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South African Counterinsurgency

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The most outstanding feature of the historiography of the South African counterinsurgency campaign between 1966 and 1989 is that very little indeed has been written about South African counterinsurgency. Most publications about the South African military at the time focus either on the nature of the military or on the war in Namibia and Angola in general. At the same time, writers have been very careful to write about the role of the South African military in the counterrevolutionary campaign against the African National Congress (ANC) and other revolutionary movements within South Africa (SA) at the time. It is possible to argue that this is a reflection of changing political sentiments within South Africa. However, a whole range of factors, as would be clear from this discussion, are influencing this reality.

In the analysis of the South African counterinsurgency campaign, it is important to take note of what has been written by those ‘on the other side of the hill’. Very little has been written by the revolutionary forces that opposed the South African security forces at the time. What has been written ‘on the other side of the hill’ predominantly captures the experiences of the Russians and Cubans in support of the revolutionary armed forces and does not necessarily focus on the insurgency approaches, doctrine and techniques of the revolutionaries. The counterinsurgency of the South African Defence Force between 1966 and 1989 was directed predominantly against South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) and its People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) in the case of Namibia and, in the case of South Africa, the ANC with its armed wing Umkhonto we Sizwe (or MK) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) with its armed wing the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA). Very little material is available from these forces about the military struggle against the apartheid forces.

The words ‘terrorists’ and ‘revolutionaries’ are often in the eyes of the beholder and the fact that the ANC and SWAPO are governing South Africa and Namibia respectively after democratisation makes the use of these terms even more controversial. This chapter focuses on the South African counterinsurgency effort between 1966 and 1990 exclusively, and the terminology is used as it was used by the South African military at the time. In some cases, reference is made to publications from the revolutionary side of the conflict. These publications are mentioned only if they contribute to an understanding of the South African counterinsurgency effort.
What influences the writing and debate?

Objectivity is an almost unattainable goal for social scientists in general and historians and political scientists in particular. Searching for the truth in a counterinsurgency campaign in which both the insurgents and the counterinsurgents were operating in a cloud of ideology and where they deliberately tried to undermine the truth in an effort to manage perceptions about the so-called threat and support for the war effort represent a real challenge. Applying Leopold von Ranke’s idea of ‘bloss zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen’ (simply show how it actually was) is simply impossible in the case of the South African counterinsurgency effort in South West Africa/Namibia and South Africa (Van Jaarsveld 1982: 74). Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the South African counterinsurgency approach requires a broad effort to gain insight into the ideological, political, strategic, operational and tactical dimensions of the war.

Writing about South African counterinsurgency, just like the unfolding of the counterinsurgency campaign between 1966 and 1994, is influenced, shaped and sometimes even dominated by three very particular considerations. The first factor is of a political nature and rooted in the harsh, often ideological, realities of the unfolding political landscape of the time. From an international and global perspective, the Cold War played itself out in southern Africa and had a defining influence on the ideological, political and military involvement of China, the former Soviet Union and Cuba in support of a variety of revolutionary organisations on the one hand, and the subtle indirect support of the West, particularly Britain and the United States, and the crumbling white-dominated states in southern Africa in general and South Africa in particular, on the other. At a continental level, it was a time of de-colonisation in Africa, and most of the wars in Southern Africa were seen, at least by the revolutionary movements, as wars of ‘national liberation’. At a national level, the apartheid ideology and subsequent policies reached its apex in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the same way that there is more to war than warfare, it is important to understand that, within the ideological context of the Cold War and de-colonisation, there was more to apartheid in South Africa than segregation and racism. Writing about South African counterinsurgency is, thus, often shaped by questions about a particular author’s position and nuanced understanding of the Cold War, de-colonisation and apartheid ideologies in Africa in general and southern Africa in particular. The influence of this factor is vividly demonstrated through Chester Crocker’s view that, in Angola, the United States finally managed to ‘win the Cold War in the Third World’ (Crocker 1992: 17). This view was countered by Shubin and Tokarev with questions such as ‘Who rules Namibia (currently): SWAPO or the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA)? Who becomes the President of Angola: Dos Santos or Savimbi? And who became the first President of democratic South Africa: Mandela or Buthelezi?’ (Shubin and Tokarev 2001: 607)

A second factor that shaped South African counterinsurgency, and therefore also writing about the counterinsurgency, is of a strategic nature and concerns the South African strategic choices at the time. More specifically, the South African military made a (not necessarily deliberate) strategic choice to focus its military Schwerpunkt in Namibia and to leave the domestic South African situation largely for the police to deal with. This strategic reality was underpinned by a number of considerations. Most important was the nature of the perceived ANC-driven threat to apartheid South Africa. The ANC’s strategic approach was based on urban mass action by millions of South Africans through the trade unions, the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and the thousands of individual actions and mass actions, as well as armed propaganda (O’Brien 2003: 63). And, as Anthea Jeffreys in her recently published book, People’s War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa (2009; also see O’Brien 2003), clearly demonstrates, the National Party government never really considered the ANC
and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, much of a military threat, or something that could not be dealt with by the South African Police. The military were therefore free to focus most of their effort on the counterinsurgency campaign in Namibia.

Of course, the war in SWA/Namibia and Angola served a number of (political) purposes for the apartheid government – besides the strategic necessity of fighting the war itself. It kept the military – the most powerful tool of the apartheid state – out of domestic politics and controversy. There was a (proud) so-called ‘a-political’ tradition in the South African Defence Force (SADF), meaning that politics was never discussed and that there was (supposed to be) no individual involvement in politics. The truth is that no military can be un-political (in the sense of being non-political) and, as an organisation, the SADF was a key political player in SA at the time. The SADF, for example, was the key actor in the State Security Council that was seen by many as a sort of politburo of the apartheid state. One of the most controversial deeds of the De Klerk administration in the early 1990s was the ‘back to barracks’ message that was sent out by firing a number of SADF generals suspected of dirty tricks (Carlin 1992: 13). In the end, the military permeated every dimension of South African society. The militarisation of the South African society was indeed one of the ‘success stories’ of the apartheid government. The military became a power instrument admired by friend and feared by foe. In the domestic security environment, the SADF was always deployed ‘in support’ of the police. At the same time, though, the military was indirectly the senior partner through the mobilisation of the society at large.

In addition, the war in SWA/Namibia and Angola provided the National Party government with tangible proof that it was making progress in the war against both the so-called swart and rooi gevaar (black and red danger). The extent to which these threats were creations of the National Party government itself is still an issue of intense debate. However, even the most extreme of autocratic governments need to keep their core constituency happy. The war in SWA/Namibia and Angola was a ‘clean’ war for white South African constituents. In typical heroic Afrikaner tradition, mothers could watch their sons go off to fight what they considered a ‘just war’ (SANDF Military Archives). The pre-emptive and follow-up cross-border operations in SWA/Namibia provided easy and tangible proof of the threat by highlighting dead PLAN guerrillas and captured Soviet equipment. Indeed, these tangible proofs of the threat were needed to mobilise the population or to keep them mobilised for the protracted nature of the counterinsurgency effort. Both the sense of threat and that of progress were essential elements of the SADF’s internal and external warfighting efforts.

It was strategically important for the National Party political and strategic decision-makers to maintain a buffer between itself and the swart and rooi gevaar. One of the successes of the South African government’s foreign policy was the extent to which it succeeded in keeping the Frontline States (FLS) from joining the fight in SWA/Namibia and Angola. This argument is rooted in the question about why the other FLS did not join the fight against the SADF forces in SWA/Namibia and Angola. To a considerable degree, the National Party government had economic leverage over these countries; some were struggling with their own internal challenges, while others, like Zimbabwe, were suffering from battle fatigue. From a South African perspective, the use of this economic leverage by the National Party government, however, was only part of the story (Potgieter 2007; Sanders 2006). For the South African government, it was strategically necessary to keep the fight against the SWAPO/Cuban/Russian forces in Angola from physically linking up with the internal fight by the ANC/PAC and others (Shubin 2008). The presence of the ANC and other SA freedom fighters in Angola provided ample proof to the South African government that there was a definite possibility that the fight in northern SWA/Namibia and Angola would shift to Namibia if the SADF withdrew from SWA/Namibia.
and Angola. From this perspective, the war in SWA/Namibia and Angola was buying time for the National Party government in its effort to find solutions for a long list of items on the domestic political agenda.

Another key factor in the strategic focus of the South African government and its military on SWA/Namibia and Angola was the need to be strategically effective. There was a fair chance that the military could play a key role in solving the problem in SWA/Namibia and Angola. It may be argued that the SADF was indeed strategically effective in the end in creating the battlefield stalemate in Angola and the impression in the minds of the belligerent forces (SWAPO/Angola/Cuba/Russia) that they needed to talk about a political solution because there was not going to be a battlefield solution. This argument makes the debate about who won the so-called Battle of Cuito Cuanavale almost irrelevant since South Africa succeed in doing what it set itself out to do – to get the Cuban/Russian forces out of Angola as a prerequisite for Namibian independence.

Because of the South African strategic prioritisation of the Namibian counterinsurgency, that particular campaign shaped the counterinsurgency doctrine that was eventually also employed domestically against the ANC and other so-called liberation movements. True understanding of South African counterinsurgency (and this is also reflected in the writings about that strategy and doctrine) necessitates a strong focus on South African military involvement in Namibia.

A third factor that influences the writing and the professional and scholarly debate about South African counterinsurgency is the South African conventional military support for União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) in the Angolan Civil War. South Africa, together with Zaire, CIA advisers and the forces of the Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA), intervened in the Angolan Civil War for the first time in 1975. This intervention, known in South Africa as Operation Savannah, ended when South Africa withdrew its forces in 1976. Yet, by the mid 1980s, the South African military was sucked into the泥池 of the Angolan Civil War for the second time. South African operational and US equipment support for UNITA against the combined MPLA, Cuban and Soviet forces in southeast Angola, resulted in the fiercest conventional battles on the African continent since the Second World War.

Many of the authors, defence analysts and scholars writing about the South African military involvement in SWA/Namibia and Angola failed to distinguish between the South African counterinsurgency war against SWAPO within SWA/Namibia that sometimes led to preemptive operations into Angola on the one hand, and the South African conventional military support to UNITA against the combined MPLA, Cuban and Soviet forces in southeast Angola, on the other. This oversight often directs the analysis of the counterinsurgency campaign and doctrine. It leads to an overemphasis on the military dimensions of the counterinsurgency doctrine to the detriment of the often-successful non-military dimensions of the counterinsurgency campaign in Namibia (De Visser 2010). The oversight also meant that the debate about who won the so-called Battle of Cuito Cuanavale that shaped the outcome of the Angolan Civil War became a metaphor for the success (or failure) of the South African counterinsurgency in SWA/Namibia (Labuschagne 2009). The support of the South African ANC government for the view of the so-called destruction of the apartheid forces at Cuito Cuanavale reiterates this particular view (Sithole n.d.).

Who is writing, why are they writing and what are they writing about?

Widely divergent reasons underpin the motivation of individuals from different backgrounds who write about the South African counterinsurgency effort in SWA/Namibia and South
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Africa. And since they are writing for different reasons, the quality of research and writing differs substantially. Often those who write are not interested in quality research but are only concerned about sharing their own experiences of the war, or trying to justify their role in the conflict. Others are still living with the legacy of the ideological indoctrination of the time of the war and are interested in highlighting the ‘true’ nature of the threat and the righteous nature of their actions.

Consequently, serious researchers are often confronted with at least two widely divergent views about a particular issue in the war: those who viewed Soviet and Cuban influence in southern Africa as the real threat versus those who see the total onslaught ideology of the apartheid state as a myth. In the case of the latter, the Soviet–Cuban presence in Angola and support for the liberation movements is portrayed as a reaction to South African destabilisation in the region. Any reading about the war, therefore, necessitates an in-depth search and understanding of the motivations of the different authors. This is true of the writings of both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent-oriented authors. This particular issue highlights the need for a comprehensive history of South African counterinsurgency by scholars who are preferably not linked to any of the belligerent groupings of the South African wars from the 1960s to the 1980s. More than 20 years after South Africa had withdrawn from Namibia and 15 years after the 1994 democratisation in South Africa such studies have yet to be done.

It is possible to distinguish between at least three groups of individuals who write about South African counterinsurgency in SWA/Namibia and South Africa. As is the case with most wars, the first easily identifiable group of authors are those who were in policy-making and strategic decision-making positions at the time. In most cases, they are writing to justify not only the war but also their own decisions and actions in the war. In terms of an understanding of the South African counterinsurgency campaign, the most important publications in this regard are the books by generals Magnus Malan (2006) and Jannie Geldenhuys (1993, 2009). Both served at different times during the 1970s and 1980s as Chief of the South African Army and later as Chief of the South African Defence Force. Malan ended his career as Minister of Defence (1980–91) in the cabinet of P.W. Botha. Malan never served in any operational command and, though being respected for the institutional changes he instituted as chief of the SADF, is generally seen as a political general. One source describes him as ‘a classroom general rather than a battlefield general’ and someone who then ‘turned into a propagandising politician’ (Liebenberg et al. 2008: 144). Elsewhere, Malan is described as a ‘uniformed technocrat turned seccurocrat’ (Baines 2009: 314). Geldenhuys, by contrast, is generally seen as ‘a soldier’s general’ (Liebenberg et al. 2010: 144). In a transforming society like South Africa, many of the primary documents that should have been in the archives have been destroyed. The books by these senior military decision-makers, therefore, make an important contribution as primary sources and a holistic understanding of the counterinsurgency campaign from a South African perspective.

There is no doubt that both Malan and Geldenhuys firmly believed in the idea of the total onslaught and the swart and rooi gevaar ideologies that featured so prominently as a means of mobilisation in South Africa at the time. Indeed, Malan, first as Chief of the Army and Defence Force and later as Defence Minister, was one of the main military architects of the apartheid state. Though his book is extremely lifeless reading, it is critical in understanding the South African counterinsurgency mindset and the ideological and political thinking about the South African counterinsurgency approach. It also provides valuable insights into the institutional and technological changes of the South African military in fighting the counterinsurgency war, particularly in Namibia. It could be argued that his work falls within the heroic military historiographical tradition with his efforts to glorify the South African military endeavours during the 1970s and 1980s.
The book by Geldenhuys by contrast has a somewhat sociological approach on account of the author’s efforts to speak on behalf of everyone who was part of the South African military at the time. Geldenhuys writes with honesty about his own experiences that would speak to the lieutenants and corporals who, in his view, were responsible for fighting the war. The sociological approach is clearly visible in his description of the 2007 edition of his book as a story about life and a story about people – great people who are small and small people who are great, friend and foe who have paved the way and walked the path (Geldenhuys 2007: I). Geldenhuys succeeds in providing a more insightful look of life as a general in the South African military at the time. As a general who was primarily responsible for the design and implementation of the South African counterinsurgency effort in Namibia, Geldenhuys’ book ought to be read by those who are interested in the story of the South African military.

Hilton Hamann (2001), in his book *Days of the Generals*, provides an interesting overview of the minds of the South African generals, their differences, their views of South African politicians in general and politicians like Pik Botha, Roelf Meyer and F.W. de Klerk in particular, and their general dislike of the South African police. The book is based, primarily, on interviews with the most influential South African generals. As a journalist who, as a conscript, served in the South African military and often accompanied the South African forces on operations, Hamann’s book is rooted in the idea that ‘South Africa’s new-found democracy and constitution – a constitution held up as a model – would never have been possible without the SADF’ (Hamann 2001: xi).

Ending counterinsurgencies is almost as challenging as fighting them. Chester Crocker (1992) in *High Noon in South Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood* outlines the role that the United States played in the ending of the wars in both Angola and Namibia. When read in conjunction with Vladimir Shubin’s (2008) book *The Hot ‘Cold War’: The USSR in Southern Africa* and the book by Jannie Geldenhuys (2009) it will help the reader to develop a nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved in ending these types of conflict. Shubin was deeply involved in the support from the former Soviet Union to liberation movements in Southern Africa. His book, written from a Soviet academic perspective, offers interesting insights about the wars in southern Africa in general and Angola/Namibia in particular.

A second very interesting genre in the counterinsurgency literature is the growing number of histories ‘from below’ that have been published in the last couple of years. These are publications from individuals who participated in the war at a technical, tactical and, in some cases, operational level. In many cases, the authors have served as conscripts in the South African Defence Force and they are now writing about their own experiences in the war and as members of the South African military at the time. As such, the publications do not necessarily contribute to the scholarly debate about the insurgency campaign or the South African counterinsurgency doctrine. Neither are these books necessarily well researched or well written. However, they do provide some interesting sociological insights into the life of a soldier involved in counterinsurgency in general and life in the apartheid military forces in particular. Examples of this category are numerous: Paul Els (2000), Piet Nortjé (2008), Clive Holt (2008), Steven Webb (2008), David Williams (2008), Jan Breytenbach (1990, 2002) and others.

In a number of these works, the reader is confronted with honesty about the realities of counterinsurgency warfighting and a deep respect for the efforts of the insurgents (Baines n.d.). Many of the authors were motivated to write about the dismal experiences they went through in order to deal with the post-traumatic stress syndrome with which many are still struggling. Publications like *Journey without Boundaries: The Operational Life and Experiences of a SA Special Forces Small Team Operator* (Diedericks 2007; also see O’Brien 1998, 2001) and *First in Last Out: The South African Artillery in Action 1975–1988* (Wilsworth 2010) place the emphasis on a particular component of the South African military.
Two recently published books in this genre are, in my view, comparable with the well-known publication *Chickenhawk*, Robert Mason’s (1984) account of his experiences as a UH-1 Iroquois helicopter pilot in Vietnam. *Buffalo Battalion, South Africa’s 32 Battalion: A Tale of Sacrifice* (Bothma 2008) is a book by an Afrikaans-speaking white South African conscript who served as a platoon commander in the well-known South African 32 ‘foreign legion’ Battalion. It is a translation of a book that was originally published in Afrikaans as *Die Buffel Struikel: ‘n Storie van 32 Bataljon en sy Mense* (Bothma 2006). The book, obviously, was also not written with a military or academic audience in mind. The author describes it as a book for those people who never participated or understood South African participation in the border war in far-off Namibia, such as parents, spouses and children of those who had to fight the war. It is above all a book written to show how ‘politicians can squander people in a war’ (Bothma 2008: 5).

The book places 32 Battalion, one of the most controversial and renowned South African military units, under the spotlight. The author highlights the fact that the book has been written not just about the war but from a deep-rooted respect for the enemy – the SWAPO guerrillas. The aim of the book is to provide an appreciation for 32 Battalion, ‘who we were, how we came together, what we learned from each other, and what happened in the bush; our fears and expectations, our tears and happiness, our camaraderie and loyalty’ (Bothma 2008: 5). Readers will gain insight into the struggle of individuals, generals and colonels, captains and corporals, to make sense of a war and a history that has not always turned out to be positive for these participants. The most important contribution of the book is the insights the reader develops for the unconventional nature of unconventional war. Yet, one develops some comprehension for the uneasiness of conventional bureaucratic militaries towards an environment and a problem that requires unorthodox thinking and solutions. This is the kind of challenge with which conventional bureaucratic militaries often have to deal, but for which they are often ill prepared. 32 Battalion was indeed created in an unorthodox way by unorthodox soldiers to deal with an unorthodox environment. This is a way of thinking and doing that needs to be studied in greater depth by all bureaucratic armed forces of the world, especially by large militaries that have developed a tradition of fighting small wars badly.

*19 with a Bullet* (Korff 2009) is a book by a white English-speaking conscript, who served in the hard-fighting parachute battalion during the border war. Through the experiences of the author, the reader develops a grasp for the training and preparation of specialist forces deeply involved in the warfighting dimension of the counterinsurgency campaign. From a counterinsurgency perspective, the description and use of the so-called Fireforce concept and the cross-border preemptive operations make some very interesting reading. The books by both Bothma and Korff are of Hollywood quality. They may not necessarily make a huge contribution to an understanding of counterinsurgency but they provide an in-depth conception of the forces and people involved in such a war, their experiences and, ultimately, the effect of the war on their lives.

The Fireforce concept was closely tied to the use of airpower during the counterinsurgency campaign in Namibia. Dick Lord (2009) in his book *From Fledgling to Eagle: The South African Air Force During the Border War* provides an interesting exposition of his experiences in the airpower domain from the first ‘incident’ at Ongulumbashe on 26 August 1966 to the end of the counterinsurgency campaign in Namibia with the so-called ‘April Fool’s Day War’ in 1989. Lord’s book is an important contribution to the debate about the proper use (if any) of airpower in a counterinsurgency campaign. Lord was a key role-player in the South African Air Force during the border war. He received his flight training in the Royal Navy, flying Sea Venoms and Sea Vixens from the aircraft carriers Centaur, Victorious, Hermes and Ark Royal, and Hunters from the naval air stations at Lossiemouth (Scotland) and Brawdy (Wales). He also did a two-year exchange tour with the US Navy, flying A4 Skyhawks and F4 Phantoms out of San
Diego, California (Lord 2010). The value of Lord’s contribution is the international perspectives that came to the fore in the discussion of airpower.

A final category of individuals writing about South African counterinsurgency comprises journalists, defence analysts and scholars who write from a more scholarly and analytical perspective and who are primarily responsible for the debate about the South African counterinsurgency. They write from different paradigms, and approach the South African military involvement in South and southern Africa during the 1970s and 1980s from different perspectives. In an article, and with reference to the scholarly writings about the so-called Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, Leopold Scholtz (2011) differentiates between what he calls ‘non-researchers’ and ‘serious researchers’. There is little doubt that serious researchers are those scholars who attempt to see through the cloud of propaganda that was raised during the war and who rely predominantly on research from a South African military perspective, the South African military archives and interviews with South Africans who have actually been involved in the war on the side of the counterinsurgents to provide clarity.

Some of the earlier works that were published in this regard were by journalists and defence analysts who had served in the SADF or who were very well connected with the apartheid military. Elsewhere, they are described as ‘partially embedded’ (Liebenberg et al. 2010: 136). The best known in this regard are journalist and author Willem Steenkamp (1983, 1989) and defence analyst Helmoed-Römer Heitman (1985, 1990a, 1990b; Heitman and Hannon 1991). Non-South Africans who fall into this category are probably Francis Toase (1987), Paul Moorcraft (1990) and Fred Bridgland (1990). These authors often provide an insider’s view on account of their connections with the apartheid military establishment. They had access to the operational area, the opportunity to interview commanders and eye-witnesses, and often accompanied the South African military on operations. They also had close links with the news media in South Africa and elsewhere and access to the military archives in Pretoria. Some may not have been as closely connected, but were also writing from an insider South African perspective.

In The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa, Annette Seegers (1996) provides a thorough analysis of the role of the military in the developments in South Africa. The book does not necessarily address counterinsurgency and also covers a much wider timeframe than the counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The book, although somewhat unsystematic, is relatively well researched and provides an in-depth analysis of the South African military from the creation of the Union in 1910 to democratisation in 1994. It should be read in conjunction with Chris Alden’s (1996) book Apartheid’s Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State. Alden presents a detailed analysis of the operationalisation of apartheid through André Beaufre’s ideas of a total strategy and total onslaught and John J. McCuen’s ideas on a counterrevolutionary strategy. Of particular importance is Alden’s analysis of the so-called National Security Management System that formed an integral part, if not the most important pillar, of the domestic counterrevolutionary campaign of the South African government.

More recently, academics from across the ideological and political spectrum in South Africa have shown renewed interest in the border war, though not necessarily the South African counterinsurgency approach. Recently published articles in journals such as Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies and the Journal of Contemporary History confirm this trend (editions 2006 [31 (3)] and 2009 [34 (1)] in particular). The articles in these journals are generally well researched and cover a wide variety of perspectives on South African counterinsurgency. The article by Leopold Scholtz (2006) in Scientia Militaria titled ‘The Namibian Border War: An Appraisal of the South African Strategy’, for example, is a good overview of the counterinsurgency campaign in Namibia. In addition, graduate students are also increasingly examining the
South African counterinsurgency effort or dimensions thereof in their studies (Van der Merwe 1985; Veldhuizen 1994; Labuschagne 2009; De Visser 2010). One such study by a senior SADF operational commander on the so-called Cassinga Raid led to a heated debate amongst former SADF commanders about the nature of the raid and their roles in the operation (Alexander 2003; Baines 2007).

Conclusion

Within South Africa, all official interest in counterinsurgency came to an end with democratisation and the 1994 rise to power of the African National Congress. The idea that South Africa may face a low-intensity threat in future did not feature in the ideological framework of the ANC in the period after it came to power. Ten years after the 1994 political transition the ANC government has found itself faced with the appearance of international terrorism and an increase in transnational organised crime; in addition it has also been hampered by escalating service delivery problems and a return of domestic civil unrest. The government and security services in particular have thus realised that such an effective counterinsurgency and counter-terrorist capacity is an indispensable part of contemporary Third World security governance – and after 9/11 even in the developed First World. The South African military, unfortunately, lost most of its counterinsurgency institutional knowledge, specialised skills and doctrine during the 1990s. No deliberate effort was made within the South African security sector to learn from both the insurgents and the counterinsurgents through an institutional process that could have culminated in a very refined insurgency/counterinsurgency doctrine (depending on who the South Africans may have to fight) (Gossman 2008; Baker and Jordaan 2010). As a result, there is at present renewed interest from the security sector in both insurgency and counterinsurgency.

One of the most outstanding features of South African counterinsurgency is the absolute lack of comprehensive studies in the vein of Jakkie Cilliers’ (1982, 1984) study about the Rhodesian counterinsurgency campaign. Due to political changes in the country and driven by a need for political correctness in the scholarly community, no official studies were conducted in the aftermath of the insurgency and counterinsurgency campaigns of the 1960s to the late 1980s. Those interested in South African insurgency or counterinsurgency search in vain for a book containing a comprehensive treatment of the topic. It is really only possible at present to develop an understanding of South African counterinsurgency by reading a host of articles and books that are dealing with the topic as part of a broader discussion of either the South African military at the time or of the war in general. Thus, South African counterinsurgency is, in essence, a target-rich environment for scholars interested in serious primary research on insurgency/counterinsurgency.

Notes

1 The irony was that some of the most senior SADF members did enter politics, albeit after resignation from the military. The most obvious example in this regard is Gen. M.A. de Malan who resigned as chief of the SADF in order to take up the position of Minister of Defence. In this way, the SADF was catapulted into the heart of apartheid governmental decision-making, i.e. militarising the political discourse about the military and politicising the military organisationally.

2 In one of the after-action reports on Operation Protea in 1981, two sections were set aside for a discussion of ‘oorwinning ‘n tradisie’ (winning a tradition) and the ‘profiel van ‘n wenner’ (profile of a winner). This discussion draws on the South African participation in the First and Second World Wars to underline the justness and success in Operation Protea as ‘die voortsetting van ‘n trotse militêre tradi-
3 There is no doubt that the threat of communism was real and that South Africa was part of a broader Soviet strategy to expand its control over the mineral riches of southern Africa and its influence in Africa. That explains to some extent the policy of constructive engagement by the United States and the positive stance of some European governments towards apartheid South Africa – France and the UK in particular. The book by Vladimir Shubin provides an interesting exposition of the involvement of the former Soviet Union in southern Africa.

4 In a discussion on the South African military archives during the 2008 XXXIII International Congress of the Society of Military History in Cape Town it came to the fore that certain documents have been removed from the military archives in the period just before the 1948 takeover in 1948 and the transition to democracy in 1994.

**Recommended readings**


**References**


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