhardt's arrest, various newspapers reported the story. The *Rand Daily Mail* had a front page article with the headline "Navy man in Red spy case".⁵⁶ The article was written by John Battersby, the political correspondent of the *Rand Daily Mail*.⁵⁷ The article stated that Commodore Dieter Gerhardt, who was commanding the Simonstown naval dockyard, had been detained and that this sent shockwaves through the SADF.⁵⁸ The article also mentioned that he was being held under section 29 of the Internal Security Act.⁵⁹ The article also reported on the press conference on 26 January 1983 held by PW Botha, Minister of Law and Order Le Grange and Minister of Defence Malan that announced the arrest of Gerhardt.⁶⁰ According to the article Botha

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*,

⁵² *Ibid.*,

⁵³ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁵ Kalley, J.A.; Schoeman, E. & Andor, L.E. (Eds) (1999). *Southern African Political History: a chronology of key political events from independence to mid-1997*, Westport: Greenwood.

⁵⁶ *Rand Daily Mail* 27 January 1983

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,

mentioned at the press conference that sensitive information had already been leaked to the Soviet Union.⁶¹ Also on the front page of the *Rand Daily Mail* was an article written by Chris Olckers with the heading “Top Naval Officer, wife may face death sentence”.⁶² This was due to the fact that if it was found that information passed on by Gerhardt and his wife to the Soviet Union had resulted in the death of a SADF member, they could be given the death penalty. The *EP Herald* also reported on the Gerhardt saga with an article on the front page of the 27 January 1983 edition with the headline “Navy spy bombshell”.⁶³ However, *Die Burger*’s report was far more thorough than that of the *EP Herald*. *Die Burger* led with multiple front page articles regarding the Gerhardt saga written by different correspondents. The main headline was “Spy Revelations” with sub-heading “Big Money hidden in Swiss bank account”.⁶⁴ The main article was written by Tim Du Plessis, regarding Gerhardt’s arrest and the press conference held by PW Botha.⁶⁵ The article mentions that Botha stated at the press conference that Soviet interests were placed ahead of South African interests.⁶⁶ Gideon Joubert, defence correspondent for *Die Burger*, also wrote a front page article detailing how Gerhardt had access to highly sensitive information and how Gerhardt compromised the entire defence force of South Africa.⁶⁷ He also interviewed some of Gerhardt’s colleagues, all of whom expressed their shock.⁶⁸ The government’s handling of the matter shows that the SADF was loathe to divulge state secrets to the media before it made a public statement.

The Gerhardt incident harmed the intelligence services of the apartheid government, and the manner in which the Gerhardt saga was sensationalised by the local media only added to the PR damage to the South African intelligence community already caused. The Gerhardt saga is pertinent to the Steyn Commission as it was not the media that divulged sensitive information about the SADF, but rather it was the SADF’s own members whose actions betrayed its secrets. Ironically, the SADF had as much – if not more - reason to distrust its own members than the media.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

⁶² *Ibid.*,

⁶³ *EP Herald* 27 January 1983

⁶⁴ *Die Burger* 27 January 1983

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

The Commission also recommended various amendments to Section 118 (I) which relates to the improper disclosure of information. The Commission recommended that the basis of authorisation accorded the Minister in sub-section 1 to release information and allow publication should be broadened to allow him to give a priori permission for the publication of certain categories of news included in the prohibition.⁶⁹ Thus the Commission in essence recommended that the Minister of Defence be given greater censorship powers. The Commission also recommended that the ambit of Section 118 (1) (a) “that any information relating to the defence of the Union is secret” and (b) “Where the accused is proved to be, or have been a member of the SADF” has to be restricted and clarified especially to enable the press to perform its watchdog role but without endangering the security of the Defence Force during operations.⁷⁰ (c) Provision had to be made to identify the responsible officer who may release information during any joint operations with the SAP in connection with the combating of terrorism.⁷¹ (d) The whole of section 118 is widely and vaguely formulated and the suggested redrafting attempts to engender more clarity and precision whilst simultaneously preserving and protecting that basic information requiring protection.⁷²

Thus in summary the Steyn Commission suggested the following recommendations:

That the SADF and the SAP should give attention to improving their liaison with the media through the greater professionalism of their PROs and through more timeous liaison in the main centres outside Pretoria.⁷³ The media, for its part, must give urgent attention to better professionalising of journalism as a calling and in any case only senior journalists should be appointed to handle SADF and SAP matters.⁷⁴ The system of accrediting correspondents should be refined so that the correspondents did not regard defence and police reporting as just another beat, but as a field in which there could be proper reporting and insight in depth.⁷⁵ To this end, the military and police liaison offices should provide more meaningful briefings.⁷⁶ As a general principle, the Commission recommended that Government secrecy should be meaningful and restricted to the minimum necessary to safeguard the security of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁷¹ *Ibid.*,

⁷² *Ibid.*,

⁷³ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,

the state and the community.⁷⁷

According to Addison the prescription for an integrated communications policy in which the news media were to play a role had definite totalitarian overtones.⁷⁸ Addison is mistaken here, in that as shown in Chapter 3, apartheid South Africa should rather be described as an authoritarian state, and not a totalitarian one. The Commission insisted that the press was not to be deprived of its watchdog role, and that its right to report matters of public concern should be limited only where matters adversely affecting the security of the state were at play.⁷⁹ Over sensitivity by officialdom towards criticism sometimes led to unnecessary suppression of information and tended to create circumstances in which rumours thrived and panic occurred through uncertainty.⁸⁰ What was needed between the authorities and the media was a partnership of mutual respect.⁸¹ Instead, the military insisted on keeping the media at arm's length as if the relationship was a "marriage of convenience". By exposing administrative malpractice, corruption, neglect and dishonesty, the press was not being disloyal but on the contrary was facilitating effectiveness and promoting a sound relationship between the community and the security forces.⁸² The Steyn Commission reckoned that it could achieve this without having to publish sensitive facts about operational methods, equipment or actions of the security forces, which had to remain secret.⁸³

As stated in Chapter 2, self-censorship and legislation were not the only ways in which journalists and the Department of Defence interacted with each other. The Newspaper Press Union (NPU) reached an agreement with the Minister of Defence in 1967 with a later amendment in 1979.⁸⁴ The aim of this agreement was to create a work and liaison mechanism between the Directorate for Public Relations of the SADF and the Press Union.⁸⁵ In accordance with the agreement, a liaison committee was established with the purpose of discussing matters of policy and principle as often as necessary.⁸⁶ The main aim of the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.194

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁸¹ *Ibid.*,

⁸² *Ibid.*,

⁸³ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁴ The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding The South African Defence Force And The South African Police, (Pretoria, 1980),p.143.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

agreement was stated as follows: “The release to the press of as much information as may be released within the framework of security and with the least possible delay” (agreement clause 2).⁸⁷ The SADF as well as the members of the press union, informed the Steyn Commission that voluntary regulation of reporting on the basis of the agreement was preferable to the implementation of existing legislation.⁸⁸ This appears to suggest that the SADF and the media could see mutual benefits in a trusting relationship (like a “marriage”) between the two parties.

According to the Steyn Commission, more than enough evidence existed to prove that the agreement between the Minister of Defence and the NPU functioned smoothly at the liaison committee level, but not within the NPU itself as well as among its members. Therefore, according to the Steyn Commission, the need of the SADF for stricter legislation was a valid claim. The SADF also wanted further powers and the means of dealing with those publications which did not belong to the NPU. The Commission was of the opinion, however, that the SADF had, in fact, at its disposal numerous legal tools, but that these were not utilised sufficiently and consequently had not been put to the test. The SADF gave evidence to the Commission that it would prefer to operate in accordance with the agreement, which according to the commission showed an attitude which indicates a readiness to communicate. It should be noted that the legal status of the agreement was questioned and therefore whether it was truly binding on both parties. What was certain, however, was that the Agreement could in no way replace legislation. At the most it was “a tool for facilitating sound and healthy communication”.⁸⁹ The Commission suggested that the Agreement should be retained and refined, it should be utilised within the framework of strict legislation, and be given legal status.⁹⁰ Accredited correspondents was a system that was implemented to give limited access to journalists with regards to the SADF and security matters. This system was essential in ensuring that sensitive information did not get published. The system ensured a continuity of accredited correspondents so that the relationships not be damaged by inexperienced or incompetent journalists.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*,

The press took a keen interest and reported extensively on the Steyn Commission (1980). The following newspaper reports were sampled in order to illustrate how the recommendations/report of the Steyn Commission (1980) was reported on. The first is an article by the *Rand Daily Mail* published on 16 April 1980 with the headline “A Report with two faces” which stated that the report of the Steyn Commission was a bizarre mixture of good and bad.⁹¹ The positives were that the watchdog status of the media was acknowledged and that only secrets that threaten the security of the country should be kept secret.⁹² Also, the government should work with the media, not against it.⁹³ However, the media and the government cannot become partners, because that was not the intended role of the media.⁹⁴ Control over foreign journalists was a transparent way to control the flow of news.⁹⁵ The scepticism, however, came into play with regards to the attitude which the government had displayed towards the media for a very long time.⁹⁶ The article hinted that it was more likely the negative recommendations would be implemented.⁹⁷ Another article was published in the *Pretoria News* on 15 April 1980 with the headline “Defence Reporting and the National Interest” which reported that the report of the Steyn Commission brought perspective and balance to a terrain which is generally known for being a problem area.⁹⁸ On the one hand the importance of secrecy was emphasised whilst the role of the media as watchdog was still acknowledged.⁹⁹ The government should appreciate the broad context within which the report was based and should not only notice the restrictive elements of the report.¹⁰⁰ The call to change the Defence Act of 1957 in order to give the media more freedom in its watchdog role was also welcomed.¹⁰¹ And lastly, it speculated that the suggestion that foreign intelligence and propaganda activities be monitored would cause problems in the future.¹⁰² Thus it is evident that the reporting on the Steyn Commission (1980), much like the opinions regarding it, was quite varied.

⁹¹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 April 1980

⁹² *Ibid.*,

⁹³ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁸ *Pretoria News*, 15 April 1980

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰² *Ibid.*,

MID Media-Analysis of the Steyn Commission (1980)

Before any further analysis is done, it should be noted that the MID report dated 14 May 1980 made special mention of the Steyn Commission and how it was being reported on in the media. The MID media-analysis reports, which was discussed in Chapter 3, mention the Steyn Commission (1980) and thus it is incorporated into this chapter which has specifically dealt with the Steyn Commission. What follows is an analysis of MID reports (mentioned in Chapter 3) which focused on the Steyn Commission (1980).

The MID report separated the reporting on the Steyn Commission into two categories namely the Afrikaans and the English media. According to the information captured by the reports, the Afrikaans media received the report of the Steyn Commission in a positive manner. The Afrikaans media also agreed with all of the recommendations made by the Steyn Commission. The English media was far more cautious in its approach. They weighed the positive and negative aspects of the report on the Steyn Commission very carefully. The majority, however, saw it in a negative light and thus took the opportunity to criticise the government. Those sectors of the media which saw the Steyn Commission in a negative light explicitly stated that they did not have any real trust in the report or that they would change their opinion of the report once it is implemented by the government. The *Rand Daily Mail* also said that it became suspicious of government's good intentions given the strained relationship that the newspaper already had with the government.¹⁰³ The Steyn Commission was the largest opinion-forming topic in this specific report. This is due to the fact that the report of the Steyn Commission enjoyed plenty of attention in the media. The media attempted to see both the positive and negative aspects of the Steyn Commission. Thus the reports attempted to give a generally balanced distribution between positive, negative and neutral reporting regarding the Steyn Commission.

The reporting on the Steyn Commission was also given a score regarding the attitude towards the Commission by the media. This score was calculated according to how frequently the Steyn Commission was being reported on within a specific time. In general, The Steyn

¹⁰³ SANDF Archives, SADF Media Analysis Report, Volume 22, 14 May 1980, CSADF, 1, 53

Commission was given a score as follows: Total Frequency: 143, positive: 30, neutral: 113, negative: 0.¹⁰⁴ The Steyn Commission's recommendations were also given a score, more specifically that the recommendations would be made into law fairly soon: Frequency: 47, Neutral: 47.¹⁰⁵ The Steyn Commission's findings was also given the following score: Frequency: 37, Neutral: 37.¹⁰⁶ The MID analysis seems to suggest a far more positive analysis of the report by mainstream media than my own sampling of such material. It suited the MID to create the impression that the press was well disposed towards it. Presumably because the MID reports were meant for PW Botha and thus the leader had to be shielded from the truth.

The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media

For the purposes of this thesis, the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media is not as important as the first Steyn Commission (1980). However it is still relevant as it relates to the reaction of the apartheid government towards media reporting. It did not specifically investigate issues pertaining to the relationship between the media and the military, as it was a more general investigation of the media. The Commission, similarly to the first Steyn Commission (1980), also made recommendations regarding the media. These recommendations came with the report on the Commission published in 1983.¹⁰⁷

On 27 June 1980, the Department of Interior Minister, Mr. AL Schlebusch, announced that Justice MT Steyn, chairman of the first Steyn Commission (1980), would chair The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media.¹⁰⁸ The appointment of the Commission was formally announced in Government Gazette 7106 dated 27 June 1980.¹⁰⁹ The report of the Commission was based on information gathered by way of evidence, arguments, submission and exhibits. The Commission also took into account facts that were general knowledge or were reported in the press although not formally presented to it by way of evidence or

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁷ Report of The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media (Pretoria, 1983), p.1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

otherwise.¹¹⁰ The Commission serves as proof of the obsession which the apartheid government had regarding media reporting. Investigating the media's reporting on defence matters was not sufficient for the apartheid government, thus a more general investigation of the media was also needed. And this investigation came in the form of The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media.

The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media could be heavily criticised for promoting a simplistic view of journalism.¹¹¹ The Commission's version of patriotism, which was often invoked, saw the media as a servant of the state.¹¹² For the Commission, the public's "right to know" was subordinate to the "national interest".¹¹³ Similar sentiments were shared by the first Steyn Commission (1980). The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media was an admirer of the "Total Strategy" theory prevalent in apartheid South African political and military discourse during the 1970s and 1980s. The Commission was also a fervent supporter of the idea that the media should act in cooperation with the authorities. At the outset, the Commission stated that its concern was not just the ordinary or general practise of news reporting.¹¹⁴ For the Commission, the "problems" within the media went far deeper than just journalistic practices.¹¹⁵ The problem area identified was an attitude which shaped journalistic practices.¹¹⁶ This "attitude problem" of the media was seen as a "libertarian" ideal held by the media that freedom of the press implies absolute freedom. The Commission found that any "libertarian" view of freedom of the press should be rejected.¹¹⁷ The Steyn Commission went on to say that absolute freedom in the press exists nowhere and that freedom itself implies responsibility within the situation in which the media finds itself, including the circumstances of its country.¹¹⁸ However contrary to this, the Commission stated that it was not its intention to curb the principles of a free press in South Africa, because, according to the Commission, "without this free, vigorous and responsible press the South African community would be much poorer."¹¹⁹ In fact, (apartheid) South Africa without

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.522.

¹¹¹ C. Merrett., *Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994) p.85.

¹¹² *Ibid.*,

¹¹³ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁴ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media, (Pretoria, 1983), p.1121.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.152.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1124-25.

press freedom is hard to imagine”.¹²⁰ This made little sense as the Commission obviously contradicted itself. It recommended that the freedom of the press should be limited, yet at the same time it also stated that it had no intention of doing so. Although according to the Commission the apartheid government accepted principles of a free press, they placed more emphasis on the vital necessity of press loyalty and responsibility.¹²¹ This, again, is a completely contradictory ideal as the press could not be free and independent if it had to be loyal to the wishes of the apartheid government. The Commission stated that a loyal and responsible press does not simply imply a manipulated press, and that the major yardstick for loyalty lies in service to the community.¹²² However what the Commission failed to see was that if the freedom of the press was limited, its ability to serve the community would also be limited.

The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media came to the defence of the Steyn Commission (1980) after it was heavily criticised. The First Steyn Commission’s description of South Africa as a “developing and expanding democracy” was severely criticised on the grounds that South Africa was in fact a racially oppressive “pigmentocracy” (Commission’s own phrase) which denied the vast majority of the population the right to have a say in the decision-making at governmental level.¹²³ The Commission found that this criticism was illegitimate and was simply anti-South African. Thus the second Commission agreed with the first in terms of its branding of apartheid South Africa as a “developing and expanding democracy”. This was clearly typical apartheid rhetoric and was in no way based in reality and more importantly, it was Steyn defending his earlier work within the previous media commission. Most worryingly was the Commission’s understanding and interpretation of the South African constitutional system. The constitutional system during apartheid was anything but fair and progressive, however it did allow for some freedoms for the white population.

The Commission was established soon after the first Steyn Commission (1980) as the first Steyn Commission (1980) did not cover all aspects relating to media reporting. For the apartheid government a more general investigation of the media was also needed. The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media was tasked with investigating into and reporting

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹²¹ *Ibid.*,

¹²² *Ibid.*,

¹²³ *Ibid.*,p.34

on whether the conduct of the local South African mass media met the needs of the South African community at the time and, if not, how it could be improved upon. The Steyn Commission found that when it reported the local South African media did not meet the needs and requirements of the South African community and that it needed to be improved. It can be argued that the apartheid government appointed the Steyn Commission merely to diminish the fears of opposition groups. There was a multitude of legal means in place that the apartheid government used in the late 1970s and early 1980s to contain opposition opinions within the media and thus the public sphere. It is then possible to argue that the Report on the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media was a tool used by the apartheid government to justify its control of the local media.

The Commission itself noted that the apartheid government in its mandate to the Commission provided the following yardstick, “Whether the conduct of, and the handling of matters by, the mass media meet the needs and interests of the South African Community and the demands of the times, and if not, how they can be improved”.¹²⁴ According to the Commission, the very emphasis on the needs and interests underlined the question whether broad community interests were sufficiently represented in and served by the media, or not.¹²⁵ This section in the report can be seen as a justification that was used by the Commission to ensure that the public saw it as an autonomous entity that worked independently from the government and that it was a necessary Commission with a valid mandate.

The Commission drew attention to the fact that the scope and ambit of the report was substantially larger and longer than originally intended. This was due to various reasons. Firstly, opposition to the idea that there was any onslaught whatsoever on apartheid South Africa existed. The Commission made special reference to the fact that the nature of both the demands of the times, needs and interests of the community and the question whether the media meet these demands and needs can be radically different in abnormal times from these pertaining to normal times.¹²⁶ The Commission regarded “normal times” as when there was no opposition to apartheid and no security threat. It is debatable whether it was possible for “normal times” to exist in an abnormal (i.e. apartheid) society. Thus the Commission was

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*,p.10.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*,p.22.

trying to absolve itself from an unsatisfactory finding by saying the needs and interests are being met within the context of “abnormal times” as the Commission saw it. The report stated that, secondly, “protagonists of black radical thought” refused and declined to submit and engage with the Commission despite invitation to do so.¹²⁷ However the report itself provides no evidence that this was indeed the case. Presumably the black extra-parliamentary opposition did not recognise the legitimacy of the apartheid state nor the authority of its commissions.

The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media made various recommendations relating to the media. Even though the Commission did not specifically investigate the relationship between the media and the military, it did make mention of what it saw as problem areas within the relationship between the media and the Department of Defence. The Commission found that, “The standpoint of the authorities is, justifiably, that they have to interfere if the newspaper (or media) cannot discipline itself. It is obvious that the freedom of the press becomes ever more endangered in this way, even if a high value is placed upon it.”¹²⁸ The intertwined elements of legislation and self-discipline enforced by the media clashed with the ideas of a free press. In this instance, the Commission served as a mouthpiece for the apartheid government. It implied that newspapers had a wide margin of freedom and that they were only limited by legal constraints which citizens were also subjected to. The Commission also recommended the registration of journalists.¹²⁹ The purpose of registration was to sift out unfriendly reporters.¹³⁰ Similar sentiments were shared by the first Steyn Commission (1980) that held that the media should have a specific role to play within the “Total Strategy” theory employed by apartheid South Africa. Both Commissions were in favour of a “loyal” media which took its direction from the apartheid government and was not allowed to independently report on security matters. Self-discipline by the press was also mentioned by the Commission. It was framed as a possible solution for the freedom versus legislation dichotomy. If the media practised self-censorship (or self-discipline as the Commission referred to it), the media would be doing the apartheid government’s work for it. The Report on the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media’s findings and recommendations were widely criticised. The Steyn Commission argued that the manner in which to solve the

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.145.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*,

problems facing the media was through the "professionalization" of the media. Thus blaming the media's apparent lack of professionalism for problems created by the apartheid government.

The apartheid government saw it necessary for the media to make a clear distinction between reporting "that (which) really endangers the security of the country and general matters of public interest".¹³¹ The apartheid government had realised that legislation could not possibly prevent everything that they deemed to be truly harmful from being published. Thus if the press enforced self-discipline or self-censorship the apartheid government could further entrench the lie that South Africa had a free press according to Western standards of the time. The Commission saw the problem of legislation dealing with the media and especially newspapers was basically the problem of which norms should be applied to hold the media to "their responsibilities".¹³² The problem with legislation dealing with the media has always been definitional in nature. How can the state define what is "harmful" content without seemingly overstepping its reach? Thus newspapers enforcing self-censorship or self-discipline by the standards of the apartheid government would have solved a large portion of this problem of dealing with the media reporting sensitive information for the apartheid government if the relationship was based on trust – like a "marriage".

It became clear that the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media was inclined towards protecting the apartheid government's policies regarding the media. This created a conflict situation between the media and the Commission. The conflict between the Commission and even relatively moderate sections of the commercial media was in essence a struggle over the right to reflect perceived reality.¹³³ According to Merrett, Steyn was fundamentally antagonistic towards modern trends in journalism, so his conflict with the conservative as well as moderate press was technocratic as well as ideological.¹³⁴ This was not the only criticism levelled at Steyn and the Commission. The appointment of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media was not widely welcomed by the media either. So much so that the Commission itself made mention of this. The Commission referred to a content analysis report which was done regarding reporting of the Commission which indicated a highly

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.153

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.154.

¹³³ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁴ Merrett, *Culture*, p.85.

negative attitude towards the Commission and its composition (no details were given regarding this content analysis report, or where it stems from).¹³⁵ Another factor that the Commission recognised, was that the liberal media (or what the Commission deemed to be the liberal media) especially thought that the Commission would be a vehicle to shackle the media, specifically the opposition press which tended to be critical of the apartheid government and the military.¹³⁶ The majority of the press had lukewarm feelings towards the Commission due to their suspicions of government intervention. These suspicions were justified as the Commission came across as being very pro-government. Also many, if not all of its recommendations echoed the sentiments made by the apartheid government regarding the media and freedom of the press.

It is also important to single out the MID report of 15 August 1980 as it mentions the Second Steyn Commission. It was then simply referred to as the Media Commission as this was before Steyn was appointed as the Chairman of the Commission. The report offered the following analysis regarding the Commission: that the Commission investigating mass media reporting was being criticised and attacked by the media from all quarters.¹³⁷ The most prominent criticism came from academics, who saw the entire undertaking as unnecessary.¹³⁸ There were also academics who completely rejected the commission because they felt that the commission would base its findings on information that was not scientifically obtained and was subjective.¹³⁹ These sentiments were also conveyed in an article which was published in the newspaper *Hoofstad* on 1 July 1980 entitled: “Media Commission: Experts have their doubts.”¹⁴⁰ The following problem areas were identified in the report: The scope of the report was too broad, there already existed enough legislation to keep the media in check and the appointment of the Commission came whilst the Press Union and the Government was still involved in talks regarding the first Steyn Commission (1980) report.¹⁴¹ Thus the apartheid government noted the criticism being levelled towards the second Steyn Commission as it was picked up within the MID media-analysis reports.

¹³⁵ The Report on The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media (Pretoria, 1983), p.8.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁷ SANDF Archives, SADF Media Analysis Report, Volume 22, 15 August 1980, CSADF, 1, 53

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁰ *Hoofstad* 1 July 1980

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

The fact that The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media was set up soon after the first Steyn Commission (1980), shows that the situation in which the apartheid government found itself in forced it to take a serious stand regarding the media. Two prominent media commissions commissioned in close proximity of each other was not a regular occurrence within apartheid South Africa. Between the two commissions, the main concerns of the apartheid government regarding the media were specifically addressed. After the PR disasters of Operation Savannah and Reindeer, the role of the mass media within society as well as the manner in which the media reports on security matters had to be investigated. If this did not occur, the apartheid government ran the risk of having a repeat of the PR disasters of Operation Savannah and Reindeer. The second Steyn Commission became a supplement to the first Steyn Commission as it provided context with regards to how the mass media operated. The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media saw the role of the media in terms of reassuring the white population worried about the growing pressure of social and political change facing apartheid South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴² It did this by way of propagating the view of the apartheid government regarding South African conditions.¹⁴³

Conclusion

It is important to note that the historical context within which the two Steyn Commissions took place is vital to the analysis of the Commissions themselves. The subject matter which the Commissions covered always reverted back to the political situation within which apartheid South Africa found itself. At times, the Commissions attempted to directly address questions relevant to the then current political situation in apartheid South Africa. The manner in which the Commissions described South African society reinforced the propaganda of the apartheid government. The aim of the Commissions was to describe and comment on the nature and composition of the South African state and community. However they only succeed in propagating beliefs regarding the composition of the South African state and community similar to those of the apartheid government. Apartheid South Africa saw itself as a legitimate state, thus it always portrayed itself as the victim of conflict situations

¹⁴² The Report on The Commission of Inquiry into the Mass Media (Pretoria, 1983), p.8.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*,

caused by its enemies. Thus for both Steyn Commissions, the nature and role of the South African media was to form part of apartheid South Africa's "Total Strategy" against the "Total Onslaught" posed by the enemies of South Africa. If the media of South Africa were to form part of the "Total Strategy" doctrine, legislation governing the media would have to be relevant and effective. Thus it was of crucial importance for the apartheid government that the Steyn Commissions investigated the effectiveness of the relevant legislation governing the media.

Both Steyn Commissions occurred after Operations Savannah and Reindeer which left the SADF and the apartheid government with proverbial egg on its face. It can then be deduced that the Steyn Commissions were deployed to tighten loopholes that allowed the local media to pick up on stories reported by the international media. There is of course no direct causal relationship between Operations Savannah and Reindeer and the Steyn Commissions. However, as previously shown, there is circumstantial evidence (in absence of the *in camera* submissions) to show that the Steyn Commissions investigated the local media so as to concur with the apartheid government's "Total Strategy" discourse. The only real leverage which the apartheid government had was to ban or register foreign media especially after the PR debacles of Operations Savannah and Reindeer. The authoritarian tendencies of the apartheid government were defended and described as measures to ensure national safety. Thus censorship of security information was always defended by the Steyn Commissions no matter the consequences. The censorship of security information, as previously shown, created a dependence for the media on the military. This dependence was favourable for the military as it entrenched the "convenient marriage" between the military and the media. This also ensured that the media's relationship with the military was a "marriage out of necessity".

Conclusion

It is the purpose of this chapter to draw together the key issues and arguments articulated in the thesis. It will also be shown how findings made throughout the different chapters play a central role in answering the main question posed. This chapter will draw together each component of the arguments developed within the thesis in a logical and meaningful way. It will also summarise key points and show how they connect with the main question. This chapter will also show how the thesis relates to the overall field of research. It should be noted that these findings are not merely a summary of the different chapters of the thesis. It is rather a consolidation of the arguments presented in the body of the thesis. But the following summation will follow the sequence of the chapters in the thesis.

In chapter 2, the thesis specifically focussed on censorship legislation. The thesis found that extremely strict censorship legislation existed within apartheid South Africa. An arsenal of legislation existed not only regarding censorship in general, but specifically relating to reporting on defence matters. The legislation made it incredibly difficult for defence correspondents to report on defence matters as they did not want to be prosecuted for breaking the law. The thesis showed how various forms of legislation was used by the apartheid government to ensure that information related to security matters did not reach the public sphere. The thesis showed the importance of the censorship legislation for the apartheid government because the apartheid government needed the legislation to control the media. Throughout the thesis, censorship legislation was emphasised as to show how it impacted the relationship between the media and the SADF. From this it can be deduced that censorship legislation promoted the secrecy needs of the SADF at the expense of the media's right to publish information for purposes of informing the public. The barrage of censorship legislation ensured that the media could generally not independently report on defence matters. The Defence Act of 1957 (and amendments made up until 1980) was the most important piece of legislation as it limited the freedom of the media to publish reports about defence matters. As chapter 2 showed, the 1957 Defence Act stipulates conditions details regarding reporting on defence matters.

Harold Lasswell (1941) coined the phrase the “Garrison State” and defined it as a society in which its most powerful and influential members are those either closely associated with the military, or are members of it. The thesis found that apartheid South Africa was a “Garrison State”. It was shown in chapter 3 that apartheid South Africa was a highly militarised society with authoritarian tendencies. The Department of Defence White Paper of 1977 which outlined apartheid South Africa’s “Total Strategy” as an answer to the perceived “Total Onslaught” that was being waged against the country was a very important document. It showed how apartheid South Africa used the French military theorist Andre Beaufre’s “Total Strategy” theory to frame its policies. These policies justified the steps taken to ensure that the country became a “Garrison State”. Chapter 3 details the theory of “Total Strategy” and the “Garrison State” and how this impacted on the relationship between the SADF and the media. Referring to apartheid South Africa as a “Garrison State” is not only a useful categorisation, it also assists in contextualising the environment in which the media had to operate. As the thesis showed throughout, this was a very difficult and authoritarian environment which was not conducive to in depth reporting on defence matters. Chapter 3 also details the Military Intelligence Department’s secret monitoring of the media’s reporting on the SADF and PW Botha. The question that the thesis asked was why was a military department monitoring the media? The thesis found that apartheid South Africa embodied the characteristics of the “Garrison State” and so enabled the military establishment to influence the apartheid government to a greater degree than what would have been the case in other societies which are/were not authoritarian in nature. The thesis cited examples of the USA and the UK both of which have civil departments (the NSA and MI5) which undertake monitoring roles within their societies. Thus the purpose of the MID monitoring the media was the first step to ascertaining whether the media was complying with the draconian censorship laws. It also gave the military insight into how the media perceived the SADF, i.e. what image it projected.

A fairly large section of the thesis is dedicated to discussing the manner in which defence correspondents interacted with the Department of Defence. The thesis found that the defence correspondents sampled interacted in various manners with the Department of Defence. The thesis provided contrasting examples of Bob Hitchcock of the *Rand Daily Mail* and Gideon Joubert of *Die Burger*. As shown in chapter 4, Hitchcock had his accreditation as a defence correspondent revoked for criticising the defence establishment even though he was never

overtly anti-military. Gideon Joubert, who can be described as pro-military, never criticised the defence establishment, and never had his accreditation as a defence correspondent revoked. Such case studies show how the relationship between the SADF and the media functioned at its most basic level. The thesis found that defence correspondents acting on behalf of their respective media organisations who criticised the SADF were effectively cut off from information regarding defence matters. It is important to note how the defence establishment acted as a gatekeeper in terms of reporting on defence matters. Defence correspondents were not allowed to report on any issues relating to defence matters unless it was pre-approved by the Department of Defence via its Liaison Officers. Thus the thesis found that defence correspondents operated in a very difficult and secretive environment.

After the relationship between defence correspondents and the Department of Defence was analysed, chapter 4 provided an analysis of the political fallout of both Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer. The thesis first offers an account of the Operations and also the media coverage of them. The thesis used these two case studies to show how the consistent reply of “no comment” made by the defence establishment to the media only resulted in worsening the crisis situation caused by these Operations. Also, the thesis examined these Operations to show how the military failed to take the media into its confidence. Chapter 4 shows that the military was short sighted in not taking the media into its confidence in that it could have used the media to reduce the damage caused by the political fallout of the Operations. Therefore, the thesis found that the military did not trust the media, and that it repeatedly favoured the “no comment” reply rather than working with the media. The thesis also found that Operations Savannah and Reindeer were Public Relations disasters for the SADF because they exposed the SADF. Operation Savannah not only exposed the SADF as being inadequately prepared to defend the country, but also as being overly secretive and dishonest in its dealings with the public. The fact that SADF troops had crossed into Angola without the knowledge of the South African public, and the consequent exposure of this by the international media, was a massive embarrassment for the military establishment of apartheid South Africa. The political fallout in the aftermath of Operation Reindeer was also a PR disaster for the SADF in that the SADF was accused of war crimes. The SADF’s failure to adequately deal with these allegations in the court of public opinion caused a further PR setback for the SADF. The SADF consequently lost the propaganda war with the MPLA and SWAPO. Therefore, the thesis found that the overall policy of secrecy by the SADF, its

distrust of the media and failure to take the media into its confidence, and the consistent reply of “no comment” ensured that Operation Savannah and Operation Reindeer became PR disasters.

Chapter 5 analysed both Steyn Commissions. The purpose of the chapter was to analyse both Commissions and show what impact they had on the relationship between the government/SADF and the media. The chapter first gave an account of the appointment, primary task and recommendations of each Commission. The thesis found that it is important to note the relevance of these two Commissions as both made recommendations regarding the relationship between the media and the SADF. The thesis found that both Commissions portrayed the apartheid government in a positive light. Also, the authoritarian tendencies of the apartheid government were defended by the Commission and described as measures to ensure national safety. It should be noted, however, that both Commissions were never overtly protective of the apartheid government and its policies. The support was given via a more subtle and nuanced manner as to ensure that the notion that apartheid South Africa had a free press was not tainted. The chapter also showed how censoring reporting of security information was also supported by the Steyn Commissions. Therefore, the thesis found that both of the Steyn Commissions are crucial in understanding the relationship between the media and the SADF/apartheid government. The thesis also found that the Steyn Commissions had a negative effect on the relationship because it validated the secretive environment created by the apartheid state in which the media had to operate. It did so not only on the basis of its findings but also because it provided for *in camera* hearings of matters deemed to be sensitive to national security.

The overall conclusion regarding the nature of the relationship between the media and the SADF can be found in the manner in which it was framed and contextualised within the thesis. The analogy of a “difficult” or “dysfunctional marriage” has limitations as it does not fit with the specific characteristics of the relationship. Framing the relationship, and calling it “dysfunctional” or “difficult” would not be specific enough as a more detailed description is required to characterise the relationship. The thesis found that the relationship between the SADF and the media is two dimensional, from the perspective of the SADF the relationship could be characterised as a “convenient marriage” and for the media as a “marriage out of

necessity”. This was due to the deep-seated mistrust which the SADF had regarding the media and how it acted as a gatekeeper of defence information. The SADF, along with its allies in government, created an environment in which it was almost impossible to practice independent journalism. However, the thesis also found that not all media institutions and the defence correspondents reporting for them were victimised by this relationship. Pro-SADF media organisations (generally espousing conservative political ideologies) were given inside information which their competitors did not have access to. Thus the media organisations and defence correspondents who wanted to act independently of the wishes of the SADF were side lined and had to rely on media briefings issued by the SADF to all media outlets. Therefore, the thesis found that the relationship between the SADF and the media was very complex in nature, and that the relationship was unequal and lopsided with the SADF itself practising favouritism towards pro-SADF media organisations.

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