



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Op-ed

South Africa needs an urgent National Security and Intelligence Assessment By Daryl Swanepoel and Roelf Meyer

KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng experienced a wave of civil unrest from 9 to 18 July 2021. South Africa's seven other provinces were spared. But in the two provinces, 342 people died and, in Durban alone, damage to the value of R16 billion was caused to stock, property, and equipment. It is common cause that the security and intelligence structures were found wanting.

On 14 October, the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Thandi Modise, Minister in the Presidency, Mondli Gungubele, and Deputy Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Thabang Makwetla were held hostage in a hotel by disgruntled military veterans. Attempts to downplay the gravity of this incident are disturbing. Instead, again, questions have to be asked about the failure of security and intelligence agencies.

These high-profile cases bring into view what is a daily reality for many South Africans. Crime levels are unacceptably high. This is exacerbated by low rates of prosecution through the judicial system. Our communities are not safe. This has a direct bearing on the social and economic development of the country.

In an effort to address the failure of security and intelligence agencies to deal with crime, there are some harsh truths that have to be confronted. Over the past few years, the politicisation of crime intelligence has had a negative impact on the effectiveness of the intelligence and security community. But the problem runs deeper.

None of the six National Commissioners of Police since 2000, have completed their terms of office. Notably, Jackie Selebi was arrested and convicted of corruption in July 2010. And the former Head of Police Crime Intelligence, Lieutenant General Richard Mdluli was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison for kidnapping and assault in July 2020. These incidents have had a serious impact on the crime intelligence environment resulting in low morale and many experienced officials leaving the service.

The result has been low levels of capability, with little to no capacity to collect intelligence. In addition, there has been a lack of coherence in the intelligence and security community. There is serious underperformance and dysfunctionality within the intelligence services. If we do not solve the problem, we could face in the coming months a much bigger threat than what we saw in July 2021.

In the aftermath of July 2021, there have been several attempts to focus on uncovering the deficits in the security and intelligence communities. There has been the establishment of a joint parliamentary committee to probe the violence of July 2021. The Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence has embarked on an inquiry into allegations of intelligence failures by the intelligence services. The Presidential Economic Advisory Council has established a working group on policing and public safety in the economy. Dr Sydney Mufamadi has been appointed as the National Security Advisor. The

President has appointed an expert panel, chaired by Professor Sandy Africa, to probe the violence and security lapses in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in July 2021.

It is important to note however that as far back as 2018 already, the Mufamadi Committee of Inquiry into the State Security Agency was appointed. This Committee made several alarming findings. Its recommendations included that a comprehensive review of the architecture of the South African security community (community-wide architecture) and legislation be done, which should include a review of intelligence coordination and the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC). Since the compilation of its report there is no evidence that any of its recommendations have been implemented.

Sadly, the Mufamadi Committee, like other similar structures was confronted with scapegoating, political grandstanding, resistance, secrecy, and hostility. This does not allow for honest reflection. Often such structures have struggled to even get out of the starting blocks due to lack of adequate administrative support.

What South Africa needs to avoid is another structure which conducts another review of the security and intelligence organs in a piecemeal, uncoordinated and incoherent way. There is instead an urgent need to reconsider the overall intelligence architecture to improve the fight against crime. Due to national financial constraints, it is important that the security and intelligence architecture be optimised.

Through such a national security and intelligence assessment, we should aim to understand what the mandates of the various security and intelligence organs are. This will entail a review of the composition, structure and mandate of the security and intelligence organs in South Africa. How do the various national security and intelligence organs interact with each other? What are their specific responsibilities? We must find a way to optimise our security agencies, by looking at the overlap in the intelligence systems; between the military, the police, and state security. It is imperative though that the assessment provides for an inclusive approach which ensure wide public sector and civil society participation in the research.

This article is an extract from a concept note emanating from a 2nd panel discussion aimed at assessing crime intelligence in South Africa. The discussion was co-hosted by the Inclusive Society Institute and the In Transformation Initiative. Daryl Swanepoel is the Chief Executive Officer of the former, whilst Roelf Meyer is a director of the latter. The concept note is available at www.inclusivesociety.org.za/reports and/or www.intransformation.org.za.