

# A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY CHAPLAINCY AND COLD WAR IDEOLOGIES DURING THE BORDER WAR, 1966-1989

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## *Abstract*

*For most of the latter half of the twentieth century, Cold War ideologies dominated foreign relations and domestic state policies and, as such, it also touched the lives of ordinary men and women. Decolonisation and the Soviet offensive of anti-imperialism brought Asia and Africa into the realm of Cold War politics. The Border War (also known as the Namibian War of Independence or the Bush War, 1966-1989) in Southern Africa gave evidence of Soviet anti-imperialist propaganda. It was counteracted by justifications of western containment policies. In the South African context it elicited strong sociopolitical sentiments. With regard to the Border War it included accusations that military chaplains supported the state policy of apartheid and a call was put forth to demilitarise chaplaincy within the South African Defence Force (SADF). Ethical issues based on ideology are always multidimensional and open to different interpretations. This article gives an historical perspective on the timeframe and on the complexities of perspectives from the viewpoint of military chaplains.*

**Keywords:** Cold War; South African Chaplain Service (SACHS); Border War (Namibian War of Independence, Bush War); communism; ideology.

**Slutelwoorde:** Koue oorlog; Suid-Afrikaanse Kapelaansdiens (SAKD), Grensoorlog (Namibiese Vryheidsoorlog, Bosoorlog); kommunisme; ideologie.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The First World War (1914-1918) affirmed the character of modern warfare as exhaustive, and the Cold War was no exception. Jeremy Isaacs and Taylor Downing refer to the profound effect which the Cold War had on almost every nation in the world and on innumerable ordinary citizens who lived through those years.<sup>3</sup> The primary cause of the Cold War lay in the opposing principles and ideologies of the sociopolitical and economic systems of the western and the communist world. In

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3 J Isaacs and T Downing, *Cold War* (London: Abacus, 2010), p. ix.

Southern Africa, Cold War ideology resounded in the Border War of 1966 to 1989, also known as the Namibian War of Independence or the Bush War. It combined with the sociopolitical situation in South Africa and the civil war in Angola<sup>4</sup> to create a situation in which military chaplains who served during the war were accused of bringing church ministry in discredit and of supporting the sociopolitical system of apartheid.

This article gives an historical perspective on the accusations as a cosmic representation of the influence of Cold War ideologies on the sociopolitical scenario in South Africa. The intensity of global Cold War sentiments resulted in hardened attitudes, where people were easily labelled and where little room was left for moderation and accommodation. This article is written from the perspective of chaplains of the South African Chaplain Service (SACHS). It demonstrates the multidimensional nature of valuations and ethical decisions based on ideology and how these influence the lives of ordinary citizens. A broad literature study was carried out and, as contemporary history, oral testimonies<sup>5</sup> of chaplains who

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4 Since 1961 the Portuguese in Angola had been fighting an insurgency war against three revolutionary freedom movements, which also fought each other in a bid for national sovereignty. A full-scale civil war erupted in 1975 when Portugal declared its intention to grant independence to its colonies. Each movement had certain tribal connections which determined its support base. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, MPLA) under the leadership of Agostinho Neto, wanted to establish a Marxist state and they received Soviet and Cuban military aid and assistance. Both the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (*Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*, FNLA) under Holden Roberto in the north and the southbased National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (*União Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola*, UNITA) under Jonas Savimbi, a proclaimed anticommunist, received support from the United States of America. In this way, the Angolan civil war became part of the Cold War. Although the MPLA took office by the end of 1975, conflict continued until February 2002 when Savimbi was killed. See WC McWilliams and H Piotrowski, *The world since 1945: a history of international relations* (7<sup>th</sup> edition, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), p. 280; R Ferreira and I Liebenberg, "The impact of war on Angola and South Africa: two southern African case studies", *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 45-46.

5 Oral history is the systematic collection, arrangement, preservation and publication of recorded verbatim personal accounts, opinions and reminiscences of people who were witnesses to or participants in events. See MM Oelofse, *Remembering the truth: an oral history perspective on the victim hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 1996-1998* (PhD, University of the Free State, 2007), p. 6. The respondents were:

Maj. Gen. (Rev.) RP Jordaan. He became a Permanent Force chaplain in the South African Air Force (SAAF) in 1972. He later served as Command Chaplain, first for the (then) province of Natal and later for the Northern Transvaal. He was appointed Director Chaplaincy in 1982, and Director Ministry in 1986. He served as Chaplain General from 1990 until his retirement in 1994. Interviews: Pretoria, 3 June 2008, 17 November 2008.

Maj. Gen. (Rev.) JHJ de Witt. He was appointed as a Permanent Force chaplain at Upington in 1983. In 1986 he moved to Pretoria as the Senior Staff Officer (SSO) Personnel. Since 1988 he served as Director Logistics and Finance. In 1991 he was appointed Director Personnel, Logistics

had ministered during the Border War were incorporated. Although oral history is filtered through differences in human nature, the socialising processes following historical events and changes in viewpoints, memory and timeframe, it contributes to a more humane aspect in the understanding of history and illustrates the diversity of historical experiences.<sup>6</sup>

The debate on best practise ministry options, i.e. whether and how chaplains should function within the context of military forces, is not at stake here. The legitimacy of a chaplaincy system or the right of the military to this form of

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and Finance and from 1993 he served as Director Ministry. In 1994 he became Chaplain General until his retirement in 1998. Interviews: Pretoria, 30 September 2010, 23 May 2011.

Brig. (Rev.) NC Ackermann. He served as a Permanent Force chaplain from 1975 to 1981 and enlisted again in 1984. He served at the Chaplain Headquarters as Senior Staff Officer Manpower from 1988 to 1993. He then moved to the South African Army headquarters as Director Chaplain Service (Army) from 1993 to 1996. Interview: Pretoria, 23 May 2011.

Prof. (Rev.) WS Boshoff. He enlisted for conscription in 1985. He was sent to 101 Battalion in Ondangwa, where he remained for the rest of his conscription duty. He was involved with the reburial of the Ebo 4 in 2012. Interview and e-mail: Pretoria, 16 July 2008.

Col (Rev.) DA Smit. He ministered as a Permanent Force chaplain from 1982 until his retirement in 1999. He served at 1 SA Infantry Battalion and later at Headquarters, OFS Command, Bloemfontein before being transferred to Headquarters, Natal Command, Durban. Telephonic interview and e-mail: 17 July 2008.

Dr (Rev.) G van der Watt. He reported for conscription in 1981. He served at Okahandja, a multi-ethnic training base of the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF). After six months he took up an appointment as Permanent Force chaplain in Bethlehem. During border duty he visited bases in the Caprivi Strip and at Ondangwa. Interview: Bloemfontein, 15 May 2008.

Capt. (SAN) (Rev.) R Thornley. He completed his conscription in 1963 and served as an instructor in the South African Navy for 14 years. He resigned in order to qualify as a minister of the Methodist Church. He was appointed as a Permanent Force chaplain at the Military Academy in Saldanha Bay in 1984. At his own request, he was transferred to SAS *Saldanha* in 1985, with ministering obligations at the Military Academy (Saldanha) and at the Air Force Base Langebaan. In 1992 he moved to Simon's Town, where he retired in 2003. Interview and e-mail: Simon's Town, 12 March 2008, 13 June 2008.

Col (Rev.) DM Williams. He completed his nine months' conscription at Oudtshoorn in 1965, before becoming a Methodist minister. In 1979 he became a Permanent Force chaplain in the SAAF. His first operational service period was carried out in Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe). During the following 11 years he did border duty on a regular basis, and also accompanied the Special Forces (Recces) during operations. Telephonic interview: 11 August 2008.

Col (Rev.) F Celliers. He completed his conscription at 3 SA Infantry Battalion, Potchefstroom in 1974 and participated in the first cross-border operation into Angola. From 1979 he served as a Methodist part-time chaplain, and in 1982 he was appointed as a Permanent Force chaplain at Voortrekkerhoogte (today Thaba Tswane), Pretoria. In 1984 he became a chaplain to the South African Medical Corps (SAMC) at 1 Military Hospital, Pretoria, and in 1989 he was transferred to the Department of Correctional Services. Telephonic interview: 31 July 2008.

Lt (Rev.) A Meiring. He enlisted for conscription in 1986. He served for four months on the border before being transferred to Potchefstroom. After completing his national service, he also completed approximately ten military camps. Interview: Bloemfontein, 6 May 2008.

6 Oelofse, chapter 1.

spiritual care was never questioned. Before 1994 South Africa considered itself a Christian country and the SADF maintained a military chaplaincy within the historical context of the official authorisation of chaplains for armies by the Council of Ratisbon in 742.<sup>7</sup>

The scope of this study does not provide for a detailed analysis of either the Border War or the Cold War, or for an account of the prior historical developments and incidents which shaped the sociopolitical reality of South Africa during the twentieth century. However, to fully understand the different viewpoints on the controversy surrounding military chaplains during the Border War, a broad outline is provided of Cold War ideologies in the South African context and how the Border War became entangled with these.

## 2. BACKGROUND: COLD WAR IDEOLOGIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The opposing principles and ideologies of the western and the communist world became embodied in the two superpowers of the post-world war era, namely the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The ideological divide became prominent during the final phases of the Second World War and by the early 1950s the American secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, declared Soviet domination the greatest threat the world had ever faced.<sup>8</sup> Wayne McWilliams and Harry Piotrowski state that it became almost impossible to change the image of an expansionist USSR once the concept had gripped western imagination.<sup>9</sup> For decades, Soviet containment formed part of western domestic and foreign policies.<sup>10</sup> This sociopolitical dispensation compelled most states to choose sides, either on the basis of their ideological association or due to the realities of demand and supply. Before 1994 the South African government adopted a pro-western stance. Dulles's rhetoric regarding a communist threat and the incommensurable delineation between freedom and tyranny, democracy and totalitarianism, misery and development found its way into the media and the speeches of South African leaders.<sup>11</sup>

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7 See JF Potgieter, *Die militêre kapelaan: die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die amp, taak en organisasie van militêre kapelane in die geskiedenis van die Christelike kerk, met besondere verwysing na Suid-Afrika* (DDiv, University of Pretoria, 1971), pp. 68-69.

8 WR Keylor, *The twentieth century world: an international history* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 263, 296.

9 McWilliams and Piotrowski, p. 47.

10 In retrospect, contemporary writers agree that these strategies were often based on apparent rather than actual politics, but during the timeframe the threat was perceived as real. See, for instance, McWilliams and Piotrowski, p. 47.

11 See, amongst others, "Stryd teen RSA net so fel soos in verlede", *Paratus Supplement* 27(11), November 1976, p. iv; *Beeld*, 22 March 1980, p. 4.

Peter Hennessy from the University of London is of the opinion that future generations will only be able to interpret contemporary history if they understand just how threatening the Cold War was.<sup>12</sup> The strong emotions, contempt and mistrust on both sides and the commitment each side had to its cause compel writers like McWilliams and Piotrowski to doubt historical objectivity in studies on the Cold War.<sup>13</sup> William Keylor comments on the emotional intensity of the timeframe when he expresses the opinion that Dulles's Manichean concept of good and evil, and his Messianic devotion to free world notions, resulted in a situation where each side regarded the other as so intrinsically evil that no form of accommodation was possible.<sup>14</sup> This was mirrored in the reports of the American diplomat, George F Kennan, when he wrote in the late 1940s that these two systems could not even exist together in the same world.<sup>15</sup>

Cold War ideologies were transferred to Asia and Africa with the demise of colonialism in the late 1950s. This created an opportunity for the USSR to revive its policy of anti-imperialism and to become the champion of Third World aspirations at the expense of the western colonial powers. In Asia, communism was used as a liberation tool and it was easily transplanted to Africa a decade later when anti-imperialism became the keystone between African nationalism and Soviet interests.<sup>16</sup> The absence of communist political parties in Africa forced the USSR to infiltrate nationalist organisations. Both the western and the communist world manifested support for African nationalism through alliances, cooperation and aid, linking these to the preference of a specific political and economic order.<sup>17</sup> Southern Africa was no exception.

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12 Isaacs and Downing, pp. xv-xx.

13 McWilliams and Piotrowski, p. 7.

14 Keylor, p. 296.

15 Isaacs and Downing, p. 10.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 149; Keylor, pp. 308-309; McWilliams and Piotrowski, p. 120. Unlike its European counterpart, African nationalism is not a uniform movement which revolves around a specific country or culture. It is a multifaceted phenomenon, which took visible shape during the 1960s in decolonisation and Pan-Africanism. African nationalism is embedded in the international Black Consciousness movements. It embraces concepts such as Marcus Garvey's "black is beautiful" and Dr M Delaney's "Africa for the Africans". In the international arena it claims the right to self-determination in line with the African Personality and the recognition of black human rights. It displays supranationalism to the African continent with strong, even militant, anticolonial and antiwestern sentiments. Due to the latter, African nationalism easily associated with the Soviet ideology of anti-imperialism and communism. See HJ van Aswegen, *Geskiedenis van Afrika: van die vroegste oorsprong tot onafhanklikheid* (Pretoria: Academica, 1982), pp. 523-527.

17 Z Brzezinski (ed.), *Africa and the Communist world* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), pp. 3, 24; P du T Botha, *Die Sowjet-Unie in Afrika besuide die Sahara, 1919-1981* (Pretoria: Afrika-Instituut van Suid-Afrika, 1983), pp. 13-14. Not all writers agree that Soviet assistance to Third World countries was due to superpower rivalry. Vladimir Shubin states that terms like "Cold War" and "proxy states" were not included in the Soviet political vocabulary of the time, and that Soviet economic, military and technical assistance stemmed from a unified struggle of

Historical events in one timeframe can be consequential to another. Soviet interest in South Africa stemmed from the early 1920s and in 1927 a relationship was forged between the USSR and the South African liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC), when Josiah T Gumede, the President of the ANC, and JT LaGuma of the Communist Party of South Africa (later renamed the South African Communist Party, SACP) toured the USSR as the unofficial guests of the Soviet government.<sup>18</sup> In 1928 the SACP announced that an African national democratic revolution would be the first stage of the South African socialist revolution. The SACP was banned in 1950, but, during its reconstitution, African nationalism moved to the centre of the design for a South African socialist revolution. Apartheid was redefined as a special type of colonisation and the almost 1 500 African members of the SACP were redirected to participate in ANC programmes.<sup>19</sup> The scope of this study does not allow for a detailed exposition of the bonds between the Soviet Union, the SACP and the ANC, but DR Kempton ascribes his choice of the ANC as one of three case studies on Soviet strategies regarding African national liberation movements to the unusual high level of Soviet involvement with the movement,<sup>20</sup> while Vladimir Shubin estimates that Soviet military equipment allocated to the ANC by 1982 enabled its military wing, the Spear of the Nation (*uMkhonto weSizwe*, MK)<sup>21</sup>, to maintain large-scale military action in South Africa over a protracted period of time.<sup>22</sup>

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the socialist community, the liberation movements and the working class - with the USSR first and foremost - against imperialism. However, David Morison points out that the USSR refused to recognise the demise of imperialism in Pakistan, Burma (today Myanmar) and Libya for years, because these countries were perceived to be western orientated. See V Shubin, *The hot "Cold War": the USSR in southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 2-3; D Morison, *The U.S.S.R. and Africa 1945-1963* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 2.

- 18 Shubin, p. 239; DR Kempton, *Soviet strategy toward southern Africa: the national liberation movement connection* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), pp. 154-155.
- 19 TRH Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: a modern history* (5<sup>th</sup> edition, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), p. 316; DT McKinley, *The ANC and the liberation struggle: a critical political biography* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), p. 33; Kempton, pp. 158-159.
- 20 Kempton, p. 8.
- 21 MK was an underground movement which launched its armed struggle on 16 December 1961. As a co-founder, the SACP had an important influence on MK. Nelson Mandela and Joe Slovo were appointed to jointly lead the organisation, and Stephen Ellis states that, since Mandela was also a member of the SACP's Central Committee, the joint leadership simply served to disguise the important role of the SACP in MK. See Kempton, p. 164; Davenport & Saunders, p. 420; S Ellis, *External mission: the ANC in exile* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2012), p. 27.
- 22 Shubin, pp. 240, 242, 249-250. Before 1963 funds allocated to the SACP from the International Trade Union Fund were also used to support the ANC, but from 1963 the ANC received regular direct Soviet financial assistance with the granting of US\$ 300 000 to the movement. Between 1963 and 1990 the ANC was supported by the USSR with military supplies to the value of 36 million roubles. It included several thousand AK-47s, 3 362 Simonov self-loading carbines, 6 000 pistols, 275 grenade launchers, 90 Grad-P missile launchers, over 40 Strela anti-aircraft missile

Although each African country reflected its own dynamics during anti-imperialist conflicts, these conflicts converged through similar support lines, training facilities, civil disobedience programmes and revolutionary warfare based on Mao Zedong's teachings.<sup>23</sup> The historian and journalist, Leopold Scholtz, remarks that revolutionary warfare almost always signified violent, radical societal change in which Marxism served as the ideological motivation.<sup>24</sup> This placed politics and state systems central to these conflicts and, against the background of the historic bonds between the USSR and the ANC, it resulted in an official South African viewpoint that all expressions of African nationalism should be seen in the light of a communist offensive to take control of the region.<sup>25</sup> South Africa did not escape the emotional intensity of the ideological differences of the Cold War. It was mirrored in reports, speeches and sermons on the "Red Menace" and the "total onslaught" of communism against the South African western and Christian heritage. In 1985, A de Jager reported that the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce Conference at Modderfontein was informed that terrorist acts, like the car bomb explosion of May 1983, should be seen in the context of a long-term campaign by the ANC and the SACP alliance to overthrow the state violently. Many South Africans became convinced that capitulation would mean a Stalinist regime.<sup>26</sup>

When the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO)'s<sup>27</sup> military wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), commenced its armed

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launchers, 20 Malyutka anti-tank rocket launchers and over 60 mortars. Apart from equipment, ANC cadres received training in the USSR, many studied at Soviet universities and between the late 1970s and 1991 more than 200 Soviet advisers, specialists and interpreters and their families were sent to Africa in support.

- 23 See PH Katjavivi, *A history of resistance in Namibia* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1990), pp. 47, 84.
- 24 L Scholtz, "n Strategiese en operasionele beoordeling van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag (SAW) se oorgrens-operasies in Angola, 1978-1988", *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), February 2009, pp. 58-59.
- 25 Botha, *passim*. In retrospect, many African countries did not implement the ideological content of communism. Communism was used as an instrument to attain support, aid and political power, but in the sociopolitical climate of the Cold War this was not always clear and comprehended. See McWilliams and Piotrowski, p. 275; Kempton, p. 24.
- 26 *The Star*, 19 April 1985, p. 6. Also see H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: biography of a people* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), pp. 499, 588; F v Z Slabbert, *The system and the struggle: reform, revolt and reaction in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1989), pp. 110-111.
- 27 SWAPO was formed in 1958 in Cape Town by a group of expatriate Ovambos from South West Africa (SWA, today Namibia) as the Ovambo People's Congress (OPC). The founder leader, Andimba (Herman) Toivo Ja Toivo, was deported by the end of 1958 due to political activism. Before his departure, a decision was taken to restructure OPC into a national organisation which could realise the objectives of African nationalism in SWA/Namibia. On 19 April 1959 the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) was established in Windhoek. To overcome its strong Ovambo image, OPO changed its name to SWAPO in June 1960 and launched initiatives to secure members from other ethnic groups. See Katjavivi, pp. 41-42, 45.

struggle in South West Africa (SWA, today Namibia)<sup>28</sup> in 1966, the convergence and solidarity among African nationalists and their links with the communist world served to define the SWA/Namibian situation for many in South Africa in the Cold War ideology of Soviet expansionism. The founder leader of SWAPO, Herman Toivo Ja Toivo, had close ties with the ANC and the SACP, and when the organisation embarked on a campaign of civil disobedience in 1960, they utilised the support lines of the Soviet and the Cuban world.<sup>29</sup> The demarcation between African nationalism and communism was further blurred by the rhetoric of a radical African nationalist element, which, after years of Soviet propaganda on western exploitation, regarded all Europeans (whites) in Africa as settlers with one goal only: to enrich themselves by exploiting and displacing African resources and African (black) people. Typical of this rhetoric were the statements made during SWAPO meetings and which were referred to in SWA/Namibian newspapers during July and August 1973. Amongst others, SWAPO declared all white people, even those outside Africa, enemies and warned them that they should pray for protection as the worst was still to come under a black government. White South Africans assessed this type of rhetoric in the light of antiwestern manifestations of African nationalism and atrocities against whites in countries like the Belgian Congo (later Zaire, and today the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC). Soviet threats of intervention during the first days of the Congo crisis served to enhance perceptions of a communist takeover and eminent chaos.<sup>30</sup>

As the major white population section in South Africa, the Afrikaners<sup>31</sup> regarded themselves as the defenders of the western values of democracy and the free market. They were often defined in conservative terms. In November 1982 the Principal Chaplain of the Church of the Province of England (Anglican Church), Cpln (Rev.) JM Daines, described Afrikaans-speaking chaplains as “Biblical fundamentalist Calvinists”.<sup>32</sup> The strong religious bearing of most

28 The combined term SWA/Namibia will be used in the article, since SWAPO and the United Nations (UN) referred to the territory as Namibia, while, for many years, South Africa referred to it as South West Africa (SWA).

29 R Craig Nation and MV Kauppi (eds), *The Soviet impact in Africa* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1984), pp. 22, 45.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 105; Morison, pp. 37-38; N Barnard, *Die staatkundige ontwikkeling in Suidwes-Afrika vanaf die Wêreldhofuitspraak in 1966 tot die aankondiging van die Turnhalle-beraad* (MA, University of the Orange Free State, 1979), pp. 96-97; HJ du Bruyn, *Vrees as faktor in die regse blanke politiek in Suid-Afrika sedert 1948: 'n historiese ontleding* (MA, University of the Free State, 1994), pp. 83-85, 123-124.

31 In this article, the term “Afrikaners” is used for descendants from Dutch and other European stock who settled at the Cape during the seventeenth century and who, over time, developed a unique South African culture and identity. For more information on the history of the Afrikaners, see Giliomee, *passim*.

32 *The Sowetan*, 25 November 1982, p. 8. Also see *Rapport*, 20 July 1980, p. 16.



Afrikaners<sup>33</sup> made them susceptible to Dulles's interpretation of communism as an evil, godless system, and, for many, the Cold War intensified from a conflict between two contending political and economic orders to a clash between Christianity and atheism. Military chaplains from English denominations referred to the "crusade mentality" of Afrikaans chaplains with regard to the Border War and Soviet containment, and Rev. S Luckett, Director of the Anglican Board of Social Responsibility, Cape Town, accused them of regarding the war as a religious calling.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. THE BORDER WAR AND THE COLD WAR

The first clash between insurgents of PLAN and the South African Police (SAP) took place at Ongulumbashe<sup>35</sup> in the north of SWA/Namibia on 26 August 1966. The confrontation stood in the hallmark of anti-imperialism and African nationalism<sup>36</sup> and, as early as August 1961, SWAPO had contacted the USSR with regard to training. In 1963 it requested material aid in the form of food, clothes, arms and ammunition.<sup>37</sup>

The roots of the confrontation went back to 17 December 1920 when SWA/Namibia, a former German colony, was placed under South African administration

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33 Although this may not have been a personal conviction for many, the Christian religion formed an important aspect of Afrikaner culture before 1994. Christian beliefs were written into the South African constitution of the time and the three main Afrikaans reformed churches were often accused of supporting state politics. They are the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Nederduitse Hervormde Church and the Gereformeerde (Reformed) Church, collectively known as the Afrikaans Reformed Churches (ARC). They are based on Calvinist doctrines and are regarded as sibling churches due to the minor differences in ministry. The ARC played an important role in upliftment projects amongst Afrikaners after the Anglo-Boer War, and religious ministers, such as Dr DF Malan, later Prime Minister of South Africa, ascribed a special mission to these churches. In addition to a ministry task, they had to teach the Afrikaners to determine God's hand in their history and in their calling as a nation. This resulted in a situation which compelled Dr WA Visser t'Hoof, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), to remark during the early 1950s that church, nationhood, language and politics were so interconnected among the Afrikaners that it was extremely difficult to arrive at a clear distinction. See Giliomee, pp. 327-328; B Clarke, *Anglicans against apartheid 1936-1996* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008), pp. 116-117.

34 *The Sowetan*, 25 November 1982, p. 8. Also see McWilliams and Piotrowski, p. 91.

35 PLAN's clash with the SAP on 26 August 1966 resulted in two PLAN deaths and nine insurgents being taken prisoners. Initially, SWAPO denounced any knowledge of the prisoners, but on 29 August they admitted the clash in a broadcast from Dar-es-Salaam, claiming (incorrectly) that 15 whites were killed. Henceforth, SWAPO honoured 26 August 1966 as the commencement date of the freedom fight for SWA/Namibia. For more information see PJ Els, *Ongulumbashe: where the Bushwar began* (Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers, 2007), *passim*.

36 Also see L Scholtz, *Die SAW in die Grensoorlog 1966-1989* (Kapaastad: Tafelberg, 2013), p. 5.

37 Shubin, p. 196.

as a Class C-mandate.<sup>38</sup> The disestablishment of the League of Nations on 18 April 1946 necessitated a revision of the mandate system. Countries were requested to transfer their mandates voluntarily to a Trusteeship Council under the auspices of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN).<sup>39</sup> In reviewing the role of the Trusteeship Council in Africa, K Smith and FJ Nöthling observe that South Africa's refusal to place SWA/Namibia under UN trusteeship could not be defaulted from a strictly legal point of view, but that the strong anti-imperialist sentiments in the UN overruled the judicial aspects.<sup>40</sup> The USSR used the opportunity provided by UN debates to voice its championship of anti-imperialism on behalf of the third world countries.<sup>41</sup> South Africa's administration of SWA/Namibia became an international bone of contention and on 27 October 1966 South Africa's mandate of SWA/Namibia was repealed and a council was appointed in 1967 to administer the region. South Africa regarded these steps as illegal and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Helgard Muller, declared in the General Assembly that the South African government would do all in its power to defend those who were entrusted to its protection.<sup>42</sup> Unyielding attitudes developed on both sides.

On 18 July 1966 the International Court of Justice in The Hague dismissed allegations by Ethiopia and Liberia on a breach of South Africa's mandatory obligations. Peter Katjavivi states that the verdict came as a complete surprise, as a ruling against South Africa was expected.<sup>43</sup> SWAPO interpreted the ruling as a betrayal of African nationalism, leaving them no choice but to take up arms. Members were trained in various African countries, the USSR and, since 1965, also in China and North Korea. These trainees reassembled in Tanzania where the planning of the military operations was finalised. By planting landmines, sabotaging

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38 Article 22(6) of the Covenant of the League of Nations described Class C-mandates as undeveloped regions and recommended that these regions should be administered as an integral part of the mandatory, and that the latter's laws should also be applicable to the mandated region. For decades, this resulted in SWA/Namibia being regarded as a "fifth province" of South Africa. Barnard, pp. 68-69; JN Hamman, *'n Beslissingsanalitiese perspektief op die onafhanklikwording van SWA/Namibië* (MA, University of the Free State, 1994), pp. 91-97.

39 Barnard, p. 72.

40 K Smith and FJ Nöthling, *North of the Limpopo: Africa since 1800* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1993), pp. 380-382.

41 Morison, p. 34. It can be argued that the prevailing sentiment was that countries had the right to decide their own political future. In the case of SWA/Namibia this argument was defeated when the General Assembly rejected a memorandum on a plebiscite in 1946 on the grounds that the local inhabitants were not politically developed and sophisticated enough to decide their political future. The majority of the local population in SWA/Namibia voted for incorporation into South Africa. The voting results constituted 208 850 in favour of incorporation, 33 520 (mostly Herero) against incorporation and 56 790 abstaining from voting. Whites did not participate in the plebiscite. See Hamman, pp. 101-105.

42 Barnard, p. 117.

43 Katjavivi, p. 57.

infrastructure and intimidating those in the local population who were seen as traitors, SWAPO aimed to destabilise the South African administration of SWA/Namibia, forcing the involvement of the UN and the granting of independence to the territory.<sup>44</sup>

The Border War did not adhere to the classical standards of warfare. The initial stages carried the hallmark of anti-imperialism and African nationalism, but during the late 1970s the conflict intensified into a proxy arena of the Cold War, resulting in the involvement of the USA, the USSR and Cuba in the peace settlement of 1989.<sup>45</sup> In essence, the war consisted of revolutionary warfare and counterinsurgency operations and, except for an occasional urban bomb blast and SWAPO raids on white-owned farms in the midlands, it was limited to the northern border region of SWA/Namibia and to Southern Angola.<sup>46</sup> With Angola still a Portuguese colony,<sup>47</sup> SWAPO was initially forced to infiltrate SWA/Namibia from Zambia and they received little support from the local population in the region. The SAP handled the insurgencies, but lack of manpower resulted in a transferral of this obligation to the SADF on 1 April 1974. All the arms of the SADF, including the SACHS, were deployed to the border. Military bases were erected in the operational area at Grootfontein, Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Mpacha and Ondangwa. Spiritual ministry in the camps was conducted by Permanent Force and Citizen Force chaplains, rotating for periods of three months. Local clergy also ministered to the military and from 1977 National Service (conscription) chaplains also carried out border duty.<sup>48</sup>

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- 44 Shubin, p. 196; Katjavivi, pp. 59-60, 84-85, 87. During November and December 1966, SWAPO raided the property of pro-South African Ovambo chiefs. These attacks intensified, and during the late 1970s SWAPO murdered more than 20 ministers, clan captains and clan chiefs, including Chief Minister Filemon Elifas, Minister Toivo Shiyagaya, Minister David Shikongo, the Herero leader Clemens Kapuuo, and Deputy Captain Hausiki Enkaile. Captain Willipard Enkale's son was abducted and taken to Angola. See Katjavivi, p. 60; Hamman, p. 120; J Geldenhuys (comp.), *Ons was daar: wenners van die oorlog om suider-Afrika* (Brandfort: Kraal-uitgewers, 2011), p. 63.
- 45 See A Esterhuysen, "The strategic contours of the South African military involvement in Namibia and Angola during the 1970/1980s", *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), February 2009, pp. 19-21.
- 46 W Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War 1966-1989* (Gibraltar: Ashanti Publishing (Pty) Ltd., 1989), p. 15; Geldenhuys (comp.), pp. 63, 75-80; Scholtz, *Die SAW*, p. 5.
- 47 After the Second World War, South Africa and Portugal collaborated in Africa with regard to state security and economic matters, e.g. when Kenya, the Sudan and Egypt detracted landing rights for the South African Airways (SAA) in 1961, the airport at Luanda was put at the disposal of the SAA. See CFJ Muller (ed.), *Veftienderd jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* (3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition, Pretoria: Academica, 1984), p. 568.
- 48 W Steenkamp, "The citizen soldier in the Border War", *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 9-10; SG van Niekerk, *The history, role and influence of the South African military chaplaincy: 1914-2002* (DTh, University of South Africa, 2002), pp. 263, 314.

Although ministry in the SACHS was usually done in a denominational context with a policy of no proselytism, logistics in the operational area required intercommunal ministry, and it was an unwritten rule that no reference should be made to specific denominational practices. Most denominations in South Africa were represented in the SACHS, with the DRC chaplains as the most numerous. The principle was that each member of the SADF had the right to participate in religious practices according to the beliefs and customs of his/her denomination. Chaplains had to be ordained ministers and each denomination signed a separate agreement with the SADF which determined the role and position of their chaplains. The appointment of chaplains depended on the number of enlistments in each denomination and, if the numbers of a denomination did not justify the appointment of a Permanent Force chaplain, use was made of local clergy as parttime chaplains. In 1982, there were 120 Permanent Force and 241 parttime chaplains. Chaplains were required to be medically fit, to have security clearance, and preferably to be under the age of 40.<sup>49</sup>

On 25 April 1974 the situation at the border became inauspicious for South Africa. This was due to the Portuguese *coup*, the subsequent decolonisation of the Portuguese colonies and increased communist involvement in the Angolan civil war. Not only was SWAPO, as comrades of the Marxist Angolan freedom movement, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, MPLA), in a position to execute their insurgencies directly across the border from Southern Angola,<sup>50</sup> but communist activities in Angola escalated. These included Soviet transportation of Cuban troops, tanks, armoured personnel carriers and small arms to Angola, communist party building, internal security measures in line with communist practice, and Marxist-Leninist indoctrination. Between 1976 and 1980 Soviet military aid to the value of US\$ 620 million dollars flowed to Angola, as well as a further US\$ 260 million from Cuba. The USSR also fostered Angolan training camps for SWAPO, MK and Rhodesian (Zimbabwean) guerrilla fighters. As a result, the USSR moved outside the limits of a Eurasian power and Soviet strategic interests were advanced in a region where communist influence was previously limited.<sup>51</sup>

Not only South Africa,<sup>52</sup> but also the USA perceived this to be a threat. The latter clandestinely turned to South Africa, as direct intervention in the wake of the

49 See Potgieter, pp. 321-322; L Brits, "The Chaplain-General", *Militaria* 12(2), Commemorative issue 1982, p. 77; JA van Zyl, "Die Kapelaansdiens in die SA Weermag", *Paratus* 25(2), February 1974, p. 3.

50 Katjavivi, p. 84.

51 Craig Nation and Kauppi (eds), pp. 106, 108; Keylor, pp. 444-445, 447.

52 Except for the threat of a Marxist state on its doorstep and the escalation of internal unrest with the return of trained MK cadres, South Africa also had an economic interest in the preference for an anticommunist government in Angola. An agreement was signed with Portugal for a hydro-

Vietnam War was impossible, and in 1975, Operation Savannah involved South Africa in the Angolan civil war as the ally of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*, UNITA).<sup>53</sup> When this controversial matter was raised in the USA's Senate, the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, declared Angola a lost case. Realising that American promises would not be fulfilled, South Africa withdrew from Angola in March 1976, but in the eyes of the UN, South Africa had turned into an imperialist power.<sup>54</sup>

South Africa's withdrawal restored SWAPO's strategic advantage in Southern Angola and resulted in an intensification of communist activity and military operations. By the mid-1980s Angola received one billion dollars worth of Soviet military equipment per year. Large numbers of Soviet advisors were sent to Luanda and in 1988 Cuba had approximately 58 000 troops stationed in Angola. The International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Soviet Foreign Ministry established special sections for Southern Africa, while the Propaganda Department of the Committee for State Security (KGB) extended its South African section, making it the largest section in the Department.<sup>55</sup>

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electrical plant in the Kunene River (partly on Angolan soil) to further industry development and irrigation in Ovamboland. In 1975 the plant was under construction with large investment sums from South Africa. When the civil war in Angola threatened the Ruacana scheme, a South African platoon was sent to defend it and South Africa offered advice and arms to the FNLA and UNITA; a matter on which the South African cabinet was highly divided. See Muller (ed.), p. 578; Steenkamp, "The citizen soldier", p. 11.

53 See Scholtz, *Die SAW*, pp. 13-34; Scholtz, "'n Strategiese en operasionele beoordeling", pp. 60-62.

54 Isaacs and Downing, pp. 346-348; Ferreira and Liebenberg, p. 46.

55 P Vanneman, *Soviet strategy in southern Africa: Gorbachev's pragmatic approach* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), p. ix. L Finch observes that propaganda constituted an integral part of all twentieth century military clashes, manipulating public opinion and determining sociopolitical trends. With regard to the Border War, both CJ Jacobs and J Geldenhuys state that the South African government never understood the importance of propaganda in the war effort. An example is the concern expressed by the American reporter, Jim Hooper, on the international misconceptions regarding the anti-insurgency unit, Koevoet. As the main platform for the condemnation of the South African administration of SWA/Namibia, SWAPO members addressed the UN and accused South Africa of imperialistic prospects with regard to neighbouring countries such as Botswana and of a reign of terror in SWA/Namibia, burning down villages and murdering men, women and children randomly on a scale of extermination. These were devoid of truth, but succeeded in turning the South African image into one of a racist, imperialist power. During interviews, Brig. (Rev.) NC Ackermann noted that the context of the timeframe was negative towards the SADF and this was reflected in news reports. See L Finch, "Psychological propaganda: the war of ideas during the first half of the twentieth century", *Armed Forces & Society* 26(3), Spring 2009, pp. 378-379, 383; CJ Jacobs, "The forward defence strategy of the South African Defence Force (SADF), 1978-1989", *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, p. 39; J Geldenhuys, *Dié wat wen: 'n generaal se storie uit 'n era van oorlog en vrede* (Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1993), p. 107; J Hooper, *Koevoet!* (Wokingham, Berkshire: GG

Over time, the war became more conventional. South Africa launched a number of pre-emptive operations into Angola to damage SWAPO's combat capabilities.<sup>56</sup> Chaplains were assigned to these formal, semiconventional, crossborder operations. They used to stay at medical posts, but from 1977 their slogan changed to "as informal as possible, and as far forward as possible", putting them in the same dangers as the troops.<sup>57</sup> The late Maj. Gen. (Rev.) RP Jordaan, Chaplain General from 1990 to 1994, emphasised that the policy of the SACHS was that the chaplain should be where the troops were and that no man in need of pastoral care should be neglected.<sup>58</sup>

On 1 August 1980 SWA/Namibia took partial responsibility for its own defence with the establishment of the South West Africa Territory Force (SWATF).<sup>59</sup> By 1984 SWATF handled about 70 per cent of the conflict. Although the heavy reliance on South African soldiers eased off,<sup>60</sup> the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 turned African nationalism to SWA/Namibia and South Africa as the last western imperialist enclaves on the continent. Military, economic and diplomatic support was provided to the South African liberation movements. Riots in black townships escalated and the SADF was called on to support the SAP in riot control.<sup>61</sup> The utilisation of the SADF in South African black townships linked the internal sociopolitical situation and the policy of apartheid with the Border War. During the 1980s the SADF was increasingly described in negative terms and in the multiracial South African English denominations<sup>62</sup> military chaplaincy became the

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Books, 2012), p. 247; Barnard, p. 116; Interview: I Bredenkamp – NC Ackermann, Pretoria, 23 May 2011.

56 Scholtz, *Die SAW*, p. 251 *et seq.*; Steenkamp, "The citizen soldier", p. 15.

57 Van Niekerk, pp. 279-280, 304.

58 Interviews: I Bredenkamp – RP Jordaan, Pretoria, 3 June 2008, 17 November 2008.

59 During May 1980 the South African government announced that it was handing over many territorial administrative functions, including control over the local members of the security forces, to SWA/Namibia. SWATF comprised of a few local infantry battalions and some support elements. Since early 1981, SWATF began conscripting both black and white inhabitants from SWA/Namibia. They were trained at the Rooikop facilities in the Walvis Bay Military Area. SWATF consisted eventually of approximately 30 000 of all ranks, structured into three main components: the Reaction Force, the Area Force, and an assortment of specialist and support units. In some respects, the structure of SWATF closely resembled that of its "parent", the SADF, and in others it differed considerably. The two organisations worked in close cooperation, with the SADF providing specialist services. See Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War*, p. 94; Steenkamp, "The citizen soldier", pp. 18-19; Van Niekerk, pp. 257, 287.

60 Steenkamp, "The citizen soldier", p. 16; Van Niekerk, p. 282.

61 T Cameron (ed.), *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* (2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1991), p. 300.

62 C Villa-Vicencio regards the term "English-speaking churches" in the South African context a misnomer. It refers to churches which originated in Britain with English as language, but the majority of the South African members constituted black people with an African tongue as mother language. In 1980 the term included the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican

scapegoat of state policy. No differentiation was made between the internal South African situation and the operational area of SWA/Namibia, and this resulted in a distorted viewpoint on military chaplaincy.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4. ACCUSATIONS AGAINST MILITARY CHAPLAINS

Traditionally, the South African English denominations had little influence on the socio-political scenario in South Africa. They regarded themselves as part of the English theological world, while cooperation with the Afrikaans Reformed Churches (ARC) was hampered by the latter's nationalistic tendencies. It was only after the 1968 Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the establishment of a special fund to support liberation movements that English denominations participated in debate on the liberation from apartheid.<sup>64</sup> When Bishop Desmond Tutu took office as the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in 1978, a new phase in church protest began. The period of Bishop Tutu's tenure of office coincided with the Zimbabwean independence in 1980, the escalation in black unrest and an intensification in international criticism of apartheid. During the 1978 SACC National Conference at Hammanskraal, near Pretoria, resolutions were passed to disobey state laws and to support those who did so. The following year the Anglican Church became the first South African church to openly endorse the civil disobedience campaign. In 1980, at a conference of the WCC Programme to Combat Racism in Amsterdam, Oliver Tambo, leader of the ANC Revolutionary Council, called on the church to give more than financial assistance and to take up arms against apartheid.<sup>65</sup>

The utilisation of the SADF in riot control at the home front resulted in accusations that it was a government tool, used for black oppression and for the bolstering of white supremacy. It also impacted on the Border War and the SADF was increasingly referred to as a hostile army of occupation in SWA/Namibia. Military chaplains were charged with sanctioning apartheid through their association with the SADF, thus impairing the integrity of church ministry. A call was put forth for the demilitarisation of chaplaincy in the SWA/Namibian

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Church), the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (Methodist Church), the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (Presbyterian Church) and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (United Congregational Church). The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) supported these churches, while the Baptist Union of South Africa did not participate in the demand for demilitarisation. See C Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in apartheid: a socio-theological history of the English-speaking churches* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. 16-17.

63 Also see Scholtz, *Die SAW*, p. 5. Chaplains, like Cpln (Rev.) A Meiring, state that they had no reservations serving as chaplains during the Border War, but that they had reservations serving as chaplains during riot control at the home front.

64 Villa-Vicencio, pp. 14, 109.

65 Clarke, pp. 343, 350, 367-368; *Die Volksblad*, 21 October 1980, p. 7.

operational area. It implied a pool of civilian ministers, selected to serve on a rotational basis in the operational area for limited periods, appointed and remunerated by their respective churches and not wearing any insignia that could link them to the SADF.<sup>66</sup>

In 1984 the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the United Congregational Church, the Methodist Church and the Anglican Church formed an Inter-Church Committee on the Chaplaincy to the Military (ICCCM). The committee submitted a memorandum on the demilitarisation of chaplaincy to the Minister of Defence, Gen. MA de M Malan, who referred the matter to the Chaplain General, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) CP Naudé, Chaplain General from 1984 to 1989. The ICCCM also raised the question of ministry to the guerrilla fighters.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout the 1980s chaplains were under constant attack for wearing the SADF uniform, their basic training in the use of weapons, their remuneration by the SADF, the fact that they should have security clearance and their subjection to the Military Discipline Code. It was believed that these aspects forced them to further state policies. Clerical and synod meetings were characterised by heated debates in which different viewpoints on military chaplaincy came up hard against each other between conservatives and the leftwing and across racial lines. During interviews, English chaplains confirmed that they were targeted by activists. Cplns (Revs) DM Williams and F Celliers state that some got very personal and insulting, while others did all in their power to defend them. Cpln (Rev.) R Thornley recalls that they were “crucified” during synod meetings.<sup>68</sup> The controversial viewpoints regarding the Border War and Cold War ideology is clearly illustrated in the debates of, amongst others, the 1979 Southwestern Transvaal District Synod of the Methodist Church. Revs W Mbete of Orlando and D Katane of Soweto objected to an Army chaplain wearing his military uniform on the grounds, that black feelings were not considered and that chaplains were defending discriminatory laws and apartheid. In response, a layman, LH Faulds, noted that the Border War was waged against Marxism and communism and not for apartheid.<sup>69</sup>

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66 Davenport and Saunders, p. 529; *Evening Post*, 31 January 1983, p. 2; *Sunday Tribune*, 17 July 1983, p. 20; 26 March 1978, p. 18; *The Natal Mercury*, 16 May 1984, p. 20; *The Star*, 27 June 1978, p. 6.

67 Van Niekerk, pp. 197-198, 201.

68 Telephonic interview: I Bredenkamp – DM Williams, 11 August 2008; Telephonic interview: I Bredenkamp – F Celliers, 31 July 2008; Interview: A Wessels – R Thornley, 12 March 2008, Simon’s Town; E-mail: R Thornley – I Bredenkamp, 13 June 2008.

69 *The Star*, 27 June 1979, p. 3. Also see I Bredenkamp and A Wessels, “Die Suid-Afrikaanse Kapelaansdiens en die beginsel van ‘n regverdige oorlog: die Namibiese Vryheidsoorlog, 1966-1989”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 35(1), June 2010, pp. 52-58; I Bredenkamp and A Wessels, “Die Suid-Afrikaanse Kapelaansdiens (SAKD) en staatsbeleid tydens die Grensoorlog, 1966-1989”, *Acta Theologica* 31(1), June 2011, pp. 9-14.



The controversy on the Border War and military chaplaincy also featured prominently in Bishop Tutu's 1983 annual review. He wrote that the Anglican Church was torn along racial lines on the question of the war, conscription, conscientious objection and military chaplaincy with most whites supporting the war effort, conscription and the need for military chaplains, while most blacks supported the quest of African nationalism and wanted ministry to the freedom fighters as "their boys" on the other side.<sup>70</sup> The 1985 Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church in Pietermaritzburg was dominated by attacks on the SADF, and Tim Clarke reported that disunity and deep rifts were visible at all church levels.<sup>71</sup> Several important motions were passed, including one declaring the SADF an unwanted oppressive occupying force in SWA/Namibia and another which gave general support to the End Conscription Campaign (ECC).<sup>72</sup> A third, which would effectively have suspended all Anglican ministry in the operational area, was overturned at the last minute. The implication of leaving many Anglicans without spiritual care in war circumstances resulted in bitter confrontations.<sup>73</sup>

Over time, the divide on Cold War ideology intensified and, in the English denominations, the call for demilitarisation became stronger. When Methodist chaplains objected to leaving conscripts without spiritual ministry in the operational area, it was stated that the conscripts should then choose the ECC way and go to jail.<sup>74</sup> The Presbyterian Church rejected a proposal to demilitarise chaplains, but they asked for a full investigation into the matter.<sup>75</sup> The RCC suggested that chaplains should only serve in a parttime capacity and priests, such as Father Basil van Rensburg of District Six, Cape Town, drew public attention to the matter by

70 Clarke, p. 360; *The Daily News*, 27 October 1980, p. 18.

71 *The Citizen*, 13 July 1985, p. 5.

72 *The Cape Times*, 11 July 1985, p. 4. Provision was made in the SADF for religious pacifists to be exempted from military service, but not for people with moral or political objections. The ECC was founded in 1983 as a passive resistance movement against conscription. It was a non-clerical organisation, but sought support from the different denominations. In the same year a Board for Religious Objection was established to review applications for military exemption, with Judge MT Steyn as Chief Adjudicator. The Board consisted of three theologians, an Army chaplain and a SADF officer. If the objector's religion was not represented, a minister could be coopted. The Anglican Church withdrew its representation in 1985. Those, whose applications for exemption of military service failed, faced prison sentences on refusal to do military service. By September 1989 there were 771 conscientious objectors. See "Agtergrond: ECC sry teen diensplig", *In Hoc Signo* 12(2), June 1986, pp. 6-7; J Daines, "The work of the Board for Religious Objection", *In Hoc Signo* 11(3), September 1986, p. 10; *Business Day*, 27 September 1989, p. 2.

73 *The Cape Times*, 9 July 1985, p. 2 and 11 July 1985, p. 4; *The Star*, 12 July 1985, p. 10; *The Natal Mercury*, 13 July 1985, p. 15.

74 Telephonic interview: I Bredenkamp – DM Williams, 11 August 2008; Telephonic interview: I Bredenkamp – F Celliers, 31 July 2008; Interview: A Wessels – R Thornley, Simon's Town, 12 March 2008; E-mail: R Thornley – I Bredenkamp, 13 June 2008.

75 *The Star*, 27 September 1985, p. 18.

fasting.<sup>76</sup> Except for full support to the ECC, most English denominations decided to minister to the liberation forces fighting against the SADF, but in practice, this never materialised.<sup>77</sup> In SWA/Namibia, churches, like the Evangelical Lutheran Church, declined to minister to the military.<sup>78</sup> In January 1983 the RCC Archbishop of Windhoek, Rev. Bonifatius Haushiku, declared SWAPO a liberating army and the SADF a hostile army of occupation.<sup>79</sup>

In 1989, during a meeting of *Reforum* (a Dutch Reformed Church discourse organisation) in Pretoria, Prof. D Bosch, Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), accused chaplains of betraying their ministry, while Mr N Jackson of the ECC declared that the war prevented a constitutional solution in South Africa because it was waged against the ANC – a misconception which clearly illustrates the entanglement between the Border War and the local South African situation in arguments on the war.<sup>80</sup> In 1990 two exconscript chaplains, Marius Maree and Lourens Erasmus, aligned themselves with the arguments of the English denominations. They referred to the dual role of chaplains as both clergy and soldiers as the “schizophrenia” of chaplains, hampering impartial ministry and creating circumstances unfavourable for peace and reconciliation.<sup>81</sup>

In the English denominations the controversy surrounding military chaplaincy led to much uncertainty among English chaplains as to their position and ministry. It became difficult to fill vacancies in English denominations.<sup>82</sup> Cpln (Rev.) Thornley admits that the critique of fellow clergy sometimes made him wanted to quit chaplaincy.<sup>83</sup>

## 5. VIEWPOINTS OF THE SACHS AND MILITARY CHAPLAINS

The official viewpoint of the South African Chaplain Service (SACHS) that chaplaincy formed an integral part of military structures and that soldiers had an inalienable right to spiritual ministry,<sup>84</sup> was defended by members of the Chaplain General’s office and by successive Chaplain Generals in interviews, press polemics, debates and statements on the matter. During the late 1980s, the Director Chaplain Services, Cpln (Rev.) CF Matthee, reminded supporters of demilitarisation that

76 *The Cape Times*, 11 October 1985, p. 7; *The Star*, 15 October 1985, p. 15.

77 *The Cape Times*, 25 November 1982, p. 5; *The Sunday Star*, 11 December 1988, p. 2.

78 Van Niekerk, p. 289.

79 *Evening Post*, 31 January 1983, p. 2.

80 *Beeld*, 16 August 1989, p. 6; I van der Linde, “Teologie: die weermag, die kerk en lensiesop”, *Insig*, October 1989, pp. 49-50.

81 *Rapport*, 24 June 1990, p. 3.

82 Van Niekerk, p. 331.

83 Interview: A Wessels – R Thornley, Simon’s Town, 12 March 2008; E-mail: R Thornley – I Bredenkamp, 13 June 2008.

84 See Potgieter, pp. 67-69.

the status, integrity and ministry of chaplains were determined by the various denominations, since they actively participated in the appointment of chaplains.<sup>85</sup> During an interview in 1983, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Naudé stated that the chaplain's primary responsibility was to bring the Gospel to the troops entrusted to him, and that the nature of his task was not cultural or political.<sup>86</sup> This viewpoint was also expressed by Maj. Gen. (Rev.) JA van Zyl, Chaplain General from 1970 to 1983, in a letter to the newspaper, *Beeld*<sup>87</sup> and strongly emphasised during interviews by Maj. Gen. (Rev.) JHJ de Witt, Chaplain General from 1994 to 1998, and Brig. (Rev.) NC Ackermann, Director Chaplain (Army) from 1993 to 1996.<sup>88</sup>

On receiving the ICCM memorandum in 1984, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Naudé, entered into direct negotiations with the committee. He also met with individual denominations and church leaders and invited them to visit the operational area.<sup>89</sup> Respondents remark that these visitors, despite their antiwar and antichaplaincy standing, expressed appreciation for the spiritual work done in the SWA/Namibian operational area. Since 1974, local inhabitants and people who fled Angola also served in the SADF and this gave rise to ethnic battalions, such as the San 201 Battalion (later known as 31 Battalion or Alpha Group), the Angolan 32 Battalion and the East Caprivian 701 Battalion (formerly 33 Battalion). Ministry to these battalions' men and their families had to overcome obstacles of language and distance. Several projects were initiated, such as Project Samuel and Project Rome which distributed Bibles and spiritual literature among the local population. Braille Bibles in the Kwanyama language, sponsored by the local military staff, were also supplied to children of the Eluwa School who had been disabled during landmine explosions set by SWAPO. Bibles were eventually distributed in 14 languages throughout SWA/Namibia, while organisations like World Vision participated in relief work in refugee camps in Southern Angola where men, women and children who fled the civil war, arrived with almost nothing. They were provided with food, clothing and Bibles, and services were held with the aid of interpreters. These endeavours resulted in SWA/Namibia being one of the most evangelised areas in Southern Africa between 1970 and 1990.<sup>90</sup>

85 CF Mathee, "Predikante en kapelane", *Die Kerkbode* 142(9), 2 September 1988, p. 13; CF Mathee, "Kapelane is volkome 'kerkgebonde'", *Die Kerkbode* 143(4), 3 February 1989, p. 11.

86 "Ons eie generaal: ds CP Naudé: Kapelaan-generaal (SAW)", *Arcadia-kerknuus* 31(6), June 1983, p. 8.

87 *Beeld*, 29 August 1997, p. 8.

88 Interviews: I Bredenkamp – JHJ de Witt, Pretoria, 30 September 2010, 23 May 2011; Interview: I Bredenkamp – NC Ackermann, Pretoria, 23 May 2011.

89 Van Niekerk, pp. 197-198, 201.

90 See A Wessels and I Bredenkamp, "Military chaplaincy in the South African Defence Force during the Namibian War of Independence, 1966-1989", *Journal for Contemporary History* 34(1), February 2009, pp. 327-329.

Many chaplaincy meetings took place during this time and the statements issued, emphasised that the church had an obligation to provide pastoral care to all its members, irrespective of the circumstances. Parttime ministry was not considered to be effective.<sup>91</sup> In March 1978, a meeting of English-speaking Permanent Force chaplains unanimously declared that they were aware of the ethical requirements of their ministry and that they did not want civilian status as this would inhibit their freedom of movement.<sup>92</sup> In 1983 RCC military chaplains met in Johannesburg. They addressed an open letter to all South African and SWA/Namibian RCC members stating that, in obedience to Christ's command, they saw it their priestly duty to minister to Catholics in whatever situation they find themselves. They denied that wearing uniforms in accordance with the Geneva Convention gave formal approval or disapproval to any given ideology.<sup>93</sup> By far the most important declaration was issued on 21 November 1985. Representing 33 denominations, a conference of chaplains unanimously stated that they served God first and foremost and that they were obedient to Him only. They rejected all forms of discrimination and racism and stated that they had a calling to serve the soldiers of the SADF. They denied that their presence promoted conflict and war and pointed out that neither side, whether serving the *status quo* or the revolution, could claim to have God's exclusive anointment.<sup>94</sup> During the late 1980s, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Naudé placed an open invitation in the press, enticing proof of those critical of military chaplaincy that chaplains were not free to minister according to the doctrines of their denominations, emphasising that the SACHS, as the official channel for spiritual ministry in the SADF, did not sanction any war.<sup>95</sup>

Interviews over the whole spectrum of military chaplaincy revealed that the respondents interpreted the Border War as a defensive war in line with the western policies of communist containment. In 1983, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) Naudé referred to the situation in Angola, where he served as the only Afrikaans chaplain for seven months, and stated his conviction that the Border War was waged against communism, an anti-religion and anti-Christian ideology with no tolerance for religious freedom.<sup>96</sup> Even chaplains who were outspokenly critical of the state policy of apartheid, such as Dr (Rev.) G van der Watt, confirm that chaplains were sincere when they interpreted the Border War as a defensive war to prevent a communist takeover of SWA/Namibia. Dr (Rev.) Van der Watt refers to the fact that Russians, Cubans and East Germans were at the border, that Cold War spheres

91 *The Natal Mercury*, 16 May 1984, p. 20.

92 *Sunday Tribune*, 26 March 1978, p. 18.

93 *The Daily News*, 8 October 1983, p. 2.

94 *The Star*, 25 November 1985, p. 19; "From the Chaplain General: declaration at chaplains' conference on 21 Nov 1985", *In Hoc Signo* 12(1), January 1986, pp. 1-3.

95 *Beeld*, 18 August 1989, p. 5.

96 "Ons eie generaal", pp. 4, 8.

of influence in Africa were at stake and that the Berlin Wall only came down at a later stage.<sup>97</sup> Prof. (Rev.) WS Boshoff voiced the viewpoint of most when he stated that the Border War was a clash between opposing ideologies which could not be separated from communist infiltration of the historic process of decolonisation, or from South Africa's responsibility towards the people of SWA/Namibia with regard to SWAPO attacks on civilians.<sup>98</sup>

Traditionally, English denominations held a more liberal philosophy of life than Afrikaans denominations. Despite the fact that English chaplains did not support the crusade mentality of the Afrikaans chaplains with regard to the Border War, they also regarded it as a defensive war against a communist threat. Cpln (Rev.) DA Smit of the Methodist Church details their viewpoint. "Whether or not one agreed with all the government policies at the time, the fact remained that we dared not throw open our borders to all and sundry, to come as they please and cause untold havoc. I could justify the Border War on this basis."<sup>99</sup>

On the question of crossborder operations, Maj. Gen. (Rev.) RP Jordaan pointed out that, in line with the Calvinist interpretation of Romans 13 and as a Christian country, South Africa had the right to defend itself against communism. He refuted accusations that chaplains promoted apartheid, stating that they took precedence in democracy by ministering to the multi-ethnic troops at the border; an aspect which many of the respondents regard as beneficial to the establishment of a democratic South Africa in 1994.<sup>100</sup> Cpln (Dr) EA van Niekerk, Hospital Chaplain at the military base, Voortrekkerhoogte (today Thaba Tswane), also referred to Romans 13 when he stated that the SADF was an institution by God for the defence of South Africa's Christian faith and cultural heritage. As gifts from God, these should be treasured and not cast away for communism to trample on.<sup>101</sup>

Chaplains also received support from various other quarters. In 1985 Rev. TV Mentz, Archdeacon of Pretoria, declared that he was absolutely astounded that the

97 Interview: I Bredenkamp – G van der Watt, Bloemfontein, 15 May 2008.

98 E-mail: WS Boshoff – I Bredenkamp, 16 July 2008. In December 2009 the American president, Barack Obama, referred in his speech at the Nobel Prize Giving Ceremony in Oslo, Norway, to the controversial issue of a just war. When is terrorism an abhorrent act, targeting defenceless civilians/when is it a fight for freedom and a righteous cause? Should a legitimate government react in defence of its subjects/should it abdicate in favour of the terrorists? Jim Hooper, for instance, condemns the rhetoric of justifications in this regard by SWAPO as statements on behalf of a naïve western audience. See B Obama, "Sperro News: text of president Obama's Nobel Speech", 2009, <<http://www.sperroforum.com/a/24029/Text-of-Presidents-Obamas-Nobel-Prize-speech>>, retrieved 4 January 2010; Hooper, p. 10.

99 E-mail: DA Smit – I Bredenkamp, 15 May 2008.

100 Interviews: I Bredenkamp – RP Jordaan, Pretoria, 3 June 2008, 17 November 2008. According to Calvinist dogma based on Romans 13, God is a God of peace, but due to the broken reality of sin, the state is instituted with the sword as an instrument against crime, insecurity and anarchy.

101 EA van Niekerk, "Kapelandsiens handhaaf gesonde balans", *Die Kerkbode* 139(14), 15 April 1987, p. 12.

Anglican Synod had been so obsessed with political issues that it had forgotten the right of every Anglican to be served according to his/her spiritual needs.<sup>102</sup> Several editorial comments also defended military chaplaincy. *The Star* regarded uniformed padres a global phenomenon and uniforms a practical necessity for freedom of movement.<sup>103</sup> This was also emphasised by a spokesperson for the Chaplain General's office when he commented on the logistics of demilitarisation. Clergy, untrained in military operations, might be a danger to themselves and to others and, since there is no guarantee that civilian clergy will not become a target, the SADF could not provide escorts for them when it needed all its manpower for military operations.<sup>104</sup> *The Cape Times* warned that the church had as much a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of conscripts as it had for stands on matters of principle, especially since conscription was compulsory, while *The Natal Mercury* warned that the controversy furthered racial polarisation and the sharpening of a "them" and "us" attitude. It cautioned that those "obsessed with subjective righteousness, whose ideas of what is just are overcoloured by political considerations rather than Christian compassion" should consider the consequences if the church itself set foot on the road to confrontation, thereby eliminating all its opportunities to play a role in restraint and peacemaking.<sup>105</sup>

Back in the operational area a stalemate situation had developed by 1988. Diplomatic negotiations and the signing of the Ruacana Accord on 22 August 1988 resulted in the ending of hostilities and the implementation of UN Resolution 435. SWATF officially demobilised on 1 April 1989 and on 21 March 1990 Namibia became independent.<sup>106</sup>

## 6. CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES

As the motivational force compelling ordinary people to support warfare, ideology is inherent to all military conflicts. Leopold Scholtz refers to it as a lens on reality, but instead of better insight, it distorts and serves as rigid and unyielding factors in mediation processes.<sup>107</sup>

Cpln (Rev.) DA Smit points out that our human political stance sanctifies our ideological perceptions.<sup>108</sup> This was illustrated in the conflicting viewpoints

102 *The Citizen*, 13 July 1985, p. 5.

103 *The Star*, 16 May 1984, p. 10.

104 *The Cape Times*, 22 February 1978, p. 9.

105 *Ibid.*, 12 July 1985, p. 8; *The Natal Mercury*, 10 July 1985, p. 10.

106 GJJ Oosthuysen, "Regiment Moorivier, Potchefstroom: grensdienservarings van 'n Pantserburgermageenheid, 1975-1989", *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, p. 214; Van Niekerk, pp. 311, 313.

107 *Beeld*, 14 September 2009, p. 8.

108 E-mail: DA Smit – I Bredenkamp, 15 May 2008.

on military chaplains. The defenders of demilitarisation rooted their arguments in the ideals of African nationalism and anti-imperialism. This, however, was not so much based on SWAPO's liberation struggle in SWA/Namibia, but it was fully rooted in the human rights issue of apartheid and the struggle in South Africa, as was illustrated in the incorrect remark by Mr Jackson at *Reforum* that the Border War was waged against the ANC. On the other end of the spectrum were those who defined the links between African nationalism and the communist world and the presence of Soviets, Cubans and East Germans in Angola as a communist offensive to encroach on Southern Africa, which should be stopped before it reached the borders of South Africa, without taking into consideration the aspirations of African nationalism. The strong sentiments and the emotional rhetoric of the international sociopolitical timeframe left no room for accommodation or negotiation, and Cold War ideology cemented the Border War protagonists' perceptions of each other as intrinsically evil.<sup>109</sup>

The experiences of chaplains who participated in the Border War, set against the background of the call for demilitarisation, illustrate the complexities of the sociopolitical timeframe and the diverse outlooks on life that were trapped within the Border War. Although chaplains regard the Border War as a defensive strategy against communist expansion, there were different levels of interpretation, ranging from the Afrikaner crusade mentality to the more liberal viewpoints of the English chaplains. None, however, identified with the accusation of furthering apartheid, or experienced a betrayal of principles during ministry. On the SWA/Namibian border chaplains brought pastoral care and shared trying and dangerous circumstances with the troops. All the respondents voiced the rewarding experience of contributing spiritually to the welfare of ordinary people in the unusual circumstances of war, trauma and stress. Cpln (Rev.) F Celliers states that it sticks with you when a soldier, shaking with fear, can be calmed down. "I don't regret those days whatsoever.[...] I do not want it over, but the opportunities were precious."<sup>110</sup>

Cpln (Rev.) Smit sums up the conviction of the respondents: "I was aware of the political sentiments of the day [...] However, when I proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ [...] I did not allow their political sentiments to prevent me from functioning fully as a chaplain. [...] With political agendas on both sides of the political divide at the time, I simply needed to minister to the conscripts caught in the middle."<sup>111</sup>

The southern tip of Africa did not escape the effects of Cold War ideologies and the intensity of emotions associated with it. It took 23 years of conflict to temper the radical elements on both sides of the ideological divide and to drive

109 Hamman, p. 125.

110 Telephonic interview: I Bredenkamp – F Celliers, 31 July 2008.

111 E-mail: DA Smit – I Bredenkamp, 15 May 2008.

home the message of a more collaborative attitude. Prof. (Rev.) Willem Boshoff highlights the controversy of ideological convictions when he recounted an incident during which a SWAPO prisoner, on arrival in the SADF camp, recognised someone from his home town and they conversed like old friends, inquiring about family and acquaintances. At a later stage, during a private conversation with the prisoner, Prof. (Rev.) Boshoff realised how similar he was to the South African troops. He admits that this confounded the ideological boundaries he had set for himself.<sup>112</sup> It also illustrates the polarisation of ideological viewpoints and the way in which it influences the lives of ordinary citizens. Today, most of the respondents are more cynical about justifications based on ideology. They regard soldiers as the pawns in political ideology and state that, under the circumstances, it was a privilege to minister to those who bravely served their country.

The changing world of détente and the demise of communism brought peace to SWA/Namibia. Most of the respondents evaluate the Border War as an instrument that also drove home the message of peace in the larger Southern African context. It not only prevented a communist take-over of the region, but it kept civil war in South Africa at bay. In a sense, the ethnically integrated troops of the operational area became a cosmic prelude to the new democratic South Africa of 1994. Both the South African government and African nationalists realised that war is not the answer to the historic problems of relations in the region. The negotiations that followed, served as the forerunner to a new South African democratic dispensation.

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112 E-mail: WS Boshoff – I Bredenkamp, 16 July 2008.