

# Covert ops 'a necessary evil'

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security or, to be more accurate, a move away from the notion that security is only state-centric. Threats to security could come in the form of poverty, injustice and oppression. Territorial integrity was but one aspect of state security, albeit an important one.

Another problem with covert operations is that often they are started neatly but soon gain their own messy momentum. Their existence can justify their need to exist.

After the end of the Cold War all secret services had to readjust - the angst at having an enemy is always only slightly greater than the angst at not having one.

Who is the enemy now? One has existing structures, therefore there must be an enemy. Make one.

This logic is far from ludicrous. Large portions of any country's security service depend on a threat to keep their jobs. It becomes tempting to manufacture one, or at least to exaggerate the existing one. This threat becomes hard to assess in the sober light of day because of the secrecy which surrounds it, and immediately one is back in what seems to be the perpetual circle that is part of covert operations.

"Necessary murder" was how WH Auden described the Spanish Civil War. Poets don't make good seurocrats, this is true, and romantics should be kept far from the levers of power.

But, allowing that covert operations are necessary, what can be done to preserve the new South Africa from the excesses and aberrations such operations seem to trail in their wake?

Differences of definition and framework aside, there was all-round agreement at the conference on one issue: without a healthy political culture all will fail. The character that covert operations take in a society is shaped by the political philosophy of a

# Any Smileys out

CAN one speak of ethics in relation to covert operations? They seem in opposition. The covert involves concepts like "plausible denial"; the ethical is truthful - "transparent" in the political jargon.

Whatever they may be in fact, fictional spies and spy stories continue to fascinate large numbers of readers. When they emanate from a corrupt system like apartheid, however, such tales are often one-dimensional, the intrigue centred around the lengths to which some will go in order to stay in power.

In the democracy that we are inching towards the tales - and the issues, ethical or otherwise - become more complex. Good people may be doing bad things for a good cause. According to the Afrikaner Vryheidstigting's Carel Boshoff junior, it is not the morality of covert operations but the morality of the state protected by them that is the issue.

Annette Seegers (University of Cape Town) asserted in her address on "Ethics and Covert Operations" that the covert operatives of this world are a homeless species, hunted by the enemy, rejected by their own. The result is a sub-culture in which they clubbishly gather together for support.

The Hammer Unit which was active in the Eastern Cape is a case in point. Sam Sole of *The Sunday Tribune*, who spoke on "The Hammer Unit and the Goniwe Murders", characterised the unit as an "old boys' club" whose members looked out for each other, living in their own world according to their own rules.

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