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Zondo commission – SSA used to sabotage CR17 in lead-up to Nasrec

The commission of inquiry into state capture heard on Friday that the State Security Agency (SSA) was allegedly used to sabotage President Cyril Ramaphosa's CR17 campaign ahead of the ANC elective conference in Nasrec in 2017. Furthermore, millions were withdrawn from the SSA in what appears on the surface to be an attempt to influence conference outcomes.

Secret witness Miss K, a lead investigator into allegations of corruption, abuse of power and fraud at the SSA, completed her in-camera testimony on Friday. She told the commission that despite the revelations of the findings of her investigation that she had made since Wednesday, SSA staff remained patriots of South Africa and operated with integrity.

According to Miss K, one of the findings of Project Veza, a wide-ranging investigation into the affairs of the SSA between 2008 and 2018, was of an operation carried out by an irregularly appointed cohort of intelligence operatives in February 2017, to impede the distribution of CR17 campaign regalia in Gauteng. CR17 is the campaign name that President Cyril Ramaphosa adopted in the lead up to the ANC's 54th elective conference in Nasrec, Johannesburg, in December of the same year.

A further discovery was that an amount of R19-million was removed from the SSA under the guise of funding for a secret operation on 15 December, and a receipt that appeared to correspond with it was found to have hand-written notes that presumably show how some of the cash would be allocated. The notes, read out by evidence leader Advocate Paul Pretorius, were written as R5-million (Kingmaker); R7.9-million (Bra J) and R900 000 (Vele). Miss K confirmed that the circumstances under which the money left the agency were still under investigation, as were many other transactions found to have taken place during that period.

Over the course of Veza, Miss K said her team had found that it was not unusual for money to be requested for operational expenses ahead of ANC events, including elections, and not reconciled later. In fact, such was the norm that cash requests were made, and fulfilled, with only a temporary advance (TA) slip as documentation to match the amount withdrawn. These would often be in cash, sometimes to the tune of R20-million for one person, and would most often be overridden with the blessings of chief financial officers who could not be named in her evidence. The abuse of the TA system, she said, came to be prevalent after the appointment of former ambassador Thulani Dlomo as deputy director-general of counter intelligence in January 2012.

Under Dlomo's watch, a parallel SSA structure was created with the main purpose of providing protection of former president Jacob Zuma. This was in late 2008 and early 2009, before Dlomo was even officially appointed, without undergoing proper vetting processes, according to Miss K.

Veza investigators found correspondence between the SSA and Dlomo's previous employer, the provincial department of social development in KwaZulu-Natal, confirming that there was an arrangement through which Dlomo was providing assistance to the SSA.

He recruited 48 operatives without vetting them first. Some were later absorbed into functions of the South African Police Service and the National Defence Force that were mandated for Zuma's protection. To date, some of the firearms and ammunition that were given to the group as part of their irregular operations remain unaccounted for, as is an amount placed at R9-billion (in assets) by current SSA acting director-general (DG) Loyiso Jafta, who testified before Miss K.

The irregular unit was purportedly discontinued on the arrival of former DG Arthur Fraser in 2016, but the Veza probe has learned that members were occasionally recruited for ad hoc missions, such as CR17 and Nasrec. Some of the operatives who belonged to the unit, said Miss K, told her team in interviews that they were used and discarded later when Dlomo no longer needed their services, despite initial promises of permanent employment within the SSA.

Fraser was found to have approved operations previously undertaken by the members of the unit, despite confirming its dissolution. In fact, said Miss K, the operating expenditure of the SSA ballooned from R42-million in his first year in office, the 2016/17 financial year, to R303-million in the next one.

Over the course of three days, from Wednesday, Miss K has been confirming the contents of the affidavit of another witness with a hidden identity – known on commission records as Mr Y – in oral evidence. Mr Y, having been scheduled to give the evidence, had a medical emergency that rendered him unable to testify, Pretorius explained on Wednesday. On the basis that he had worked closely with Miss K on Veza, the commission then arranged to have her replace him as a witness, to confirm parts of his affidavit that she was privy to.

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