

The South African Intelligence Services

From apartheid to democracy,
1948–2005

Kevin A. O'Brien



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reason that I chose this topic to glean as much insight into as possible – I am hoping that those insights will prove useful to others, both those who experienced the events discussed in this book and those who have merely watched them with interest. In that light, I must thank one former covert operator for his insights into “the disease” that afflicted so many former apartheid-era operatives – known collectively (and colloquially) as “the I-don’t-remember disease”; while facetious, this pointed me towards one of the main challenges (and – occasionally – dangers) in developing an academic study of a topic that remains very much alive for those who lived through its story. In this sense, and most importantly, this study would not exist in the form it does – perhaps not at all – if it were not for the many interviewees and the hard-learned-but-never-forgotten lesson they taught me that one person’s academic research is another person’s life, livelihood and possession. Ultimately, it was the review and critique (and not a small amount of direct criticism, at times tinged with the legacy of personal experiences under apartheid) that came from many of those involved – on both sides – in South Africa’s dirty wars, as well as the transition from apartheid to democracy and the efforts to develop a “new dawn” in South Africa’s intelligence dispensation, that strengthened my resolve to see this story – one which will never be complete – told. This book is better for those critiques, no matter how harshly put at times. To that end, I particularly owe a great deal of thanks to W.M. for his good-natured tolerance of my stumblings and fumbblings, his personal insights on many of the harder issues, and his invaluable advice on where to stride and when to keep low and move fast. In a similar manner, I must particularly thank Tony for trusting me enough to let me in.

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Finally, and most curiously, I must pay my debt to David Cornwell for the inspiration many years ago, which has never wavered – may this go some way towards the reality of your world.

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANC-DIS	African National Congress Department of Intelligence and Security
ANC-NAT	African National Congress Department of National Intelligence and Security
ANC-NEC	African National Congress National Executive Committee
APLA	Azanian Peoples' Liberation Army
Capravis	<i>Inkatha</i> supporters trained for hit-squad activities by DMI
CCB	Civil Co-operation Bureau (SADF)
COIN	Counter-insurgency
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CSADF	Chief, SADF
CSI	Chief of Staff, Intelligence (SADF)
DCC	Directorate Covert Collection (SADF)
DCI	Directorate of Covert Information (SADF)
DG	Director-General
DMI	Military Intelligence Division (SADF)
DP	Democratic Party
DST	Directorate Special Tasks (SADF)
EMLC	Electronic magnetic logistical component
FRELIMO	<i>Frente de Libertação de Moçambique</i> (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique)
<i>Geveilstaf</i> (GVS)	Joint Security Staff (Afrikaans acronym)
GIKOM	<i>Gesamentlike Inligtingskomitee</i> – Joint Intelligence Committee (Afrikaans acronym)
GIS	<i>Gesamentlike Intelligensiesentrum</i> – Joint Intelligence Centre (Afrikaans acronym)
GOC-SF	General Officer Commanding, Special Forces (SADF)
GOS	<i>Gesamentlike Operasionele Sentrum</i> – Joint Operations Centre (Afrikaans acronym)

IFP	<i>Inkatha</i> Freedom Party
KIK	<i>Koördineer Inligting Komitee</i> – Co-ordinating Intelligence Committee (Afrikaans acronym)
KOMKOM	<i>Kommunikasiekomitee</i> – Communications Committee (Afrikaans acronym)
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
KZP	KwaZulu Police Force
MK	<i>Umkhonto we Sizwe</i> – Spear of the Nation, the military wing of the ANC/SACP
MPLA	<i>Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola</i> (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola)
NCM	National Co-ordinating Mechanism
NIS	National Intelligence Service
NP	National Party
NSCS	National Security Co-ordination Structures
NSMS	National Security Management System
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PIDE	<i>Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado</i> (International Police for the Defence of the State), Portugal
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
RENAMO	<i>Resistência Nacional Moçambicana</i> (Mozambican National Resistance – also MNR)
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAP	South African Police
SAP-CCID	South African Police Crime Combating and Investigation Division
SAP-CIS	South African Police Crime Intelligence Service
SAP-SB	South African Police Security Branch
SEMKOM	<i>Staatkundige-Ekonomiese-en-Maatskaplikekomitee</i> or Constitutional/Economic/Welfare Committee (Afrikaans acronym)
SSC	State Security Council
Stratkom	Strategic Communications Branch, State Security Council (Afrikaans acronym)
SWAPO	South-West African People's Organisation
TBC Special Forces	Transkei, Bophutatswana and Ciskei Special Forces
TBVC	Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda, and Ciskei
TBVCDF	TBVC Defence Forces
TBVCPF	TBVC Police Forces
TBVIS	Transkei, Bophutatswana and Venda Intelligence Services
<i>Trewits</i>	<i>Teen Rewolusionêre Inligting Taakspan</i> (Counter-

	revolutionary Targeting Committee) (Afrikaans acronym)
UDF	Union Defence Force (1910–1957)
UDF	United Democratic Front (1976–1990)
UNITA	<i>União Nacional para la Independência Total de Angola</i> (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola)
VEIKOM	<i>Veiligheidskomitee</i> – Security Committee (Afrikaans acronym)
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Resistance Army

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1 Introduction

South African intelligence in revolution and counter-revolution 1948–2005

Who will believe that your course is just when your behaviours are so unjust?

Unknown sixteenth-century French peasant

On 12 September 1989, two men checked-into the Palace Hotel in Lucerne, Switzerland. Using the names Michael James and Jacobus Maritz, they were in Switzerland illegally – travelling on false passports, false documentation and under cover-names – but decided that the risk was acceptable, given the enormity of what they were about to embark upon. Waiting nervously in their rooms for their contacts – John and Jack Simelane – they considered the possibility that they, or their contacts, could be killed in the process of the meetings, or – possibly even worse – detected and exposed by the Swiss authorities, or the American, British, French or West German intelligence services. As the evening wore on, the Simelane brothers arrived at the hotel, and asked for James' and Maritz's suite. Approaching their door cautiously in case James or Maritz were waiting to shoot them down in their turn, the Simelane brothers turned the corner into the room, and stopped: standing before them were James (in reality, Mike Louw, the deputy director of South Africa's National Intelligence Service) and Maritz (in reality, Maritz Spaarwater, its chief director of operations), with nervous looks on their faces. Entering the room, John Simelane (in reality, Thabo Mbeki, a leading member of the African National Congress' National Executive Council) and Jack Simelane (in reality, Jacob Zuma, the deputy head of the ANC's National Intelligence Department) grinned in relief. "Well...", sighed Mbeki, "here we are, bloody terrorists and for all you know fucking communists as well." The group broke-up in laughter, thereby starting the first moves by the intelligence services of both the apartheid state and its principal opponent of negotiating a settlement towards the end of apartheid, and a democratic future for all South Africans.¹

Introduction

Since 1994, South Africa has moved down the path towards a multi-racial, representative democracy based on non-racialism and the concept of “one man, one vote”. In reaching this point, the country has moved from a political system where a single party – composed of representatives of the white Afrikaner minority in South Africa – dominated politics for 45 years, to a political system where a single party – composed of representatives across the “colour bar” in South Africa – completely dominates politics. While promoting a vision of national co-operation with other political parties in the country, the African National Congress (ANC), which achieved electoral victory in April 1994 during the country’s first all-race elections, is of such political strength – in a not-dissimilar manner to the power of the Afrikaner-dominated National Party during apartheid,² but under altogether different circumstances – that it has been able to dictate largely the terms of the ensuing transition.

This transition has been a difficult one – yet, relatively smooth when considering comparative examples in other African countries and the alternative futures confronting its crafters in 1990. However, a number of very serious issues confront the new government and its supporters, issues which are being dealt with as well as possible in light of the staggering effect that some of them have. While the successive ANC-led governments since this transition have succeeded generally in dealing with many of the same type of problems faced by their predecessors in Africa who underwent decolonisation or moved from white-minority to black-majority rule, in attempting to deal with these problems, new ones have been created, some of which appear insurmountable based on current attempts to deal with them.

Many of these challenges surround South Africa’s ever-evolving intelligence dispensation – and, in the post-apartheid era, reflect many of the same issues with that dispensation that confronted (and, by-and-large, were ignored by) the apartheid state’s political and security leadership. As such, it must be borne in mind from the start that South Africa’s approach to intelligence today evolved out of the intelligence dispensation which existed under the apartheid regime; as such, this dispensation has both the unique characteristics for a democratic system, and the failings and foibles of a transitional state following liberation. In many ways, it could be said that not only South Africa’s history, but also its viability as a country and a society has been – to varying degrees over the period from 1910 to 2005 – dictated and influenced by its intelligence dispensation. As Sanders notes,

Since the early 1960s, South Africa has been a land infested with spies. Some intelligence operatives are essentially civil servants, others are freelance traders in information ... over the last half-century, the ten-

tacles of intelligence stretched far and wide ... espionage, however incoherent and dishonest, is part of the glue that has held apartheid and post-apartheid society together.³

This is true as much for the apartheid era as it has been for the period since South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 – and while that transitional period can now be said to be over, many problems from that transition remain, and continue to evidence societal and political fall-out for South Africa today.

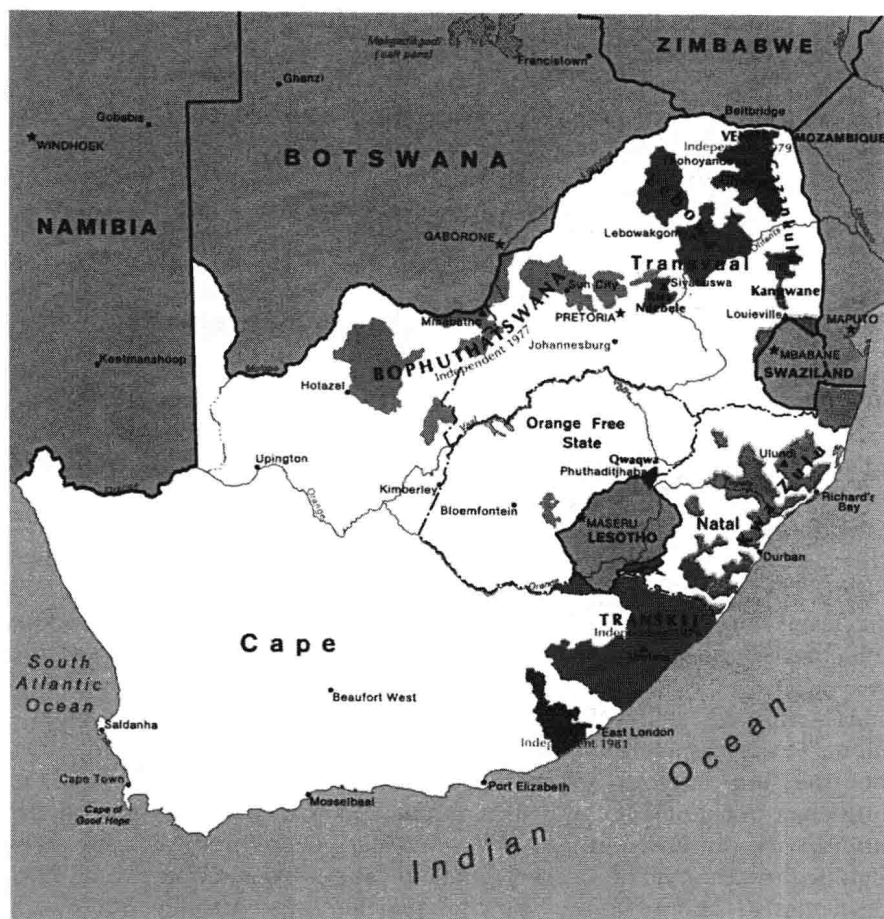
Overview: South Africa's evolving national intelligence and security establishment

This study grapples with those issues – with a long-view approach to understanding how and why they have evolved (in terms of South Africa's intelligence dispensation as a whole), what impact and influence they have had on South Africa's society and politics across its modern history, and what lessons may be learned from these understandings for the future.⁴ As such, this study's primary period of interest is that from 1961 – the year in which South Africa's first formal national intelligence capability was established since the founding of the modern South African state in 1910, therefore effectively the beginnings of its post-colonial intelligence history, and the year after the ANC launched its “armed struggle” against the apartheid state – through 2005 – the year that saw the most recent set of amendments to that dispensation introduced by the government in Pretoria. It is, however, impossible to strike a clean starting-point at 1961 – given the influence that intelligence in the decades prior to that year had on the intelligence dispensation long after that year. Therefore, this study takes significant account of developments in that dispensation from 1939 particularly – and 1948, the year that apartheid was introduced in South Africa – in order to understand this evolution in long-view. Equally and clearly, South Africa's intelligence history did not freeze in 2005 and many significant events have continued to unfold even to the point of writing (2010), as is discussed in Chapter 9's Postscript – but with this last round of legislative amendments to the dispensation (which do not reflect on the 2009 Presidential Decrees forming the State Security Agency – see Chapter 9) occurring in 2005, an end-point must also be dictated.

The impact of South Africa's political history on its security

While space prevents a discussion of South Africa's history generally, a brief appreciation is required.

This history centres on the struggle between the Dutch-descended people of South Africa (known as Afrikaners) and all other ethnic groups which have inhabited or controlled South Africa at various points throughout its history, including



Map 1.1 South Africa (including homelands) 1990 (source: CIA World Factbook).

confrontations between those of English descent and the Afrikaners. One of the single biggest misunderstandings with regard to South Africa's past is that Afrikaner antipathy towards the English is as strong, if not perhaps greater than, their belligerence towards the various black tribes of the region, as Allister Sparks has pointed out in his remarkable study *The Mind of South Africa*.⁵

When the National Party (NP) was elected to power in 1948 and declared the policies of apartheid ("separateness"), it did so with the view that these were necessary in order to ensure the survival of the Afrikaner nation in a country where it was thought that black majority-rule would lead to genocide against the Afrikaner nation, and where the English could never be trusted. Thus, the National Party (hand-in-hand with the