



12 May 2021

Zondo commission – Intelligence regulator tells Zondo of “rot” in SSA

The work of regulating South Africa’s intelligence agency, the State Security Agency (SSA), has been a tough one for Inspector-General of Intelligence (IGI) Setlhomamaru Dintwe, who came into office in 2016. He completed his evidence before the state capture commission on Wednesday, having returned for a second appearance.

If Dintwe’s office is not dealing with internal SSA challenges of officials attempting to block investigations by his office, he is frustrated by the inaction of politicians in the sector. Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence (JSCI), to which he accounts and to which he submits reports, has ignored submissions from his office that contain recommendations for cleaning up. Many of his recommendations for the tightening of controls within the SSA have not been implemented, leading to a situation where the agency is bled dry by officials who use the cover of secrecy to undertake sometimes unlawful activities involving large cash amounts, at the SSA’s expense.

As for the ministers who have occupied the portfolio of state security, Dintwe said he has enjoyed little support for the work of his office. On his previous appearance in April, he told the commission that Police Minister Bheki Cele, Defence and Military Veterans Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, and State Security Minister Ayanda Dlodlo had all tried to interdict his testimony by complaining to President Cyril Ramaphosa, even suggesting that Dintwe be suspended. Former acting SSA director-general Loyiso Jafta gave a similar account earlier in the year. He too had been instructed by Dlodlo to not testify at the commission, but did so anyway.

Dintwe said on Wednesday while Parliament in the form of the JSCI holds the power of oversight to compel the minister to see to bettering whatever weaknesses appear in the SSA, his own office cannot be absolved from responsibility in the intelligence service’s degeneration over the years.

Before his appointment in 2016, the office had been without a permanent IGI for two years. When he arrived in the office, however, he discovered that recommendations made in reports by his predecessor before the two-year vacancy, the late Advocate Faith Radebe, were often ignored. For the most part, she too had tried to remedy the recklessness with which operatives within the SSA were allowed to take large sums of cash, sometimes running into the millions, to fund their operations, with only a signed A4 Word document supplied as record of such a claim.

During his investigations into the Principal Agent Network (PAN) allegedly set up by former SSA director-general Arthur Fraser, Dintwe recalled two instances where one operative claimed 120 000 Euros’ worth of travel expenses, which was just over R2-million. The operative was a close protection officer of a minister, and although he claimed the money was for his travels with his minister, the IGI could not find corresponding records for the minister in question that reflect as much travelling as he had claimed for.

Another operative accumulated claims totalling R9-million over three years. Neither of the two has provided proof that these monies were indeed spent for the purposes they claimed. These, Dintwe said, were just examples of how much the rot within SSA has gone without consequences.

The lack of interest in his investigations by political principals who have occupied the portfolio is also a worrying factor. While he has enjoyed the support of JSCI members like UDM leader Bantu Holomisa and the EFF's Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, both of whom have vowed to fight for the independence of the IGI's office, the ministers who must implement the changes he has recommended to the JSCI have largely ignored him.

"Former minister Mahlobo says he was not aware that Mr Arthur Fraser was implicated in the PAN investigation, and I went to the office because the commission wanted us to confirm whether there were some presentations made to the minister with regard to the PAN investigation," said Dintwe. "The same recommendations in the PAN investigation was that he should be charged."

To date, Fraser has not faced the music. With the protection of Mahlobo's successor Bongani Bongo, Fraser tried to have Dintwe removed from office in an attempt to scupper his investigation into the PAN. According to Dintwe, it was through the PAN that Fraser oversaw an infiltration of the SSA in which members of the network flouted standard procedures, with financial protocols being overridden, using large sums of money for operations that could not be monitored or audited by the Auditor-General's office for years.

In one case of possible political interference, Dintwe said he was called by Bongani Bo Mbindwane, the special advisor of then police minister Fikile Mbalula, just days before the ANC's Nasrec conference in 2017. Mbindwane sought to rope Dintwe into a plan to procure a grabber, allegedly at an inflated price, citing threat in the form of foreign spies who had supposedly come into the country to infiltrate the conference, but were disguised as tourists.

"He told me that he has been sent by the minister. I must impress upon the commission that the minister never sent me to that meeting but I went. When we met, he told me there was a group of backpackers who wanted to influence the outcome of the Nasrec conference, and thus they were in need of grabbers to the tune of R210-million. However, because the date was too close they could settle for one grabber for R45-million."

Mbindwane then explained what the grabber could do, saying Dintwe must not be surprised that it was so expensive. Ordinarily, a grabber costs around R7-million, said Dintwe. The reason Mbindwane approached him was so that Dintwe could influence a crime intelligence divisional head to sign off on the purchase. Only later did the latter tell Dintwe that Mbindwane had omitted to reveal that the grabber would be purchased from a media company already under investigation by the IGI, that Dintwe did not name. The Independent Police Investigative Directorate stopped the purchase.

Dintwe would later tell Mbindwane when he sent him a text message to enquire about the change of plans, that he did not get involved in procurement processes. Nor did Mbindwane, he told the commission, have authority to get involved in procurement matters.

In his conclusion, Dintwe said he hoped for a chance to clean the SSA, adding that he would be a happy man if his successor could "reap the rewards" of a concerted effort to do that. His term of office ends in March 2022.

Useful links:

[Zondo Commission website](#)

Corruption Watch's [Zondo Commission update page](#)

[State Security Agency](#)