

SSA runs like a bad soap opera

by **Dianne Kohler-Barnard MP** – DA Shadow Minister of State Security

Before I begin – allow me to say that my thoughts and prayers are with the families of our two Honourable members Nombulelo Hermans and Jacqui Mofokeng – both stalwarts of the committee, level-headed, never sinking to attempt to score political points off us as colleagues – these women are much, much missed.

Out of the hundreds of pages that comprise the High-Level Review Panel Report on the State Security Agency there is a single line that sums up the issues faced in terms of Parliamentary oversight coupled with the almost daily revelations from the Zondo Commission and elsewhere: *“There is a disproportionate application of secrecy in the SSA, stifling effective accountability and facilitating serious non-compliance with controls including blatant criminality”*.

Today there are South Africans who duck while the hand grenades are tossed left and right out the Zondo Commission, and the virtually daily headlines read like some Spy vs Spy cartoon series. Amongst all this there are those who have begun to call this, the HLR report, into question. Some of the testimony given at the Zondo commission claims that R59 billion went missing from the SSA, another claim said R9 billion was looted – but the current Minister says this is all a complete fabrication. Indeed, the Minister herself has said here in the National Assembly that it wasn't R9 billion looted, it was only R9 million.

Of course, she has to rely on information given to her about what happened before her time with the SSA – and one has to ask whether or not the information given to her is perhaps not from the very people behind the looting. Certainly not one rand has been recovered, nor one person jailed in this regard.

We heard clearly in one presentation to the Zondo Commission that, for example, R9 billion in so-called assets simply disappeared. Added to that, it seems if one's petty cash runs dry, there are always the safes locked in what are supposedly the most secure premises in the country: stroll in, walk out with R17 million in foreign currency, and hand to money to ... who?

Well, that's the multi-billion-rand question isn't it?

The High-Level Panel report released to the public on the 10th of March 2019, was compiled by Dr Sydney Mufamadi, and a team comprising nine other members with a wide range of senior level experience and expertise in law, security studies, civil society, academia, the intelligence and security communities and other arms of government.

Extraordinary people every one of them, but this is the team the Minister says got it wrong. That the billions looted, weren't really.

Now at face value the Minister is a very charming individual – although of course there have been endless well-publicised claims that she has a tendency to ride roughshod over senior staff at the SSA. Indeed, she is facing a myriad of accusations – I'm sure it's all part of the job – that she's a gambling addict, that she's married to a CIA operative, that she's allied to the Zuma camp – the mudslinging goes on and on.

And then like a bad episode of *Isidingo*, came the shenanigans surrounding this very Minister: an affair, a coup, and a foreign country that has South Africans shaking their heads in disbelief.

Who but President Ramaphosa would think he had the right to allegedly send her to Botswana to try and strong-arm their President into dropping charges of money laundering and the financing of a coup attempt – all of this against his sister-in-law, Bridgette Motsepe-Radebe?

Of course, one would still be more inclined to dismiss the accusations against the Minister out of hand if she hadn't brought back Arthur Fraser's right-hand man... Graham Engel, who is suddenly the general manager of operations in the domestic intelligence branch. In a country reeling from the daily revelations, she brought back a man from three years suspension, and promoted him.

Minister, seriously? How is South Africa supposed to take this whole "step aside" – not step this way into a prison cell I might add – just step aside situation seriously when there is a distinct feeling that the looters are on their way back – if indeed they ever left?

I'm sure the ANC would like us to swallow this whole pre-election revelation that criminality is a really bad thing – so bad that they'll ask those with a barrage of criminal charges against them to step aside – but it seems every time someone inside tries to dish the dirt on their particular division, and to turn off the looting taps, they quickly get the boot.

Let's look at Mr Jafta, former Acting DG of Intelligence, who testified at the Zondo Commission. We heard in detail how the SSA funded the Zuma-aligned ANC factions and election campaigns.

When the Minister learned of his intent, she attempted to block him from testifying, but he did, and out he went. Was she trying to hide the wrongdoing in the Agency during the Zuma years? Of course, she denies it but that move naturally threw fuel on the whole "she's a Member of the Zuma camp" fire.

It's not as if these revelations have come from a single source – because the Jafta revelations were closely followed, for example and amongst many others, by those of the Inspector-General of Intelligence Advocate Dintwe.

He, too, has had the SSA in a flurry by baring all to the Zondo Commission. Not all of it flattering to the Minister, as he announced that she had appointed 26 managers without following proper procedures, ignoring employment regulations as well as the DG's refusal to recommend the appointments.

Additionally, he claimed that the SSA had 40 operatives employed without any criteria whatsoever, and who were seriously peeved that they were not being given the positions they were assured they would receive. He said the recruitment procedure was now abused by politically connected people and that nepotism had crept in.

I'm shocked.

Smoke. Mirrors. Plots and Paranoia. Reports over the years have always claimed that each and every Minister of Intelligence has hired cadres, like Richard Mdluli did

when he hired 7, if not many more, totally unqualified members of his immediate family into Crime Intelligence. Advocate Dintwe confirmed this, stating that both Ministers and officials recruited and appointed agents loyal to them personally. He referred to the manipulation of Judges, to the pressure put on Robert McBride (previously infamously kicked out as head of the IPID) not to investigate within the SSA and also confirmed wholesale looting, by giving an example that, *"Lots of money, up to 200 000 Euros at a time, was stolen in suitcases from the SSA, and then used to fund a faction of the ANC"*. €200 000 is nearly R3.5 million.

With the State Security Agency by all accounts knee deep in unaccounted for and untraceable cash, it was hardly a surprise that even the Minister of Finance was moved to threaten not to pay their budget should they not recover the monies stolen from their various impregnable safes.

One doesn't want to believe this, because to think that the looters would be put back into positions of power right at the very moment the Zondo commission was sitting and revealing all – the audacity of it is unimaginable.

Sadly, all indications are that as the Zondo Commission tightens the State Capture noose, so the looters are repositioning and looting even faster than before.

This JSCI is by law tasked with oversight over agencies that remain invisible on the whole – the strictures are that we may bring in nothing to the meetings, leave with nothing and say nothing or we as Honourable Members, face jail. Frankly, the newspapers are writing it all for us these days. One must ask if we don't perhaps glean more from those reports than we do inside the committee.

This is how the billions were stolen. By keeping committee members in a dungeon of darkness – because that is what those of the intelligence agencies are trained to do – and then blame our colleagues of the former parliament for not doing their job while those billions were stolen.

The High-Level report says there are excessive levels of secrecy, and as committee members we may not even be emailed so much as an agenda. Over the past year, barely a day has gone by without a headline revealing more spy vs spy antics, while the Zondo Commission has pretty much stripped the State Security Agency bare.

Top of the charges against Arthur Fraser is that he ran an illegal parallel intelligence structure, called the Principal Agent Network (PAN), as the then director-general of the SSA.

The High-Level Report found that the PAN was involved in serious criminal behaviour under the guise of conducting covert work and that the behaviour may have involved theft, forgery and uttering, fraud, corruption and bordered on organised crime.

The current President didn't fire Fraser, he shifted him over to, of all places, Correctional Services DG in which position he has sat untouched by investigation to this very day. That was, one supposes, the first of the Step Aside exercises. And a jolly highly paid step it was.

Now his chum is back where the looting took place. And reports are that his reinstatement was on the orders of, wait for it, the President. What next? Is Fraser on his way back?

For the information of those who are perhaps unsure of what exactly this murky State Security business entails – it is a 3-legged pot which stands on the State Security agency, plus Crime and Defence Intelligence. It is supposed to be the front-line force field tasked with protecting every civilian in South Africa.

Now if you imagine that the looting has only been happening at the SSA, you've just not been listening. A decade ago, I spoke out about Mdluli looting from the CI slush fund, and now the latest head of CI has been suspended under what I believe to be a manufactured cloud held over the heads of those trying to stop the looting. Rather like the hatchet job they did on General Johan Boyson.

We have watched as General Jacobs, who had finally turned off those looting taps in Crime Intelligence, was himself (perhaps inevitably) stitched up, removed, and dumped where he can do no harm – and from all I'm told the looting taps are switched on full again. Richard Mdluli (if they can find him) must be so pleased.

Yesterday a draft internal audit report revealed that R1.6 billion had been looted in PPE procurements over just six months – yet the man with the letter from Treasury is the only one suspended.

Moving on to the third leg. The Military. Slim, fit, the cream of the crop. One might have imagined that Defence Intelligence was too principled to loot. Well, you'd be wrong. In December we were startled to hear of weapons being stolen.

19 R4 automatic rifles, manufactured for extreme warfare, were taken in the robbery from a supposedly highly protected military facility.

Of course, it was an inside job, and was a stark reminder of earlier thefts of similar weapons at the 9SAI military base. Oddly enough, weapons exactly like that have been used in various bank and cash-in-transit heists recently.

And there's more. A leaked investigation report has revealed a veritable looting spree of R4 billion from SANDF.

The investigation implicated the defence intelligence bosses but has never been officially made public.

So, the State Security Agency, Crime and Defence Intelligence – all involved in looting on a grand scale.

What we need in each of these three entities is a drive to create modern, fully trained organisations lead by extraordinary people, able to perform in this fast-paced world. Not unqualified friends, lovers, and children.

We need an intelligence environment free of scandal and inefficiency and as the HLR states, we need to move away from the highly secretive intelligence milieu and look for the quality of the output rather than the quantity of the plundering.

Of course, this government should focus primarily on the terrible situation the majority of South Africans find themselves locked into. And what we as a country certainly do not need is this bloated, expensive, secretive network.

The High-Level report gave crystal clear direction two years ago, but today all we see is infighting. We need clear priorities: a visible move away from that Big Man driven doctrinal shift, world-class training, and a review of the legislation bringing it in line with international best practice. What we get is muddied waters, backstabbing on a brutal level, and zero legislation to the extent perhaps Committee bills are the only way to go. Surely losing the court case to *amaBhungane*, which now prevents your bulk surveillance, was a wake-up call? We all know the rot goes much deeper than the six areas of unconstitutionality identified by the court.

We need these three agencies to provide unique insights into threats and trends which will protect South Africa and all who live in it. We have just a flimsy washing line between us and a war across the northern border but, let me repeat, no one has been jailed, and not a single cent recovered.

Does the DA believe the looting has stopped? No.

Does the DA believe the ANC wants it to stop? No.

Does the DA believe the three agencies can be saved and enabled to do the crucial jobs they are mandated to do? Yes – and when we run South Africa we will ensure that happens.