

CHAPTER 6

INTEGRATING SANDF CAPACITY INTO THE SAPS

The process of handing over the Commandos' rural safety functions to the SAPS has been, and remains, the cause of some uncertainty. On the one hand, the SAPS is in the process of creating a new category of reservist in order to broaden the social base from which civilians are recruited into the reserve. The planned change in the structure of the reserve coincided with a national SAPS instruction to implement the concept of sector policing at police stations across the country. Broadening the base of the reserve was designed specifically to recruit reservists into sector policing functions. It has also been understood from the start that sector policing structures, together with ACCUs, are to absorb the capacity of, and fill the role played by, the Territorial Reserve in the wake of the latter's closure.³⁵ It was thus envisaged that Commando members would be invited to apply to join the police reserve.

There was, however, a snag. The police reserve is a voluntary structure. Members of the Commandos' non-area bound units are remunerated for their work; as discussed earlier, between 12,000 and 15,000 Commando members have no other significant income, and their participation in the Commando is the primary source of their and their family's livelihoods. Thus, when 17 Commandos around the country ceased operating during the course of 2004, it came as no surprise that the vast majority of their members did not apply to join the police reserve. Most, presumably, went in search of remunerated work.³⁶ In police jurisdictions where Commandos have ceased functioning, the force multiplication capacity contained in the Commandos has, for the moment at any rate, been lost.

This is an unfortunate state of affairs. As is apparent in the three case studies above, the farming community's relationship with the SAPS in many parts of the country is a troubled one. There is a more or less ubiquitous perception that the delivery of policing services to rural areas is extremely poor. Allowing Commandos to cease operating in the absence of a replacement capacity not only weakens policing in rural areas, it further sours the relationship between the SAPS and the farming community. This creates a vicious circle: the souring of police/civilian relations itself weakens policing services.

In mid-2005, the SAPS began to move to clarify the situation. In May, the Safety and Security Minister announced that the SAPS plans to recruit all 50,000 part-time members of the Territorial Reserve into the SAPS Reserve.³⁷ Since then, the SAPS has set aside budget to remunerate an annually escalating number of reservists beginning in the current financial year until 2009. For the 2005/06 financial year, budget has been set aside to call up 2,000 reservists for a maximum of seven days per month for active duty. This figure will rise incrementally until by 2009/10, when 20,000 reservists will be called up for a maximum of seven days per month. At the rank of Inspector, reservists will be paid R126.99 per day of active duty at 2005 prices.³⁸

If one assumes that 12,000 part-time soldiers currently earn a living in the Commandos, and that they work an average of 120 days per year, their collective manpower totals 1.44 million working days per year. If, by 2009, the SAPS deploys 20,000 reservists on active duty for seven days each month, collective manpower will total 1.68 million working days per year. By this narrow and limited measure, a total gain of 14% of annual working days would have been gained by the time the last Commando closes its doors in 2009.³⁹ The issue that remains is how the SAPS will fashion and deploy this capacity. The rest of the present chapter explores this issue.

A number of questions remain in this regard. First, for what sort of work is the SAPS going to remunerate reservists? In the latest draft of the SAPS national instruction on the police reserve, the principle that reservist work is voluntary is reaffirmed. The instruction states that reservists will only be remunerated when they are “called up for fulltime duty”.⁴⁰ Typically, reservists are called up for fulltime duty “during special operations and big events (i.e. elections, sporting events etc.)”.⁴¹ One assumes that the SAPS is to reinterpret the meaning of “fulltime duty” far more broadly; it is hard to imagine that the SAPS will expend 1.68 million working days a year at football matches. Yet, the question remains just how broadly the meaning of “fulltime duty” will be redefined. Will budget be available to remunerate reservists for participating in regular rural crime prevention operations? If not, the capacity currently contained in the Commandos will be lost to rural policing.

Assuming that reservists will be paid for participating in regular patrols, another question arises: it is not clear – indeed, it is in fact unlikely – that the reserve capacity the SAPS obtains will be distributed in the way the SANDF distributed it. The SAPS has stated that in making budgetary provisions for the recruitment and training of reservists, the SAPS’s 169 priority stations will be prioritised. These stations are overwhelmingly urban. The result is that the

capacity currently contained in the Commandos will, once transferred to the SAPS, shift, to a greater or lesser degree, from rural to urban areas.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that we are wrong on both of the above accounts. Let us assume that reservists are to be remunerated for participating in regular patrols, and that the geographical distribution of working days remains unchanged, ie, that Commando members currently deployed in police station jurisdiction X will, once recruited into the police reserve, still be deployed in police station jurisdiction X. Even then, station commissioners will be compelled by their performance targets to shift increasing proportions of this capacity from the rural to the urban sectors of their jurisdictions. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to elucidating this argument.

The police reserve

The SAPS is in the process of redesigning the structure of the police reserve in order to broaden the social base from which it recruits. A standard police reservist, known as a Category A reservist in the new structure, can in principle be trained and empowered to perform general functions in all operational facets of policing.⁴² To be eligible for recruitment as a Category A reservist, a person must have a matric and pass a psychometric test.

An additional category of reservist created by the new schema, a Category D reservist, needs neither a matric nor pass a psychometric test to be eligible for recruitment. But along with the lowering of entry criteria, a Category D reservist’s powers and functions are circumscribed in three ways:

- 1) he or she can only perform one set of functions, those of a sector patrol officer.
- 2) Each Category D reservist is assigned to a specific sector, either urban or rural, within a police station jurisdiction, and can only perform functions as part of a sector team.
- 3) A Category D reservist may wear a uniform, but can only perform his or her functions under the direct supervision of a permanent member or a Category A reservist.⁴³

It is probably safe to assume that the vast majority of Commando members who apply to join the police reserve will first attempt to do so as Category A reservists. It is probably also safe to assume that most of those who fail will

be invited to join the SAPS as Category D reservists. How many Commando members will fail to meet Category A criteria? It is difficult to say. A large minority of those recruited into the Commando's non-area bound units in the last decade do not have a matric and will thus be automatically disqualified from Category A recruitment. Many will thus be joining as Category D reservists. We have described the formal ambit of their powers and functions. How are they to be deployed within this ambit? What, precisely, is sector policing?

Sector Policing

In its National Instruction on Sector Policing, the SAPS has interpreted the concept very broadly and very modestly. What it will mean on the ground is thus to be shaped in no small part by how it is interpreted and implemented at area and station level. Interpreted conservatively, it requires few changes to grassroots policing. Each police station is divided into sectors. Each sector is assigned a sector manager, and his or her primary task is to convene a Sector Crime Forum – a formal structure of liaison between the SAPS and civilians. Sector policing may thus entail only that one or two personnel be redeployed from patrol and response work to do community liaison work in geographically demarcated sectors. The rest of the organisation can function much as it always has.

In this scenario, stations and areas will rely on hotspot policing as they have in the past. They will, as has become tradition in SAPS, throw numbers at problems, whatever those problems might be. Category D reservists will thus be used in ways not dissimilar to the part-time soldiers of the Territorial Reserve: they will be force multipliers, bodies to place in hotspots.

The Instruction is open to more ambitious interpretations. In the West Rand, for instance, police stations' centralised Crime Prevention Units have been stripped, and their personnel distributed permanently into the sectors. The primary mechanism for high visibility hotspot policing has thus been weakened. Stations are forced to place less emphasis on throwing numbers at problems, and more at trying to solve or manage those problems through target hardening, environmental design and civilian partnerships.⁴⁴

The chances are that at most police stations around the country, Category D reservists will be used more to intensify hotspot policing than to develop alternative forms of policing. First, throwing numbers at problems is easier than attempting to problem-solve, and real attempts at problem-solving policing are thus probably reserved for pockets of excellence within the

SAPS. It is safer, and perhaps wiser, for a police manager to stick to what he knows his personnel can do. Second, it appears from their brief statements on the matter that force multiplication is precisely what the SAPS and ministerial leadership have in mind. In the May 2005 statement in which he stated that he the SAPS aimed to recruit 50,000 former Commando members into the reserve, Minister Nqakula said that the increase in police numbers would coincide with a "massive crackdown" on serious and violent crime. "A huge number of police will be deployed," he said, and warned the public that the operations he had in mind would cause a degree of civic upheaval.⁴⁵ One can only imagine an intensification of the regular SAPS fare of high-density police operations.

As far as the rural sectors of police stations are concerned, one may be tempted to imagine that the transition to the post-Commando era will be reasonably seamless. In a SAPS rural sector that inherits a strong area bound unit, a good sector manager will keep its intelligence and information-gathering functions alive. It is hardly necessary for the entire area bound unit to join the SAPS for this to be accomplished. Commandos' information gathering functions do not require large investments either in fulltime personnel or in infrastructure. A well-chosen sector manager is probably sufficient to keep existing information gathering networks functioning. And if sufficient members of area bound units are recruited into Category A of the police reserve, there is no reason why the Commandos' emergency and rapid response capabilities cannot be retained.

As for the existing non-area bound unit members, there is little reason, in this scenario, to imagine that they cannot play their historical function in their new capacity as Category D reservists. They would remain force multipliers, bodies to place in hotspots, guided by appropriate intelligence and expertise.

Yet everything in this scenario assumes that the SAPS will deploy much of the capacity it is to inherit in the rural sectors of its police stations. This assumption is mistaken. There will in fact be inexorable pressures on police managers at area and station level slowly to siphon capacity from rural sectors to urban sectors.

Police discretion

It is a universal feature of policing that there are always more crimes committed than the police are able to detect or investigate. Whether as matter of policy

or through the more random predilections and decisions of its individual officers, police forces inevitably exercise discretion over which crimes to police. Indeed, exercising this discretion is probably the most fundamental and the most important strategic decision senior police management makes.

Choosing which crimes to police is usually influenced, among other things, by a theory of crime reduction. And since nothing in social theory is quite as indeterminate and undecided as crime reduction theory, fashions come and go. For instance, in the 1960s, the New York Police Department (NYPD) shifted its budgetary emphasis from visible policing to the detective branch. Within the detective branch, it invested its resources in getting convictions on serious violent crimes at the expense of such crimes as petty theft and common assault. The theory on which this discretion was based was that the rate of serious violent crimes would decline as convictions in these categories went up. Gradually, the police could shift resources back into policing less serious crimes.⁴⁶

Thirty years later, the NYPD had reversed its strategy. In the 1990s, it began policing public spaces very aggressively, with an emphasis on “zero tolerance” for petty crimes. On the subways, for instance, police were instructed to enforce the laws against fare-shirkers and graffiti artists; on street corners, panhandlers and idlers. The theory was that when public spaces are dominated by petty miscreants, the confidence of ordinary citizens is weakened, rendering them fearful in their own neighbourhoods, and thus facilitating the emergence of more serious crime.⁴⁷

During the early years of its existence, it was difficult to discern precisely how the SAPS had chosen to exercise police discretion. There was a list of priority crimes, and it was revised annually, but the list was very long indeed. Nor were specific crime reduction targets attached to priority crimes. This state of affairs changed dramatically in the early 2000s under the leadership of Commissioner Jackie Selebi. The annual list of priority crimes is now considerably shorter, and each priority crime is linked to a reduction target. The list has various incarnations. A broad list is drawn up nationally. Each province, area and station draws up its own priority list, taking its cue directly from the national list. For instance, if the national list cites contact crimes as a priority and the most prevalent recorded contact crimes in a station jurisdiction are rape and assault GBH, then rape and assault GBH become that station’s priority crimes.

For the 2005/06 financial year, the SAPS has established a number of specific targets for police action.⁴⁸ For instance, getting illegal firearms off the streets

has been prioritised: the specific target is to recover 80% of the number of firearms reported stolen during the financial year. In regard to vehicle theft, the target is to recover 46% of the number of vehicles reported stolen in the financial year. Another target is that property and commercial crimes, as well as attacks against police officials, decrease during the financial year.

The most important priority by far, however, is contact crimes. The crime reduction target in this regard has been set at seven percent for every station in the country. The target is a direct response to a Cabinet instruction: in January 2004, a Cabinet Lekgotla decided that government must work towards a reduction of contact crimes of between seven percent and ten percent annually over the next ten years.⁴⁹ It is an extraordinarily ambitious target, and its consequences have rippled through the entire SAPS organisation. At station-level, the seven percent reduction target becomes police management’s most important performance indicator; station commissioners are under overwhelming pressure to invest their energy and resources in areas where the level of contact crimes is high. The target also shapes police management at sub-station or sector level: the formal aim of the implementation of sector policing is to decrease the number of serious and violent crimes in each sector.⁵⁰ At area and provincial level, police managers must respond to the target by increasing investments of infrastructure and personnel in stations where levels of contact crimes are highest. And at national level, it has become a matter of explicit policy that 169 stations identified as contributing to the lion’s share of violent crime be prioritised.

Exercising police discretion in this manner is not just reasonable, but perhaps commendable. The SAPS is a large, centralised police organisation, indeed, one of the largest in the world. Setting quantitative targets from the centre, applicable to the entire organisation, to which all levels of police leadership are accountable, is perhaps the most effective mechanism national management has at its disposal to ensure that all 1,100-odd stations across the country are reading off the same score.

Nor can the choice of priorities be faulted. Of all the crimes committed in South Africa, contact crimes cause a disproportionate share of personal pain and trauma, and are disproportionately corrosive of human wellbeing. Deciding to invest more resources in policing serious assault than in sheep theft, for instance, is a normative, value-laden decision, and a commendable one at that.

There are, of course, reasonable criticisms of exercising police discretion in this way. One is that the heavy reliance on recorded crime figures as a performance

indicator will motivate police officials to suppress the reporting and recording of crimes. One need not have spent much time on patrol to see how this might happen. Police can use a host of informal mechanisms to discourage members of the public from reporting certain crimes. Perversely, then, police might attempt to reach their targets by providing a poorer service.

A more fundamental criticism attacks the very idea of a nationally centralised police organisation setting global targets. The primary function of a police force, the argument goes, is to provide policing services to communities. A national organisation is simply too inflexible to provide a nuanced, responsive service to communities across the country. Only a decentralised organisation, one in which decisions are taken close to the ground, can truly be accountable to the people it serves.⁵¹

A third criticism is that setting quantifiable targets for priority crimes in the absence of a sufficient increase in policing resources is unfair to management, and leads to intolerably skewed forms of policing. For instance, prioritising contact crimes over sheep theft is reasonable. But if a station manager is forced to leave sheep theft *entirely unpoliced* in order to meet quantifiable reductions in contact crimes, is this still reasonable?

This is a danger worth contemplating. In each of the three case studies above, a single police station is responsible both for dense urban settlements and for sparsely populated commercial farming districts. In all three cases, contact crimes obviously cluster around town. Take Uitenhage, for example. KwaNobuhle, a township of about 250,000 people, situated just outside the boundaries of Uitenhage SAPS jurisdiction, has poorly developed service and retail industries. On weekends and pension payout days, cash-laden consumers pour into Uitenhage CBD from KwaNobuhle, and are the prime victims of the station's share of aggravated and common robbery cases. The station commissioner's strongest performance indicator, and thus his most urgent task, is to bring contact crimes down by seven percent. He really only has one instrument at his disposal to do so: numbers. He must identify hotspots by place, time of day, week and month, and, to the extent that he is able, saturate them. He is, in essence, in search of feet to put on the ground.

Say, hypothetically, that the De Mist Commando closes down, and that most of its non-area bound members join the SAPS as Category D reservists. The national instruction on the reserve tells the station commissioner that he is to deploy each of these new recruits "in a specific sector in an urban or rural area at station level..." The station commissioner would be behaving

irrationally were he not to invest as much of this capacity as he can in urban rather than rural areas. His priority is contact crimes, and the vast majority of these happen in town. A few are recorded in the rural districts, but it is quite difficult to prevent them by police action: the rural area is large, and its contact crimes far less patterned than in urban areas. True, he has also been instructed to reduce property and commercial crimes, but these are scattered across his jurisdiction, and do not have the heavy, punitive figure of seven percent attached to them.

Recall that in Uitenhage, the bulk of rural sector policing was conducted by the Commando. In the scenario described above, much of the capacity currently used to police the rural districts will move ineluctably into urban sectors. Such must be the case if local police managers are to respond responsibly to their crime reduction targets. The policing of the rural district must weaken.

Station commissioners are placed in an invidious position. On the one hand, a very vocal and vociferous local constituency – commercial farmers – will protest that the quality of policing has declined since the demise of the Commandos. They will demand better service. Indeed, by establishing Crime Sector Forums in rural sectors, the SAPS is encouraging that such demands be made. Yet pressure exerted on the station commissioner from within the SAPS, in the form of performance targets will be to feed the urban sectors. The station commissioner will find himself wedged between the demands of a grassroots constituency and the priorities established nationally.

The dilemma is not an easy one at any level. We have no intention of sounding self righteous, or of pretending that we have simple solutions. But it would be well to point out some of the dimensions of this dilemma as sharply as possible:

- 1) The concept of sector policing encourages civilians at the grassroots to enter into a dialogue with the SAPS and to articulate their needs. There is an implied reciprocal responsibility on the part of the SAPS to respond to these needs. However, police discretion in the SAPS is exercised primarily at national, not local level. Some sub-station sectors will thus be neglected. The civilian/SAPS dialogue at sector level will thus, in some instances, be a false dialogue, and will trigger a deterioration in police/civilian relations.
- 2) Prioritising contact crimes is more than reasonable; it is commendable. In certain instances, though, the trade-offs are stark. Where Commandos

close down and their personnel are absorbed into the police reserve, the likelihood is that the quality of policing in rural areas will visibly deteriorate.

There isn't an easy solution to these tensions. We would not like to propose, for instance, that ex-Commando members recruited into the police reserve be deployed exclusively in rural areas. That would be to pretend that there isn't a problem.

The task of this paper, however, is to assess the crime combating capacity that will be lost with the closing of the Commandos, and the capacity that will replace it in the SAPS. A combined reading of the SAPS national instruction on the police reserve, together with its crime reduction and police action targets, tells us that, for better or for worse, the closing of the Commandos will see a transfer of policing resources from rural to urban sectors of police stations throughout the country. The result will be a deterioration in the policing of rural sectors, and in particular of agricultural crime. The potential gain is that residents of rural town centres will be better policed.