

Operations Rachel

1995 - 2001

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BACKGROUND

Operations Rachel is a bilateral co-operation agreement on arms destruction between the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM), effective since 1996. The specific co-operation is taking the form of a number of joint weapons destruction operations code-named 'Operations Rachel'. Through these operations, a significant source of illegal weapons that have been destabilising the Southern Africa sub-region have been destroyed.

Many of the defining characteristics of Rachel were not planned in advance, but resulted from responses to operational difficulties arising from the use of two different national police forces and from looking to rural communities to provide a continual supply of information on arms caches.

AIMS

The aim of Operations Rachel is to destroy arms caches left behind after the civil war in Mozambique. After 20 years of single-party rule by *Frente de Libertacao de Mozambique* (Frelimo), multiparty elections were held in Mozambique in October 1994. This watershed marked the beginning of democracy in Mozambique. It was then that concerted efforts were made to destroy arms caches left in the bush and firearms collected by the UN peace missions. During the same time, as the political violence was subsiding in Mozambique, South Africa was undergoing similar political transitions and preparing for its first democratic elections.

The almost concurrent reduction of political violence in South Africa and Mozambique in the early 1990s, resulted in a scourge of redundant weapons in the two countries. In addition to this, weapons continued to flow in via the illegal smuggling pipelines that had, so recently, fuelled the political violence in both countries. These weapons were finding new markets amongst criminals. Both the South African and the Mozambican governments lacked effective measures for coping with the resulting crime.

MOTIVATION FOR OPERATIONS RACHEL

Neither the motivation for embarking on Operations Rachel nor the model for the operations can be attributed to any one particular factor. However, when an alignment of the chronic security threat⁰-heightened by the availability and mobility of firearm-with the political and operational will which ensued, Operations Rachel were launched.

This political will was signified by the signing of an agreement of co-operation on mutual assistance in the combating of crime between Mozambique and South Africa in March 1995. Thus Operations Rachel were placed within the national security framework of both the South African and Mozambican governments. The agreement provided the framework within which Operations Rachel were conceptualised.

Under Article 6 of the Co-operation Agreement, all parties to the 'Co-operation and Mutual Assistance in the Field of Crime Combating Agreement' "... recognising the incidence of organised crime and the need for close co-operation in addressing the problem..." undertook:

- the exchange of crime information on arms on a regular basis;
- the planning and co-ordination of operations, including covert operations, and;
- the provision of technical assistance and expertise where these are required for the purpose of criminal investigation.

STARK SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MOZAMBIQUE AND SOUTH AFRICA

To fully appreciate the strength of Operations Rachel as a bilateral operation between Mozambique and South Africa, the context in which it was conceptualised needs to be understood. On one hand, the two countries are similar in that they are both intimately involved in a political transition process; on the other, they have different operational capacities existing within their two police forces, which act as the implementing agents of Operations Rachel.

The political transition processes in both Mozambique and South Africa showed striking similarities, such as:

- an increase in small arms proliferation;
- a shift in the use of weapons from war to crime;
- an increase in violent crime;
- an expansion of the illegal arms market within and between the countries;
- a lack of state capacity to provide security for the public; and
- ultimately, the potential for general social instability.

The model for Operations Rachel had to take into account the unmistakable differences between two forces. The South African and Mozambican police force:

- had never worked together in any meaningful way before;
- had historical differences which made them adversaries;
- had uneven operational capabilities; and
- had an unequal endowment of resources.

The Mozambique police had neither the financial resources nor the expertise to destroy arms caches, while the South African police lacked the knowledge of Mozambican terrain and had no legal right to operate inside that territory. The main problems hampering effective communication and the sense of common purpose during Operations Rachel 1 related to the reigning stereotypes: historical distrust, personality-related conflicts, cultural differences, and perceptions that evolved from the prevailing prejudices and different languages spoken by the two police forces.

Yet, by emphasising the common problem of firearms which the two police forces faced, the more minor problems were ultimately overcome. Operations Rachel managed to creatively forge a sound working relationship between the South African and the Mozambican police forces. Although the lesser obstacles still intervened in Rachel 1 and 2, by Rachel 3 they were mere memories of a former time.

At the start of Rachel 2, the complaints raised during Rachel 1 (personality clashes, for example) had been actively addressed. In Rachel 2, to improve relationships between the two teams and the population, as well as among police officers themselves, a one-week training course was undertaken. Similar training courses have since been implemented on a regular basis. The content of the training course aimed to improve team building as well as expertise. It included, among others, handling techniques for explosives and booby-traps, techniques for safely uncovering underground caches, and communications skills.

BUILDING COMMON GROUND BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICAN AND MOZAMBIKAN POLICE FORCES

The governments of South Africa and Mozambique outlined their common ground before the police agencies started to work together. Problems were defined in such a way that neither country would be seen as helping the other, but that each was in the process of serving its own country's security needs. The destruction of arms caches in Mozambique by the SAPS was interpreted as part of its mandate in maintaining law and order within South Africa. SAPS officials working in Mozambican territory were fulfilling their duties, and they had to commit themselves as fully to the task as they would have done if they were policing Johannesburg streets. For the Mozambican police service, this operation is an additional effort in the country's process of demilitarising society.

At a political level, agreements allowed these police forces to undertake joint operations in response to common safety and security problems, while at an operational level the design of Rachel had to take into account the different characteristics of these two police forces. To overcome this, confidence was built by allowing the officers on the ground to determine the path of Operations Rachel. This resulted in Rachel having a flexible and ad hoc implementation strategy.

To foster an equal partnership between the two police forces, in Rachel 1, a joint command comprising one senior police officer from each country was established in Maputo. While the joint command was responsible for jointly co-ordinating the actual work, including taking decisions regarding current operational contingencies, each team representative referred to its respective police headquarters for clearance. By Rachel 2, the operational team was communicating directly at ground level, although clearance was still required at senior level to initiate an operation.

UNORTHODOX POLICING APPROACH

Under a traditional, proactive policing operation, one would expect individuals holding arms caches to be prosecuted. Under the more unorthodox policing approach of Operations Rachel, there was co-operation with individuals with information on arms caches who were remunerated for disclosing these locations. This resulted in Rachel becoming a combination of an undeclared amnesty and a series of buy-back programmes.

The main reasons for the unorthodoxy of this approach were, amongst others:

- *To secure future sources of weapons:* the belief was that most of the community-based cache informers knew of more than one cache. If the informers were prosecuted, the flow of information on other caches would cease.
- *To keep the operations de-politicised:* in the Mozambican post-conflict situation, a proactive police operation ran the risk of being easily politicised, since most of the caches had been kept for political objectives.

- *To in no way jeopardise the reconciliation processes:* for the sake of reconciliation, an undeclared amnesty formed a component of the operation, as the arms caches were kept by one political party.
- *To show sympathy with the poverty in rural areas:* given the poverty prevailing in the rural areas of the country, it was decided to reward people disclosing arms caches through a modest buy-back programme.
- To ensure community support: a proactive policing strategy would only find very reluctant community support, as this involved prosecuting informers, without whose support there was nothing the police could do to locate the caches.

At the beginning, the involvement of local communities was to be encouraged through small rewards to informers. A cash reward was given to those who supplied information. No rigid criteria were used to define the value of the reward: it depended mostly on the value of the cache (both with regards to quantity and quality of weapons). This, in turn, was determined at the discretion of the team through negotiations with informers. Since rewards were used as an incentive for disclosing caches, the value was greatly influenced by indications that the informer might know of other caches. Informers were thus mobilised to disclose further caches that they were aware of, and were encouraged to pass on their experience to other potential informers.

When women and children became increasingly important as informers, other incentives, such as supplies and sweets, were introduced. The operations managed to attract civil society's attention and companies in South Africa expressed willingness to provide the incentives. In the last operations a motor vehicle company (Delta Motor Corporation) supplied the police with 4x4 vehicles. In Rachel 2, there was an increasing collaboration-voluntary and unpaid-on the part of the local population, particularly women and children.

MOFDE OF OPERATION OF THE PROGRAMME

The aspect of Operations Rachel that dealt with the destruction of arms caches was intelligence-driven. Both the Mozambican and South African police forces gathered information about cache locations and plotted them on a global position system (GPS) map. Subsequently, the retrieved weapons and explosives, where safe to do so, were destroyed on site by a team of Mozambican and South African police experts.

In Rachel 1, the operation started with an exchange of information related to arms caches. The Mozambican side had to verify this information by contacting informers and confirming the existence of these caches. The GPS system was introduced during Rachel 2 and improved the flow of the operations, since the police handling the informers did not need to be present during the location of the cache for destruction. By Rachel 3, the information gathering had become a routine, ongoing activity that fed information into the joint GPS maps.

However, in Rachel 4, a new problem emerged-that of communication and co-ordination between the operation teams and other security agencies within Mozambique, particularly the army. The Mozambican defence force destroyed some of the caches that were already plotted on the GPS map. While the fact that the caches were destroyed is undoubtedly good, the lack of communication led to a duplication of efforts and a waste of resources.

RESOURCES FOR OPERATIONS RACHEL

In Rachel 1-5, South Africa paid the bulk of the costs of the operations and provided expertise on weapons and explosives disposal and destruction. In subsequent operations (6 and 7), European Union funding was secured, which contributed to some of the costs. In the last Operations, 7(1) and 7(2), a large part of the EU funding was used.

The SAPS not only supplied the bulk of the financial resources, but also supplied the landmine-resistant vehicles and other specialised equipment, as well as highly trained senior police officers. In return, Mozambique gathered intelligence and-with its knowledge of the local conditions-facilitated contacts with local communities.

Capacity building also takes place in the form of specialised training given to Mozambican police officers involved with Operations Rachel. These training exercises not only enhance the skills and knowledge of the police to be utilised during operations, but also during their normal policing functions and hereby carrying over skills and knowledge to their colleagues.

There was a concern about the costs of Rachel 3, since it was more expensive than the former two operations. The expansion of the operation northwards meant that the further afield it moved, the more expensive it became. Almost all of the costs incurred were directly proportional to distance. The longer the operation takes, the more expensive intelligence gathering and rewarding informers become. Informers have become aware that they can get material and financial benefits from knowing where weapons are. As they sense a demand for their services, it is logical that the price will escalate.

Operations Rachel 7(1) and 7(2) are the operations that have moved the most northwards since the beginning of these destruction operations. 7(1) and 7(2) have also been the most expensive operations, but have also destroyed large quantities of weapons. Operations Rachel will also enter a new phase now as it moves northwards. New intelligence networks need to be set up, costs of operations will be more expensive than before, shorter routes to the areas must be found-through neighbouring countries-and the operations are now entering the stronghold areas of the former rebel movement (Renamo).

The South African Police Service (SAPS) is of the opinion that the firearms destroyed in Rachel 7(1) are not having an effect on the availability of firearms in South Africa anymore, but more on countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania. One would feel that the SAPS has reached their goals and aims set out in the beginning of these operations in that these firearms are no longer fuelling the violent crime trend in South Africa. On the contrary, they have committed themselves to continue with Rachel in partnership with the Mozambican police as long as it takes. The only hurdle in the way is the ever-increasing financial burden, of which the SAPS still carries the bulk of the costs.

RESULTS OF OPERATIONS RACHEL

The increasing costs of Operations Rachel did not prevent further operations from taking place, thanks to the political commitment, the sound working relationship among police officers, and an increasing awareness and willingness by local communities, business, national and international donors, to support the operation. The Operation's structure and procedures have taken root, and its philosophy has been internalised among police officers. In all, it has gained a momentum of its own. The environment of co-operation is further enhanced by the success of all the

Operations Rachel to date, where every operation provides an uncontroversial basis for the next operation.

Rachel 1 and 2 resulted in the two police forces working out their differences. Although the arms seizures were significant, the future of the agreement still remained uncertain. Rachel 3 was clearly a watershed operation. It was launched against a background of several elements: a reiterated political commitment; a sound working relationship between members of the joint team; improved skills and methods of arms collection among police officers; an improved understanding of and support by the community; an ever-sensible civil society; and conversely, increased cost.

At the end of Rachel 3, the enthusiasm among both officers and the leadership became more pronounced. Everything seemed to be going according to plan and it was felt, on both sides, that if this process was to continue, this source of illegal arms would presently be exhausted. In Rachel 4, delay in starting the operation, as well as the rising costs apparent in Rachel 3, placed a slight damper on operations.

Rachel 5 and 6 were distinguished from the former operations by the fact that the individual operations were downscaling. These operations were smaller and even more ad hoc than the former operations. Ad hoc pockets of funding usually determined the start of subsequent operations, as well as the availability of information. As information on the caches came through, both from the South African and the Mozambican police, so operations were launched. This was based on the prerequisite that no operation was undertaken without the approval and involvement of both sides. These smaller ad hoc operations are proving as successful as the former larger ones. The advance of these was expected to move into the northern parts of Mozambique over the next few years. The first operation into the northern parts of Mozambique ended in May 2001 and the last operation ended on the 26 September 2001.

The flooding in Mozambique, as well as the election, were seen as hindering the implementation of Operations Rachel 6, but subsequently Operations Rachel 6(1), 6(2), 6(3), 6(4), 6(5), 7(1) and two ad hoc operations have been completed, building upon the lessons of the former operations. Operations are now implemented in a very orderly and routine fashion. The officials from both South Africa and Mozambique are familiar with the parameters of the operations and highly experienced in the operational and implementation aspects.

WEAPONS DESTROYED

Several operations are conducted per year. Each operation varies in size and expenditure. As shown in Table 8, a single operation was conducted per year for 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999. In 1999, four operations took place and in 2000, there were five planned operations and two ad hoc operations. In 2001 only two operations occurred.

The annual statistics for the various operations clearly indicate that it is not only firearms such as pistols and rifles that are destroyed, but also a considerable amount of explosive devices and parts (see tables 1-7).

Table 1: WeapoGFns destroyed during Operation Rachel 1995 (including Rachel 1)

Weapons	Amount
Firearms	1 120
Pistols	8

Anti- personnel mines	96
Landmines	3
Hand grenades	407
Mortars	379
Launchers	43
Projectiles	202
Boosters	219
Cannons	6
Ammunition	23 182
Magazines	344
Other accessories	1 008

Table 2: Weapons destroyed during Operation Rachel 1996 (including Rachel 2)

Weapons	Amount
Firearms	475
Pistols	13
Anti- personnel mines	577
Landmines	4
Hand grenades	66
Mortars	230
Launchers	292
Projectiles	59
Boosters	51
Cannons	17
Ammunition	136 631
Magazines	577
Other accessories	694

Table 3: Weapons destroyed during Operation Rachel 1997 (including Rachel 3)

Weapons	Amount
Firearms	5584
Pistols	78
Anti- personnel mines	518
Landmines	4
Hand grenades	336
Hand grenade detonators	153
Detonators	602
Mortars	3726
Launchers	79
Projectiles	2340
Boosters	83
Cannons	13

Ammunition	3 000 000
Magazines	3674
Other accessories	301

Table 4: Weapons destroyed during Operation Rachel 1998 (including Rachel 4)

Weapons	Amount
Firearms	4385
Pistols	353
Anti- personnel mines	410
Landmines	0
Hand grenades	5201
Hand grenade detonators	0
Detonators	0
Mortars	21
Launchers	72
Projectiles	5039
Boosters	923
Cannons	1
Ammunition	156 161
Magazines	1317
Other accessories	0

Table 5: Weapons destroyed during Operation Rachel 1999 (including Rachel 5(1), 5(2), 5(3), 5(4))

Weapons	Amount
Firearms	1755
Pistols	208
Anti- personnel mines	28
Landmines	0
Hand grenades	210
Hand grenade detonators	0
Detonators	0
Mortars	6
Launchers	5
Projectiles	99
Boosters	98
Cannons	0
Ammunition	108 973
Magazines	1524
Other accessories	0

Table 6: Weapons destroyed during Operation Rachel 2000 (including Rachel 6(1), 6(2), 6(3), 6(4), 6(5), Ad hoc 1 & 2)

Weapons	Amount
Firearms	2394
Pistols	18
Anti- personnel mines	129
Landmines	1
Hand grenades	496
Hand grenade detonators	0
Detonators	0
Mortars	70
Launchers	55
Projectiles	422
Boosters	39
Cannons	8
Ammunition	100 509
Magazines	1290
Other accessories	0

Table 7: Weapons destroyed during Operation Rachel until 31 May 2001 (including Rachel 7(1))

Weapons	Amount
Firearms	2803
Pistols	65
Anti- personnel mines	48
Landmines	0
Hand grenades	266
Hand grenade detonators	0
Detonators	30
Mortars	1065
Launchers	54
Projectiles	385
Boosters	1 case
Cannons	2
Ammunition	477 000
Magazines	1170
Other accessories	599

Operations Rachel: a Model for Joint Action in Africa

Finally, Operations Rachel set an important precedent for the Southern African region, as well as the rest of Africa, for the following reasons:

- In combination, the total arms captured and destroyed by Operations Rachel exceed any other amounts captured and destroyed in gun buyback or other collection operations anywhere else in the world.
- The total cost of Rachel is below that of other similar or related efforts worldwide.
- Operations Rachel are the only small arms recovery and destruction programme that was initiated, created and designed entirely by indigenous decision-makers and implemented entirely with African resources, both financial and human (for the first five operations at least).
- It is unique in that it was implemented without first developing a confidence building approach at operational level between the partners. This means that police and armed forces of two nations regarded as enemies for over a decade, shifted to a collaboration mode within a period of less than twelve months.
- The programme was the result of a political decision between two governments who instructed their agencies to collaborate in identifying and destroying caches in a co-operative manner. When this decision was implemented, the organisation for regional police co-operation had not yet been institutionalised, nor was there any other formal umbrella for co-operation in existence.
- Rachel was unique because, despite the natural animosity between the agencies, and between one of the agencies and the people of the affected territory, all the problems of implementation were analysed and resolved as the operations evolved. The rapid resolution of personal and historical problems generated trust between the lower structures of the implementing agencies and created a bond between the beneficiaries and the agencies.
- When implementation problems arose, both governments refused to politicise differences, preferring quiet diplomacy and effective corrective action to the benefit of all concerned.
- As the operations progressed, the bond that had developed between the people and the implementing agencies started to drive the political process. The mandate from above that had forced the initiation of the project became a driving force from below that ensured the continuation of the project, despite the imminent cutting of funds.
- Operations Rachel are not resource-driven but information-driven.

For all of the above reasons, Rachel is unique and could become a model for joint action elsewhere in Africa. Most importantly it should be studied as a model for confidence building, not only between erstwhile enemies but also between police, the military and civilian populations in other regions.

Notes

1. This report is based, in part, on M Chachia, The Evolution of Operations Rachel, 1996-1999, in Governing Arms: the Southern African Experience, edited by V Gamba, Pretoria, ISS, 2000, which covered the development of Operations Rachel 1, 2, 3 and 4. This report focuses on these operations as well as providing an update on Operations 5, 6 and 7.
2. All statistics utilised in this report were obtained from Director MJNaude, Head: Serious and Violent Crimes Detective Services, SAPS, Head Office and Project Manager: Operations Rachel and assisted by S/Supt R. Roeland.
3. The actual expenditure on each operation was estimated at considerable less than the budget allocated.
4. Table 9-11 provides certain of the detailed categories of small arms, weapons and explosive