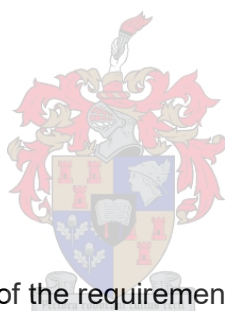


**IN THE EYE OF THE PUBLIC: MILITARY–MEDIA RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**By**

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**December 2022**

## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I - 13191764, Jacobus Daniël Johannes Theunissen – declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

**JACOBUS DANIËL JOHANNES THEUNISSEN**

Date: December 2022

## ABSTRACT

The conflict of interest between the military and the media originates from the inception of professional journalism. Militaries are as old as humanity and throughout history required various aspects to be victorious. The most important of them being operational security. The media on the other side want to provide an account of what occurred in a truthful and factual manner. Historically the relationship between these two entities have been strenuous as the military needs total control over information and access to conflicts as opposed to the media who required access in order to be able to provide an objective narrative.

In the first 10 years of democracy in South Africa there was a congruent relationship between the military and the media. This relationship steadily deteriorated over the years where it is considered to be non-existent at present by certain journalists who regularly interact with the military. The media is of the opinion that the military does not communicate intentionally, timeously, and courteously by taking editorial processes into consideration. From the media's side the level of professionalism in journalism has dwindled due to the juniorisation of its editors and journalists who no longer understand the military.

Up to 2004 corporate communication officers in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) were highly specialised and had many years of experience in dealing with the media. The media liaison function was decentralised and there were continuous liaison between the different management levels of the military and the media. This changed when media liaison was centralised to the Defence Headquarters in 2000. Since then officers without corporate communication qualifications and experience have been appointed in various senior corporate communication and media liaison posts. The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* details the role of corporate communication functionaries and their responsibilities to ensure a positive public image on behalf of the command cadre. It is an extensive document addressing the command and control of the discipline on all the management levels as well as the education, training, and development aspects for the discipline.

In South Africa it seems as if reporting on the military by the media is either predominantly of a negative nature or there is very little coverage of substance on the SANDF. The purpose of the study is to determine and explain what underpins the relationship between the military and the media in South Africa. The public needs to know what the military does, and the most effective way for the military to communicate with its stakeholders is using the media as a mass communication tool. Communication plays a pivotal part to ensure that the role, functions and activities of the SANDF is presented to ensure a positive public opinion.

## OPSOMMING

Die konflik tussen die militêr en die media het sy oorsprong met die totstandkoming van die media as profesie. Weermagte is so oud soos die mensdom en deur die eeue was daar verskeie faktore wat 'n rol gespeel het vir weermagte om te seevier tydens oorloë. Operasionele sekerheid was en bly een van die mees belangrikste aspekte vir die weermag. Daarenteen wil die media 'n ware en feitlike weergawe gee van wat gebeur het. Histories is daar dus 'n onwrikbare verhouding tussen die weermag wat totale beheer oor informasie en toegang tot konflikte wil handhaaf teenoor die media wat toegang benodig tot beide om 'n objektiewe weergawe te voorsien van wat gebeur het.

In die eerste 10 jaar van demokrasie in Suid-Afrika het daar 'n gematigde verhouding bestaan tussen die militêr en die media. Die verhouding het oor die afgelope paar jaar stelselmatig verswak en sekere joernaliste wat gereeld oor die weermag verslag doen is van die mening dat daar tans geen verhouding bestaan tussen die weermag en die media. Dit is die media se opinie dat die weermag die media nie intensioneel, tydig en met respek behandel nie, veral as dit gaan oor redaksionele prosesse binne die media. Aan die ander kant gee die media toe dat die professionaliteit van die media gedaal het as gevolg van die vlak van kundigheid by redakteurs en joernaliste, omrede hierdie persone nie meer die weermag verstaan soos vroeër nie.

Tot en met 2004 was die korporatiewe kommunikasie offisiere in die Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Weermag (SANW) hoogs gespesialiseerd met jare se ondervinding in media skakeling. Die media skakeling funksie was gedentraliseer en daar was gereelde skakeling tussen die verskillende vlakke van bestuur van die SANW en die media. Hierdie tendens het in 2000 verander toe media skakeling in die weermag gesentraliseer is in die Verdedigingshoofkwartier en van toe af is persone sonder korporatiewe kommunikasie kwalifikasies en ondervinding in senior korporatiewe kommunikasie en media skakeling poste aangestel. Die Korporatiewe Kommunikasie Beleid van die Departement van Verdediging bespreek in detail wat die rol van die korporatiewe kommunikasie funksionaris is en wat hulle verantwoordelikhede is om 'n positiewe publieke beeld van die weermag te skep namens die bevelstruktuur van die weermag. Dit is 'n goedgeurdagte dokument wat bevel en beheer in die kommunikasie dissipline aanspreek op alle vlakke van bestuur asook die opvoeding, opleiding en ontwikkeling van die dissipline.

Dit blyk dat verslaggewing oor die SANW in Suid-Afrika van 'n negatiewe aard is of dat daar weinig berig word oor die weermag wat van substansieële waarde is. Die doel van die studie is om te bepaal en te verduidelik wat die verhouding is tussen die militêr en die media in Suid-Afrika. Dit is in die belang van die militêr dat die publiek weet wat die SANW doen en dat dit in die mees effektiefste manier gekommunikeer word. Kommunikasie speel 'n uiterse belangrike rol om te sorg dat 'n positiewe beeld van die SANW uitgedra word deur die media te gebruik as massa kommunikasie medium.

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- My fellow corporate communication functionaries who share my passion for the discipline.

I dedicate this thesis to the new generation of corporate communication functionaries. May the command cadre of the South African National Defence Force realise and appreciate the value of corporate communication professionals.

*“The art of communication is the language of leadership.” James Humes.*

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
ADR	African Defence Review
ANC	African National Congress
APR	Accredited in Public Relations
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEF	Black Editors' Forum
C SANDF	Chief of the South African National Defence Force
CAR	Central African Republic
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CDCC	Chief Director Corporate Communication
CEMIS	Centre for Military Studies
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
CoE	Conference of Editors
Corp Com	corporate communication
DCC	Directorate Corporate Communication
DDCC	Director Defence Corporate Communication
DoD	Department of Defence
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EU	European Union
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
HoC	Head of Communication
ICT	information and communication technology
IOL	Independent Online
IPI	International Press Institute
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
JIIM	joint, interdepartmental, interagency and multi-national
ML	media liaison
MLO	Media Liaison Officer
MoD	Minister of Defence
MoDMV	Minister of Defence and Military Veterans
MOOTW	military operations other than war
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NPU	National Press Union
OAU	Organisation of African Union
OOTW	operations other than war

PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PMC	Personnel Management Code
PR	public relations
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontières
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SANEF	South African National Editors Forum
Sec Def	Secretary for Defence
SIGLA	Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa
SSO	Senior Staff Officer
SWAPO	South-West Africa People's Organisation
TMG	Times Media Group
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
US	United States
USA	United States of America

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO MILITARY–MEDIA RELATIONS

#### 1.1 Background

The military and the media are seen as two opposite sides of a coin; yet, they are on the same coin, which means there is an interdependent relationship between these two groups. The military, by its nature, is an autocratic institution, as opposed to the media that can only function to its true potential in a democracy. As the relationship between the military and the media evolved over the years, it appears that no common ground has been found to date. One can accept that there will always be some type of relationship between these two entities and therefore they will need to communicate with one another to try to establish a workable solution satisfying the interests of both groups.

A senior journalist who reports mainly on military matters, with many years of experience behind his back at various media houses, Kim Helfrich, noted on defenceWeb:

Having dealings with military media liaison officers over a more than 15-year period, it is obvious, with some notable exceptions, that the SANDF sees the media more as an enemy, at best a nuisance, rather than an ally.<sup>1</sup>

He argues that requests for information and answers to questions from the media have to be followed up continuously before there is a response from the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and sometimes there might be no response at all.<sup>2</sup> Another journalist, Leon Engelbrecht, wrote that the military believes the media are “unpatriotic, destructive, negative and a danger to national security”.<sup>3</sup> Both these views point towards an animosity between the military and the media.

Many writers use the analogy of a marriage when they write about military–media relations. Shanker and Hertling refer to military–media relations as a “dysfunctional marriage”.<sup>4</sup> Cucolo calls it a “rocky marriage”<sup>5</sup> and Esterhuyse describes military–media relations as a “difficult marriage”.<sup>6</sup> It therefore seems as if military–media relations are strained by implication. It would seem that this is an international tendency. However, very little research material is available on this subject from eastern countries. Moreover, as is clear from the literature review, very little research has been done in South Africa in this regard. The nature of military–media relations within democratic and democratising states constituted the context of the study, as South Africa finds itself within this category.

#### 1.2 Rationale

Unlike the case in South Africa, military–media relations have been well researched internationally and various books have been written on the subject. Amongst others, there are *The media and international security* by Stephen Badsey,<sup>7</sup> *The media and the military: From the Crimea to Desert*

*Strike* by Peter Young and Peter Jesser,<sup>8</sup> *The US Army and the media in wartime: Historical perspectives* by Kendall Gott<sup>9</sup> and *The military and the media* by Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey.<sup>10</sup> Strydom suggests that what has emerged from all the writers on military–media relations nationally and internationally is that the military–media relationship has always been complicated because of the demand by the media for access to information versus the need for the military to ensure operational security and winning the battle at all costs.<sup>11</sup>

Belknap is of the opinion that the military experience meddling by the media in military matters is a threat to operational security, and military personnel often do not want to risk their careers by providing information to the media or allowing to be interviewed. Belknap argues that the military recognises the role of the media as watchdog and objective commentator.<sup>12</sup> Scholtz is of the view that the military can be their own worst enemy by not supplying any information to the media.<sup>13</sup> He quotes Harry G. Summers, an American strategist who fought in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, who argues that by not giving information the military “... jeopardises public support” and that “... total [military] security may be worse than no security at all”.<sup>14</sup>

Williams notes that the media have two vital functions in the context of the Clausewitzian paradoxical trinity of war.<sup>15</sup> The Clausewitzian trinity is normally explained as the **government**, which uses the military as instrument of policy; **the military** for whom war is an exercise of skill; and **society** as an expression of the will of the people.<sup>16</sup> The two functions of the media in this trinity are:

- to keep the public informed of the policies of government and how these are implemented; and
- the need to record the history of what happens by informing the population of what the military does.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.3 Theoretical framework

The military and the media exist in a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship with one another. This relationship dates back to ancient times when kings would take scribes along to have an account of campaigns or battles that took place. These were obviously very subjective reports.<sup>18</sup> The evolving modern-day relationship between the military and the media has been well researched, and many academics, military personnel, members of the media and other interested parties have written extensively about the coverage of armed conflicts by professional journalists. Tareque notes that every war since the Mexican–American War of 1848 has been covered by the media.<sup>19</sup> These include, the American Civil War, the Crimean War of 1853–1856, the two World Wars, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Falklands War, the United States of America (USA) invasion into Panama and Grenada, the two Gulf Wars, the USA intervention in Haiti and Somalia, the United Nations (UN) intervention in Kosovo and the war in Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup>

In South Africa, there has been far less research on military–media relations than in the rest of the world. However, several academics, researchers, defence analysts and members from the media have written about the military and its interaction with the media. The research relates predominantly to media coverage of the various conflicts in which the South African armed forces were involved – the Anglo-Boer War, the two world wars and the more recent Border War.<sup>21</sup> Some of the research also covers the leading role South Africa played in the 1998 intervention in Lesotho,<sup>22</sup> the SANDF involvement in peace support operations<sup>23</sup> as well as the intense battle in 2013 in the Central African Republic (CAR) in which South African soldiers were involved.<sup>24</sup>

According to Le, the citizens of a country obtain almost everything they want to know about their country's foreign policy and its military deployments from the mass media. This could be obtaining it either personally from the media or hearing it from acquaintances who acquired information from the media.<sup>25</sup> Bowen et al. argue that the majority of reporters believe it is their public duty as the fourth estate to present society with required information in order to form their own opinion on issues.<sup>26</sup> The term 'fourth estate' was coined by Thomas Carlyle (1840) who noted, "there are three estates in Parliament; but in the Reporters Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all".<sup>27</sup> Since then, the media saw their new role as the fourth estate as an obligation to the citizenry to ensure that they are provided with all the possible information to help them evaluate their government, which includes the military.<sup>28</sup>

Although the military has various stakeholders, the overall stakeholder of any military remains its own society. The military is dependent on society for taxes to support the defence budget, for political-moral support for long campaigns, for recruitment into the military, and for providing social status to serving in the military, as well as for honouring fallen soldiers and heroes, etc.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore important to reflect on the relationship between the military and civilian society. As is the case with civil–military relations, military–media relations are multi-layered and interdependent. The interaction between these two entities affects society at many levels. Bruneau and Matei state, "there are serious impediments to research and writing on the topic of civil–military relations, especially in non-democratic regimes or developing democracies".<sup>30</sup> However, in South Africa, civil–military relations changed drastically from an autocratic top-down structure to a participatory system with civilian input after the Apartheid era.<sup>31</sup> Following 1994, the military came under civilian control, with civilian input in the broad process of defence policy formulation. The armed forces were restructured into the Department of Defence (DoD) consisting of the SANDF and the Defence Secretariat who are primarily responsible for oversight and transparency. The focus of the DoD is to establish civil–military relations in South African society through the balanced model. This refers to the division of powers within the DoD and the hierarchy of authority between Parliament and the SANDF with civil supremacy over defence.<sup>32</sup>

Huntington states that the role of the military in society is frequently discussed in terms of civilian control. He differentiates between subjective and objective civilian control and concludes that objective civilian control has only been possible since the emergence of the military profession.<sup>33</sup> According to him, the control of the military should be vested in the government with ministerial control.<sup>34</sup> Matei suggests an additional trinity within the Clausewitzian trinity of civil–military relations “(1) [d]Democratic civilian control of the security forces; (2) the effectiveness of the security forces in fulfilling their assigned roles; and (3) their efficiency, that is, fulfilling the assigned roles and missions at a minimum cost”.<sup>35</sup> Matei claims that control of the armed forces remains a pivotal role of the government; however, in the twenty-first century, effectiveness of the armed forces in fulfilling its role and the efficiency with which it is done are of equal importance.<sup>36</sup> Matei argues that modern armed forces are less involved in war-fighting but increasingly involved with peace support operations and military operations other than war in support of broader human security aspects, especially in new and developing democracies; therefore, the need for armed forces to be effective and efficient for the society it serves.<sup>37</sup>

Ferreira postulates that with the trends of post-modern civil–military relations the armed forces structure and culture are moving towards that of a civilian organisation since the role of war-fighting is no longer the primary focus. As is the case worldwide, societal events underpin change within the South African armed forces.<sup>38</sup> The civil–military gap in South Africa results predominantly from the growing lack of understanding in civil society for the role and functions of the military.<sup>39</sup> This lack of understanding is caused partly by the lack of information in society of military matters.<sup>40</sup> The media have an important and critical role as a medium to communicate to the military stakeholders in an objective, effective and efficient manner.

As was mentioned earlier, many authors have written about military–media relations. Belknap,<sup>41</sup> Paul and Kim,<sup>42</sup> Gott,<sup>43</sup> and Rid<sup>44</sup> provide an extensive historical view on military–media relations ranging from the Crimean War to the war in Afghanistan. Stephen Badsey, a well-known author of many books and articles on military–media relations, covers the history of this relationship extensively. He does not only concentrate on conflicts in which Britain was involved,<sup>45</sup> but also discusses conflicts in which the United States and other countries were engaged.<sup>46</sup> His writings on military–media relations also cover peacekeeping operations.<sup>47</sup> Badsey does not only write on matters pertaining to the history of military–media relations but provides a theoretical grounding on military–media relations.<sup>48</sup> His main conclusion was that military–media relations have not improved over the years. Other writers that cover the history of military–media relations and who suggest models to improve the relationship include Barnes,<sup>49</sup> and Bowen et al.<sup>50</sup> who concentrate on the theoretical aspects of military–media relations and seek ways and means to improve the relationship by means of dialogue between members from the military and the media. Boylan discusses military–media relations from personal experience and provides practical suggestions on improving the relationship by giving

advice on how to engage with the media.<sup>51</sup> Le focused on the military–media relations and their impact on public opinion.<sup>52</sup> There are also authors, such as Hunt, who captured issues between senior military members and members from the media at a conference on military–media relations focusing especially on the role of ‘new media’ and the complexities it holds for both entities.<sup>53</sup>

In the South African context, Scholtz has written on military–media relations in international history and also focused on where South Africa has been involved in conflict.<sup>54</sup> De Klerk discussed the coverage of the military by the media using a specific Afrikaans newspaper.<sup>55</sup> Kirsten focused on the military–media relationship in South Africa between 1975 and 1983,<sup>56</sup> and Warden investigated the role of the SANDF’s internal magazine with reference to the broader media.<sup>57</sup> It is only Esterhuyse who writes about military–media relations in a broad spectrum in the South African context.<sup>58</sup> The above-mentioned authors of books and articles, both internationally and South African, cover the spectrum of work from academics, historians, defence analysts, soldiers (writing from personal experiences) and journalists who have covered conflicts as well as day-to-day military activities.

#### **1.4 Research problem and purpose**

Good civil–military relations underpin the nature, functioning, effectiveness and efficiency of armed forces.<sup>59</sup> For one, if a society does not trust or support the armed forces, the legitimacy and justification of the defence budget are problematic.<sup>60</sup> For the SANDF, it is critical to inform its stakeholders and society of its role and responsibilities – and to explain its successes, challenges and even failures in the appropriate context. Internationally, the media represent the quickest, most direct and most effective way to communicate with and inform the stakeholders of the armed forces. In South Africa, it seems as if reporting on the military by the media is either predominantly of a negative nature or there is very little reporting on the SANDF. Having worked closely with the media for 30 years, it is my observation that the SANDF is not making optimal use of the media to relate its position to the South African society. Roberts et al. for example, postulate that the SANDF receives very little coverage in the media and when it is reported on, it is mostly negative in nature.<sup>61</sup> Two questions then arise: firstly, who is responsible for media relations in the SANDF; and secondly, is media reporting on the SANDF in general of a negative nature? As a result, the purpose of the current study was to determine and explain what it is that underpins the relationship between the military and the media in South Africa. The study therefore intended to:

- provide a theoretical overview of communication and the public relations discipline;
- provide a historical outline of military–media relationships globally;
- provide an overview of media reporting on the African continent and especially in terms of democratic South Africa;

- demarcate some of the views of the South African media and defence commentators of their relationship with the SANDF, and vice versa; and
- explain the opinion of corporate communication practitioners in the SANDF on the way it is portrayed in the media.

## 1.5 Research design and methodology

The study comprised a descriptive analysis of the problems underpinning military–media relations in South Africa. The study relied on inductive reasoning based on qualitative data. As the word explains, ‘descriptive research’ describes a condition, issue, activity or occurrence.<sup>62</sup> It interrogates the “who, what, when, where, and how associated with a particular research question or problem”.<sup>63</sup> This type of study normally questions “what is” scenarios.<sup>64</sup> According to Delaney, this type of research is “used to observe and describe a research problem without influencing or manipulating the variables in any way. Hence, these studies are correlational or observational, and not experimental. This type of research is conclusive in nature, rather than exploratory.”<sup>65</sup>

I relied on secondary sources for a theoretical overview of the history of military–media relations. The first part of the study relied predominantly on scholarly books and journal articles, as well as more popular newspaper and magazine articles. Secondary sources were also used to discuss the role of military–media relations in civil–military context to contextualise South African military–media relations. An analysis of media reporting on the SANDF was made in a discussion of South African military–media relations and is reported on in Chapter 6. Primary documents that were consulted were policies, doctrine and instructions within the SANDF. The most relevant are the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*, and the 1998 and 2015 South African Defence Reviews.

Unstructured interviews were used to capture the views of identified members of the media on its relations with the SANDF. The editors and journalists that were interviewed were those that often write and report about military affairs and that were working for the various media houses. These comprised both print and electronic media. My experience in the field of media liaison in the SANDF assisted in the identification of the editors and journalist that were interviewed. Specialists in the field of military–media relations and civil–military relations were interviewed, such as defence analysts and defence commentators.

The views of the SANDF regarding the media will also be explored. Besides the use of official documentation, I conducted interviews with selected members of the SANDF. I received approval from the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities of Stellenbosch University to conduct the aforementioned interviews after I complied with the stipulated regulations. The selection of members for the interviews was based on position and appointment, both in terms of seniority and in terms of



job description and management of the media. Past and present staff officers and civilian members working in the corporate communication environment were interviewed. It was important to get their perspective of how they perceived the media and its coverage of the SANDF as well as to clarify whether the command cadre and other members of the SANDF understood how the media functions. I relied on my institutional knowledge, which I obtained by being a member in the SANDF with more than 30 years of experience in corporate communication and having obtained various academic qualifications in the field of public management and corporate communication.

## **1.6 Limitations**

The biggest limitation to the study was that the majority of SANDF members that presently interacts with the media had limited to no training in dealing with the media. Also, few of the corporate communication functionaries appointed in senior corporate communication posts had neither any academic qualifications in corporate communication nor attended short courses and seminars on media relations. Therefore, there is little knowledge on what should be the correct way in dealing with the media. This became evident during the interviews with some of the SANDF members.

## **1.7 Value and contribution of the study**

Since this study was about the relationship between the military and the media, some experiences and opinions might be perceived as negative between the two entities. The purpose of the study was not to point fingers and make accusations, but rather to establish what the cause of conflict between the two entities are and then to provide a better understanding of their relationship to facilitate interaction on middle ground.

## **1.8 Outline and structure of the study**

The research provided a theoretical overview of communication theory and the public relations discipline in practice in order to explain the importance of communication and present public relations as a professional vocation. The study considered the evolution of military–media relations over four eras of conflict:

- firstly, the Napoleonic times to the Russo–Japanese War;
- secondly, the world wars;
- thirdly, conflicts of the Cold War; and
- the post-Cold War era conflicts.

This was done to show that relationship between these two entities are interdependent and that, over the centuries, various aspects were identified in terms of the strained relationship between the



military and the media. An overview on military–media relations in Africa is provided to furnish a continental perspective, and I then concentrate on post-1994 South Africa, as this relates to the fact that media freedom can only exist in democracies. Views of selected members of the media, defence commentators and defence specialists are provided on the relationship between the media and the SANDF in order to ascertain how they perceive the military–media relationship. Lastly, the view of some corporate communication functionaries from the SANDF on the relationship that exists between the military and the media is reflected in order to establish whether they believe there is a problem and, if so, to establish the reason why.

The chapter outline is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: An overview of public relations and communication theory in practice
- Chapter 3: The historical evolution of military–media relations
- Chapter 4: Turning to Africa – from a post-colonial African perspective to military–media relations in post 1994 South Africa
- Chapter 5: An outside-in perspective – talking to the media and defence commentators about military–media relations in South Africa
- Chapter 6: An inside-out perspective – talking to the military about military–media relations in South Africa
- Chapter 7: Conclusion

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## CHAPTER 2

### AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION THEORY IN PRACTICE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theory of communication. It explains what communication is, the different types of communication, and what constitutes effective communication. The media are used to communicate with the community at large, which is one of the communication categories. Therefore, the media is a critical role player in mass communication in both open and closed societies. The concepts of media and media typologies are explained and a brief description is provided of the evolution and the fundamental functions of the media. The value of the media in shaping public opinion is outlined within the context of the history of how civil society was informed of military matters over the centuries. The role of the media in civil–military relations is mentioned as well as the way this evolved over centuries. The latter part of the chapter focuses on communication as a discipline within an organisation. The discussion highlights the confusion regarding the naming of the communication discipline and why the different names for the function is one of the causes that have a negative effect on the communication discipline. The characteristics, roles, techniques and functions of the communication functionary are mentioned, and the section concludes with the challenges the communication functionary has to face.

#### 2.2 The theoretical foundation of public communication

This section provides a theoretical overview of the concept of communication. It explains what communication is, discusses the obstacles to communication, and explains what is required for effective communication. It further discusses the means of communication and explains the different communication categories.

Communication is as old as humanity. When applied to communication, the systems theory recognises the interconnectedness of human communication rather than observing just one component.<sup>1</sup> All systems, be it nature, society or organisations, can be categorised in terms of the context and environment and amount of interchange with their surroundings.<sup>2</sup> Systems range from open to closed. “Closed systems have impermeable boundaries, so they cannot exchange matter, energy, or information with their environments. Open systems, on the other hand, exchange inputs and outputs through boundaries that are permeable.”<sup>3</sup> The systems theory is an important aspect in the broader communication environment and sets the stage for effective communication. Communication therefore takes place where the communicator and the receiver are either part of the same system or where each belongs to a bigger system.

Human beings communicate for various reasons. According to Myers and Myers, an entity communicates:<sup>4</sup>

- to do introspection;
- for self-realisation;
- to acquire knowledge;
- to live in harmony with others;
- to convince others; and
- for entertainment purposes.

Cutlip, Center and Broom agree with the definition of communication by theorist, Wilbur Schramm, who argues that communication has a vital role to play where people “[are] relating to each other and their groups, organizations, and societies, [are] influencing each other, [are] being influenced, [are] informing and being informed, [are] teaching and being taught, [are] entertaining and being entertained”.<sup>5</sup> More to the point might be Steinberg’s definition of communication as “a transactional process of exchanging messages and negotiating meaning to establish and maintain relationships”.<sup>6</sup> All these definitions have aspects that concur with the other and therefore the communication model of Osgood and Schramm, dating back to 1954, is still of use and applicable. In this model, communication is a process where two participants engages one another in an active collaboration where messages are traded in an ongoing cycle. Because there is feedback, the cycle is continuous whilst being collaborative.<sup>7</sup>

In the open systems theory, there are aspects that hamper communication, as communication is a dynamic process with various internal and external impetuses. According to Skinner and Von Essen:

[The obstacles to reception] include certain needs, anxieties and expectations of the listener, his attitudes and values as well as certain environmental stimuli. The main obstacles to understanding include the sender’s choice of language and jargon; the ability of the listener to concentrate completely on receiving the message; prejudices; the degree of open-mindedness of the listener and his ability to consider factors that are disturbing to his ideas; the length of the communication process and the existing knowledge of the listener. The main obstacles to acceptance include the attitudes and values of the listener; prejudices; any status clash between the sender and the listener; and interpersonal emotional conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, communication needs to have an outcome, because one communicates with a reason and therefore the communicator needs to be effective in sending messages.

To ensure effective communication in an organisation, the communicator needs to understand the way he or she needs to add to or interfere with the processes within the organisation. The

communicator therefore requires an intrinsic knowledge and should comprehend the total spectrum of communication in order to have a positive influence. The key to effective communication is understanding. Cutlip et al. present the following aspects as part of effective communication:<sup>9</sup>

- credibility;
- context;
- content;
- clarity;
- continuity and consistency;
- channels; and
- capability of the audience.

If people do not understand why others act in a certain manner or if they are not aware why particular issues arise, they will also not be able to start addressing problems or have possible solutions, as there will be no communication. Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner state that the end result of communication will not always be interactive; it could also be perceptive, inspiring or just thought-provoking.<sup>10</sup> Communication may be emotional messages, establishing certain views or encouraging people to take action.<sup>11</sup>

Communication covers an extensive arena of different characteristics. Throughout civilisation, there have been three methods to communicate, knowingly or unknowingly. Fox, Schwella and Wissink describe the three methods as:<sup>12</sup>

- **Oral communication.** This is the oldest and most used form of communication. Everyday uses of oral communication are conversations, sermons, lectures and gossiping. Advantages of oral communication are swiftness and response. One major disadvantage is that, when the message has to pass through a number of people, misrepresentation of the message could develop.
- **Written communication.** There are various forms of printed communication, such as memorandums, letters, magazines, electronic mail messages and many more. Major advantages of written communication are lastingness, clarity and the ability to validate. It is usually a concise and well-considered process. Disadvantages are that there is no certainty that the message has been received and, if it had been received, whether the interpretation is what was intended. There is also no feedback unless specifically requested or specified. Written communication consumes much more time than oral communication.
- **Non-verbal communication.** Subconsciously or consciously, this is the most significant method of communicating. Non-verbal communication includes body motions, such as facial

expressions, and the physical distance between the sender and receiver. The disadvantage is that individuals interpret non-verbal communication according to their own perceptions.

Generally, communication aims to ensure understanding; however, there could be more specific goals, such as advice or encouragement or making sure action is being taken.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in terms of human communication, there are six contexts according to which communication are categorised:<sup>14</sup>

- intrapersonal;
- interpersonal;
- group;
- public;
- organisational; and
- mass.

There is direct feedback in all of the above, except for mass communication. Skinner and Von Essen argue that, because of the way that mass communication is produced, there is little opportunity for direct feedback, but delayed feedback may occur, such as letters sent to editors of newspapers by organisations or individuals responding to media coverage.<sup>15</sup> Organisations can also use opinion polls and surveys to get feedback from their stakeholders. According to Skinner and Von Essen, mass communication has the following characteristics:<sup>16</sup>

- the audience is relatively large, heterogeneous and anonymous to the source;
- it is indirect owing to the diverse nature of the receivers;
- communication is unilateral, as the roles of communicator and receiver are not interchangeable;
- it can be described as public; and
- it is fleeting.

In other words, mass communication is the activity of dispersing news using the various forms of media available to communicate the messages of an organisation to its stakeholders.<sup>17</sup>

Humans communicate for various reasons with each other by means of different methods or a combination of methods. There are however obstacles to communication, and therefore the communicator needs to ensure that effective communication with the receiver takes place to ensure understanding and feedback.<sup>18</sup> Two important aspects of communication are to inform and to influence attitudes.<sup>19</sup> It is here that the military, as communicator, needs the media to communicate its messages to the population, who is the recipient.



## 2.3 Understanding the role of the media in public communication

This section briefly discusses mass media in its different formats and the way it has evolved over the past few centuries. The roles and functions of the media are mentioned, showing its importance in modern societies. Also discussed are the origin of public opinion and the role the media play in forming public opinion. The section ends with a discussion of civil–military relations and the important role the media play in an understanding of and between government, its citizens and the military.

The concept ‘media’ in essence refers to mass media, which is defined as “technology that is intended to reach a mass audience. It is the primary means of communication used to reach most of the public”.<sup>20</sup> Modern-day media can be divided into three broad categories: printed, broadcasting and digital media.

- **Printed media** is the oldest form of media and are categorised into written periodicals that are published with regular issues. Examples are daily newspapers, weekly news magazines, monthly journals and annual book series.
- **Broadcasting** is the second oldest medium, starting with radio, followed by film, movie or motion picture and television. More recently, internet broadcasting was included in this category.
- The last medium is **digital media**, which – although it is a wide phenomenon in terms of media – can be explained as internet-based and social media, such as web-based platforms, for instance Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note that the borders between these categories are fluid and not clearly demarcated. Newspapers, for example, are increasingly also available in digital format. The public are dependent on the mass media to obtain news regarding political and social issues, recreation and news.<sup>22</sup> De Beer conceptualises these into four functions: the surveillance, correlation, transmission and entertainment functions.<sup>23</sup>

Warden postulates that the media as a social institution have undergone three periods of development. The first is the emergence of the printing press in the 1500s.<sup>24</sup> Even today, many people all over the world refer to the media, and not only the printed media, as ‘the press’. The second development initiated with the invention of the telegraph that could transmit coded information across and between continents. The discovery of wireless translation of information led to the third development with the emergence of the internet and the distribution of information via the cyber domain, which makes the global sharing of information instantaneous.<sup>25</sup> The luxury of various mass media options available is that people can choose which media platforms they want to use, although their preferences are predicted for them by algorithms due the frequency of certain key words they use.

The media have become a very powerful institution and business entity with a global reach and therefore have a great responsibility. O'Connor indicates that the media, in a liberal democracy context, has six fundamental roles or functions.<sup>26</sup>

- Firstly, it has an informative role to inform society about the government and its leaders. The media also inform society about developments in the political, economic, social, cultural and technological environments to make informed and rational decisions or in forming their own opinions on certain issues.
- Secondly, the media has an educative role to inform citizens on how policies and regulations work and how these will affect their lives. It is important to realise that this function is not only about sharing information but also about assisting citizens in understanding and comprehending the information.
- Thirdly, the media serve as a platform to society to voice opinions to the population at large and to the government. It is important that the media be allowed to do this in an objective and unbiased manner.
- Fourthly, the media have a publicity role to allow individuals and government as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to publicise their mandate, cause, goals or duties. Through the media, widespread audiences can be reached.
- Fifthly, there is an adversarial role, which relates mainly to government where the media function as a 'watchdog' to ensure that government is held accountable in acting in the public interest.
- Lastly, the media have an advocacy role. The media should broadcast and promote different viewpoints from organisations, institutions and political parties. It is important that in this case, these viewpoints should be done objectively without giving preference to any one or more organisations, institutions or political parties or its members. This is also relevant to governments and its various departments, such as the armed forces.<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned above, these roles and functions are based on the premise that there is freedom of speech in a country.<sup>28</sup> African countries have been struggling with this and other democratic principles since the 1960s when many countries attained independence, either from their previous colonial masters or from military dictatorships.<sup>29</sup> According to Ansah, these countries have been searching for freedom in "political structures, economic systems, societal arrangements and institutional mechanisms".<sup>30</sup> Mass media play a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining these democratic principles. Unfortunately, many African countries have not attained true democracy and media freedom is of one of the casualties of this.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, since modern media comprise a highly technological and expensive field, many developing states within Africa are still left behind. As stated by Ansah, "the freedom of expression can [only] be concretized in the freedom of the press in a

society which has the facilities [capability] for printing”.<sup>32</sup> Mass media are, therefore, dependent on technology and financial support in order to function effectively.

With all the roles that the media play, the question arises how public opinion in democracies is formed as everyone has freedom of his or her own opinion on certain issues. It is therefore important to explore the notion ‘public opinion’, its two key words (‘public’ and ‘opinion’) and their meanings. The concept ‘public’ is understood as a concentration of people who have the same interest and who share something unique amongst them.<sup>33</sup> Opinion is seen as the articulation of a viewpoint on a debatable topic.<sup>34</sup> According to Moy and Bosch, public opinion is the method by which information is presented, the way people discover certain matters, and the consequences of this information for their outlook, views and actions.<sup>35</sup> Cutlip et al. argue that public opinion cannot be the opinion of an individual on behalf of many, but it rather echoes a vibrant manner in which concepts are communicated, altered and conceded to ensure shared resolve. This takes place within groups where people interact with each other to establish why a certain concern is of public interest and how can this be addressed.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore fair to assert that functional public opinion is mostly applicable to democracies and not part of the antediluvian monarchies, such as autocracies, one-party states and undemocratic states.<sup>37</sup>

In ancient times, kings and warlords would take scribes along to narrate their battles fought.<sup>38</sup> Although this was technically only a historical and one-sided perspective, it still played a vital role in informing the readers of what had happened. One can accept that these kings and warlords would initially decide on who would have access to these chronicles. Furthermore, according to Scholtz, military commanders, such as Alexander the Great and Richard the Lionheart, did not worry or even taken public opinion into consideration in planning and executing their campaigns. This view has changed drastically over the years, and today it is a very different situation.<sup>39</sup> In modern militaries, the media are considered an instrument of war,<sup>40</sup> since “winning modern wars is as much dependent on carrying domestic and international public opinion as it is on defeating the enemy on the battlefield”.<sup>41</sup> Although modern-day commanders try to give preference access or information to journalists that they know will report favourably on unfolding events in conflicts, other journalists over whom they have no control will also report on the events.<sup>42</sup> More importantly, these commanders have no influence over where and sometimes in which media the information, both from their so-called ‘favoured’ as well as the other journalists, will be printed or broadcast and to which audiences.

The reporting on political and military matters changed drastically in the seventeenth century with the publishing of the world’s first newspaper, the *Nieuwe Tijdinghen*, in Antwerp in the Netherlands in 1605.<sup>43</sup> Badsey indicates that this was around 150 years after the introduction of printing in Europe. Interestingly, the term ‘journalist’, “a person whose job is to collect news and write about it for newspapers, magazines, television, or radio”, only appeared 50 years later.<sup>44</sup> The first modern

newspapers that exerted real political influence appeared during the eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Young and Jesser argue that, up to the era when newspapers were introduced in the English society, public opinion was governed by the “teachings of the Church and demands of the State”.<sup>46</sup> Citizens did not have access to information and public opinion. The term ‘public opinion’, first created in the mid-eighteenth century, was shaped by the state and the church when deciding what citizens should or should not know.<sup>47</sup> This form of censorship was eradicated as the reporting by newspapers became more prevalent and led to public opinion being formed at different levels in society. Young and Jesser quote Sir James MacIntosh who remarked in 1803 with the emergence of newspapers that it has considerable power, and “[t]he multiplication of newspapers has produced a gradual revolution in our government by increasing the number of those who exercise some sort of judgement on public affairs”.<sup>48</sup> With newspapers, there was now the freedom for citizens to form their own informed opinions and even participate in the political discourse. Badsey supports this motion by arguing that newspapers were originally founded to ensure that civil society was informed and kept up to date with what the government of the day was doing.<sup>49</sup> He notes that, like today, those early newspapers were sponsored by advertising and the *raison d’être* of mass media was and still is to ensure a forum for political and social debate.<sup>50</sup>

The nineteenth century saw the first Industrial Revolution and the beginning of official education for the proletariat. Before the 1800s, children of the poor, especially in Britain and Europe, could not afford schooling. This changed in the early 1830s when the British government made it compulsory to have at least two hours of education per day for children who worked in factories.<sup>51</sup> Apart from the fact that people’s lives improved in general, this also created an educated society, which started to question and debate issues and ultimately formed their own opinions. Later in the nineteenth century, the invention of the telegraph was an important step in communication, which marked a new era in journalism. This aided Paul Julius Reuter in establishing the world’s first major news wire agency at the London Royal Exchange in 1851.<sup>52</sup> This later became known as Reuters, and to date is still one of the world’s leading news agencies. This development led to news from the battlefield reaching the public, sometimes even before the command structure of militaries or their political masters were notified of actions and activities on and around the battlefield – often to the dismay of commanders and politicians. The speed with which news travelled had an influence on the employment of force – both on information regarding the enemy that was being provided and on the shaping of public opinion.<sup>53</sup> However, even before a country employs military force, it will need the support from its population. Therefore, before employing the armed forces, the leadership of a country needs to ensure that public opinion is sympathetic and in support of the armed forces. This is where the media play a crucial role to inform the population on the matter and to elucidate the reasons offered by government of why armed force is utilised as the last option.<sup>54</sup>

Although the stakeholders of the military can be placed in different categories and even prioritised, the overall stakeholder for any military remains its own population. However, the military is part of government and cannot be separated from its political master. It is therefore important to consider the relationship between the military, government and civilian society. It is significant to note that the reference to the relationship between the military and civil society implies that it is a civil–military and not military–civil relationship. According to Esterhuysen and Heineken, this emphasises the subordinate role of the military in terms of civil society.<sup>55</sup> Further, note that it is a civil–military and not civilian–military relationship. This underscores that both the state and society form or constitute the civil part. Esterhuysen and Heineken note that, theoretically, civil–military relations “are typically conceptualised with either military professionalism or political loyalty as key construct”.<sup>56</sup> Ebo describes civil–military relations as –

[T]he web of relations between the military and the society within which it operates, and of which it is necessarily a part. Such relations encompass all aspects of the role of the military (as a professional, political, social and economic institution) in the entire gambit of national life. Civil–military relations involve issues such as the attitude of the military towards the civilian society, the civilian society’s perceptions of, and attitudes to the military, and the role of the armed forces in relation to the state.<sup>57</sup>

Esterhuysen and Heineken assert that civil–military relations relate to the well-known trinity described by Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), a Prussian general and military theorist who emphasised the moral and political aspects of war.<sup>58</sup> There are various differing opinions between military scholars, strategists and academics on how to interpret the trinity shaped by Von Clausewitz in his book *On war*.<sup>59</sup> However, there is agreement that there are two central conceptual levels that can be assigned to the trinity. The primary conceptual level of war is passion, reason and chance, and the secondary conceptual level is people, government and the military.<sup>60</sup> Beutel declares, “the secondary trinity of people, government, and the military is a tangible translation which provides a framework for managing the elements of war within a relatable socio-political context”.<sup>61</sup>

Bruneau and Matei identify three essential components in civil–military relations: “democratic civilian control; operational effectiveness; and the efficiency of the security institutions (i.e. the armed forces, the intelligence community, and police)”.<sup>62</sup> Garner maintains that, even before Samuel Huntington wrote *The soldier and the state*<sup>63</sup>, the bulk of civil–military deliberation had centred on the fear of a military *coup d’état*.<sup>64</sup> Chuter argues, “[i]f civil–military relations were only about the reduction of military power, then the sensible thing would be to abolish the military altogether.”<sup>65</sup> He pronounces that a military must have a beneficial function, and civil–military issues cannot be reduced to diminish military power.<sup>66</sup>

According to Bruneau and Matei, comprehensive literature must be available on civil–military relations in order to truly understand the dynamics of this relationship. Several key considerations should be taken into consideration on the importance of civil–military relations.

- Firstly, “in all countries, the relationship between the state and the armed forces is often crucial for the survival of the state against foreign and domestic enemies”;
- secondly, “fairly large percentages of national budgets go to national defense and security in most, if not all, countries. The global average is 2.2 percent, with a range from 0.1–11.2 percent”; and
- thirdly, “in most newer democracies, the armed forces and security services were key components of the previous, non-democratic regimes, and their treatment is central to later democratic consolidation”.<sup>67</sup>

Governments use official publications such as White Papers, Defence Reviews, annual reports, and speeches by the executive to communicate issues on its military, which might not always be 100% truthful, according to Chuter.<sup>68</sup> However, in most countries, the image of the military is largely created by the mass media.<sup>69</sup> The role of the media in communicating to and on behalf of the above trinity must not be underestimated. It is important for the media to report on all matters in which the military are involved in a truthful and unbiased manner to ensure that public opinion on the military can be formed based on facts.

As the media have a role to play in a democracy so does the military. Bailie argues, “the military has been one of the biggest obstacles to Africa’s democratic development and therefore the freedom of Africa’s people”.<sup>70</sup> Bear in mind that, unless a country is ruled by means of a military dictatorship, a government can also use its military to remain in power. Therefore, it is important to ensure that “the actions and operations of the military and the control over the military, reflect democratic values and protect human freedom”.<sup>71</sup> Matei states that in new democracies in sub-Saharan Africa – amongst other emerging democracies the world over – the emphasis is on democratic security rather than national security.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, “these new regimes focus on control of the armed forces as more important than the ability of the armed forces to defend the country”.<sup>73</sup> This all points back to the age-old dilemma of who guards the guardians.<sup>74</sup> The basis of democracy rests on transparency and accountability, and this is where the media should be the guards of the guardians and where they should play an even bigger role in emerging democracies than in fully fledged democracies.

The mass media provide a technology-driven environment that has made quantum leaps in the past two centuries. The media perform various roles in society, ranging from informing the population to being a watchdog within society. It plays a vital role in forming public opinion, and history has shown that this is not a modern phenomenon, as it has originated in ancient times and will continue to play an important role. This is especially relevant in the civil–military environment where there has to be

understanding, communication and especially consensus between the government, the population and the military about the role of the military in a political system.

## 2.4 Public relations as key element of the communication discipline

This section discusses the communication discipline. There are various names for the communication discipline, ranging from 'communication' to 'corporate communication' to 'public relations'. It is important to elaborate on the name, as it is one of the main reasons why communication is not taken seriously nationally and internationally. Apart from the argument on the name, the characteristics, roles, techniques and functions of the public relations practitioner are mentioned. The section concludes with the challenges faced by the public relations practitioner.

The word 'communication' can be ambiguous because it is seen as an action but also as a function or a discipline within an organisation. Skinner and Von Essen claim:

Public relations, in essence, is a process of communication. The PR [public relations] practitioner communicates on behalf of the organisation [the constitutional communicator] with the organisation's target audiences [the receivers] about the organisation's policies, goals, and procedures [the message] by means of a speech, a newsletter or publicity in the mass media [the channels or media] in situations involving either personal or indirect contact [the interpersonal, small-group, public or mass communication]. The practitioner attempts to eliminate noise or obstacles and is sensitive to feedback to determine whether he/she has achieved his/her aim, which is to establish mutual understanding between the organisation and its target audiences.<sup>75</sup>

Skinner, Von Essen and Mersham state about public relations in modern South Africa that it "is a sophisticated, multi-faceted discipline able to forge effective two-way communication between an organisation and its various publics".<sup>76</sup> Skinner et al. maintain that, in corporations, government, education and charitable organisations, amongst others, public relations is playing an important management role. In the educational field, opportunities for both theoretical and practical knowledge are emerging for those wishing to enter public relations as a profession.<sup>77</sup> In South Africa, the professional body of public relations, called the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), is contributing on a national and international level to ensure that there are proper B-Tech and M-Tech academic degrees in public relations management.<sup>78</sup> Still, this discipline is not completely grasped by the business world. Even though it has progressed rapidly over the last century, it has not managed to take its rightful position as part of top management.<sup>79</sup>

Steyn and Puth state, "[concepts such as] public relations, public affairs, corporate communication, and communication management illustrate the progress of both the academic discipline and the organisational practice".<sup>80</sup> This further confuses the communication functionary, management and the organisation itself because communication is seen as a profession but there is no consensus on



what to name the discipline. Public relations is a professional entity guided by accredited organisations globally. These organisations are all referred to as ‘public relations’ and not as ‘corporate communication organisations’, ‘societies’ or ‘institutions’. The international governing body is called the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and other continental, regional or national bodies are also called ‘public relations’, i.e.

- in Europe, the Confédération Européenne des Relations Publiques (CERP);
- in the United Kingdom, the Institute of Public Relations;
- in the United States of America, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA);
- in Asia, the Federation of Asian Public Relations Organisations (FAPRO);
- in Africa, the African Public Relations Association (APRA); and
- in Southern Africa countries, the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA).<sup>81</sup>

Despite the fact that all the institutions refer to the professional bodies as ‘public relations’, Steyn and Puth argue that the name ‘corporate communication’ is the preferred name for the discipline.<sup>82</sup> Budd states that, when public relations practitioners communicate they do it better than anyone else, “[b]ut to suggest that we are just communicators is like saying ... Eisenhower [was] only a general” and “[i]n our self-image we are practicing public relations no matter what our title.”<sup>83</sup> According to Walker, the term ‘public relations’ is employed mainly by establishments in the United Kingdom.<sup>84</sup>

Cutlip et al. say that staff functions “dealing with an organization’s relationships with specific groups or publics are parts of the larger public relations function”.<sup>85</sup> Some other names used for the public relations discipline are “consumer relations, government affairs, employee communication and media relations – to list but a few”.<sup>86</sup> In most organisations, there is also a divide between internal and external communication, where **internal** communication focuses on the shareholders, employees and their families, and **external** communication focuses on the external publics to the organisation. Cutlip et al. argue that the name issue is further complicated when the communication discipline is given many other classifications favoured by some over public relations such as ‘public information’, ‘corporate communication’, and ‘public affairs’.<sup>87</sup> The official definition of public relations according to PRISA is, “[t]he management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organization and its internal and external stakeholders”.<sup>88</sup> Apart from the above, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) refers to the discipline as corporate communication.

Public relations is a professional discipline since it belongs to professional institutes and associations, and it requires its practitioners to be qualified in terms of academic degrees, diplomas and certificates. Skinner et al. identified the following characteristics of public relations:<sup>89</sup>



- it is dynamic;
- it is analytical;
- it is planned;
- it implies action;
- it requires evaluation; and
- it demands adjustment.

In such a dynamic profession, various roles of the public relations practitioner evolved over the years. Since organisations are mostly open systems there are numerous factors internally and externally that affect the organisation on different levels.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, there are various roles that the public relations practitioner plays within the organisation and between the organisation and its publics. Four major roles of the public relations practitioner have been identified. There could be a variation of two or more of these roles but mostly there is one role that is more predominant than the others. The role or roles that the practitioner plays could be either by choice of the practitioner or forced on the practitioner by management. These roles are:<sup>91</sup>

- **Communication technician.** These are mainly the entry-level practitioners with communication and journalistic skills. They will design and produce invitations, menus and programmes for functions as well as posters and pamphlets for events and activities. Other responsibilities might include the writing of articles for newsletters and in-house journals. Depending on the size and nature of the organisation, they could also be camerapersons or videographers to capture and edit audio-visual material for internal and external communication purposes.
- **Expert prescriber.** This type of practitioner is an expert in a specific field in public relations, such as an editor for the in-house journal or a media liaison expert. They normally act with considerable autonomy and very little interference from management due to their level of expertise.
- **Communication facilitator.** This function is related to the position of the liaison person acting between the organisation and its external stakeholders. This practitioner will create an amicable environment to ensure open communication channels to establish or improve relationships between the organisation and a specific stakeholder of the organisation. Normally, there would be different requirements for the various stakeholders of an organisation.
- **Problem-solving facilitator.** As the name indicates, this practitioner is a specialist in problem solving. This person is normally part of the top management of an organisation and

is trusted by management to provide public relations solutions to problems or issues that the organisation faces.

According to the definition of public relations, the primary role of the discipline is to establish and maintain mutual beneficial relationships between an organisation and its various stakeholders. Therefore, this relationship relies on an equal, honest and respectful basis for both parties. The organisation needs to communicate with its stakeholders regarding its policies, procedures, activities and projects to ensure that the different stakeholders are informed of or educated in certain aspects. This could be to garner either financial or moral support. Therefore, the public relations practitioner uses various techniques obtained through courses and academic studies to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the organisation and its internal and external publics. These techniques could vary from media relations to corporate identity programmes. Considering the characteristics, roles and techniques of the public relations practitioner, Skinner et al. state that the following functions are expected of a public relations practitioner:<sup>92</sup>

- research;
- programming and counselling or planning and advising;
- media relations and placement;
- organising;
- writing;
- editing;
- production;
- speaking;
- training; and
- management.

It is clear that the public relations function is a regulated discipline, an art and a science. There is ample theory on the field; yet, research has shown that the public relations practitioner is not taken seriously by management. Steyn and Puth aver that there are two reasons for this. Firstly, from within the organisation, as debates over the last five decades have proven that:<sup>93</sup>

- the executive does not recognise the significance and worth of public relations;
- the public relations function does not enjoy free access to the executive;
- the public relations department often reports to another functional department and not directly to the executive; and
- the budget allocation to the public relations department or section is totally inadequate.

Secondly, it was established through various studies and is indicated in literature that public relations practitioners fail themselves by:<sup>94</sup>

- not being part of the decision-making role in the organisation;
- only seeing themselves as implementers of policy rather than architects of policy;
- not comprehending the political, economic, social and technological challenges and opportunities in their respective industries;
- focusing too narrowly on their own environment and failing to address strategic issues;
- lacking general managerial skills and not doing proper research;
- not integrating the public relations function into the strategies of the organisation; and
- being reactive and awaiting guidelines by the executive, rather than being proactive.

Skinner and Von Essen declare that public relations should be a management function where the public relations practitioner would interact with both internal and external publics whose shared views make up public opinion.<sup>95</sup> This would allow the public relations practitioner to be aware of inputs and outputs from the environment and to evaluate opinions and needs on an ongoing basis in order to plan and execute programmes to address various issues that might arise.<sup>96</sup> Direct access to top management is of paramount importance to ensure pro-active communication at all times. If the public relations practitioner is not seen as part of management, he or she will not be able to support the corporate mission, policy and goals of the organisation.<sup>97</sup> It is therefore the responsibility of the public relations practitioner to ensure that top management understand the roles and functions of public relations. Simultaneously, the public relations practitioner must ensure that he or she understands the corporate environment of the organisation and to keep him- or herself up to date in terms of the latest policy changes.

This section showed that, although public relations is a highly regulated discipline with historical and academic backing and an established vocation internationally, there are concerns about the use of the communication function by management. The section started with the disparity in the name and then discussed the characteristics, roles, techniques and functions of the public relations practitioner. The section ended with challenges faced by the profession due to management not understanding the discipline and public relations practitioners not making it their responsibility to ensure that they are taken seriously as professional employees that play an important and vital role within the organisation.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the theory of communication, concentrating on what communication is and how to communicate effectively. The reason why humans communicate was discussed, identifying the different mediums and obstacles. Without communication, one will not know what is happening, why it is happening or what is done about it. Communication is one of the foundations of humanity and the different media used to communicate ensure that, since the creation, there has been a historical timeline from which the next generations could learn. Effective and efficient communication is therefore required by the military to inform and influence the attitude of its stakeholders.

One of these media is mass communication. In modern times, mass communication has developed drastically to ensure the speedy and widely spread of information. Therefore, the concept of mass media was explained with its influence on society and the different functions that it fulfils. The role of the media in shaping public opinion was discussed taking it from a historical to modern-day perspective. An explanation was given of civil–military relations and the role the media play in communicating between and on behalf of each aspect within this three-tiered relationship. The reality of freedom of the media and the effectiveness of civil–military relations in democracies were highlighted. In fact, if a state does not conform to all the aspects of democracy, there cannot be freedom of speech. The mass media are of critical importance to civil–military relations to ensure that there is open two-way communication between the government, the population and the military.

A theoretical overview was given of the public relations discipline as a profession with all its dynamics ending with the roles and functions of the public relations practitioner as a specialist in modern organisations. Although professional bodies and societies worldwide refer to the profession of public relations as ‘public relations’, the SANDF has adopted the name ‘corporate communication’. Therefore, in the rest of this thesis, the discipline will be referred to as ‘corporate communication’.

The public relations practitioner communicates with the internal and external stakeholders of an organisation. However, if this discipline is not taken seriously by top management or if the public relations practitioner is not suitably qualified, communication on behalf of the organisation will not be effective. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the public relations discipline be treated as a specialist function in the military and that the public relations practitioner forms part of management. The public relations practitioner should be a specialist communication advisor to top management and executor of all relevant public relations activities.

The next chapter focuses on the historical outline of military–media relations where the role of the media as medium of communication is outlined with the military as communicator to the population who comprises the receivers in order to form an opinion on the military.

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## CHAPTER 3

### THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF MILITARY–MEDIA RELATIONS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the historic evolution of military–media relations and the often tense, divergent, and sometimes adversarial relationships between the military and the media. The discussion refers to four eras:

- limited wars in the nineteenth century, from the Napoleonic times to the Russo–Japanese War;
- the period during the world wars;
- conflicts during the Cold War where there was mainly friction between the two superpowers; and
- post-Cold War conflicts.

The discussion focuses predominantly on Western warfare, since the development of military–media relations coincided largely with the development of democracy in the Western world.

Looking at conflict over time, the issue of self-censorship by the media and the media as a watchdog for the citizens of a country are discussed. This puts access to information for the media and access to areas of conflict by the media in focus. The operational exploitation of the media by the military for purposes of deception and the frustration of censorship for the media is also highlighted. The role of the media for propaganda purposes by the military and politicians in various wars is therefore outlined. The accreditation of media and the role of radio are outlined within the context of the ever-changing relationship between the military and the media.

The development of the media necessitates an analysis of the concept of the media analyst and his or her role. Similarly, the military as institution evolved with the changes in war, and this necessitates an analysis of the growth of disinformation and propaganda. The role of television is highlighted as television brings war into the living rooms at home. The diversity and modernisation of the media facilitate access to the military and battlefield domains by the media, necessitating changes by the military in the management of the media. This brings the role of public relations and affairs, the management of corporate communications, the so-called ‘pool system’, and the embedding of the media by the military into focus. The CNN effect is covered in detail, as it changed the role of the media in conflict and war to the point that some analysts started to refer to modern war as ‘spectator-sport war’. The chapter concludes with an emphasis on the independence of the media.



### 3.2 Explaining military–media relations

This section explains the nature of military–media relations in times of peace and war. The discussion focuses on the spectrum of conflict and the military challenge of justifying its relevance in times of peace. The analysis also elucidates why Western wars and the relationship between Western militaries and the media were of relevance for this research.

Ever since creation, no living organism, human, entity, organisation, business, community or country can exist or survive on its own. We live in a world of interrelated systems and therefore various factors are constantly at play in our daily lives.<sup>1</sup> The military and the media exist in a symbiotic relationship. This is no new phenomenon as it is almost as old as civilisation itself. Military–media relations are not limited to conflicts, wars and interventions but include peacetime day-to-day bureaucratic functioning of the military in the conduct of training and exercises. Military–media relations exist and function in three situational contexts, namely in times of peace, when the risk of war looms, and during actual conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Each of these contexts has a different effect on the dynamics of policymaking within the bureaucratic structures of government departments, such as defence, and their relationship with the media and public opinion.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, there have been a myriad of studies on the military–media relationship along the whole spectrum of conflict. According to the 2015 Defence Review, the spectrum of conflict is the “range of military operations that a military force has to contend with, extending from supporting Civil Authority, to Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), to Major Combat Operations”.<sup>4</sup> In reality, there will always be media interest in and coverage of any military activity and conflict situation. At times, the military finds this a challenge with which they have to deal. Although media interest in times of conflict and war is a given, military–media relationships in peacetime, or rather covering activities outside the spectrum of conflict, are not that well covered in literature. The military and the media, as role players in society, especially democratic states, have a mutually beneficial but often strenuous, relationship. For the military, the basic requirement from the media remains its role as a medium to communicate with society as the stakeholder of the military.

Badsey notes that the United States (US) media are the dominant media player globally; however, according to him, all media universally are virtually identical in what they report on, how they report on militaries, and the modus operandi within media houses.<sup>5</sup> The English knowledge cluster on military–media relations is therefore dominated by US examples and research.<sup>6</sup> This is also because the United States is at the forefront of many conflicts in the post-Cold War world. In the non-Western world, military–media relations also exist – both amicable and strained. Unfortunately, not much material on the media in these conflicts is available. Where research has been done, the results are not readily available.

There are few reporters and their editors who know anything about the military, the organisation, structure or even purpose, role and responsibilities of the military.<sup>7</sup> The media have no experience of the military as very few of the journalists have been exposed to the military or have served in the military.<sup>8</sup> Engelbrecht provides a South African perspective by noting:

[The] nature of the media–military relationship is one of mutual ambivalence, suspicion and antagonism, for a variety of reasons. These include the fact that we mostly do not understand each other, often do not wish to associate and frequently have conflicting organisational cultures.<sup>9</sup>

He claims that, as in the case of militaries, different newsrooms are never alike. Every newsroom has its own peculiarities, systems and ways of operating, and this is even more evident between newspapers, radio, television and wire service newsrooms, which “are about as different as the Army, Air Force and Navy”.<sup>10</sup>

Two other very important points that Engelbrecht highlights are, firstly, the fact that media houses are first and foremost businesses. He quotes *Vrye Weekblad* editor, Max du Preez, who told the Cape Town Press Club that they are no longer editors but that they “get rewarded for making money. That division between state and church, between editor and management, has disappeared. Editors have become capitalists. Now we have making money as the first concern, not journalism as the first concern.”<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, the media are not a single entity. Engelbrecht argues that similar to the open systems model, the media are no more a single organism than humanity is. He acknowledges that there are good media houses with professional journalists and then there are those that are not so proficient. He remarks that the same can be said of the officers’ corps in the military, “there are those who walk their talk and some that only talk the walk”.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, it remains true that, throughout the centuries, the military did not understand how the media function and vice versa. Neither the military nor the media have made an effort to learn about the other in order to understand how and why each entity functions the way it does. Strong and vigorous military–media relations are a key element of the democratic form of governance as it underpins the social contract between the military, society and government. This explains why the focus of this research was predominantly on the relationship between the military and the media in the democratic societies of the West.

### **3.3 Military–media relations from the Napoleonic times to the Russo–Japanese War**

The discussion in this regard focuses on the role of the war correspondent and the editor of newspapers in the relationship between the military and the media. The discussion outlines the concept of self-censorship by the media and explains the strained relationship that exists almost as

a given between the military and the media. The invention of the telegraph, photography and cinematography placed increased tension on the military–media relationship. The military introduced censorship and strict control measures in terms of the media. The use of the media for deception purposes is discussed as well as the way accreditation for the media was introduced. The discussion concludes with an outline of the role that the radio plays with an emphasis on the speed of reporting.

Young and Jesser argue that the first professional war correspondent was Henry Crabb Robinson who covered some of Napoleon’s campaigns in 1807–1808 for the *London Times*.<sup>13</sup> According to Young and Jesser, Charles Lewis Guneiso of the *Morning Post* provided a comprehensive and balanced coverage of the Spanish Civil War of 1835–1837.<sup>14</sup> However, others such as Badsey<sup>15</sup> and Chiaventone<sup>16</sup> consider William Howard Russell of the *London Times* as the world’s first recognised war correspondent with his reporting on the Crimean War (1853–1856). Although not the only correspondent in the war, with his reporting from the battlefield, Russel was quite critical of the British military leadership and the government.<sup>17</sup> He was well supported by his editor at home, John Thadeus Delane, who ensured that his reporting was published. Russel was accused that his reporting led to operational security risks, which created animosity between him and the soldiers who started to believe that his writings played a part in their casualties. However, the opposite was in fact true, as his reporting led to the improvement of their conditions, such as better rations and improved medical support.

Both Russel and Delane were confronted with considerable political pressure and harassment by the military and government. The British High Command even accused Russel of espionage.<sup>18</sup> In order to defuse the situation, the *London Times* agreed to self-censorship. This did not really improve the relationship with the military or government, but a precedent had been set for what the public would expect from the media regarding war coverage in future.<sup>19</sup> Taylor endorses this by saying that the defining moment in the Crimean War “was significant in that the public could no longer accept uncritically the official pronouncements of the military spokesmen. An increasingly literate, educated and enfranchised public demanded third-party mediation, and the press filled this demand as a watchdog.”<sup>20</sup> For governments and the armed forces, this was a realisation that there was a new and important role player in waging war. One can surmise that this was the beginning of a strained relationship between the military and the media. It was clear that this new role player was going to complicate matters, as Napoleon Bonaparte is supposed to have remarked, “[f]our hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.”<sup>21</sup>

This new relationship was thoroughly tested with the American Civil War (1861–1865), the Franco–Prussian War (1870), the Sudan War (1898), the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905).<sup>22</sup> Young and Jesser argue that the correspondents supported by modern technologies, such as wire communication (telegraph), photography and even

cinematography, although only very basic, introduced serious concerns of security risks to the military commanders as well as national and international public opinion in terms of their governments.<sup>23</sup> According to Young and Jesser, this led to stricter censorship and control over access to information and less support from the military, such as transport and accommodation for journalists.<sup>24</sup> The reporting of the American Civil War (1861–1865), Badsey argues, might have been “the first war fought by a literate democracy”.<sup>25</sup> Chiaventone suggests that, although the Crimea introduced the first battlefield correspondents, the American Civil War was really the birthplace of modern war reporting.<sup>26</sup> He explains that, with the commencement of the hostilities, there were over 500 correspondents just from the Northern papers alone. This was much to the dismay of the military commanders, as illustrated by General Irwin McDowell who said, “I have made arrangements for the correspondents of our papers to take the field, and I have suggested that they wear a white uniform to indicate the purity of their character.”<sup>27</sup> The animosity was not only directed at the war correspondents themselves but also at their editors, as General Robert Edward Lee said:

It appears we have appointed our worst generals to command our forces, and our most gifted and brilliant to edit newspapers! In fact, I discovered by reading newspapers that these editor-geniuses plainly saw all my strategic defects from the start, yet failed to inform me until it was too late. Accordingly, I'm readily willing to yield my command to these obviously superior intellects and I'll, in turn, do my best for the cause by writing editorials – after the fact.<sup>28</sup>

Andrews notes that more than 130 years later, after the American Civil War, not much has changed in the relationship between the military and the media.<sup>29</sup> Essentially, then and now, the first and most important requirement from the media remains access, be it to information or to the areas of conflict. The military wants complete control over access to information and areas of conflict. Andrews relates the famous story between General William Tecumseh Sherman and the war correspondent Florus Plympton when the latter arrived at the battlefield in Kentucky, with the necessary authority from the higher command to interview Sherman. It was well known that Sherman hated the media and he essentially ordered Plympton to take the next train back. When Plympton complained and insisted that he only wanted to report on the truth, Sherman lost his temper and said, “[w]e don't want the truth told about things here; we don't want the enemy any better informed than he is.”<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this can relate to the old adage that the first casualty of war is the truth.

In 1870, France declared war on Germany in what became known as the Franco–Prussian War (1870–1871). Badsey writes that this was the first war “in which the speed of reporting from the battlefield became a critical issue for newspapers”.<sup>31</sup> ‘Speed’ was the operative word in this war in that era. The Prussian Chief of General Staff, General Helmuth Karl Bernhard von Moltke, had modernised his armies and built up a railway system to transport and support his forces. He was able to deploy over a million soldiers within 18 days.<sup>32</sup> The media were also present in full force on both sides. The members from the media did not only comprise citizens from the two opposing forces

but also from 'neutral' countries, such as Russel from Britain. The two opposing sides had conflicting approaches to the media. France decided on complete censorship, as it was concerned about operational security, such as information leaking out to the enemy. Germany however realised the value of the role the media could play in informing nations and their citizens on the war.

The Chancellor of the German Empire, Otto von Bismarck, deliberately exploited and manipulated the media for Germany's cause to what may be considered the first form of deception.<sup>33</sup> Krüger argues that this type of deception would later prove to have considerable negative implications on future wars.<sup>34</sup> According to her, the German media strategy was to focus solely on how well the German soldiers were fighting and how significant the modern military equipment was rather than reporting on the horrendous casualties as well as the vast number of soldiers who died or were injured and maimed for life on both sides. This caused the German population to be sheltered from the atrocities of war and de facto the rest of the world, which read and saw manipulated pictures of the war, which did not portray the carnage. The destructiveness and inhumanity of war with all the gruesome fatalities were therefore not portrayed, and the general belief was created that modern warfare is not that harmful. The German media also exaggerated the way the *francs-tireurs*, French civilians and coloured colonial soldiers mainly from Africa, conducted warfare. They were accused of all types of barbaric war crimes, such as mutilating wounded German soldiers with "their knives or teeth".<sup>35</sup> Although this was the first time that the military used the media as part of a deception plan, it was not the last.

British General Sir Herbert Kitchener was one of the first military commanders to impose strict censorship on the media in the Sudan War (1898). According to Young and Jesser, he also disliked reporters and did not give them any assistance or information. It was only after the editor of the *London Times* made so-called representations to government that reporters were allowed into the area of operations. The alteration between the military, the political leadership and the media proved two things: firstly, the media can be controlled; and secondly, the media have power to influence public opinion.<sup>36</sup>

During the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), the British continued with the same censorship approach about the media as during the Sudan War. Young and Jesser write, "in addition to censorship, correspondents were manipulated by the military into sending dispatches acceptable to the commander".<sup>37</sup> Scholtz gives another view where he is of the opinion that the written accounts by reporters were "by and large, objective, and are still very useful as sources by present-day historians".<sup>38</sup> It must be taken into consideration that there were over 300 war correspondents in South Africa during the height of the Anglo-Boer War and these were not only from Britain but also from Europe, America and Australia.<sup>39</sup> Although most of these were seasoned and respected

reporters, it was the first time in which they encountered such a strict system of media censorship imposed by the military.<sup>40</sup>

One of these Australian journalists was the well-known Alfred Arthur Greenwood ('Smiler') Hales. According to Hales, the actual reason for censorship was to keep the British public away from the "disastrous mismanagement"<sup>41</sup> of the war by the British military in South Africa and not, as the military made out, that the censorship was necessary for reasons of operational security. Trembath quotes Hales who said, "[t]hat is not why the military people want our work censored. The real reason is that their awful blunders, their farcical mistakes, and their criminal negligence may not reach the British public."<sup>42</sup> Another notable occurrence during this war was the use of propaganda. Present at the battles were cinematographers, and one of the newsreels caused quite a reaction in Britain following an incident where a British Red Cross team was attacked by the Boers. This caused great support for the war effort of the government by the British public. However, it later became evident that the incident was staged by professional actors.<sup>43</sup> This form of propaganda was used here for the first time, but not the last.

Trembath writes that, even though the British authorities established more stringent media regulations in South Africa than had been the case in the Crimean War and the other colonial or imperial wars, censorship by the military was still much more relaxed than it would be after 1900.<sup>44</sup> Trembath relates that this era was labelled by British historians "the golden age of military reporting".<sup>45</sup> This golden age of military reporting ended with the outbreak of the Russo–Japanese War (1904). According to Young and Jesser, the Japanese were faced with a dilemma when more than a hundred journalists suddenly arrived in Tokyo to cover the war. At that stage, the Japanese themselves did not have the media freedom they have today. To address this dilemma, they went the diplomatic route by which journalists had to apply for visas. The Japanese strategy was to frustrate the journalists with the process of acquiring a visa. Needless to say, many applications got lost in the bureaucratic process and it is believed that fewer than 20 foreign journalists were able to cover the war.<sup>46</sup> Trembath continues that, apart from this diplomatic type of censorship, the Japanese additionally came up with irregular approaches of handling the media, such as to keep journalists away from the area of operations by providing foreign correspondents with "enough food, alcohol, comfort and women" and also to attach escort officers to them in order to control their movements.<sup>47</sup> This was a form of accreditation, as journalists had to be registered for them to be transported, accommodated and fed by the military.

The Russo–Japanese War also introduced two further new developments in the military–media relationship. Lionel James from the *London Times* was permitted by the Japanese to transmit information on the naval war via a transmitter that was installed on board a chartered yacht. This was highly effective and showed the value of the radio in reporting from the front. However, the



Japanese retained control of his shore link and then banned his broadcasts when he was done serving his purpose for the Japanese Intelligence.<sup>48</sup> Ironically, it was the Japanese who made it known that they considered all foreign journalists to be spies. The Japanese waged war on fronts covering more than 150 kilometres. This distance made it almost impossible for the correspondent to cover the conflict. From then on, journalists did not only rely on information and communications from the military, but also on logistical support, such as transport and accommodation.

In conclusion, the arrival of the war correspondents changed the nature of news on conflict for good. Self-censorship by the media and censorship of the media by the military in various wars made for a strenuous relationship between the media and the military. The innovation of wireless technologies, such as the telegraph and the radio, had a significant influence on the turnaround time of news on conflict, violence and war and the way different countries dealt with their own and foreign media reporting on conflict. Increasingly, the media were used by militaries and their governments for purposes of deception in war. The misuse of the media for purposes of deception raises questions about the loyalty and patriotism of the media as a key element in democratic societies. These questions inevitably give rise to a more strenuous relationship with and role of the media in conflict environments. The military increasingly approached the media with a restricted mind-set and almost adversarial relationship.

### **3.4 Military–media relations in the world wars**

The section demarcates the relationship between the military and the media during the two world wars at the beginning of the twentieth century. The discussion covers the origin of the military analyst and the development of the military view of the media as a serious security risk. The media were increasingly being used for deception and propaganda purposes by both the democratic and authoritarian parties to the conflict. The need for the media to approach their role as a balancing act between loyalty and patriotism on the one side and objective reporting on the war on the other to keep the public well informed, is highlighted.

Charles à Court Repington from the *London Times* is considered the first military analyst, as he covered the First World War in detail from London. Commenting on this new role, Repington wrote:

I had seen from the outset that more useful work could be done by a man who remained at the London nerve centre, than war correspondents of the old type who sought to repeat the feats of Russell, Archibald Forbes and Stevens at the seat of war. I knew they would be shepherded, almost imprisoned and prevented from telling the truth owing to the regulations which had been established in all Armies to muzzle the press, whereas in London, I had no censorship to control me and could speak my mind.<sup>49</sup>

Repington not only had the vision for what was going to become the norm in military–media relations but his reporting was also far better than those who came from the area of operations.

For the military, the speed of media reporting on a war became a real security threat, and even their governments believed that control was required over media reporting during conflicts. This in all probability led to the 1899 Hague Convention on warfare where the first recognition was given to the military–media relationship. This was in later years also part of the various Geneva conventions where it was established that “reporters would receive non-combatant status with armies, but only if they were registered or accredited”.<sup>50</sup> This subsequently led to formal censorship of the media by various countries before the start of the First World War, which in turn provided both government legislation and military regulations with powerful control measures to punish military members who had unauthorised dealings with the media.<sup>51</sup> Chiaventone mentions that, apart from official censorship by the British government already been imposed on the media, the government established an office for war propaganda during the First World War.<sup>52</sup> According to Chiaventone, neither the government nor the media saw anything wrong with this, as everyone had an ardent sentiment of patriotism and “this was the dawn of a new age of a concerted, organized effort to control what the public saw of the wars fought on their behalf”.<sup>53</sup>

Badsey is of the opinion that the word ‘propaganda’ as it is used in military terminology and defence doctrine could be misunderstood or misused in modern times; however, up to just after the end of the First World War, it was a form of public relations.<sup>54</sup> The intention was not to deceive anyone but rather that it was an innovative way of getting a message across that was to the advantage of the British government, the military and the citizens.<sup>55</sup> Although the use of propaganda is viewed negatively nowadays, Badsey argues that the emphasis of modern-day use of propaganda is not so much on factual correctness as on the insignificance of truth or falsehood as a means of persuasion.<sup>56</sup> To substantiate what Badsey is saying, he quotes a definition from the Central Intelligence Agency, which states that propaganda is “a dissemination of information – facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths or lies – to influence public opinion, and as such ... it is an act of advocacy in mass communications which is not necessarily deceptive”.<sup>57</sup> Young and Jesser agree with Badsey when they say that the reporting by British, French as well as German reporters was not only not truthful but these reporters also willingly participated in spreading propaganda to keep the hardships and mass deaths away from their respective populations in order to maintain public support for the war effort. Young and Jesser argue that both sides also used pro-active communication means for support of their cause in overseas media, where they mainly targeted the United States. The Germans were beaten for the support of the US population because of a well-planned and finely executed media campaign by the British Secret Service.<sup>58</sup> This shows another side of the value that the media have played – even until today – to garner support for a just cause and a plea that they should keep on playing this role in future. Moreover, according to Badsey, the



British decided, wisely, before the end of the First World War, rather to refrain from using the term 'propaganda' and opted for the term 'information'.<sup>59</sup>

Even though the British did not use the term 'propaganda' anymore, they still controlled the media with all possible efforts and means. Winston Churchill remarked in 1940, "[i]n time of war the machinery of government is so strong that it can afford largely to ignore popular feeling."<sup>60</sup> A Ministry of Information was formed just before the start of the Second World War, employing more than a thousand personnel. They were given unlimited powers, and all persons, journalists and news editors were prohibited by means of strict censorship from communicating any form of information whether by mail, cable or telephone that the Ministry thought might be useful to the enemy.<sup>61</sup> Still, the correspondents on both sides supported the war efforts of their countries in both the world wars with diligence and sincere patriotism.<sup>62</sup> According to Taylor, despite strict censorship measures on the media, the British media "clashed a remarkably few times" with the government and the military in the six years that the Second World War lasted.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, in the United States, an Office of War Information was established to inform the American people about the war.<sup>64</sup> Journalists were entrenched within different units and, even though they were subject to rigorous censorship, they played a fundamental role in maintaining public support for the war effort at home.<sup>65</sup> The military was so impressed with the media that General Dwight David Eisenhower even referred to 500 strong members from the media that were attached to his corps during the Second World War as "my friends".<sup>66</sup> The Germans simply used the media as a force multiplier. They established a *Propagandakompanie*, which eventually grew to 15 000 members. Just as the British correspondents, these were civilian specialists in their fields of journalism, photography and cinematography, as well as broadcasters who were issued with military uniforms and incorporated into the *Wehrmacht*. Their purpose was to spread propaganda to their own forces and citizens at home on how well the German armed forces were doing. They also spread disinformation to the enemy as directed by the Minister of Propaganda, the infamous Joseph Goebbels.<sup>67</sup>

Badsey postulates that, just as the journalists considered the period from the Crimean War to the 1900s as the golden age for reporting, so did the military consider the period from the start of the twentieth century until the end of the Second World War as the golden age for its relationship with the media, as the military basically controlled the media.<sup>68</sup> John Steinbeck, a war correspondent at the time, portrayed this relationship clearly when he said, "[w]e were all part of the war effort. We went along with it, and not only that, we abetted it."<sup>69</sup> Reporters were not allowed in war theatres unless they were accredited, and they were only accredited if they agreed to submit their articles to military censors.<sup>70</sup> There are many opinions of what the true relationship between the military and the media was, and it mostly comes down to friction and criticism of each other. However, General

Sir Harold Alexander, the commander of the British Forces in the Middle East in 1942, had a much more objective view when he wrote:

My own opinion is that the press correspondent is just as good a fellow as any military officer or man who knows a great many secrets, and he will never let you down – not on purpose – but he may let you down if he is not in the picture, merely because his duty to his paper forces him to write something, and that something may be most dangerous. Therefore, he must be kept in the picture.<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion, the growing importance of the military analyst vis-à-vis the physical presence of the war correspondent on the battlefield is a growing tendency. The speed of the news from the battlefield to the home country made security and the reporting of the war by the media of major concern to the military. Increasingly, official structures were set up by the military to control the media. Use by the military of the media for deception and propaganda purposes continues to raise questions about the position and role of the media and the importance of the elusive idea of objective media reporting. The military benefitted from the role of the media during the world wars and created expectations within the military that this is the way the media should report on the military as an instrument of government.

### **3.5 Military–media relations in conflicts of the Cold War**

This analysis highlights the restrictions imposed on the media by the military during the Cold War. It was a difficult period in the relationship between the military and the media, since open warfare flared up on the periphery of world politics in developing countries (then called ‘Third World countries’), but for the most, it was a period of armed peace between the major powers of the world. Issues, such as the reliance of the media on the military for information and access to areas of engagements, are highlighted. The way the media portrayed the military and its effect on public opinion is discussed, especially with reference to the arrival of television, which brought the war into the living rooms of the population. The fact that members from media houses internationally had access to conflict areas increased the frustration for the military in the already shaky relationship between the military and the media. Conflicts of importance in this era are the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Falklands War and the US interventions in Grenada and Panama. The discussion highlights the absence of information between the military and the media in the armed tensions between the United States, Russia and China.

The censorship of media reporting on conflicts by governments was abolished not long after the end of the Second World War. However, the mentality of regulating the media during conflict was inculcated in militaries and continued into the early years of the Cold War. Furthermore, governments persisted to control the flow of information between the military and the media and utilising the media as instruments for propaganda either with the consent of the media or without the media being aware

of it.<sup>72</sup> The Korean War was the first limited conflict after the world wars, and the last one where acute censorship on the media was blatantly enforced. Although censorship was initially limited, it soon escalated as the military were displeased with the perceived negative reporting on the UN commanders, especially relating to General Douglas MacArthur who noted, “[o]ne cannot wage war under present conditions without the support of public opinion, which is tremendously molded by the press and other forms of propaganda.”<sup>73</sup>

According to Holm<sup>74</sup> as well as Shanker and Hertling,<sup>75</sup> the media originally imposed self-censorship in order to ensure operational security in Korea, but the military considered any reporting on the conflict that was not absolutely positive as having a negative influence on the soldiers. Only six months into the conflict, they imposed full media censorship. Because the media were entirely reliant on the military for transport, accommodation and even the dissemination of their reports back to their media houses, they could be penalised in various ways for not toeing the line by having some of their privileges taken away up to being court-martialled.<sup>76</sup> Reporters did not have the same sense of patriotism as during the world wars and started to realise that there was an open-minded national and international opinion on the conflict and that is why their reporting was sometimes critical towards their own governments. The military believed that the reporters were more worried about their careers than about the lives of the soldiers participating in the conflict. This led to an attitude of distrust between the military and the media, which would come to a head in Vietnam.<sup>77</sup>

With the Vietnam War, various new facets came into play, and the war in Vietnam became infamous for all the wrong reasons by setting the future trend for military–media relations. Television broadcasting made a quantum leap from 1950 onward when only 20 per cent of the US population owned television sets versus 90 per cent in the early-1960s.<sup>78</sup> Dubbed the ‘First Television War’, news networks competed to get the most dramatic and exciting stories into the living rooms of the American population.<sup>79</sup> However, with the dramatisation of stories, television coverage of conflicts sometimes misled the public in terms of what was happening in operations. Furthermore, the vivid images of soldiers being wounded and killed, and specifically the reporting on the famous Tet Offensive,<sup>80</sup> led to an outcry of public opinion against the war effort.

The Vietnam War was also the first open-limited conflict where modern media (radio and television) had unlimited access to the entire conflict. Although technology existed at that stage to transmit directly to the United States via satellite, it was not done regularly, mainly due to the high costs involved. Instead, the footage was airlifted and arrived a few days later at the news networks.<sup>81</sup> There were very few restrictions on the movement of the media and the media were not dependent on the military for movements to and from the area of operations, on the contrary, the military assisted the media to get to the conflict zones.<sup>82</sup> As Dennis and Grey put it, “accredited correspondents enjoyed a priority only below casualty evacuation and aerial resupply”.<sup>83</sup>

At the start of the war in Vietnam in 1965, the US administration considered media censorship but then rejected the idea as impractical and unnecessary. Even at the start of the conflict, the majority of the media endorsed US support to the South Vietnamese, although a few newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, questioned the American strategy in the conflict.<sup>84</sup> While the military–media relationship in Vietnam seemed to be going well, Chiaventone is of the opinion that the estrangement between the two entities started when the military began presenting regular scheduled briefings in Saigon for the over 500 journalists present. These were presented at 17:00 every day and were labelled the ‘Five O’clock Follies’ by the media.<sup>85</sup> As this was the only real source of information about what was happening in the theatre of operations for journalists based in Saigon, it was well attended. The media, however, soon realised that the briefings were almost always extremely positive towards the American and South Vietnamese effort. As Chiaventone remarks, “[t]he problem, of course, was that these briefings were invariably optimistic, frequently incomplete, or just plain misleading.”<sup>86</sup> It became clear that the military was manipulating the real facts as many correspondents who were not restricted to Saigon and were able to report from the frontlines, had a different view of what was happening. Once these reports became known, it was clearly contradictory to what the military was saying.

The relationship between the military and the media soured in Vietnam, never to be restored to what it was during the world wars and even the Korean War. The acrimony that had developed between the military and the media was the making of both parties. From the military side, the senior leadership came from the era of the world wars and the Korean War and was used to deal with the media in a specific manner, such as exercising considerable censorship on media reporting. They now found it difficult to change and to adapt in this new spectrum of conflict. From the media side, most journalists were young and had no military experience and the challenges were that they did not understand the hierarchical command structure of the military, the levels of operations, the different concepts of operations, or the art of war in general. The biggest mistake by the new generation members of the media was that they did not understand that militaries only operate within the confines of what their political leaders instruct them to do.<sup>87</sup>

It was generally assumed that the Tet Offensive at the beginning of 1968 was a disaster, and it was believed to be where the United States lost the war. The reality was that the offensive was militarily decisively beaten back, and on the battlefield, it was a great victory. However, because the journalists did not comprehend military operations fully, they reported on it as a defeat for the Americans and South Vietnamese.<sup>88</sup> In fact, most of the tactical skirmishes were won by the US and South Vietnamese troops. As Jesser and Young suggest, the real reason for America losing the Vietnam War was the lack of a well-defined strategic intent and “a protracted and unsuccessful campaign, and disillusionment in the face of government disinformation, denial and deception”.<sup>89</sup>

The animosity between the military and the media in Vietnam was due to the way the military commanders at operational, and even more so at strategic level, treated the media. Although one must be careful to assume that all the military commanders treated the media deviously, and the same went for the media. Not all the correspondents were ill-informed, had ulterior motives, and did not understand the military. Joseph Galloway, a formidable war correspondent who made his name during the Vietnam War, said he met many great correspondents acquiring stories during intense battles living through the same harsh conditions and coming under enemy fire with the unit with which they have been embedded.<sup>90</sup> It seemed that at the tactical level, the relationship was much more cordial. Shanker interviewed Lieutenant General Harold Gregory ('Hal') Moore, who commanded the first major ground engagement at the Battle of Ia Drang years later. Shanker asked Moore what the recipe was for good military–media relations. Moore, who was a lieutenant colonel at the battle, responded, "I told reporters don't get in the way. And don't give up my plans. And I told my troops, talk from your level – don't speak for the highers. And tell the truth."<sup>91</sup> Moore and Galloway, who was present as a reporter during the battle, co-authored the book *We were soldiers once ... and young*, which later became a blockbuster movie *We were soldiers*.<sup>92</sup>

William Hammond argues that the media did not lose the Vietnam War as the military wanted the American public to believe. It was rather due to 'policy or strategy' issues from government and the military.<sup>93</sup> He writes that, although the war started "[with a] compliant media and public affairs program that upheld military security without violating the rights of reporters",<sup>94</sup> the contradictions from government and the military high command became more prevalent than what was happening on the ground and therefore gradually changed the public opinion of the US citizens from positive to negative.<sup>95</sup> This was obviously exacerbated by the exponential increase of body bags returning to the United States as the war progressed. The opinion of Hammond was echoed by the Chief of Public Affairs during the Vietnam conflict, Major General Winant Sidle, who years after the war said, "[y]ou don't need much public affairs when you are winning. Your success shines forth. The opposite, however, is also true. The best public affairs program imaginable will not disguise failure."<sup>96</sup> After the Vietnam War, the term 'Vietnam syndrome'<sup>97</sup> was coined where the military commanders kept believing that the war was lost in the living rooms of families in the United States because of the television coverage the war received.<sup>98</sup>

Although there was almost no censorship imposed on the media during the Vietnam War, it became clear that after the Vietnam War, the military changed their stance in interacting with the media from regulating the media to controlling the media. This became evident in how the media were managed by Britain during the Falklands War and by the United States during the interventions in Grenada and Panama.<sup>99</sup> Young and Jesser argue, "[r]emoteness favours the military, while a lengthy conflict favours the media."<sup>100</sup> The Falklands War gave the military the benefit of dealing with the media as it was far from any civilian support infrastructures and the media were completely reliant on the

military for all their travel and logistical requirements. Apart from denial of access to conflict zones and communications equipment to transmit reports, the British government also used tactics such as deception, misinformation and disinformation to ensure public support for the war effort.<sup>101</sup>

Moskos argues, “the British military’s complete control over reporters during the 1982 Falklands War served as the model for [the] American military’s stringent control of the media in Grenada”.<sup>102</sup> In the case of Grenada and Panama, the arduous access to the countries before and during the conflict and the shortage of local media infrastructure also played to the advantage of the military.<sup>103</sup> Rid goes as far as to say, “denial of access and flow of information was the policy” in both the Grenada and Panama invasions and even in the First Gulf War.<sup>104</sup> Although the military thought that this was a successful way of dealing with the media, in a democracy this was in direct contrast to freedom of speech and media freedom. Due to the frustrations experienced by the reporters and editors in the way the media was treated in Grenada, the US Congress became involved and the Justice Committee recommended that the military and the media must “seek guidelines for a press policy in war times that would be satisfying for both sides”.<sup>105</sup> This led to the establishment of the ‘Sidle Panel’ named after the head of the panel, retired Major General Winant Sidle. The panel consisted of both military public affairs officers and members from the media. They had to answer one basic question: “How can we [the US government] conduct military operations in a manner that safeguards the lives of our military and protects the security of the operation while keeping the American public informed through the media?”<sup>106</sup> The answer with which the panel came up with was:

The American people must be informed about United States military operations and this information can best be provided through both the news media and the government. Therefore, the panel believes it is essential that the U.S. news media cover U.S. military operations to the maximum degree possible consistent with mission security and the safety of U.S. forces.<sup>107</sup>

One of the recommendations of the Sidle Panel was that a pool system be created in order to grant media access to the battlefield.<sup>108</sup> This system was first tested during the Panama invasion of 1989 and during the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>109</sup> The concept was that a selected group of reporters would produce stories subject to security reviews by the military, which would then be distributed to other media houses.<sup>110</sup> According to Rid, the “military’s philosophy was not to control what the press could print [but] to control what the press could see [a method officially called] security at the source”.<sup>111</sup> In comparison to the complete ban of media coverage during the Grenada intervention (in 1983), the criticism of the pool system after Panama (in 1989) was moderate.<sup>112</sup> Although reports were late, they were at least possible.<sup>113</sup> However, soon after the end of the Gulf War (in 1991), it became evident that the pool system was only beneficial to the military, as once again, the military controlled access to the battlefield as well as to information.<sup>114</sup>



The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China were involved in the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Soviet–Afghan War where they utilised the media for propaganda purposes within their countries as well as sharing it with the rest of the world.<sup>115</sup> Both these countries (Soviet Union and People's Republic of China) exercised very tight media control on Western media and used their national media to spread disinformation.<sup>116</sup> Unfortunately, as with most of the conflicts that occurred in developing countries, there is very little research material available on conflicts in the Eastern countries and in terms of the Middle East during the Cold War.

In summary, the Korean War was the last conflict where total censorship was applied by the military on the media, and the Vietnam War was the first war that was televised. This brought the war closer to home and had a major influence on public opinion. What is very clear though is that, at tactical level, the relationship between the military and the media was much better than at operational and strategic level as both the soldier and the reporter experienced the reality of war first-hand. At operational and strategic level, where the military wanted to drive a specific message home through the media, there were animosity and disagreement. Media reporters had almost unlimited access to countries where there were conflict but the restrictions imposed on members of the media by the military in the conflict areas became greater. The media could not get to conflict zones on their own and were completely dependent on the military to provide them with information, transport, food and accommodation as well as transmission of their reports to their respective media houses. This all led to the pool system being introduced by the military for the media, which in essence allowed the military to have total control over media movements and to a great extent of what was being reported.

### **3.6 Military–media relations in the post-Cold War era**

While the Vietnam War (1955) was the first televised war, the Gulf War (1991) was the first real-time war as television reporters were able to transmit in real time from the conflict zones to anyone in the world who owned a television set and were able to pay for cable television. The post-Cold War era (1991) also saw an increase in human intervention operations by the military. These interventions had a multi-national component that made the relationship between the media, government and the military more complicated than ever. Within the theatres of operation, the media were diverse and not just those reporting on the conflict. The opposition forces often had an ally in the media and used the media for propaganda and disinformation purposes.

With the start of the 1991 Gulf War and the end of the Cold War (in 1991), the nature of conflict changed drastically. It was no longer an East–West stand-off and there were very few state-to-state conflicts and more and more intra-state conflicts. In the words of Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former UN Secretary-General, “the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty has passed [and has been replaced by] universal sovereignty”.<sup>117</sup> Although many see UN interventions as a blanket approach to peacekeeping, this expression created various problems, and Badsey claims that “Humanitarian

Intervention” would be a more sensible term to use where UN forces are involved in intra-state conflicts.<sup>118</sup> Be it as it may, these added functions of humanitarian operations had their own challenges for the military. While it was still required of the military to do normal offensive military actions, they now had duties, which included activities such as “electoral assistance, protection of humanitarian relief efforts, training local police and the disarmament, cantonment and demobilisation of armed forces”.<sup>119</sup>

As the nature of conflict changed, so did media coverage of conflicts. Although the role of the media remained that of storyteller and commentator on the conflict, which should remain unbiased, the UN had its own interest in the way in which their actions were reported.<sup>120</sup> The nature of peacekeeping operations could not justify any type of media control or manipulation as that would be a direct contradiction of the concept of openness on which peacekeeping operations are built.<sup>121</sup> News is not limited to the countries of conflict, and while the Vietnam War was considered the first television war, the 1991 Gulf War was considered the first real-time war.<sup>122</sup> This was because CNN delivered 24-hour news reports, which were dubbed the ‘CCN Effect’.<sup>123</sup> Although the news literally reached everyone with a television set worldwide, many media members and academics believed this to be the worst reported war due to the strict control over journalists by means of the pool system, which resulted in selective and sanitised coverage.<sup>124</sup>

To dispute this sentiment somewhat, is the fact that Saddam Hussein – who also believed in the Vietnam syndrome – came with an interesting tactic by allowing media houses from around the globe to stay behind in Baghdad following the outbreak of the aerial warfare phase.<sup>125</sup> Hussein was under the impression that there would be mass bombings, which would result in the killing of civilians and the destruction of public infrastructure. He believed that this would then lead to public outcry if transmitted via CNN, BBC and other media houses. The war for the Coalition<sup>126</sup> would then be lost due to public opinion turning against the governments of these countries. However, the Coalition forces used precision bombs and, except for a few misguided bombs, very little collateral damage was caused. In one instant, where there were great casualties of women and children by one of these bombs, the news networks placed self-censorship on some of the images, as they were too gruesome. Still even with the toned-down reporting, the *Daily Mail* accused the BBC of being the ‘Baghdad Broadcasting Cooperation’.<sup>127</sup>

Important to note, though, is that this type of reporting via television was only profitable for cable news networks, such as CNN and BBC and later Al Jazeera, as they sell cable services. For other major television networks, such as ABC, CBS and NBC, in the case of the United States, as well as state-owned television corporations worldwide, it was not to their advantage to work so closely with the military as they lost advertising revenue.<sup>128</sup>



The rapid change in technology made it possible for the media to match the communication systems of the military – and in some instances even surpassed that of the military. The reality that bureaucratic processes within media houses are almost non-existent and the fact that many media houses operate on a 24/7 basis gives a further advantage to the media that makes it very difficult for the military with its highly regulated and strenuous bureaucratic processes to manage the media.<sup>129</sup> Another challenge for both the military and the media comprises new tendencies, such as where the opinion of recently retired senior officers on military matters taking place during a conflict is being regarded as authoritative discourse.<sup>130</sup> On the other hand, there are correspondents who became famous with almost celebrity status, who are considered the specialists now. These add to the complicated relationship that already exists.<sup>131</sup>

For the politicians, all these technologies and trends added to their headaches in terms of a complicated world and a classic example of the open systems theory of Cutlip et al.<sup>132</sup> There are many examples of how political decisions were based on what the public and the politicians saw simultaneously on television. So was President George Herbert Walker Bush blatantly honest when he said, “I learn more from CNN than I do from the CIA.”<sup>133</sup> Moreover, President William Jefferson (‘Bill’) Clinton decided to pull the US forces out of Somalia after footage of an American soldier being dragged naked in the streets of Mogadishu in 1993 had been televised.<sup>134</sup> Interestingly, the video footage that was shown of this incident was not obtained or taken by an official Western journalist but by Mohamoud Hassan, a former freelance cameraperson for Reuters.<sup>135</sup> This once again proved that, with new technologies, anybody can take video or still footage and it can be viewed almost instantaneously worldwide.<sup>136</sup> It was furthermore not only the public and politicians that were watching these television broadcasts. As mentioned earlier, during the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein started using the media against the Allied Forces, and subsequently, Mohamed Aideed in Somalia, Slobodan Milosevic in Kosovo and the Taliban in Afghanistan followed suit.<sup>137</sup> The use of open-source information by the media has been added to the arsenal of asymmetric warfare by the adversaries of the United States and other countries involved with peacekeeping operations. Now the fight was no longer just on the battlefield but also in a virtual battle space where public opinion was formed based on gruesome images of war in the media by the viewers in their own countries.<sup>138</sup>

It became evident that the impact of real-time television could not be underestimated, as UN Secretary-General at the time, Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, referred in 1995 to CNN as the “sixteenth member of the UN Security Council”.<sup>139</sup> However, Belknap warns that the CNN Effect is a double-edged sword, “a strategic enabler and a potential operational risk”.<sup>140</sup> She quotes retired General Andrew Jackson Goodpaster, former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, who said:

While there is – or should be – a natural convergence of interests in providing to the public accurate information about our armed forces and what they do, there is at the same time an inherent clash of interests (especially acute when men are fighting and dying) between military

leaders responsible for success in battle and for the lives of their commands, and a media intensely competitive in providing readers and viewers with quick and vivid 'news' and opinion.<sup>141</sup>

In democracies, the view is that the media should not be under direct control of a government; however, the exact opposite is the sentiments of other political systems where it is believed that the mass media should assist the government in forming opinions and viewpoints to support its base of power.<sup>142</sup> Badsey indicates that the independence of the media is no longer only a Western or democratic notion; it has become a fundamental part of international law.<sup>143</sup> This has been supported by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice as well as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "[e]veryone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."<sup>144</sup>

In summary, technologies in both the military and the media continue to grow in sophistication. The military finds it increasingly difficult to deal with the speed of media reporting. The bureaucratic nature of governments and their various departments, including the military, makes it difficult to deal with the media in a proactive manner. Military interventions are of an expeditionary nature and make control of the media difficult, if not impossible. Both the conflicts and the media are multi-national, leading to concerns by the military and governments about propaganda and disinformation. The most critical challenge in democracies for the military–media relations seems to be the balance between freedom of speech and control of information.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the concept of military–media relations. Military–media relations are found almost exclusively in democracies. The discussion focused on conflicts in which the military and the media of Western countries were involved from Napoleon's campaigns in 1807 to the Gulf War in 1991.

Although wars have been covered by scribes and historians since creation, the emergence of the war correspondent changed the relationship between the military and the media forever. One of the first restrictions on reporting was self-censorship by the newspapers. However, as relations soured and because of the change in public opinion, the military started to introduce censorship on the media. With the arrival of technologies, such as the telegraph, photography and later film and radio, governments and their militaries had a difficult time to restrict reporting on the military by the media. Governments did not only increase restrictions but also started to misuse the media for deception and propaganda purposes.

During the world wars, the issue of patriotism versus objective media reporting came to the fore. Due to the speed of reporting, which became increasingly faster, the military introduced strict control

measures on the media. The media (representing their respective countries) reported what the military wanted them to report, and in most cases, the media did not mind. The military continued to misuse the media for propaganda and deception purposes, and this was truly the golden era of good relationships with the media from a military point of view.

In conflicts during the Cold War, censorship on the media ceased but the restrictions imposed on the media took new formats. Since the conflicts took place on foreign soil, the military could not prevent media from all over the world to descend on the country where the conflict took place. However, the media were reliant on the military for information as well as transport, food and accommodation to the areas of conflict. The Vietnam War was the first televised war and brought the war into the living rooms of anyone who owned a television set. This had a direct impact on public opinion, not only the opinion of citizens of the country involved in the conflict but also on international public opinion towards that country. To try to contain media reporting, the pool system was introduced, which led to almost total control of the media by the military by controlling what the media see or to which they have access.

During the Gulf Wars and conflicts after the Cold War era, the establishment of cable television ensured direct reporting from the conflict zones to the world. This introduced the era of multi-national countries involved in conflict, which ranged from pure war-fighting to humanitarian interventions. As with the evolving technologies, so did foreign travel also advance to such a level that it was now impossible to keep the media away from countries where conflicts took place. This implied that freedom of speech was no longer applicable to democracies only, but it became an international law with the declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN in 1948.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the evolving relationship between the media and the military, firstly in Africa from a continental perspective, and secondly in terms of the situation in South Africa. The discussion on Africa relates to the period when democracies started in African countries at the end of colonialism. The South African perspective therefore also deals with post-Apartheid South Africa.

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- <sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>119</sup> Young & Jesser *op. cit.*, p. 192.
- <sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>122</sup> Gorman *op. cit.*, p. 99.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>125</sup> Taylor *op. cit.*, p. 195.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196–197.
- <sup>128</sup> Badsey, "The media and UN 'peacekeeping' ..." *op. cit.*
- <sup>129</sup> Dennis & Grey *op. cit.*, p. iv.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*
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- <sup>132</sup> C Cutlip, AH Center & GM Broom. *Effective public relations*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 2000, 240.
- <sup>133</sup> LA Friedland. *Covering the world: International television news services*. New York, NY: Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1992, 8.
- <sup>134</sup> Hammond *op. cit.*, p. 145.
- <sup>135</sup> Rid *op. cit.*, p. 92.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- <sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

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<sup>139</sup> Badsey, *The media and international security op. cit.*, p. xviii.

<sup>140</sup> MH Belknap. "The CNN effect: Strategic enabler or operational risk?" *Parameters* Autumn 2002. 101.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Badsey, *The media and international security op. cit.*, p. xx.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*



## CHAPTER 4

### TURNING TO AFRICA – FROM A POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE TO MILITARY– MEDIA RELATIONS IN POST-1994 SOUTH AFRICA

#### 4.1 Introduction

Since there are 54 states in Africa, it would be arduous to discuss the history of the media and the militaries of all these states in detail. Therefore, this chapter sets the scene with an overview of the development of the media during democratisation in Africa since the end of the Cold War. The bigger part of the chapter, however, focuses on South Africa, a summary of the post 1994 media landscape, and the military–media relations since the establishment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in 1994. The importance of sound civil–military relations in South Africa is highlighted with specific reference to the role of the media in the Clausewitzian trinity of state, society and the military.

It is important to mention the relationship between the military and the media in South Africa before 1994. During the so-called Border War (1966-1990), South Africa fought on the side of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) against the Angolan government, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and their allies, mainly Cuba.<sup>1</sup> At the start of the war, South Africa vehemently denied that the South African Defence Force (SADF) was involved in the conflict on the border between Namibia, Angola and Botswana.<sup>2</sup> However, when it became known internationally that the SADF were in Angola, the South African government used the Defence Act (No. 118 of 1957) to censor certain news agencies but allowed others that were prone to be positive in their reporting of the involvement of South Africa in this war.<sup>3</sup> Addison postulates that positive reporting was found especially in Afrikaans newspapers and negative reporting, according to the SADF, was found in English newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Due to the political viewpoint of the government pre-1994, the era before 1994 was not taken into consideration for this study.

#### 4.2 Media reporting in post-colonial African conflicts

A broad overview is given of the state of the media in African states since decolonisation. Human rights, including freedom of speech, during and after the Cold War and the impact thereof in sub-Saharan Africa, are discussed. The challenges facing media houses are mentioned together with the overall role that international, continental and domestic politics, the economic situation in African countries and the lack of infrastructure in African countries played in media reporting on conflicts.

By 1960, most African states started fighting for independence from colonial powers.<sup>5</sup> The primary Cold War actors, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (also known as the Soviet Union) in particular, entrenched the use of force in the post-independence political process in Africa by providing military and financial support to the opposing forces in the respective

regions and states in Africa.<sup>6</sup> This came at a stage when African countries tried to adapt to the political systems of their former colonial European countries.<sup>7</sup> The military and financial support provided by the superpowers to these opposing forces contributed to more conflicts, which later, after decolonisation, established a culture of political intolerance in many African countries.<sup>8</sup> The independence of many states in Africa affected the media in three particular ways:<sup>9</sup>

- Firstly, governments regarded the media as part of the machinery of the state to ensure development of nationalism between different ethnic and cultural groups.
- Secondly, despotic policies against media houses led to the decline of both the quality and quantity of newspapers, which, in turn, affected freedom of speech and the ability for the population to form their own opinions.
- Thirdly, the economic decline in most sub-Saharan countries, with the exception of South Africa, had a major influence on the production and sales of newspapers due to the buying power of the citizens and the lack of advertising revenue for the media houses.<sup>10</sup>

The media in Africa, especially the printed media, experienced serious incidences of censorship, intimidation and even imprisonment in reporting on government activities in African states involved in intra- and/or interstate conflict.<sup>11</sup> To address this, a seminar was hosted in Namibia from 29 April to 3 May 1991 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which led to the Windhoek Declaration of Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press.<sup>12</sup> This was endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference in order to ensure a free and fully independent media in democracies worldwide.<sup>13</sup> Many thought that the 1990s would be the end of dictatorial and autocratic rule in Africa when not only democratic reform but also economic changes became the norm and no longer the exception.<sup>14</sup> Samuel Huntington refers to this as the “third wave of democracy” as governments in Africa acceded to mounting pressure from their citizens for political reform.<sup>15</sup> Internally, various activist groupings, such as student bodies, civic action groups, trade unions and the media coerced political multiplicity.<sup>16</sup> External factors that helped ensure democratic momentum were the involvement by Western governments, mostly the original colonisers, and various multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).<sup>17</sup> The latter decided to change its name to the African Union (AU) in 1999.<sup>18</sup> With democratic reform in Africa, which was gaining momentum in the 1990s, many independent media networks and associations were established to keep the often marginalised and isolated communities informed compared to the state-owned media.<sup>19</sup>

Africa has always been divided geographically and ethno-culturally into Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa further into Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone countries due to the language of its former colonisers.<sup>20</sup> Capitant and Frère posit that, since the late 1980s, the media systematically started functioning more effectively in sub-Saharan Africa in order to reach

audiences in both the urban and rural areas.<sup>21</sup> They affirm that the print media is fundamentally related to cities mainly inhabited by the privileged where a varied and wide-ranging audience has access to audio-visual media.<sup>22</sup> According to Esipisu and Kariithi, information and communication technologies (ICTs) also play a prevalent role since the 1990s augmenting the traditional print and radio media.<sup>23</sup>

Sadly, neither the transitions from colonies to fully fledged democracies nor the vital role that the media are supposed to play went without violence, terror, immense human suffering and bloodshed.<sup>24</sup> Clark indicates that, from 1990 to 2003, no fewer than 26 military-assisted transitions took place as part of the liberalisation of countries in Africa.<sup>25</sup> It is evident that there is a dearth of understanding from the local populations of politics, the process of political change, the right of association, the rule of law, and the importance of free speech. This lack of understanding led to various atrocities in places such as Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and the Congo.<sup>26</sup> Twumasi and Keighley argue that these differences are entrenched in the history of Africa, which has been beleaguered by colonial oppression, poverty and social inequalities, tribalism and the struggle to adapt from post-colonial independence to fully fledged democracies.<sup>27</sup> The poignant part is that all the conflicts in which the West was involved in Africa received exposure and media coverage internationally and nationally within specific Western countries. Examples cited in this regard include Somalia (United States) and Liberia (United Kingdom).<sup>28</sup> The loss of lives in various inter- and intra-state conflicts in Africa was however not properly covered or even mentioned in the media.<sup>29</sup> According to Hawkins, 88 per cent of the world's conflict-related deaths between 1998 and 2007 can be attributed to sub-Saharan Africa with the majority of these conflicts taking place in the Great Lakes Region – without any real media coverage and without the world at large being cognisant of these disasters.<sup>30</sup>

Odine suggests that there could be two main reasons for the lack of media coverage of the critical and strategic realities unfolding in Africa:

- There is the infotainment value of the media through competitive commercialisation together with sensationalism where media coverage of conflicts is simplified and structured in a 'Hollywood-style' scenario with a good guy, bad guy and victim.<sup>31</sup> Odine is of the view that these stories have financial value, either to be bought or sold, and therefore news about conflicts must be fresh and live. However, unlike movies, news about conflict needs to be reported in real-time or else it is considered hackneyed and old news.<sup>32</sup>
- There is a lack of a media footprint. Due to budget restrictions, media houses are dependent on resident reporters working in the country of conflict with limited resources, and they are mainly dependent on government media releases and information, which are almost always a one-sided story from the government.<sup>33</sup>

Hawkins argues that the two factors outlined by Odine did not ensure media coverage of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as the likelihood of media coverage of the DRC was limited even with more than 5.4 million deaths in the country from 1998 to 2007.<sup>34</sup> Odine highlights four reasons for the lack of media coverage of the conflict in the DRC:

- the conflict in the DRC was exceptionally complex due to factors, such as ethnicity, minerals, religion and interferences from various countries, and it therefore did not fit the “30-second byte”<sup>35</sup> of modern audio-visual media;
- the lack of infrastructure and the sheer vastness of the country deterred media organisations from tasking media teams for lengthy periods to cover stories that would have been old news by the time it reached the media houses. The conflict might also have jeopardised the lives of their reporters and camerapersons;
- the Western media had given up their empathy reporting on the suffering of black Africans mainly due to the inundation of reporting on tragedies, such as the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s; and
- the Great Lakes Region was simply not that important in the bigger global arena compared to conflicts in the Middle East and the Asian sub-continent, which had a more direct social, political, economic and military impact on the major international players in the East and West.<sup>36</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, Africa witnessed dramatic changes in the media. With more foreign investments and open economies in various countries in Africa, technological advances, such as television and the internet coupled with vast improvements on infrastructure, made the availability of various forms of media much more accessible than before.<sup>37</sup> The media were for long in chains and under control of African leaders, their collaborators, and multinational corporations. The relationship was exacerbated by political instability and conflict.<sup>38</sup> VonDoepp and Young reiterate that not only proper academic research but also astuteness signifies that media freedom is crucial for good governance.<sup>39</sup> The authors argue that impartial media guarantee accountability and strengthen democracy to ensure peace and stability.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, and despite the growth, African mass media still face problems stemming from:<sup>41</sup>

- weak ownership of media houses;
- low financial support;
- no properly trained journalists;
- weak organisational structure;
- considerable geographical areas;

- no proper access to information; and
- regular clashes with authorities.

This, however, is not fully applicable to certain countries on the continent, such as Nigeria and South Africa. These two countries developed, in most instances, with the rest of the world regarding infrastructure and telecommunications. Their media houses are thriving businesses and the quality of media reporting is relatively good.<sup>42</sup>

Freedom of speech is one of the cornerstones of democracies, but the absence thereof is one of the challenges that sub-Saharan countries faced during and after colonisation.<sup>43</sup> The media were a casualty in many of the conflicts of the Cold War as the two main role players, the United States and the Soviet Union, caused division by providing military and financial aid to opposing sides in conflicts. In addition, the lack of media access and freedom remained a legacy issue in post-Cold War Africa. African conflicts have not and still do not receive appropriate coverage from the international media. Simultaneously, domestic media houses often struggle to provide objective and timely news due to constrained budgets, a shortage of good-quality reporters and equipment, the vastness and geographic impediments of Africa, and the lack of infrastructure.

### **4.3 The media in the first few years of democracy in South Africa**

In this section, the discussion is aimed at providing a brief overview of the media in a democratic South Africa. The focus is on the expectation of media freedom and the extent to which the legacy of apartheid still plays a major role in the transformation of the media. The level of professionalism of post-1994 media is a critical element in this regard.

By lifting the bans outlawing the liberation movements in 1990, the National Party initiated the process for the transfer of power after more than 300 hundred years of white domination in South Africa to the black majority in the country.<sup>44</sup> South Africa entered a fairy-tale era of media freedom when Nelson Mandela was elected the first black president of democratic South Africa. Louw states that, when the African National Congress (ANC) became the ruling party, media freedom was restored as most of the censoring laws related to the media were removed.<sup>45</sup> In 1994, before he was elected President of the Republic of South Africa, Mandela was the keynote speaker at the International Press Institute (IPI) World Conference in Cape Town. Mandela expressed the view that:

A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy. The press must be free from state interference. It must have the economic strength to stand up to the blandishments of government officials. It must have sufficient independence from vested interests to be bold and inquiring without fear or favour. It must enjoy the protection of the constitution, so that it can protect our rights as citizens.<sup>46</sup>

In 1992, while Mandela was the ANC president, he said that the party valued “a free, independent and outspoken press”.<sup>47</sup> However, he indicated that there were four aspects of concern to him:

- the absence of representivity in the print media, which led to one-dimensional reporting;
- the pessimistic view of white journalists that the country was going to turn into a bloodbath;
- the lack of exceptional journalism; and
- black reporters who were being loyal to their white bosses instead of being loyal to the liberation.<sup>48</sup>

After the first free democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the new government adopted a developmental approach to communication, focusing on the fundamental values of democracy, openness and participation.<sup>49</sup> A communication task group was established in 1996, and amongst the recommendations was the establishment of a Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) to coordinate all government communications. Another recommendation was the establishment of a Head of Communication (HoC) in each government department responsible for leading communication in that department at chief director level with a media liaison officer (MLO) reporting to the HoC. The roles and responsibilities of the MLO include enhancing the public image of the political principal by utilising the media.<sup>50</sup>

Although the world was in euphoria about the promise of true democracy and freedom, the fairy-tale era for the media was short-lived as South Africa was still a highly polarised country. The ANC-led Government of National Unity alleged that they were not receiving impartial treatment from the media, which they perceived controlled and owned by white males.<sup>51</sup> The general view was that the role the mass media were supposed to play in the new South Africa was to enhance the principles of democracy in building a non-racial all-inclusive South Africa.<sup>52</sup> Kgosana states that, in the media, the legacies of apartheid were still experienced in the cultural, technological and economic environments until the late 1990s.<sup>53</sup> Kolbe, in his thesis on the transition of South African print media, refers to Mike Siluma, editor of *The Sowetan* who argued that both government and the media were still trying to define their respective roles in the newly established democracy.<sup>54</sup> Kolbe relates that Siluma noted that by 1996 many people were of the opinion that the media should play an opposing role to government as many black journalists had strong political convictions and did not necessarily agree with the policies or governance of the ANC.<sup>55</sup> Siluma was of the view that, at the time, there were also white editors who were still clinging to the past and who were of the view that the media had to be suspicious of everything the government did.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, Siluma conceded that there were also those who were of the belief that the media had to support the ANC unconditionally in the interests of the transformation.<sup>57</sup>

All these criticisms placed pressure on most editors and journalists. At the time, white editors felt there was no longer a place for them, and black journalists felt that their professional integrity was being questioned.<sup>58</sup> To address these concerns, editors, senior journalists and journalism educators across the racial divide, various media houses and media platforms as well as educational institutions came together to form the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) in October 1996.<sup>59</sup> Two opposing groups were the main drivers, namely the Black Editors' Forum (BEF) and the Conference of Editors (CoE). According to Barrat "BEF members were highly politicised, exclusive and had strong black consciousness or Africanist approaches, while CoE members were mostly white liberals or apartheid supporters in an exclusive, non-political club of English and Afrikaans newspaper editors".<sup>60</sup>

One of the first activities on which SANEF embarked was to address the criticisms by government towards the media regarding the lack of transformation, and what Mandela and Thabo Mbeki believed – the media not adopting a positive or nation-building approach.<sup>61</sup> Over time, the criticisms concentrated increasingly on the absence of accurateness, the reporting of the good issues on which government was focusing, and accusations of political prejudice still remaining.<sup>62</sup> SANEF has engaged with various government departments and ministers, including the GCIS and the Department of Defence, on various issues. It seemed that the relationship deteriorated further until 2001 when SANEF met with President Mbeki and a decision was taken to host a workshop between government and SANEF.<sup>63</sup> In his opening remarks, SANEF chairperson, Mathatha Tsedu, acknowledged that there were levels of triviality and a lack of professionalism in the South African media.<sup>64</sup> However, according to Tsedu, government was to blame, as it was not communicating in a professional and cordial way with the media, especially when government was criticised.<sup>65</sup>

In 2010, it appeared that nothing had changed, as there was again a high-level meeting of government and SANEF, chaired by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe.<sup>66</sup> Once again, SANEF raised issues of the lack of media freedom due to government interference in newsrooms and aspects that SANEF regarded as intimidation of the media by certain government departments. In addition, there was the matter of government not communicating with the media and the old problem of hiding issues under the so-called 'sensitive' or 'secret' pretext.<sup>67</sup> Government felt that it was vilified and treated unfairly by the media and that the media did not want to treat government differently to other organisations. Government was further of the opinion that it was its duty to protect the democracy, peace and freedom of the country, and the media had to support them.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, as in the past, the issue of diversity was raised as well as the quality of reporting by the media.<sup>69</sup>

The level of professionalism in the media was researched by Adrian Hadland for his doctoral thesis presented at the Centre for Film and Media Studies at the University of Cape Town. Hadland indicates that, at the time, journalists in South Africa had no guarantee of full-time employment and



their level of proficiency was not up to standard.<sup>70</sup> The low levels of journalistic competences were exacerbated by the media profession itself, as it did not regulate and ensure professional journalistic qualifications.<sup>71</sup>

This proved to be correct by an audit on journalism skills done by SANEF in early 2000.<sup>72</sup> The findings showed:<sup>73</sup>

- weak interviewing skills;
- weak legal knowledge;
- a lack of sensitivity,
- weak knowledge of ethics;
- poor general, history and contextual knowledge;
- low levels of trainer knowledge;
- a lack of concern in terms of accuracy;
- poor writing skills;
- poor reporting skills;
- a lack of life skills; and
- a low level of commitment.

A total of 112 reporters were surveyed, most of them with some type of journalism qualification.<sup>74</sup> But there are also positive aspects, such as the development of the media since the end of the apartheid era which has been marked with a massive increase in diversity and exponential growth in all three major areas: printed, digital and broadcasting media.<sup>75</sup>

#### **4.4 Media landscape in post-1994 South Africa**

The present day South African media landscape is robust, varied and vibrant. According to Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) although media outlets do not hesitate to reveal scandals involving powerful figures the police sometimes fail to protect the journalists when they are exposed to violence.<sup>76</sup> The modern-day print media industry of South Africa comprises of several independent and publicly owned companies. Newspapers and magazines are printed in all 11 official languages of the country and are divided into the following groups:<sup>77</sup>

- **Independent Media** is South Africa's leading newspaper group. It covers all nine provinces and some of the titles are available across the African continent. The company produces over 30 quality daily and weekly publications and is the only title that serves the African continent.



The printed publications of Independent Media have a loyal and steady readership of over six million.

- **Times Media Group** is a publicly owned company and trades on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange as TMG. The printed side of the group consist of newspapers and magazines and covers the nine provinces of South Africa.
- **Naspers** is a South African internet and media group that offers services in over 130 countries. Naspers also produces newspapers and magazines and predominantly caters for Afrikaans speaking audiences but also English audiences throughout the nine provinces of South Africa.
- **Caxton/CTP** is known as one of the foremost publishing and printing companies in the South African print media industry. The company is involved with publishing several regional community newspapers, the magazine division of Caxton/CTP publishes 15 titles that cover the following areas: women's magazines, family magazines, lifestyle, home, décor, entertainment, farming, and religion.

As with the rest of the world the speedy development of digital media had a huge influence on the South African media landscape. It remains the most cutting edge digital industry on the African continent and is on par with global digital tendencies. The telecommunications sectors which include the internet and mobile technology now offer consumers innumerable choices. There are mainly four online media platforms available to the public:

- **Independent Online (IOL)**, is one of the leading South African multi-platform content companies. IOL brings national events and breaking news presented to the public digitally in the form of a website to millions of readers around the country and the world. Most of the news comes from its newspapers, news wires and there is a small portion of news that is generated by IOL staff members.<sup>78</sup>
- **Naspers** was mentioned in the 'Printed Media'. Its main digital media subsidiary is 'Media24'. Media24 is an online news publication known as being the largest digital publisher in South Africa. It covers broad-spectrum news reports on both local and international news, politics, entertainment, business, sport, technology, motoring, lifestyle and much more.<sup>79</sup>
- **The Daily Maverick** is an independent South African online newspaper. The paper has a distinctive blend of news, analysis, information and opinions in order to provide high quality content. It has an estimated readership of 700 000 people.<sup>80</sup>

- **'defenceWeb'** is an online African defence and security news publication. Its focus audience is the key opinion-former and decision-maker in parliament, the executive, the military, industry, academia, the media, and the broader public. defenceWeb focus mainly on military matters in Africa but have an audience in North America and Western Europe as well. defenceWeb claim to have a readership of around 700 000.<sup>81</sup>

The broadcast media is the largest part of the South African media landscape and also the most regulated of the three sectors. There are mainly five corporations and companies that provide news, entertainment and information to audiences in South Africa and some other African states:<sup>82</sup>

- The **South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)** is the largest of all the broadcasting media and is state owned. The SABC has three television channels, SABC 1, SABC 2 and SABC 3. All SABC channels are available to watchers nationwide. The SABC also broadcast on 19 radio stations in the 11 official languages of the country.
- **'e.tv'** is a privately owned, free-to-air English television channel in South Africa. Every evening at 6:30pm the news bulletin called 'eNews Direct' is aired. The late-night news is aired at 10:00pm. It also has a 24-hour television news broadcaster called 'eNCA' focusing on South African and African stories. The broadcaster became South Africa's first and most watched 24-hour news service.
- **Primedia Group** is a leading South African broadcasting media holdings company that operates over 50 different brands. It has a wide-ranging portfolio of assets and subsidiaries that consist of some of the most prominent and popular radio stations in the country, major out-of-home media service providers and the biggest cinema chain in South Africa. EWN publishes news across multiple platforms and places focus on local and international breaking news stories. Content is available on the internet, on the radio, and by means of mobile technology. 'Eyewitness News' is the broadcasting media platform for the Primedia Group and it is available through all the major platforms such as 567 CapeTalk, 947 Highveld Stereo, Radio 702, and 94.5 KFM radio stations, and also on the internet.
- **MultiChoice** is a top South African television entertainment and internet company with an operational presence throughout South Africa and in several countries on the African continent. These countries are Namibia, Lesotho, Zambia, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Angola, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Botswana. MultiChoice sources local and international television channels and packages to suit a variety of viewers. One of the company's brands is 'DStv', a subscriber television service that provides viewers with channels that cover areas like, movies, general entertainment, lifestyle, culture, documentaries, sport, news, music, commerce, religion, and more.

- **Kagiso Media** is a South African broadcasting company with major media assets. Kagiso is positioned in growth markets through its associates, subsidiaries and joint ventures. Interests include new media, specialised publishing, content production, television, and radio broadcasting.

In the period immediately after democratisation, South Africa was therefore still highly divided in terms of race, financial standing and language, which created tension in the media sector. Although there was a short flicker of hope that a new era of media freedom and objectivity had dawned, it seems that government was suspicious of negative reporting and was of the opinion that the media were biased towards the government. The lack of professionalism of the media and poor reporting on certain issues by the media were part of the context that shaped the ongoing hostile relationship between government and the media. The rapid growth of media technologies and the expansion of diversity in not only race and language but also in the variety of new opportunities in the media landscape made South Africa one of the major media sectors on the African continent.

#### 4.5 Civil–military relations in the first few years of a democratic South Africa

The peaceful transition from the former statutory and non-statutory forces into a national defence force and the struggle the SANDF had with its new mandate were significant in shaping civil–military relations in a democratic South Africa. The independence of the media is a critical element not only to ensure civilian control of the armed forces but also to educate the public on what the armed forces are supposed to do and to what extent.

In Chapter 2, reference was made of a new conceptualisation of civil–military relations consisting of democratic civilian **control**, the **effectiveness** of the security forces in fulfilling their roles, and the **efficiency** with which these roles are fulfilled.<sup>83</sup> The security forces of a country consist of the police, intelligence agencies, and the armed forces. The armed forces have the most threatening assets of these three agencies due to the war-fighting equipment and personnel at hand. As Matei notes, any armed forces that are powerful enough to defend a country can also take it over.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, civilian control and oversight are crucial in democracies, and this oversight is not only exercised by the three estates of democracy but also by the media as the so-called ‘fourth estate’, civil action and interest groups within a country, and international organisations.<sup>85</sup>

In any democracy, the relationship between a military and its polity remains pivotal and is more complex where a country transitioned into a democracy.<sup>86</sup> Chuter states that, whatever the road to democracy was, the military must play a correct and useful role in the political process.<sup>87</sup> The term ‘military’ is also wide and complex. Therefore, to narrow it down in terms of civil–military relations, Chuter explains that, when he refers to ‘the military’, it generally means officers with the rank above colonel.<sup>88</sup> This might be a limited view, as it is generally accepted that the majority of work done and

the level of expertise in militaries are at the level of colonel. Chuter admits that politics could also mean many things ranging from election debates to “power politics”<sup>89</sup> and normal governance.<sup>90</sup> Although the military should not be involved in decisions on how a country is run it should be involved in certain aspects as part of the governance of a state. According to Chuter, the participation of the military should include the following:<sup>91</sup>

- a full and appropriate part in the defence policymaking process;
- the appearance by military officers before parliamentary committees to explain technical military issues;
- the appearance by military officers at media conferences and presentations of government policy in support of ministers; and
- on- or off-the-record briefings with the media on military issues.

There is thus a need for the SANDF to ensure open dialogue with the public mainly through a healthy military–media relationship by engaging the media.

When there is a shift in political power in a country from one regime to another, as was the case in South Africa, it is normally associated with conflict followed by negotiations hopefully in terms of a political agreement.<sup>92</sup> Normally, the military will play a role in the peace process, especially if the outcome of the political resolution was due to armed conflict.<sup>93</sup> As with all spheres of the private and public sector, the military also went through a transition process in the period after 27 April 1994 when the statutory and non-statutory forces were integrated to form the SANDF. This process in South Africa was initiated by the democratic elections and shaped by the *Defence in a democracy: South African White Paper on Defence 1996 and the Defence Review 1998*. The latter declares civil–military relations as one of three major areas of the transformation of the SANDF; the other areas being normative and cultural transformation and organisational restructuring.<sup>94</sup>

Since the early 1990s, the expectations from the political leadership regarding the role of the SANDF changed from a conventional oriented war-fighting force to a multi-role armed force reflective of the diversity of the society from which it stems.<sup>95</sup> Apart from active involvement in peace operations, the SANDF also has to involve itself in social upliftment programmes and support to government departments in infrastructure improvements.<sup>96</sup> The SANDF participates in joint interdepartmental and interagency cooperation and multi-national exercises within and outside South African territory. What was traditionally considered secondary missions, such as assistance with disaster relief and other humanitarian assistance operations, are now part of the core functions of the SANDF. However, the SANDF was and still is not structured for these roles. The so-called Strategic Defence Packages that were procured in the early 2000s stemmed from the 1998 Defence Review with its

focus to conventionalise the SANDF.<sup>97</sup> According to Esterhuysen and Heinecken, this led to much institutional tension that is still prevalent within the SANDF.<sup>98</sup>

Esterhuysen and Heinecken emphasise that civil–military relationships influence the defence of states and the efficiency of their armed forces, and they argue that civil–military relations are simultaneously an “input, as well as an output of military professionalism”.<sup>99</sup> The 1998 Defence Review relates that, due to the diverse histories of the different statutory and non-statutory forces, each had its own understanding of civil–military relations.<sup>100</sup> The 1998 Defence Review further states that it is important to establish a unique South African civil–military relations tradition by recognising the principles of civil–military relations as in Western societies.<sup>101</sup>

Although the SANDF has been involved in peace operations since the turn of the century, operations other than war (OOTW), various humanitarian assistance operations, and support to other government departments, it still needs to come to grips with what the traditional role of the SANDF is and what government and society at present expect from it. Part of the anxiety that the SANDF experiences is the perceived lack of sufficient funding for all the tasks it is expected to perform.<sup>102</sup> Esterhuysen and Heinecken point out that there is a disparity between the strategic aspirations of the political power and what the military can afford, which not only places the civil–military relations in the public domain but also aggravates frictions in “the culturally diverse political-military marriage”.<sup>103</sup> Esterhuysen and Heinecken note that politicians are idealists who tread carefully in making decisions due to possible political ramifications. By contrast, the military leaders are traditionally pragmatists who simply want to get the job done as fast and as effective as possible. However, in this relationship, the civil component is the senior partner, and the civil–military discourse is fraught with socio-economic challenges that have a considerable influence on the funding of the military.<sup>104</sup> It is commonly accepted by both civilians in general and officers within the SANDF that the so-called ‘civil–military gap’ is caused by the lack of understanding by civil society of the role and functions of the military, mainly due to the lack of information on military matters available to the general population.<sup>105</sup>

The significant social changes that the Defence Force has undergone since 1990 are not unique to South Africa. Moskos presents a table of trends depicting a paradigm of force variables during the modern, late-modern and post-modern eras, mainly within Western militaries.<sup>106</sup> It is important to mention five of the force variables that were relevant to this study:

- the force structure of the Defence Force was mainly conscription-based in the modern era, but moved to a small professional defence force in the post-modern era;
- the major mission definition of the defence force was to defend the homeland, and this transitioned into peacekeeping and humanitarian missions;

- the dominant military professional changed from the role of a combat leader to the role of a soldier-scholar;
- the public attitude towards the military moved from a supportive position, although limited mainly in terms of the minority white population, to an indifferent attitude; and
- media relations changed from an incorporated relationship to a courted relationship.<sup>107</sup>

The SANDF, therefore, found that it does not automatically have the support of the broader population and the South African media do not see itself as an ally to the SANDF.

According to Cilliers and Heinecken, South Africa emerged from a time warp in the 1990s in terms of civil–military relations due to its history between the Second World War and 1990.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, in a sense, South Africa skipped the late-modern era. Ferreira postulates that the majority of the force variables in Moskos’s table are reflected in the post-modern trends in the present SANDF.<sup>109</sup> Cilliers and Heinecken state that, at present, the media are “no longer cajoled but courted” by the military.<sup>110</sup> This is evident in the force variables regarding media relations. The other force variable – that of public attitude towards the military – is important as the SANDF needs the media to inform the public of what it does, how it is done and why, in order to ensure public support.

Like military–media relations, civil–military relations are complex and interdependent. The interaction between these two entities affect society on many different levels. It is here that the military must realise the importance of communication and take ownership to communicate with its stakeholders in order to ensure a sound civil–military relationship.

#### **4.6 Media reporting on the military in South Africa**

An overview of reporting on the military in the mainstream media in South Africa reflects a view of the military that is mostly negative. This raises questions about both media objectivity and the ability of the SANDF to communicate effectively with the media – also about SANDF failures and ineffectiveness. These two realities are clearly visible in reporting by the media on the SANDF intervention operation into Lesotho, the day-to-day running of the SANDF, and the SANDF’s so-called Battle of Bangui in the Central African Republic.

The way the 1996 White Paper on Defence and the 1998 Defence Review were compiled was significant in public participation and transparency, compared to how this was done before 1994. The public was informed by media reports and various public participation conferences and processes, which ensured broad participation and contributions about the future of the country’s armed forces.<sup>111</sup> In addition, during the integration process, the SANDF had to interact with the media and, according to Esterhuyse, the media considered this the golden age of South African military–media relations because they had direct access to the corporate communication officers at various

military units.<sup>112</sup> The media knew that, when they requested a response or answers to questions, they would receive it in time for their deadlines.<sup>113</sup>

Sadly, most of the good work was undone by the South African military intervention in Lesotho, Operation Boleas, in September 1998<sup>114</sup> – a continuation, one might argue of the pre-1994 military–media set-up in South Africa. Scholtz wrote that seldom “has there been a military operation where the communication and media liaison weaknesses of the South African government and military have been so cruelly exposed”.<sup>115</sup> Media reporting on this intervention was harsh and deleterious as newspaper headlines referred to Operation Boleas as “A city ruined by bungled intervention”,<sup>116</sup> “The incursion that went wrong”<sup>117</sup> and “SANDF blunder means longer stay in Lesotho”.<sup>118</sup> In a briefing to the Parliamentary Defence Committee and the Portfolio Committee on Foreign Affairs, Lieutenant General Deon Ferreira, at the time Chief of Staff Joint Operations of the SANDF, informed members there were no guidelines for media liaison for the operation and therefore all media-related activities were reactive in nature. According to Ferreira, the so-called ‘media war’ had been lost at all levels, and especially at strategic level.<sup>119</sup>

In the after-action review, the SANDF admitted that neither the Corporate Communication Directorate nor its media liaison section was part of the planning. At political level, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Mr Aziz Pahad, confessed that the absence of a well-defined media strategy attributed to the condemnation of the operation.<sup>120</sup> He also acknowledged that there was very little communication to the public of South Africa explaining the reasons and objectives of the operation.<sup>121</sup> Neethling states that the media regarded the South African intervention into Lesotho as its “school of hard knocks”.<sup>122</sup> Neethling further indicates that the role the media played was vital since it not only provided the country with news of the events that unfolded during the operation but also questioned the decision by government for the intervention.<sup>123</sup> Neethling says government spokespersons promptly contested allegations that the media reports were inaccurate or biased rather than to communicate with the media in a truthful and pro-active manner.<sup>124</sup> In retrospect, Operation Boleas was an immense media blunder for the SANDF, and mostly because of its own neglect to plan the management of the information campaign. Frustrations by the media in their efforts to gain access to information were most probably the reason underpinning the mostly negative reporting of the military on the campaign.

Moreover, media reports on the day-to-day running of the SANDF in the late 1990s tended to be mostly negative in nature with issues such as ineffective discipline, racial tensions, poor maintenance of equipment and a general lack of fitness of soldiers, especially with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS amongst the soldiers, receiving much attention.<sup>125</sup> On 16 September 1999, a black officer killed seven white members from his unit in Bloemfontein before committing suicide. Some newspapers highlighted the issue that black members from the unit refused to form part of the guard of honour



for the deceased but attended the funeral of the killer.<sup>126</sup> The following week, the Minister of Defence (MoD), Mosiuoa Gerard Patrick ('Terror') Lekota, and senior uniform members from the military visited the Afrikaans daily newspaper, *Volksblad* in Bloemfontein, and accused Afrikaans newspapers of exploiting media freedom by reporting, according to Lekota, 'false information'.<sup>127</sup> Many saw the minister's actions as bordering on intimidation of the media.<sup>128</sup>

Lekota did not take kindly to this kind of reporting, and issued a directive in July 2000 raising his concern about what he perceived as the uncontrolled and uncoordinated release of information to the public.<sup>129</sup> The directive stated that the ministry is accountable for defence and it is, therefore, the responsibility of the ministry to provide information to the public. The directive further declared that the ministry is accountable to parliament and therefore the release of information regarding the defence force is improper.<sup>130</sup> Apart from the fact that this immediately centralised all communication to the minister's office, the directive relegated the role of the departmental Communication Directorate of the SANDF to mainly communicating with internal stakeholders.<sup>131</sup>

The Chief of the South African National Defence Force (C SANDF) then issued an instruction to commanders and managers within the SANDF in which they were instructed that they were no longer allowed to liaise with the media. The order indicated that in future, all aspects of media liaison would have to be managed via the Chief Director: Corporate Communication (CDCC) to the office of the minister.<sup>132</sup> In practice, the order implied that pro-active media liaison and communication became impossible due to the lengthy chain of command and the deadlines of media houses. Furthermore, liaison with the media was centralised to the point of irrelevance.

The ministry soon realised that it was not capacitated to handle all the media-related activities pertaining to the different levels of the SANDF, and an addendum to the instruction was issued stating that CDCC would handle all external communication aspects on behalf of the Minister of Defence, the Secretary for Defence (Sec Def) and the Chiefs of the Services of the SANDF.<sup>133</sup> However, all communication with the media was still highly centralised. The CDCC still had to soundboard and coordinate media and communication aspects with the office of the minister. All external communication, including media liaison, for the entire defence force became the responsibility of Defence Headquarters in Pretoria. The approval process for communication with external stakeholders, the media, was not only centralised within the SANDF; it was also bureaucratised to the extent that it has become a time-intensive process to gain approval of information distribution to the media at the highest levels.

Media coverage of a defence force in a democracy is undeniably of the utmost importance in ensuring sound civil–military relations.<sup>134</sup> Esterhuysen states that, if governments interfere with the relationship between the military and the media or the military and society by means of its defence minister, civil–military relations are being compromised.<sup>135</sup> Even when the portfolio of minister of



defence changed from one person to another in the SANDF, the restrictions regarding media liaison were kept in place by the defence force. If nothing else, the SANDF lost its capacity to communicate day-to-day issues of practical, tactical and operational necessity with the media effectively. Increasingly, all communications with the media have been looked upon from a political perspective and the reputational impact it may have on the specific individuals at strategic and political level. As such, all media liaison by the SANDF was, in a way, politicised. This was clear in the way the media were engaged by the Department of Defence (DoD) in relation to the illegal and violent march of soldiers to the Union Buildings on 26 August 2009 when the spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans was the first one who responded to requests from the media.<sup>136</sup>

Not only the media but also the defence oversight committees of Parliament had problems getting answers from the MoD regarding this action by soldiers. The primary mandate of the SANDF is to protect and defend the republic and its people.<sup>137</sup> However, as De Waal says, when the military starts acting outside the constitution and refuses to be accountable or transparent, then the citizens have reason for concern about whose interests are being served.<sup>138</sup> It is possible that political interference in military–media relations is part of the democratic processes and this might be acceptable. However, when soldiers start losing their lives due to political interference, it is time for serious introspection.

Between 22 and 24 March 2013, about 200 South African soldiers were involved in one of the fiercest battles in the post-1994 history of the South African military. These soldiers fought against thousands of rebels in Bangui, the capital of the CAR. The battle resulted in 15 dead South African soldiers and several wounded.<sup>139</sup> Many questions were asked about the legality of the SANDF deployment to the CAR, specifically questioning the personal interests of then president, Jacob Zuma, in the mining industry in the CAR. These questions mostly remain unanswered, even to Parliament, and apart from the fact that both the government and the Defence Force focused on the bravery and fighting skills of the soldiers at tactical level, the blunders at operational and strategic level were disregarded.<sup>140</sup> Media reporting on the battle and various circumstances surrounding the battle was covered from different angles with headlines ranging from “SA’s role in the Battle of Bangui: The blood on Zuma’s hands”<sup>141</sup> to “SA soldiers carved us up, say rebels”<sup>142</sup> and “SA soldiers died in CAR while generals dithered”.<sup>143</sup> From the reporting of the Battle of Bangui, it was quite clear that the media, in general, were cautious in their praise for the soldiers, highlighting mostly their courage. The media were, however, highly critical of the reasons for the battle, the presence of South African soldiers in the CAR, and the support for the soldiers from defence headquarters in Pretoria before, during and after the battle. From a distance, it seemed as if neither the politicians nor the military leadership appear to know how to maximise or use the role of the media in communicating with its stakeholders in a pro-active manner.

In 2013, Helfrich complained, “after interacting with military media liaison officers over more than a 15-year period, it is obvious, with some notable exceptions, that the SANDF sees the media more as an enemy, at best a nuisance, rather than an ally”.<sup>144</sup> Eight years later, in 2021, the situation has not improved, as Helfrich, states, “from somewhat poor communication with its various external audiences, there also appears to be a lack of communication internally”.<sup>145</sup> Helfrich explains that the Defence Corporate Communications Directorate and the SA Army Corporate communications section contradicted each other.<sup>146</sup> It is clear that the situation has not improved. In fact, Helfrich suggests that it has become worse.<sup>147</sup>

Although the military have made mistakes, such as not utilising the corporate communication function in a pro-active way, the political interference seems to be the bigger problem. In 2000, the scene was set for a strenuous relationship between the SANDF and the media. The SANDF lost much of its truthfulness, as those responsible for communications were increasingly seen as responsible for being military propaganda mouthpieces by the media.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Even after decolonisation and the so-called ‘democratisation’ of sub-Saharan African states, media freedom is still an elusive reality for most countries in the region. Because of instability and slow economic growth, media reporting on conflicts is limited in most countries on the African continent. Major problems that many African states face are the sheer size of their country with limited infrastructure, especially regarding ICT. All these factors make it easy for dictators and even some newly formed democracies to control media reporting.

South Africa is an anomaly, because its economy remained strong, and it is still the most developed country in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the country also remains highly polarised on political issues and race relations. Since 1994, the government of the day does not trust the media and does not appreciate it when the media report negatively on it. The government wants the media to be its mouthpiece while the media want to remain the watchdog. The media in South Africa is diverse and on the edge of modern day technologies. It can be considered relatively free as it is public and privately owned.

As with the transformation of all aspects of society, the military also went through a major transition phase after 1994. The defence force has to play a new role as to its role before 1994. The military is also more in the public eye than before, and civil–military relations have become even more important than before, as the military has to justify its existence and *raison d’être* in a complex society. The posture of the military professional changed, and the public opinion towards the SANDF is apathetic. Therefore, the role of the media is of essence to the SANDF in telling its story to the public.

The military needs the media to communicate on its behalf with the population. As with military–media relations, internationally and over centuries, neither of the two entities understood how the other functions. Therefore, also in South Africa, there is a certain level of distrust between the two. The level of distrust between the media and the military worsened as the newly founded democracy in South Africa gained momentum. Although the military made some blunders in the late 1990s, its political leadership is not pleased with the way in which reporting on the military is done. Since media liaison in the SANDF has been centralised, it has become more difficult than before for the media to get timeous responses from the military.

The next chapter reports on and discusses some of the views of the South African media on its relationship with the SANDF as well as the views of selected defence specialists and academia on the relationship between the SANDF and the media.

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- <sup>139</sup> H-R Heitman. *The Battle in Bangui: The untold inside story*. Johannesburg: Parktown, 2013, 6.
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## CHAPTER 5

### AN OUTSIDE-IN PERSPECTIVE – TALKING TO THE MEDIA AND DEFENCE COMMENTATORS ABOUT MILITARY–MEDIA RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to depict the perception of the media about the relationship between the media and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). The focus is on local media, since the SANDF seldom receives any international media coverage. In Chapter 3, the historical evolution of military–media relations was discussed. The argument was made that, over centuries, there were certain aspects such as censorship and control of the media by the military that contributed to a tense relationship between the two sectors. This chapter reports on an investigation of the roots of a possible tension between the media and the military sectors in South Africa. The discussions took into account the views and experiences of the media in their engagement with the military and the possible frustrations of the media when dealing with the SANDF. As such, the discussion aims to provide an outside-in perspective of the ability of the military to communicate effectively with the media in South Africa. The chapter concludes with brief recommendations for possible improvement of the relationship that exists between the SANDF and the media. The chapter relies predominantly on interviews with journalists with a long history of reporting on military matters from the print media, the radio and web-based media. A few defence commentators have also been interviewed for an academic and, perhaps more objective, perspective.

#### 5.2 Engaging the SANDF

This section reflects the views of media specialists of the military in South Africa and the factors underpinning their interaction with the SANDF. Some defence commentators provide their opinion on the military–media relations that exist presently in South Africa, as seen from a non-partisan or neutral perspective. The chapter provides the responses of the selected media members and defence commentators that were interviewed.

A seasoned journalist – who is well known for reporting on military matters – was of the view that, at the time of this research, there was no relationship between the military and the media. To be specific, the journalist Erika Gibson, who has a long history of reporting on the military in South Africa and who has also served in the military at some stage, based her view on several considerations.

Firstly, she noted, newsrooms do not have dedicated military correspondents anymore. In the media domain these days, it seems as if every journalist is expected to do a little bit of everything. There is simply no time for journalists to specialise and for a special relationship to develop between the military and specific journalists. As such, very few journalists in South Africa at present have

developed into military specialists and are allowed to develop a close, working relationship with the military in general and the military media liaison officers in particular.

Secondly, the relationship between the military and the media is largely based on the use of email correspondence. Journalists are making use of email questions in the hope that a response from the military would be provided in time, as there is very little direct face-to-face communication between journalists and corporate communication (Corp Com) officers at the services and divisions in the SANDF.<sup>1</sup>

Several of the journalists who were interviewed expressed these sentiments and, by implication, their frustrations with the military do not encourage face-to-face contact or response to written enquiries in time. In the words of Kim Helfrich, a journalist at defenceWeb with many years of experience with the SANDF, “there is – with a few exceptions – no relationship between the national defence force and the media”.<sup>2</sup> Helmoed-Romer Heitman, perhaps the best-known defence analyst in South Africa and correspondent for the *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, reiterates the view expressed by Helfrich. According to Heitman, “there is no relationship between the SANDF and the media”.<sup>3</sup>

Graeme Hosken, a journalist working for the *Sunday Times* and with 18 years of experience reporting on military affairs in South Africa, notes that, to engage with the military in South Africa is like a -

[A] complete closed shop. [...] As a journalist you are kept at an arm’s length by the SANDF. The impression from the media’s side is one of, to paraphrase [...] you are not allowed to ask questions or we are doing you a favour to allow you the opportunity to ask question.<sup>4</sup>

Hosken is of the view that the perception the South African military has of the media is one of an institution set on presenting the military in a bad way and to write negative stories about the military in the media.<sup>5</sup> In the interview, Gibson indicated that she deals regularly with the SANDF, and she asserted that the responses by the military have worsened progressively over the last ten years. Gibson mentioned that she would send an inquiry consisting of “pages and pages” explaining the situation and background of her inquiry to various people within the media liaison section of the Directorate Corporate Communication (DCC) and that she is very specific about the deadline for an article. Gibson noted that she was aware that the Corp Com officers in the services and divisions work hard to find the answers to her questions and enquiries. However, if and when she gets an answer from DCC, it is mostly after a deadline, and it will often be a meek response consisting of one or two paragraphs irrespective of the nuanced nature and complication of the matter.<sup>6</sup>

In the interview, Darren Olivier, a journalist working at *African Defence Review (ADR)* argued that dealing with the media liaison section is “quite painful” but he experienced that the Corp Com officers from services and divisions tend to be quite responsive. Olivier noted that Corp Com officers are often not necessarily authorised to provide answers on the spot as they have to send the information

and all the requests “back up the chain” of military command. It is at DCC where the answers are delayed, refused or not properly answered, which Olivier said he found rather frustrating as journalists are faced with deadlines.<sup>7</sup>

It was Olivier’s view that there is no respect in the SANDF for media deadlines and, therefore, the South African military does not respond to inquiries in full and in time. It is possible for the SANDF to be proactive in its interaction with the media if the SANDF takes the initiative. However, the SANDF does not take the initiative in proactive engagement with the media. The problem seems to be that Corp Com personnel at lower levels are not empowered to engage with the media in a proactive manner. In his experience with other militaries, the media relations personnel are empowered and authorised to be able to respond to requests from the media immediately, or to engage with the media at regular intervals and set ways – through a daily press conference, for example. This places those militaries at an advantage when dealing with the media.<sup>8</sup> The lack of urgency in the SANDF when responding to the media seems to be a matter of considerable frustration for media personnel. Suzanne Paxton, a radio journalist, indicated that, to work through the official spokespersons of the Department of Defence (DoD), the Head of Communication (HoC), or in the SANDF, the Director Defence Corporate Communication (DDCC) “is not a pleasant experience”, as they normally do not answer their phones when she needs to get hold of them urgently. Ms Paxton pointed out that radio deadlines are much shorter than those of television and print media and even when she leaves messages for media personnel of the SANDF to contact her, it never happens.<sup>9</sup>

Helfrich indicated that it is highly frustrating to work via the DCC for answers on inquiries related to specific events, exercises or operations. Helfrich noted that, in most instances, the answers that are eventually provided by the DCC could be better supplied by the lower-level military service or the division to which the inquiry relates.<sup>10</sup> Olivier also noted that it is unclear to whom to direct inquiries in the SANDF. He also expressed frustration that the SANDF does not have a functional website like most militaries worldwide. The websites of these militaries typically provide detailed information about whom to contact at various levels within the military regarding media-related inquiries.

Another critical concern is the confusion about precisely who the spokesperson for the SANDF is. In a sense, this is worrisome, as the HoC for the DoD sometimes acts as spokesperson for the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans (MoDMV) and sometimes as the spokesperson for the SANDF. This is highly frustrating and problematic, as journalists are not always sure when to contact the HoC or when to contact the DDCC.<sup>11</sup> Olivier remarked that it is generally confusing for the media to know who is responsible for what in the SANDF, and who should be reached by the media for what. In most militaries, he declares, seasoned journalists more or less know which person to approach. In the SANDF, that is not necessarily the case. In South Africa, it is often very difficult for a ‘fresh’ journalist, one who has not engaged with the SANDF previously, to know to whom to reach out and

whom to contact. Olivier noted that the *ADR* often receives requests from journalists for indications in terms of “who to speak to” in the SANDF. There are no clear lines and practice of communication with the media in the SANDF and much time is often wasted by journalists who are under pressure and who are chasing critical deadlines for publication.<sup>12</sup>

Heitman was of the view that the SANDF leadership and the command cadre do not understand the editorial and content processes within media houses – not to mention the media in general.<sup>13</sup> Gibson said she believed that the SANDF leadership either does not want to understand the media or they are scared of the media “because there is absolutely zero understanding” of the media by the military in South Africa. Gibson indicated that she used to present military–media relations training and education sessions at the South African Defence and National War Colleges but that had ceased by about 2009. According to Gibson, this might be a big contributor to the poor relationship that exists between the military and the media.<sup>14</sup> Gibson was also of the view that the SANDF leadership and command cadre is extremely ignorant about the way the media operates and that the SANDF leadership and command cadre have a very negative view of the media.<sup>15</sup> Olivier maintained that the SANDF leadership does not bother to learn how media houses operate. The SANDF therefore misses the opportunities to present itself in a positive light or even just to clarify misperceptions.

Olivier acknowledged there are journalists who are not as professional as they ought to be, but for the most part, “journalists aren’t out there to get you or make you look bad”. The media are always in search of a story, and most personnel are motivated to find the truth. Olivier reiterated that the more the military understands the intention of the media, namely searching for the truth, the more the military will be able to provide journalists with information and context, and the better the chances will be that the military will be able to shape the stories and ensure the viewpoints of the SANDF are presented correctly. However, this requires the SANDF to respect the media and their deadlines, the editorial processes of the media houses, and the fact that headlines are not necessarily written by the journalist but by editors and sub-editors. Olivier emphasised that the journalists writing the stories often have little control over the headlines.

Another problem outlined by Olivier was the non-availability and inaccessibility of the command cadre of the SANDF. Olivier noted that the SANDF occasionally presents media breakfasts as an opportunity for journalists to get to know the senior leadership. These breakfasts are typically organised by the Chief of the SANDF. As a matter of irony, the senior military personnel and dignitaries are often late for these breakfasts, and are the guests of honour at their own functions for the media. These breakfasts do not provide enough opportunity and cannot serve as a framework for the media to engage with the SANDF. The SANDF leadership does not get to know, for example, the editorial staff and the people behind the processes at the various media houses at these

conferences. Consequently, the SANDF leadership cadre seldom develops an understanding of the media sector, media processes, and the nature of media houses.<sup>16</sup>

The members of the media that were interviewed are of the view that there is an absence of good relations between the media and the military in the country. These members are not impressed with the way the SANDF is treating the media, according to them it is as if military is doing the media a favour to accommodate them. It also seems as if the relationship has worsened over the last ten years. There is appreciation for the work the military is doing and the effort of the Corp Com officers at the services and divisions who are doing their best to assist the media. The perception from the media, though, is that the HoC and the DDCC within the SANDF are responsible for the breakdown of military–media relations in South Africa. The two key frustrations for journalists are the uncertainty about whom to engage within the SANDF regarding media liaison, and the lack of understanding in the command cadre of the SANDF for the editorial and content processes within media houses.

### **5.3 Media frustrations in dealing with the SANDF**

The relationship between the military and the media seems to have been fairly good up to approximately 1998. Since then, it appears as if the relationship has deteriorated, and at present it is at a stage where the media believe that the relationship has broken down and disintegrated to a point where there seems to be no relationship between the military and the media in South Africa. The main concern from the side of the media is the total lack of respect in the SANDF for the deadlines of the various media houses. At the same time, there is acknowledgement of the lack of insight and understanding of the military sector by a new generation of journalists.

The animosity that presently exists between the military and the media is a fairly recent phenomenon. Hosken asserted that, when he started covering the SANDF in 2003 for the *Pretoria News*, there was a relatively good relationship between the press and various services. He recounted how, in the past, the media were invited to various events and open days during which the SANDF exhibited far more openness to discussion than they do now. He remembered that he could phone any spokesperson in the defence force – from services and divisions – and he would get an appropriate response within a matter of hours, or at the most, within a day. He said he was inclined to think that the relationship between the media and the SANDF has become progressively worse, especially over the past five years.<sup>17</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the changes in government in 1994, the SANDF was transparent, open and willing to engage with the media by inviting the media to activities.<sup>18</sup> Gibson agreed and indicated that, specifically during the term of Joe Modise as the Minister of Defence between 1994 and 1999, the relationship between the military and the media was the best that she could recall, “it was absolutely a joy”.<sup>19</sup> Over a period of 20 years, there has been a gradual reduction of access to

information by the media. This was justified by the SANDF through an increased classification of information. These views were confirmed in the PhD study by Wilhelm Janse van Rensburg on the oversight by parliament of the military in South Africa.<sup>20</sup> This did not make sense to journalists, as most of the information that the media requested eventually appeared in published documents, such as annual reports and the annual defence budget vote, which are normally much more comprehensive and fully accessible than answers by the military from the media.<sup>21</sup> Gibson said the so-called 'Tempe massacre' in 1999 and the reaction of the Minister of Defence at the time, Mosiuoa Lekota, to media reporting about this incident was the end of the good military—media relations that existed between the SANDF and the media.<sup>22</sup>

Suzanne Paxton also related how the relationship between the SANDF and the media deteriorated over time. She became a journalist in 2005, and one of her first assignments was with the SANDF in Botswana during an exercise. Ms Paxton recounted that, at the time, the military was willing to explain to the media what they were doing, and this contributed to an honest and open relationship "it was awesome". Unfortunately, this good relationship soured over the years, as journalists struggled to get answers – or a response of some sort – from the SANDF.<sup>23</sup> Heitman claimed that the only time the DoD interacted well with the media was during the tenure of Joe Modise as Minister of Defence.<sup>24</sup> Cilliers, chairperson of board of trustees of the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) and head of the African Futures and Innovation Programme said he believed the deterioration of the relationship between the media and the military is due to the military's excessive culture of secrecy and that South Africa used to enjoy a robust security debate, which is no longer the case.<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, the media form an important part of the oversight function.<sup>26</sup> Proper oversight by the media is however hindered by a growing tendency to cloud all issues of a military and security nature in excessive secrecy in South Africa. Obviously, certain matters need to be kept secret. Nevertheless, confidentiality should be informed by the democratic principle of what is in the public interest. Higher levels of secrecy tend to lead to less public scrutiny and a greater risk of abuse of power.<sup>27</sup> This raises the question of why the South African military approaches the media with a certain level of distrust and animosity.

One of the biggest frustrations expressed by Helfrich in dealing with the SANDF was their absolute disregard and disrespect for deadlines. This is influenced by the DCC operating as a "clearing house" or sifting through information that had been supplied by services and divisions.<sup>28</sup> Gibson expressed her belief that the media liaison section of the SANDF realises the importance of deadlines, especially with regard to radio, online or daily newspapers. However, those in the upper echelons of the SANDF do not have the "foggiest clue" what a deadline means. The SANDF does not stick to deadlines, Gibson noted, as "it is not important to them".<sup>29</sup> This leads to articles being published without input from the SANDF, which then causes the SANDF to be dissatisfied with information that might not necessarily be correct or to their liking. However, by not participating in the media process,



the SANDF forfeits the right or ability to influence what is being written about the military in South Africa.

Suzanne Paxton acknowledged that there are some Corp Com officers who are qualified in public relations, who have many years of experience in their field, and who understand the urgency of media deadlines, especially those of radio. However, these officers do not necessarily have the authority to answer media questions. In contrast, the people to whom the media are compelled to speak do not answer their phones when they are called, even when their names are on the media release for enquiries.<sup>30</sup> Hosken highlighted the same problem, namely that there is simply no understanding of deadlines, which he found ironic as the military itself has to work with strict deadlines.<sup>31</sup> Olivier also commented on the fact that the SANDF's response to deadlines is unsatisfactory and causes a serious problem for journalists, as the SANDF loses the opportunity to provide context and clarity to media reports.<sup>32</sup>

Hosken expressed the view that the responses he receives from the SANDF are mostly unsatisfactory, incomplete or mediocre. This causes him to suspect that these responses do not come directly from the Corp Com officers at the different services and divisions from where he requests the information, but that they are merely conveying the messages received from higher headquarters – the DDCC and/or the HoC. This reinforces the impression that the media are treated as though the command cadre of the SANDF simply does not care about requests from the media.<sup>33</sup> Olivier expressed concern about the quality of the responses that the media receive from the SANDF, because what is provided is only the bare minimum of information and often without any context. He asserted that the SANDF does not make sufficient effort to educate the media, and it is impossible for journalists to know everything. Often the information is either highly specialised or complicated.<sup>34</sup> In his experience, Helfrich noted, responses to direct questions are just glossed over with wordy statements saying nothing of real value.<sup>35</sup> Olivier affirmed that the SANDF misses opportunities to ensure that its side of the story is told and to use the media to keep the public informed of current issues. It is, however, important to empower journalists by giving them adequate information. Instead, the answers the media receive from the SANDF are often too short and abrupt and they contain insufficient information. The sense is that the response process is being dragged out by the SANDF, and that the SANDF would rather not answer. This does not display and reflect confidence in the media by the SANDF.<sup>36</sup>

The general feeling of the military, it seems, is that the media do not understand the military, mainly because most journalists are increasingly jack-of-all-trades doing reporting a mile wide and an inch deep.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, journalists do not have the time to focus on one area of society, specialising in military affairs. Olivier explained that, due to the complicated structure of the military, it is very difficult for the media to comprehend the various aspects of the military. The military is complex by nature,

with different concepts of operation, organisational structures, various military equipment and its uses, and the art of war in general.<sup>38</sup> As Gibson pointed out, there are junior journalists at media houses, also junior sub-editors and editors, and there is often a limited understanding of the military in the broader media environment.<sup>39</sup> Hosken declared that, in 2003, there were news editors and sub-editors at the *Pretoria News* who understood the military well. As a result of the keen interest in the military, and because of all the military headquarters and units in and around Pretoria, the military often featured positively in the paper. This understanding of the military has gradually declined over the years, as the SANDF reduced interaction with the media and the media lost many with keen interests in military affairs. At present, editors and journalists do not know the difference between the Army, the Air Force, the Navy and the Military Health Services, “never mind the difference between a Rooikat and a Ratel”.<sup>40</sup>

The initial period of democratisation in South Africa was a time of effective interaction by the military with the media. The media refer to the time of Joe Modise as Minister of Defence as the ‘golden period’ of military–media relations in South Africa. Certain journalists viewed the relationship between the media and the SANDF as adequate to approximately 2005. Since then, however, it progressively deteriorated. The media are of the view that the military has no respect for deadlines, and that responses to inquiries are less than satisfactory. Eventually, those employed in the media believe it is the SANDF that is at the losing end because it is unwilling or not interested in providing the military side of the story. The media acknowledge that the fault does not lie with the SANDF only, as the media also struggle with the juniorisation of journalists and availability of staff.

#### **5.4 Suggestions on improving future military–media relations**

In a democracy, the military is dependent on the media to convey messages on its roles, functions and responsibilities to the general public. This raises the question about the importance of public opinion in terms of the SANDF and the relevance of the military in the political and socio-economic context of the society within which the SANDF finds itself. In short, how important is it for the SANDF to engage with the media?

The media in South Africa seem to hold the view that the military does not utilise it as a medium to communicate on its behalf, thus ensuring visibility in the public domain. Cilliers, for example, noted that South Africa no longer engages in debates on security. Even among academia, the military and security are not of interest anymore.<sup>41</sup> In short, society – the public in general – has lost interest in the SANDF and the DoD.<sup>42</sup> Kevin Ritchie maintained it is vital that public opinion is influenced positively towards the SANDF.<sup>43</sup> This is of critical importance, for example, in the justification of the defence budget and the creation of general awareness of the need to maintain an effective and efficient defence force in South Africa.



Wilhelm Janse van Rensburg explains that there are four aspects that play a role in shaping public opinion towards the SANDF in the years after 1994:<sup>44</sup>

- There has been a regression of interest in the Defence Force since the end of the Border War in 1990. The end of the war led to an exponential cut in the defence budget together with a change in civil–military dynamics with the end of conscription and growth in the civil–military divide due to a lack of interaction between the military and the public.
- There is waning interest in defence matters as socio-economic aspects of the country have become increasingly important. The natural result is less discussion on military matters.
- The work of parliament, including parliamentary committees on defence, which is the link between the people and the executive, has deteriorated over the past 20 years. The role of parliament in informing the public about defence matters has diminished.
- Only few academic institutions and academic writers focus on the military. Apart from Esterhuysen from the Faculty of Military Science and Heineken from the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology of Stellenbosch University, who publish articles on defence-related issues, the only academic institutions focusing on the military are the University of the Witwatersrand School of Governance, the Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa (SIGLA) and the Centre for Military Studies (CEMIS). Janse van Rensburg expresses the view that not even the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) looks at matters of defence any longer. The media are therefore one of the few institutions left to inform the public about military matters.

Gibson believed it is only the media that can tell the public what is happening in the defence force. She asserted that there might be a few question-and-answer sessions in parliament, but these rarely put issues relating to the military in context. She maintained that the defence committees are not very active.<sup>45</sup> Roelf Meyer, a former minister of defence, agrees that the only way the SANDF can form its public opinion is through the media.<sup>46</sup>

In a democracy, the military has no choice but to reach out and to engage with the media, to cultivate a relationship with journalists, and to develop them as military journalists and so-called ‘war correspondents’.<sup>47</sup> Ritchie believed that the media have a vital role to play in keeping the military accountable, and journalists therefore ought to understand the military. He argued that media houses cannot afford military correspondents only.<sup>48</sup> Gibson agreed and claimed that military or war correspondents will never work again. The newsrooms have been reduced in size and journalists now need to cover multiple types of assignments, as varied as a car crash, an armed robbery, a heart-to-heart conversation with someone or attending a media conference. Gibson testified that there are some journalists like her who are freelancing and who still write mainly about the military, but very few are left.<sup>49</sup> Helfrich stated that defence and military correspondents would never again

be employed in South Africa. There is simply no real interest in things military and defence from the mainstream media and society. South Africa has taken on many of the attributes of the so-called 'post-military societies of the world'.<sup>50</sup> Helfrich argued that it would be useful to have journalists with an in-depth understanding of military affairs asking questions "rather than someone who doesn't know the difference between a G5 and an R5 at a defence media briefing".<sup>51</sup> Hosken agreed that there is a necessity for military correspondents, considering recent events in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the conflicts that keep flaring up in Lesotho, the Eswatini clashes, as well as other places where the SANDF had been involved, such as the Central African Republic.<sup>52</sup>

Heitman believed the most important aspect to improve military–media relations is to decentralise the Corp Com and media liaison function to a self-accountable unit level in the SANDF. He argued that this could be a junior officer who does not necessarily need to be a qualified Corp Com officer.<sup>53</sup> Helfrich, by contrast, noted that, as a start, there should be officers who are spokespersons who know and understand both the SANDF and the media, and who could ensure the SANDF is receptive to questions. He argued that, when someone from the media does not know how the military is structured and how it functions, the SANDF should make an effort to explain it to the media. He quoted a former Chief of the South African Navy, Vice-Admiral Refiloe Mudimu, as saying, "the press is a force multiplier that doesn't cost anything – use it!"<sup>54</sup> Hosken provided three suggestions for improving military–media relations:<sup>55</sup>

- the leadership and command cadre of the SANDF, the Chief of the SANDF and the chiefs of the services and divisions specifically, should have a workshop with the top structure of the media, SANEF, in particular. The aim should be to develop a better mutual understanding of the two sectors;
- an educational programme should be implemented in the SANDF, similar to those in many Western militaries, to educate its personnel on how to engage with the media; and
- media should train with the troops in simulated combat exercises, and be deployed with soldiers during operations, even if it is not for the entire training and operational period.

Ritchie maintained there should be various forms of engagement:<sup>56</sup>

- Firstly, formal structural engagements, such as media breakfasts hosted by the chiefs of the different services and divisions along with their respective senior leadership cadre need to be held annually.
- Secondly, engagements by journalists with the senior Corp Com officers of services and divisions should be done regularly.

- Lastly, the Corp Com officers at unit level should engage continually with the local media regarding their area of influence.

Cilliers stated that there needs to be a very deliberate effort by the military to reach out and educate the media by including journalists during internal and external operations, exercises and even with normal combat-readiness training.<sup>57</sup> Janse van Rensburg made three suggestions on improving the relationship between the military and the media:<sup>58</sup>

- The military should conduct an introspective study to understand its position and to develop a strategy to develop its position and image in society.
- The SANDF must be more transparent and answer media inquiries with greater care and in more detail than is the case at the moment. Obviously, there are operational matters that should remain classified. At present, though, the Defence Force often uses so-called 'classified information' as a type of smokescreen when it does not want to answer questions or provide the correct information.
- The SANDF should actively engage the media and allow them an opportunity to probe a bit deeper.

Janse Van Rensburg notes that, in the past, the SANDF took media houses to the Port St John's training area, where the soldiers were preparing through mission-specific training for deployment to the DRC, and later, taking the media to the deployment areas in the DRC.<sup>59</sup>

The SANDF is not in the public eye because very few people in the media, the academe or society focus on military issues. In addition, the number of media and scholarly articles related to the military has reduced. Not much research is being done on military and defence issues in South Africa. There are also very few military correspondents or journalists focusing on military matters. The media members and defence commentators who were interviewed during this study provided a few suggestions on what the military and the media could do to improve relations between the two entities.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The fact that media services are centralised at Defence Headquarters seems to be one of the major frustrations for the media. There seems to be confusion about whom to interact with in the military regarding media matters. Probably the greatest frustration for the media is that there seems to be no understanding of the processes within media houses by the leadership of the SANDF, and this has a considerable impact on journalists. According to the media, an amicable relationship existed between the two sectors in the period 1994–2005. Since then, the relationship has progressively deteriorated as the entities grew apart and neither understands how the other functions. The military

is not so visible in the public domain anymore, as there are no longer military–media specialist journalists and also little academic discourse on the military in civil society.

In exploring the views of the media on its relationship with the military in South Africa, it is quite clear that the media view the relationships as almost non-existent. The nature of the relationship and the view the media have of it are rooted in a number of key considerations. From the perspective of the media, the command cadre of the SANDF, the HoC and the DDCC in particular, are seen as particularly uncooperative, obstructive and unresponsive. This situation seems to have worsened over time since 1998 and has declined even more since 2017. This is evident in the way the military responds to media inquiries marked by absolute disrespect for the time and the work of the media in general. Media enquiries are not answered at all or the answers are feeble and they arrive late. The media and defence commentators are further of the view that the SANDF misses significant opportunities by not communicating effectively and pro-actively with the media to state the case of the SANDF to the public about its agenda. It is also the view of the media that the SANDF can do much more to engage with the different levels of management within media houses by educating and informing the new and young journalists, sub-editors, editors and even the support staff. The SANDF needs to be in the public eye to garner support for its activities and to increase its budget. There are not many individuals and institutions left from which to get support on behalf of the Defence Force. To improve military–media relations, journalists are of the view that the SANDF should consider educating members of the media about the SANDF, taking the media on exercises and operations, training military members on how media houses work, and decentralising media liaison to the lowest levels of war and the organisational levels of the DoD.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Interview with Ms E Gibson, reporter at *Die Beeld*, *The Citizen* and freelance, WhatsApp, 24 May 2021.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr K Helfrich, journalist at *defenceWeb*, email, 16 August 2021.
- <sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr H-R Heitman, author, journalist, historian and military analyst, Pretoria, 24 August 2021.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with Mr G Hosken, reporter at *Sunday Times*, MS Teams, 28 September 2021.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr D Olivier, director at *African Defence Review*, Skype, 18 August 2021.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with Mrs S Paxton, news reporter at RSG Spektrum, Zoom, 17 August 2021.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with Helfrich *op. cit.*
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with Olivier *op. cit.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Heitman *op. cit.*
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Olivier *op. cit.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Hosken *op. cit.*
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Olivier *op. cit.*
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Dr W. Janse van Rensburg, research fellow at the Security Institute for Governance in Africa at Stellenbosch University, MS Teams, 27 August 2021.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with Olivier *op. cit.*
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Paxton *op. cit.*
- <sup>24</sup> Interview with Heitman *op. cit.*
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with Mr J. Cilliers, chairperson of the Institute of Security Studies Board of Trustees and head of the African Future and Innovation Program, MS Teams, 27 August 2021.
- <sup>26</sup> FC Matei. "A new conceptualization of civil–military relations". In Bruneau, TC & Matei, FC (eds), *The Routledge handbook of civil–military relations*. Oxon: Routledge, 2013, 30–31.
- <sup>27</sup> A Esterhuysen. "The South African security predicament: Making sense of the objective realities". *Scientia Militaria* 49/1. 2021. 13.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Helfrich *op. cit.*
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with Paxton *op. cit.*
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Hosken *op. cit.*
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Olivier *op. cit.*
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with Hosken *op. cit.*
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with Olivier *op. cit.*

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- <sup>35</sup> Interview with Helfrich *op. cit.*
- <sup>36</sup> Interview with Olivier *op. cit.*
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>40</sup> Interview with Hosken *op. cit.*
- <sup>41</sup> L Heinecken. *South Africa's post-apartheid military: Lost in transition and transformation*. Cape Town: UCT Press, 2019, 62–78.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Cilliers *op. cit.*
- <sup>43</sup> Interview with Mr K Ritchie, independent media consultant and former regional executive editor for the Independent Media Gauteng, MS Teams, 20 August 2021.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with Janse van Rensburg *op. cit.*
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with Mr R. Meyer, former Minister of Defence and chairperson of the Defence Review 2014 Committee, MS Teams, 27 August 2021.
- <sup>47</sup> Interview with Ritchie *op. cit.*
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> Interview with Gibson *op. cit.*
- <sup>50</sup> M Shaw. *Post-military society: Militarism, demilitarization and war at the end of the twentieth century*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Helfrich *op. cit.*
- <sup>52</sup> Interview with Hosken *op. cit.*
- <sup>53</sup> Interview with Heitman *op. cit.*
- <sup>54</sup> Interview with Helfrich *op. cit.*
- <sup>55</sup> Interview with Hosken *op. cit.*
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Ritchie *op. cit.*
- <sup>57</sup> Interview with Cilliers *op. cit.*
- <sup>58</sup> Interview with Janse van Rensburg *op. cit.*
- <sup>59</sup> Interview with Janse van Rensburg *op. cit.*

## CHAPTER 6

### AN INSIDE-OUT PERSPECTIVE – TALKING TO THE MILITARY ABOUT MILITARY–MEDIA RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### 6.1 Introduction

The aim of the chapter is to provide an inside and insider perspective of the liaison of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) with the media. The first section of the chapter provides an autobiographical outline of myself. Not only am I working in the SANDF and responsible for media liaison at the operational level, but my academic qualifications, experience, institutional knowledge and present appointment are used as reference material in this chapter. A historical overview is given of the nature of corporate communications in the period 1994 to 2004 with specific reference to education, training and development of corporate communication (Corp Com) functionaries. An outline is also provided of the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*, and the way the policy guides the command cadre of the SANDF and its corporate communication officers to ensure a positive public image of the SANDF through the media as a tool to communicate. A view of the political and military leadership of the media and the understanding of the media environment by the command cadre of the SANDF is provided. The discussion concludes with an explanation of the way in which media services are currently provided and dealt with in the SANDF.

Corporate communication is a command function.<sup>1</sup> An attempt was made to interview the command cadre of the SANDF to ascertain their views of the image of the SANDF as portrayed by the media. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the command cadre not being available. I tried numerous times to schedule interviews with a number of generals but they did not even respond to my requests. Therefore, the Head of Communication (HoC) of the Department of Defence (DoD), senior SANDF staff officers and civilian members of the corporate communication domain of the SANDF were interviewed. From an operational perspective, these are the people that most often represent their respective chiefs of services and divisions in interaction with the media. Retired corporate communications members of the SANDF were also interviewed to capture their reflections of the interaction of the SANDF with the media.

#### 6.2 An autobiographical outline of the researcher

As a researcher, I work as a senior officer with the military rank of captain (SA Navy) in the SANDF and have more than 33 years' service in the SANDF. Military courses that I have done are:

- officers course for naval officers at the South African Naval College;
- combat officer qualifying course at the Maritime Warfare Training Centre;

- various intelligence courses at the South African Military Intelligence College;
- junior staff and warfare course at the South African Naval Staff College;
- joint senior command and staff programme at the South African National War College;
- defence foreign relations course presented by the Directorate Foreign Relations; and
- security and defence studies programme at the South African National Defence College.

This provided me with well-rounded qualifications in the military and an understanding of the different levels of war.

I started working in the corporate communication environment in the Defence Force in 1991 and specialised in the field ever since. I completed functional corporate communication courses, such as the intermediary communication course presented by the SANDF. I obtained a National Diploma in Public Relations at Tshwane University of Technology, and have done various courses presented by the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), such as the Certificate in Public Relations Practice and the Public Relations Management Certificate. During my career, I have attended various workshops on media relations and media tendencies. I completed a master's degree in Public Administration at Stellenbosch University where my dissertation focused on corporate communication. These courses, seminars and academic qualifications provided me with an in-depth knowledge of the corporate communication discipline both within and outside the SANDF.

Earlier in my career, I was appointed Corp Com officer for a peace support operation in Burundi and on deployments by the Navy to foreign countries. I was deployed at operational level as the corporate communication officer on various internal deployments, such as the SANDF support to other government departments in the fight to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. I participated as Corp Com officer in many joint, interdepartmental, interagency and multi-national (JIIM) exercises both within and outside the borders of South Africa. On many occasions, I was appointed liaison officer for various international visitors, foreign ships visiting South Africa and international conferences, such as the Twelfth Non-Aligned Movement Summit (1998). During the latter part of my career, I was seconded on two occasions to the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans (MoDMV) to support the communication environment during bi-lateral talks with other Southern African Development Community (SADC) states. These appointments provided me with experience of working with other countries and cultures and understanding corporate communication in the continental and global arena.

In 1999, the SANDF went through another transformation process, and I was appointed to implement the restructuring and amalgamation of the various public relations functions of navy units into one



department on tactical level. From 2008 to 2012, I represented the SA Navy on the SANDF work-study group into the re-engineering of corporate communication in the DoD. I formed part of the team that developed doctrine, strategy, policy and business processes for corporate communication in the DoD as well as a career dispensation for Corp Com functionaries. These appointments not only provided me with comprehensive change management experience and insights into the implementation of employment equity and other transformation initiatives but also expanded my knowledge base on corporate communication at departmental level.

I was instrumental in the arrival of the so-called Strategic Defence Packages relating to the Navy, and was responsible for the execution of the corporate communication activities surrounding the arrivals. Media liaison formed an integral part of all these activities. I was seconded to the 2015 Defence Review Committee where I was responsible for the corporate communication aspects related to the defence review process. These activities provided me with insight into national, provincial and local levels of government corporate communication. At present, I am appointed as Senior Staff Officer (SSO) Operational Communication at the Joint Operations Division in Pretoria where I am responsible for all corporate communication facets regarding the internal and external deployments of the SANDF as well as JIIM exercises.

The formal military and functional courses of the SANDF, combined with my academic qualifications, as well as the experience gained over a period of more than 30 years in the SANDF provided me with an in-depth and comprehensive inside-out perspective of military–media relations in South Africa. I was employed from tactical to strategic level in corporate communications in the SANDF with exposure to local, provincial, national and international corporate communication activities. This is a valuable body of knowledge that could not be ignored during the current research.

### **6.3 Media liaison in the SANDF from 1994 until 2004**

The discussion here provides an outline of corporate communication in the SANDF between 1994 and 2004. The focus will be specifically on the SANDF Corp Com personnel and their understanding of the media between 1994 and 2004. This section also provides an explanation of how media liaison was carried out before and after ministerial instruction centralising media liaison to the Ministry of Defence in 2000.

From 1994 to 2004, corporate communication personnel were well skilled in the field of corporate communication as they attended various corporate communication courses presented by the military and also by private institutions, such as PRISA.<sup>2</sup> Most of the personnel working in corporate communication obtained degrees and diplomas in corporate communication at universities, universities of technology, and colleges.<sup>3</sup> It is possible to argue that the level of SANDF Corp Com officers was at such a high level that they were invited to lecture at PRISA courses on a variety of

corporate communication skills, including media liaison.<sup>4</sup> Some of these officers were also on the adjudication panels for candidates to be accredited in public relations (APR) at PRISA.<sup>5</sup> Corporate communication officers had career paths where they started their profession at units and bases and worked their way up to formation headquarters and ultimately to their service or division headquarters.<sup>6</sup> The idea was that only then would corporate communication officers be appointed at defence headquarters, since they would then have an in-depth understanding of their service or division.<sup>7</sup> The qualifications coupled with the vast exposure that these officers obtained during their careers ensured that they were regarded as extremely professional corporate communication functionaries.<sup>8</sup> In 2004, Rear Admiral Robert William ('Rusty') Higgs, then Captain (SA Navy), received the National Bua Award from the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) for the Best Government Communication Official. Higgs humbly maintains that he received the award on behalf of the Navy Corporate Communication team due to his "qualified and experienced corporate communication officers".<sup>9</sup> One of these members is Captain (SA Navy) Fiona Strydom who obtained the first position on the PRISA management course in 2003.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, many of these professional, qualified and experienced corporate communication officers have since retired or have been consigned to appointments in the SANDF outside the corporate communication function.

Apart from ensuring that corporate communication officers were trained and that they gained exposure in the corporate communication environment, the SANDF also recruited journalists from various media houses to improve and strengthen their relations with the media.<sup>11</sup> This practice seemed to work well as the members had an intimate knowledge of how the media worked and succeeded in strengthening the interaction between the military and the media. Colonel (retired) John Rolt was one of the individuals who were recruited by the SANDF in this way. In an interview with me, he explained that, as the senior staff officer (SSO) media liaison (ML), he had to ensure direct availability to the media – 24 hours per day, seven days a week.<sup>12</sup> As the SSO ML, he was mandated as the first point of entry for any media-related inquiries. By being available at all times, he was able to respond to media inquiries in a speedy and professional manner. He and his media liaison section ensured that media inquiries were directed to the SSO Corp Com of the service or division to which the inquiry related in order to take action and interact with the media on their appropriate level.<sup>13</sup> The fact that media liaison was decentralised ensured that reporters were able to communicate with Corp Com officers closest to the incident or activity of the inquiry.<sup>14</sup>

Rolt mentions that there used to be high-level engagements between the command cadre of the Defence Force and the National Press Union (NPU) before 1994, and with the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF), after 1994.<sup>15</sup> As the SSO ML, Rolt regularly had formal and informal discussions with the editors of various media houses. He also encouraged the SSOs at service and division level to do the same as well as the rest of the Corp Com officers in their geographical areas

where their bases or units were located.<sup>16</sup> The Defence Force used to present media training at various levels of management either during senior and joint command courses or as seminars specific for the command cadre.<sup>17</sup> This practice was also encouraged at service level, and the Navy, in particular, presented seminars on how to deal with the media to the commanders of ships and units in the Western Cape.<sup>18</sup> The same principle was applied at higher headquarters where journalists would participate in media training and where the military members would be interviewed in a simulated set-up.<sup>19</sup>

Even with the infamous Chief of the South African National Defence Force (C SANDF) Communication instruction 01/2000: Uncontrolled release of information, which was distributed in August 2000 inside the DoD, the media liaison section was still highly effective in communicating with the media.<sup>20</sup> This idea was confirmed during interviews with journalists who viewed military–media relations as being in a fairly good state until around 2004 when it started to deteriorate. According to Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Petrus Abel Louw ('Piet') Paxton, everything changed when Colonel John Rolt retired and the media liaison officers who were appointed after him in the SSO ML post had either no communication and media liaison qualifications, or very limited experience in the media liaison and broader defence force environment.<sup>21</sup> Almost all corporate communication training, both within and outside the Defence Force, had ceased by 2004.<sup>22</sup> This includes the various seminars and interaction sessions that Corp Com officers used to attend together with PRISA and other professional bodies in the corporate communication environment.<sup>23</sup>

In the period 1994 to 2004, the personnel and staff of the SANDF corporate communication environment were skilled and trained Corp Com functionaries and highly regarded in the GCIS and PRISA environments. The media liaison function was decentralised and effective. What seems to have changed since then was that officers were being appointed in the SSO ML post without any corporate communication and media liaison qualifications or with very little experience in the corporate communication and broader defence force environment. This meant that the delivery of sound media relations services gradually started deteriorating by 2004.

#### **6.4 The policy for corporate communication in the SANDF**

One may now ask, what is the policy regarding corporate communication and public relations in the SANDF, where does corporate communication fit into the military bureaucracy, who is responsible at what level, and what are the outcomes required from Corp Com functionaries? This section provides a summary of the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*<sup>24</sup> and its status of implementation.

A work-study on the restructuring of corporate communication in the department was started in 2007 and ended in 2012.<sup>25</sup> The aim of this work-study was to restructure corporate communication in the

DoD through processes that were aligned and integrated with overarching SANDF doctrine, policies and strategy, government policies as well as GCIS guidelines, principles and procedures.<sup>26</sup> The primary objective of this work-study was to ensure that corporate communication was established as an integrated corporate communication function and structure in the DoD under a single HoC and aligned with a departmental and government corporate communication strategy. The secondary objective of this work-study was to develop the following:<sup>27</sup>

- a policy for corporate communication;
- a career dispensation including a personnel management code (PMC) for Corp Com functionaries in the DoD; and
- a doctrine for corporate communication in operations.

On 26 March 2013, the C SANDF signed the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*, which effected the implementation of the policy on 1 July 2013.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, 19 years after the establishment of the SANDF, a guiding document was provided to the corporate communication function in the Defence Force. The DODI/167 superseded the Ministerial and C SANDF Instructions of 2000 on uncontrolled release of information. The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* follows the government communication policy in outlining what is expected of government departments in relation to communication.<sup>29</sup> The HoC is the most senior communication official in a government department and, as such, embraces the communication function across the political and administrative entities and is accountable and responsible for the overall communication function.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the DoD, the HoC is accountable to the MoDMV and serves the Sec Def and C SANDF.

The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* is a comprehensive document spanning 345 pages and contains much theoretical information on corporate communication.<sup>31</sup> The policy covers all the functions of corporate communication from internal communication to external communication (media liaison forms part of external communication), communication support and events management. The policy provides guidelines and instructions on how to execute the total spectrum of corporate communication and public relations on all three levels of war and also the five organisational levels of the DoD, namely:<sup>32</sup>

- level 0 – Ministry of Defence;
- level 1 – DoD headquarters;
- level 2 – services and divisions headquarters;
- level 3 – formation headquarters; and
- level 4 – unit level.

The policy covers the processes and procedures for functional development of Corp Com functionaries in the DoD from career management to education, training and development.<sup>33</sup> The GCIS commended the SANDF, and remarked that this is the best policy on corporate communication in all the government departments.<sup>34</sup>

The HoC is responsible to advise the MoDMV, the Sec Def and the C SANDF regarding corporate communication matters as well as to ensure that the function is directed through policy, strategy, planning and budgeting guidelines and functional instructions.<sup>35</sup> The Director Defence Corporate Communication (DDCC) is responsible for the direction of corporate communication in the SANDF and for the provision of corporate communication support to the MoDMV, the Sec Def and the C SANDF.<sup>36</sup> Corporate communication functionaries at services and divisions must implement corporate communication activities and ensure alignment with DoD and GCIS doctrine in operations, policies, strategies, planning and budgeting guidelines and functional instructions.<sup>37</sup>

The auditable outcomes of corporate communication as listed in the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* are the following:<sup>38</sup>

- “Corp Com [corporate communication] is incorporated in the planning and conduct of military campaigns, operations and exercises.
- Constitutional imperatives of transparency, openness, accountability and consultation are correctly applied.
- A two-way symmetric communication model regarding Corp Com is implemented.
- Stakeholders have rapid access to correct and relevant information, especially with regard to crisis communication.
- Internal and external stakeholders’ needs and concerns are addressed, promoting positive stakeholder relationships and enhanced trust and credibility.
- Cost-effective, efficient and effective optimised communication outputs are ensured.
- The HoC, as the process owner of Corp Com, advises, directs and guides all Corp Com activities in the DoD.
- Fully staffed appropriate Corp Com structures exist at all levels in alignment with the Corp Com Competency Profile in terms of the Personnel Management Code (PMC) and Planning Guidelines for the Implementation of a Career Dispensation for Corp Com Functionaries in the DoD.
- Processes and procedures to integrate relevant Corp Com management and training are established.
- Appropriate and adequate Corp Com research and development programmes are implemented.

- The protection of the reputation and the image of the DoD are implemented through stakeholder relationship management processes and procedures”.

These outcomes relate to several of the corporate communication aspects that were discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis (see Chapter 2). Therefore, these outcomes ensure that corporate communication in the SANDF adheres to the professionalism of the discipline.

The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* prescribes that, when interacting with the media, communication functionaries are expected to cover the entire range of media services, namely:<sup>39</sup>

- the provision of media releases;
- responding to media queries, and conducting media visits, events or conferences;
- writing letters to editors;
- consulting with the media; and
- building and maintaining good relations with the various media houses.

According to the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*, the management approach with regard to corporate communication brings about that it is based on centralised direction and decentralised execution.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, media liaison is decentralised to the different levels of war as well as the DoD organisational levels.

The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* was only approved 19 years after the establishment of the SANDF, and non-implementation of the policy is perhaps an indication of the priority that is assigned to communication and media liaison by the command cadre of the SANDF. The policy is however comprehensive and well written covering both the theory and the practice of corporate communication – what is required of the Corp Com practitioner, the importance of the function, and the position of the function within the management and training of not only the practitioner but also management of what the discipline entails.

## **6.5 The importance of the media in communicating on behalf of the SANDF**

This section provides a snapshot of how the political and military leadership views the role that the media should play in communicating a positive image of the SANDF towards its stakeholders. The understanding of the relevance of corporate communication and utilising the media to communicate on behalf of the SANDF by the command cadre of the SANDF is discussed.

After the Battle of Bangui in the Central African Republic in 2013 in which 16 SANDF members were killed, the reporting on the incident by the media did not portray the SANDF in a positive light, even

though the soldiers conducted themselves extremely brave and fought a hard battle. This and the fact that the media coverage of the SANDF was mostly negative prompted the Council on Defence to host a Communications Workshop.<sup>41</sup> On 21 January 2014, the MoDMV, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, delivered an opening statement at the MoDMV Communications Workshop. Present at this workshop from the DoD, were the Sec Def, the command cadre of the SANDF, the HoC, the DDCC and senior Corp Com officers from services and divisions. Other attendees were members from different media houses, academia and specialists from both the military as well as the communication environments and members of the 2015 Defence Review Committee. The MoDMV initiated the workshop, as she was concerned about the level of communication in the DoD. The MoDMV wanted the academia, communication and military specialists and members from the media to provide presentations to the command cadre of the SANDF and their respective senior Corp Com officers on how to improve communication between the DoD and the South African population.<sup>42</sup>

After the MoDMV had delivered her opening statement, she left the venue. The Sec Def, the C SANDF and chiefs of services and divisions left before the workshop started.<sup>43</sup> This resulted in the entire workshop being in vain as those who were left behind realised that the command cadre needed to hear what the challenges were regarding communication and military–media relations in the SANDF.<sup>44</sup> The plan with the workshop was that, after the presentations by the invited speakers, that there would be five groups to look into certain facets of communication of which one was to focus on military–media relations. The minister did not want the workshop to be seen as an academic exercise but it had to yield recommendations to devise a communication strategy and a plan of action that would enable the DoD to project its military forces in a positive light.<sup>45</sup> Although the five groups, consisting of the senior Corp Com officers, presented their outcomes after the two-day workshop, no communication strategy was devised.<sup>46</sup> Eight years later, nothing further has been done to improve communications and media relations between the SANDF and its stakeholders.<sup>47</sup>

Interviews conducted with members currently working in media relations and communications in the SANDF reflected a perception of a dysfunctional relationship between the media and the military in South Africa at present. It was the opinion of the current HoC, Siphiwe Dlamini, for example, that the leadership of the SANDF does not understand how the media works and therefore they have a negative perception of the media.<sup>48</sup> He believed that the ‘media specialists’ should deal with the media but that the rest of the Defence Force members, not only the command cadre, must at least have a basic understanding of the communication discipline, which includes media liaison. Dlamini declared that the ‘commanders’, including the command cadre of the SANDF, need to be trained on basic principles in dealing with the media.<sup>49</sup> Senior staff officers corporate communication from the services agree with Dlamini, as Colonel Marius Bosch stated that the command cadre in the Air Force does not understand the content and editorial processes within media houses.<sup>50</sup> He elaborated that some generals think that the journalist at an event “who puts the camera or the microphone



under your nose is the one that's going to immediately publish it".<sup>51</sup> Captain (SA Navy) Sam Khasuli agreed and said that the command cadre in the Navy does not understand the media, as they expect that, when the media attends an activity at the Navy, for example a parade, it will automatically be broadcast or printed.<sup>52</sup> He indicates that the command cadre is often upset if an event is not covered.<sup>53</sup>

Dlamini articulated that it does not bode well for the SANDF that its members do not understand the media, as the relationship between the military and the media by its nature is strenuous, as any security institution is always cautious when it relates to media engagements.<sup>54</sup> He explained that the media already have a certain stance on an issue before they approach the SANDF and because the SANDF does not understand this, the automatic fallback is to use the excuse of "classified information" in order not to respond to media inquiries.<sup>55</sup> Colonel Louis Kirstein was of the opinion that the mistrust that exists between the military and the media in the South African context is a historical issue that started with the so-called 'Border War'.<sup>56</sup> He elaborated that the South African government and the military are not sure about the agenda of the media, but neither are the media sure about the agenda of the SANDF because "we [often] will say something and then do something else, and so will the media".<sup>57</sup> Colonel Philip Makopo asserted that when he joined the corporate communication function in 2003, the military–media relationship was good but that it declined over the years.<sup>58</sup> He was of the opinion that this is the case because the majority of SANDF members see the media as the enemy. He used a recent example where the media were invited to the launch of a vaccine in the SANDF. The media were at the facility for the launch, but 30 minutes before the event started, it was cancelled by senior management without providing an explanation to the media. Makopo believed that this is not the way you treat the media, especially not when you want them to convey messages to the public.<sup>59</sup>

It is apparent Mapisa-Nqakula realised that there is a problem from the SANDF side in dealing with the media. However, it seems that her concerns were not shared by the command cadre of the SANDF, as they were not interested to listen to the problems of military–media relations and, more importantly, how to improve it. To date, there is no communication strategy or plan of action to improve the relationship between the military and the media. It is also evident that the command cadre of the SANDF does not understand how the media function and that they need to be educated on dealing with the media. According to senior Corp Com officers, this leads to a strenuous relationship between the military and the media.

## **6.6 Current practice in the SANDF in engagement with the media**

The manner in which all functions of media services are executed in the DoD is discussed in this section. It refers to the government directive that there must be a HoC in each government department. The relationship between the HoC and DDCC is also discussed. A summary is then

given of the role and responsibilities of media liaison according to the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* versus how media liaison functions at present.

Up until 2002, the corporate communication discipline was headed by a uniformed member at the level of chief director (major general).<sup>60</sup> Since the beginning of 2003, a civilian member was appointed HoC for the DoD<sup>61</sup> according to the Cabinet Memo: 8 of 1997.<sup>62</sup> The uniform member at the DCC was relegated to the level of brigadier general, which in the military environment made the member subordinate to the command cadre of the military, which is mainly at major general to lieutenant general level. It seems that this was also the beginning of confusion with regard to boundary management between the HoC and the DDCC.<sup>63</sup> Sometimes both members represent corporate communication at the same meetings and to complicate matters, especially regarding the media, the HoC will sometimes act as spokesperson for the SANDF and at other times, the DDCC will be the official spokesperson.<sup>64</sup> The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* does not stipulate who should be the official spokesperson for the DoD.<sup>65</sup> The issue, however, is not who the spokesperson is but rather, from the point of view of the media, who their first point of contact in the military should be.<sup>66</sup> The relevance here is that the media are not certain whom to contact with regard to media inquiries.<sup>67</sup> Because both the HoC and the DDCC are often engaged in high-level meetings – sometimes both are at the same meeting – neither the SSOs Corp Com for services and divisions nor the media can get hold of them.<sup>68</sup>

Since 2004, the media liaison section would receive an inquiry and then forward it to the relevant service or division SSO Corp Com.<sup>69</sup> This officer is then responsible for obtaining the required information from where the inquiry originates or to which it relates. Before the Corp Com officer at that level forwards the response, approval must be obtained from the commander at that level. After approval, the information is sent to the SSO Corp Com at service or division level, who must then get approval from the commander at his or her level before it can be forwarded to the media liaison section. Once it reaches the media liaison section, approval must be obtained from either the DDCC or the HoC, and in some cases both, before the response is given to the media. This process is laborious and cumbersome, as in many cases, someone is not immediately available in this lengthy chain of approval. Up to 2003, the SSO ML was responsible for all media-related activities and there were no delays or confusion about whom to contact.<sup>70</sup>

According to Captain (SA Navy) Prince Tshabalala, who was the SSO ML from 2013 to 2016, the appointed DDCC from 2011 to 2016 centralised media liaison by insisting that, as DDCC, he was the only person allowed to communicate with the media.<sup>71</sup> Unlike Tshabalala, this officer was not a Corp Com functionary and had no corporate communication qualifications or training and no prior experience in the corporate communication environment.<sup>72</sup> The next appointed DDCC adopted the same approach, as he acted as the official spokesperson for the SANDF.<sup>73</sup> Piet Paxton was of the

opinion that the SSO ML should be a senior and seasoned Corp Com officer with broad-based experience of the SANDF in its totality.<sup>74</sup> He indicated that, as part of the work-study on the restructuring of corporate communication, the recommendation was made that the SSO ML should be a person who has served in the joint operations division after his or her appointment at service level. This would ensure that the member understands not only force preparation concepts but also those of force employment.<sup>75</sup> The way of engaging with the media now is to centralise media liaison to the DDCC and the HoC, mainly because members that are appointed as DDCC and SSO ML do not have proper corporate communication qualifications and/or experience of how to deal with the media. They also do not have full understanding of how the SANDF functions in operations and exercises.

According to the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*, the media liaison section is responsible for media services, which include the total spectrum of media liaison.<sup>76</sup> However, this is not how it plays out in practice, as the SSO ML either does not know what to do or is not allowed by the DDCC to act according to the policy.<sup>77</sup> Although the DDCC reports to the HoC on a functional command line regarding corporate communication, the functions of the media liaison officer (MLO) in the SANDF is not similar to the functions of the MLO of other government departments. The SSO ML manages the media liaison office for the DoD but is not responsible for the public image of the political principal like the MLO in other government departments. This is done by the MoDMV spokesperson.<sup>78</sup> The lines regarding who is responsible for what became blurred since 2004, to the extent that the SSO ML has basically become a 'post box' between the media, the HoC and/or the DDCC and the SSO Corp Com at services and divisions.<sup>79</sup>

The SSOs at services and divisions with their respective media liaison officers are not allowed to interact with the media directly even though the policy states that they should.<sup>80</sup> There are many examples of when they should function according to the policy, but then they would be reprimanded by the HoC, the DDCC or even the C SANDF.<sup>81</sup> One such incident was in 2015 when a South African Air Force helicopter was shot at in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This formed part of the SANDF deployment to a United Nations peacekeeping mission. I sent out a media release with the information after informing my military commander, Chief of Joint Operations, and the functional manager, the HoC and the DDCC. I was subsequently admonished by C SANDF for speaking to the media.<sup>82</sup> However, what is more worrisome to Corp Com officers is the fact that chiefs of services and divisions do not allow their SSOs Corporate Communication to take any media initiatives unless it is sanctioned by the DDCC and the HoC.<sup>83</sup> This means that opportunities to utilise the media in a pro-active way are lost due to the lengthy process of obtaining approval first.<sup>84</sup> Once again, this is contrary to the policy. This type of incidences led to Corp Com officers being confused and even scared to fulfil their media functions according to the policy.<sup>85</sup>

With the appointment of a civilian member as the HoC and the rank level of DDCC being lower than that of HoC, boundary management in terms of who is responsible for media handling became problematic. All forms of media services have been centralised to these two appointments, which rendered the ML section worthless. Because the HoC and the DDCC are part of the command cadre of the SANDF, they are not readily available to handle media inquiries. The blurring of lines of responsibility regarding media liaison has also curtailed pro-active media liaison from the SSOs Corporate Communication at service and division level, especially because they are not supported by their respective chiefs of services and divisions.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

Up to 2004, the Corp Com officers in the SANDF were highly skilled in the corporate communication environment as they all attended courses within and outside the SANDF. The majority of them had tertiary qualifications in the discipline, they were experienced and had many years of seniority in the corporate communications mustering. There was also continuous interaction between these officers and professional corporate communication bodies, such as PRISA. The Defence Force recruited journalists from media houses to improve the relationship between the military and the media. There used to be engagements between the command cadre of the SANDF, their respective SSOs Corporate Communication and the media, whether on courses, media training seminars or during official and unofficial meetings with editors of media houses or SANEF. This enabled both parties to address certain issues when they arose and to deal with such issues expediently. Even with C SANDF Communication Instruction 01/2000: Uncontrolled release of information, which centralised media liaison to the Ministry of Defence, a certain level of professionalism was maintained in the military–media relationship, as there were still qualified and experienced Corp Com officers in the media liaison environment.

When the work-study on the restructuring of corporate communication in the department commenced in 2007, these qualified and experienced Corp Com officers formed part of the group. The outcome was, amongst other, a comprehensive policy on corporate communication in line with government imperatives, which included the appointment of a HoC. The policy clearly stipulates the processes and procedures for functional development of Corp Com functionaries in the DoD – from career management to education, training and development. It also highlights the importance of a professional corporate communication function that must be supported by the command cadre. The most important aspect is that corporate communication must be based on centralised direction and decentralised execution.

The fact that Mapisa-Nqakula ordered a communication workshop in 2014 is a clear indication that she was concerned about media reporting on the SANDF. Unfortunately, the command cadre left the workshop before they could be informed of how the media function as well as what the value of

corporate communication is and how they should support their Corp Com functionaries. It seems that the command cadre does not understand the total spectrum of how media houses operate. It might be that the command cadre does not recognise or understand the problem and therefore does not deal with it. There is a need to educate the command cadre and also the rest of the SANDF members on media liaison aspects.

With the establishment and the appointment of the HoC, boundary management issues have been created where there is uncertainty about who is responsible for media liaison in the SANDF. When members were appointed as DDCC or SSO ML without the proper qualifications and/or experience, the media liaison function was centralised instead of decentralised. This led to more uncertainty of who should speak to the media, and the chiefs of services and divisions became increasingly reluctant to support their Corp Com officers to liaise with the media without prior approval from the HoC and the DDCC. This was an aspect that rendered pro-active media liaison impossible.

It seems that the DoD leadership does not regard communication as an important trade within the organisation. Even though the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* is a comprehensive and excellent policy, it has not been implemented yet.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Department of Defence (DoD). *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*. DODI/167. Pretoria: Chief Defence Policy, Strategy and Planning, 2013, 1-2.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (retired) S Schultz, Corporate Communication officer at various SANDF institutions, Pretoria, 18 October 2021.
- <sup>3</sup> Captain (SA Navy) JDJ Theunissen, senior staff officer of Operational Communication at the Joint Operations Division.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with Colonel (retired) J Rolt, former senior staff officer of Media Liaison at Defence Headquarters from 1988 to 2003, telephonically, 27 October 2021.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Theunissen *op. cit.*
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (retired) PAL Paxton, Corporate Communication officer at various SANDF institutions, WhatsApp, 30 October 2021.
- <sup>8</sup> Interview with Rear Admiral (retired) RW Higgs, former senior staff officer of Navy Public Relations, Pretoria, 14 October 2021.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Theunissen *op. cit.*
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with Colonel L Kirstein, senior staff officer of Strategy, Policy and Planning at the Directorate Defence Corporate Communication, Pretoria, 26 August 2021.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Rolt *op. cit.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Brigadier General MM Visser, former director of Defence Corporate Communication, telephonically, 1 October 2021.
- <sup>18</sup> Theunissen *op. cit.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Paxton *op. cit.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with Schultz *op. cit.*
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Rolt *op. cit.*
- <sup>24</sup> DoD *op. cit.*
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Kirstein *op. cit.*
- <sup>28</sup> DoD *op. cit.*, pp. iv-v.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1-4.
- <sup>30</sup> Government Communications Communication and Information System (GCIS). *Government Communication Policy*. Pretoria: Tshedimoseiso House, 2018, 17.
- <sup>31</sup> DoD *op. cit.*

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- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with Kirstein *op. cit.*
- <sup>35</sup> DoD *op. cit.*, p. 1-7.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-5–1-6.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6A-1–6A-11.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1-4.
- <sup>41</sup> NN Mapisa-Nqakula. Opening statement by the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans at the MoDMV Communications Workshop, Royal Elephant Hotel, Centurion, 21 January 2013.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> Theunissen *op. cit.*
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with Kirstein *op. cit.*
- <sup>45</sup> Mapisa-Nqakula *op. cit.*
- <sup>46</sup> Theunissen *op. cit.*
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> Interview with Mr S Dlamini, head of Communication for the Department of Defence, Pretoria, 28 August 2021.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Interview with Colonel M Bosch, senior staff officer of Corporate Communication for the South African Air Force, Pretoria, 26 August 2021.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> Interview with Captain (SA Navy) KS Khasuli, senior staff officer of Navy Public Relations, Pretoria, 26 August 2021.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> Interview with Dlamini *op. cit.*
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Kirstein *op. cit.*
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>58</sup> Interview with Colonel P Makopo, senior staff officer of Corporate Communication for the South African Military Health Services, Pretoria, 24 August 2021.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup> Interview with Rolt *op. cit.*
- <sup>61</sup> Interview with Ms P Grobler, deputy director of Communication Support at the Directorate Defence Corporate Communication, Pretoria, 18 October 2021.
- <sup>62</sup> GCIS *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- <sup>63</sup> Interview with Rolt *op. cit.*
- <sup>64</sup> Interview with Paxton *op. cit.*
- <sup>65</sup> DoD *op. cit.*
- <sup>66</sup> Interview with Kirstein *op. cit.*
- <sup>67</sup> Interview with Mrs S Paxton, news reporter at RSG Spektrum, Zoom, 17 August 2021.
- <sup>68</sup> Theunissen *op. cit.*



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<sup>69</sup> Interview with PAL Paxton *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Captain (SA Navy) P Tshabalala, former senior staff officer of Media Liaison for the SANDF, telephonically, 20 October 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Anonymous 1, Corporate Communication officer that is or was a member of the SANDF.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Interview with PAL Paxton *op. cit.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> DoD *op. cit.*, p. 1A-12.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Anonymous 1 *op. cit.*

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Kirstein *op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> Theunissen *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Anonymous 1 *op. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Interview with PAL Paxton *op. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Kirstein *op. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Anonymous 2, Corporate Communication officer that is or was a member of the SANDF.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to determine and explain that which underpins the relationship between the military and the media in South Africa. A theoretical overview was given of communication and the public relations discipline. Because the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) refers to the discipline as 'corporate communication' instead of 'public relations', the term 'corporate communication' was used in the rest of the thesis. An explanation of what communication is, the different types of communication, and that which constitutes effective communication was provided. The use of the mass media to communicate with the community at large was discussed and the role of corporate communication as a professional discipline was highlighted. A historical evolution of military–media relations was provided together with the often tense, divergent and sometimes adversarial relationship between the military and the media. The discussion was divided into four eras:

- limited wars in the nineteenth century, from the Napoleonic times to the Russo–Japanese War;
- the period of the world wars;
- conflicts during the Cold War where there was mainly friction between the two superpowers; and
- post-Cold War era conflicts.

The scene was set with an overview of the development of the media during democratisation in Africa since the end of the Cold War. From there the focus was on South Africa and military–media relations since the establishment of the SANDF in 1994. The importance of sound civil–military relations in South Africa was highlighted with specific reference to the role of the media in the Clausewitzian trinity of state, society and the military. The views and experiences of the South African media in engaging with the military and the frustrations from the side of the media when dealing with the SANDF were explored. Therefore, an outside-in perspective of the ability of the military to communicate effectively with the media in South Africa was adopted. An inside-out perspective was provided by starting with a historical overview of the nature of corporate communication in the period 1994 to 2004. The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* was examined and it was explained how the policy was intended to guide the command cadre of the SANDF and its corporate communication officers to ensure a positive public image of the SANDF through the media as a tool to communicate.

The first part of this chapter contains a summary of the main findings regarding the nature of media reporting on the SANDF and the relationship that exists between the military and the media. The second part will cover the role of the command cadre and the Corp Com officers in the SANDF in shaping military–media relations. The last part comprises the concluding remarks on this chapter with suggestions for future studies.

## **7.2 The role of corporate communication in military–media relations**

Humans communicate for various reasons and use different methods or a combination of methods to interact with one another. Without communication, one will not know what is happening, why it is happening, or what is being done about it. There are various reasons why we communicate. Two important aspects of communication are to inform and to influence attitudes. This is where mass communication comes into play. Mass media offer the tool utilised by individuals and organisations to communicate with the population. Mass media also present a technology-driven environment that has made substantial steps over the last centuries, and the media are gaining momentum on a year-to-year basis. The media perform various roles in society ranging from informing the population to being a watchdog within society. Mass media further play a vital role in forming public opinion. History has shown that this is not a modern phenomenon, as it originated in ancient times, and will probably continue to play an important role. This is especially relevant in the civil–military environment where there must be understanding, communication and especially consensus between the government, the population and the military about the role of the military in a political system.

The responsibility to ensure effective and efficient communication is a leadership and management function but the execution of corporate communication activities lies with the Corp Com practitioner. Corporate communication is a highly regulated discipline with historical and academic backing and an established career internationally. There is a discrepancy in the name of the function that ranges from public relations to public liaison, public affairs and corporate communication. The SANDF refers to the discipline as ‘corporate communication’ and therefore it was addressed as such in the study. The characteristics, roles, techniques and functions of the Corp Com functionary are outlined to show what is required of the Corp Com functionary to communicate on behalf of the organisation with its internal and external stakeholders. It seems however that the discipline faces challenges in South Africa due to management not fully comprehending the corporate communication discipline on the one hand. On the other hand, the Corp Com practitioners do not make it their responsibility to ensure that they are taken seriously as professional employees who play an important and vital role within the organisation in terms of planning and strategising.

Throughout centuries, the military had difficulty in understanding how the media operate and vice versa. Both the military and the media have to make an effort to learn more about the other in order to understand how and why each entity functions the way it does. Technologies in both the military

and the media continue to grow in sophistication, and the military, as a conservative institution, often finds the speed of media reporting difficult to deal with. The bureaucratic nature of government, which includes the military, makes it difficult to deal with the media in a proactive manner. Yet, strong and vigorous military–media relations are key elements of the democratic form of governance as these underpin the social contract between the military, society and government. In democracies, the most critical challenge for military–media relations seems to be the balance between freedom of speech and control of information.

The role of the SANDF changed radically since 1994 when it transitioned from a conventionally oriented war-fighting force to a multi-role armed force. The military is now more in the public eye than before, and civil–military relations have become even more important than before, as the military has to justify its existence and *raison d'être* in a complex society. The posture of the military professional also changed, and the public opinion towards the SANDF is perhaps best described as apathetic. Therefore, the role of the media is of the essence to the SANDF in communicating information to the public. As with military–media relations, civil–military relations are complex and interdependent. The interaction between the military and the media affects society on many different levels. Political interference in military matters, especially at operational and tactical level, is critical for the military and of major interest to the media. As such, the leadership of the SANDF must realise the importance of communication and should take ownership to communicate with its stakeholders in order to ensure a sound civil–military relationship.

It is the responsibility of the Directorate Corporate Communication to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with the stakeholders of the SANDF. The SANDF must therefore ensure that the corporate communication discipline is and remains a professional entity. Political interference in the relationship between the military and the media since the late 1990s has made it difficult for open and honest dialogue between the SANDF and the media. The SANDF also made mistakes in not utilising the corporate communication function in a pro-active manner. The leadership of the SANDF must take ownership of the current relationship with the media and other stakeholders as corporate communication is a command function.

### **7.3 The relationship between the South African media and the SANDF**

In exploring the views of the media on its relationship with the military in South Africa, it is quite clear that the media view the military–media relationship as highly problematic – to the point where such a relationship is seen as almost non-existent. The nature of the relationship and the view the media have of it have their roots in a number of critical variables. Firstly, from the perspective of the media, the command cadre of the SANDF, the Head of Communication (HoC) and the Director Defence Corporate Communication (DDCC), in particular, are seen as uncooperative and unresponsive. This situation seems to have deteriorated over time, specifically from about 2004 and rapidly declining

over the past five years. Secondly, both media and military specialists are of the view that the SANDF misses significant opportunities by not communicating effectively and pro-actively with the media. In short, the SANDF does not seem to be effective in stating its case and communicating the SANDF agenda effectively. Thirdly, media personnel – journalists – are of the view that the SANDF can do much more to engage the media houses by educating and informing new and young journalists, sub-editors, editors and even the support staff. To improve military–media relations, journalists are of the view that the SANDF should:

- be proactive in educating members of the media about the SANDF in an effort to create understanding, context and perspective;
- take the media on exercises and operations; and
- train military members on the nature of the media, on engaging the media and the way in which media houses function.

Moreover, decentralised media liaison by all levels of the Department of Defence (DoD) is critical for effective military–media relations. This includes a deliberate effort from the side of the military to build positive and personal relations between journalists and military Corp Com functionaries.

In the period 1994 to 2004, the personnel and staff of the SANDF corporate communication environment were skilled and trained Corp Com functionaries. The military members were highly regarded in the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) environments. The media liaison function was decentralised and effective, and there were continuous interaction between the different levels of management of the military and the media. Since then, it appears that officers were being appointed in senior staff officer media liaison (SSO ML) posts without any corporate communication and/or media liaison qualifications or very little experience in the corporate communication environment, and even the broader defence force. This means that the delivery of sound media relations services gradually deteriorated since 2004. Positive interaction between the military and the media consequently seems to have come to a dead end.

In 2007, a work-study group was established to restructure corporate communication in the DoD to become effective and efficient once again. One of its outcomes was the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*, which was signed by Chief of the SANDF into policy in March 2013. The policy is comprehensive and well written, covering both the theory and the practice of corporate communication as well as aligning it with the GCIS imperatives. It addresses what is required of the Corp Com practitioner, the importance of the function, and the position of the function within management. It also attends to training, not only of the Corp Com practitioner but

also of management in terms of what the discipline entails. The most important aspect of this policy is that corporate communication must be based on centralised direction and decentralised execution.

Military leadership is not interested to discuss, analyse and interrogate challenges in terms of its relationship with and approach to dealing with the media. The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans (MoDMV) ordered a communication workshop in 2014, as she was concerned about media reporting on the SANDF. Unfortunately, the command cadre of the SANDF left the workshop before any comprehensive insights and a sound basis for cooperation could be explored. There seems to be no deliberate effort within the SANDF to learn about the functioning of the media, the value of corporate communication, and the support that ought to be provided to Corp Com functionaries of the SANDF. In brief, it appears as if the command cadre of the SANDF does not understand how the media work. There is a need to educate the command cadre of the SANDF, and perhaps the SANDF in general, about the importance of media liaison. At present, and with the establishment and the appointment of the HoC, boundary management issues have developed where there is uncertainty in the SANDF about who is responsible for media liaison in the SANDF. When members were appointed as DDCC or SSO ML without the proper corporate communication qualifications and experience in media liaison, there was a natural tendency to centralise instead of decentralise media liaison, which is in breach of the policy. This led to more uncertainty about who may have the authority to speak to the media, and the chiefs of the services and divisions became increasingly reluctant to support their Corp Com officers to liaise with the media without approval from the HoC and DDCC. This is an aspect that rendered pro-active media liaison impossible.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

Although this study did not cover military–media relations before 1994, it appeared that the relationship was highly subjective, depending on from which side of the political spectrum it was observed. According to the members of the media that were interviewed, between 1994 to round about 2004, there existed a much more professional and even amicable relationship between the military and the media. Since then, the military–media relationship declined steadily to a point where it is currently seen as non-existing. The media want to relate the stories of the military, but they need to have effective, direct and prompt access to the primary source of information to be able to have the correct facts in a timeous manner. The defence force needs to realise that it is the responsibility of the media to communicate all facts in an objective manner in order for the public to form its own opinion. The political leadership, in particular, have to trust the military in its communication of tactical and operational detail with the media, and should focus on strategic and political issues relating to the DoD.

At present, it appears that the SANDF leadership does not have a proper understanding of the value and importance of a professional corporate communication discipline to communicate to its

stakeholders. The *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence* is a comprehensive and excellent guiding document. The command cadre of the SANDF should ensure the implementation of this policy to assure centralised direction and decentralised execution of not only media liaison but also of the entire corporate communication discipline.

By implementing the *Policy on Corporate Communication in the Department of Defence*, issues of training and staffing of qualified Corp Com functionaries will be guaranteed. If the command cadre of the SANDF fully comprehend the roles, functions and responsibilities of the corporate communication discipline, it will utilise corporate communication as a strategic management tool in the execution of its duties. If the SANDF command cadre is exposed to how the media function and if the media are educated on how the military operates, this will minimise the adversarial relationship that currently exists between the military and the media. Important also is that there should be continuous interaction between the different levels of management in the media and the military. This will not mean that the military–media relationship will suddenly turn to be positive, but like any flourishing marriage, the two parties will be able to resolve issues between them by honest and open communication.

During this study, the following themes were identified for possible further studies. Firstly, researching the nature and role of social media in effective military–media communications could be considered. Social media are accessible by many more than just media houses. Therefore, a study on how to optimise the use of social media to communicate with SANDF stakeholders will be a study of significance to the SANDF. Secondly, it will be of value to investigate the building of a positive professional corporate image for the SANDF amongst the public in South Africa by looking into the corporate communication environment as a whole.



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