

JOINING FORCES AGAINST CRIME

Potential for the private security industry to become proactive

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The extent to which the private security industry has a role in proactive policing is an issue that is receiving increasing attention. At present the industry performs reactive functions in relation to crime; these may include armed response, transporting cash and conducting investigations. This article reflects the debate and considers some of the issues that would need to be addressed if the industry were to be more proactive in combating crime.

Traditional reactive policing is primarily concerned with responding to calls and conducting follow-up investigations.

Similarly, security companies regularly respond reactively to crime that is underway or has already occurred. For example, an employee may press a panic button when robbers pull out firearms at a business, or a homeowner may phone her alarm company when she sees someone breaking into her garage.

Both police and security personnel do at times perform tasks which some may argue are proactive. For example, routine patrols involve driving around neighbourhoods in the hope that crime will be less likely to occur because of the visibility of a law enforcement officer. Similarly, a guard who is employed to patrol business premises could prevent crime from happening by being present and observing. This is visible policing.

Proactive policing, however, should be more concerned with conducting crime analyses, working together with the community to understand crime concerns, and strategising to address safety and security related issues. Proactive policing should be

concerned with specific targeting of criminal and disorderly behaviour.

Security companies that analyse crime statistics and trends and instruct their officers to park their vehicles at hijacking hotspots when not responding to calls are acting proactively and assisting to prevent crime from occurring. Similarly, a security company that is contracted to post guards at a shopping centre is acting proactively when it considers trends such as teenagers using drugs at night in unlit areas of the centre and conducts patrols that result in the youth removing themselves from those areas. Such activities can be an important part of efforts to prevent crime.

South Africa's private security industry

The role that the private security industry can play in crime prevention is certainly significant. Consider the resources of the private security industry: There are about three times as many security officers as police members on the streets and about three times as many armed response vehicles as police patrol vehicles. Ten years ago there were about 100 000 security officers, but this had grown to almost 300 000 by April last year, according to the Private

Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSIRA). Seth Mogapi, the director of PSIRA, said last year that in addition to 296 000 active private security officers working for 4 763 companies, there were about 689 000 inactive officers (King 2006). The Security Industry Alliance estimates the overall industry to be worth about R40 billion annually.

The public also regards the private security industry as more efficient in crime control duties than the SAPS. Research conducted by professors Johan Prinsloo and Coen Marais of the University of South Africa's Department of Criminology found that the efficiency of security guards in controlling crime was regarded as 'very good' by 28% and 'fairly good' by 43% of the respondents. A total of 80.7% of respondents believed that it was a 'good thing' that the private security industry was increasingly taking up certain policing and public protection functions previously entrusted to the state police. In addition, people were more likely to come into contact with a private security officer than with the police (Oliphant 2006).

Types of security

Private security companies perform a number of different functions. The biggest aspect of the industry in South Africa is guarding. This function is concerned with the protection and safeguarding of property or persons. Although such visibility may result in crime being prevented, one can argue that a security company is not really acting proactively by simply posting a guard at a specific venue, particularly when the guard is primarily responsible for access control. This is not to say that these guards do not prevent crime, but rather that they are not involved in proactive initiatives, projects and measures that aim to reduce a particular crime or to deal with specific criminals.

Incidentally, there has also been much debate in the media in the last few years about private security companies being contracted to guard police stations and to assist the police at major events. Some argue that this relieves the police from performing more menial tasks and enables them to focus specifically on policing the community, while others contend that the police

should be able to protect themselves, rather than employing the services of outside companies.

Private security companies also play a role in guarding the gated communities and fenced-in residential areas that have rapidly increased in number over the past few years, particularly in Gauteng. These are established largely because residents feel unsafe in their homes, and result in these communities setting up their own systems of policing, with services provided by private security companies.

In addition to guarding, security companies also provide armed response or alarm response, by monitoring alarms and dispatching security personnel when the alarm is triggered. Although the guarding industry employs the bulk of security personnel, more clients are serviced through the armed response component of the security industry.

Armed escort services are also provided by private security companies who offer to transport cash, assets and confidential documents. Some security companies also provide services during sporting or entertainment events, conduct investigations and security training, and become involved in various aspects relating to the provision and installation of monitoring equipment and security devices.

Processes currently underway

Discussions between government and the private security industry are already underway on how the industry and the police can build better relationships. President Thabo Mbeki said in his State of the Nation address this year that one of his aims is for the police, together with the private security industry, to 'create an environment in which the security expectations of the public, in which huge resources are expended, are actually met.'

Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula said in his budget vote speech in May 2007 that talks between government and the private security industry regarding how the two could share information and resources were progressing well.

A project that will enable the security industry to share information with government so as to ensure a

better response to situations that look as if they may lead to a crime being committed, is due to be piloted later this year, according to the chairman of the Security Services Employers' Organisation, Kevin Derrick. He added that 'all parties are very eager to find solutions and work together to find ways to prevent crime'. (Goodenough 2007)

The focus, according to the chairperson of the Council of the Security Industry Alliance, Steve Conradie, needs to be on how private security officers can gather information and intelligence and utilise it to identify suspicious behaviour or people before criminal activities are perpetrated. In this way the security industry will be integrated into crime prevention processes, and as a result be more proactive in addressing crime.

Any initiatives aimed at establishing working relationships between the SAPS and the private security industry are regarded by the security authority's Mogapi as key to the development of a positive strategy to fighting crime. However, he emphasises the role of PSIRA in this regard:

The Authority aims to facilitate such partnerships and co-operation through proper regulation which will cause the private security industry to become and to remain a valuable partner to the public police in dealing with crime. Partnerships will include active participation in community police forums and the sharing of crime intelligence. (Mogapi 2007)

This is necessitated even more so, Mogapi points out, by the tremendous growth and increasingly important role of the private security industry - which has raised questions as to the ideal relationship between public policing and the provision of private security services in dealing with crime.

An example of creative thinking around the relationship between the private security industry and government was the assistance provided by security companies in Durban's business district and along the beachfront during the last Christmas holiday period. A total of 11 companies provided security officers free of charge to assist with security-related activities in this area.

According to the chairman of the Security Industry Association of South Africa, Shadrack Dladla:

It was a successful operation. Crime was minimal on the beachfront and in Durban generally. Policing in the eThekweni municipal area was more visible and the security guards were able to relieve police members from duties such as access control at boom gates (which restrict access by vehicles along the beachfront during the holiday season). (Goodenough 2007)

Inadequacies of the private security industry

Many roleplayers in the private security industry talk about the need to change the generally poor image that the industry has among the public. President Mbeki said in his State of the Nation address this year:

The increase in the incidence of particular crimes during the security workers' strike should have brought home to all of us the fact that the security industry cannot be handled simply as a private affair of the private sector. Quite clearly the regulatory system that we have in place is inadequate. This applies to such issues as wage levels, personnel vetting systems, enforcement of guidelines on cash-delivery vehicles, and so on. (Mbeki 2007)

According to Mogapi (2007), one of the objectives of PSIRA is to encourage and promote efficiency and responsibility with regard to the rendering of security services. This efficiency includes ensuring the service is rendered in the manner agreed on by the security service provider and client, and meets the client's expectations. He argues that the Authority needs to assist the industry to render a security service in a capable, productive and effective manner, and to operate responsibly, saying that appropriately trained security officers will contribute to an efficient security service being rendered.

Security practitioners agree. The national chairperson of the South African National Security Employers' Association, Cobus Bodenstein, argues that security providers themselves also need to be more proactive in ensuring that their guards are not

involved in perpetrating crime. This should be done by employing the right personnel and looking after them properly:

The mere fact that a guard entering the security industry is vetted via his fingerprints by PSIRA is in my view far from adequate. More stringent checks are needed in respect of the individual who wants to work in the industry, and although some of these are costly, I think it is money well spent. (Goodenough 2007)

In addition, Bodenstein suggests incentives be put in place by the security provider together with the client, to reward guards who go the extra mile:

Many guards are approached by criminal syndicates and are offered money for information or to look the other way. In some cases the amounts offered are substantial. I believe guards who are forthcoming with such information should be well rewarded. (Goodenough 2007)

Bodenstein also calls for the monitoring of the movement of guards between security companies, to reduce the 'bad apples' who are involved in criminal activities and who simply move from one security company to the next. His view is supported by Derrick, who warns that the private security industry needs to develop the right ethics and ensure compliance to gain the trust of the public. Only by doing so will they be able to play a more proactive role.

Another aspect that requires serious consideration is the training that security personnel receive, and the support that they obtain from their managers. These factors are particularly important when considering the potential of the private security industry to operate in a more proactive manner. Referring to a guard posted in the parking area of a business, a security consultant asks: 'Are criminals really deterred by one oke with two weeks of training?' (Goodenough 2007)

In many cases personnel are expected to guard properties at night without the area being properly lit or having access to working torches and radios. Guards expected to check the inside of vehicles at

exit points also need to be trained to recognise the company products that could be at risk. In addition, a high staff turnover means that regular training is critical, and if the security companies aim to be proactive in addressing crime, there also need to be opportunities for intelligence gathering and sharing of information about possible threats and trends.

Private security: a benefit only for the rich?

The private security industry exists because there are people who can afford to pay for it. However, is it only the wealthy that benefit from private security? Mogapi emphasises that the private security industry operates on a profit motive and is accountable only to its clients. eThekweni municipal manager Dr Michael Sutcliffe states:

Distances, both social and physical, then divide people even further and the more resourced group decides to spend more money on privatised security. The poor in turn become more reliant on a security force whose members are often paid less than that of the private sector... The myriad of measures often proposed and implemented (usually at higher cost with ever fancier CCTVs and gates) and which have as their aim the reduction of crime, often don't make things safer at all and sometimes feed the belief that higher walls mean there is more to protect. The sadder result, of course, is that the middle classes are removed even further from the society at large. This creates a cycle where two societies live in two different worlds and the possibility of creating a single society becomes more difficult to achieve. (Sutcliffe 2007)

Mark Shaw also addressed this issue in his book *Crime and Policing in Post Apartheid South Africa: Transforming under Fire*:

Private security could threaten citizens' rights and entrench a divide between those able to hire personal protection and those who cannot. In the suburbs, the likelihood that the former will be mainly white and affluent, the latter mainly poor and black may harden racial or social barriers and increase the possibility that security will

become, or at least be seen to become, a weapon used by the former against the latter, eroding a fundamental norm of democratic societies – that policing should be uniformly available to all, its powers exercised through uniformly-applicable laws. (Shaw 2002:103)

The view that the security industry benefits only those who can afford to pay for services, is reinforced by a security company owner:

We exist because our clients pay for our service. We can try to assist in general crime cases but this isn't really our role, and it can't be done at the expense of our clients. (Quoted in Irish 1999)

Shaw uses a similar quote, which he describes as one of the maxims of the industry: 'The client is always right, the criminal is always wrong.' He adds that since private security is a contractual agreement between the private security company and the client, it is generally more accountable to those who can afford it, than to the police. Furthermore, the primary concern of private security companies is the interest of the client. (Shaw 2002: 113)

However, the chairperson of the KwaZulu-Natal branch of the Professional Security Council, Margaret Kruger, says that where private security guards are employed at places such as shopping centres, government buildings, hospitals and clinics, police stations and schools, they are benefiting many people who would ordinarily not be in a position to afford to contract a security company to provide armed response services to their homes. She believes that when one considers the current levels of crime, and the limited number of police members, the private security industry should be seen as providing a role that is adjunct to the state police. Considering the findings of Prinsloo and Marais mentioned above, it is also worth noting that the private security industry also has the support of a significant portion of those surveyed.

Conclusion

Dladla is adamant that the security industry is a critical component of any efforts to address crime; without it there will be little success.

Unless government takes the security industry seriously and calls the security industry to be involved in developing crime prevention strategies, I believe there will not be any progress in the combating of crime. (Goodenough 2007)

Certainly there is little doubt that by working together in partnerships with other role players, the security industry has the potential to play an increasingly greater role in proactively preventing crime. Gauteng MEC for Community Safety, Firoz Cachalia, talked at the launch of the Gauteng Safety Strategy about the accomplishments that can be achieved through partnerships:

Examples include the partnership between the police and organisations such as Business Against Crime and the South African Bank Risk Centre (SABRIC) to tackle business related robberies. We have also used this approach to achieve success against the problem of taxi violence. We will be seeking to extend this approach to addressing other types of priority crimes such as house and business robberies. (Cachalia 2006)

The role of the private security industry in proactive crime prevention is already being explored. Such efforts should continue, because addressing crime is not only the responsibility of those in the criminal justice system. With the resources in its possession and the role that it plays in assisting to address crime in South African communities, the private security industry certainly has a critical role in any such partnership.

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