

Dodgy deal puts SA troops at risk

A series of damning military reports highlights alleged multimillion-rand tender irregularities said to have endangered thousands of South African troops battling rebels across Africa.



The reports into the operations of a Johannesburg logistics company include a restricted UN document, and e-mails from Free State border control officials and Airport Company of SA officials - all of which the military's top brass appear to have ignored.

The documents deal with the operations of Y&P Logistics - one of the SANDF's top-five service providers. It supplies heavy-lift transport aircraft.

The age and condition of the military's own heavy-lift aircraft has forced the Defence Department to contract private aviation companies to transport equipment and men to missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

The reports call for an investigation into Y&P's continued securing of tenders despite:

- It not being an aviation firm;
- Operating aircraft with no serial number;
- Using certain aircraft that have no technical documentation, and an aircraft not approved by the SA Civil Aviation Authority.

Y&P Logistics director Seelan Padayachy said: "This has never been raised with us. All the aircraft we use are from reputable suppliers.

Various concerns

"If the SANDF is so concerned, why are we continually short-listed as a preferred service provider?" Padayachy asked.

SANDF spokesman Brigadier-General Xolani Mabanga failed to respond to questions posed to him by The Times.

The documents raise a series of concerns and reveal incidents such as the alleged partial shut-down of Rwanda's Kigali Airport, failure to deliver reinforcements and equipment on time to South African paratroops fighting in CAR's Battle of Bangui, the continued flying of a troop-carrying aircraft despite a mid-air emergency that might recur and the landing of an aircraft at Bloemfontein Airport after it had closed for the night.

One of the reports - written in June for Lieutenant-General Derrick Mgwebi, chief of the SANDF's joint operations division - called for an investigation into the awarding of a R23m tender to Y&P to airlift supplies and troops to soldiers fighting in Bangui, CAR.

Another company, despite being able to supply the required aircraft on time and at a cost of R15m, lost out on the contract

Y&P had to provide a Boeing and an Antonov but was unable to do so for several days. It took nearly two days to get the reinforcements to the area and six days to supply troops with armoured vehicles and fuel.

Fifteen South African soldiers died in the battle.

Investigation

The document's author requested an investigation after a diplomatic incident at Kigali Airport when an aircraft chartered by Y&P crashed while transporting army vehicles. The aircraft involved in the crash was allegedly not approved for use by the Defence Department.

Rwandan authorities impounded the armoured vehicles being carried by the aircraft, which had been destined for troops battling M23 rebels in the DRC town of Goma.

The report claims that the inclusion of Y&P on the SANDF's supplier database was questionable because the company had not complied with contractor requirements.

"Since the inclusion [of Y&P], the Department of Defence was, and still is, faced with a multitude of challenges concerning non-compliance on the contract for the past two years," the documents alleged.

The documents state that one of the requirements of the two-year contract was that all the technical documents for each aircraft were to be submitted to the Defence Department and the Civil Aviation Authority during the evaluation process.

"Compliance with this criterion is crucial for aviation safety [and the soldiers' safety]. The company did not submit detailed information in respect of its experiences in the air-transport industry because it had no previous aviation experience.

"Because of the non-compliance with lease agreements, which are compulsory, the company sources aircraft from sub-contractors regularly in an unknown manner. These subcontractors are not vetted by Defence Intelligence, or cleared by the SACAA, and place the Defence Department [passengers and cargo] in danger," the document claimed.

Source: The Times via I-Net Bridge