

OPERATION IRON FIST AFTER SIX MONTHS

Provincial police strategy under review

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At the beginning of July last year, the Gauteng MEC for Community Safety publicly announced the launch of a six month, high intensity police operation called Operation Iron Fist. This article draws from a media statement delivered by the MEC on 2 February 2007 in which the achievements of Iron Fist between July and December 2006 were discussed. Given that little information on policing strategy is currently provided to the public, the *SA Crime Quarterly* hopes, by publishing extracts of the MEC's statement, to assist in documenting and publicising anti-crime efforts and to help hold accountable those in positions of leadership on crime in South Africa.

The purpose of Operation Iron Fist was to address a spike in certain crimes in Gauteng. At a meeting with the SAPS Provincial Commissioner and his management team, the MEC requested the police to develop a specific operational plan to address the increases in some of the crime categories. In particular, it was highlighted that certain objectives relating to police visibility and performance should be included in the plan and that certain crimes should be prioritised.

As a result, the MEC reported in a public statement on 11 July 2006 that Operation Iron Fist would have eight key performance objectives:

- the public could expect to see more police on Gauteng's roads and streets;
- the police would put up more roadblocks;
- the police would increase their efforts to track down and bring the most wanted criminals to justice;
- the police would focus their deployment to tackle serious crimes;

- efforts to remove and destroy illegal firearms would be stepped up;
- efforts would be made to improve the service delivery from 10111 call centres;
- the police would improve safety on the province's trains; and
- there would be a focus on increasing community mobilisation against crime.

The primary intention of the operation was to arrest the spike in certain crime categories and stabilise the situation in the short-term period of six months. The intention of the Department of Community Safety was to establish what impact a high-intensity, high visibility police operation would have on the following specific crimes:

- vehicle hijacking;
- cash-in-transit heists;
- house robbery;
- business robbery;
- taxi violence; and
- residential burglary.

The evaluation of Iron Fist's achievements comes at a time of growing public concern about violent crime in our country. There can be little doubt that an analysis of crime patterns across the province will not offer consolation to those who have been robbed in their homes, families of those killed for a cell phone, women raped on the way to work, those who have been hijacked at gun-point or an elderly person assaulted on the way from a pension pay point.

Nevertheless, every effort has been made to guarantee the integrity and objectivity of this assessment. The Community Safety Department's evaluation of Operation Iron Fist was based on information from police performance management systems, crime statistics from the SAPS and other sources. The department also conducted its own research, including a public perception survey that was undertaken by an independent organisation.

Understanding the role of the MEC in relation to safety

It is important to note that the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) of the Gauteng Provincial Government responsible for Community Safety has no direct managerial authority over the police. The SAPS is a national organisation that is resourced and managed centrally. However, as an elected member of a provincial government with the responsibility for community safety, the MEC is responsible for expressing the safety concerns of the public to the police and requesting that the police respond. The Community Safety Department monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the police's response to public concerns in an attempt to ensure that the police are held accountable to the public.

Assessing Iron Fist against its objectives

The section that follows presents the main findings of the evaluation of police performance against the specific objectives outlined above.

Objective 1: Increased mobilisation of police resources

The aim was to improve police visibility through increasing the number of officers in the field. During the operation, a nationally driven restructuring process of the SAPS resulted in 3,000 police officers being deployed to priority police stations (i.e. those stations that record the highest levels of serious violent crime). Furthermore, all officers, including administrative staff, were expected to work overtime to support operations, and 400 entry-level constables were deployed throughout the province.

Police reservists

The objective of doubling the number of reservists in Gauteng by July 2007 was partly achieved. The number of trained reservists available in July was 3,206. To double this number the police would have had to recruit 266 reservists per month on average. By the end of December an average of 237 reservists had been recruited per month. This meant that 1,421 reservists were recruited during the Operation Iron Fist period.

Recently the structure of reservists has changed to allow for four categories of reservists:

- 'Category A' reservists receive six months of training and have the same powers as fully functional police officers.
- 'Category B' reservists provide administrative support to the SAPS.
- 'Category C' reservists provide specialist skills (e.g. lawyers, medical doctors, etc).
- 'Category D' reservists are replacing the old commandos and similarly will not have full police powers or authority. They will be utilised primarily on patrols and high visibility operations.

Once the curriculum has been finalised for these reservists a large-scale recruitment drive can be undertaken.

Vehicle patrols

The number of police vehicle patrols was also increased. A total of 93,757 vehicle patrols were undertaken during the operation (a monthly average of 15,626 vehicle patrols). This meant 7,202 more

patrols (an increase of 8%) than in the same period in 2005, and 2,037 more patrols (an increase of 2%) than in the first half of 2006.

Highway patrols

There were more highway patrols when compared with the same time period in 2005, but marginally fewer than in the first six months of 2006. A total of 8,528 highway patrols were conducted during Operation Iron Fist (a monthly average of 1,421 highway patrols). This was 3,415 more (an increase of 67%) than in 2005, but 160 fewer (a decrease of 2%) than in the first half of 2006.

During Operation Iron Fist there was better coordination between the SAPS and the Metropolitan Police Departments. This meant that the police could focus their resources within communities while the MPDs focused on the highways. There were also targeted interventions at areas identified as 'hot-spots', such as the Rivonia off-ramp on the N1 highway. Police increased their patrols to improve safety in that area.

Vehicles searched

There was a substantial increase in the number of vehicles searched during Operation Iron Fist. A total of 698,555 vehicles were searched during the operation (a monthly average of 116,426 vehicles). This represented 161,590 more (an increase of 30%) vehicles searched than during the same time period in 2005, and 133,308 more (an increase of 24%) vehicles searched than in the first half of 2006.

People searched

There was a notable increase in the number of people searched during the operation. A total of 1,705,235 people were searched (a monthly average of 284,206 people). This represents 504,865 more people (an increase of 42%) than during the same period in 2006, and 542,116 more people (an increase of 47%) than during the first half of 2006.

Objective 2: Increased roadblocks

The objective of increasing the number of roadblocks was achieved, as reflected in the figures below.

Roadblocks

The police put up a total of 10,727 roadblocks (an average of 1,788 per month) during the operation. This meant 3,159 more roadblocks (a 42% increase) than during the same period in 2005, and a 40% increase compared with the first six months of 2006.

Vehicle control points

There was a substantial increase in vehicle control points compared with the same time period in 2005 but a decrease when compared with the first six months of 2006. In total 17,528 vehicle control points (a monthly average of 2,921) were set up during the operation. This represents 3,731 more vehicle control points (an increase of 27%) when compared with the same period in 2005.

However, there was a 21% decrease in the number of control points when compared with the first six months of 2006. This can be attributed to operational decisions that resulted in resources for vehicle control points (i.e. personnel and vehicles) being used for other purposes (e.g. roadblocks and targeted patrols).

Objective 3: Targeting key wanted suspects

In terms of tracing wanted suspects, a total of 4,653 initiatives were carried out to trace wanted criminals during the operation (a monthly average of 776). This represents 2,920 more initiatives (an increase of 169%) than during the same period in 2005, and 2,246 more (an increase of 93%) than during the first six months of 2006.

Suspect raids were also substantially increased as part of Operation Iron Fist. A total of 4,416 suspect raids were undertaken during the operation (a monthly average of 736). This represents 2,316 more raids (an increase of 110%) than were undertaken over the same period in 2005 and 1,638 more raids (an increase of 59%) than were carried out during the first half of 2006.

Apart from other arrests made during the above raids, a total of 224 suspects who were on Gauteng's 'most wanted' list at the start of Operation Iron Fist, were arrested.

Objective 4: The targeted deployment of police against serious crime

The police arrested a total of 218,572 people during the operational period for *all* offences. This resulted in 10,471 more people being arrested than in the first six months of 2006 (a 5% increase).

During Operation Iron Fist, a total of 80,729 people were arrested for all *serious* crimes, ranging from murder to theft. This was an increase of 2,775 people (a 4% increase) from the same period in 2005 and an increase of 9,767 (a 14% increase) over the first six months of 2006. Moreover, at the beginning of the operation in July, 32% of the total arrests were for serious criminal offences. By December the proportion of arrests for serious offences had increased to 43% of the total.

In terms of arrests for the specific crimes that Iron Fist aimed to reduce, the following numbers of arrests were made:

- Business robbery: 124 suspects were arrested, representing an increase of 103% when compared with the same six month period in 2005, and an increase of 114% when compared with the first six months of 2006. While it is encouraging to see a substantial improvement in the number of arrests for this crime category, it is important that these numbers increase further. Far more resources need to be devoted to identifying and arresting people involved in business robberies.
- Residential robbery: During the operation, a total of 566 suspects were arrested for residential robberies. This represents a 21% increase in the number of suspects arrested in 2005 and an increase of 25% over the number of suspects arrested during the first half of 2006. As with business robberies, the increase is encouraging but more attention will need to be given to identifying and arresting people involved in these crimes.
- Vehicle hijacking: 273 suspects were arrested, which is 84 more people (a 44% increase) arrested than in both 2005 and during the first half of 2006 (for both periods 189 suspects were arrested for hijacking).
- Cash-in-transit heists: 15 suspects were arrested for CITs during the operational period. This

represents nine more arrests when compared with 2005 and two more arrests when compared with the first half of 2006. It should also be noted that the gang of 26 who were arrested in KwaZulu-Natal during the operational period were also operating in Gauteng.

- Residential burglary: During the operation a total of 4,093 suspects were arrested for residential burglaries. While this represents 52 fewer arrests (a decrease of 1.2%) when compared with the same time period in 2005, it represents 84 more arrests (an increase of 2%) when compared with the first half of 2006.
- Taxi violence: 26 people were arrested for taxi violence, which represents 13 more arrests when compared with the same time period in 2005 and 15 more arrests when compared with the first half of 2006.

Objective 5: Removing illegal firearms

Efforts to remove illegal firearms from communities were stepped up, as is reflected in the increases in various police activities presented above. During Operation Iron Fist 8,324 firearms were recovered by the police. During November and December 2006, a total of 102,751 firearms that had previously been recovered by the police were destroyed. This is more than double the number of firearms destroyed during 2005 (approximately 40,000).

Objective 6: Improving the functioning of the 10111 Emergency Response Centres

Over the Operation Iron Fist time period, 136 personnel at the 10111 Police Emergency Response Centres underwent training to improve service delivery. Senior managers were also deployed to each of the six 10111 centres to improve the levels of supervision. These are however short-term measures and will not address the structural shortcomings facing the six 10111 call centres. These include challenges relating to recruitment, staffing and technology. There were also clear differences between the six existing call centres in Gauteng.

In order to address these structural challenges, the SAPS is in the process of changing the entire 10111

system. An amount of R600m has been spent on building and equipping a new world-class police emergency response centre in Midrand. This has already happened and it is anticipated that staff at the six existing centres will start being redeployed into a single emergency call centre from July 2007.

Technology for the satellite tracking of police vehicles is also in the process of being installed. This will enable the SAPS to better identify the location of individual police vehicles and then closely monitor the response times to calls for assistance. New staff recruitment, training and supervision systems will also be put into place to improve the service delivered by 10111 call operators to members of the public. The SAPS will publicly launch the new centre once it is fully operational.

Objective 7: Improving safety on the railways

In the month of July a special operation called 'Operation Railway Safety' was undertaken, during which 497 Gauteng provincial SAPS reservists were deployed onto the trains. They made a total of 4,435 arrests, successfully tackling the criminal elements that had started to operate on railways in the earlier part of the year. These police remained on the railways until the deployment of 300 permanent SAPS Railway Police Unit members.

Objective 8: Increasing community mobilisation against crime

The indicators used to measure this objective included the number of police visits to schools, number of pamphlets distributed by the SAPS, and the extension of CPFs.

School visits

The SAPS substantially increased the number of visits to schools during Operation Iron Fist. A total of 12,474 schools were visited (a monthly average of 2,079 visits). This demonstrates that 3,888 more visits took place, (a 45% increase) than in the same time period in 2005 and 1,530 more visits (a 14% increase) than during the first six months of 2006. These visits are undertaken by police members to educate children and youth to be aware of the

dangers of drugs and weapons, and to assist them in reporting crime.

Distribution of pamphlets

A total of 51,283 pamphlets on crime and police contact information were distributed during the operation. This is 23,779 more pamphlets (an 87% increase) than were distributed over the same time period in 2005 and 35,501 more pamphlets (a 225% increase) than were distributed during the first half of 2006. These pamphlets are distributed to assist communities with crime prevention tips and information on how to contact the police for assistance or to report crime.

Community Policing Forums (CPF's)

Many CPFs across the province stepped up to support Operation Iron Fist. The Gauteng Department of Community Safety was involved in a number of initiatives to assist CPFs and encourage community participation against crime. CPFs and sector forums were strengthened in 27 police precincts, including, among others, Booysens, Jeppe, Hillbrow, Kagiso, Tembisa, Naledi, Khutsong, Dobsonville and Kliptown.

In places such as Marabastad, Sebokeng and Rabie Ridge, community patrollers were deployed in community identified crime hotspots such as parks and around certain shopping malls. In places such as Mamelodi, Orlando, Naledi and Meadowlands, the CPFs were actively involved in road shows, Imbizos and door-to-door campaigns to ensure that people were aware of, and could support, Operation Iron Fist in their communities.

The Star newspaper also launched a campaign to support and publicise the work of various CPFs that started during the operational period.

The impact of Operation Iron Fist on crime

Information provided below on crime trends for specific targeted crimes in Gauteng over the Operation Iron Fist period is based on SAPS crime statistics. Increases or decreases in crime have been determined by comparing the monthly numbers in question with the same time the previous year. This provides a more accurate assessment, as there are distinct annual patterns for most crime categories.

Vehicle hijacking

Vehicle hijacking stabilised over the Operation Iron Fist period, compared with the increases that occurred during the first half of the year. Fewer instances of vehicle hijackings were reported during Operation Iron Fist than were reported during the first six months of 2006. Nevertheless, there are still too many hijackings occurring in Gauteng and greater effort will be needed to continue the downward trend in this crime that has been occurring over the past four years.

Cash-in-transit heists

There was a substantial reduction in the number of cash-in-transit heist (CIT) incidents during Operation Iron Fist. The Cash-in-Transit Crime Combating Forum, consisting of industry role players such as the South African Bank Risk Information Centre (SABRIC) and the police, announced that they had recorded a 27% reduction of CITs in the last four months of 2006 when compared with the same period in 2005.

Business robberies

Operation Iron Fist had some impact on business robberies. Although business robberies continued to increase during Operation Iron Fist, they did so at a slower rate than during the first six months of 2006. However, where businesses have come together to address robberies in specific sectors, positive results have been achieved. For example, the Consumer Goods Council Crime Prevention Programme reported that armed robberies among their members in the retail industry had decreased by 11% during 2006 when compared with 2005. Nevertheless, business robberies continue to be of concern and further attention will be paid to improving policing and business strategies for addressing this crime type.

Residential robberies

This crime occurs when criminals use violence against people while the victims are at home, to enter their premises and rob them. This crime continues to be of concern and although more people were arrested for residential robberies, decreases in the incidence of this crime were not recorded during Operation Iron Fist. This situation,

where armed criminals attack people in their homes, cannot be tolerated. This crime will continue to be prioritised until decreases are achieved, and to this end, new strategies and tactics are being explored to tackle this crime in 2007.

Residential burglaries

House burglaries occur when criminals break into houses when there is no one at home. It is encouraging that there was a substantial reduction in house burglary during Operation Iron Fist. This reflects a significant change, as house burglaries had increased slightly during the first six months of 2006.

Taxi violence

There was a substantial reduction in taxi violence towards the end of the Operation Iron Fist period with far fewer incidents occurring in November and December than during previous months. Nevertheless, there were still a few incidents in certain areas and efforts to end taxi related violence will continue.

Key lessons

Some of the key conclusions about the evaluation of Operation Iron Fist are discussed below.

Improved targeting

Operation Iron Fist demonstrated that the law enforcement agencies were able to mobilise their resources to increase visibility and arrest rates. The police use of resources did result in a decrease in overall crime rates, especially for property related crimes. However, the levels of violent crime remain high.

The strategy did not succeed in reducing incidents of specific types of violent crime, in particular house robberies and business robberies. These crimes account in some measure for the growing levels of fear in our society. Clearly, the capability of the police to target these types of violent crime needs to be strengthened. The Premier of the province has asked that the SAPS Provincial Commissioner develop specific strategies to target these types of crime, and explain the approach that the SAPS will be adopting to the Gauteng Legislature.

Effective partnerships

The results clearly showed that when relationships between CPFs and police management are effective, better results are achieved. Typically, partnerships result in increased and better intelligence being provided to the police in relation to individuals or groups committing specific crimes in specific communities. These results demonstrate that it is possible to reduce serious and violent crimes if communities and the police work together and focus their efforts.

Over half (56%) of Gauteng policing precincts saw a reduction in priority crimes, including places such as De Deur, Alexandra, Atteridgeville, Mamelodi and Eldorado Park (which recorded the largest decrease in Gauteng). In many instances it was also because of dedicated police station managers who were able to work in constructive partnerships with mobilised communities. Nevertheless, community involvement is still too low and efforts will be made to improve this through the launch of a 'social movement against crime.'

Some stations recorded significant increases in crime, including Dobsonville, Zonkwizwe, Ennerdale, and Midrand. These stations will require increased attention in the months ahead.

Station management

The restructuring of the SAPS initiated by the national office resulted in improved management and leadership at station level in some areas. This has led to significant reductions in crime in some communities, such as Johannesburg Central, Hillbrow and Booyens. Nevertheless, demonstrable improvements in police responses to calls for assistance from the public must be achieved. In addition, more attention needs to be paid to ensuring that police responsiveness improves. The tracking devices installed in police vehicles later this year should result in better police responses.

Cooperation of law enforcement agencies

During the Iron Fist period, metropolitan police departments adjusted their operational plans in accordance with the operation, resulting in improved coordination of law enforcement agencies

in the province. This is one of the areas that experienced a positive impact during Operation Iron Fist. The trend towards an increasing proactive response by local government in improving safety must be encouraged.

The adoption of a comprehensive Gauteng Safety Strategy

There can be no doubt that a six-month, police-driven operation alone will not solve our crime problem. What is required over time is a comprehensive integrated strategy that includes a focus on improving the quality of policing, community mobilisation and partnerships, better coordination of law enforcement operations by the SAPS and the metropolitan police departments, and increased involvement of local authorities. It is for this reason that the Gauteng Provincial Government adopted a comprehensive eight-year Gauteng Safety Strategy in August of 2006 (see the next article in this issue).

Conclusion

All those who demonstrated considerable commitment and dedication during Operation Iron Fist and the continuing fight against crime must take credit for the achievements noted above. In particular, the SAPS Gauteng Provincial Commissioner and his dedicated policemen and women ought to be commended for their efforts and sacrifices in tackling crime. Appreciation must also be expressed to the metropolitan police departments, and the members of CPFs and the many unsung heroes who participate in these efforts.

Public safety is a priority and the Community Safety Department will continue to work in a systematic, focused and determined way to ensure that all people can enjoy the freedom and security that they deserve.