

# Violence: The role of the security forces

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As I stand before you, there are people out there dying in the townships. In the Madala Hostel in Alexandra, an Inkatha warlord may be urging his impis to yet again attack innocent township residents, while in an ANC stronghold in Phola Park, disillusioned Umkhonto we Sizwe members may be planning a revenge attack on Inkatha impis.

In the past week, newspapers reported that a former hostel dweller has provided the Goldstone Commission with a direct link between Inkatha leaders and township violence and train attacks and that renegade members of the ANC's military wing in Phola Park have been involved in murders, armed robberies and attacks on security force members.

But I do not want to talk today about the complicity of Inkatha and the ANC in political violence. I want to introduce you to another dimension of this violence which has claimed the lives of 923 people in the first four months of this year and a staggering 12 867 people since September 1984.

Let us move to Police Headquarters in Pretoria where a senior police officer may be studying an intelligence report on a possible Inkatha attack. Instead of activating a special investigations or peacekeeping unit, he looks at the gold Rolex watch he received after 25 years of meritorious service, sees that it is 16h30, packs his briefcase, goes home and tells his wife about the bloody blacks killing each other again.

This may be Lieutenant-Colonel Hermanus "Boep" du Plessis, previously a member of the Port Elizabeth Security Branch, before being transferred to the newly-formed Crime Combatting and Investigation force in Pretoria.

Du Plessis is a man with a dirty and murderous past. He has been implicated in the brutal murder of activist Sizwe Kondile in 1981. Kondile was captured, interrogated and tortured by the Port Elizabeth Security Branch. He fell through a window, and to avoid a second "Steve Biko" incident, he had to be killed. He was transported by du Plessis and other security policemen to Komatipoort in the Eastern Transvaal where he was shot and burnt. It was proved in the Johannesburg Supreme Court last year that du Plessis sent false telex messages to Security Branch headquarters in Pretoria to conceal the real whereabouts of Kondile.

Du Plessis was also in charge of the interrogation of youth activist, Sipiwo Mtimkulu, who disappeared in 1982 and was never heard of again. He is alleged to have been

killed by security police after instituting a claim for torture and poisoning against the Minister of Police.

And yet, despite the evidence against him, du Plessis remains a member of the South African Police. No action has ever been taken against him. I have seen du Plessis twice in my life, once at the Harms Commission of Inquiry where he was assisting the Commission with their investigation into death squads, and the second time as one of the investigating officers into the death squad allegations of a former member of the Vlakplaas counter-insurgency force.

I want to talk to you today about men like Hermanus du Plessis. Why do I specifically single him out? Because I believe that men like du Plessis are members of what is known today as the "Third Force".

I do not believe in the existence of a special force set up specifically to disrupt the peace process and kill anti-apartheid activists. What I do believe in, is in a unique and very special culture existing in the South African Police. Let us call it the Total Onslaught Ideology culture.

This culture is at least partly responsible for clear evidence of police complicity in acts of violence and their unwillingness to act against Inkatha and other forces opposed to the ANC.

I believe that this culture is alive and well and living in a rather large number of policemen, especially former security policemen. Men like Lieutenant-Colonel Hermanus du Plessis. Discredited, bent policemen, whose mission in life has been to destroy the ANC and its allies, and uphold apartheid through repressive legislation. Their past experiences have taught them that most black people are inferior, untrustworthy and have a strange tendency towards Communism.

As members of the Security Branch, performing illegal operations inside and outside the borders of the Republic of South Africa, du Plessis and his colleagues enjoyed a special protection. This enabled them to operate above the laws of the country and above the rules and regulations of the South African Police. The security police's culture, their techniques, skills and methods had much in common with those of a gang of ordinary thugs. What distinguishes them from common criminals was that they believed themselves to be involved in a kind of "Jihad" – a holy war against the total onslaught.

Then suddenly, on February 2, 1990, the South African political situation changed dramatically. The ANC and the South African Communist Party were no longer the enemy. There was no longer a total onslaught against Christianity or civilised norms.

Since that day in February 1990, the SAP's Directorate of Public Relations would like to tell you, Hermanus du Plessis has suddenly become just a bobby on the beat. With the stroke of a pen, this once terrifying security policeman is now your friendly neighbourhood cop, catching thieves and fighting crime.

To prove this, and in an effort to get the support of the general public, Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok disbanded the Security Police and declared: "This step would remove the police from the political playing field."

But has it really? No, it has not, and let us look at what happened. When Dirk Coetzee and Generals Jan Viktor and Jac Buchner started the Vlakplaas counter-insurgency unit in 1981, there were sixteen policemen. In 1990, this unit has grown to 120 men and later in the same year we discovered that the very notorious Koevoet unit has been brought from Namibia and integrated with the Vlakplaas unit.

In the same year, death squad commander Eugene de Kock was promoted from the rank of Major to Lieutenant-Colonel and Brigadier Nick van Rensburg was transferred from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria to head the Vlakplaas Unit. I have mentioned four names – Buchner, Viktor, de Kock and van Rensburg. Let's look at them.

Eugene de Kock has been implicated in various acts of atrocities, inside and outside of South Africa. He was transferred from the Koevoet unit to take over Vlakplaas in 1983. In June 1986, he was implicated in the killing of four young activists in Chesterville in Natal when his squad fired 88 rounds at the unarmed youths. In June 1988, his squad shot another four activists near Piet Retief in the South-eastern Transvaal. There was no evidence that the infiltrators were armed. It was the stock explanation: ANC infiltrators were frequently mowed down by the police in acts of "self-defence".

Former security policeman and self-confessed hitman Almon Nofemela claimed before the Harms Commission that de Kock point-blank shot security guard Japie Maponya to prevent identifying Nofemela afterwards. Judge Louis Harms rejected Nofemela's evidence, but a magistrate ruled afterwards that it was possible that Nofemela had been telling the truth. Maponya was never seen again.

To make things worse, de Kock is not even a good policeman. According to evidence before the Harms Commission, the counter-insurgency unit had not arrested more than 20 infiltrators between 1982 and 1990 – an average of just more than two every year.

Brigadier Nick van Rensburg is alleged to have been involved in various death squad atrocities in the seventies and eighties. He was Ermelo Security Branch commander in the seventies and is alleged to have been involved in a break-in into the United Nations office in Swaziland and acts of violence in which various people were injured and killed. He then became head of Security Police in Port Elizabeth, where he is alleged to have been involved in the killing of Sizwe Kondile. Evidence was lead in the Rand Supreme Court in 1990 that van Rensburg gave the command to kill Kondile.

General Jan Viktor is Commissioner of Police in the Ciskei. He was the founder of the Vlakplaas hit squad unit where he was implicated in various atrocities and the killing of anti-apartheid activists. According to reports, he has "purged" the Ciskei police of those against the Ciskei Government or sympathetic towards the ANC and has reinstalled former Ciskei policemen who were kicked out of the police force after being jailed for the murder of Eric Mntonga.

Major-General Jac Buchner is Commissioner of KwaZulu Police. Previously, Buchner was the security police chief in Pietermaritzburg and was regarded as one of the SAP's experts on the ANC. He spent seven years in Rhodesia as an intelligence officer for the SAP during the bush war. Thereafter he was for many years based at Section C (Vlakplaas) where he was chief interrogator of captured ANC and PAC guerillas. He was the architect of using "turned" guerillas against the ANC and

masterminded the raids on Matola in Maputo and Maseru in the early eighties. He is described by the ANC as an "efficient killing machine". Various members of his police force have been implicated and jailed for atrocities. There is evidence that officers under his command bought and provided arms to Inkatha.

How is it possible that these men can still serve in the South African Police, and how can the Government expect South Africa to have faith in its security forces when de Kock and his askaris still roam the townships and the SAP's architects of black-on-black violence still serve in the security forces?

Over the past two-and-a-half years, a succession of allegations against the security forces, which at first seemed incredible, have proved to be true. The allegations of hit squads seemed fantastic, but turned out to be true. The allegation of police collusion with Inkatha seemed far-fetched, and proved to be true. The idea that military officers would defy President de Klerk by concealing and destroying military evidence seemed incredible, and proved true. So did the police's complicity in the Trust Feed massacre and the subsequent cover-up, the involvement of the SADF's Chief of Military Intelligence in the killing of the Cradock Four, and the secret bases from where undercover and faceless policemen plan attacks on the ANC.

The dirty tricks laundry list goes on and on.

The South African Police, and to a lesser extent the South African Defence Force, has become a degenerate organisation, a haven for gangsters like Hermanus du Plessis, Eugene de Kock, Nick van Rensburg, Jan Viktor and Jac Buchner.

These policemen, and many others, I believe, constitute South Africa's "Third Force". How can you expect a man to one day defend a specific set of norms and laws and the next day make a 180 degree turnaround? The Total Onslaught Ideology has been too deeply embedded in them.

Listen again to what Brian Mitchell said in the Trust Feed Massacre trial: "We attacked the UDF because we regarded them as the enemy and Inkatha as an ally."

The white public has had an enormous problem accepting the new political realities of South Africa. They might have voted "yes" in the referendum, but still deeply distrust the ANC and its Communist allies. This explains why the Inkatha Freedom Party enjoys such huge support in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Why would the attitude of the average South African policeman be that different?

Major Dolf Odendaal, second-in-command of the Peninsula Riot Squad, had to testify in 1988 in the Cape Supreme Court why the police did not act against a vigilante group burning down houses and driving out inhabitants. He said: "If black people decided to fight, there is nothing I can do. You do not know black people when they decide to fight." Odendaal told the court that he believed it would be a solution if, in unrest situations, police were by law allowed to shoot anyone holding a stone.

Why, I ask myself, would Odendaal's attitude suddenly have changed after February 1990. Yet, he still serves in the force and has recently been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Does this attitude not explain, perhaps, the police's unwillingness to act against Inkatha impis attacking ANC supporters, Casspir armoured vehicles guarding the "Rooidoeke" vigilante group, the unwillingness of a police general and brigadier to investigate the Trust Feed Massacre and the Commissioner of Police rushing to court to prevent the Weekly Mail from exposing an undercover police operation?

Respected **UNISA** criminologist, Irma Labuschagne, who testified on behalf of Brian Mitchell, has identified a new psychological disorder in South Africa; she calls it the Total Onslaught Ideology disorder. According to Labuschagne, South African policemen have been brutalised to such an extent by the Total Onslaught, that it should be recognised in our courts as a recognised disorder. She says that she believes that Brian Mitchell is a decent person, but was turned into a monster by this ideology. She says that many, many policemen are in dire need of psychological treatment before they can continue their policing activities. Her theory is fully supported by, amongst others, University of Cape Town psychologist, Prof. Don Foster, who also believes that South African policemen should undergo a healing process after being brutalised by four decades of apartheid rule.

What a shame that the South African Government and Police do not admit the crisis in their midst. Two weeks ago, there was a programme on police training on Radio 702 during which a Brigadier Chetty (the highest-ranking non-white police officer) was asked how the SAP was retraining Koevoet. Chetty replied that he was not aware of the existence of Koevoet in the SAP.

Let me first of all say that in my investigations over the past three years, I have come across many decent, professional and ethical policemen. The SAP is today a force consisting of 110 000 policemen. Members of the force are getting killed at an alarming rate and South Africa must be an extremely difficult country to police.

In many quarters of the SAP – and the SADF – there have been major changes and I often sense new attitudes and an acceptance of new political realities. But the top brass in the armed forces and the responsible politicians should realise that a culture cannot be terminated by new rules and regulations. Or change a monster into a dove. There has been no effort by the State to clean up the security forces and help create a new culture more conducive to peace and stability.

With the continued presence in the force of policemen implicated in atrocities and dirty tricks and the continued existence of former hit squad units like Vlakplaas, it is unthinkable that the South African Police can ever be acceptable to the majority of South Africans.

Unless the authorities remove the Hermanus du Plessis's from the force, disband units like Vlakplaas and start a healing process among policemen emerging from the previous era, the deep distrust in the SAP and their complicity in the violence will continue. And so will the existence of this faceless, silent "Third Force" that has driven basically decent human beings into committing ghastly atrocities.