Challenges to Peace and Security in Southern Africa: The Role of SADC

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Although arguably the most stable region in Africa, southern Africa is not immune to challenges to peace and security. Armed conflict, political crises, democracy and governance deficits are some urgent issues contributing to state and human insecurity in southern Africa. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is the region's principal organisation for security cooperation, and the regional contribution to the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). This brief analyses the main challenges to peace and security in southern Africa in the past five years and how SADC has responded to these.
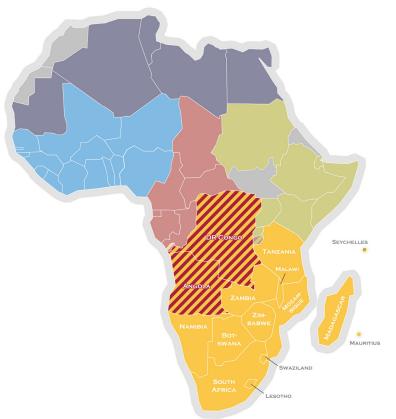
Southern Africa is a region of great contrasts. Although levels of human development in the region are higher than in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, income inequality within southern African states is among the highest in the world. Despite cultural, language and ethnic differences across (and within) SADC member states,[1] the majority share significant historical commonalities: Southern Africa was the last region on the continent to gain independence from colonisation and the majority of the current ruling parties were directly involved in the liberation movement. The joint struggle for independence and common opposition to apartheid has resulted in a sense of brotherhood among SADC member states, which in many ways defines the nature of regional cooperation.

SADC's peace and security structures

SADC was founded in 1992, with the establishment of the SADC Treaty. The organisation initially focused on economic integration, but also inherited a defence and security-orientated agenda from the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid southern African organisation *Frontline States,* which was dissolved in 1994. The most important legal documents guiding SADC's role in peace and security are the *Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation* and the *Mutual Defence Pact.*

The SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security (*the Organ*) is responsible for promoting peace and security in the region. The Organ was established in 1996, but remained largely inoperable until 2001 due to disagreement among SADC member states about the appropriate structural relationship between the Organ and the rest of SADC. Concern about the risk of making sensitive information available to SADC donors nevertheless prompted some member states to promote separation of

1 Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

the Organ from the rest of SADC. Today, the Organ is subordinate to the Summit of Heads of States of SADC, the supreme policy-making institution of the organisation. Nevertheless, concern about donor involvement in SADC peace and security structures continues to affect the work of the Organ to this day. In contrast to some other RECs, for example ECOWAS, SADC appears to be more of a forum where regional leaders coordinate policy, rather than an institution with a partly autonomous function. As such, the Organ has little opportunity to direct policy and largely acts as an administrative tool. The Organ reports

to its chair, a head of state, a position that rotates annually and is managed by a troika of the incoming, current and outgoing chair. Much of the work and direction of the Organ is dictated by the interests of the current chair, resulting in little continuity in its work.

SADC's conflict managing and conflict preventing capacities include a regional early warning system, a regional peacekeeping centre and the SADC Standby Force. The SADC Standby Force is regarded as one of the most mature of the regional standby forces which are intended to make up a fully operational African Standby Force from 2016. The Organ also has election monitoring and mediation capacities, including the recently established Mediation Support Unit and a Panel of Elders to act as SADC mediators.

SADC responses to main challenges to peace and security since 2010

In an effort to analyse the role of SADC in addressing challenges to peace and security, the following sections offer an overview of the organisation's responses to the main sources of insecurity in southern Africa over the past five years.

- *Armed conflict*

As the only current armed conflict in the region, the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (DRC) has frequently been on the SADC agenda over the past years. The organisation has a history of engaging in the conflict, both through mediation initiatives and military interventions conducted by its member states. In 2012, the DRC government faced an insurgency by the rebel group M23 in the eastern parts of the country. The member states of the African regional organisation *International Conference of the Great Lakes Region* (ICGLR) sought to launch an international military intervention to fight and eradicate the M23. The DRC government was wary of the presence of troops from ICGLR member states Rwanda and Uganda on its territory, instead preferring that such a mission be carried out by SADC. SADC accepted this request and decided to deploy its Standby Force in the DRC, with South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi contributing some 3,000 troops.

Questions about who would pay for the deployment and concerns about the need to coordinate with the existing United Nations (UN) operation in the DRC resulted in the force being deployed as the *Force Intervention Brigade* (FIB) within the UN peacekeeping mission. The FIB's

explicitly offensive mandate, which includes the right to neutralise armed groups, is unprecedented within the context of UN peacekeeping. Although part of the UN framework, the FIB's existence is a consequence of the political will of the SADC member states that contribute troops to it. The force was successful in defeating the M23 and managed to reverse a pattern of military setbacks. This led to the signing of a peace declaration at the end of 2013, under the terms of which the M23 would be disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated (DDR). Progress on DDR has nevertheless been slow and it is unclear what role SADC has, if any, in monitoring and implementing the process. FIB's deployment in the DRC continues, and its mandate has expanded to fighting rebels beyond the M23.

- *Political crises*

The current crisis in **Madagascar** followed the March 2009 coup that replaced president Marc Ravalomanana with Andry Rajoelina. SADC, which had failed to follow up an early warning assessment mission with preventive diplomacy prior to the coup, denounced the coup and suspended Madagascar from the organisation. Despite previous engagement in the country, SADC was slow to re-engage following the coup, only sending a SADC special envoy to Madagascar in May 2009. SADC then appointed former Mozambican president Joaquim Alberto Chissano as mediator and created an international contact group intended to work as a platform for dialogue among all parties. The objective of SADC mediation lined up with that of the African Union (AU) and UN, which sought to find a solution acceptable to both sides rather than merely reinstating the president. Despite a transitional power-sharing agreement being signed in 2009, Rajoelina took steps that effectively blocked its implementation.

South Africa took over the chair of the Organ in August 2011 and this resulted in the country becoming more actively involved in SADC mediation efforts. However, rather than relying on SADC resources and infrastructure in its mediation work, South Africa relied primarily on its own. SADC mediation then focused on the establishment of a transitional roadmap towards elections, an agreement that was signed by relevant parties in September 2011. As an important step in ensuring peace, SADC eventually convinced Ravalomanana and Rajoelina not to run in the upcoming election. The latter only agreed not to run after an electoral court reconstituted by SADC ruled him and his wife ineligible to take part in the election. In January 2014

the first presidential election since the coup was held and was deemed legitimate by SADC and the AU. Madagascar regained its membership in SADC in February 2014.

As regards the political crisis in **Zimbabwe** that followed the disputed presidential election in March 2008, SADC also engaged in mediation efforts, alongside the AU. The mediation resulted in the signing of the *Global Political Agreement* (GPA) and the formation of a power-sharing government involving Robert Mugabe of the *Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front* (ZANU-PF) party as president – a post he has held since 1987 – and Morgan Tsvangirai of the *Movement for Democratic Change* (MDC) party as prime minister. The GPA, for which SADC and the AU served as guarantors, was intended to serve as the roadmap for creating a constitutional and electoral framework capable of ensuring that the next election be free, fair and credible. According to the agreement, oversight of GPA implementation was to be performed by a Zimbabwean multipartisan panel, the *Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee* (JOMIC). Following accusations by MDC that ZANU-PF was in breach of the agreement, it soon became evident that JOMIC had little potential to either monitor or ensure implementation of the GPA. Recognising the limitations of JOMIC, SADC proceeded to strongly urge both parties to implement the agreement in November 2009 and then again in August 2010, without success. Despite widely viewed as not having complied with the provisions of the GPA, Mugabe proceeded to call for elections in April 2013, giving MDC little more than a month to prepare. The election results, which MDC deemed flawed, showed Mugabe winning 61% of the vote, thus securing his continued tenure as president. SADC's failure to enforce the GPA can be mainly attributed to the fact that Mugabe is highly revered by leaders in SADC member states due to his involvement in the creation of the organisation, his stature within the liberation movement and the deep respect he is granted as an elder.

The latest political crisis to break out in **Lesotho** started after prime minister Thomas Thabane suspended Parliament to prevent a vote of no confidence and fired the Chief of the Army, actions that precipitated a military coup in August 2014. The army's loyalty lies with the deputy prime minister, Mothetjoa Metsing, whereas the police supports Thabane. After fleeing to South Africa, Thabane urged SADC to intervene militarily to restore order, a request rejected by the organisation. Subsequent mediation by SADC resulted in key political stakeholders signing an agreement seeking

to contain the crisis by calling for early elections in 2015, while also seeking to remove contentious commanders from the police and the military. The army chief responsible for the coup, Tlali Kamoli, was exiled. Nevertheless, threats from the military that it would intervene in the upcoming election caused SADC to return to mediation in February 2015. This mediation resulted in an agreement by key stakeholders, including the security services, specifying that the military would not intervene. The February 2015 election, deemed free and fair by SADC, resulted in a victory for former prime minister Pakalitha Mosisili. Yet the situation quickly unravelled following the election, with Mosisili failing to implement reforms and reinstating the exiled Kamoli as army chief. The crisis escalated in June 2015 when an army lieutenant general and former SADC Standby Force commander was assassinated by troops loyal to Kamoli. Meanwhile, numerous opposition leaders have fled the country, fearing that they will become victims of government assassinations. These events have caused SADC to re-engage, with the subsequent establishment of a SADC Commission of Inquiry into the death of the army lieutenant general and the roots of the crisis. The verdict of the commission is expected to be reported to the SADC Organ by December 2015 and the findings may have serious consequences for future development of the crisis. At the time of writing, Lesotho has launched a legal challenge to the commission's report, which has been presented to SADC but not yet been made public, something that has caused SADC to express "great concern".

- **Democracy and governance deficits**

The SADC countries are a heterogeneous group as regards democratic practice and governance. The region is home to six of the ten best-governed countries in Africa according to the *Ibrahim Index of African Governance* (2015). However, southern Africa also hosts two of the most poorly governed countries on the continent, namely Zimbabwe and the DRC. The extent to which democratic principles are upheld varies considerably across member states. SADC's commitment to democratic practices is explicit in guiding documents such as the SADC Treaty and the organisation's *Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ*. Nevertheless, SADC strategies for achieving democracy mainly focus on achieving and upholding electoral standards in the region. In 2004, SADC adopted its *Principles and Guidelines for Governing Democratic Elections in southern Africa*. However, its efforts to promote democratisation in the region by

dispatching election observers have been criticised for focusing too much on election day procedures and for alleged rubber-stamping of contested election results. SADC has not appeared willing to take a more long-term perspective to furthering democracy in the region by seeking to promote civil liberties in the period between elections. This is due to the organisation's principle of not intervening in domestic affairs, a principle stemming from a deep sense of loyalty among member states due to their joint liberation movement legacy. The decision to engage in Madagascar had more to do with standing up for a fellow member state government than promoting democracy *per se.*

The most flagrant example of SADC giving in to pressures by its member states to limit the implementation of its mandate is exemplified by the failure of the SADC Tribunal. As mandated by the treaty, the SADC Tribunal was set up to act as the organisation's judicial arm with regard to the interpretation and application of the SADC Treaty in conflicts between member states, but also between member states and natural or legal persons. Yet, following the Tribunal's recent ruling against Mugabe's confiscation of white Zimbabweans' farmland on human rights grounds in 2007, SADC took steps to downgrade its status, eventually to that of an administrative panel in 2015, making it essentially unable to fulfil its original mandate.

SADC as a peace and security actor

One way of evaluating SADC as a peace and security actor is to assess its ability in conflict prevention and conflict management. Looking at SADC's scorecard in the last five years, the organisation appears at first glance to have been largely successful in managing armed conflict in the DRC and in preventing political crises in Madagascar, Zimbabwe and Lesotho from erupting into violence. Yet, a closer look casts doubt on this conclusion. In all these cases, it has been the efforts of individual member states rather than SADC as an organisation that have achieved results. The FIB is more of a South African, Tanzanian, Malawian and UN success story than a SADC success. With regard to political crises, SADC mediation has drawn exclusively on high-level mediators rather than the organisation's own mediation infrastructure. In Zimbabwe, SADC was incapable of enforcing the GPA, with the result that Mugabe blatantly ignored SADC's pleas for him to implement the treaty.

The fact that the political culture in the SADC region remains heavily determined by its liberation legacy is also evident in relation to the role of South Africa within SADC. South Africa is the region's economic and military giant, making its cooperation absolutely necessary for SADC military interventions. However, its status also means that South Africa keeps a low profile in order not to be perceived as a regional hegemon by SADC member states, who despise any signs of imperial powers. This has caused South Africa to take a modest posture within SADC, preferring instead to influence the agenda setting on the continental AU level.

While non-interference in internal matters makes regional cooperation easier in some ways, it also poses serious obstacles to conflict prevention when root causes of threats to peace and security stem from domestic sources. This fact also raises questions about the effectiveness of SADC's early warning system, given that few member states are willing to share sensitive information amongst each other. Moreover, early warning at the SADC level has not been appropriately fed into the continental early warning system at the AU level, an evident challenge for the future functioning of APSA. The unwillingness of member states to share information related to SADC's peace and security work is even greater towards donors, despite the SADC budget depending heavily on international funding. Fear of diluting sovereignty among member states has undermined the function of the Organ and thus SADC's potential to be an actor of real relevance in promoting regional peace and security. This is problematic given that future security challenges in the region are most likely to stem from domestic sources. Since the problem is related to the nature of member states,, and not primarily the functioning of SADC, it cannot be addressed by organisational capacity-building. Rather, any further strengthening of the role of SADC as a relevant actor in peace and security will require a change in member states' political culture.