SADC and the African Union's Evolving Security Architecture

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The year 2003 was another one of great expectations and modest achievements for the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (the Organ). The August 2003 summit in Dar es Salaam looked like it had achieved a long-needed breakthrough in the cumbersome effort to integrate the security policies of Southern African states. At the summit, SADC heads of state signed a Mutual Defence Pact and approved the Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO). The latter was intended to be an implementation plan providing substance and direction to the broad and vague goals set out in the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation (signed in 2001).

However, the Organ's achievements were soon overshadowed by continental developments, as the security structures of the African Union (AU) began to take shape with surprising speed. Firstly, this chapter argues why the Organ's achievements in 2003, although grand on paper, in reality have done little to overcome the greatest obstacles to security integration in the region. Secondly, it describes the AU's new security architecture, and, thirdly, it shows how SADC will manage to remain a relevant actor on the African continent in the immediate future through its role as one of the AU's subregional 'legs'. Perhaps oddly, in 2004–05 it will be the ambition to create a continent-wide and pan-African net of security institutions that will ensure that the countries of the Southern African subregion continue to deepen their security co-operation, albeit slowly.

The Organ and the SIPO

The SADC Organ has received more than its fair share of attention since its restructuring in 2001 when compared to the slow pace at which it has moved and the modest gains it has made since that date. The climax of

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the Organ's efforts came at the August 2003 summit, when heads of state assented to an implementation plan for the Organ's policies, the SIPO.

After the August 2003 summit, the Organ receded to the background, issuing fewer communiqués than in the year before and seemingly taking a low profile on the region's political and security problems. By May 2004, the only statement issued by the Organ chair, Lesotho, had been a reaction to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Abuja, Nigeria, in December 2003. The statement was a hostile and controversial response to CHOGM's decision to continue the suspension of Zimbabwe (which reacted by quitting the organisation). The statement, issued by South Africa on behalf of the Organ chair, strongly attacked 'some members' (meaning in particular Britain and Australia) for their handling of the Zimbabwe issue. This was accompanied by suggestions from South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki, of a North–South and racial divide within the Commonwealth. The reality was more complex: at the CHOGM, Africa was more or less split down the middle in its view on what to do about Zimbabwe.

As the contents of the implementation plan for the Organ seeped into the public sphere after its approval at the 2003 summit, excitement soon receded. The plan gave a solid analysis of the security problems, broadly defined, that SADC countries face. However, it provided little in terms of concrete prioritisations and policies that would turn the Organ into a serious and important security actor in the region. By July 2004, 11 months after the SIPO was approved, it had still not been released as a public document.

Realising the limitations of the implementation plan, the Organ almost immediately started one more round of confidential deliberations, this time in order to flesh out an implementation strategy for the implementation plan. The heads of state agreed in Dar es Salaam to bring the donor community into this process, so that funding can be secured for the Organ's projects and policies from the moment the implementation agenda is ready.

The Dar es Salaam summit also signed a SADC Mutual Defence Pact. While it was an achievement to reach agreement on this document, the defence pact means less than one might think. Unlike the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), SADC does not have a pact that automatically triggers military assistance in case of outside aggression. The NATO slogan of 'an attack on one is an attack on all' has in the case of SADC been translated into the following paragraphs (article 6):

1. An armed attack against a State Party shall be considered a threat to regional peace and security and such an attack shall be met with immediate collective action.
2. Collective action shall be mandated by Summit on the recommendation of the Organ.

3. Each State Party shall participate in such collective action in any manner it deems appropriate.

In other words, whether and how to intervene on behalf of a fellow member state will be left entirely up to each state to decide. Paragraph 6(3) was inserted in the last stages of negotiations, and it is unlikely that agreement could have been reached without this significant watering down of the defence pact.

However, the pact has other and more important tenets, including an obligation to share military intelligence and to facilitate joint training of military personnel and joint military exercises. Such integration will be a useful contribution to SADC's evolving common peacekeeping capacity, as well as to the region's recently established early warning mechanism. There are also signs that these obligations are taken seriously in practice. Certainly, SADC's peacekeeping capacity, as well as the region's political will to deploy peacekeeping troops, is improving. South Africa and Mozambique have sent soldiers to Burundi; South African peacekeepers are also in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Namibia has a small contingent in Liberia. In early 2004, Angola also offered to send UN peacekeepers to Côte d'Ivoire, but claims that the Angolan government was too close to Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo led Angola to change its mind and withdraw the offer.

Early warning mechanisms and peacekeepers are central elements of the African Union's security structures. It is therefore time to turn to a discussion of the AU, before we go on to assess SADC's contributions to the continental security agenda.

The AU's security architecture: From blueprint to skeleton

While 2003 and the first quarter of 2004 did not offer great hope in terms of the SADC region's ability to deal constructively and effectively with its own security problems, they provided cause for renewed optimism over the AU. After the relative failure of its predecessor, the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), in dealing with security issues, the year 2004 brought with it the hope that the AU may yet become a positive force for peace on the continent. In December 2003, the AU protocols on an African Peace and Security Council and a Pan African Parliament came into force, and both institutions were inaugurated a few months later.

In January 2004, the Protocol for the Establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights entered into force. The court so far exists only on paper, since the AU summit has yet to choose a location for the court, as well as elect its 11 judges. The court, once established, has the potential of becoming a strong institution, although so far the protocol only allows it to hear cases brought before it by African governments and

intergovernmental organisations, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (a relatively feeble organisation). Individuals and non-governmental organisations will not be allowed to present cases to the court.

In February 2004, AU heads of state signed a Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy. Throughout 2003 and the first quarter of 2004, African defence ministers and chiefs of staff held a series of meetings to flesh out the plans for an African stand-by force. They managed to sideline the grand plans of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi for a pan-African standing army, and decided instead to build the AU's capacity to respond militarily to threats to peace and security on the subregional building blocks. The aim is for each of the five AU-defined regions to create a regional stand-by force, at the disposal of the AU. More realistically, the AU will in the beginning rely on the two subregions that have come the furthest in their military co-operation: the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) and SADC.

Although the chairmanship of the former president of Mali, Alpha Oumar Konare, has added considerable charisma and dynamism to the OAU/AU bureaucracy in Addis Ababa, the flurry of decisions and activity in 2004 cannot be attributed solely to the new leadership in the AU Commission. The determination with which the AU security architecture is being transformed from blueprint to functioning institutions is primarily a sign that key African actors such as South Africa and Nigeria have a strong interest in making the AU work.

The African Peace and Security Council (APSC) is arguably the most important of the many new AU institutions. It consists of members from 15 AU countries. Ten serve for two years, while five keep their seats for three years. While there are no permanent members and no country has veto powers, the requirements for becoming an APSC member ensure the participation of Africa's economic and military heavyweights such as South Africa and Nigeria. The requirements include the capacity and commitment to shoulder the responsibilities of being an APSC member, such as participating in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peacemaking operations and contributing financially to the AU's peacemaking efforts. After serving one two- or three-year term, there are no restrictions on a country serving consecutive terms on the council. South Africa's foreign minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, was elected chairperson of the Peace and Security Council at the AU Summit in Addis Ababa in July 2004.

Unlike the SADC Organ, the APSC has not tied its hands when it comes to dealing with the internal affairs of its member states. The SADC Organ takes decisions by consensus, which means that each member in effect has a veto, as long as they show up at the Organ meetings. In contrast, when the APSC discusses the situation in a particular country,

that country will have to leave the meeting. This means that while SADC members can block decisions regarding themselves, the AU's institutional arrangements ensure that the organisation can make critical statements and decisions on the actions of particular member states. This gives the APSC considerably more credibility than the SADC Organ.

SADC's contributions to the AU

In the last year, students of Southern African security co-operation have turned their gaze from regional to continental developments. However, despite the impressive flurry of activities in the first half of 2004, it is still too early to say how strong an organisation the AU will become or how successful it will be in dealing with the continent's many security problems. While the AU has been more dynamic than SADC in the last year or so, it should be cautioned that it may well be unfair to compare the two institutions in this way. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, SADC also looked relatively dynamic when it was in its institution-building phase. It is only now, when the onus is on implementation and practical co-operation, that the process has slowed down. The same could happen to the AU, although there are already signs of the APSC being a much more visible and active institution than the SADC Organ has ever been. Secondly, the continental security structures rely on the subregional building blocks. SADC, together with Ecowas, has been the most important subregional organisation in bringing forward the AU security agenda.

Although official statements and actions were few and far between from the Organ in 2003 and the first half of 2004, this does not mean that it has been idle. Instead, SADC foreign, defence and security officials have been busy hammering out how the region will contribute — in concrete and significant ways — to realising the AU's security architecture. The SIPO makes numerous references to the AU and is committed to upholding its principles and contributing to its security mechanisms. As one of the AU-defined African regional communities, SADC members have played an important role in pushing a continental security agenda. For instance, SADC chiefs of staff have been instrumental in bringing about agreement on the stand-by force, helping to push aside Colonel Gaddafi's dream of an African army and setting up a more realistic alternative.

SADC's role in the AU is of course partly the effect of South Africa's strong interest in the continental organisation. However, the fact that South Africa often chooses to push its AU initiatives through the channel of SADC makes the subregional organisation important. Add to this the fact that Mozambique, a close ally of South Africa and prominent member of SADC, took over the AU reins from South Africa at the Maputo summit

in 2003, and the role of Southern Africa in creating the AU security structures becomes clear. Both Mozambique and South Africa — together with Lesotho — are part of the troika leadership of the SADC Organ, thus ensuring a strong link between the subregional and continental organisations.

Conclusion

The idea behind the AU has always been to strengthen continental co-operation through strengthening the 'building blocks' of the subregional groups. However, the attempt to simultaneously erect ambitious interstate institutions on both the continental and subregional levels raises some serious questions about how the continental and subregional levels of security organisation in Africa can function together and complement each other, rather than duplicate and steal scarce human and financial resources away from each other. The AU's endeavour to standardise the regional building blocks is already leading to some frustration in SADC: The priorities of the region do not always coincide with those of the continent, and not all policy-makers concerned with SADC Organ affairs are happy to let the Organ's agenda be dictated by AU decisions. So far, though, the co-ordination and co-operation is not going too badly. One reason for this is that neither the AU nor SADC has come far in implementing practical policies and programmes, thus making co-ordination less of a problem.