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# Keynotes

## Cranfield CSSM Case Study Series

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### Security Reform and the Privatisation of Violence in South Africa: 1994-2000

#### Aim

The aim of this study is to highlight the conditions under which security reforms may contribute to the privatisation of violence, using the case of South Africa.

#### Map of South Africa



## South Africa at a Glance

<b>Name:</b> Republic of South Africa <b>Capital:</b> Tshwane (Pretoria) <b>Area:</b> 1,219,912 sq km <b>Life Expectancy:</b> M 43.25; F 42.19 (2006 est.)	<b>Government:</b> Presidential Democracy <b>Currency:</b> Rand (ZAR) = 100 cents <b>GDP:</b> \$187.3 billion (2005 est.)
<b>Population:</b> 49.9 Million – 79% African; 9.6% white; 8.9% coloured; and 2.5% Indian/Asian (2005 est.) <b>Religions:</b> Christianity (79%), Islam (1.5%), Hinduism (1.2%), African Tradition (0.3%), Judaism (0.2%), Others (0.6%), unspecified (1.4%), none (15.1%) (2001 census) <b>Official Languages:</b> English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga <b>Key Industries:</b> Mining (world's largest producer of platinum, gold, chromium), automobile assembly, metalworking, machinery, textiles, iron and steel, chemicals, fertilizer, foodstuffs, commercial ship repair <b>Exports:</b> gold, diamonds, platinum, other metals and minerals, machinery and equipment \$50.91 billion (2005 est.) <b>Main Political Parties:</b> African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), United Democratic Movement (UDM), African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and New National Party (NNP) <b>Military:</b> South African National Defence Force (SANDF) –Army, Navy and Air Force <b>Police:</b> South African Police Service (SAPS) <b>Intelligence Services:</b> the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and the South Africa Secret Service (SASS)	

## Background

The Republic of South Africa is, notwithstanding its negative history of apartheid repression, one of the eight countries with the highest index of democratic freedom in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup> This impressive performance is due largely to the process of security sector reforms that have been implemented by state officials since making the historic transition to democracy in 1994, as a necessary strategy for pursuing democratic development.

Paradoxically, however, the implementation of these security reforms in the course of the transition was marked by increasing insecurity, particularly in the form of the privatisation of violence by non-state informal security actors. As crime rates soared from the mid-1990s onwards and the democratic state failed to deal with the problem within a context of high social inequality, parallel systems of armed community-based protection groups began to emerge as providers of public security and safety.<sup>2</sup> Within a short period of time, these parallel security systems metamorphosed into violent armed groups engaging in activities other than crime fighting, including low-level conflict.

## Specific Objectives

This study focuses on the wider context of the state's institutional capacity within which the security reforms were implemented, the nature of the reforms, crime and community response, and capacity building the control of private violence.

## **Institutional Capacity for Public Safety**

As a post-authoritarian state, South Africa has a history of a security sector that was highly politicised and which focused more on political order than law enforcement against crime.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the little crime fighting policing that existed was conducted exclusively in white settlements, while crime in the majority black and coloured townships was neglected.<sup>4</sup> However, because the priority of national security policy was on political violence crime and related violence was relegated to the background and allowed to fester through the final years of apartheid rule.

A serious implication of this policy bias was a drastic lack of capacity for law and order policing. Due to the high degree of militarisation as a response to political resistance, state resources were channelled to paramilitary policing and violent repression. Most of the police functions involved joint internal operations with army troops mostly in the black townships.<sup>5</sup> Daily crime incidents were dealt with by community structures of social ordering, including street committees, area committees and neighbourhood watches.<sup>6</sup> The result was that at the time of the transition, the capacity of the South Africa Police Service (SAPS) to fight soaring crime was acutely deficient.

## **The Security Sector Transformation**

Security Sector Transformation undertaken in the course of the transition was concentrated mainly on the defence sector.<sup>7</sup> This not surprising, giving the discredited role of the military in the politics of apartheid and the national mood to break from the past. However, this has meant that policing did not receive the rigorous attention that was given to defence in the security reform agenda. Thus the low capacity problem in the SAPS was exacerbated by the failure of policy makers in the immediate post-transition years to overhaul policing.

Furthermore, the few changes that were undertaken in policing – such as the integration of the various police structures into a single national service and the establishment of oversight bodies – neglected the need to enhance the operational capacity of the service. It was important to put in place accountability mechanisms in order to repudiate the state violence of the past, but it was also crucial to bolster the operational effectiveness of internal security agencies to control the threat of violent crime. The prioritisation of accountability and transparency over operational effectiveness and efficiency, or the lack of balance between the two sides limited the scope for good governance in policing.

## **Crime and Community Response**

In the face of pervasive crime and the failure of the police to adequately protect ordinary people, communities resorted to self-help policing particularly in the form of vigilante activities. One of the most important expressions of vigilantism in course of the reforms was PAGAD (People Against Gansterism and Drugs), which operated in the Cape Flats between 1996 and 2000.

PAGAD emerged first as a mass-based pressure group to protest the failure of the criminal justice system with respect to crime. However, within the first year of its emergence, PAGAD was infiltrated and captured by radical local elites who turned it into an instrument of urban terrorism in the Cape Town area.<sup>8</sup> The movement's crime fighting agenda provided the initial legitimacy and a mass popular following, but with its take over by radical ideological forces it gradually became a structured and fully armed organisation engaging in acts of violence. PAGAD was notorious for openly shooting and burning suspected criminals as well as bombing public places, police stations and courts. Thus the lack of capacity of the criminal justice system, principally the police became a rallying point for community self-protection initiative which quickly grew into an informal security forces operating beyond the control of the state and threatening public safety as well as the rule of law.

### **Capacity Building and the Control of Private Violence**

Building the capacity of the police was instrumental to the containment of PAGAD and its liquidation in 2000. The initial response of the police to the violent operations of PAGAD was hesitancy since the old structure policing did not have the appropriate capacity to deal with violent crime and acts of urban terror. Policing was still highly centralised and most of the resources and competencies were concentrated at the national and provincial levels, far away from the scene of crime. More so, evidence-based and democratic policing were new norms that had not taken roots while the new political climate and constitutional framework made paramilitary policing obsolete.<sup>9</sup> In addition, many of the experienced members of the old South Africa Police (SAP) left the service after the integration process in protest of the new occupational environment where they had work with their former political foes.<sup>10</sup>

The situation began to change when the SAPS devolved most of its expertise from provincial commands to the station level, where flexible responses to local problems were designed and implemented. For instance many specialised units, including a PAGAD unit, were created and staffed with personnel with intelligence and counter-insurgency background. The PAGAD unit deployed intelligence capabilities to frustrate PAGAD planning and operations, visible policing became a new strategy for eroding the perception of failure that fuels informal policing.<sup>11</sup> As the police gains more capacity at the local level, PAGAD's violent campaigns began to dwindle towards the end of the decade, and although the police has not managed to control crime in the Cape Town area the expression of organised private violence has ceased since 2000.

### **Key Lessons**

A key lesson of this case study is the political and socio-economic context within which security sector reform is implemented. Although South Africa is an emerging economy and consolidating democracy, the state is still weak. The state was more fragile at the time of the transition and the security reforms implemented at that time exposed the weakness of the state, creating opportunity structures for the emergence of militia-type organisations. However, as the state consolidated its critical institutions, those

opportunity structures gradually disappeared and it became difficult for political or ideological entrepreneurs to unleash privatised violence.

## Questions

- What were the opportunity structures that emerged from the process of post-apartheid security reforms in South Africa?
- In countries where the state is unable to provide adequate security for all of its population, what should be the focus of security sector reform?

## Discussion

Does the nature of the state determine the outcomes of security reform strategies?

## Useful Publications

Jacklyn Cock (2004) 'Rethinking Militarism in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Crisis States Research Centre Working Paper* no. 43 (London: Development Research Centre, LSE)

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<sup>1</sup> See Freedom in Africa Today, Freedom House Annual Report 2006. Available at:

[http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special\\_report/36.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/36.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See DFID Country Profiles: South Africa for an overview of social inequality in the country. Available at:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa/southafrica.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Charles Carelesen, Cape Town, South Africa, November 2005

<sup>4</sup> Interview with B

<sup>5</sup> See Laurie Nathan, 'Troops in the Townships', in

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Professor Wilfried Scharfe, Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town, South Africa, November 2005

<sup>7</sup> Much has been written on the success story of the security transformation in post-Apartheid South Africa. For a comprehensive analysis of the process, see Gavin Cawthra, '

<sup>8</sup> Interview with... Veary, Police Director, Nyanga Police station. Nyanga is one of the townships in the Cape Flats where Pagad operated.

<sup>9</sup> Veary, *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Gordon Brookbanks, Cape Town, South Africa, November 2005. Gordon Brookbanks is former officer of the SAPS who.....

<sup>11</sup> Veary, *op. cit.*