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South Africa's National Security Management System, 1972-90

by ANNETTE SEEGERS*

ANALYSES of the South African state during the 1970s and 1980s all tried to come to grips with the rôle of the security forces.[1] Research justifiably ran in different directions, but the National Security Management System soon became an essential part of recent work,[2] albeit remaining very much of a mystery.[3] Since we need to know how it originated, developed, and operated in practice, as well as its legacy, this article attempts to describe the N.S.M.S. and offers avenues of interpretation.

PERCEPTIONS OF MILITARY EFFECTS AND INFLUENCE

A significant feature of the N.S.M.S. was the extent to which it was surrounded – and, indeed, its very existence justified – by perceptions of various attributes. Bureaucrats and politicians often claimed that the military produced superior and timely ideas, that military men were leaders, and that the South African Defence Force (S.A.D.F.) best knew how to do things. From beyond official circles, even the highly critical interpretation that the N.S.M.S. was the real but covert government, ironically supported such a line of reasoning.

The origins of the perceptions lie between 1961, when South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth severed the link with the United Kingdom's security institutions and interests, and the creation in 1972

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[1] For example, Jackie Cock and Laurie Nathan (eds.), *War and Society: the militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1989); Philip H. Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians: civil–military relations in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1984); and Kenneth W. Grundy, *The Militarisation of South African Politics* (London, 1986).

[2] Except where otherwise indicated, the term 'state' refers to government and associated bureaucracies, while 'security forces' include the military and the police.

[3] With the accession of F. W. de Klerk to power, the N.S.M.S. was changed into the National Co-ordinating Mechanism (N.C.M.). For a more complete assessment, see Annette Seegers, 'After Angola and With De Klerk: current trends in South Africa's security establishment', in Vernon J. Kronenberg et al. (eds.), *The Military and Democracy* (forthcoming). Because of this transition, I here use the past tense in describing the N.S.M.S.

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of the State Security Council (S.S.C.).[4] During the 1960s the Cabinet
eventually realised that the confidential reports being received reflected
the interests of one or other of the various rival organisations in this
field. What was required was one national agency to co-ordinate
information from subordinate bodies. The Potgieter Commission,
briefed to inquire into 'matters relating to the security of the state', led
to the adoption of the Security Intelligence and State Security Council
Act of 1972, and to the creation of the S.S.C. The forum for that ideal
single voice advising the Cabinet was in place.[5]

The formal creation of a national security agency failed to put an end
to the rivalries of the 1960s. Some bureaucrats between 1972 and 1980
also produced grossly inaccurate 'intelligence',[6] while others demon-
strated a weakness for corruption and ineptitude. A series of inquiries
and investigations reported on the gap between the need for national
security and its achievement, as well as the deficiencies of actions taken
by civilians in this field.[7] The decision that effective implementation
required a military-style apparatus was much boosted when the
Minister of Defence, P. W. Botha, became Prime Minister in 1979 in
the wake of the so-called 'Information Scandal', and said he valued
above all else the need for 'clean' and 'efficient' government coupled
with 'teamwork'.[8] By the end of the 1970s, official perceptions of the
situation were simple: at an appropriate time, those associated with the
S.A.D.F. produced a superior understanding of the threats facing the
Government, and the best ideas about how these should be countered.
Comparisons of departmental responsibilities for national security led

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[4] Annette Seegers, 'Extending the Security Network to the Local Level: a clarification and
some further comments', in *Politeia* (Pretoria), 7, 2, 1988, pp. 120–5.

[5] Politicians (including the Prime Minister) between 1961 and 1970 usually de-emphasised
threats to South Africa or remained otherwise convinced that the régime had sufficient strength
to ward them off. Public warnings of a fierce general assault started to appear from the S.A.D.F.
(and the Minister of Defence) in 1970. James Selfe, 'The Total Onslaught and the Total Strategy:
adaptations to the security intelligence decision-making structures under P. W. Botha's
administration', M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1987, pp. 115–24.

[6] The most conspicuous failure was the prediction by the Department of Foreign Affairs about
election results in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). See Deon Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation:
South African foreign policy making* (Johannesburg, 1984), pp. 118–19, for Pretoria's heavy backing
of Bishop Abel Muzorewa's United African National Council.

[7] The relevant documents remain classified, including that known to bureaucrats as the Venter
Report, produced in 1975 for the Public Service Commission. When interviewed in Pretoria, 22
November 1989, J. J. Venter pointed to the decisive rôle of P. W. Botha and close associates in the
mid-1970s, as well as to the importance of the *Oorlogsdagboek* (Diary of War), created in 1918 in
conjunction with the Colonial Office, as a place to record threats. When instructed to examine this
diary, Venter found that entries had stopped in 1968. See also, Magnus Malan, 'Die Aanslag
Teen Suid-Afrika', in *Issup Strategic Review* (Pretoria), November 1984, pp. 3–16, and the post-
1975 White Papers on Defence and Armaments Supply.

[8] Geldenhuys, op. cit. pp. 84–9.

to the view that the S.A.D.F. was efficient and prepared, with serious wrongs being attributed to civilians.[9]

Perceptions of military leadership were underscored by the post-1983 revival of violent resistance. In comparing the performance of departments, the conclusion was again reached that civilians had failed, not least because of their own shaken confidence in the ability to maintain facilities in areas where violence was most intense. Even worse, some local bureaucrats were thought to have covertly sought a *modus vivendi* with resistance groups so as to continue services. As was the case in the 1960s and 1970s, perceptions were partly based on fact. It could be shown that many civilians had failed to meet their own goals. Most attention now focused on the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning whose responsibilities included the black town councils of which, by October 1985, only a fraction remained intact and operational.[10]

The perceptions embedded in the N.S.M.S. did have consequences. Initially, the Government issued strong denials,[11] but later statements made a case for the benefits derived from the military's positive rôle in South Africa,[12] with actions such as those in Alexandra being widely publicised as evidence.[13] For critics, this constituted proof that the N.S.M.S. was really ruling South Africa.[14] What was done selectively,

[9] As in the following: Republic of South Africa, *Report of the Office of the Prime Minister, 1980* (Pretoria, 1980); the explanations of Lieutenant-General Pieter van der Westhuizen in David Braun, 'Malan Lifts Covers Off Government's National Security System', in *The Argus* (Cape Town), 12 March 1976; and General A. J. van Deventer's 'Briefing to the Press on 21 September 1983 by the Secretary of the State Security Council', Pretoria, 1983, as well as his later article in *Die Burger* (Cape Town), 27 May 1986. See also, Jack Spence, 'Politicians in Army Fatigues', in *Sunday Tribune* (Durban), 1 September 1985.

[10] Simon Baynham, 'Political Violence and the Security Response', in Jesmond Blumenfeld (ed.), *South Africa in Crisis* (London, 1987), pp. 107–13. See also the Government's various justifications when a state of emergency was initially introduced in July 1985 for 36 magisterial districts, when eight more were added three months later, and when subsequent emergency regulations were applied and renewed nationally.

[11] See Republic of South Africa, *Debates of the House of Assembly* (Cape Town), 112, 27 January–9 March 1984, cols. 29–106, for perhaps the most strongly-worded attack on those who were critical of military influence in government.

[12] For example, General Malan's claims that the N.S.M.S. was neither sinister nor secret, and his references to services rendered, as reported in Braun, loc.cit., and the statement by the Information Minister, Stoffel van der Merwe, about addressing grievances, 'Stoffel on Stability', in the *Financial Mail* (Johannesburg), 13 February 1987.

[13] Foreign visitors to South Africa were taken on tours through the area. For press coverage, see Mark van der Velden, 'A Face-Lift for Alexandra', in *The Natal Witness* (Pietermaritzburg), 18 March 1987; Spencer Reiss, 'The Tale of Alexandra', in *Newsweek* (New York), 30 March 1987; Johan Vosloo, 'Vaarwel aan die Oue', in *Rapport* (Johannesburg), 19 April 1987; and the statements by J. S. Burger, an Alexandra administrator, as reported in *The Star* (Johannesburg), 6 March 1987, and in *The Citizen* (Johannesburg), 9 March 1987.

[14] The view of the African National Congress is given in 'JMC's Centres for Control and Repression', in *Sechaba* (London), January 1988. See also, Simon Baynham, 'South Africa: the

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in Alexandra and other townships like Mamelodi, Mbekweni, or New
Brighton, was taken to be what was done generally. Equally erroneous
was the belief that the N.S.M.S. entities existed and operated as
described by officials. Consequences can also be found elsewhere.
Within the state, the organisation's administrative staff offered courses,
awarded qualifications, and gave lectures on how bureaucrats were
supposed to work. Doing one's job properly meant acquiring the right
motivation, best inculcated when the person(s) concerned realised that
inefficiency – disregarding instructions, putting departmental/personal
interests before the national good, or sloppiness – might lead to a
communist takeover and revolution.

   South African bureaucrats would have had plenty of food for
thought if they had studied the depressing record of attempted military
'clean-ups' elsewhere, but they were not encouraged to critically
examine the claims that civilian ways of doing things needed to be
reduced, if not ended. On the contrary, the seductive power of the
belief in military competence and influence was enhanced when
advocates cited 'facts' about happenings within government during
the last 20 years as 'proof' of the wisdom and practicability of their
ideas. And then they set forth to educate others to accept their
diagnosis.

THE INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION OF THE N.S.M.S.

   The first phase in the creation of a national security management
system began with South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth
in 1961, and ended in the establishment of the State Security Council
in 1972. The second started with the recognition that the S.S.C., in its
existing form, was inadequate, and ended with the announcement that
the N.S.M.S. had become fully operational in August 1979.[16] The
third phase involved post-1980 developments, partly during the state of
emergency.

   As mentioned earlier, rivalry between security agencies in the 1960s
had led to the recognition that a single institution was required to co-

Government in the shadows', in *Africa Confidential* (London), 28, 14, 8 July 1987, pp. 1–4; 'The
Network: from Soweto to De Aar to Ogies to Koega to Koppies', and Anton Harber, 'The
Uniformed Web that Sprawls Across the Country', in *The Weekly Mail* (Johannesburg), 3 October
1986; Peter Gastrow, 'The Real Message Is: the military's ruling the country', in ibid. 7
November 1986; and Neill Ross, 'JMCs Usurping Role of Public Representatives', in *The Cape
Times*, 28 November 1986.
   [15] The administrative section of the N.S.M.S. was located in Pretoria, and headed by
A. P. Stemmet (formerly of the Department of Justice), who provided me with information about
the training given there.
   [16] Republic of South Africa, *1980 Report of the Office of the Prime Minister* (Pretoria, 1980).

ordinate information. Submissions to the resulting Potgieter Commission remain classified, but the final report favoured an institutional and functional design along the lines found in the West.[17] Thus, the S. S. C. was formally endowed with the status of being a sub-committee of the Cabinet by statutory legislation in 1972.

In its second phase, the rôle of the security system was extended because of a perceived need to co-ordinate not only information but also the making and implementation of policies. The S. S. C. itself was strengthened by additional staff, and a working committee was created, consisting of all heads of government departments and staff from other cabinet committees. A survey of the scope of executive bureaucracy identified 15 functions, including civil defence, culture, manpower, and transport, that each required a co-ordinating inter-departmental committee (I. D. C.). In addition, a joint management centre (J. M. C.) was established to co-ordinate government activities in each of South Africa's 12 official regions, as was a sub-J. M. C. in each of the 60 sub-regions, and a mini-J. M. C. in each of the 450 or so mini-regions, while a local management centre (L. M. C.) was created for every city and designated town.

Co-ordinating executive functions thus required a new set of institutions. At the national level, there was the S. S. C. (with its specialist committees, notably the working committee and the I. D. C.s). But the rest of the bureaucracy functioned on a geographical basis – regional, sub-regional, and so on – and for each a single co-ordinating body was created (J. M. C., sub-J. M. C., mini-J. M. C., and L. M. C.). Efficiency required more than co-ordination, however, and the specified hierarchical relationships were intended to shorten and simplify the chain-of-command: L. M. C.s reported to mini-J. M. C.s, these in turn to sub-J. M. C.s, to J. M. C.s and, finally, to the S. S. C.[18]

After 1980, in its third phase, the N. S. M. S.'s development was influenced by bureaucratic factors within the state and, from beyond, by the revival of violent resistance. The newness of entities meant that forms and functions had to be clarified to bureaucrats. At regional and local levels, many boundaries were redrawn as, for example, when a mini-J. M. C. was redefined to become a sub-J. M. C., or a L. M. C. was called into existence. At the top level, the depth and scope of violence initiated by opposition to the 1983 constitution led to an important alteration. The I. D. C. for security was selected to monitor and manage

[17] Republic of South Africa, Report [Abridged] of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to the Security of the State (Pretoria, 1972).
[18] The outline here is largely based on the 1980 Report of the Office of the Prime Minister, pp. 1–11, and Van Deventer, op. cit.

events on an almost daily basis, and was renamed the national joint management centre (N.J.M.C.). Described as the 'operational headquarters' of the N.S.M.S. by those who ought to know,[19] this became the body to which all J.M.C.'s reported. Meetings were chaired by the Deputy Minister of Law and Order.[20]

The institutional origins of the N.S.M.S. thus stem from the poor advice given to the Cabinet in the 1960s. The diagnosis of what was wrong led to the creation of the S.S.C. by a swift stroke of the legislative pen. Later judgements that civilian departments had failed required a more comprehensive or systemic cure, however, and were dictated by the powers of administrative discretion. The goal now was to co-ordinate executive-bureaucratic functions at every level. From its humble beginnings as providing advice to the Cabinet, the S.S.C. ended astride a hierarchy of institutions intended to lead the whole state to efficiency.

THE N.S.M.S.: WHO PARTICIPATED IN WHAT?

The jurisdictional boundaries of N.S.M.S. structures were mainly geographic. A J.M.C. was responsible for the co-ordination of a region (for example, Eastern Province), as was a sub-J.M.C. for a sub-region (like Port Elizabeth) and a mini-J.M.C. for a mini-region (such as Port Elizabeth North). We know that the internal design of these entities compelled the involvement of all government departments. But which bureaucrats participated? and how was the work divided?

Each J.M.C., sub-J.M.C., mini-J.M.C., and L.M.C. had the following: (1) A committee for security, known by its Afrikaans acronym *Veikom*, required participation by the Department of Defence, the National Intelligence Service, the S.A.D.F., the South African Police, and the chief civil defence officer of the region.[21] (2) A committee for constitutional, economic, and social affairs, known as *Semkom*, was composed of bureaucrats from the relevant civilian departments. (3) A committee for communication, known as *Komkom*, was attended by public relations officers from the Bureau for

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[19] Including R. P. Meyer, former Deputy Minister of Law and Order.

[20] The National Joint Management Centre came into effect towards the end of 1986, and its existence was publicly acknowledged. Confusion did, however, arise in nomenclature, as the old I.D.C. was known as the *Gesamentlike Veiligheidskomitee* (or G.V.K.), and some officials referred to this body by its older name and not as the N.J.M.C. See Hennie Kotzé, 'Aspects of the Public Policy Process in South Africa', in Albert Venter (ed.), *South African Government and Politics* (Johannesburg, 1989), pp. 170–200.

[21] The *Veikom* was aided in its work by a joint intelligence committee (Afrikaans acronym G.I.K.) and a joint operational committee (G.O.S.).

Information and the Combined Operations section of the S.A.D.F. Finally, the chairmen of *Komkom*, *Semkom*, and *Veikom* formed (4) a *Uitvoerende Komitee*, or executive committee; they elected an overall chairman, and made use of a secretary.

A four-part division of labour thus prevailed, with the *Veikom* dominating security issues, the *Semkom* developmental progress, and the *Komkom* in charge of public relations, with the *Uitvoerende Komitee* providing necessary links in the chain-of-command.[22] Every government institution had to participate in one or another committee of the N.S.M.S. on national, regional, sub-regional, mini-regional, and municipal levels. If the most senior officials were unable to attend – as, indeed, required – they were represented by other bureaucrats.

However, there were at least two areas where participation was not, strictly speaking, so restricted. The N.S.M.S.'s concern with preventing a 'revolutionary climate' meant that most actions focused on black communities where administration, since the mid-1970s, had been problematic for a variety of reasons. But criticisms were frequently made about blacks who became municipal officers either by a little (or even no) explained appointment, or by election on the basis of an often ludicrously-low turnout. Self-promotion and governmental patronage similarly produced a number of Coloured officials, especially in the Western Cape.[23] Given such participants, the N.S.M.S. in most areas, and in a very obvious way, clung to the letter but not the spirit of the officials-only claim.

In the second instance, N.S.M.S. entities were required to liaise with local communities and, to this end, links were promoted with developmental associations at all levels. Thus the J.M.C. of, for example, Northern Natal, liaised with the chairman of the Regional Development Advisory Committee of KwaZulu, Northern Natal, and Northern Transkei (Development Region E). Within this region and on a town level, the L.M.C. of Empangeni-Richards Bay, for example,

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[22] The internal design of the N.S.M.S. was recorded by officials and observers in the following: Harber, loc.cit.; Lester Venter and Norman West, 'Enter the Peace Corps', in *The Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 2 November 1986; Dennis Cruywagen, 'JMCs – a Network of Secrets', in *The Argus*, 28 November 1986; Tos Wentzel, 'Security Council's Silence on Secret JMCs', in ibid. 9 December 1986; David Braun, 'Govt Plans to Hijack Revolution for its Own Ends', in *The Star*, 17 March 1987; Vosloo, loc.cit.; and Moira Levy, 'Fumbled Bid to Hush Security Debate', in *The Weekly Mail*, 28 November 1987. See also, Mark Swilling and Mark Phillips, 'The Powers of the Thunderbird', in Centre for Policy Studies, *South Africa at the End of the Eighties* (Johannesburg, 1989), pp. 29–73; Seegers, 'Extending the Security Network to the Local Level', pp. 132–5; and Selfe, op. cit. pp. 115–80.

[23] The actions of the so-called management committees in the Coloured areas of the Cape Province were discussed in 'Bonteheuwel's Silent War', in *Upfront* (Cape Town), 6, April 1987, and *New Era* (Cape Town), April 1987.

liaised with the chairman of the Lower Umfolozi Community Chest. In addition, formal liaison forums were established in order to bring together prominent members of the community, including leaders in education, business, and religion. Clearly the N.S.M.S.'s need for information led to the involvement of some private individuals, although they may not have become privy to *Veikom* secrets.[24]

Participation in the N.S.M.S. thus primarily took the form of compulsory attendance at meetings of committees at each level by representatives of all the relevant institutions of the state. But membership was not always confined to those required to attend, because some non-officials were also involved, by either self-promotion or invitation.

THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF THE N.S.M.S.

Obviously the four committees of the 12 J.M.C.s, 60 sub-J.M.C.s, approximately 450 mini-J.M.C.s, and the myriad L.M.C.s were not at all times equally and fully operational. Hence the need to raise questions about conditions affecting their functions.

First, despite being described as neither secret nor sinister, the N.S.M.S. lived under the umbrella provided by strict statutory constraints on the dissemination of information about the security forces and their actions. This cover was drastically enlarged by emergency regulations.[25] But what of the confidential matters discussed inside committees as co-ordination would require? Even for the

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[24] Information provided in this paragraph was derived from: unsigned report of statements by the chairman of the National Regional Development Advisory Council, Dr Piet Rautenbach, 'Military to Have Voice in Local Decisions', in *The Argus*, 24 June 1986; Braun's report on Alexandra, loc. cit.; Patrick Cull's report of J.M.C. liaison in the Port Elizabeth area in 'Minister: PE area has six JMCs', in *Eastern Province Herald* (Port Elizabeth), 2 April 1987; unsigned report, 'Principal Tells of Unexpected JMC Meeting [in Athlone]', in *South* (London), 7 May 1987; unsigned report of activities in Hout Bay entitled 'JMC Proposal at Secret Indaba', in *New Nation* (Cape Town), 11 June 1987; Diana Games's report on the rôle of the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce, Randburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Transvaal Chamber of Industries, the Security Association, and the Engineers Association of South Africa, entitled 'New Security Network Set Up', in *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 16 July 1987; unsigned report of manpower liaison committees in the Johannesburg area entitled 'Control Centres', in *The Financial Mail* (Johannesburg), 24 July 1987; Gavan O'Connor's report of liaisons in the Port Elizabeth area in 'Forum Links Government, Private Sector', in *Eastern Province Herald*, 8 September 1987; and Franz Kruger's investigation of the link between the 'Greater East London Coordination Committee' and J.M.C.-activity in that area as reported in 'Liberals Linked to Covert Security Panel', in *The Weekly Mail*, 21–27 November 1987. See also, Annette Seegers, 'Local Government: state strategy – the national security management system and the joint management centres', The Urban Foundation, Johannesburg, 1988.

[25] This cover was demonstrated in the legal proceedings instituted against the Minister of Law and Order over action taken in the Crossroads area of the Western Cape during 1986. Information supplied by the Legal Resources Centre in Cape Town.

governmental members, however, information came only on a need-to-know or too-late basis, and generally flowed vertically upwards to the N.J.M.C. and S.S.C. from *Veikoms*. The activities of these executive committees often surpassed those of *Komkoms* and *Semkoms*, not surprisingly because of successive states of emergency,[26] but their closed-shop habits offended civilian bureaucrats. In addition, the latter's image of standing aloof from government repression was hurt by intense *Veikom* activity, wherein co-ordination seemed merely to consist of supporting the unpleasant elements of state business.

Second, when interviewed, officials typically referred to their membership of a J.M.C. but, when asked to be more specific, often could not comply. Indeed, those in the same entity would disagree about whether they were part of a mini-J.M.C. or a L.M.C., and were uncertain about broader hierarchical outlines. The reason for the confusion was not hard to find. Most committees were located on the local level of government where boundaries were drawn and redrawn in accordance with the 1983 constitution and, with the subsequent spread of violence, because of variations in the kinds of bureaucracies involved in the affairs of black areas. An allocated place in the N.S.M.S. network could change very quickly.[27]

To give a few examples. Where a black township fell under the authority of a neighbouring white municipality, an L.M.C. could assume responsibility for both, and thus would report to the relevant mini-J.M.C. If the size of the town warranted it, however, it could contain a sub-J.M.C. (e.g. Port Elizabeth) with mini-J.M.C.s (e.g. for Port Elizabeth and Port Elizabeth North). If the black area there lacked independent municipal authority (e.g. Walmer), such a mini-J.M.C. (i.e. Port Elizabeth) did not contain a L.M.C. If it lacked any formal municipal status, and if it also did not link up with the adjacent white municipality, its affairs were administered by the regional office of the Department of Constitutional Planning and Development and, as such, would form part of the sub-J.M.C. (e.g. Mbekweni, a

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[26] This interpretation is suggested by the number of arrests, as well as by the selectivity of upgrading efforts. According to the Black Sash, '*Greenflies*': *municipal police in the Eastern Cape* (Mowbray, 1988), p. 4, between 25,000 and 40,000 were detained during the first year of the third state of emergency (or after 12 June 1986).

In an interview during early 1988, the Secretary of the State Security, General C. J. Lloyd, indicated that upgrading projects were selected on a 'strategic' basis, and that several were in communities which formerly had been scheduled for removal – or, stated differently, where infrastructural development had ceased. His views were supported by the fact that many communities did not receive socio-economic assistance despite their urgent needs.

[27] J.M.C. boundaries were roughly equivalent to S.A.D.F. command areas, but those of lower entities seemed to follow S.A.P. jurisdictions.

community formerly scheduled for removal). Where a black area did
have independent municipal status (e.g. Lekoa, near Johannesburg), it
could contain a L.M.C. but, if warranted by size, a mini-J.M.C.
emerged.

Finally, officials in black areas often held the N.S.M.S. and *Veikom*
actions in high regard. But for those not spurred by immediate
problems and accompanying violence, participation was an un-
rewarded burden. The system demanded an additional layer of
bureaucratic work with extra meetings, reports, and travel. Yet,
N.S.M.S. trainers insisted that even enthusiastic participation would
not lead to substantial personal or departmental reward. The incentive
was the pleasure to be had from knowing that your work was being
done more effectively. Many officials justified their indifference to the
N.S.M.S. by arguing that although undoubtedly appropriate for black
areas, the new search for efficiency added to their own workloads, failed
to rid the state bureaucracy of its appetite for 'red tape',[28] and
probably fuelled local feuds and jealousies.[29]

Interest and participation in the N.S.M.S. thus varied across time
and place, but was usually related to the presence or prospect of
violence, as well as the self-motivation of bureaucrats. Many not so
threatened or moved, remained sceptical about the real need for more
unrewarded additions to their daily routine, not least because the
perpetrators of unpleasantness were getting too close. In short, the
N.S.M.S. had to rely on the security forces at the disposal of *Veikoms*
in black areas.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

The clandestine nature of the N.S.M.S. drove the issue of security
expenditures deeper into the recesses of the state. Whereas secrecy
formerly mainly concerned events related to the central government,
the N.S.M.S. created undisclosed spending on regional, sub- and mini-
regional, and local levels. Further, while previously rationalised as the
inevitable consequence of having to buy arms on the international
black market, hidden budgets now meant that funds were being

[28] Seegers, 'Extending the Security Network to the Local Level', pp. 50–70. Bureaucrats
frequently complained about having to travel long distances between, for example, a mini- and
a sub-J.M.C., in order to attend N.S.M.S. meetings which often dealt with inconsequential
and/or routine affairs.
[29] Some of these were personal likes and dislikes, but others involved more enduring disputes
between institutions. For example, the apparent reluctance of the S.A.P. to permit the
deployment of the S.A.D.F. during unrest in Sebokeng (Lekoa) led to substantial damage to the
city council's property.

allocated secretly for domestic and often partisan reasons. This heightened public criticism of the N.S.M.S. as much as redirecting and sharpening disputes about spending within the state.

First of all, the N.S.M.S. perpetuated battles among security agencies over how best to manage South Africa's problems. An enduring difference concerned the weight to be given to international/ regional and domestic security, with emphases on, respectively, relatively high technology and labour-intensive spending. The domestic preoccupation of the N.S.M.S. certainly favoured increased funds for the S.A.P. and other policing institutions rather than the S.A.D.F., and hence the more dire needs of some communities were met, albeit on a very selective basis.[30] Municipal police, for example, were recruited by the Department of Manpower, partially trained by the S.A.P., and finally resorted under the authority of the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning.[31] For a time it seemed as if the military's grip on the coffers of the state was being loosened.

Second, the N.S.M.S.'s concern with the causes of violence pointed to a long list of ugly realities in the lives of many blacks. A single visit to, say, a community once scheduled for removal, told a horrible tale of what ending development had done over time to the provision of education, electricity, water, housing, roads, and other services, and the costs of even small improvements in material conditions were staggering. The central authorities could help, for example, by using the presidential housing fund and by increasing departmental budgets, but most marginalised communities could not finance upgrading because the residents themselves either resisted or were unable to pay rates and taxes. A way had to be found to transfer money from wealthy white municipalities to poorer areas. Hence the identification of 'priorities' by the N.S.M.S., because with this information the regional services councils (R.S.C.s) could then redistribute local wealth.

Third, the description of the 1980s as an age of scarcity helps to explain the N.S.M.S.'s links with development associations and liaison forums. For the state, business interest in projects contributed to a better climate for economic development and, more to the point, made funds available.[32] Local investment was encouraged as developers once

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[30] On the spending issue, see Seegers, 'After Angola and with De Klerk'.
[31] As from 1990, the S.A.P. took command of municipal police forces.
[32] [Then Brigadier] C.J. Lloyd, 'The Importance of Rural Development in the Defence Strategy of South Africa and the Need for Private Sector Involvement', Workshop of the Urban Foundation, Natal Region, 10 August 1979.

deterred by the presence of a nearby slum-like community saw that its
upgrading was evidence of a governmental change of policy and a
better infrastructure.[33] The private sector's involvement with the
N.S.M.S. not only provided valuable information about local events
but created opportunities for financial advances. Construction firms,
for example, gained by successful tenders for housing projects.[34]
Concurrently, more companies came to realise that they could
profitably promote an image of social awareness by visible concern
with the surrounding community, or gain a reputation for political
sensitivity cultivated by opposing security agencies.[35]

Finally, because the N.S.M.S. drew together in committees those
already employed by the state and/or seconded personnel, its staffing
and running costs were low. In addition, it was not presented as the
vehicle by which hidden 'slush funds' were distributed.[36] State
expenditures remained as approved by the legislature with, in other
words, itemised financial allocations being held inviolate.[37] Upsets in
existing bureaucratic habits arose mainly from formal accusations
about weakness or incompetence, but those criticised could at least
console themselves with the knowledge that their budgets were exempt
from interference.

There is no doubt that secretive spending by the state was extended
to hitherto unknown levels by the National Security Management
System. Although the full financial story cannot be told, it seems that
the N.S.M.S. did not preside over large funds of its own. But it was
able to alter the balance of spending among security agencies, to
rearrange state financing in conjunction with the R.S.C.s, to link the
resources of businesses to state projects, and to criticise the use of money
by civilian departments.

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[33] See, for example, the physical proximity of new businesses and industries to projects being
upgraded in Alexandra and Mbekweni.
[34] Newspapers in the Eastern Cape, for example, benefited from the upsurge of tender
advertisements. In other areas, construction projects, particularly those of private dwellings,
plainly advertised the companies involved.
[35] For example, the switching fortunes of Carl Coetzer of P. E. Tramways in the Eastern Cape.
[36] According to A. P. Stemmet of the N.S.M.S.
[37] However, a J.M.C. could recommend to the S.S.C. that certain actions be taken, according
to General Malan, and then 'arrangements could be made for the Treasury to release the
necessary funds to the departments concerned, and this amount would later be approved by
Parliament as part of the annual Additional Appropriation for that Department'. David Braun,
'Malan Tells of 12 Bodies That "Defuse Unrest"', in The Star, 12 March 1986.

INTO THE NATIONAL CO-ORDINATING MECHANISM

Within weeks of de Klerk presiding over his first cabinet meeting, it was announced that the N.S.M.S. had been replaced by the National Co-ordinating Mechanism (N.C.M.), described in the accompanying documentation as a network of committees focusing on socio-economic development rather than security. Henceforth, co-ordinating state functions would mainly be at the discretion of regional and local officials.[38] Has there just been a change of nomenclature?

The N.J.M.C. has been abolished, as has the office of its chairman, the Deputy Minister of Law and Order, and the national decision-making momentum of the S.S.C. – of which de Klerk was never a member – has been curbed. The influence of the military and civilian bureaucrats has been reduced by the stipulation that only politicians should be members of the S.S.C., by the decision that the administrative strength of its secretariat should be slashed,[39] and by the creation of the Cabinet Committee for Security Affairs (C.C.S.A.). The S.S.C. had been criticised not only by those who wished to maintain the 'apolitical' nature of the civil service, but also by military men who argued that although the S.A.D.F. was an instrument of the state, it should not be used to prop up a failing civil service – in other words, a 'purification' of its agenda was necessary.[40]

There is no doubt that the usually small N.S.M.S. committees created valuable opportunities for personalising relationships within the state. Although no two meetings in some areas ever seemed to involve the same constellation of individuals, in others more than a decade of membership inevitably created some close friendships, often spanning a wide spectrum, even when departmental interests were at stake. Although the compulsory system of participation for delivering problems into the hands of higher authority has gone, alliances and understandings, especially at the lower levels of the state, may well, in some areas, perpetuate the N.S.M.S. by more informal means.

Comparisons of certain organisational arrangements before and after the 1980s also show how the N.S.M.S. has left its mark. For example, the practice had long been to have a relatively small South African

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[38] The Secretary of Cabinet, '*Handleiding: nasionale koordineringsmeganisme (NKM)*', Cape Town, 22 March 1990, pp. 1–3ff.

[39] Half the posts in the S.S.C.'s secretariat were scheduled to be phased out by the end of 1990, mainly by the abolition of the research and training sections. Information supplied by A. P. Stemmet, 5 March 1990.

[40] Ibid. 11 November 1989, and by P. du Preez of MILISTAN, a private firm specialising in military contracts, 20 December 1989.

Police (S.A.P.) force that was backed up in emergencies by members of the S.A.D.F. and other personnel. However, for a variety of reasons, the use of national servicemen, municipal police, and special constables (police with abbreviated training) proved to be counter-productive, ineffective, and politically undesirable. This helps to explain why the S.A.P.'s budget was more than doubled between 1985 and 1989,[41] thereby enabling its authorised establishment to be drastically increased from nearly 41,000 to over 80,000.[42]

Increased size demanded that changes be made in the traditionally top-heavy S.A.P. command-structure, and N.S.M.S. experience suggested how this should be accomplished.[43] All ranking generals served in headquarters located in Pretoria, and from here line- and staff-directives were sent to the 19 magisterial districts. Since January 1990, South Africa's police districts and stations have been placed in 12 regions. In 11 of these, the regional S.A.P. commissioner can finalise such important matters as deployment, logistics, operations, promotions, and transfers without higher authority. Although the 12th region is still the voice of the central state, the re-organisation is designed to allow the police to concentrate on preventing and fighting crime, not least because they are now more closely tied to communities and territory.[44]

State administration is beginning to involve units containing people of all racial categories,[45] a trend that runs counter to the older practice of ethnic exclusivity. The N.S.M.S. does not hold sole responsibility for these changes, but played a huge part in advancing the idea and practices of regionalised administration.

ISSUES OF INTERPRETATION

It needs to be stressed that information about the N.S.M.S.'s existence and operation is not available in readily accessible form. Besides being hidden by a battery of laws and regulations, it is scattered

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[41] South African Institute of Race Relations, *Race Relations Survey, 1986*, Part I (Johannesburg, 1988), p. 73, and *1987/1988* (Johannesburg, 1989), p. 335.

[42] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of the South African Police, 1984* (Pretoria, 1985), and ibid. *1989* (Pretoria, 1990).

[43] With the exception of joint management centres, N.S.M.S. entities below the national level were eventually led by S.A.P. personnel who gained importance because of the actions of *Veikoms*.

[44] *White Paper on the Organisation and Functions of the South African Police* (Pretoria, 1991), and *Annual Report, 1989*, p. 2.

[45] The blocs largely coincide with the 11 policing regions: Eastern, Western, Northern, and Far Northern Transvaal; Eastern, Northern, and Western Cape; Natal, Orange Free State, Soweto, and Witwatersrand.

in local newspapers (such as the tender advertisements where upgrading was under way), in journalistic interviews with N.S.M.S. participants, in legal actions (such as the trial over the events in Crossroads during 1986), in printed materials circulating in townships, in stickers praising or criticising leaders, in political graffiti commenting on past or forthcoming events, in parliamentary questions and answers, and in state spending-patterns.

Hence the necessity for any scholar in this field to repeat interviews, to cross-check information repeatedly, and to follow lines of information expecting only a tiny ultimate yield. In cost and time, these research methods are expensive, and this means that every 'fact' collected is likely to be endowed with a value it might otherwise not have been given. For an 'outsider', perhaps inevitably, the Afrikaans language and culture of many bureaucrats creates a barrier beyond which, one came to suspect, events were 'controlled'. The difference between rhetoric and reality leads to suspicions that governmental deceptions are intentional and systematic, particularly when state employees adopted a hostile and irritated attitude, as though the researcher's questions were dangerous and trivial.

Although hard-pressed to avoid describing the development and operation of South Africa's security system in conspiratorial terms, I have tried in this article to be as specific as possible about cohesion and disunity, formalities and dynamics, and the extent or lack of control. Given this information and emphasis, what analytically can be made of the N.S.M.S.? Interpreted institutionally rather than strategically, three broad issues warrant discussion.

1. The Significance of Administrative Ideology

Recent state ideology, especially Total Onslaught/Strategy, has been usually interpreted as though state ideas, images, and words have a legitimising function. It is not surprising that the technicist language originated during the 1970s, and that it is related to the de-racialisation of the state, to the rise of planning on a modernistic basis, to underlying political alliances, to ideological management of the failures of the reform process, and/or to the continuing need of surveillance.[46] In the

[46] Debbie Posel, 'Language, Legitimation and Control: the South African state after 1978', in *Social Dynamics* (Cape Town), 10, 1, 1984; Willem van Vuuren, 'Domination Through Reform: the functional adaptation of legitimising strategies', in *Politikon* (Pretoria), 12, 2, December 1985; Doreen Atkinson, 'Power, Surveillance and the New Administration in South Africa: some insights from Michel Foucault', Biennial Conference of the Political Science Association of South

late 1980s, state ideologues abandoned Total for Revolutionary
Onslaught. Instead of communist-inspired subversion directed by the
Soviet Union, the new slogan was calculated to focus attention on the
nation's developmental problems.

   Being part of the 'Third World's poverty and instability' legitimated
state violence and rationalised the white electorate's fears of 'lowered
standards'. A functional interpretation of state ideology is still valid,
being reinforced by continuing views that 'military things are better',
notably because of the need to justify 'control, hierarchy and power',[47]
and by emphasising the importance of such notions as: a 'can-do'
enthusiasm, unqualified commitment to the job, the shortest possible
distance between a problem and its solution, control by command, and
institutional simplicity. The society- and state-oriented functions of this
ideology nevertheless remained logically connected. Militaristic admin-
istration required a harsh depiction of the surrounding world. Chaotic
and incapable of natural order, a third-world society permanently
needed vigorous management.[48]

   Administrative ideology cannot only be a matter, however, of ideas
having consequences. As Doreen Atkinson has suggested, recent state
notions were rooted in traditional practices like labour control and
societal manipulation. In other words, South Africa was simply seeing
the latest rationalisation of – not a qualitative break with – deeply
entrenched habits.[49] These continued not because fresh calculations
about what was best always reached the same conclusion as before, nor
were old habits broken upon discovering new levers for shifting society
in this or that direction. Judged on recent experience, rationalism was
dwarfed by institutional context and dynamics. Administrative
ideology in substantial measure derived from competition within the
state, particularly in response to problems and challenges among
departments of the first tier. Here self-interested dramatisations showed
that bureaucrats were far more likely to be influenced by what they did
to, and what was done to them by, other bureaucrats than by
technocratic innovation. Their long and vivid memories made an
administrative ideology.

Africa, University of Stellenbosch, October 1987; and Wilmot G. James and André du Pisani,
'End of a New Deal's Contradictions of Constitutional Reform', in James (ed.), *The State of
Apartheid* (Boulder, 1987), pp. 37–50.
   [47] B. C. Smith, *Bureaucracy and Political Power* (Brighton, 1988), p. 157.
   [48] When the legacy of *apartheid* was raised, bureaucrats responded with the qualification that
South Africa was a third-world society which had made mistakes. See Annette Seegers, 'The
Government's Perception and Handling of South Africa's Security Needs', in D. J. van Vuuren
et al. (eds.), *South Africa: the challenge of reform* (Pretoria, 1988), pp. 414–24.
   [49] Atkinson, op. cit. p. 18.

The messages heard by state employees promoted the value of uncritically submitting to authority, of being aggressive against those violating conventional norms, of de-emphasising concern for individual human beings, and of encouraging thinking in rigid conventional terms. Hence the growth of cynicism, the preoccupation with the outwardly strong, and the belief that unregulated things are dangerous and wild.[50] Being too heavily oriented towards bureaucratic interests and military ways, South Africa's administrative ideology, although appearing modernistic, was thoroughly indifferent to equality as a practice or principle.

2. Institutionalising Cultural Habits?

Although South Africa became increasingly dominated by Afrikaners after 1948, most analysts have shown little appetite for relating the state to cultural factors. In part, the reluctance is theoretically motivated. Many favour other concepts, especially class, but even those with anthropological inclinations are cautious. Cultures are rarely mono-lithic and scholars disagree about the nature and significance of the differences to be found in collections of sub-cultures. Others point to the fact that although the interests of one white minority are favoured by the state, the majority of its employees are neither Afrikaners nor have command of the language. Yet in researching the N.S.M.S., I have repeatedly been struck by certain of its characteristics which can only be described as 'cultural'.

First, and perhaps the most prominent feature, is the stress on seeking agreement, expressed in, for example: *spanwerk* (teamwork), *samewerking* (co-operation), and various references to the extremely popular game of rugby football (like *dinkskrum*, or robust meeting of minds). In addition, there are the negative descriptions of not fitting into a team (such a person is a *dwarstrekker*, or recalcitrant), and the stress on resigning yourself to group-decisions (*berus by die besluit*).

Second, there is conspicuous deference to authority. Employees must initially clear things with superiors (*die saak eers uitklaar*) to the point where one suspects that no entity below the highest level has any life of its own. Good bureaucrats are often simply described as loyal bureaucrats who have the right attitude (*gesindheid*) or persuadable

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[50] These values are those of the so-called F-scale, as explained in T. W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950). The scale is used on the grounds that the military, as an institution, systematically embodies authoritarian values.

mind (*oop kop*), unlikely to second-guess or inhibit instructions with personal views. Good managers are tough men who inspire loyalty by sticking to the rules (*onverbiddelik* and *streng*). Innovation, especially by lower bureaucratic entities, is de-emphasised.

Third, despite some deference to sound techniques, what ought to be done is most often explained in terms of power or flatly asserted. Almost wholly absent are descriptions of situations grounded in the abstract and general, like the realities of human nature or the tendencies of governments everywhere. You hear a great deal of past and present particulars, told in heavily anecdotal style.[51]

The origins of this Afrikanerised style of management probably lie far in the past. Most of the formative political experiences of Afrikanerdom are still haunted by internal divisions. The Great Trek was, in fact, different treks that remained unreconciled. The two Boer Wars were plagued by fundamental disagreements over how to fight. Religious life split into different churches, divided to this day. Strong partisan choices have been made in favour of, for example, nation as opposed to empire, and the National rather than the United Party. Although the causes of these two centuries of divisions cannot be addressed here, abundant evidence exists for concluding that Afrikaners view kin in the spirit of radical egalitarianism. Among themselves, they are a collection of *dwarstrekkers*.

With divisions a permanent danger, Afrikanerdom developed unifying mechanisms, including ideology. Another is to make decisions in a way that produces unity. No effort is spared to encourage inclusivity. When unity is obviously threatened, a decision will be postponed or diluted, but if, after long effort, actions have to be taken in the face of disagreement, those opposing are cast out and crushed. Organisations were shaped by mechanisms of decision-making that included strict chains-of-command that institutionalised deference to authority, although the latter is likely to be a group and not an individual. Since large gatherings invite divisions, power goes to groups that are as small as possible. And, superiors do not lead by command. Successful management of the like-minded demands consultation.

Anthropologists may argue that, in the last resort, cultural differences are matters of degree and means. Since all cultures have ideological and institutional mechanisms of unity, Afrikanerdom is not exceptional. Even so, its cultural properties need to be addressed if we are to

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[51] See Annette Seegers, 'Institutionalising a Cultural Style of Management? Afrikaners, the N. S. M. S. and State Power', Annual Conference of the Association of Sociologists of South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2–5 July 1989.

understand the state's devotion, through the N.S.M.S., to teamwork, to deference to authority, to decision-making by small groups, and to a consultative style of management, albeit all grounded in flat assertions about power.

3. Papering the Cracks in the State?

Most analysts have argued that the rise of the military can be explained by the following sequence of events. After losing its unifying republican goal, Afrikaner populism was replaced by a bureaucracy driven by the executive; formerly episodic black resistance gained greater scope and depth; the economic boom of the 1960s gave way to a prolonged recession; and old mechanisms of control became unworkable. With the state in crisis, half-enlightened pockets of Afrikanerdom promoted reform, the S.A.D.F. advocated aggressive counter-revolutionary actions, and pro-military personalities moved into power.[52]

These interpretations have advanced understanding, but they fail to relate the rise of the military to the N.S.M.S.'s strategy of seeking security by co-ordination on all levels of government. Although analysts are right to point out that the state was fractured, this was not primarily because intensified challenges made cracks appear in the mechanisms of control – it was deliberately broken into pieces long before the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s as a natural consequence of *apartheid*. Vertical divisions between the central, provincial, and municipal levels of government were not that unusual. Decades of legislation also, however, divided the state horizontally, notably by setting up the administration of society along racial categories in, for example, separate education departments. Another was to create Homeland institutions, further separating black South Africans along territorial lines.[53]

These *apartheid*-inspired divisions have had many bureaucratic implications, not least because state employment grew 'at a rate greater than the growth in both total population and economically active population', including a 'tremendous growth in the number of

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[52] Views about how a militarised state manages crisis can be found in: Grundy, op. cit. pp. 49–57; Selfe, op. cit.; Stephen M. Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels: inside South Africa's hidden war* (New Haven and London, 1987), pp. 158–202; and Gavin Cawthra, *Brutal Force: the apartheid war machine* (London, 1986).

[53] J. A. Lombard, 'Fiskale Beleid in Suid-Afrika', in *The South African Journal of Economics* (Johannesburg), 47, 4, 1979, pp. 359–66, discusses the effects of the state's horizontal and vertical divisions on fiscal policy.

blacks working for the state'.[54] As the numbers and cost of administration increased, however, so did inefficiency and incoherence. Many state functions, especially those involving internal security, transport, and communications, simply could not be split either ethnically and/or territorially.[55] Horizontal divisions also tangled jurisdictional lines, compounded by competition and self-interestedness, even among the white-dominated security agencies. For as long as *apartheid* reasoning stayed in place, the pieces in the administrative jigsaw could not come together – except on the basis of co-ordination induced by the threat of revolution.

The much-vaunted rationalisation of the mid-1970s addressed the problems of a fractured state by reducing the number of departments, but improvements were predominantly confined to the first tier,[56] and affected vertical more than horizontal divisions. The N.S.M.S. compelled participation in a host of specially designed administrative units, established one all-important chain-of-command, and sanctioned the crossing of jurisdictional boundaries – though not necessarily fiscal kingdoms – in the interests of three functional areas. But the new hierarchy simply could not, however, rationalise the entire administration of the state. As the discussion showed, most N.S.M.S. entities lived erratically, springing to life mostly under the gun.

Yet, although necessary to note that militarism and repression can continue by informal means, the more important legacy of the N.S.M.S. is that it sustained the impetus towards rationalisation. The view now taken by the Government is that coherence and greater efficiency can be achieved by regionalising administration in ways that override ethnicity. Key central ministries and departments have been re-organised along these lines and, within each of the 12 regions into which South Africa has recently been divided, various entities have been given wide discretionary power to cross ethnically-inspired jurisdictions.

The rise of the N.S.M.S. with its peculiar internal design and its legacy must thus be related to the attributes of bureaucracies generally but, in greater measure, to the fractured nature of the South African state. As was the case with the origins of administrative ideology, the roots of this condition are to be found in past political logic.

[54] Barry Standish, 'Some Statistics on Public Sector Employment in South Africa, 1920–1980', Working Paper No. 69, University of Cape Town, September 1987, p. 76.
[55] Lombard, loc. cit. p. 361.
[56] See Paul S. Botes, 'Die Sentrale Administrasie', in Charles F. Nieuwoudt et al. (eds.), *Die Politieke Stelsel van Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria, 1981).

CONCLUSION

This discussion of South Africa's national security system from 1972 to 1990 has concentrated on its organisational characteristics. Crucial questions remain unanswered, including: Who decided on upgrading its entities? How was this done? How much money was involved? Who drew the boundaries of regions? But enough is now known to enable at least an initial assessment of the N.S.M.S. to be made, despite the fact that crucial areas remain a closed – though not necessarily a conspiratorial – world.

The approach taken in this article should not be viewed as being at the expense of a strategic interpretation, which would focus on the relationship of the N.S.M.S. with society, and on how the régime in power has handled actual and perceived threats to its continued existence. The point is that the institutional nature of the national security system has influenced South African reactions to the world beyond the state. Moreover, it is necessary to describe and attempt to interpret the rise of administrative ideology, and the curious forms that bureaucratic imperatives have taken in the local context, in order to understand the South African state on an historical basis.