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The SADC Mutual Defence Pact: si vis pacem, para bellum?

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Part Two

Introduction

Part One of this analysis examined mutual defence pacts against the wider context of security, and probed the background to and provisions of the recently concluded SADC mutual defence pact. In essence, the pact allows for collective self-defence and collective action, stating that '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 action'. However, the text of the pact also states that parties have the option of choosing how to respond to a call for immediate action, presumably including the classic 'do nothing' policy option. Part Two explores the policy implications of this pact, by questioning whether it is an appropriate and thoughtful response to the troubles the region finds itself in.

The right response to the challenges of the time?

A decade after the cold war's end and apartheid's collapse, it is surprising to observe the tenacity of the military impulse. Many governments, whether of the superpower or regional variety, still find it attractive to exercise military force as a policy option. Bureaucrats and politicians, having noted academia's obsession with the notions of new / widened / human security, merely continue with maintaining the *status quo*. The British, claiming to be guided by an ethical foreign policy orientation, is the world's second-largest arms supplier. The post-apartheid South African government did not find it particularly difficult to retain the state's defence industry – and in particular in promoting seemingly lucrative arms sales. After some parliamentary debate, cabinet decided to embark on an ambitious project to upgrade the country's military hardware – at the staggering cost of R50 billion. The public debate around aspects of the 'arms deal' is by now legendary. The overriding question is to what extent the military can provide the region with security. Clearly, there is some role for the soldiers beyond maintaining regime security, and nobody is seriously arguing for the closing of the barracks. But what, exactly, do the people of the region want the soldiers to protect them from?

Africa's security threats ought to be understood in the context of the post 9/11 global security terrain, with American unilateralism and globalisation seemingly rampant. In the face of such global turbulence, the actions of a regional grouping in concluding a collective self-defence pact – in order to prepare for an armed attack from outside its borders – appears to be an anachronism. Pointing to the unstable Great Lakes region, some argue that there is a real danger that SADC countries will experience further armed attacks from outside their borders. Others highlight the threat from an assortment of trerrorist, ethnic, secessionist, criminal and suchlike groups. The reality is that SADC has to exhaust several instruments and strategies (primarily via its Organ, the UN and AU security system) before activating the provisions of the mutual defence pact. Without minimising the existence of 'traditional security' threats, it needs to be said that the issues on the human security agenda (human rights, democratic governance, poverty eradication, economic recovery from violent conflict) ought to be the region's focus. And to a large extent it is. The SADC Treaty explicitly recognises most of these issues – freedom from want and freedom from fear – as constituting the new terrain of struggle. Furthermore, as suggested above, the Organ's primary task is to promote peace and security in the region by way of conflict prevention, management and resolution. And if these efforts fail (as many argue, by pointing to Zimbabwe) then the region can call on either the new African Union or the United Nations, both mandated to assist and intervene in various ways to provent conflict and maintain or restore peace. In this sense, then, the focus of the region ought to be on advancing its collaborative security tasks.

Clearly, SADC and its leadership have a major task in explaining to the people of the region the pact's *raison d' etre*.

A paper tiger?

In terms of the current SADC security architecture, the organisation has two key instruments to manage threats to the region's peace and security: the Organ, designed to track, and take care of, conflicts between and within member states; and the Mutual Defence Pact, designed to allow a coordinated response to external military threats. In this sense, whether the threat emanates from outside, or within, SADC can proudly proclaim that it has adopted structures and mechanisms to deal with it. However none of this means that SADC is ready, in practice and on the ground, to act. Many argue that SADC's security mechanisms ought to be tested first. SADC and member states should therefore actively assist in getting the operationalisation of the Organ (including Article 9 of the Pact dealing with defence cooperation and preparation) off the ground. The creation of a SADC brigade as a regional contribution to the proposed African standby force[1] is the business of the Organ proper, and not the Mutual Defence Pact, as some seem to imply.

A jigsaw puzzle?

There is growing recognition that Africa's emerging security architecture might be unnecessarily complicated for the tasks at hand. There is poor evidence of a harmonious fit of the various building blocks of the continent's security arrangements. To strengthen the collective security approach, a special effort is needed to clarify the relationships between – and priorities of – various relevant but overlapping activities; the AU's fledgling Peace and Security Council; the AU's Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA); the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security and its sub-committees; and the SADC Mutual Defence Pact. At a minimum, the implementation of the working plans of the SADC (the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Programme – RISDP) and the Organ (the Strategic Indicative Programme of the Organ – SIPO) ought to be closely coordinated and rationalised.[2]

Challenges to the Region

Poverty and underdevelopment

Southern Africa remains one of the poorest regions in the world. Half of the region's people live on a dollar a day or less. In countries such as Zambia, Mozambique or Malawi, at least 60 per cent of households live below national poverty income levels. The poorest households in the region are concentrated in the rural areas. In South Africa, perhaps the world's most unequal society, about 60 per cent of Africans live below this line, compared to only 2 per cent of whites. Of the estimated South African population of 45 million, 10 million find themselves in the low income category, with another 20 million in the underclass – the illiterate, uneducated, unemployable. For some economists this is a social crisis waiting to explode.

Weak states

Not all the countries of the region suffer from a dysfunctional public sector. However, colonialism, violent conflict, failure of models of development, high levels of debt and the subsequent imposition of structural adjustment programmes have undermined the capacity of the state to provide services and regulate society. Weak states mean the unchecked exercise of power, uncontrolled criminality and corruption, and an accelerated brain-drain. It also means a deterioration of civil-military relations. The era of African *coups d' etat* has not yet passed. Policy making is thus increasingly dominated by outside forces such as the international financial institutions, working in a neo-liberal framework that few believe privileges the poor.

Resource conflicts

Angola and the DRC have experienced the most horrific wars, with millions dead and maimed. Although complex, a significant cause of these violent conflicts relates to efforts to control access to the mineral riches found in these countries: oil, diamonds and other minerals, and timber. Elsewhere in the region, periodic droughts (accelerated, some believe, by global warming) might – if poorly managed – in future result in water wars.

Disease

Major diseases in the region cause suffering and death, and impact greatly on the poor by perpetuating poverty. The high incidence of HIV/Aids, malaria and tuberculosis in the region acts as a damper on socio-economic development, erodes the social base and robs the region of its intellectual capital. According to UN estimates, the Aids death toll for Africans will be 40 million by 2010. The crisis is particularly severe in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Malaria kills over one million people worldwide each year, with no vaccine available. For poor countries, the cost of the tools required to fight TB, malaria and HIV might be prohibitive.

Economic marginalisation

The effects of globalisation and the revolution in information and communication technology (ICT) has hit the region like a tsunami wave, threatening to drown all those in its path. Very few economies in the region are prepared for it; and efforts to harmonise and incorporate regional economic activities with the demands of the global capitalist system, such as intra-SADC trade and trade agreements with key global players, might be too little too late.

Democratic governance

Democracy is a relative newcomer to the region. As a popular approach to governance, it has apparently settled in comfortably, with only Swaziland and the post-conflict countries of the DRC and Angola struggling to adapt to its demands. But old habits die hard and many predict democratic reversals for countries under severe socio-economic stress. Democratic consolidation is by no means a foregone conclusion.

Concluding thoughts

The world is currently experiencing significant turmoil and instability. Africa has a small and perhaps diminishing capacity to absorb the impact of external shocks. Mutual defence pacts will not protect the region's peoples from continuing local and global exploitation. Civil society – including the academic community – is correct in questioning and critiquing the ruling elite's obsession with power and force. It becomes key, therefore, for governments and peoples to develop a deep understanding of the nature and impact of this emerging global security and economic order, as expressed through the 'war on terror' and globalisation agendas. Such new understandings should assist with determining, harmonising and integrating national priorities and structures with the regional and continental security architecture. In the process, SADC, its Organs and its Pact will experience continuous transformation and the development of shared values, hopefully giving rise to a new understanding of the old saying 'to make peace, prepare for war'.

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Sources of further reading

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Endnotes:

1. According to South African Minister of Defence Mosiuoa Lekota the African standby force is at an 'advanced state of discussion' with 'full agreement and consensus' on a range of matters such as doctrine, peacekeeping, standards, and the like (Defence Department Budget Vote, 13 June 2003).
2. It appears the 2003 SADC Summit was aware of this requirement and gave instructions, presumably to the SADC Secretariat, to take appropriate action.