

Chapter 2 The rural protection plan

At a February 1997 meeting of the National Operational Co-ordinating Committee (NOCOC) – which co-ordinates SAPS and SANDF activities at national level – the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) requested that something should be done to prevent the escalating number of attacks on the farming community. The SAAU felt that the security structures existing at the time were not functioning effectively. It specifically indicated that follow-up actions by security force personnel after farm attacks were largely unco-ordinated which hampered the arrest of suspects.¹

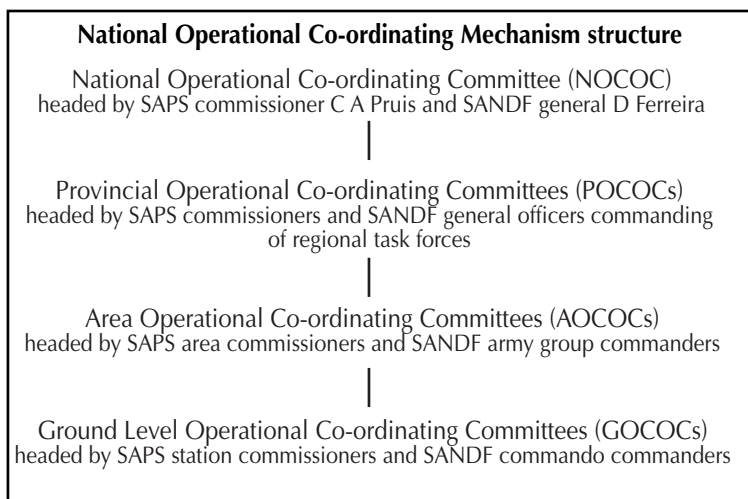
In response, the Joint Security Staff at the time identified violent crimes against the farming community as a specific crime tendency which required particular operational attention. The Joint Security Staff ordered that a steering group on rural protection should be established. The group consisted of various roleplayers, such as the SAPS, the SANDF and organised agriculture.

In the months following the NOCOC meeting, a task team was appointed which visited all the provinces and spoke to approximately 400 roleplayers (farmers, farm workers, security force personnel, organised agriculture, business people, and others). The findings and recommendations of the task team brought about the *rural protection plan* which was implemented in October 1997 at the request of the former president, Nelson Mandela.²

The object of the rural protection plan is to encourage all roleplayers concerned with rural safety to work together in a co-ordinated manner, and engage in joint planning, action and monitoring to combat crime in the country's rural areas.³

Moreover, the rural protection plan seeks to co-ordinate the operational activities of all relevant roleplayers effectively within the priority committees for rural protection which were established as part of the national operational co-ordinating mechanism on all levels. These are the SAPS, the SANDF, organised

agriculture, provincial and local government and any other person, group or organisation which can play an active role in, or support the rural protection plan.⁴



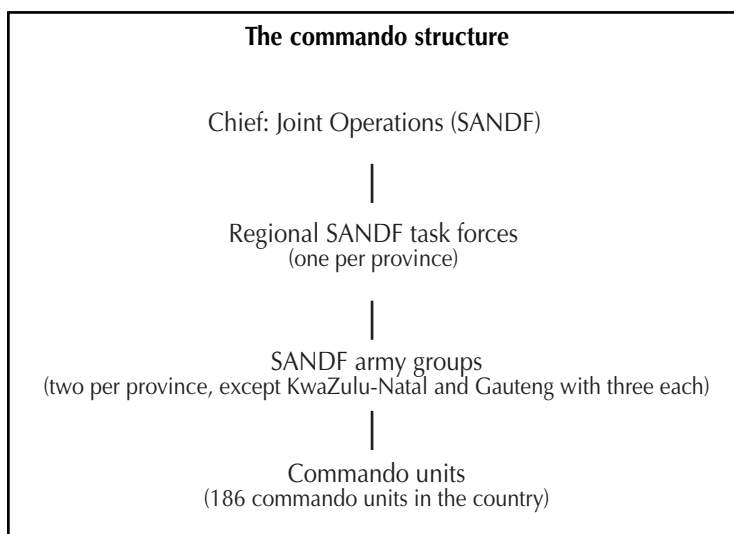
National Operational Co-ordinating Mechanism structure

Every committee (NOCOC, POCOC, AOCOC and GOCOC) has its own *priority committees*. There are, for example, priority committees on rural protection, gang violence, taxi violence and political violence. The priority committees on rural protection were added in October 1998. They are responsible for the operational planning and implementation of the rural protection plan.⁵ Other functions of the priority committees on rural safety include:

- co-ordinating all security related actions relating to rural protection;
- identifying factors that have a negative influence on the safety of the farming community; and
- distributing relevant information and providing feedback on the rural protection plan to all relevant roleplayers.⁶

The commando structure

At the beginning of 2000, there were 186 commando units (officially called the 'territorial reserve force system'). There are approximately 82 000 commando members deployed in South Africa, covering 98% of the country.⁷



Members of the public can belong to one of three types of commando structures:

- *Area-bound reaction force commando members:* These are generally staffed by people who live in the country's towns and cities. In an emergency, the local commando to which they belong, can call them up for commando duty. Having been called, such commando members are issued with a rifle and uniform, which they have to return once they are booked off duty. These commando members are paid for the hours they work. Area-bound reaction force commando members are trained jointly with police reservists to conduct patrols, roadblocks, follow-up operations, cordon and search operations, and farm visits.⁸
- *Home and hearth protection reaction force commando members:* These are staffed by farmers and smallholders, and their workers. Members of this type of commando are responsible for assisting other farmers and smallholders in their district only if a farm or smallholding attack has occurred. Such commando groups then go into action (for example, setting up roadblocks or searching an area) until the area-bound reaction force commando members arrive on the scene and takes over from them.
- *House and hearth protection commando members:* These are staffed by farmers and smallholders, and their workers. Members of this type of commando are not

called up, but are responsible for protecting themselves and their own farm or smallholding if under attack. Such commando members are issued with a military rifle only if they do not possess their own rifle.

Notes

- 1 J M J Visser, Violent attacks on farmers in South Africa, *ISSUP Bulletin 3/98*, 1998, pp 11-12.
- 2 Interview with Lt Col H J Boshoff, National Operational Co-ordinating Committee, Pretoria, 20 April 1999.
- 3 Visser, op cit, p 12.
- 4 Interview with Lt Col H J Boshoff, National Operational Co-ordinating Committee, Pretoria, 20 April 1999.
- 5 Interview with Lt Col H J Boshoff, National Operational Co-ordinating Committee, Pretoria, 17 February 2000.
- 6 National Operational Co-ordinating Committee document, *National Operational Coordinating Committee crime prevention and response service*, 29 September 1998, NOCOC/3/9, p 5.
- 7 Letter from Col B J Schoeman, Senior Staff Officer, Operational Planning (Land), South African National Defence Force, 3 March 2000.
- 8 NOCOC/3/9, op cit, p 6.