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SADC STANDBY FORCE INTERVENTION CAPABILITY : CHALLENGES TO OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT

Colonel Rashia Phofuetsil

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Exercise Solo Flight

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Colonel Rashia Phofuetsil

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SADC STANDBY FORCE INTERVENTION CAPABILITY: CHALLENGES TO OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

Southern African Development Community region herein referred to as SADC, has a standing military force formally known as SADC Brigade. This intervention component is now called Southern African Development Community Standby Force (SADCSF) as it comprises of civilian and police components as well.¹ The SADCSF was formed in 2007 in Zambia in line with African Union (AU) concept of standby force which has been cascaded to regional level hence the formation of regional standby forces such as SADCSF. The African Union Standby Force (AUSF) and by extension the regional standby forces, envisage to have a capability that would enable it to intervene in troubled areas to address, issues that include gross violation of human security such as genocide, coup de tat, civil unrest and also to address other contemporary human security challenges such as humanitarian disasters².

The capability and operational preparedness of the SADCSF can be regarded as work in progress. The standby force has more than 10 years of existence but has not effectively demonstrated a meaningful intervention mechanism in as far as intervening to address human security challenges in the region is concerned. Interventions in conflict areas have been in the Democratic Republic of Congo, by a tripartite alliance of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe and recently the intervention by South Africa, a

¹ Bake, D.P and Maeresera S (n.d.). SADCBRIG intervention in SADC Member States:A Reason to Doubt. *African Security Review 18.1 Institute for Security Studies* .

² Solomon, H. (n.d.). Critical Reflections of the African Standby Force: The Case of its SADC Contingent . *Southern African Peace and Security Studies ,Volume,Number 2* .

regional hegemony who has not been able to rally the entire region in this endeavour³. Lesotho has been experiencing internal strife emanating from the political unrest, a situation that has been ongoing for a long time. Zimbabwe recently experienced a “coup” code named “Operation Restore Legacy” by the military, which the region seemed neither interested nor prepared to intervene to stop it.⁴ On the humanitarian front, the regional partners, Mozambique, Malawi and some parts of Zimbabwe were ravaged by a cyclone around March 2019 and the response from the regional body was slow and on voluntary basis.⁵

AIM

The aim of this paper is to argue that Southern Africa, despite having initially formed the SADC standby force in accordance with African Peace and Security Architecture to address regional peace and security challenges, has failed to demonstrate both an employment mechanism and meaningful capability to intervene to address human security challenges in the region.

The scope of the paper will cover SADC Regional Legal Frameworks for Peace and Security, Regional Security Threats, SADC Standby Force Capability and Readiness and the Challenges to Intervention and Trigger for Mobilisation and Response Mechanism.

SADC REGIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The Southern African region can be regarded as enjoying a reasonable peace dividend and relative calm. The region however used to be conflict ridden with civil

³ Bake, D.P and Maeresera S (n.d.). SADCBRIG intervention in SADC Member States:A Reason to Doubt. *African Security Review 18.1 Institute for Security Studies* .

⁴ Chigara, B. (2018). “Operation Restore Legacy (2017) renders Southern African Development Community (SADC) constitutionalism suspect in the coup d’état that was not a coup”. *Oregon Review of International Law, Volume 20 Issue 1* , 1-43.

⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03>

wars in Angola and Mozambique as well as apartheid rule in South Africa which had caused the neighbouring countries to form what was referred to as the Frontline States.⁶ The region has over the years transformed and has legal mechanisms in place to address regional peace and security issues. The Harmonised Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (HSIPO II), alongside the SADC Mutual Defence Pact 2003, are there to guide the implementation of what is referred to as the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. The HSIPO (II) identifies objectives related to improved politics and diplomacy in the SADC region amongst them being to protect people of the region against harm arising from conflict.⁷ Formed in 2001, the SADC's Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation forms the key legal framework for peace and security⁸. According to Hull and Derblom, 2009, the Protocol was adopted and the Organ was to be incorporated in the overall SADC structures and placed under the authority of the Summit. The Protocol (2001) further outlines the general objectives of promoting peace and security in the SADC region which are just to name a few, protection against instability that would occur as from the breakdown of law and order, coup de tat and humanitarian crisis arising from natural disasters.

REGIONAL SECURITY THREATS

The end of the tumultuous period in the region, which was characterised by civil wars, saw calm coming to the SADC region. This was followed by the end of apartheid rule in SA. It however should be noted that there are still grey areas that need to be addressed such as the unstable security situation in DRC. The DRC as one

⁶ Hull, C. a. (2009). Abandoning frontline trenches? Capabilities for peace and security in the SADC region. Swedish Defence Research Agency. *Swedish Defence Research Agency* .

⁷ Desmidt, S. (2017). *Understanding The Southern African Development Community Peace and security: how to fight old and new demons?* www.ecdpm.org/pedro.

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member of SADC has been embroiled in some internal unrest from warring militant groups.⁹ The country recently held elections that saw President Kabila who had been in power since the assassination of his father relinquishing power. The DRC situation is mostly compounded by rebel movements suspected to be operating across the borders of Burundi and Rwanda which creates an uncertainty in the prospects of an everlasting peace in the country post elections.

Lesotho is another country that from time to time experiences internal political instability. Lesotho's political bickering is compounded by military meddling in the political affairs of the country. In 2015 there was an incident that involved the assassination of ex-Army Commander Mahao, who was once the commander of the SADC Standby Force. SADC instituted a Commission of Inquiry to establish the root cause of the instability.¹⁰ The situation almost led to an outbreak of conflict. The argument for the solution in Lesotho has been to reform the security sector. Currently the efforts made by SADC to find a lasting solution have been the employment of a small contingent called *SADC Prevention Mission in The Kingdom of Lesotho* whose aim is to see the country realise necessary reforms.¹¹

In Zimbabwe there was a situation that saw the forced step down of President Mugabe by the military he was replaced with his deputy whom he had deposed, the current President, Mr Edson Mnangagwa. This was celebrated in some quarters but

⁹ Ancas, S. (n.d.). The effectiveness of regional peacemaking in Southern Africa –Problematising the United Nations-African Union-Southern African Development Community relationship. 129-152.

¹⁰ Desmidt, S. (2017). *Understanding The Southern African Development Community Peace and security: how to fight old and new demons?* www.ecdpm.org/pedro.

¹¹ Magogo, J. L. (2018, April). 2nd Planning Conference for SADC Standby Force Command Post Exercise convened. *SADC Secretariat Monthly Newsletter Issue 4* , p. 15.

had the potential to explode into a civil war.¹² It is ironic that after endorsing the Zimbabwean 2013 elections, the SADC and AU stood by as the “democratically elected” government of Robert Mugabe was deposed via a military takeover in 2015 without any attempt of intervention by SADC¹³. The non intervention led to President Mugabe berating SA and the region by saying he had hoped that given the military strength and influence would rally the region to intervene. He categorically singled SA and berated that former President Zuma and he said, they “gave a false impression that all was okay and that they had spoken not just to us but also to the soldiers, and then gave out that there was no need for intervention”.¹⁴ He pointed that this is what ultimately influenced non action from the rest of the region.

The afore mentioned cases define the more state centric definition of human security challenges in the region that normally requires armed intervention. In all the cited case SADCSF was never postured to intervene and in the case of Lesotho a call was made for intervention but there was no readily available force.¹⁵ The region also experiences other human security threats such as the constant breakout of ebola in DRC, the threat of drought as well as the recent tropical cyclones that hit Mozambique, Malawi and some parts of Zimbabwe.¹⁶ The latter threats may not necessarily require the entire standby force intervention but the gross loss of life and disruption to basic amenities caused by the cyclones require prompt response to take

¹² Chigara, B. (2018). “Operation Restore Legacy (2017) renders Southern African Development Community (SADC) constitutionalism suspect in the coup d’état that was not a coup”. *Oregon Review of International Law, Volume 20 Issue 1* , 1-43.

¹³Chigara, B. (2018). “Operation Restore Legacy (2017) renders Southern African Development Community (SADC) constitutionalism suspect in the coup d’état that was not a coup”. *Oregon Review of International Law, Volume 20 Issue 1* , 1-43.

¹⁴ *ibid*

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¹⁶Yuhas, A. (2019, March 19). Cyclone Idai May Be ‘One of the Worst’ Disasters in the Southern Hemisphere. New York, NY, USA.

aid to the affected person to reduce the humanitarian suffering as espoused in the organ's objectives.

THE STANDBY FORCE CAPABILITY AND READINESS

The SADC Standby Force is a concept that in effect comprises of military force, civilian and police components of a brigade. The individual countries pledge battalion size forces that are put under standby at respective countries “on call” for in the event there is an urgent need for deployment. It has to be noted that the composition of the force still has serious challenges that would hamper operational effectiveness in the event there is a need for deployment. The main challenge with the standby force is that despite having more than ten years, it is still lacks the requisite capacity to respond timely and operate smoothly as envisaged by the conceptualised capability.¹⁷ It is however assuring that member states, albeit individually, continue to participate in the United Nations and African Union Peace Support Operations. This move gives the participating nations the required exposure in peace support operations and would enhance regional capacity to conduct own operations. It is however unfortunate that not all states partake in these initiatives which does not help in building the standby force capability. Currently as per the AUSF roster of a six-monthly rotational basis, the SADC SF has been put on standby as per the roster from 1st January 2019 to 31st June 2019. The assumption is that being on standby, SADC SF should be prepared to execute its responsibility to “provide the African Union with capabilities to respond to conflicts through the deployment of multi-dimensional peacekeeping forces and to undertake interventions pursuant to Article 4(h) and (j) of

¹⁷ Okonkwobo, E. A. (2017). Feasibility of funding peace operation in Africa: understanding the challenges of Southern African Development Community Standby Force (SADCSF). *Africa Review*, 2017 VOL. 9, NO. 2, 140–153, 140-153.

the Constitutive Act” when required to do so.¹⁸ The standby force should be able to undertake tasks such as observation and monitoring missions, peace support missions, interventions for peace and security restoration. The request for intervention should come at behest of a Member State.¹⁹ On Command and Control the SADC Standby force operates as a tool of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. Its employment guidance is derived from the SADC Committee of Chiefs of Defence staff and the Committee of SADC Police Chiefs.²⁰

CHALLENGES TO INTERVENTION MECHANISM

The standby force despite being in existence on the ground there are however many factors that point to lack of a comprehensive intervention mechanism in place that would be effected at a time of dire need. The following are discussed to point out the limitations and challenges.

Lack of Interoperability and Regional Cohesion

SADC region constitute of countries that seems to have a more common understanding in terms of main objectives which include achievement of common development and economic growth. It however does not possess the same with regard to preservation of peace and security of regional countries. The constitution of individual countries point to a silo mentality is as far as integrating military capability is concerned. The individual countries military procurements are meant to meet individual country needs of building own capability to meet national threats. It has been

¹⁸ *SADC Prevention Mission In The Kingdom Of Lesotho*. (2018). Retrieved May 2019, From <http://www.SADC.int/Documents-Publications/Show/5508>.

¹⁹ Magogo, J. L. (2018, April). 2nd Planning Conference for SADC Standby Force Command Post Exercise convened. *SADC Secretariat Monthly Newsletter Issue 4* , p. 15.

²⁰ *ibid*

argued by different writers as to what exactly is at the heart of the failure to build a strong and operational intervention force as opposed to a paper force. The answers could be found somewhere between the lack of political will and direction, lack of capacity and resources, mistrust between individual countries as well as competing individual strategic interests.

Sophie Desmidt (2017) contends that “SADC peace and security interventions are not driven by an adherence to the SADC Treaty, guidelines or protocols, but by efforts of individual or coalitions of SADC member states”. This has been evident with the interventions by Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola in DRC, as well as South Africa and Botswana in Lesotho. Currently South Africa is in DRC on a PSO mission, not flying the SADC flag.²¹ The prevention mission in Lesotho is constituted by a few countries from SADC. Desmit further asserts that the lack of effective interventions in SADC could be attributable to a more fundamental issue which is lack of shared political values.²² South Africa's has been pointed out as intervening to pursue national economic interests and that in the DRC the target is pursuit of national interest.

Command and Control (C2)

The commander and control constitute the human element. The concept of C2 for SADC standby force is that a force commander would be nominated from individual countries. The challenge with the arrangement is that the force

²¹ Desmidt, S. (2017). *Understanding The Southern African Development Community Peace and security: how to fight old and new demons?* www.ecdpm.org/pedro

²² *ibid*

commander and the rest of the force are postured on standby at home countries.²³

Logistics

Botswana is host to the Main Logistics Depot, which is a central regional facility for maintenance, storage and management of logistical infrastructure for the SADC SF. The site for the depot has been standing for a considerable time and has not been fully established or resourced to ensure that sustenance capability is built for the regional standby force. This is despite that, apart from own resources, the region receives some benevolence from donor countries willing to support the regions peace support initiative.

TRIGGER FOR MOBILISATION AND EMPLOYMENT MECHANISMS

Conflict or humanitarian crisis situations have indicators which call for effective early warning mechanisms that would trigger action on the part of the regional body. This seems not to be the case as SADC almost all the time reacts to the situation when there is already duress. It has become evident that the early warning mechanisms SADC are not effective. The regional body has even been criticized for slow implementation due in part to its evident non unwillingness to share vital peace and security information as has been observed by Motsamai (2014). He argues that the Regional Early Warning Centre (REWC) can be said to be “veiled in secrecy, with speculation that it exists merely as intelligence based system to protect ruling

²³Kok, N. (2015, Jan). Post-conflict development What South Africa can achieve through SADC . *Institute of Security Studies Paper 279* .

regimes in the region”²⁴. This but supports the argument that there cannot be a timely response when countries still operate in silos and have misplaced priorities with regard to the broad regional security threats. This would mean that REWC cannot inform about potential threats timely (ibid).²⁵

Humanitarian situations would normally have warnings before they occur, such as early warnings for impending cyclones. *Cyclone Idai*²⁶ happened early 2019 and left a trail of destruction. The SADC had recommended that in the event of heavy or above normal rains, intervention mechanisms should include implementation of the SADC disaster preparedness and response strategy, utilisation of the SADC Disaster Preparedness and Response Fund and positioning of SADC Standby Force.²⁷ The scenario played out, as *Cyclone Idai* came with destruction and loss of lives. The countries responded individually with SA again displaying its capability to intervene alone. Some other members played their part albeit there was less in the form of employment of the standby force. This is surprising that in 2015 *Ex Blue Okavango*, an *Air Exercise* was conducted in Botswana to exercise the SADC air forces on humanitarian rescue operation missions.²⁸

²⁴ Motsamai, D. (2014). SADC 2014 – 2015: Are South Africa and Zimbabwe shaping the organisation? *Institute for Security Studies*, 1-12.

²⁵ (CSC), S. C. (2018). *Early Warning Bulletin Update of the 2018/19 Southern Africa Regional Rainfall Season*. Gaborone: SADC CSC Early Warning Bulletin.

²⁶ Yuhas, A. (2019, March 19). Cyclone Idai May Be ‘One of the Worst’ Disasters in the Southern Hemisphere. New York, NY, USA.

²⁷ ibid

²⁸ Keakabetse, B. (2015, Jul , Fri 24). Blue Okavango Exercise Ends. . Gaborone, Gaborone, Botswana.

CONCLUSION

The SADCSF is a regional intervention force with the mandate to help address peace and security threats in SADC and AU. It has however limitations that have been evidenced by failure to effectively intervene in situation that would have validated its capability to employ even beyond the SADC borders. DRC situation is one case in point where only SA is currently employed not as part of SADCSF. Lesotho is country that from time to time experiences internal political instability compounded by military meddling in the political affairs of the country. *SADC Prevention Mission in The Kingdom Of Lesotho* whose aim is to see the country realise necessary reforms should be having the full presence of the SADCSF not a few countries. Zimbabwe military takeover was left to pass and the coup was “legitimised” by non intervention despite SADC having recognised the democratic process in 2013 which meant that President Mugabe was properly voted into office. The SADC was slow to respond to the devastation caused by *Cyclone Idai* early 2019 and did not deploy SADCSF to help in relieve work despite SADC *Centre for Climate Services* recommendation of SADCSF in the event of above normal rainfall.²⁹ There is however more that could be done in this regard to improve on the intervention mechanisms of the SADCSF. The regional body could embrace a responsibility to protect concept as one of the determining and influencing factors to address the limitation placed by the current intervention mechanism. A further consideration could be undertaken to determine the possibility of enhancing the intervention mechanisms.

²⁹(CSC), S. C. (2018). *Early Warning Bulletin Update of the 2018/19 Southern Africa Regional Rainfall Season*. Gaborone: SADC CSC Early Warning Bulletin.

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