



Institute for Security Studies
Institut d'Etudes de Sécurité

Knowledge empowers Africa • Le savoir émancipe l'Afrique

THE SADC ORGAN FOR DEFENCE, POLITICS AND SECURITY

Jakkie Cilliers,
Executive Director, Institute for Defence Policy

Occasional Paper No 10 -October 1996

INTRODUCTION

While the South African Development Community (SADC) defines itself as a community devoted to development integration, it has become clear that economic growth and development cannot be achieved without peace, stability and a concomitant move towards democracy – part and parcel of an approach to emancipate the market, increase trade and reduce trade barriers within the region. South Africa being accepted as a member of SADC in 1994 and Mauritius in 1995, increased the number of member states of this sub-regional organisation to twelve. The other members are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Among these members are some of the poorest nations in the world, with a declining share in the global economic product – a paltry 0,58 per cent in 1993, or 0,13 per cent without South Africa's input.¹ Despite its size within SADC, South Africa is a dwarf in the global context, with its GNP only one third of that of the Netherlands and six per cent of that of Germany.²

Senior SADC officials are frank in stating that 'without stability, investment and development will not follow'. The recognition of the interrelationship between economic growth, stability and democracy heralds an important paradigm shift within the region. Similar to developments at the level of the OAU, sovereignty is no longer a holy cow in Southern Africa and, albeit grudgingly, governments accept that the manner in which they conduct their internal affairs are open to legitimate scrutiny. The move to include a focus on conflict mediation, preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping in SADC with the establishment of the Organ for Defence, Politics and Security earlier this year, is therefore borne from a process and with the perspective of development.

THE SADC ORGAN

The Declaration and Treaty of the SADC, signed by SADC Heads of State and Government in Windhoek in 1992, expressed confidence that recent developments – the independence of Namibia and the transition in South Africa – "... will take the region out of an era of conflict and confrontation, to one of co-operation; in a climate of peace, security and stability. These are prerequisites for development ..." The Windhoek Declaration called, among others, for "... a framework of co-operation which provides for ... strengthening regional solidarity, peace and security, in order for the people of the region to live and work together in peace and harmony ... The region needs, therefore, to establish a framework and mechanisms to strengthen regional solidarity, and provide for mutual peace and security."

Clearly, a continual move towards democracy within the constituent states of SADC must underpin greater regional co-operation and integration. This is already implicit in the SADC Treaty that, in Article 4, commits the organisation to the principles of:

- the sovereign equality of all Member States;
- solidarity, peace and security;
- human rights, democracy and the rule of law;
- equity, balance and mutual benefit; and
- the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Article 5 lists eight further objectives, including to "... *promote and defend peace and security*."³ Seen from this perspective, the establishment of the Organ for Defence, Politics and Security provides substance to these intentions.

PRESENT REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION

SADC has already established two commissions and nineteen sectors and sub sectors to guide and co-ordinate regional development policies and programmes in specific functional areas. The sectors are allocated to individual member states to co ordinate and provide regional leadership. Sectoral activities are supervised by sectoral committees of ministers. A major advantage of this approach has been that it has proven to be cost-effective and to contain the development of a bureaucracy.

However, the capacity of many countries to co-ordinate activities in their allocated sector is limited, and progress in that particular sector is consequently slow. In a case where the local civil service suffers from a lack of resources to enable it to fulfil its daily, ongoing tasks, SADC responsibilities are an 'over-and-above' function that often gets left to the last moment. Some kind of formalisation and the expansion of the existing SADC bureaucracy in Gaborone is therefore inevitable, with the most likely avenue a movement towards a greater reliance on commissions, of which there are already two – one on Transport and Communications and one on Agricultural Research (SACCAR). The small size of the Secretariat in Gaborone is already severely limiting in terms of SADC's activities.

Most observers do not realise how small the SADC Secretariat in Gaborone is. Countries contribute to SADC, not on the basis of their total GDP or even GDP *per capita*, but on an equal basis. The result is that South Africa (the largest country) and Swaziland (the smallest country) each contribute less than US \$1 million annually. In fact, SADC has only ten professional staff members and about twenty administrative persons at its head office. To the total of thirty persons in Gaborone, the fifteen persons who work in the food and agricultural and transport commissions could be added. The work load of this small staff is very heavy. SADC has more than 400 current projects that require a total of US \$80 billion in funding. Of this funding, fifty per cent was secured by 1994, with no more than approximately fifteen per cent coming from member countries themselves, and the remainder being provided by donors.⁴ With so many projects covering a very diverse field, the requirement for an integrated regional development plan (the 'top-down' framework) is obvious. Yet, the vast majority of the projects appear to be discrete ('bottom-up'), largely because they are driven by individual countries and not by the region (i.e. by SADC or through multilateral agreements), and as a result of the absence of a coherent regional framework. SADC has only recently tried to introduce such an integrated policy framework, but at a time when many of the projects are already in place.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

Part of the regional policy framework will come from the adoption of a series of 'protocols'. Article 22(1) of the SADC Treaty provides for member states to conclude protocols to "*spell out the objectives and scope of, and institutional mechanisms for co-operation and integration*." These protocols are to be negotiated by member states and, after approval by the Summit (i.e. the Heads of State), become an integral part of the SADC Treaty. During its August 1995 meeting, SADC signed the first of these binding agreements, the Protocol on Shared Water Course Systems, dealing with the scarce water resources available in the region.

During the SADC Heads of State and Government Summit Meeting in Lesotho in August 1996, four additional protocols were signed. These dealt with:

- Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking;
- Energy;
- Transport, Communication and Meteorology; and
- Trade.⁵

The draft protocol on the Free Movement of SADC Persons that would have served at the Lesotho Summit Meeting, met with resistance from the regional ministers responsible for Home Affairs and was therefore not tabled. The feeling was that the inequalities in the region

would result in the mass movement of peoples if restrictions were lifted too soon. The most basic statistics bear this out – the South African GNP is more than three times the total of that of the other eleven members of SADC, three times larger than that of Nigeria and twenty times that of Zimbabwe.⁶ As a result, the draft protocol was referred back to be structured according to the current realities in the region. Angola did not sign the protocols on Trade and Transport, Communications and Meteorology to "... *allow internal processes to be completed.*"⁷

THE CREATION OF A SADC ORGAN FOR POLITICS, DEFENCE AND SECURITY

On 18 January 1996, at a meeting in Gaborone of the SADC Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security, the ministers agreed to recommend to their heads of state that a SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security should be created, that "...*would allow more flexibility and timely response, at the highest level, to sensitive and potentially explosive situations.*" The term 'organ' is borrowed from the Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution at the OAU. This agreement, according to the subsequent press statement, would allow for a permanent SADC mechanism, while maintaining the flexible approach of the old Front Line States which it effectively replaced. Right from the start, SADC had wisely decided to separate political and security considerations from 'SADC proper' (i.e. economic development) through the creation of a separate structure that should arguably not be located with the SADC Secretariat in Botswana. Through the establishment of the Organ, SADC has moved away from an *ad hoc* approach to address common foreign and security issues.

According to the subsequent press statement,⁸ the Organ will abide by the same principles as those of SADC, including the sovereign equality of all member states, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the observance of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The objectives of the Organ include:⁹

- safeguarding the region against instability from within or outside its borders;
- promoting political co-operation and common political values and institutions (this commits SADC to the promotion of democracy and an observance of human rights);
- developing a common foreign policy and a joint international lobby on issues of common interest (the SADC Treaty itself commits the organisation to "promote the co-ordination and harmonisation of the international relations of Member States");
- security and defence co-operation through conflict prevention, management and resolution;
- mediation of disputes and conflicts;
- preventive diplomacy and mechanisms, with punitive measures as a last resort (in other words, the possibility of enforcement actions as a last resort is explicitly recognised);
- sustainable peace and security through peacemaking and peacekeeping (this and the preceding objectives effectively place the Organ in line with the UN Charter);
- development of a collective security capacity, a Mutual Defence Pact, and a regional peacekeeping capacity (an unprecedented and, in fact, unrealistic goal for the foreseeable future);
- co-ordination of the participation of its members in international and regional peacekeeping operations (opening the door to an arrangement similar to the Nordic division of labour in peacekeeping); and
- addressing extra-regional conflicts which impact on peace and security in Southern Africa (confirming that SADC does not have an inward orientation, but acknowledges the realities of its position in the region).

The Organ will operate at Summit level, as well as ministerial and technical levels. It will also function separately from other SADC structures. Exactly how this will occur in practice is still unclear, but what is evident is that the chairpersonship of SADC (currently President Mandela) and of the Organ (currently President Mugabe) will ensure a differentiation between the two institutions at the level of the Heads of State and Government. At present, the annual SADC Heads of State and Government Summit Meeting has already instituted a practice (reflected in the relevant press releases) of commenting on issues of concern within each of

the SADC countries. It is not clear if this practice will continue or if the agenda items related to peace, stability and democracy will be moved to a second annual Summit Meeting. Logically, the two events (the Heads of State and Government Summit meetings of SADC and the Organ) will probably be combined or the Heads of State and Government will only convene in terms of the Organ when necessary.

Arguably, the loss of the traditional SADC 'sector' approach within the Organ is unfortunate. Continuing a sectoral approach would have allowed the Organ to operate at a more technical level right from the start (i.e. at the level of bureaucrats and not politicians). Allocating the Organ to a single country would have been very difficult due to the highly sensitive and political nature of the issues that the Organ deals with, such as early warnings of potential conflict and crises within the various SADC countries. Given the rotating nature of the chairpersonship, there is at present a debate on whether the Organ will require a permanent secretariat – without which it may struggle to operate effectively and keep abreast of events. This would be a particular necessity should the Organ wish to proceed with the establishment of an early warning system similar to the one being established at the OAU. The Organ may, in time, possibly come to replicate the way in which the Central Organ of the OAU functions, in other words, where the regular, and by far the majority of business, is conducted at ambassadorial level and the need to consult at the levels of ministers and heads of state is very limited. The problem with this vision is that it implies both permanence, officials and infrastructure for the Organ.

FUNCTIONING OF THE ORGAN

One of the proposed institutions which will be absorbed into the Organ is the existing Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC) with its impressive system of numerous committees and sub-committees on defence, police and intelligence matters. For the time being, the ISDSC brings some structure to the Organ and does so at no expense to SADC, since the various governments pay for their involvement within the ISDSC from their own budgets. Should it become clear that a permanent secretariat is required, the Organ will be faced with the following choices:

- It may establish a small, multinational permanent secretariat at a permanent location. The country that chairs the Organ takes the responsibility for liaison with the permanent secretariat.
- The alternative is the establishment of a multinational secretariat that relocates to the country chairing the Organ, each time the chairpersonship changes; this would clearly be impractical.
- Finally, SADC may accept that the country chairing the Organ, provides all staff for the duration of the chairpersonship, with some mechanisms put in place to ensure a degree of continuity with the rotation of the chair.

In fact, it may make sense for the Organ's secretariat not to be located with the existing SADC Secretariat in Botswana – in effect, separating the development and peace/stability functions, so that they do not interfere with each other. Such a clear distinction should provide the Organ with a greater ability to operate in a flexible and informal manner and could occur from separate offices in a country such as Namibia, Zimbabwe or Zambia. Due to its dominant size and relative strength within the region, the Organ should preferably not be located in South Africa, since this would merely add to its dominance and fuel possible fears of its role within the region.

The Organ will have its first official meeting in Angola later this year "*... to lend support to the peace process in that country*",¹⁰ and it could be expected that greater clarity on the structure, location and functioning of both the Organ and the ISDSC will arise from this meeting.

However, there is much that can be done through the use of modern communications systems to ensure rapid and effective liaison, particularly at the level of heads of state. The South African Minister of Defence, Joe Modise, the previous chairperson of the ISDSC, has noted the requirement for a 'hotline' (at the seventeenth meeting of the ISDSC in Johannesburg in September 1995), and there are indications that such a system is investigated at present. Still, undertaking the Organ's administration and supporting its activities cannot be done via modem and remote computer access alone. It will require its own permanent staff.

In fact, this proposal highlights a further dilemma, namely the pre-eminence of the military, police and intelligence departments within the ISDSC that is chaired by the ministers of Defence of the various SADC countries on a rotational basis (currently Malawi). The establishment of the Organ with its focus on preventive action clearly places the responsibility for interaction and liaison with the Organ squarely within the domain of the respective departments of Foreign Affairs. The formalisation of the Organ will therefore clearly impact upon the way in which the ISDSC operates at present, including the level (ministerial) and the department of the chairperson (presently Defence). Within its structures, the ISDSC also includes standing sub-committees on maritime affairs and aviation, both of which include non-military agencies and concerns. As a result, the establishment of the Organ will also have an impact on the manner in which the ISDSC has been structured and has operated in the past.

Furthermore, since the elections in South Africa in 1994, the ISDSC has focused on criminal issues, such as vehicle theft and cross-border crime (apart from discussing the exchange of military personnel, collaboration in training, etc.). As such, it would follow that the implementation of the recently signed protocol on Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking would become a responsibility of the Organ and not of SADC in Gaborone. This further raises the issue of who would be responsible for the implementation of decisions and the monitoring of progress without a permanent administrative and support structure.

The highly sensitive issue of the establishment of an early warning system for conflict prevention within the ISDSC is now also open for discussion. Should this still remain the implicit task of the intelligence communities – seemingly the ISDSC's approach – or would it not make sense to move this to the diplomats, obviously still with the support of the various intelligence agencies?

Another issue that is becoming urgent is that of the national focal points for SADC within the various member countries. Previously, this was generally the departments of trade and industry of each government, with some exceptions. In South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mauritius, the total SADC involvement is the responsibility of their Foreign ministries. With the Organ committed to peace, preventive diplomacy and security issues, liaison is increasingly through other departments, such as Defence, Police and Foreign Affairs. Therefore, SADC would either have to

- continue with the practice of accepting that all liaison occurs through a single department, such as Trade and Industry, which would be hugely impractical when dealing with a crisis requiring rapid reaction;
- move to a system where the various government departments increasingly work together on a direct basis, with the co-ordination of national policies occurring within each country on an interdepartmental basis; or
- accept that liaison with SADC occurs through one department for issues dealing with development and through another (Foreign Affairs) in the case of the Organ.

At present South Africa already has a ministerial committee on SADC that co-ordinates all South African interaction with SADC on an interdepartmental level.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the establishment of the Organ for Politics, Defence and Security heralds a new dimension for SADC and its member countries. It is the start of a long road which must be travelled as a first step towards acceptance of an integrated vision of comprehensive and co-operative security built on interdependence.

ENDNOTES

1. J Herbst, *Africa and the International Economy*, paper presented at a conference on South Africa in the Global Economy, 11-12 July 1996, Jan Smuts House, Johannesburg, p. 21
2. R Cornwell, *Lost Prophets*, Africa Insight, 26(2), 1996, p. 90.
3. J Cilliers, *The Evolving Security Architecture in Southern Africa*, [African Security Review](#), 4(5), 1995, p. 30
4. Interview with Dr Charles Hove, Chief Economist, SADC, 30 July 1996.

5. Communiqué, SADC Summit, Maseru, Lesotho, 24 August 1996.
6. Cornwall, *ibid.*
7. Communiqué, SADC Summit, Maseru, Lesotho, 24 August 1996
8. Communiqué on the Establishment of the Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, Gaborone, January 1996.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Communiqué, SADC Summit, Maseru, Lesotho, 24 August 1996.