

# bulletin

The Conflict, Security  
& Development Group

Contemporary Russian organised crime is a complex and shadowy phenomenon. Its roots are widespread, extending into the criminal fraternities of the *vory v zakone* ('thieves-within-code') that came to dominate the Soviet prison system. It has permeated the primordial traditions of corruption and influence-trading, which have allowed ordinary Russians to survive, and the networks of self-seeking party officials who took advantage of the Soviet Union's collapse to turn themselves into a new generation of businessmen and politicians.

This 'mafiya' is characterised not by disciplined monolithic structures, like the classic model of the Sicilian Mafia, but, rather, by loose networks of semi-autonomous groups that come together temporarily to exploit specific opportunities or to resist a threat to the arrangement as a whole.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there are kin-based groupings, which have a more coherent identity, but even these are less exclusive than outsiders may expect. The feared Chechen *bratva* ('brotherhood'), for instance, includes many Azeris, Dagestanis and other peoples of the Caucasus, as well as even Russians and Ukrainians.

There are between 13 and 15 major organised-crime networks in Russia, plus many thousands of individual components. This kind of structure poses all sorts of obstacles to effective analysis. Distinctions between constituent groups and the main networks are often not understood and 'membership' is not necessarily connected to some clear identity, location, background or race. Indeed, membership itself is often problematic, as many of these criminals are not full-time gangsters. Instead, they are often entrepreneurs with a variety of business interests, ranging from the entirely criminal to the essentially licit.

Nevertheless, it is clear that organised crime presents a formidable challenge to Russian security. It undermines faith in the state and its laws, creates alternative sources of power and influence, and distorts and drains resources from the economy. Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov has estimated that corruption currently costs the country around \$15 billion per annum. On top of this, some \$20–25bn is lost each year as a result of the illegal flight of capital.<sup>2</sup> One of the many issues that makes

***In this issue*** . . . a special extended article on organised crime and Russian security forces by Mark Galeotti and a feature on the crisis in Zimbabwe by Daniel Compagnon. In addition, John Penn looks at engaging with local media in conflict situations.

organised crime a genuine national-security concern, furthermore, is that, far from being able to control it, Russia's security forces are all too often part of the problem. Journalist Dmitri Kholodov warned in June 1994 that 'our Russian army is sliding down into a world of organised crime'.<sup>3</sup> In October 1994, while investigating claims for the *Moskovskii Komsomolets* newspaper that commandos from the élite 16th Spetsnaz Brigade were working as gunmen within organised crime, he was killed by a booby-trap bomb.<sup>4</sup> Alexander Gurov, one of the first Russian police (militia) officers to look seriously at organised crime and now a parliamentarian, believes that police officers are becoming the dominant force in the country's underworld.<sup>5</sup>

It is important, however, not to overplay the involvement of former soldiers and police officers in the mafiya. They represent no more than a small proportion of the total membership. One reason that their role is often exaggerated is that, because of conscription, many young men who might end up as criminals will have served a term with the armed forces. They will often then be described in newspaper accounts as 'ex-soldiers'. Another reason is that military personnel may well have

abilities that make them disproportionately effective and newsworthy. The late Alexander Solonik, for instance, a notorious mob assassin, was formerly a special-service sniper. But specialists of every kind are available for hire. Former Federal Government Communications and Information Agency employees are regarded as the best computer hackers, while many money-laundering experts are those who participated in KGB efforts to salt away Communist Party funds in the West during the final years of the Soviet Union.

### **Security forces as a security problem**

The Russian security apparatus<sup>6</sup> is suffering a long-term decline in effectiveness, morale and discipline. Crime within the Russian military is rife and it is worsening.<sup>7</sup> The officer corps is notoriously corrupt, in part because wages continually fail to keep pace with inflation and are typically paid in arrears. Between accidents, suicides and deaths through bullying and brawls, the Russian army loses as many soldiers every three years as it lost during 10 years of fighting in Afghanistan. Draft evasion is so widespread that many regional courts are offering petty offenders the choice of conscription instead of prison. In this context, it is hardly surprising that discipline is a serious problem and that many within the ranks are turning to crime.

The militia and other law-enforcement agencies, while mercifully lacking the army's *dedovshchina*<sup>8</sup> traditions have still suffered a dramatic reduction in terms of prestige, resourcing and remuneration. This has led to a crisis in morale and discipline and, if anything, they are more corrupt than the military. A traffic policeman earning less than \$60 per month, for example, can issue on the spot fines – in fact, many simply stop cars at random, and most drivers would rather pay a small bribe than go

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through an inspection that could last for one hour. Officers with the paramilitary Tax Police are similarly notorious for using their powers creatively. In 1996, the team under Tax Police Colonel Pavel Glebov, for instance, demanded \$200,000 from a company to avoid a full audit.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, they constitute an especially attractive recruitment target for organised crime, since the threat of a major, disruptive and intrusive audit could be enough to convince many businesses to pay protection money.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) and other internal-security forces also have a complex and often collusive relationship with organised crime.<sup>10</sup> Despite the continued power and prestige of these bodies, salaries and benefits have been eroded and a number of their members have become corrupt. In addition, there are suggestions of institutional linkages. During the Cold War, the KGB made extensive use of criminals as enforcers to control dissidents, informants and even cross-border couriers; its contemporary successors appear just as willing to use them.

The criminalisation of the military, law-enforcement and security structures poses a very real security threat. It leaves Russia with an unstable and unreliable army, as witnessed by its brutality and ineffectiveness in Chechnya in the 1990s. It means that these structures, which are supposed to be the final defenders of the state, become allies and suppliers of organised crime and even generate their own groupings. It permits the transfer of weapons and skills to private and criminal entities. All of this ensures that not only is this a problem without any quick solutions, but also that it is in the international community's interest to help Moscow tackle the issue.

Organised crime is also a demobilisation dilemma. The armed forces have been cut from around three million soldiers to an official strength of 1.2m personnel – although in prac-

tice the figure is less than one million – largely in a haphazard and under-funded way. For many soldiers, demobilisation resulted in the loss of subsidised housing and food, as well as a lost sense of purpose and identity. There have been efforts to make the demobilisation process less of what one Russian officer has portrayed as a 'recruiting station for the mafiya'. Western states, such as the UK, have provided material assistance for retraining demobilised officers and there are plans to extend these programmes. In general, however, former soldiers, police and security officers have a limited and often unsatisfactory range of employment options. While the dramatic growth in the private security industry indicates the lack of confidence in the law-enforcement agencies, it has at least provided one source of alternative legal employment. For many soldiers, though, having become used to a culture of criminality and corruption while in service, crime becomes a logical and even attractive career prospect.

### **Gangsters in shoulder-boards**

Criminal groupings within the security forces usually have links with corrupt local politicians and other gangs that operate in their vicinity, but are organisationally separate. They tend to be rather more specialised than 'civilian' gangs, exploiting particular assets at their disposal, and often embezzling state resources. In the Kaliningrad enclave and the North Caucasus Military District, for instance, military gangs siphon fuel from aviation and naval stocks for illegal resale to private consumers. Unofficial estimates suggest that embezzlement costs the armed forces between 12 and 17% of the total defence budget, currently around \$7.3bn. Gangs within the militia and the security agencies, by contrast, tend to stick to protection racketeering or to selling seized illegal assets, such as drugs.

The main role of the security and police forces involved in Russia's complex underworld,

however, is to facilitate and supply a range of services and resources to the *mafiya*. Military transport routes, for example, are favoured for smuggling, as border controls and internal checks can often be passed through with impunity. The Border Troops have become infamous in this regard, as has the Tajikistan-based 201st Motor Rifle Division, many of whose officers use supply convoys to bring drugs into Russia on return journeys. On an even grander scale, naval supply convoys to and from the Kaliningrad enclave regularly sail to St Petersburg packed with cars stolen in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, and return with drugs destined for Western Europe.

Early fears that a criminalised military would begin selling weapons of mass destruction to the world's terrorists have, fortunately, proven misplaced. In part this reflects the relatively narrow market for such armaments, and in part it reflects the perceived risks involved in such activities. Yet there has been a massive haemorrhage of conventional weapons from military and police stocks – some 30,000 disappear each year – into the hands of Russian organised crime and on to the illegal arms market. In addition, corrupted and criminalised members of the security forces can pass on the skills needed to use these armaments. One of the allegations that Dmitri Kholodov was investigating when he was killed was that the 16th Spetsnaz Brigade's training grounds were being used to teach criminal gunmen.

### **Provision of protection**

If not actively assisting the *mafiya*, criminal allies within the security apparatus are able to provide protection. Most obviously, this involves turning a blind eye. Russian sources suggest that, on average, a little under one-third of the proceeds of criminal gangs goes towards 'buying a roof', reportedly by paying off local officials and police officers. But security

personnel are also engaged in more active forms of protection. In response to a decade-long funding crisis, members of the police have increasingly offered their services for hire. This involves not just moonlighting while off-duty, but also acting as private security guards through the Extradepartmental Guard Departments, which are now present in most militia commands. These spread throughout Russia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as a formal source of additional police protection for individuals and, especially, private companies. Growing crime and insecurity led to a huge rise in demand for private security services and to a large extent this was an attempt by the cash-strapped police to compete in the market.

To an extent, this is a common phenomenon the world over. What is striking about the Russian experience, though, is the degree to which criminals are using police officers and resources. Following the 1997 assassination of the alleged organised-crime figure, Vasili Naumov, for instance, it emerged that his bodyguards were members of an élite police unit, *Saturn*.<sup>11</sup> The formation of new links between the militia and the *mafiya* is one reason why, in 2001, some regional police commanders have been agitating for an end to the Extradepartmental Guard scheme, despite the significant revenue it generates. The view of many is that the corruption it engenders far outweighs the benefits to local police budgets.

Military personnel rarely have the same opportunities on an individual basis, but there is growing evidence that military bases and secure compounds are offering a degree of 'extraterritorial' sanctuary for *mafiya* operations. Kaliningrad, for instance, has long been a haven for criminals operating both in St Petersburg (with which the enclave is connected by regular military transport) and the neighbouring Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Yet it appears that illicit activities

have become much more widespread. Industry contacts have linked military compounds in Vladikavkaz and Mozdok in the North Caucasus with major operations counterfeiting branded cigarettes, for example, while chemical-weapon bases in the regions of St Petersburg have, since around 1998, been used to manufacture synthetic drugs, many for export to the West.

### **More cure than prevention**

Under former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, there was much talk about combating corruption, but little was done. Instead, the introduction of specific measures was left to individuals. Former Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, for example, initiated the 'Clean Hands' anti-corruption campaign in 1995. Originally intended as a short-term initiative to crack down on egregious offenders, it soon became an open-ended programme, with the creation of a specialised Internal Security Directorate within the Ministry of Internal Affairs to combat corruption. But without support at the top of this highly presidential political system, such measures have lacked coherence and tended to lose momentum as soon as their particular patron has been promoted or more often than not replaced – Yeltsin had little patience for crusaders. Russian President Vladimir Putin's position is even more ambiguous. On the one hand, he has had good working relations with many of the most corrupt figures in post-Soviet Russia.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, he is much more aware of the security implications posed by organised crime and the overlap with the security apparatus.

Combating the problem within the security forces is seen less as a rule-of-law issue and more as a matter of restoring the effectiveness of these tools of state policy. A primary issue is re-establishing discipline and control in the

chain of command. As far back as 1996, the ministry of defence proposed the creation of a 10–12,000-strong force of specialised military police officers, so that the main military 'procuracy' would not have to rely on local members to investigate their own units. The idea foundered as a result of a lack of both funds and political will, but experts working for the Russian Security Council are now revisiting the idea, which may be extended to other militarised forces, such as the Border Troops and the Interior Troops.

But there is a danger that fighting criminality in the security apparatus might provide a basis for reversing democratic safeguards and establish a level of political control that would represent a different kind of corruption. Putin has made no secret of his desire to create a new and larger security service directly subordinate to the president and with powers and responsibilities reminiscent of the KGB. In January 2000, his aides floated the idea of a Federal Service for Investigating and Combating Corruption, reporting directly to the president. The idea was shelved, as it proved constitutionally suspect, politically divisive and problematic on a practical level. Nevertheless, it still resurfaces periodically.

Putin seems prepared to combat criminality primarily when it appears to be a threat to state control.<sup>13</sup> In February 2000, for example, the FSB reacquired its Soviet-era powers to penetrate and to investigate the armed forces. Yet the first annual report from the Military Counter-Intelligence Directorate of the FSB, which was produced in March 2001 but not publicised, admitted that, in the previous 12 months, crime within the military had actually increased by 27%. However, only 15% of the section's resources were earmarked for fighting crime, the rest were directed towards monitoring potential political dissent. In previous years this figure has amounted to around one-quarter

to one-third of the budget, illustrating that, in fact, there has been a reduction in the time and manpower that the FSB devotes to fighting military crime. Instead, Putin has prioritised political control over law enforcement. Furthermore, while the law limits the size of the FSB to 76,700 staff, there are suggestions that Putin would like either to expand it or to create new parallel structures. However, the expansion would concentrate on political security and counter-intelligence elements. Meanwhile the police force remains at 30% below its establishment strength.

## Conclusion

The prospects are gloomy. Russian organised crime has not only benefited immensely from the protection, weapons and skills that it can buy from corrupt members of the security forces, but also it has infected the security apparatus as a whole. For every soldier or police officer who is an active member of an organised-crime grouping, there are many more who have occasional or regular corrupt dealings with them. Consequently, although they represent only a small fraction of the *mafia*, organised criminal groupings within the security sector are disproportionately important in the way that they further undermine public confidence in the state, create alternative chains of command, and have access to specialised and dangerous powers, weapons and skills.

Putin is more energetic than his predecessor and does appear aware of the political challenge. At the same time, though, his room for manoeuvre on some issues is limited – the state budget does not, for example, allow for major increases in salaries to reduce the pressure to accept bribes. His perspective is also limited. Rather than appreciating that the strongest foundation for a genuinely law-based state is for the leadership itself to observe the laws, Putin appears to believe that he can purge

those aspects of criminality and corruption that pose a threat to his rule, while turning a blind eye to others. This will seriously hinder efforts to cleanse the security apparatus, and will ensure that this remains a major problem for the foreseeable future.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For analysis of the '*mafia*', see Galeotti, M., 'The *mafia* and the new Russia', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, vol. 44, issue 3, September 1998, pp. 413–429; Galeotti, M., 'Inside the Russian *mafia*', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 2000, pp. 8–12; Varese, F., 'Is Sicily the Future of Russia? Private Protection and the Rise of the Russian *Mafia*', *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie*, 35, 1994, pp. 224–258; Williams, P., (ed.), *Russian Organized Crime*, (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> *The Moscow Times*, 26 March 2001; *RIA–Novosti*, 31 May 2001.

<sup>3</sup> *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 20 June 1994.

<sup>4</sup> *Radio Russia*, 18 October 1994, cited in *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts: former USSR*, 20 October 1994; Elliott, D., 'A case of deadly curiosity', *Newsweek*, 31 October 1994.

<sup>5</sup> *Novaya gazeta*, 30 January 2001.

<sup>6</sup> This is essentially composed of: the regular armed forces and the 'parallel armies' of the Interior Troops, Border Troops and Kremlin Guard; the militia (police) and other law-enforcement bodies, such as the Tax Police; and the intelligence and internal-security agencies, such as the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).

<sup>7</sup> See Galeotti, M., 'The challenge of "soft security": crime, corruption and chaos', in Averre, D. and Cottey, A., (eds.), *Securing Europe's East: new security challenges in postcommunist Europe*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2001); Staar, R., 'Russia's military: corruption in the higher ranks', *Perspective*, vol. 9, issue 2, 1998, [www.bu.edu/iscip/vol9/Staar.html](http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol9/Staar.html); Turbiville, G., 'Organized crime and the Russian armed forces', *Transnational Organized Crime*, vol. 1, issue 4, 1995, pp. 55–73; Waters, T., 'Crime in the Russian military', *CSRC Paper c90*, (Camberley: Conflict Studies Research Centre, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> The regular armed forces are plagued by a seniority-based tradition of bullying – known as *dedovshchina* ('grand-fatherism'), whereby new recruits are abused and beaten by their seniors. While officially denounced, many officers turn a blind eye to it, not least because they can then use the seniors to keep the juniors in line, an important consideration in an army with a dearth of professional non-commissioned officers.

<sup>9</sup> NTV news, 5 April 1996, reported in the *OMRI Daily Digest*, 9 April 1996.

<sup>10</sup> See Waller, J. M. and Yasmann, V., 'Russia's great criminal revolution', *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, vol. 11, issue 4, 1995, [www.afpc.org/issues/crimrev1.htm](http://www.afpc.org/issues/crimrev1.htm).

<sup>11</sup> *Kommersant-daily*, 13 March 1997.

<sup>12</sup> In his time, for example, he has been close to former St Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak and Kremlin property chief Pavel Borodin (both currently facing corruption investigations) and Yeltsin himself (around whom numerous allegations of corruption and favouritism still gather, even though one of Putin's first acts as president was to provide Yeltsin with full immunity from prosecution).

<sup>13</sup> See Galeotti, M., 'Putin versus the *Mafia*', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, June 2001, pp. 8–9.

# The Zimbabwe crisis: terrible but predictable

Many observers were caught off-guard by the current crisis in Zimbabwe. With the end of white minority rule in 1980, international interest in the country had waned until 'farm invasions' began in 2000. The international community had also been lulled into a false sense of security by President Robert Mugabe's apparent 'reconciliation' policy towards the white community in the 1980s, his embrace of structural-adjustment policies and the seemingly solid rule of his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF).

Warning signs were thus misread or ignored: corruption was thriving and mismanagement of public finances was undermining the economy; major strikes in 1995–96 were followed by 'stay-aways' in 1997 and 1998. Furthermore, hefty payments made to unruly 'war veterans' sparked the collapse of Zimbabwe's currency in 1997, and, in September 1999, the Bretton Woods institutions, worried by rapidly increasing public debt and inflation, suspended financial support when it transpired that the government had cheated on figures.

The legitimacy of Mugabe's post-independence government was eroded by successive policy failures, as demonstrated by the low turnout in the 1996 presidential election. State violence was also increasing, illustrated by the December 1997 assassination attempt on the then Trade Union leader, Morgan Tsvangirai – now head of the opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – by the bloody repression of the January 1998 food riots, and by the arbitrary detention and torture of two local journalists in January 1999.

## Land reform and elections

The unfolding crisis, however, has not only been underestimated but also misunderstood. Many analysts were beguiled by Mugabe's theatrics on land reform when the real issue is his political survival, evidenced by his manipulation of the constitutional-reform process. The Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) was packed with his supporters in order to undermine the civil-society-led National Constitutional Assembly Task Force. Rejection of the CRC draft in the February 2000 referendum provided the excuse for attacks on white farmers and their black workers. Far from being spontaneous, violence was deliberate and planned, with agents from the country's Central Intelligence Organisation, the police and the army providing financial and logistical support to ZANU–PF militia.

The financial crisis of the neo-patrimonial state meant that, by the late 1990s, Mugabe's elaborate patronage system was in disarray. Against the background of dwindling popular support, ZANU–PF used targeted violence to win the June 2000 parliamentary polls. Seizure of white-owned commercial farms provided Mugabe with a way of gaining the support of some 'war veterans', as land was the only valuable asset left. The 'fast-track' land-reform programme is, therefore, primarily a means to influence the outcome of elections – the presidential contest is in 2002 – through violence and harassment of opposition supporters. This crude survival tactic is coated in nationalist anti-imperialist propaganda, holding the UK responsible for all wrongdoings.

## Long-term impact

The long-term impact of such political expediency should not be underrated. The most obvious effect is on the agrarian base of the economy – food shortages are looming – and the banking sector is directly threatened by the

huge debts of commercial farmers. Public finances are already over-stretched by Zimbabwe's involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). And political uncertainty and violence have destroyed tourism and undermined industry and service sectors. Even if support from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was forthcoming, it would be difficult to restore Zimbabwe's economy to its former state.

## ZANU–PF's political culture has always been inherently violent . . .

The damage to state institutions has been even more significant. The independence of the judiciary – exceptional in post-colonial Africa – which had effectively counterbalanced the authoritarian and arbitrary tendencies of the regime since 1980, is in jeopardy. Judges who find against the government have been intimidated into resigning and the Supreme Court has been packed with more pliant lawyers. Moreover, crimes perpetrated by members of ZANU–PF militia or state agencies are overlooked, especially those linked to 'farm invasions' or against MDC supporters. The police, the army and, more recently, the civil service, have all been openly politicised. ZANU–PF supporters are being drafted into the police force, replacing others purged through transfers or early retirement, and some army units take part in random beatings in the townships alongside riot police and party militia.

Yet by normalising the use of violence, Mugabe might find it difficult to control his supporters later. Some farm invaders, who loot, beat and rape, boast that they are merely 'taking the law into their own hands'. A number already behave like aspirant warlords.

## Continuity

While the talk is all of crisis, much of this is not new. The ZANU–PF regime has never been truly democratic, and elections have never been 'free and fair'. Mugabe has sidelined all dissenting voices inside and outside of the ruling party. Furthermore, in his drive for absolute power in the 1980s, he retained the most repressive laws of former President Ian Smith's white minority regime. A wartime state of emergency was in force until 1990 and the Law and Order Maintenance Act has been used against the free press and the opposition as viciously as it was used against black nationalists in the 1970s.

ZANU–PF's political culture has always been inherently violent and intolerant of any opposition. Threats to wage a 'new war' if defeated at the ballot box have been uttered repeatedly since 1980. Indeed, in 1982–85, the regime targeted the support base of the opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in Matabeleland and the Midlands, causing thousands of civilian casualties. Furthermore, racist anti-white slogans were already common in 1996, associated with the theme of the 'indigenisation' of the economy – a ploy of the ruling élite to enrich themselves further after having plundered state finances.

Tsvangirai would win a fair presidential election, but Mugabe will never concede defeat and risk being held accountable for abuses of power and corruption. He would rather suspend the election results, citing threats to public order, and use the full power of the state apparatus to crush any subsequent popular protest.

That the crisis has not yet deteriorated further into civil war can be partly ascribed to the MDC's maturity. It has kept to its line of non-violent action, thus depriving the ruling party of an excuse for a bloodbath. This restraint might be explained by three factors. First, many party figures have a civil-society background



and are bolstered by trade-union discipline. Second, the memory of what happened to ZAPU supporters. And third, the knowledge that, internationally, violent rulers are generally better tolerated than violent insurgents.

### **The international response**

Since April 2000, the UK has focused on trying to disentangle itself from the 'land crisis'. The alleged breakthrough in Abuja, Nigeria, in early September essentially reiterated conditions, agreed in 1998, for British financial backing for land reform. Mugabe's effective propaganda, moreover, has prevented the former colonial power from actively promoting an anti-Mugabe coalition in the Commonwealth and among African states.

The US was, until last year, primarily concerned with Mugabe's potential stabilising role in the DRC. The administration of former US President Bill Clinton cultivated Mugabe for the sake of trade and regional equilibrium. The change of mood in Washington materialised with new Secretary of State Colin Powell's clear condemnation of Zimbabwe's lawlessness and violence when he visited South Africa in late May 2000. The bipartisan Zimbabwe Democracy Bill (providing for qualified and selective sanctions) is proceeding through the US Congress. But it is unlikely to mollify Mugabe's stance before the presidential election.

Since Zimbabwe's constitutional referendum in 2000, the European Union (EU) has moved from weak condemnation of the farm invasions to a tougher position, a shift prompted by the violence during the 2000 parliamentary polls, which the EU monitored. On 25 June 2001, it issued a 60-day ultimatum for the Zimbabwean government to restore the rule of law and provide for democratic elections and for orderly legal land reform, or face sanctions under the revised Lomé (now Cotonou) Convention. A decision is expected in October. Such sanctions,

though, would take time to impact on the political situation and would primarily affect the poor.

Initially, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) leaders ostensibly supported Mugabe, while behind closed doors South African President Thabo Mbeki was to bring him back in to the fold through 'quiet diplomacy'. When this approach failed, SADC created a regional task force to address the Zimbabwe crisis at the Blantyre Summit in August 2001. Following a visit to Harare in September, its chairman, Malawi President Bakili Muluzi, publicly criticised the Zimbabwean government for the violence and lawlessness, an indication of Mugabe's increased isolation.

The question remains, however, what effective measures SADC is prepared to implement. South Africa could exert effective economic pressure by closing its borders – no country exports more to Zimbabwe than South Africa, especially where energy is concerned, and it is also Zimbabwe's main export route and customer. But there are risks involved. South Africa is already losing direct investment because of the crisis, which is having a dramatic impact on the rand. Pretoria also fears a wave of refugees, a major recession at the regional level and the prospect of being dragged into a military intervention.

The Commonwealth, the EU, SADC, and the US must co-ordinate their efforts and jointly impose 'smart' sanctions. They need to exert maximum pressure on Mugabe to ensure transparent elections and should not recognise the outcome if the process is flawed. Contingency plans should be made for a worst-case scenario, and Mugabe should be warned of what awaits him if he holds on to power through illegitimate means.

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# The media in areas of conflict

It is well known that the media can fuel ethnic hatred and incite violence. Thus development agencies often attempt to engage with the local media to mitigate conflict at an early stage. Such efforts have raised high expectations, but there is generally insufficient regard for the limitations or clarity about what can be achieved.

Conflicts usually erupt in impoverished regions, with deep divisions surrounding the distribution of resources and sectarian interests. In such polarised environments there can be strong incentives to resort to violence, and few disincentives not to. All too frequently, donors respond to these challenges by sponsoring bland and unfocused peace campaigns. A poster displaying anti-violence slogans or a 30-second television spot are, at best, superficial, and, at worst, can exacerbate tensions by heightening fears or provoking popular derision.

Such 'persuasive' campaigns are designed to stigmatise violent behaviour or to exhort particular beliefs. Without parallel grassroots or institutional support, however, they fail to alter social or political behaviour. Messages carry more weight if they are delivered by a recognised and credible local source. A campaign that is openly backed by a foreign organisation is vulnerable to charges of interference and may provoke a nationalist backlash. Donor objectives are also invariably distorted by local bias and allegiance, making evaluation and monitoring of developments all the more important in crisis situations. And yet, this is precisely when development agencies tend to scale back their operations, casting the efficacy of some projects in doubt.

Donors must, therefore, orient their media campaigns to address local conditions and

grievances. It is vital to analyse the underlying motivations of combatants and, as far as possible, to survey public attitudes and perceptions. Demographic profiles should be appraised and different issue-based messages should be crafted for specific target audiences. A clear strategic vision needs to be developed regarding which message to communicate and to whom, and which medium to use and to what end.

The hard-line instigators of most conflicts are generally impervious to calls for tolerance. Persuasive campaigns find a far more receptive audience in the moderate centre – the majority of ordinary citizens who may be undecided about an issue. But broad appeals for peace, although laudable, are usually misdirected, if only because 'peace' is an objective ordinary citizens are not in a position to advance. It is more effective to promote specific, concrete activities that audience members can engage in to support reconciliation at the individual and community levels. Media campaigns can then seek to amplify the impact of these activities in a bid to pressurise warring parties. By highlighting existing peace initiatives, it is possible to convey the impression of growing popular support for peace.

In Macedonia, for example, fighting between the ethnic-Macedonian military and police and Albanian insurgents of the National Liberation Army has polarised the ethnic groups. The priority for development agencies is to defuse tensions and build public confidence by underscoring shared interests. This is best achieved by acknowledging existing biases and negative attitudes, and, rather than proselytising against them, working with local media partners to realign associations and provide positive frameworks for thinking about issues. For instance, by shifting the lines of identification from ethnicity to that of interest groups, such as small farmers, businessmen and parents, it is possible to encourage solidarity across different axes.

This approach can be implemented by encouraging programming that publicises positive instances of multi-ethnic co-operation and tolerance. For example, in May 2001, in Kumanovo, Macedonian paramilitaries daubed Albanian-owned shops with paint, which they planned to burn. The progressive mayor, Slobodan Kovacevski, informed local Macedonian shop-owners, who voluntarily marked their own premises, so foiling the destruction of the Albanian stores. Such stories have an impact because they present an authentic scenario that audiences can relate to. In addition, raising the public profile of moderates contributes to the marginalisation of politically extreme elements in a country.

### **Capacity and co-operation**

Engagement with the media is contingent on the co-operation and capability of local partners. Media organisations are the products of their environments, reflecting local power constellations and social mores. They have their own agendas and are often closely linked with governing structures and/or parties to a conflict. Media bodies, moreover, may face closure, repressive laws, or even a backlash from audiences if they veer too far from the prevailing political discourse. This was illustrated following the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, when even the most progressive Kosovar media outlets muted their coverage of concerted reprisal attacks against Serbian civilians. While some organisations may, therefore, be unsuitable partners because of their hard-line editorial policies and affiliations, others may lack the necessary professional standards or the ability to reach large audiences. Donors have traditionally addressed the latter by providing training and equipment, but this is a long-term approach that does little to respond to the immediate demands of crisis situations.

Consequently, donors have to compromise on the tone and scope of their media strategies. In the Solomon Islands, for example, following fighting between Guadalcanal and Malaitan groups, an initiative to disseminate the terms of the October 2000 Townsville Peace Agreement was severely hampered by the under-developed media infrastructure. In addition, the only media platform with national coverage, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, was regarded as deeply partisan. Efforts to reach a national audience had to be balanced against the realisation that information might be dismissed on the grounds of lacking credibility, or that it might be seen as imposing, rather than communicating, the peace terms.

Despite the pitfalls, a properly formulated and executed media campaign can have a significant bearing on public attitudes. The media's power to galvanise public support is illustrated by the small, donor-funded Serbian television station in Trstenik. In 1999, former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic threatened it with closure for its pro-democratic and anti-war editorial policy. When federal police arrived to confiscate its transmitter, thousands of local citizens surrounded the site and formed a human wall. Clearly, even in the most inhospitable environments, opportunities exist for donor agencies to engage with local media and citizens to make a stand in support of peaceful change.

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For more information, see 'Working with the media in conflicts and other emergencies', which was produced by the Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department and the Social Development Department in DFID.

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