

Budget on Debate Vote 23 and 26: Defence and Military Veterans

Speech by Kobus Marais MP

DA Shadow Minister of Defence and Military Veterans

Chairperson, this is our last budget for the 6th parliament, and I want to express my appreciation to our defence committees, chairpersons and staff for excellent work and support.

Our defence force should be an instrument bolstering our foreign relation, and protecting our international trade & investment interests.

This budget unfortunately decrease to an unsustainable 0,73% of GDP or R51,124bn from R51,601bn. Given the defence index of 12-15%, in real terms the budget does not allow the defence force to comply with its constitutional mandate.

While the 2015 Defence Review and National Treasury require a spending framework of 40% on COE, 20% on training and operations, and 20% on equipment procurement and maintenance, 70% will be spend on COE and only 30% on the rest.

With the abuse of the defence force to make up for failing departments, e.g. SAPS, most of the 30% is absorbed by unfunded ad hoc deployments. Little is left for maintenance and replacement of our prime mission equipment.

The **complete** service ability of some of our most crucial prime mission equipment, which mirrors the dire state of our Defence Force, include:-

- 2 of 11 Rooivalk attack helicopters; - 6 of 39 Oryx transport helicopters;
- 0 of 4 Lynx maritime helicopters; - 1 of 6 C130 cargo aircraft;
- 2 of 26 Gripens; - 3 of 11 Hawks;
- 2 of 35 Pilatus; - 0 of 4 Frigates;
- 0 of 3 submarines;
- 0 aircraft for maritime patrol, reconnaissance, search and rescue

Our prime mission equipment have not been maintained, and we have not invested in high tech digital, cyber and satellite technological capabilities. Ops Phakisa cannot be supported and we will unlikely be able to conduct search and rescue operations in the southern seas.

With the responsibility to patrol and protect our borders of 4471 km land, 7770 km air, 3942 km coastline, and our EEZ of 1.553m sqkm, it will be impossible to defend our country against attacks.

We cannot provide logistical support to our soldiers in the DRC and Mozambique with 1 x C130, with the consequence we have to charter aircraft @ R100m's per year (enough to buy C130's).

We have witnessed at 6 SAI that our airborne infantry units cannot prepare our soldiers for deployments due to the unavailability of Oryx and C130's. Our landward forces find themselves in the same predicament with Ops Corona under resourced and our borders remaining porous.

We urgently need the **Political and Management** will to bring about changes otherwise a complete collapse is imminent.

I do believe, based on current and future threats, but provided the required restructuring of the defence force and reprioritizing of its strategic focus and spending, (1) that we are R20bn underfunded, and (2) we must aim towards a 1% of GDP budget over the medium term.

Let's deal with the elephant in the room, the irrational Russian love affair.

Over the last 30 years government exploited the US & EU as our most important trade and investment partners, with significant trade and investment SURPLUSES, compared to trade and investment DEFICITS with China and especially Russia.

Four incidents that emphasize government's Russian favoritism are:-

- 1) Munition imports and exports happens via official Portnet ports of entry. Authorization was granted to the Lady-R, a Russian commercial vessel, to bypass commercial ports and abuse our naval base instead. Unrestricted access were seemingly allowed for offloading and reloading cargo during the midnight hours of 6 - 8 December with little or no control and security on the naval precinct. This was a major national security breach.
 - Who authorized this, and why?
 - Were the 2019 and 2020 import permits' for the Russian ammunition still valid?

- Something was loaded onto the Lady-R. Was it ammunition? If not, release the vessel's cargo manifest to confirm this?

Minister you and the President should know the facts and what transpired.

- If everything was above board, why not be transparent and go on record?
- The longer you stay mum the more the damage to our international image, investments & trade interests most notably AGOA, and our economic prosperity.

(2) Ex Mosi, with little value to us, provided a PROPAGANDA opportunity to the Russians, as exploited by their news agency TASS.

(3) A Russian commercial cargo aircraft was allowed to use AFB Waterkloof for supposedly diplomatic purposes, a privilege not available to other nations. Why? Where is the cargo manifest?

(4) At a time when NT criticizes defence for spending R1,5bn on travel, Chief Army was allowed to gallivant in MOSCOW. Again, TASS exploited it for PROPAGANDA purposes.

Why this favoritism and preferential treatment, especially in the light of Russia's aggressions on Ukraine's soil? Why risk our economic future, trade, investments and jobs??

Is it favors and sovereign sacrifices in return for donations to the ANC, reportedly from the Russian government and oligarchs? If so, is it treasonous against South Africa? There must be consequences.