

internal destabilisation

The South African government's regional destabilisation strategy is well-known. But its internal dimensions are less well understood ...

The belated admission by Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, that South African troops have been once again actively involved in southern Angola since late September — in what he described as 'limited support for Unita' — has rekindled international interest in South Africa's role in the destabilisation of the subcontinent.

But while external destabilisation is widely recognised as a major part of the government's regional offensive, it is less generally understood that a similar strategy is being implemented inside the country as well. The parallel emerges clearly if one examines the development of repression over the past two years.

Until recently, the government relied predominantly on its traditional strategy of detention to disrupt organisations operating outside government-sanctioned structures. While detentions have continued unabated — there have been an estimated minimum of 25 000 during the States of Emergency (of whom at least 1 000 remain in detention) — an analysis of recent events shows that detention has been supplemented by another disruptive strategy: the use of surrogate forces to exacerbate divisions within communities, to annihilate government opponents and to advance government interests.

In the sub-continent this strategy has become quite clear: Unita in Angola and Renamo in Mozambique, supported and at times actively assisted by South African forces, have played an important role in bringing regimes hostile to the South African government to their knees.

Inside South Africa, particularly within the townships, hidden from white view and obscured from history by media censorship, the art of destabilisation has reached new levels of refinement. Vigilantes — operating openly while police turn a blind eye — are waging concerted campaigns against individuals and organisations. Assassina-

tions, jungle justice and even mass killings have become features of attempts to repress political resistance.

The wild-fire spread of vigilantes has been followed by what appears, in some parts of the country, to be their formalisation: the establishment of various police units which have replaced the SADF and the SAP in many townships.

Best known are the kitskonstabels, who with minimal training have been deployed in townships throughout the country since September 1986. They fall under the control of the Department of Law and Order.

There are also the municipal police, a force established in 1982. They are sometimes called community guards, and fall under black local authorities, and ultimately under the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning. Both these forces have developed a bad name and in some parts of the country, the opprobrium of local communities. They are variously known as 'kitsies', 'blue flies', 'green flies', or 'green beans'.

The vigilante groups — and their uniformed cousins — show uncomfortable similarities to the growth of 'rebel' movements in Angola and Mozambique. And the strategy is clearly not a home-grown one. The superpowers have long perfected the use of surrogate forces to wage their wars in various parts of the world. This strategy also has a long history inside South Africa, where the government has traditionally recruited agents of repression and control from within the ranks of oppressed communities themselves. The homelands policy remains the classic example of this strategy.

Similarly, internal destabilisation has become a fact of South African life in recent years, reaching its most horrific and violent peak with the destruction of the homes and shelters of an estimated 70 000 black Cape-tonians in May and June last year, through the agency of a vigilante group known as 'wit-



Santu Mofokeng: Afrapix

Fabian Ribeiro's daughter, Barbara, at her father's funeral.

doeke' (because of the white bands worn around their heads and arms). Part of the witdoeke's acknowledged purpose was to destroy squatter settlements whose leaders were regarded as politically sympathetic to the activist youth known as 'the comrades'. Eyewitness accounts of the destruction alleged explicit collusion between the witdoeke and the security forces. These accounts were related by over 100 residents and a large number of priests, politicians and journalists. Repeated attempts to have allegations of direct police and SADF involvement in the

atrocities heard in court are only now coming to fruition in a marathon Supreme Court damages hearing. The Crossroads inferno, in which at least 100 people died, was merely the most dramatic example of 'internal destabilisation' that has emerged in recent times.

But if one draws together the various strands of information that have emerged, it is possible to perceive a pattern, albeit a limited and partial one, obscured by the numerous restrictions on the flow of information.

Statistics given in response to questions in parliament provide a glimpse of the extent of the way the kitskonstabels and municipal police have abused their power. There are 9 270 special township constables in South Africa: 6 317 in the Transvaal, 1 962 in the Cape Province, 1 023 in the Orange Free State and 148 in Natal. Between September 1986 and September 1987 at least 12 murders had been committed with firearms issued to them. During the same period, members of these forces committed 95 crimes in the Transvaal and the Cape. (No statistics were available for the OFS and Natal.) The Transvaal offences included 69 firearm offences: 11 murders, 23 attempted murders, three robberies and 32 cases of aiming a weapon. There were 26 firearm offences in the Cape including one murder, two culpable homicides, four attempted murders, four armed robberies, two assaults, five cases of aiming a firearm, one case of unauthorised use of a firearm and the loss of seven firearms. Overall the officially recorded rate of serious crimes committed by the kitskonstabels and municipal police is at least five times higher than that of the conventional police force.

It is also important to remember that these statistics and the cases brought to court reveal only the tip of the iceberg. They do not reflect the cases in which victims are too frightened of intimidation to lay charges or complaints — or where the police refuse to accept charges. And even when complaints are laid, few culminate in court cases. Nor do the statistics tell us anything about the actions that are accepted as part of the various police forces' 'execution of duty'.

When people feel safe to lodge complaints the statistics rocket — as evidenced by complaints in Duncan Village, a very small community near East London, whose residents have laid 63 out of the 195 complaints made against the municipal police throughout the Cape. Black Sash members in the Border Region, who have been actively involved in exposing the brutality of municipal police, report that many Duncan Village residents would lay complaints or charges against members of this force only in the presence of a Black Sash member, for fear of intimidation. (See article on page 48.)

Side-by-side with the rise of the special constable forces have developed 'freelance' vigilante groups such as the Ama-Afrika group in the Eastern Cape — who pay lip service to the philosophy of black consciousness. There are also gangs which are said to be loosely linked to Inkatha in Natal, groups of 'elders' in innumerable rural communities throughout the country and the more sinister bantustan police with their unenviable reputation for brutality, particularly in Venda, KwaNdebele and Ciskei.

Most sinister and disturbing of all are the nameless and faceless freelance assassins who appear to be roaming the subcontinent, conducting hit-and-run operations reminiscent of the operations of the Rhodesian Selous Scouts. It is becoming almost commonplace for political activists inside and outside the borders of South Africa simply to be hunted down.

Although political assassinations are nothing new in South Africa, the present scale of killings can be said to have begun in 1985. During that year political activists were killed by unknown assailants, or simply went missing without trace on an unprecedented scale. The United Democratic Front lost 11 of its leading figures, who either disappeared or were found murdered. These included William Kratshi, an executive member of the UDF's rural committee, who was shot dead in January. In August three leading members of the UDF-affiliated Port Elizabeth Black Civil Organisation (PEBCO) disappeared and have not been heard of since. The murders of Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sicela Mhlawuli and Sparrow Mkonto in June were

a political tragedy comparable to the death in detention of Steve Biko. In August, Mrs Victoria Mxenge, an attorney and a Natal regional executive member of the UDF was killed by unknown assailants. In October two UDF activists, Ngwako Ramalepe from the Northern Transvaal and Batandwa Ndondo from Transkei, were killed by unknown assailants.

1986 saw a continuation of this trend. In January, Chief Ampie Mayisa, a member of the UDF's executive in Leandra, Eastern Transvaal, was murdered by local vigilantes. Mrs Joyce Mabhudafasi, northern Transvaal branch secretary of the UDF, was seriously injured in a petrol-bomb attack on her home outside the University of the North. The UDF's offices in Durban were gutted by fire, causing R50 000 worth of damage.

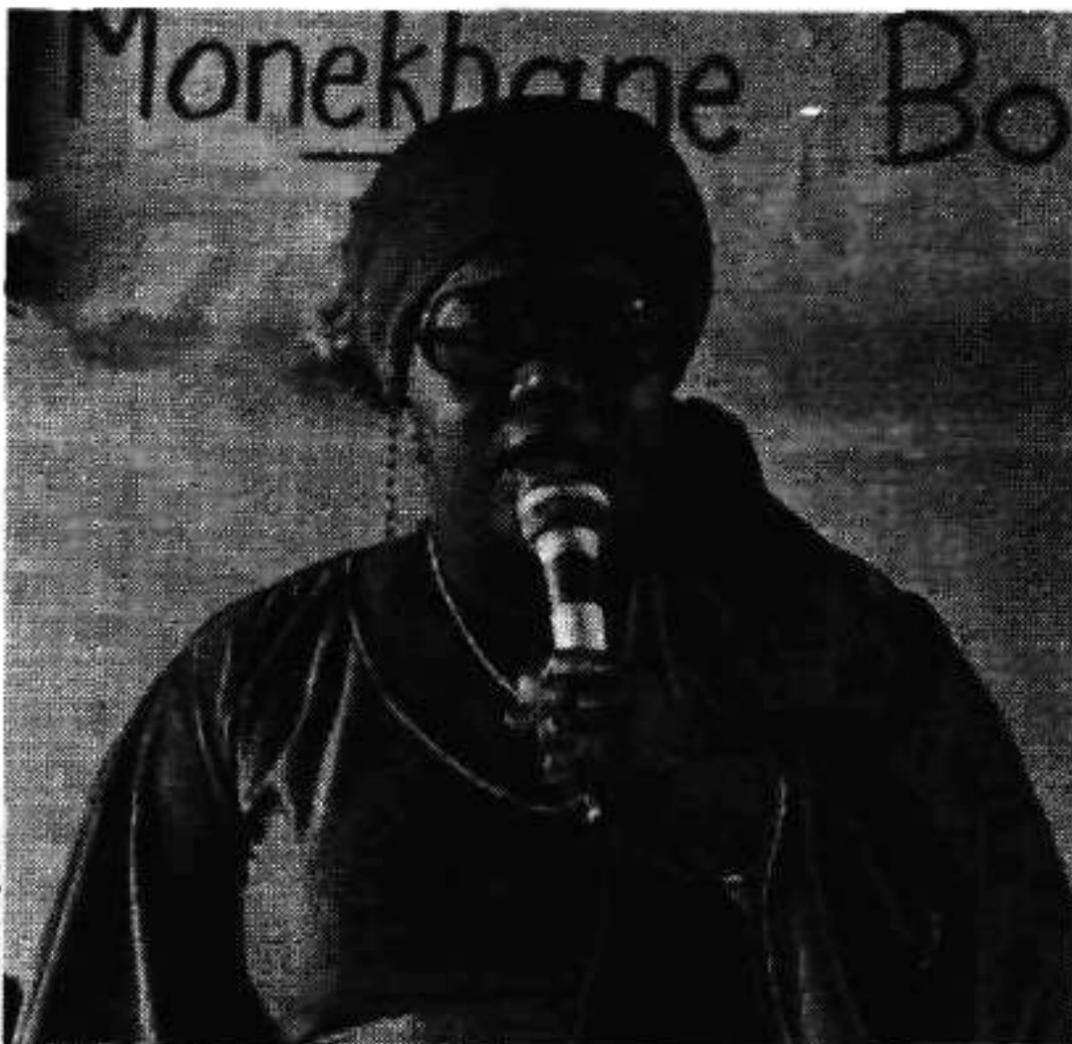
December 1986 also saw the assassination of the community physician, Fabian Ribeiro, in Mamelodi. Although Dr Ribeiro's political roots were in the Pan Africanist tradition, he was best known for his mediation between rival political groups and was a highly respected community leader.

The fact that those responsible for these actions have not been caught is curious, to say the least, given the South African Police's high success rate in solving comparable crimes. Because no one has been brought to book, it is impossible to say with any certainty whether such assassinations and other violent acts against government opponents are committed by agents of the state, or by surrogate forces, or by members of rival organisations to whose actions the police conveniently turn a blind eye.

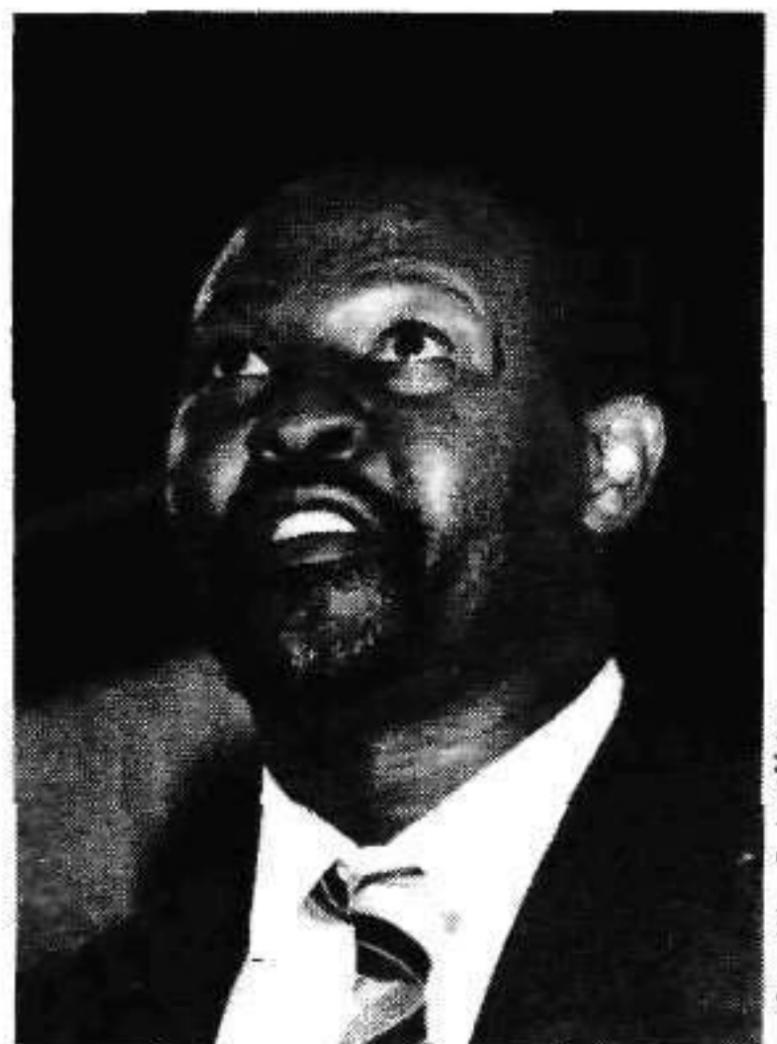
But it would also be inaccurate to claim

BELOW LEFT:
Victoria Mxenge speaking at a memorial service for a friend shortly before she herself was assassinated.

BELOW RIGHT:
Eric Mntonga died in circumstances thinly disguised as a robbery.



Jeeva Ratgopaul



Steve Hilton Barber / Afrapix

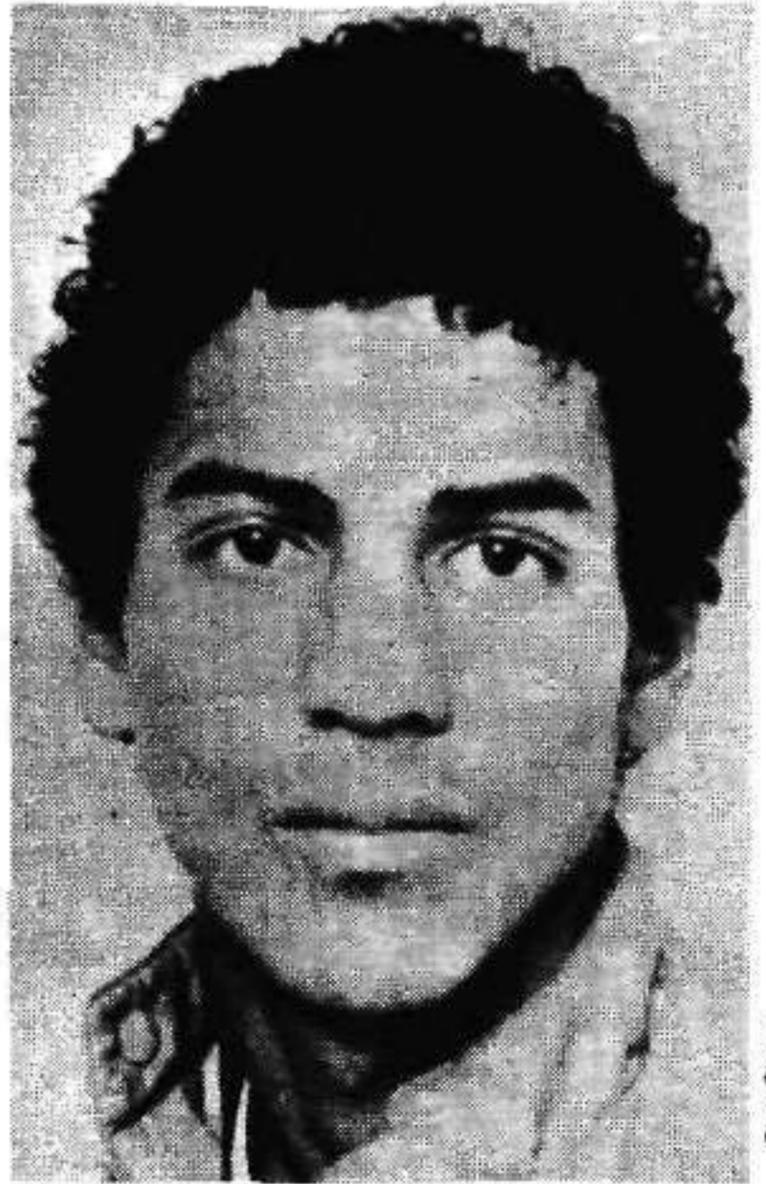
that all conflict between rival resistance movements is simply attributable to outside intervention. Tensions between different resistance organisations do exist — and these too have resulted in a mutual meting out of jungle justice during recent years.

It is usually extremely difficult to get to the root of such cases of escalating violence, as the localised civil war in Pietermaritzburg's townships has shown. Old scores pile on new ones, and the boundaries between self-defence and renewed aggression are easily blurred. Nevertheless, in this as in most other instances of violent rivalry between political organisations, evidence has emerged of outside intervention to protect and promote the interests of one group at the expense of the other, in ways that include the promotion of violence.

Similarly, the AZAPO/UDF conflict has at times taken on extremely serious dimensions. In 1986, the newly elected AZAPO president, Patrick Mosala, said that during the course of the year, 30 AZAPO members had been killed and 100 injured and that 30 houses belonging to members of the organisation had been burnt down as a result of rivalry between 'competing activist groups'. The UDF also suffered as a result of this conflict.

While such friction cannot be attributed entirely to external manipulation, there is little doubt that where conflict does exist, it is actively encouraged by outside agencies. The numerous examples of tension-fanning media, fraudulently purporting to be issued by particular organisations, is one of the more common methods of exacerbating conflict. During 1986, for example, a pamphlet on a UDF letterhead was circulated in Soweto labelling AZAPO as a 'reactionary third force' and calling for every AZAPO member to be 'hunted down'. It severely strained relations between the organisations. The UDF categorically denied any knowledge of the leaflet. Given these facts, it is difficult to distinguish between tensions which arise spontaneously between organisations and those which are actively instigated and encouraged by third parties, for reasons that can only be left to speculation. Those actively involved in township politics say the fact of such intervention is indisputable.

In the escalating spiral of civil conflict, the police have also suffered losses. And civilians accused of being 'traitors' or 'enemies of the people' — sometimes on the basis of untested suspicion — have on occasion become the victims of the most gruesome and brutal retribution meted out in the name of 'the struggle'. Many youthful executioners have been charged and given highly controversial sentences, not for their leniency as in the case of some police trials, but for their harshness. There are 32 people currently on death row



Cape Times

awaiting execution for politically-related crimes. The death penalty, highly controversial at any time, is particularly so in these cases.

A brief glance at the high-profile events in 1987 gives us some indication of the way in which the 'internal destabilisation' is developing. And some events indicate a new trend: the overlapping of the internal and external destabilisation strategies.

Between January and October at least 12 ANC operatives were assassinated in Swaziland, including Cassius Make, an ANC executive member and Paul Dlikeledi, an Umkhonto we Sizwe commander. At least two were kidnapped from Swaziland during the same period. ANC official Ebrahim Ebrahim went on trial for treason in the northern Transvaal town of Piet Retief after allegedly being abducted from Swaziland by South African agents.

As the year progressed details began to emerge of an elaborate plot to assassinate and/or kidnap leading members of the ANC. There is evidence of high-level complicity between South African security agencies, British and American intelligence and 'freelance' operators in a bid to neutralise the ANC leadership.

Inside South Africa, some major events occurred as follows:

21 January: Twelve people, including seven children, are gunned down in Kwa-Makhuta near Amanzimtoti. The gunmen — carrying AK 47 rifles — missed their intended

Mr Alpheus Ndude, husband of UDF Western Cape Press officer, Mrs Hilda Ndude, has disappeared after he was abducted from the Adult Learning Project in Mowbray by men in a car.

Another newspaper 'filler' ... This story appeared in a column of small news items on page 3 of a local newspaper. Not only does this illustrate the type of action being taken against political activists, but also the way newspapers are now treating these stories.



Gill de Vlieg/Alrapax

OPPOSITE PAGE: Ashley Kriel. There are divergent accounts of his death at the hands of the police.

ABOVE: Matthew Goniwe. His death was not only a human tragedy, but a political one as well.

target, Victor Ntuli, member of the UDF-affiliated KwaMakhuta Youth League. No arrests have been made.

28 February: Three members of the UDF-affiliated Hammarsdale youth congress are killed when gunmen open fire on them after a youth meeting. No arrests have been made.

15 March: Vusi Maduna, president of the Hammarsdale Youth Congress is stabbed to death by alleged Inkatha supporters. No arrests have been made.

17 March: Seven members of the UDF-affiliated KwaMashu Youth League are stabbed to death and their bodies dumped in a shallow grave. No arrests have been made.

7 May: A massive bomb blast rocks Cosatu House in Johannesburg causing damage in excess of R1-million and rendering the building unsafe for use. No arrests have been made.

3 July: A pre-dawn bomb blast extensively damages the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre near Roodepoort, causing at least R135 000 in damage. Wilgespruit is widely used by the SACC and affiliates as a conference and training centre. No arrests have been made.

9 July: A Bonteheuwel student, Ashley Kriel, is shot dead in a 'scuffle' with police. He is acknowledged by family and organisational sources to be an ANC member. Post mortem reports and eye-witness accounts of his death cloud the circumstances and strong hints are made that he was 'eliminated'.

22 July: SAP 'by mistake' confirm that

they have in detention Lucas 'September' Seme, who was kidnapped from Swazi police cells in August 1986. It is alleged that after extensive incarceration, Seme 'cracks' and tells all on the ANC's network.

24 July: IDASA official, Eric Mntonga, is brutally killed near East London in an attack which is thinly disguised as a robbery.

24 August: Student leader Caiphus Nyoka is shot dead in his house during a struggle with police. The SAP strongly deny that he was shot dead with a silenced pistol, as alleged by three eye-witnesses and family members.

29 August: A powerful bomb blast rips through Community House in Salt River, Cape Town, home to a number of progressive organisations, causing extensive damage. Police vehemently deny any involvement in the blast. No arrests have been made.

10 September: The National Union of Mineworkers offices in Welkom are petrol bombed. Two workers are injured. No arrests have been made.

So the spiral continues. And, as South Africa slides deeper into a seemingly bottomless pit of violence and counter-violence, where death squads stalk the land, it is those people who wish to build a non-racial democracy who are the ultimate losers. They are the ones who will have to reconstruct our society from the ashes of shattered faith, racial hatred and the bitter legacy of apartheid. □