DRUG TRAFFICKING IN SOUTH AFRICA: DOES THE STATE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO COUNTER THIS POTENTIAL SECURITY THREAT?

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INTRODUCTION

Organised crime, and particularly drug trafficking, is currently seen as a new universal security threat to world order. Analysts have argued that this particular phenomenon lies fundamentally within the global political and economic context that has emerged during the last decade. With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of “weak states” that became vulnerable as a result of the collapse of state structures, organised crime started to flourish. The most notable example is the former Soviet Union where the collapse of communist rule allowed the emergence of literally thousands of criminal organisations.

The increased capacity of drug traffickers and criminal organisations to operate internationally, represents a trend that is perhaps even more disturbing than drug-related delinquency, since it has become a potential threat to the socio-economic and political order of every country in the world. In Columbia, for example, drug lords and terrorists combined their resources to wrest power from the democratically elected government. During the late 1980s thirteen Supreme Court judges and 167 police officers were killed, while the minister of justice and the ambassador to Hungary were assassinated. The message was that death was the price to pay for refusal to succumb to drug-related corruption (Adler, Mueller, Laufer: 328).

The major of producer and consumer countries involved in the narcotics industries are characterised by social disorder and therefore government instability is the necessary consequence.

Coupes replace elections. The populations of these countries are not immune to addiction themselves. Several South American countries, including Columbia, Bolivia and Peru are now experiencing major addiction problems. In the early nineties nearly 40 000 Columbians died due to drug-related violence. Peru alone has some 60 000 addicts. The Asian narcotics-producing countries, which thought themselves immune to the addiction problem, also became victims of their own creation. Pakistan, for example, has almost 200 000 drug addicts. (Adler, et al: 328).

South Africa has not been left untouched by these developments. The new-found democratic order led to the lifting of all sanctions against South Africa, resulting in the unrestricted international movement of goods and people. This resulted in the increase in transnational trafficking of drugs and illegal goods. International law enforcement authorities view South Africa as a growing center for illegal trade in everything from narcotics to endangered species, stolen cars and diamonds. Criminals from Nigeria, Columbia, China, Russia and Bulgaria have been attracted by the bourgeoning opportunities (Shaw 1998:2).

The map shows the various international drug trafficking routes of cocaine to South Africa (Damon 1998:13). It is clear that South Africa not only serves as an important transit route, but also a spillover place for the overstocked drug markets of the rest of the world.
The potentially huge profits of the drug trade are presently encouraging an increasing number of criminals who are involved in more orthodox crimes such as robbery, extortion, gambling and prostitution, to extend their activities to drug trafficking on both a national and an international scale. This is already having serious social and security implications for South Africa and its neighbours, and the resulting disorder is capable of creating mass anxiety, which rarely is without political consequence (Grove 1999:1).

This article attempts to assess the capacity of the state to counter drug trafficking in the country. It will be done by first identifying the factors that perpetuate drug trafficking and then placing it within the South African context. The state’s response to drug trafficking and in particular the different role players involved, will be discussed in detail. Finally, the state’s capacity to counter this potential security threat is discussed.

In South Africa, research or monitoring initiatives which could explain the drug trafficking phenomenon, do not exist. To compensate for this shortcoming, the explanation in this article will rely on foreign research findings, secondary sources, press clippings and research conducted on related topics. The following section explores a socio-economic approach, which suggests possible causes of drug trafficking.

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC APPROACH

Robert Merton argues that the scope and character of deviance depend on how a society makes cultural goals (such as financial success) accessible by providing the institutionalised means (such as schooling and job opportunities) to achieve them. But not everyone who desires conventional success has the opportunity to attain it. Children raised in poverty, for example, may see little hope of becoming successful if they play by the rules. As a result, they may seek wealth through one or another kind of crime such as drug abuse or trafficking. Merton calls this type of deviance “innovation” - the attempt to achieve
a culturally approved goal (wealth) by unconventional means (drug sales) (Macionis & Plummer 1997:210).

In short, Merton’s Strain theory explains how the social structure itself contributes to the creation of deviance on all levels, although the main focus is on the lower class. Unless the means to reach the goals are equally distributed in society, the overemphasis on goals and inequality of means will result in socially structured and patterned rates of deviant behaviour (Williams & McShane 1994:94). Merton’s theory is useful to explain drug trafficking in the South African context. As a developing country South Africa hosts a competitive and materialistic society where success is measured by climbing the so-called “corporate ladder”. Failure to “make it” means failure in society. Subsequently, the South African society is characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment and crime. Lack of opportunities in most disadvantaged communities compelled many youths to become involved in the illicit drug market. Drug dealing offers a simple and easy, albeit an illegitimate, way to wealth. It provides employment for those who are unemployed and under-educated. Because of the low level of skills and resources needed to enter the market, there are many candidates.

A number of factors led to South Africa’s increased involvement in the drug market. During Apartheid the Group Areas Act, which imposed segregation, created a number of ethically specific chains for drugs (Leggett 1999:1). Marijuana, for example, was primarily cultivated and distributed by black Africans. Mandrax was imported, manufactured and distributed largely by Indians and the coloured groups. The more exotic drugs were the domain of white syndicates and users. Mandrax was the most common hard drug of abuse prior to the transition to democracy. However, with the opening of South Africa’s borders after the 1994 election, the drug scene radically changed, partly due the introduction of new role players and markets.

**FACTORS THAT PERPETUATE DRUG TRAFFICKING**

Before 1994, South Africa was not considered to have had a serious drug problem, given that the country was largely cut off from the rest of the world. However, the beginning of the nineties and the advent of democracy brought about far-reaching changes to the country. The benefits of this newly achieved status include more international flights, sophisticated banking systems that open the way for money laundering, availability of illegal and legal automatic weapons, cellphone technology, advanced communication systems, a comfortable lifestyle for the affluent and access to commodities like gold, diamonds and endangered species parts (Legett 1999:1). Unfortunately, the down-side effect of this new openness was the unrestricted international movement of goods to and from South Africa.

The country was now confronted with free trade, pervasive economic problems in neighboring countries, as well as the legal and illegal cross-border movement of people. Immigrants from Zambia, Uganda, Somalia, Kenya and Nigeria flocked to South Africa. Nigerian citizens, whose immigration was tolerated due to their role in the anti-apartheid struggle, viewed South Africa as the land of opportunity. Thousands flooded into Johannesburg and settled in cheap residential hotels in Hillbrow, Yeoville and Berea. According to a report of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in 1998, between 45 000 to 100 000 Nigerians were living in South Africa at that time. The majority of Nigerians who make their way to South Africa do so on the pretext of securing refugee status. Each applicant is entitled to a formal hearing to put his or her case and until that hearing, refugees are given
temporary political refugee status. This allows them full
erights to stay and work in South Africa. Until the middle
of last year, fewer than ten Nigerians had been found to
be genuine political refugees (Kirk 2000:4). The
Nigerians are mainly involved in the smuggling of
cocaine.

Most of the syndicates operate from Johannesburg, but
some have recently moved to Sea Point in Cape Town.
The Nigerian drug syndicates have sophisticated
trafficking skills and are attractive business partners.
According to Police Sources, the Nigerian drug
syndicates consist of five or six people. The individuals
belonging to each of these syndicates have specific
tasks and expertise. When cocaine supplies need to
be acquired from South America, each member of a
syndicate has to make a financial contribution into a
common fund for the syndicate. Representatives from
different small syndicates, normally the buyers from
each syndicate, will then meet and pool their resources.
The next step is to arrange for one specific individual to
take over the responsibility of obtaining a shipment of
cocaine from South America*. The cocaine enters
South Africa mainly through the airports. Upon arrival
in South Africa, the cocaine would be divided equally
amongst all the syndicates who have contributed
financially to the particular venture (Fourie 1999:15).

Crack cocaine is now the fastest growing substance of
abuse in South Africa, with Mandrax on the decline in
many areas. According to the police, the going
purchase price for one kilogram of pure cocaine was $2
500 in June 1998 in South America (cocaine of
maximum purity is 90% pure). Once the cocaine has
arrived in South Africa and has been sold by a
syndicate after significantly diluting its concentration,
the original one kilogram - now in its diluted form - is
sold for $50 000 (Fourie 1999:17).

Up until this point, the discussion has focused on the
factors that perpetuated drug trafficking and the extent
of the drug market. An important concern about drug
trafficking is the impact it has on communities and the
security implication for the South African society in
general.

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

Violence

Violence is strongly linked to drug dealing. In the
Western Cape much of the gang warfare on the Cape
Flats is directly related to the Mandrax market. Drugs
play an important role in gang rituals and money
gathering. Most of the gangs sell drugs, but the
“Americans” gang specialises in selling cocaine, crack
and LSD. Smaller gangs are affiliated to bigger gangs,
and call on their allies in terms of turf and market-share
battles. Sophisticated syndicates control the drug
trade, while the street gang acts as the channel for
distribution of smaller quantities of drugs (Scharf & Vale

Gangsterism and the drug trade have flourished since
1994, just prior to the public execution of Rashaad
Staggie (co-leader of the Hard Living Kids gang) by an
anti-drug group. People against Gangsterism and
Drugs (PAGAD) was formed in Cape Town as a
community reaction to the lawlessness and crime on

* According to the Unit Commander, SANAB, (Johannesburg International Airport) anything that can contain something is used
to smuggle, for example wine bottles, baby powder containers, false bottoms in spray cans, lap tops, printers, false soles in
shoes, inside the steel tubes of a suitbace or backpack. “Mules” are people who rent out their stomachs to transport cocaine
filled condoms, more or less ten grams per condom (bullet). “Shotgunning” refers to a process of running several couriers
on a single flight in the hope that one will get through.
the Cape Flats. Rape, drug abuse, murder and crime are the daily experience of people living in these townships. In reaction to this situation, PAGAD aimed to eradicate the gangsters and drug dealers so as to free the community from violent activities by gangs, as well as the distribution of drugs (Haefele 1998:10). However, it is inevitable that vigilante groups become criminals themselves through the means they choose to achieve their goals.

**Vigilante action**

There have been scores of late night attacks on the houses of alleged drug dealers all over the Peninsula, many of which the police have linked to PAGAD. The killing of Staggie (co-leader of the “Hard Livings” gang) has also posed many ethical questions for the Muslim community (Haefele 1998:12). Vigilante and irresponsible behaviour by individuals in PAGAD could seriously diminish its effectiveness in the fight against gangsterism and drugs. The SAPS strongly condemned the tendency of taking the law into own hands. Such behaviour could create the impression that it is acceptable for people to take the law into their own hands. And such an impression poses serious direct security implications for the state due to the fact that these operations are conducted outside the parameters of the law.

**Corruption**

The infiltration of the Department of Home Affairs, Customs and the corruption of law-enforcement officials have serious ramifications for national security, with the direct consequence that the capacity for effective action is undermined. According to a news reporter, police corruption in the South African Narcotics Bureau (SANAB) has taken on major proportions and has stymied the success of some of their investigations. The reporter further suggests that drug dealers have already infiltrated the SAPS ranks and government institutions, and are assisting drug trafficking cartels by providing legal documents and permits (Pretoria News: 14 June 1996). It can be recalled that in 1996 a plot to assassinate the former Gauteng premier, Mr Tokyo Sekwale, because of his repeated condemnation of the drug trade was uncovered (Qhesi 1999:100). This example demonstrates how far drug trafficking syndicates will go to intimidate authorities that are committed to curbing their illegal activities. Drug traffickers have the financial resources and firearms to corrupt and terrorise even the best-intentioned officials.

**Economic impact**

The economic consequences of the drug trade are considerable. Government expenditure on combating drug trafficking, addressing the social deterioration of drug addicts, and health-related problems, affect the budget which could have been utilised for development and job creation. The state security assets such as the SAPS and the SANDF are increasingly diverted from their primary tasks in order to combat drug trafficking.

Furthermore, drug trafficking is also connected to the theft of vehicles, smuggling of firearms, money laundering and prostitution. These activities severely impair economic growth.

**Social impact**

Vigilante response to drugs and the associated violence has a detrimental impact on local communities. There are victims of violence who are family or friends of drug dealers or traffickers who are physically assaulted or executed by other dealers or traffickers over distribution disputes. Furthermore, drug trafficking has the potential to cause enormous social problems in the form of suffering, poverty, illness and eventually death among addicts. The risk of contracting infections and diseases such as HIV (Aids) increases with the involvement in drugs by users. Heroin, for example, has become increasingly popular with sex workers, and there is also evidence
that schoolchildren are being targeted, and that heroin may become the distinctive drug of the next generation (Qhesi 1999:4). Ecstasy and the other “club drugs” such as LSD and speed are currently consumed by a growing number of youth. The highly addictive and socially damaging nature of drugs could seriously harm the well-being of the youth in society.

After this attempt to explain the security implications of drug trafficking for the country, the next step is to discuss the state capacity to counter drug trafficking. The following section deals first with legislation and then the different role players involved in combating drug trafficking. Special attention is given to the role of the security forces in combating drug trafficking.

STATE CAPACITY

Much has been done on both a legislative and operational level to bolster the state’s capacity to fight drug trafficking. On a legislative level, The Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act, 140 of 1992 makes it an offence to supply certain substances to any person knowing or suspecting that the substances will be used for the manufacture of illegal drugs; prohibits any person from converting property that they know or suspect to be gained from the proceeds of drug trafficking, and makes dealing in dangerous and undesirable drugs an offence punishable by up to 25 years’ imprisonment (Lotter 1992: par 292).

Since 1995, various administrative and legislative measures have been introduced by the police and justice sectors that aim to improve the ability of the country to reduce the supply of illicit drugs and to apprehend drug dealers and traffickers. For example, in May 1995 Cabinet approved the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS). This strategy draws together a range of government departments to develop a holistic approach to fight crime. Drug trafficking as organised crime was listed as one of seven priority areas. However, NCPS implementation has, on occasion, been characterised by a complex set of committees and has been plagued by the failure to set clear objectives of delivery (Parry 1997:46).

One area where some progress has been made, however, is the introducing of legislation, which aims to tighten the legal framework within which organised criminals operate. The Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998, became operational in 1999. The Act defines and lists 34 offence types, ranging from murder to racketeering activities. For a pattern of racketeering activity to exist, two of the offence types must be committed within a ten-year period. Anyone who manages the operation enterprise and who knows or ought to have known than any person, while employed by or associated with the enterprise, participated in the conduct of the enterprise’s affairs through a pattern of racketeering activity, is guilty of an offence. The aim is to convict crime bosses against whom there is no direct evidence of criminal activity, but where there is evidence that they associated through an organisation with people who engage in racketeering activity. Persons convicted of a pattern of racketeering activity face tough fines of one billion rand to life imprisonment (http://www.anc.org.za.parliament:7).

The Act also focuses on offences related to criminal gangs. Gang members are guilty of an offence if they willfully aid any criminal activity committed for the benefit of, or in association with a criminal gang. Furthermore, any person who promotes or contributes towards a pattern of criminal gang activity, or incites, aids or encourages another person to commit or participate in a pattern of criminal gang activity, is guilty of an offence. Persons found guilty of such offences are liable to a fine and imprisonment ranging from three to eight years (http://www.anc.org.za.parliament:7).

This Act makes provision for property and assets tainted by criminal activity to be forfeited to the state by way of civil action. The High Court can make an order forfeiting property to the state that the court finds
to be instrumental of one of the 34 types of offences listed in the Act. Money generated through the forfeiture of assets is to be deposited in a Criminal Assets Recovery Account. Such monies will be used as financial assistance for law enforcement agencies involved in combating organised crime, drug dealing, criminal gang activity and crime in general. Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, Penuell Maduna, and the National Director of Public Prosecutions, Bulelani Ngcuka, quite recently deposited R145 000, confiscated from three alleged drug lords, in the Criminal Assets Recovery Account. The R145 000 was found in a car and had traces of methaqualone a chemical used in the manufacture of Mandrax (Phahlane 2000:1).

However, it is one thing to have a comprehensive set of laws, and quite another to enforce them. The effective prosecution of organised crime assumes a degree of efficiency in the state’s criminal justice system. The criminal justice department has been experiencing serious problems since 1995. Departments in the criminal justice system are characterised by poor morale, weak middle management and corruption. Severe staff and resource shortages in the Department of Justice have resulted in declining convictions over the past five years. Since 1995, primarily because of pay, working conditions and low morale, 520 public prosecutors out of a total staff complement of 1 620 prosecutors nation-wide, resigned. Replacements generally have very little experience. In 1996, for example, the average experience of district prosecutors was 1.6 years and of regional prosecutors 2.2 years (NEDCOR ISS Crime Index No 1: E28).

Poor court management has also opened up opportunities for corruption, in particular the disappearance of case dockets. Currently there are no official statistics of how many dockets are either stolen, unaccounted for or missing. In the Germiston court for example, where statistics have been kept, a hundred dockets were struck from the register in 1996 after being lost in the system. Indications are that the situation could be worse in other areas (NEDCOR ISS Crime Index No 1: E30). However, the real problem for attaining convictions is the criminal justice activities that precede this. In most drug-related cases, inadequate investigation by the police and poor co-ordination with prosecutors result in a few cases making it to the court. And when they do, a large proportion are withdrawn due to the workload and inexperience of many prosecutors who usually have little time to prepare evidence which can secure a conviction.

Nevertheless, the main concern in combating drug-related problems is the issue of better policing and investigation. The following section analyses the role of the police in the investigation of drug-related crime, as well as the role of the defence force in combating drug trafficking.

**The South African Police Service (SAPS)**

In terms of the Constitution and Police Service Act of 1995, the role of the SAPS is the prevention and investigation of crime, maintenance of public order and preservation of internal security (http://www.anc.org.za.parliament). The investigation and gathering of information in relation to organised crime is spread across a number of SAPS units and intelligence agencies. The special unit of the SAPS, introduced to combat drug trafficking, namely the South African Narcotics Bureau (SANAB), is regarded by foreign governments as the most effective drug policing institution in the region. However, SANAB is currently understaffed and underfunded *. An internal police study found that the SAPS narcotics unit at the

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*Although understaffed, SANAB at the Johannesburg International Airport confiscated 30 716 kg of cocaine (powder) in 1994. In 1998 they confiscated 218 070 kg. 1,1 kg of cocaine is worth R275 000. (Servamus; Aug, 1999, p.2).
Johannesburg Airport should have 227 officers if they are to be effective. It has ten. And the 138 000 strong SAPS has only 18 000 detectives of which 6 000 work in national and provincial units concentrating on organised crime (Mabry 1998:17). Closely linked to lack of manpower and resources are the lack of skills of police investigators. There is a high degree of inexperience-only 13 percent of all detectives (and these mainly in specialised units) have more than six years on-the-job experience. This often results in poorly completed case dockets and unsuccessful prosecutions. This situation has been aggravated over time by structural changes in the police force. In the past, station-level detectives were often seen as ineffective and inexperienced. When specialised units were created, the result has been the removal of experienced officers from stations, and subsequently a loss of morale among ordinary street-level detectives. In a recent development the SAPS has created a detective academy to train detectives and pass skills from specialised units on to station-level officers (Shaw 1997:14).

Another attempt from government to address the weaknesses and shortcomings of the investigative arm of the SAPS led to the implementation of the Directorate of Special Operations (nicknamed the “Scorpions”) during 1999. The objective of the Scorpions is to increase national conviction rates through prosecution-led investigations. The Scorpions will focus its activities on priority crimes such as vehicle hijacking, syndicated drug and arms dealing, transnational crimes, money laundering and corruption within the criminal justice system. This prosecution-driven unit is already making an impact on organised crime. For example, the syndicates behind hijacking in Gauteng have been tackled and 100 percent of those who have been charged have been convicted. In the Western Cape, eight of the ten key gang leaders have been arrested and charged (Shaw 2000:8).

Although the SAPS made some progress in combating drug trafficking, problem areas still exist. The SAPS established a border-policing unit responsible for points of entry and exit into and out of South Africa. The unit works closely with SARS (the South African Revenue Service), the SANDF, NIA, SASS (the foreign intelligence agency) and the Department of Foreign Affairs. However, only three policemen cover 100 km of the Mozambique/KwaZulu-Natal border, well-known for gun running and Mandrax smuggling (Shaw 2000:4). Car thieves, cattle rustlers or drug smugglers simply drive through the ageing 0.9m high barbed wire fence into or out of South Africa. Not to mention corrupt officials at the border who, by accepting bribery money, allow smugglers to enter the country illegally.

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF)

The SAPS, however, are not the only law enforcement agency to combat cross border drug trafficking. The SANDF has been assisting the SAPS since 1994 in the fight against crime. Although it is not its primary function, the SANDF stands as a full partner in this regard.

The SANDF has been employed for service by the President since 12 July 1994 to uphold law and order in co-operation with the SAPS (Du Toit 1996:5). One area of deployment is the combating of drug trafficking across land borders. Although the responsibility for borderline control lies within the SAPS, the SANDF currently executes this task. The operational successes of the SANDF for September 1999 include the following: nearly 6 500 illegal immigrants were arrested, dagga with a street value of more than RM3.3 (3338.90 kg) was confiscated and 536 Mandrax tablets were seized. During September 1999 the South African Air Force flew more than 300 hours in support of crime prevention and border control operations at an estimated cost of R 561,631.
According to the Department of Defence Internal Bulletin (Oct 1996) this brings the total cost of flying in support of crime prevention and border control operations for 1999 to RM 10,600.00.

However, the SANDF is becoming increasingly unable to sustain an adequate border-line-control program for the following reasons. First, the SANDF is not the budgeting authority for borderline control. For example, the SANDF budget allocation for the 1997/1998 financial year was RM 9,579, which is RM 700 less than the previous year (Defence Budget Vote, 1997). The effect of budget cuts means that the SANDF will only be able to deploy a shrinking force level until such time as the operational deployments and funding achieve equilibrium. Secondly, the current employment of the SANDF does not furnish it with an adequate legal mandate for the proper execution of borderline control task as a primary function. By relieving the SAPS of this task, valuable SAPS manpower could be utilised at border posts and in the urban and rural areas to combat crime. The SANDF will be able to fully take on the responsibility for the South African borderline once the amendments to the Defence Act have been accepted by Parliament. These amendments are being finalised at present. The approval of the amendments will be in line with the SANDF’s preferred role of safeguarding South Africa’s borders (Bestbier 1999).

Despite the announcement that the SANDF would eventually take full responsibility for controlling the country’s borders, there is no department that could effectively execute the task of border security without the involvement of other government departments. For example, departments like Home Affairs is needed to process individual entering into the country, Foreign Affairs to liaise with other governments, Intelligence for information etc. Close co-operation between the SAPS, SANDF and the above-mentioned departments is of the utmost importance for success.

Furthermore, to counter drug-trafficking and cross-border crime, regionally based liaison with similar agencies in neighboring countries is of greatest importance. South African law enforcement institutions, despite their problems, are far better resourced and skilled than their regional counterparts. Recent operations in Zambia and Mocambique have thus had to be carried out almost entirely by the SAPS. Despite this, co-operation among regional intelligence and security agencies has improved dramatically. For example, since 1995 there has been an ongoing debate between South Africa and the Southern African countries regarding freedom of movement for the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This debate is open to serious questioning. How capable are the SADC member countries to control the movement of people through external borders? The current influx of illegal immigrants from neighboring countries into South Africa serves as a prime example of the lack of control at borders. The main concern here is the increase in cross-border crime and more specifically, drug-related crime. The signing of the proposed “Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in the SADC” would be like opening the borders for criminals. The concept of free movement is not seen as an option.

CONCLUSIONS

South Africa as a state in transition, like many other previous states in transition, is experiencing growth in organised crime with transnational connections. Criminal syndicates are currently involved in a wide range of illicit trafficking in weapons, drugs, stolen goods and illegal immigration between South Africa and the international market.

This situation is exacerbated by the entrance of South Africa into the global enterprises and the inexperience of the country’s law enforcement agencies in dealing effectively with sophisticated crime syndicates. Drug trafficking, as part of the transnational crime situation
has a direct security implication on the country’s newly found democracy, affecting all the state’s power bases i.e. socio-economic, political and security dimensions.

The state’s response to the drug problem, thus far, has been fragmented and poorly funded with no co-ordination between reactive and proactive programmes. The National Crime Prevention Strategy, aimed at achieving greater co-ordination, has been plagued by the failure to set clear objectives for delivery. Much has been done on a legislative level to combat drug trafficking, such as the confiscating of the profits of crime. However, it is one thing to have a comprehensive set of laws and quite another to enforce them.

The criminal justice system is characterised by multiple blockages (poor morale, weak middle management, budget restraints), which are not easily fixed in the short time. The lead agency of the SAPS, SANAB, is losing the battle against drugs given a lack of resources. Much more attention needs to be given to border-control initiatives. The SANDF is currently tasked with border control although constitutionally it is the responsibility of the SAPS. Police officers continue to execute border control. Another weakness remains a poorly organised customs and revenue service for the control of imports and exports through ports of entry. Corruption, declining morale, lack of skills and resources are the main obstacles to proper border-control and need urgent attention.

Although the scenario appears bleak, government has the capability to combat drug trafficking. The legislation necessary to fight organised crime and drug trafficking is largely in place. What is urgently needed is a concerted effort to implement legislation, and to improve the operational capacities of all the main components in the criminal justice system. To combat drug-related violence effectively, a multi-dimensional approach, demanding multi-professional assistance, is the answer.

In other words, there should be a close relationship between all parties involved in the control of drug trafficking, the treatment of drug abusers, as well as those involved in research and law enforcement. Public awareness to the increasing drug problem is urgently needed. The consequences of drug abuse such as loss of employment, break-up of family, declining health and the risk of aids, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases among the youth, require specific attention and should be emphasised in the media. There should be a demand for drug abuse treatment programmes and state hospitals should attend to drug abusers, rather than turn them away because they are drug abusers.

In the final analysis, however, the development of organised crime is related as much to the effectiveness of policing as to the institutional strength of the state. Assessing the growth in organised crime cannot be divorced from the broader issues of governance and economic development. The weaker the state becomes over time, the more likely that criminal organisations will form parallel and competing points of power which will be difficult to displace.

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