

Working for peace at the polls

Quelling violence during the elections will require twin strategies of strengthening violence reduction mechanisms and preparing voters. This is a summary of recommendations on the subject submitted to the Goldstone Commission by Idasa.

By PAUL GRAHAM

ALTHOUGH elections involve a contest between political parties, they are not primarily the domain of parties but of the citizens who vote. For this reason strategies which place their reliance only on the conduct of parties and of governmental institutions to ensure a peaceful and successful election are mistaken.

In a number of cases of which Lesotho is the most recent example, the conduct of ordinary citizens has been the deciding factor in whether the elections are concluded or not.

Unless the electorate – ordinary citizens – are empowered and “own” the electoral process from its inception to its conclusion, we cannot expect a successful outcome.

A clear purpose

There must be a simple, universally understood and acceptable objective for any future election. Parties at the national negotiation forum have not reached consensus on this point. While they may well reach a compromise, any ambiguity about what the election will accomplish could result in tension during the campaign, in voter apathy and in confusion about the meaning of the results.

All of these could affect the levels of violence, intimidation and disruption of the polls. In the very worst scenario, certain parties may boycott the election. Although a democratic right, history in South Africa suggests that such a campaign will make it more difficult to manage the election.

An effort by everybody

Citizens acting on their own may make complaints, draw the attention of the authorities to breaches in codes of conduct, allegations of fraud and maladministration, and



An election boycott: the very worst scenario.

ERIC MILLER

otherwise attempt to ensure that the elections remain free and fair.

However, it is organised civil society which will have the greatest impact. The ability of the Independent Electoral Commission to mobilise the resources of organised civil society will greatly enhance the achievement of peaceful elections.

The National Peace Accord, Network of Independent Monitors and the Independent Forum for Electoral Education are three of the national networks which can assist in this.

An effective programme

Reducing violence during the elections requires a multi-faceted and integrated programme. It should be primarily focused on empowering citizens by providing them with information and education, supportive and responsive structures, and protection. Amongst the facets of such a programme, certain issues should be taken into account.

- A code of conduct for political parties must be established. While some of the clauses of the Peace Accord could be included, there are a number of specifically election related issues which must be addressed. For example, the Namibian election code had a clause dealing with the acceptance of the results of the elections.

- The NPA has established a set of multi-party structures at various levels and, in the

PWV region at least, has also established a routine monitoring and marshalling programme. During the elections it is going to be essential to have good communication between the parties to resolve speedily problems which could arise between them. The existing structures may well provide a place for this.

- A code of conduct which has no “teeth” is frustrating. In fact, without any form of sanction or reward, breaches of the code by one party make it extremely difficult for other parties to maintain it. A steady upward cycle of misconduct is inevitable as parties try to maintain their credibility with constituents and their advantage in the election race.

For this reason, some sanctions and rewards should be built into the electoral system. Amongst the possible sanctions are fines, limiting access to the public by reducing party access to the airwaves for short periods, not allowing public rallies and so on. Consideration should also be given to establishing rewards for periods of compliance with the code. These would have to be negotiated and clearly defined so that there is no arbitrary action which could itself lead to controversy.

- There are few generally acceptable independent bodies in the country. While some have managed to shrug off historical

To Page 30

Security: a hot debate in mid-winter

By BEA ROBERTS

GIVEN the popularity of "Agenda" and similar TV programmes by which people can hear politicians in the comfort of their lounge, old style public meetings have all but disappeared. However, at a recent Idasa seminar in Pretoria, it was proved that despite the cold winter evening and TV options, the general public is still keen to engage face-to-face with politicians and experts around a "hot" topic.

The issue was the role of the security forces during the transition, in particular, control over the security forces in this time. Not bound by limitations of time, and not inhibited by the sterility of a TV studio, the debate was lively and the audience charged.

It was at this meeting that the ANC's Mathew Phosa first stated in public that the NEC had made a policy decision to distance themselves from the slogan "Kill the boer, kill the farmer" – and the applause which followed clearly showed the concern around the issue.

The line-up of speakers was impressive – Jakkie Cilliers from the Institute for Defence Policy, the DP's spokesperson on Law and Order, Peter Gastrow, Mathew Phosa of the ANC's legal committee and one of their key negotiators, and General Tienie Groenewald from the recently formed Afrikaner Volksfront.

Cilliers, Gastrow and Phosa all accepted that multi-party negotiations would proceed and a Transitional Executive Council be appointed.

Cilliers focused on the importance of a peacekeeping force and predicted unprecedented levels of instability and violence in the run-up to elections. He said that if the establishment of a peacekeeping force was seen as an interim measure only, there was the risk of repeating the experience of inadequately trained, unaccountable "kitskonstabels".

Peter Gastrow said that multiparty control over the police during the elections was critical, as joint control implied joint responsibility.

The widely held perception of the police as the extension of the National Party, made it easy for other political parties to use this for their own political mobilisation and to exploit the slightest form of police misconduct. This could potentially lead to the

undermining of the entire policing effort.

Phosa believed that the SAP should be restructured. This did not necessarily entail current members losing their jobs, providing they were efficient, accountable, non-partisan, and operated on the principle of non-racialism.

Phosa said that MK soldiers, as well as those from other formations, should be enabled to come home. They should be accommodated in camps, based and confined.

General Groenewald asked how one could talk about a transitional executive and an election date given the level of violence in the country.

In order to achieve peace, he said, private armies should be banned. Intimidation would prevent the possibility of free and fair elections. Once an election date was set, there would be no reason for parties to carry on with negotiations and all efforts would be channelled into winning the election.

Groenewald said integrating MK and the



Laurie Nathan (Centre for Intergroup Studies), Peter Gastrow, Mathew Phosa and Ethel Ranamane (Idasa).

SADF would serve only to break the morale of both armies. Joint control would never work, "for when everyone is accountable, no-one is accountable".

At the end of the meeting one was left with a sense that it was near impossible to reconcile the different positions.

However, the negotiations are continuing, albeit shakily and the issue of the security forces is being regarded with the utmost seriousness by all parties.

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Peace at the polls

From Page 11

associations through their track record of independence, deep suspicions are likely to re-emerge during an election period so that well-meaning independent programmes are compromised and marginalised.

It is essential that attempts be made to create a trustworthy independent civil society. Allegiance to a code of impartiality and independence is the first step towards this as demonstrated by the Network of Independent Monitors.

A pre-election conference for all parties and major non-partisan actors may be another step. This should be done as soon as possible so that it does not become a part of any party's election strategy.

Limiting violence

There is little chance that the election will be conducted without violence. What South Africa should be aiming for is a reduction of violence, measures which reduce the potential for violence, and a certainty that violence will not stop the election or discredit the result.

The Peace Accord identified violence from a number of sources: the behaviour of the parties towards one another and the general public; the behaviour of the security forces in carrying out their designated tasks and in acting outside their terms of reference; violence arising out of socio-economic deprivation.

So a number of strategies must be put in place.

Firstly, there must be, in advance of any crisis, adequate communication channels between all sectors of the society and the authorities to deal with rumours, complaints and civil disturbance or crime.

Secondly, incidents will always lead to escalations unless there are mechanisms for limiting damage. Local peace committees, telephone links between key leaders, liaison groups, local monitors and observers, and community conciliators or mediators are needed. It is not appropriate for the police to play this role because they are often one of the parties.

Thirdly, despite provocation, the police have to develop an approach to protest action, marches and demonstrations which reduces temperatures. Too often their behaviour, not necessarily malicious, contributes to an escalation of the conflict. The police cannot expect the same levels of discipline and professionalism from crowds – of whatever political persuasion – that the society demands from its police force and must therefore develop new ways of preventing

and limiting violence.

Fourthly, the society in which we live has become extremely well armed. The present strategy of substantial penalties for the possession of "illegal" weapons will not work. Police bias in the distribution of licences will ensure that it becomes a political football with the only consequences a better concealment of unlicensed weapons and a worse reputation of political bias for the police. Nor will rewards work under the present situation where possessing a weapon has substantial utility value, either for personal protection or for criminal intent.

At some point in the political process there will have to be a multi-party effort to reduce the number of weapons both licensed and unlicensed. Symbolic laying down of arms, confidence in the ability of police to provide protection, leadership public statements and actions, stronger regulatory mechanisms over import and production of certain categories of weapons, and rewards appropriate to our context will all be required. In Mozambique the strategy was "food for weapons", here it might be "jobs for weapons".

Finally, a corps of neutral peace brokers with recognised bona fides and the ability to communicate regularly with all parties, organisations and institutions is required. In some situations, ordinary people may have achieved this status within the community. But in many places in South Africa we do not have such resources.

A model worth considering is the Community Relations Service set up in the USA during the period of the civil rights

movement and still operative today. Here a relatively small group of officials is available to fly in to a situation of violence or potential violence. They have the status of the government of the day and skills in conciliation and mediation. They are already accepted by the various parties and have the "clout" necessary to gain access to party officials and state officials. It does not seem to be beyond the realms of possibility for a Transitional Executive Council to establish such a specialist group here. Unlike the investigative wing of the Goldstone Commission, its officers would not be engaged in investigation and adjudication. Their job would be communi-



Elections under civilian control, but police must protect voters.

stand by and let the state do as it pleases. If it wants support for its cause, business will have to assist communities in making their voices heard. Business people will also have to do some shouting themselves, not in favour of one or the other political party, but rather for the cause of economic growth and development.

In the economic forums space now exists for them to define what is best – alongside the communities who are always the first to feel the effects of a worsening economy.

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cation and facilitation – and like the Internal Stability Unit they need not be everywhere all the time but could "parachute" in to a situation and then move out and on when appropriate.

The police and independent observers

The police will have to play a major role in ensuring the protection of the electorate and the election. They will have to do this despite us not having completed the process of rehabilitation and community acceptance necessary to de-politicise policing.

During the election campaign the only role that is required from the SAP is professional policing under their code of conduct and in line with the procedures and policies being established through the Police Board and the transitional executive council.

However, they will have to play a role during the election day itself in providing back up security for voting stations, ballot

boxes and certified and counted ballots. This role should only be carried out by a regular uniformed police force. Other units with specialised functions and uniforms should not be used in order to maintain the image of an election under civilian control.

The SAP members who are to be deployed on election day should receive training regarding their role and the Electoral Act, and go through various simulations in order to ensure that they understand what is required of them over and above normal policing activities.

Any decision to deploy either the SADF or special units of the SAP such as the Internal Stability Unit should be made by the TEC in conjunction with monitoring groups.

Both international and local monitoring programmes will have to be organised and will operate independently of, but in communication with the police and electoral authorities.

Electoral education

Finally the citizens of South Africa must be educated. An educated electorate will resort less to irrational behaviour, will be more likely to resist misconduct by the parties, will be more apt to draw these misconducts to public notice, and will have more commitment to participating in and accepting the outcome of the election.

Earning curve for business

From Page 24

importance of these skills should not be under-estimated. It is with the knowledge of how to organise, run a meeting and deal with state funders that a community will access much more than any business CSI project could provide.

The communities referred to earlier saw that business did indeed have an important role to play in building democracy. This was because it made available services that empowered the community. In the past, business was criticised on the basis that it neither engaged the state itself nor did it help communities to do so.

In the future, business cannot afford to