

Illicit trafficking of vehicles across Beit Bridge border post

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ISS Paper 109 • June 2005
Price: R10.00



Introduction

Over the past decade, trafficking in stolen or illicitly acquired vehicles across South African borders has become a concern for police officials, not only in South Africa, but also within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as a whole. This paper focuses on the illicit movement of vehicles through the South African land border into Zimbabwe through Beit Bridge border post. Before moving to Beit Bridge, we begin with a brief overview of vehicle trafficking across South Africa's borders.

Illicit cross-border trafficking in motor vehicles refers to vehicles that are stolen, hijacked or fraudulently moved from one country to another for use or sale, either in the country that the vehicle crosses into, or for transportation to a third country where it is to be used or sold. Trafficking in luxury cars appears to be the most common form of cross-border vehicle smuggling from South Africa. There are also known cases of trucks that are stolen or hijacked and moved from one country to another.¹

The networks involved in this form of crime comprise nationals from two or more countries. These networks, through their contacts in the different countries, are not only able to source stolen or hijacked vehicles, facilitate border crossings and gain access to buyer markets, but can also ensure that the vehicle can be reregistered in the country where it is to be sold or used. The vast majority of stolen or hijacked vehicles have end users based within the SADC region, but there are reports of such vehicles being smuggled into East Africa and some even being shipped to markets as far away as Europe.²

South Africa is the major source of vehicles that are smuggled within the SADC region; according to Interpol statistics, the country accounts for between 96% and 98% of all vehicles acquired illicitly within the region. These statistics are supported by the 1997 joint

operation codenamed V4, which involved security agencies from Botswana, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. During a 12-day period, the V4 operations recovered some 1,576 stolen vehicles of which a total of 1,464 were stolen in South Africa.³ The South African Police Services (SAPS) estimate that approximately 50% of all stolen or hijacked vehicles in South Africa are smuggled out of the country.⁴ Interpol first identified the smuggling of vehicles within the

SADC region during the latter part of the 1980s when these vehicles were used as a form of currency and exchanged for cash, diamonds, and gold.⁵

There is some evidence of vehicle smuggling across South Africa's borders prior to the 1990s but, by all accounts, it appears that volumes have increased enormously in the past 15 years. Prior to the 1990s, South African military and police control of the borders, and the lack of freedom of movement of people between South Africa and its neighbours, made trade in illicit vehicles difficult without the necessary co-operation of the security forces. After 1994, a number

of factors, including the opening up of borders and an increase in trade and the movement of people, considerably reduced the risks associated with the trade in illicit vehicles.

The growth and emergence of highly organised hijacking and car theft networks within South Africa also influenced the increase of cross-border smuggling of vehicles in the 1990s. These networks ensured that a large supply of illicitly acquired vehicles was available to service not only the domestic market, but also the regional, and to a lesser extent, the overseas markets.

The growth in drug trafficking within South Africa and the region has also fuelled the smuggling of vehicles. There are reports not only of vehicles being used as a currency to purchase drugs, but also of networks of Nigerian and Pakistani origin being linked to both regional drug and illicit vehicle trafficking.⁶

The growth and emergence of highly organised hijacking and car theft networks within South Africa also influenced the increase of cross-border smuggling of vehicles in the 1990s

A variety of methods are used to smuggle vehicles across South African borders. In some instances, 4x4 luxury vehicles are driven across the long borders without going through an official border post. On some borders between South Africa and its neighbours, the border line is only defined by a long stretch of cattle fencing that can easily be cut or broken down to allow vehicles to cross.

In other cases, the vehicles are smuggled through the border post itself using a variety of methods. One method involves the fraudulent removal of vehicles from South Africa with the permission of the owner of the vehicle. Once the vehicle has crossed the border it is reported stolen or hijacked in South Africa. This form of crime often involves bank and insurance fraud where the owner will claim insurance for the 'theft'.⁷

Another method of smuggling vehicles across the borders involves the use of duplicate papers. In such cases, a vehicle will be stolen or hijacked and then taken out of the country using duplicate papers that do not belong to the said vehicle. The duplicate papers used actually belong to a vehicle of the same model and make as the one being smuggled out of the country, and often belong to another vehicle that has either been scrapped or disassembled. This form of crime often takes a fairly experienced eye to detect. This is especially the case when the engine and chassis numbers have been tampered with and the original numbers are difficult to detect.

Stolen or hijacked vehicles can be reregistered using contacts in the Licensing Department with relative ease, and these false registration papers can be used to smuggle the vehicles across the borders. There are also known cases where people from a neighbouring country may order a stolen vehicle in advance. In such cases, the vehicle may be pre-registered in a neighbouring country before or immediately after it is hijacked or stolen. The stolen vehicle then crosses the border using the new registration papers of the country from which it was ordered.

Where vehicles are being smuggled through border posts, as opposed to across border lines, it is common practice to use export permits or temporary import permits. In these circumstances, the networks rely on weaknesses identified in systems in place at border posts, lack of compliance with procedures at border posts, or compliant officials stationed at these posts.

Smuggling trucks across the borders is far less common than motor vehicles. The vast majority of trucks are stolen or hijacked for their cargo. However, during 1995 when the hijacking of trucks first rose to prominence, there were unconfirmed reports by some transport companies that the trucks were being

smuggled out of the country. In late 2004 similar reports emerged, and in a recent interview conducted at Beit Bridge with a transport company, it was alleged that trucks were being stolen and then transported to Zambia and the DRC where there are markets for stolen trucks.⁸

A person working for a prominent trucking company told us that in the past, when the trucks were hijacked, the empty container and the horse and trailer were usually recovered. However, now it is increasingly reported that the horse part, particularly those that are Mercedes or Volvos, is never found. The same person referred to a recent incident during which one of their trucks had been stolen. A few months later, during a police raid on an illegal trucking operation in Johannesburg, the horse and trailer had been discovered. The truck had been spray-painted and the double-axle had been converted to a single-axle.

The employee of the trucking company stated that the only explanation for this conversion could be that the truck was either destined for a neighbouring country or was being illegally used to transport goods across the borders into the neighbouring countries. The rationale behind his thinking is that in many SADC countries, double axle trucks are not allowed on the roads.⁹

There have also been unconfirmed reports that stolen cars have been smuggled out of South Africa into Zimbabwe in container trucks. The cars are hidden at the back of a container behind licit commodities packed at the front of the container.¹⁰ Police at Beit Bridge border post stated that they had never come across such a case, but that it was possible that this was taking place although it was not likely to be widespread.

The majority of stolen vehicles smuggled from South Africa to Zimbabwe make use of the Beit Bridge border post or are diverted through Botswana or Mozambique

Illicit movement of vehicles into Zimbabwe

The Beit Bridge border post and the 200 km of Nabob fence offer the only direct access to Zimbabwe from South Africa. Unlike some of the other borders, which consist of no more than a cattle fence, the Zimbabwe border with South Africa is separated not only by the high-security Nabob fence but also by the Limpopo River that runs alongside it.

The Limpopo River and the existence of the Nabob fence make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for vehicles to cross illegally into Zimbabwe through the border. According to the Beit Bridge border police and the SANDF, there have only been a few isolated cases of 4x4 vehicles crossing into Zimbabwe using the border. These isolated cases occurred during extremely dry periods when the Limpopo River was very low.¹¹ The majority of stolen vehicles smuggled from South Africa

to Zimbabwe make use of either the Beit Bridge border post or are diverted through Botswana or Mozambique.

Approximately 1,000 light vehicles and between 600 and a 1,000 trucks travel through the Beit Bridge border post each day. This volume increases during certain peak periods such as month-ends and the Christmas holiday period.

Many of the networks involved in the smuggling of vehicles across the border post are highly sophisticated. The general *modus operandi* involves a person who drives the vehicle up to the border area. Once in the area, a new driver will take the vehicle through the border. This change over of drivers often occurs because the new drivers not only have better knowledge of the functioning of the border, but also have contacts on the Zimbabwean side of the border.

A small group of people based in the Musina area are known to drive stolen vehicles across the border into Zimbabwe. These drivers are often termed jockeys, although according to interviews with community members in Musina they are also known locally as Makintsa, which has loosely come to mean 'one involved in stolen vehicles'. A jockey could work for one or more crime networks and has knowledge and experience of the functioning of the border post.

In the past couple of years, a group known as the 'Maguma Guma' have risen to prominence at the border post. 'Maguma Guma' in Shona means 'to get something the easy way'¹². These Maguma Guma are of Zimbabwean origin and are involved in a variety of criminal activities ranging from petty theft to facilitating the illegal crossing of people and goods through the border post. The Maguma Guma is comprised mainly of young men who reside predominantly on the Zimbabwean side of the border but move easily between the two countries. Some of the Maguma Guma operations are highly organised with people based in Bulawayo and Harare who tout for them. Some Musina community crime forums claim that members of the Maguma Guma now hire themselves out as jockeys to drive stolen or hijacked vehicles through the border post into Zimbabwe.

Vehicles being smuggled across the Beit Bridge border will often stop at particular locations in the border area, either to finalise details or change drivers before crossing into Zimbabwe. Some of the stolen vehicles will stop at these locations until the border officials that are known to the network are on duty at the border post. There are at least four known locations that have been identified by police and community members, and which are used by car smuggling networks as 'safe locations' where the stolen vehicles can stop. These locations include local motels and petrol stations. Two of these locations have

been raided by the police on at least one occasion, but ongoing policing of these locations relies on the police receiving accurate information on exactly when the stolen vehicles will be at the locations.¹³

Policing of the Beit Bridge border

In order to better understand the policing of vehicles that move through Beit Bridge it is important to first understand how the border post itself functions and the role and functions of different authorities stationed at the border post. This section looks generally at policing and controls in place at Beit Bridge. The following section will look more specifically at the policing of vehicle smuggling at Beit Bridge.

The Beit Bridge border post, like most border posts in South Africa, has undergone a number of significant changes during the past decade. Prior to the end of apartheid, the major priority at the border was preventing the border and border crossing from being used by insurgents opposed to the apartheid government. The police and military dominated border control. Since the demise of apartheid, priorities have changed. There is now greater emphasis on the facilitation of the flow of trade and people. Civilian agencies, particularly Customs and Immigration, have begun to play a far more prominent border control function than they did under apartheid.

The Beit Bridge border post is administered and policed by personnel from a number of different departments. The three primary departments responsible for policing the border are the SAPS, Customs & Excise and Home Affairs. Both the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture also have a presence at the border post with mandates specific to health issues and the control of Foot and Mouth disease.

The National Intelligence Agency (NIA) has a single official based at the border post.

The SANDF is responsible for patrolling and securing the border. In terms of current planning, the SANDF will withdraw from this function by 2009 and the security of the border will then become the responsibility of the SAPS.

The Home Affairs Department's role at the border post is to deal with the movement of people across the border.

Customs and Excise have four divisions responsible for administering the Beit Bridge border post:

- The Passenger division;
- The Cargo Division, which handles all imports and exports;
- The Operational and Administrative support division; and

The Beit Bridge border is administered and policed by personnel from a number of different departments

- The Compliance Division, which includes anti-smuggling and business intelligence functions.

Until recently, the SAPS had three divisions based at the border post:

- The Border Police, who were responsible for the overall policing of the border post;
- The Bomb Disposal Unit; and
- The Vehicles Identification Unit. This unit was comprised of two sections, the Vehicle Identification Investigation section and the Vehicle Identification Safe Guard section. The latter was responsible for vehicles that are impounded and related matters. The Investigation section was responsible for recovering and investigating stolen vehicles.

A new pilot project is currently being introduced at three border posts, one of which is Beit Bridge. The pilot projects were agreed to by the South African Cabinet in 2004 and are in the process of being implemented. Beit Bridge has now been reclassified a high priority point of entry and, under this new classification, the Protection and Security Services Division will take over from the border police with an expanded personnel base. The new policing structure will involve a single command structure whereby all the previous divisions will be absorbed into the Protection and Security Services Division. This Division will then report to the Component Head: Port of Entry Policing and Security.

While the pilot project is still in the process of being implemented, a new Protection and Security Services Division Head has been appointed for the Beit Bridge border post and it appears that some of the border police personnel are in the process of being integrated into this new Division. The Division will also be beefed up with more than 230 additional members who are currently in the process of completing their training. These additional personnel will increase the existing capacity of the border police from ten members per shift to approximately 60 police per shift.

Beit Bridge has a Border Control Improvement Project in place, which Customs and Excise is responsible for overseeing. The first phase of the project has already been implemented and involved the refurbishment of some buildings and the construction of a number of new buildings.

There is no single department with overall authority for the Beit Bridge border post, and the different departments often have diverse priorities. Monthly meetings occur at the border and involve the different government departments. Chairing of these meetings

rotates between the different government departments. Line managers of the different departments meet weekly, although attendance at these meetings often fluctuates and not all departments are present each week.

The departments also participate in joint operations that, in many instances, involve not only the departments and the divisions stationed at the border post, but also draw in the SANDF and police structures outside of the border post. These operations focus on all forms of criminal activities and, more often than not, involve the establishment of 24-hour roadblocks and check points around the border area.

Customs and Excise have also initiated three-monthly planning exercises between the different departments during which each department presents its current high-risk priorities. However, these different priorities often do not match or overlap.

Despite the existence of these various forums, co-operation remains mainly dependent on individuals from the different departments and their will to work together with their colleagues in other departments.

These individuals are motivated by their respective departments' own priorities, which do not always correspond with those of their colleagues' departments. There is, in other words, no overall border control function, only different agencies with different, sometimes competing, mandates. Indeed, a recent security assessment conducted by the NIA apparently argued for a single authority structure at the border.

Not all the departments stationed at the border have investigative capacity. Customs has the capacity to investigate the smuggling of goods. The police, who should be the primary investigation

agency, lack the capacity to conduct general investigations into smuggling and only have a limited investigation capacity based at the border itself.

The Customs Anti Smuggling Unit was established under the Compliance Division in December 2002, and has the capacity to investigate the smuggling of goods at the border post. The Anti Smuggling Unit has a staffing capacity of 36 people but there are currently five vacancies at the Unit.

For their part, the police at the border only have the capacity to investigate vehicles entering or leaving the border post. SAPS members stationed at the border comprise only Border police officials and a special vehicle detection section. There are no SAPS investigators stationed at the border to address general smuggling and, as a result, crimes not related to the trade in illicit vehicles are investigated by the CID based at the local police station in Musina. In

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such cases, the police at the border will open a docket, which is then forwarded to the Musina police station. If the case then appears to involve organised crime activities, the case will be forwarded to the SAPS Organised Crime Unit.

The Beit Bridge border handles extremely large volumes of traffic and is considered the busiest land border in Southern Africa. Congestion at the border post caused a major headache for the various departments stationed at the border. In the past, the border experienced serious problems when trucks entered the control area, which resulted in severe blockages at the border post. Vetting of paper work required before the trucks are allowed to pass across the border can take some time to process, and trucks parked in the control area while this paper work was being processed clogged up the control area.

This congestion not only made access to the control area difficult but also made policing of the control area extremely difficult. Of late, Customs and Excise has introduced new systems to address this congestion. Trucks are only allowed to enter the control area once all the paper work is completed. This has alleviated the congestion significantly by reducing the amount of time the truck spends in the control area. Beit Bridge's anti-congestion system is now being looked at by other commercial land borders as a possible best practice example of improving flows through the border.

To prevent smuggling, vehicles must be searched. Yet searching vehicles has to be balanced against the need not to disrupt trade. Presently, only approximately 3% of cargo that passes through the border is physically searched. The searching of cargo is dependent on risk profiles developed by the anti-smuggling unit. There is no scanner in place at the border, though if one were to be installed, it would allow border control officials to profile more vehicles. The scanner itself would not conclusively establish whether smuggling was taking place or not, but it would alert the customs to irregularities in the cargo, which could lead to further physical searches.

Recently, Customs officials on the Zimbabwean side of the Beit Bridge border post installed a scanner. However, this scanner is only utilised for goods exiting Zimbabwe and is located approximately five kilometres from the border post. According to one of the police officials interviewed, goods can be loaded and off-loaded between the point of scanning and the border. Physical security at the border post is a source of frustration for many of the officials stationed at Beit Bridge. The border, over the past ten years, has expanded dramatically and new buildings and structures have been added to the existing

infrastructure. The different departments are, in theory, housed in one building but the officials cannot move from one department to the other without leaving the building. The design of the building also makes visibility by the officials extremely difficult. Both Customs and the police complained that they have no clear line of sight from one side of the border to the other. This makes it difficult to observe what is coming toward the border and what (or who) is going across it.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that there is no division between incoming and outgoing traffic within the border area itself. Commercial and private traffic join the same queue. Of even more concern is the fact that exporters and importers can also mingle. Access to the controlled area of the border is not sufficiently controlled. People can move across the border from Zimbabwe without being detected and then enter the controlled area. SAPS officials say that they have had vehicles being broken into while at the border post and that, during the busy period, criminals even join the queues and pick the pockets of travellers. Control of the border is made even more difficult due to the fact that some of the staff members live within the border area itself.

Currently, there are 20 houses within the control area that accommodate some of the staff working at the border. Both the police and Customs officials cited this as a problem when controlling access to the border. A police official stated: 'These staff have visitors and how do we stop this? A person may say that they are coming to visit a border official but are really there for other reasons and we will never know.'

Being a 24-hour border post, traffic passes through Beit Bridge at night and the lighting at the border is insufficient. Officials from both the police and Customs indicated that poor lighting at

the border made it difficult to police the border after dark effectively.

Who exactly is responsible for controlling access to the border control area is not well defined. At one point there was a pilot project at Beit Bridge where the police were tasked with securing access and exit, as well as the periphery of the border control area. According to a border police official this project was later abandoned because the border police did not have the necessary staff capacity to perform this function. Subsequently, in terms of the Logical Organisational Process (LOP), which attempted to define roles and division of labour at the border post clearly, the function of securing the border control area fell to Customs and Excise. Currently, the situation is blurred and no one appears to have full control, although, in terms of the new pilot project, the SAPS will now have the capacity to perform this function. A border police official stated: 'With ten people per shift

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it was impossible for us to perform this function. Once we receive the additional personnel according to the new pilot project, this will now become possible.'

Another problem for Customs is the lack of a secure vehicle detention area. One police official cited an incident during March 2005 during which a 'bakkie' (LDV), that had been detained by Customs, disappeared from the detention area during the night. The official suspected that the bakkie had been stolen back by its owner. Transport companies also complained about items being stolen off their trucks and a trucker referred to what is commonly known as 'midnight spares' where batteries, lights and other items were removed from trucks detained at the border.

Goods entering South Africa through Beit Bridge, that are being trans-shipped to a third country, must travel from the border post to a bonded warehouse. From there, they make their way to an air or sea port. Some goods whose final destination is South Africa also transit at bonded warehouses. Customs officials worry that the journey from the border post to the bonded warehouse is unmonitored, and that goods may go missing en route. Customs officials, as well as some of the import and export agencies, believe that if the bonded warehouses were located closer to the border, the situation would be easier to control. Recently a bonded warehouse for second-hand cars being exported to Zimbabwe was established at Musina but there is a need to look at additional warehousing for other goods.

Goods transported by rail do not stop at Beit Bridge and are therefore not cleared at the border post. The goods are checked and cleared in Germiston instead. Customs officials are not satisfied with this arrangement since there are numerous stops between Germiston and Beit Bridge where goods can be loaded or off-loaded from the trains after they have been checked.

While most goods and vehicles declare themselves at the border post when crossing directly from South Africa into Zimbabwe, some goods and people are smuggled across the border. For the SANDF who are responsible for controlling the border, combating this form of smuggling is extremely difficult. Illicit border crossings are planned in order to smuggle meat, sugar, cigarettes and other contraband items. During a four-week period when a special observation exercise was conducted by the SANDF, more than 7,384 illegal border crossings were detected.

According to the SANDF, people cross at points that span almost the entire border and some of the crossings are highly organised. The smugglers have well-established communication systems and specific pick-up points at specific times. In fact, the SANDF

indicated that the routes have become so well organised that sometimes markers are used to denote specific crossings. Pieces of red cloth or bottles and tins indicate crossings for smuggled meat, while white cloth indicates pick-up points for other smuggled contraband. Red paint on the wire indicates a point where humans can cross.

SANDF officials stated that their effectiveness in patrolling the border is questionable due to a number of different factors:

- The SANDF does not have sufficient personnel to patrol the fence or to respond to alarms that are set off by the fence;
- The fence has a number of gates, which are used by farmers to access the Limpopo River, and the SANDF does not control the keys to these gates;
- The SANDF troops are not sufficiently trained in customs or immigration protocol;
- The fence itself is not being properly maintained by the contractors;
- SANDF troops are susceptible to bribes. In one incident a troop of soldiers had a 'day pass' system in place where illegals paid R30 each to cross into South Africa.¹⁴

Policing the smuggling of vehicles at the Beit Bridge border

During a four-week period more than 7,384 illegal border crossings were detected

As is clear from the previous section, smuggling of vehicles is not the only form of crime taking place at the Beit Bridge border. The smuggling of goods into South Africa, in particular contraband cigarettes, is a priority crime at Beit Bridge. During February 2005 more than R12 million worth of cigarettes was confiscated at Beit Bridge and destroyed. Other problems faced by customs include

round-tripping, under-evaluation, ghost exports and the smuggling of stolen goods across the border into Zimbabwe.

It is well known that the economic crisis in Zimbabwe has triggered a mass exodus of people. Some estimate that as many as three million Zimbabweans have left their country.¹⁵ Controlling illegal immigration is a priority for the Department of Home Affairs at Beit Bridge. As discussed earlier, the situation is extremely difficult to control because the vast majority of people are not crossing through the border post but rather across the rest of the border, which is notoriously difficult to monitor.

It was earlier noted that the SAPS has limited investigative capacity at Beit Bridge. A specialised capacity it does have, is to detect the smuggling of vehicles across the border post. Indeed, it is the lead agency in this regard.

The role of Customs in regard to vehicles relates to the issuing of Temporary Import Permits and DA65s. Customs officials issue Temporary Import Permits for vehicles from Zimbabwe temporarily in South Africa and DA65 permits to South African vehicles taken temporarily into Zimbabwe. Vehicles leaving South Africa with a DA65 will then be required to get a Temporary Import Permit (TIP) on the Zimbabwean side of the border. The role of Customs in the issuing of DA65 and TIPs appears to be largely an administrative process. The police play the major role by ensuring that the vehicle is legally permitted to leave the country.

There are a number of procedures that exist with regard to the policing of vehicles crossing the border at Beit Bridge. While some of these procedures are common to vehicles crossing most border posts in South Africa, there are others that have been implemented specifically to address problems experienced by the police at the Beit Bridge border post.

Vehicles that are still being financed by a bank require prior permission from the relevant bank before leaving South Africa. This takes the form of a letter from the bank stating that the driver has the permission of both the owner and the bank to remove the vehicle from the country.

As the number of stolen or hijacked cars has increased, the banks have become extremely strict in this regard. However, despite the banks making it clear that this requirement is spelt out in the contract signed with the bank and appears regularly on bank statements sent to their relevant clients, there are still a significant number of people who arrive at the border post without such letters. Police at the Beit Bridge border post have established systems with the different banks; even if a bank-financed vehicle arrives at the border post without such a letter, the police will be able to contact the relevant bank to verify that the car can leave the country. Even in instances where a letter is presented by the driver at the border post, the police may double-check the letter with the relevant bank authorities if they suspect that the vehicle may be stolen or being fraudulently removed from the country.

In instances where a vehicle is not financed by a bank, and appears to be taken out of the country legally, a copy of the details of the relevant vehicle crossing the border should appear on the National Information Centre for Border Control data base. In theory, this information should be able to be accessed by insurance companies when following up on stolen vehicles. A system known as UNICODE has also been introduced to assist police with identifying stolen vehicles crossing the border. Border officials can access the UNICODE system via a handheld device. If

a stolen vehicle presents itself at the border post, its details should show up on the system. A stolen vehicle's appearance on the UNICODE system is dependent on how often the system is updated and there can sometimes be as much as a three day delay before the vehicle appears on the UNICODE system. The police also have access to NATIS, the National Traffic Identification System, on which both SAPS and vehicle licence information is captured. NATIS should provide all details about the vehicle including whether it is bank financed, listed as stolen or scrapped. Once a vehicle is reported stolen it should immediately appear on the NATIS system. However, there are times when there are delays at the local police station where the theft was reported, and the vehicle does not appear immediately on the NATIS system.

In addition to these procedures, the police also conduct spot checks on vehicles to determine whether the chassis and engine numbers are the same as those listed on the documentation and licence disc. Police customarily target vehicles carrying no passengers and little luggage for spot checks, as well as South African-owned vehicles driven by foreigners.

Spot checks are also conducted on the basis of local knowledge of smugglers' modus operandi and on observation of drivers' behaviour.

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The SAPS at Beit Bridge have entered into agreements with the local SAPS Crime Intelligence division to co-operate on information regarding organised crime. On a daily basis, meetings are held between senior SAPS border officials and Crime Intelligence. If a driver is arrested attempting to smuggle a vehicle across the border he or she is handed over to Crime Intelligence for questioning.

In addition to the measures introduced at the border post, there are also Southern African Police Chief's Co-ordinating Committee (SARPCCO) agreements in place that should make it more difficult to register a South Africa vehicle in another SADC country. This SARPCCO system requires the driver of a vehicle being exported to another SADC country to not only pay the necessary customs duties, but also to acquire a special SARPCCO clearance certificate from the country of origin. This certificate must then be produced in the country the vehicle is being exported to, before the vehicle can be registered in that country. In the past, vehicles being exported from South Africa could acquire police clearances from any police station. To prevent corruption in this process, the new SARPCCO agreement will require clearance to be obtained from designated police clearance points that are SARPCCO-recognised.

A large number of second-hand vehicles from Japan destined for Zimbabwe arrive on the African continent

at South African sea ports and then enter Zimbabwe through Beit Bridge. To address the problem of stolen vehicles originating in South Africa being shipped through as part of these consignments, the police will often check these vehicles. According to police officials, these second-hand vehicles can easily be distinguished from South African-manufactured vehicles because the shapes and vehicle details are different.

Procedures regarding the smuggling of trucks across the border are less easy to manage. In most cases, the driver is not the owner of the truck and there is no system in place to check or verify if permission has been received to remove the truck.

Problems encountered when policing the smuggling of vehicles

Given all these controls and procedures, it should be difficult, if not impossible, to smuggle vehicles (especially light motor vehicles) across the Beit Bridge border. Nonetheless, border officials acknowledge that vehicles do still cross into Zimbabwe illicitly. There are a number of reasons why controlling this form of crime is difficult. Some of these relate to system weakness and co-ordination. Others relate to human factors.

At present, the smuggling of vehicles across the border post is perceived to be entirely a police matter. There is little inter-departmental co-operation in this regard. For instance, the Customs anti-smuggling unit is not directly involved in detecting vehicle smuggling. It could be argued that there is a need for greater inter-departmental co-operation in this regard. Officials from all departments should be trained and given incentives to detect vehicle smuggling. Customs has attempted to establish quarterly planning meetings at which departments identify and share their respective priorities. But there is perhaps insufficient cross-training and little incentive for this information-sharing to translate into effective co-operation.

Indeed, the SAPS acknowledge that while they make every effort to carry out checks on all vehicles at the border post, there are occasions, particularly when there is a build-up of vehicles at the exit of the border post, when a car may manage to slip through without being properly checked. Early warning signals by Customs or Immigration personnel of potential problems may assist the police to identify a particular vehicle that needs to be investigated.

Significant attention has been paid to risk-profiling for the smuggling of light vehicles through the border, but the detection of trucks appears to be dependent on the police receiving prior information that a stolen

truck is going to be smuggled through the border. There are a number of reasons for this, one of which is that, unlike light vehicles, truck drivers are not required to provide proof of permission from the actual owner of the truck before removing it from the country. Given that smuggling of trucks across the borders is nowhere near as extensive as the smuggling of light vehicles, it has received less priority and there are no developed systems in place to address this form of crime.

Apart from insufficient co-ordination between the different departments stationed at the border, there are also weaknesses in the systems used to detect vehicles being smuggled through the border post. The UNICODE system plays a critical role in detecting vehicles that have been stolen but certain weaknesses in the system have been identified. The UNICODE system is not as up-to-date as the NATIS system, and a recently stolen vehicle may not appear on the UNICODE system. Another problem is that the handheld device linking border control officials to the system has a battery lifespan of just four hours. There are thus periods when the system is being recharged

and is not in use. In any event, the UNICODE system plays a limited role. It only tells border control officials whether a vehicle is recorded as stolen. It does not assist in the detection of duplicate vehicle papers, for instance. The police also have access to the NATIS system, which provides additional details that are not available on the UNICODE system. However, one of the police officials who was interviewed stated:

Not all our members are trained and have access to the system. It also costs money to use the system. We are constantly being told; every time you press the button to access the system it costs the police money.

This obviously makes us cautious about using this system.

The UNICODE system that is currently in use is privately owned and there are plans to introduce a new system that will be owned by the police. This new system will not only provide additional details on the vehicle being checked but will also involve the scanning of the licence disc in the hope of averting problems associated with human error, such as incorrect digits being captured onto the system.

The police at the Beit Bridge border post have also picked up cases where letters from the banks granting permission to move the vehicle across the border have been forged or fraudulently acquired. To combat this problem, Wesbank has recently introduced a new system where only a select group of Wesbank personnel are eligible to sign these letters. The names of these personnel have also been forwarded to the

The UNICODE system that is currently in use is privately owned and there are plans to introduce a new system that will be owned by the police

police at Beit Bridge. However, not all the banks have similar systems in place and even in the case of Wesbank, the system relies on the border official to verify the signatures and notice irregularities.

The debate about the functions and responsibilities of the different departments operating at the border post is related to the function of moving bank-financed vehicles through the border. Customs is responsible for processing the DA65 document, which allows for the temporary removal of the vehicle from South Africa. In theory, they should be responsible for checking the related documentation. However, the view of the Banking Council of South Africa and the police is that bank authorisation should remain the responsibility of the police. This is most likely based on the banks' viewpoint that the police are more likely to prioritise the crime of smuggling vehicles than Customs.

What this means is that a vehicle that is temporarily crossing into Zimbabwe needs to first obtain the DA65 and then obtain authorisation from the police. Under the current system where the departments have different priorities, it is understandable that this duplication occurs, but if the priorities were better understood, this duplication could be avoided.

The border police at Beit Bridge currently operate on a three-monthly rotation basis. The rationale for this is that it prevents or limits the corruption of officials at the border post. However, like most systems, it has its weaknesses: every three months, new staff unfamiliar with the operandi of car smugglers must gain vital knowledge from scratch. The new personnel arrive with all the theory but will require some time before they can learn the practical lessons linked to the illicit trade in vehicles.

The new pilot project at Beit Bridge, which, as stated earlier, will see large numbers of SAPS personnel deployed permanently at the border post, will obviously do away with the rotational system and it is still too early to say whether this will have a negative or positive effect on policing at the border. Under the new system, the number of SAPS personnel on duty at Beit Bridge will increase from ten to 60 per shift. This may resolve many of the problems linked to capacity at the border post, if it is implemented successfully. However, one of the challenges that the new pilot project will pose, and which applies to most situations where there is a dramatic increase in capacity, is how to effectively manage this increase and ensure that new personnel are sufficiently skilled and experienced to perform the required tasks.

Aside from systemic weaknesses, officials interviewed for this paper identified complicity of border control

officials and corruption as a crucial facilitating factor in the smuggling of vehicles across the Beit Bridge border post. This applies not only to the smuggling of vehicles but to all forms of crimes occurring at the border post. This corruption also relates to facilitating paperwork, and extends to personnel stationed at the exit who assist in facilitating illegal activities either by not checking or verifying any of the documentation, or by simply ignoring inaccuracies in the documentation. According to the police, some car smuggling networks leave their vehicles in safe locations close to the border and wait until certain complicit officials arrive on duty before taking the vehicle through the border.

A number of investigations into corruption have been conducted by different departments and agencies at the Beit Bridge border post. According to the police, in the past three years, more than 27 police members have been transferred away from the Beit Bridge border, some as a result of suspicion of corruption.

Some transporters, forwarding and clearing agents, and border officials have indicated that the investigations and the current systems in place, such as the rotation of the police, have significantly reduced corruption, although it is still a problem that needs ongoing attention.

A forwarding and clearing agent who was interviewed stated:

You have a big investigation at the border and immediately after that things improve and people are scared to involve themselves in irregular practice, but if this is not followed up and built on, the corruption gradually seeps back.

The different departments face major challenges in addressing corruption because the money on offer to officials is substantial. A border police officer stated that he had been offered R35,000 to turn a blind eye to a R9 million consignment of cigarettes being smuggled across the border.

One-Stop border post

Despite all the current challenges facing policing of the Beit Bridge border post, the greatest challenge is yet to come. The Beit Bridge border post has been identified as one among several that will eventually become a 'One-Stop border post'. This will mean that people and goods travelling between South Africa and Zimbabwe will only stop once at a single border post. There will no longer be a Zimbabwean and South African border post but rather a single crossing point. The plan is that goods going into Zimbabwe will be checked by the Zimbabwean authorities, and goods coming out of Zimbabwe will be checked by South African authorities.

The Beit Bridge border post has been identified as one among several that will eventually become a 'One-Stop border post'

With regard to the smuggling of vehicles and the systems put in place by the SAPS to reduce illegal vehicle crossings, the biggest challenge will be the jurisdiction of the SAPS to operate on the Zimbabwean side of the border. A bilateral agreement is required between South Africa and Zimbabwe, that will allow the SAPS to operate on the Zimbabwean side of the border if the police are to continue to play a role in vetting vehicles crossing this one-stop border.

Conclusion

There are numerous challenges facing officials at the Beit Bridge border post, many of which involve smuggling of vehicles and other forms of crime occurring at the border. Many of these challenges are not unique to Beit Bridge and apply equally to other land borders in South Africa.

One of these challenges relates to the capacity of different personnel stationed at the border, particularly the SAPS. The new pilot project will increase the physical presence of the SAPS at the border post but will not necessarily address the investigative capacity of the SAPS. The police are the primary agency responsible for crime prevention, cross border smuggling and dealing with transnational crime syndicates. As such there is a need to build the investigative capacity of the SAPS at Beit Bridge.

Another challenge is securing the physical environment of the border control area so as to enable more restricted and controlled access and movement within this area. The plans developed under the Beit Bridge Border Improvement Project need to address this physical environment as part of upgrading the border post.

The human factor and complicity of staff stationed at the border is an ongoing problem at almost all border control sites and is one of the most difficult issues to address. During interviews with both SAPS officials and Customs, suggestions were made regarding the installation of CCTV cameras within the border control area as one possible means of reducing levels of corruption.

However the biggest challenge at the border remains the lack of alignment and co-ordination between the different departments stationed at the border post. There is an urgent need to develop a more co-ordinated approach to the way different departments work and prioritise tasks at the border post. Currently, each department has its own set of priorities, which, more often than not, do not correspond with the priorities of their colleagues in the other departments. The situation is worsened by a lack of overall authority at the border post. To address the smuggling of vehicles (in fact, all forms of crime occurring at the border) effectively, there is a need for all the departments to have a single set of priorities and goals to which each department contributes. This co-

ordinated approach to border control needs to be backed up by equipping the relevant departments with the requisite training and infrastructure.

Endnotes

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List of abbreviations

LOP	Logical Organisational Process
NATIS	National Traffic Identification System
NIA	National Intelligence Agency
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SARPPCO	Southern Africa Regional Police Chiefs Co-operation Organisation
SAPS	South African Police Service
TIP	Temporary Import Permit

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About this paper

Over the last decade the trafficking in stolen vehicles has become a prominent form of crime within Southern Africa. Vehicles stolen or hijacked in South Africa are transported across the borders for sale in neighbouring countries.

Since 1994 there have been a number of significant changes to the policing of South African land borders. A number of innovative measures were introduced to address the illicit cross border trafficking of vehicles. The Beit Bridge border with South Africa is one such land border.

This report examines the policing of the Beit Bridge border post, and discusses measures in place to prevent the illicit cross border vehicle trade and the impact these measures have had on this trade.

About the author

Jenni Irish-Qhobosheane works for Injobo Nebandla, which is a consultancy that focuses on conducting investigative research within Southern Africa. Injobo Nebandla has worked on various criminal justice related projects and has produced several publications including: Vehicle hijackings in South Africa, Assessing community crime prevention initiatives in communities in Kwazulu Natal, Crime in post conflict societies in Southern Africa, and Drug trafficking within South Africa and neighbouring countries.

Funder



This paper and the research upon which it is based was made possible through the generous funding of the Royal Danish Government through their Embassy in South Africa.

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ISSN: 1026-0404

