



State strategy and popular response

KATE PHILLIP examines the developing contradictions in state security strategies.



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Total strategy began as a military initiative to counter the total onslaught. With PW Botha's rise to power, it became the framework for an overall political strategy.

Central to that strategy was the belief that South Africa's war is only 20% military, and 80% social, economic and political.

For the SADF, this did not mean it should confine itself to the military aspects of that war. Instead, it provided the basis for legitimising the increasing military involvement in all spheres of strategic decision making, co-ordinated through the state security council.

The state of emergency provided the gap for the military to consolidate its 'creeping coup', by

extending the structures of the national security management system (NSMS) at regional and local levels. This decisively entrenched military involvement and dominance in internal security.

The NSMS is made up of 13 joint management centres, chaired primarily by SADF personnel. These overlap with military command structures and regional services council boundaries. Under these are sub- and mini-JMCs, which reach down to township level. All members are bound to secrecy by the Protection of Information Act.

There are four NSMS sub-committees: security; social, economic, political and constitutional (or 'welfare'); communications; and joint intelligence.

They are intended to provide a hotline of key intelligence from the

townships up to the state security council, helping to formulate state strategy. To keep their fingers on the pulse of daily township activity, the mini-JMCs try to mirror strategies of democratic organisation. In Bonteheuwel, for example, attempts have been made to house police reservists on every street, and there have been door-to-door recruitment attempts. And some JMCs have set up community liaison forums, which draw in hand-picked and influential members of the community.

The most immediate task of the JMCs has been to smash the power of mass-based democratic organisations, and regain control of the townships.

But their role is not merely repressive; the 20%-80% logic is based on the belief that street patrols, blade wire and overt

repression can only achieve an unstable stalemate. Any long-term solution to the crisis of control necessitates winning greater legitimacy for the state among black South Africans.

The role of the JMCs is thus also to co-ordinate, monitor and develop strategies for this reformist dimension of state policy at local and regional level.

At a confidential briefing for businessmen, Major General Charles Lloyd, secretary of the state security council, clarified the different dimensions of the state's counter-revolutionary strategy.

Firstly, he said, the specific areas of dissatisfaction identified by the ANC need to be addressed - education, housing, health care and freedom of movement. Lloyd stressed that support from the private sector is vital in addressing these grievances.

Secondly, argued Lloyd, the security forces must protect government, must protect the masses against intimidation, and must 'eliminate' revolutionaries.

He stressed that the ranks of the enemy are very small, and consist of trained, committed and active revolutionaries. These people need to be identified specifically, and the security forces must be careful not to incur the wrath of the masses by 'eliminating' uncommitted, non-revolutionaries 'by accident'.

Thirdly, Lloyd stressed the need to win the support of the masses by communicating and demonstrating a 'realistic new future' to them.

The secrecy of JMC structures facilitates both disinformation campaigns and covert security force operations. The state denies masterminding vigilante murders. But there is a certain cynicism in the fact that a Reverend Maqina is both the chair of the community liaison forum in Port Elizabeth's mini-JMC, and the head of Ama Africa, a vicious vigilante squad that has been terrorising residents of Uitenhage townships.

Against a backdrop of ongoing repression, the JMCs have embarked on upgrading strategies. These reflect a shift in the state's analysis of the causes of the political crisis, which are no longer reduced to the work of agitators alone.

Instead, there is a recognition that

real grievances exist.

Major General Bert Wandrag of SAP riot control argues, for example, that in Pietermaritzburg a small outlay of capital for text-books could have pre-empted the school boycotts, and saved the state millions of rands. In addition, he points to the misappropriation of school fees by school principals, and blames the DET for not exercising better control.



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Major General Charles Lloyd

Wandrag uses this example to set out a broader strategic argument: 'The outcome of this struggle will not be determined by weapons alone. If this had been the case, I would not have any fears, because the communists are bent upon avoiding military confrontation. They prefer to foment domestic grievances - real as well as imagined - and to instigate the country's inhabitants to full-scale insurrection and revolution. The only way to render the enemy powerless is to nip revolution in the bud, by ensuring that there is no fertile soil in which the seeds of revolution can germinate'.

The upgrading strategy is premised on this logic, and coupled to the notion that black political aspirations can be bought off by improved

township conditions. As Magnus Malan says: 'The big question is how many black people are only really interested in meeting their material needs - things like housing, education, job opportunities, clothes, food and so on. I do not think democracy is a relevant factor for the masses in South Africa. For them, it is a question of satisfying their own needs'.

Government thus hopes that if local authorities get the credit for upgrading initiatives, they will win credibility in the eyes of township residents, despite their lack of any real power.

Much of JMC strategy has been geared towards boosting the credibility of the local authorities before the October elections, to ensure that these structures have at least sufficient legitimacy to collect the garbage without army protection.

Councillors have handed out food parcels, organised soccer tours, cut red ribbons at new township facilities, and had daily prime-time coverage on TV2 and TV3.

In areas where local authority structures have been completely destroyed, there have been attempts to engage democratic organisations in negotiations around upgrading. These initiatives have invariably been accompanied by attempts to co-opt organisations into participation in local authority structures.

Organisations damaged by years of emergency rule rarely enter these encounters from a basis of strength, and their structures of mandate and accountability have often been smashed. This explains the contrast between these initiatives, and the local-level negotiations the state was forced into when democratic organisations were on the offensive.

At St Wendolins in Natal, democratic organisations have participated on a committee that includes known JMC figures, and there have been continued attempts to tie upgrading to participation in local authorities.

And in the 'white corridor' between the Transkei and the Ciskei, similar attempts have been made. In this area, village committees had forced the state to deal directly with them in relation to pensions.

Last year, these village committees were asked to send representatives to a committee to liaise with the



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authorities in defining upgrading priorities. They were offered offices and a 'secretariat'.

At the same time, the local authority boundaries in their area were being redefined to replace the tribal authority structures with town councils. The clear intention is to draw the village committees into these structures.

While the state was unsuccessful in both these cases, they highlight the need to formulate a national strategic response to NSMS upgrading strategies.

Township upgrading is a central part of the state's economic strategy. The threat of sanctions, coupled with the dismal performance of South Africa's manufacturing industries on international markets, has brought inward industrialisation to the fore as the impetus for capital accumulation. The provision of township housing is intended to kickstart this process.

The state hopes to depoliticise the sphere of housing by privatising township land. Capital has taken the bait, competing for the seemingly lucrative township contracts.

Nor does capital seem to have any moral dilemmas about working with the welfare committees of the JMCs. In Thokoza, for example, the JMC has tapped capital's social responsibility programmes to boost its shortfall of revenue needed for upgrading.

There is little apparent contradic-

tion between JMC upgrading initiatives and liberal capital's own 'winning hearts and minds' strategy, which entails promoting home ownership and township upgrading in an attempt to win support for free enterprise.

Capital's social responsibility programmes usually attempt to distance themselves from apartheid. Nonetheless, there is increasing evidence of capital's direct participation in JMC structures, particularly at the level of community liaison forums.

And while the privatisation of township land and housing development is supposed to depoliticise this sphere, township residents' inability to meet their bond repayments puts the onus of eviction on building societies and housing contractors. This further politicises the role of capital, rather than de-politicising the sphere of housing.

But the state does not have the economic resources to deliver the goods on a national scale, and this places an obvious limitation on NSMS strategies.

Only a handful of 'oilspot' townships have tasted the welfare side of the NSMS strategy, while the rest have had to content themselves with repression alone.

Even where upgrading is taking place, there are attempts to recoup the costs by including them in the price of housing - a fatal mistake reminiscent of the logic behind the rent increases that sparked the 1984

and 1985 township uprisings.

But even if the state does manage to beg, borrow or steal the money it needs for national township upgrading, the NSMS strategy is far from a watertight solution to the current crisis. For the state has underestimated the extent to which particular grievances that sparked the township uprisings were merely the signifiers of a broader resistance to national oppression and rank exploitation.

Whatever the nuances of Botha's reform rhetoric, this oppression and exploitation remains intrinsic to the experience of the mass of South Africa's people. Tared roads and toilets may improve the quality of life, but they do not give people more control over their lives.

The state has misjudged the extent to which the form of struggles waged was as important as the particular local content. The experience of building mass-based democratic structures, of participating in street committees, SRCs and union local committees, breaking through the boundaries of silence and finding a voice, wielding power through collective action, and breaking down some of the structures of control - all these were of longer-term significance than the particular issues and demands of the moment.

These experiences of organisation and the political consciousness developed in the process are the basis of new forms of organisation and resistance to the new contradictions arising from the NSMS strategy.