

Defence budget falls short of the standard required to build a credible military

By Thomas Walters – DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Minister of Defence

Honourable Chair,

When applying our minds to the budget for this department, we use the following criteria:

Firstly, the Armed Forces of any country according to author James F. Dunnigan can be described as *“one more bargaining chip in a state’s international diplomacy. If war comes, the armed forces have failed in their primary purpose: To appear too strong to be successfully attacked.”*

Secondly – and differently put - our military has a constitutional role in protecting both our human and economic resources.

Thirdly, our military has to support our police and emergency services (within very carefully circumscribed circumstances) in situations of emergency and disaster.

None of the above, given our current geopolitical and internal settings, are “nice to haves” or “nonessential” to use the parlance of the day.

Honourable members, applied to our context it means that a basic minimum capacity and strength for the [South African Defence Force \(SANDF\)](#) is a non-negotiable and any budget that either underfunds our military or siphons off resources from the core strategic needs cannot be supported.

A desire for a well-supported military does not, therefore, equate to a desire for unnecessary expense, or a vanity project or simply an ongoing interest that needs to be satisfied.

In fact, a credible military is in fact a societal investment in conflict avoidance – to avoid the concurrent human and economic costs of conflict.

It is a societal investment in protecting jobs and the potential for job creation.

It is a societal investment in being prepared and being able to effectively respond to exactly the kind of crisis that our country – and the world – is currently facing.

The DA – and let this be very clear - therefore supports a credible military capable of preventing human and economic costs and seeks a budget that speaks to that.

However – and that brings me to another criteria - that does not mean that the DA supports expenditure for the sake of expenditure.

What the DA does not support is luxury cars for top officers; the siphoning off of resources that detracts from a credible military.

What it does not support is the long term underinvestment in our military and misdirecting of its resources – whether it is to corrupt Arms Deals, keeping supporters’ sweet or very simply because of short-sightedness.

It does not support expenditure that as a former colleague in parliament, David Maynier put it “an armed welfare service” in a military where too many soldiers on the payroll do not fulfill the basic requirements of a credible military.

It is that type of expenditure that in fact ensured that the basic criteria that the DA holds up, when considering our support for this budget, are not met.

It is that type of expenditure that means that South Africa is geopolitically less secure.

It is that type of expenditure that ensures that our resources are increasingly being looted off our coasts and from over our borders.

It is that type of expenditure that makes our soldiers and fellow citizens less safe.

And, as starkly demonstrated – it is that type of expenditure that ensures that in 2020, we are far less prepared for a pandemic than we should have been.

The DA cannot support a budget that slowly kills the constitutional mandate and strategic role of our military.