South Africa and Regional Peacekeeping

by Jakkie Cilliers and Mark Malan

In April 1996 South Africa donated R12.6 million (about $3.2 million) to the United Nations in aid of international peacekeeping operations in Africa. The amount, equal to about 80 percent of South Africa's regular UN budget assessment, was “over and above” Pretoria's other voluntary contributions. The donation fulfilled a December 1995 commitment made by South Africa's permanent representative to the UN, Khophusizi Jele, following the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 50/83, which absolved South Africa of its membership arrears accrued during the apartheid years.

Although this contribution may have temporarily staved off pressure on South Africa to become involved in UN peacekeeping operations, it will not be long before the country is again requested (and this time morally obliged) to contribute troops to the UN, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), or a regional peacekeeping organization under the broad ambit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In fact, South Africa recently dispatched a military advance team to Burundi following urgent appeals by both UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim (in the latter case directly to South African Minister of Defense Joe Modise) for assistance in the efforts by neighboring countries to do something about the escalating ethnic slaughter.

South Africa had previously refused such requests on the grounds that participation in peacekeeping operations could not be seriously considered until after the integration of the country's various armed forces into a single South African National Defense Force (SANDF). Completion of this process is expected by the end of August 1996, although the training of integrated members and the cultural adjustment of the entire force will continue for some years. (See “South Africa's New Defense Force: Progress and Prospects” by Rocklyn Mark Williams, CSIS Africa Notes no. 170, March 1995.) Although still cautious on the issue of troop commitment, the SANDF seems to have accepted the inevitability of future involvement in peace operations, perhaps as soon as the end of 1996.

A May 1996 South African White Paper on National Defense has proposed a frame of reference for peacekeeping operations not dissimilar to that adopted by the United States:

- There should be parliamentary approval and public support for such involvement. This will require an appreciation of the associated costs and risks, including the financial costs and risk to the lives of military personnel.
- The operation should have a clear mandate, mission, and objectives.
- There should be realistic criteria for terminating the operation.
- The operation should be authorized by the United Nations Security Council.
- Operations in southern Africa should be sanctioned by SADC and should be undertaken together with other SADC states rather than conducted on a unilateral basis. Similarly, operations in Africa should be sanctioned by the OAU.

There is a widely held expectation that Africa will be the primary focus of South African involvement in peacekeeping and humanitarian support operations. Africa in the 1990s has been the venue of some of the more spectacular failures of international peacekeeping. The experiences of the major powers and traditional UN troop-contributing states in Somalia, Rwanda, Mozambique, and Angola have made them increasingly
The Organization of African Unity

The United Nations Charter adopted in 1945 anticipated the involvement of "regional arrangements or agencies" in UN efforts to maintain international peace and security. Article 53 even refers to enforcement action by regional bodies, but requires that in most circumstances "no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council." Following the establishment of the OAU in 1963, however, African interstate conflict was dealt with through a system of ad hoc arrangements, while intrastate conflict was largely left to each member state to handle as it saw fit.

Only after the end of the cold war did the OAU acknowledge that "there is a link between security, stability, development, and cooperation in Africa" and that the problems of security and stability in many African countries had impaired the capacity of the OAU to achieve cooperation. As a result, a Division of Conflict Management was established in March 1992 and given a small budget. Soon thereafter, in July 1992, the annual OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government agreed "in principle" to create within the organization's secretariat a "Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution," which was inaugurated the following year. (See "Conflict Management in Africa" by Herman I. Cohen, CSIS Africa Notes no. 181, February 1996.) OAU Secretary General Salim described the significance of this step as follows: "What Africa said to the world is that, yes, we may continue to need outside help in dealing with our problems, but we will be centrally involved and provide leadership in any efforts at conflict resolution. . . . we can no longer fold our hands and wait for the foreigners to come and resolve our problems."

The establishment of the Mechanism committed the OAU to close cooperation with the United Nations in peacemaking and peacekeeping. The Mechanism is also committed to close cooperation with regional organizations such as SADC.

As part of this process of capacity-building, the OAU intends to:

- establish an early warning network to "cover the entire continent" (a first Africa-wide seminar on the subject was held in Addis Ababa during January 1996 and a strategy group was appointed to assist the OAU with the establishment of the network);
- establish and enhance the capacity of the OAU conflict management center through the seconding of personnel from member countries (some African countries, notably South Africa, have already responded);
- establish a database covering all member states, detailing each country's general background, its conflict profile, and individuals who can be engaged as special envoys or special representatives for conflict prevention duties (some of these envoys are already in the field in Burundi);
- have member states "earmark forces in their respective armies and security structures for possible utilization in peace observation and peacemaking operations first and foremost by the United Nations and, in exceptional situations by the OAU";
- "establish a proper machinery and unit to manage peacekeeping operations" (with the financial assistance of the United States and other countries, the construction of the OAU situation room is now nearing completion);
- examine "possibilities of establishing a proper military Coordinating Unit at the OAU [Secretariat and Funding]."

Although the OAU's formal security mechanisms have improved steadily in recent years, its ability to intervene and coordinate operations effectively is still at an early stage of development, and its past experience has not been positive. The operation in Chad in the early 1980s was a disaster, and
the deployment of a military observer group in Rwanda during 1992 and 1993 was patently unsuccessful. Virtually only the observer mission in Burundi has played a positive role.

By the OAU’s very nature, decision making within the organization is problematic, but even more so is the tendency among many African countries to pay little more than lip service to OAU resolutions. As a result, the OAU’s shortfalls in political will, finances, and experience will continue to limit its capacity to mount all but the most modest of mediation and/or observer operations.

It is perhaps at the regional level, therefore, that preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, mediation, and possibly peacekeeping may come to the fore. Because of southern Africa’s relative stability, the continent is looking to SADC in general, and South Africa in particular, to exhibit the desired leadership and set an example in this regard.

SADC

The Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC)—SADC’s predecessor organization—was established in 1980 and focused on issues of economic cooperation and development. In 1989, the SADCC heads of state decided to formalize the organization and replace the existing memorandum of agreement. In 1992, after years of negotiation, the member countries signed a treaty inaugurating SADC. The SADC treaty calls inter alia for “a framework of cooperation 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.”

With the change of name from SADCC to SADC, the organization’s emphasis changed from “development coordination” to “development integration.” With the entry of South Africa in 1994 and Mauritius in 1995, SADC now has 12 members, the others being Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This membership list includes some of the world’s poorest nations. The total combined GNP of the 10 SADCC countries was $28 billion in 1992, while that of South Africa was $106 billion.

In essence, the vision of SADC is that of full economic integration and trade liberalization in the southern African region. Although SADC defines itself as a development agreement, it also sees itself as a regional political organization under the OAU with a special interest in mediation, preventive diplomacy, and peacekeeping.

Article 4 of the SADC treaty commits the organization 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. Although the internal practices of the SADC member states do not equate with these ideals, Article 4 provides some source of communality in intent.

Article 5 of the treaty lists eight objectives, including an effort to “promote and defend peace and security.” The treaty also lists 10 activities in support of these objectives; none of these activities are directly related to defense or security cooperation, the closest being a commitment to “promote the coordination and harmonization of the international relations of Member States” and “develop such other activities as Member States may decide in furtherance of the objectives of this Treaty.”

The first serious movement toward establishing a southern African security institutional framework originated at a SADC Workshop on Democracy, Peace, and Security held in Windhoek in mid-July 1994 and was strengthened at the end of that month by the decision of the antiapartheid “Front-Line states” (FLS) grouping to dissolve and “become the political and security wing of SADC.” A flurry of meetings and recommendations followed on the establishment of some structure to deal with security and preventive diplomacy. The most prominent of these recommendations was to replace the FLS structure with an Association of Southern African States (ASAS).

At a January 1996 meeting in Gaborone, Botswana, the SADC countries’ ministers of foreign affairs, defense, and security agreed to recommend to their governments the creation of a SADC Organ on Politics, Defense, and Security that “would allow more flexibility and timely response, at the highest level, to sensitive and potentially explosive situations.” The use of the rather strange term “organ” was borrowed from similar usage by the OAU, which had established a policy group called the “Central Organ.” This agreement would allow for a permanent SADC mechanism while maintaining the flexible approach of the old FLS grouping.

At the June 1996 summit meeting of SADC’s heads of state and government in Gaborone, it was affirmed that the objectives of the Organ would include the following commitments:

- Protect the people and safeguard the development of the region against instability arising from the breakdown of law and order, interstate conflict, and external aggression.
- Cooperate fully in regional security and defense through conflict prevention, management, and resolution.
- Mediate in interstate and intrastate disputes and conflicts.
- Use preventive diplomacy to preempt disputes in the region, both within and between states, through an early warning system.
- Where conflict does occur, to seek to end this as quickly as possible through diplomatic means. Only where such means fail would the Organ recommend that the summit (heads of state) should consider punitive measures. These responses would be agreed in a protocol on peace, security, and conflict resolution.
The Inter-State Defense and Security Committee (ISDSC)
The ISDSC is a forum (presently chaired by South African Minister of Defense Modise) at which ministers of southern African states responsible for defense, home affairs/public security, and state security meet to discuss a range of issues relating to their individual and collective defense and security. Established in 1983 under the aegis of the FLS, the ISDSC initially included six member states (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). The remaining SADC countries joined the ISDSC in the 1990s, so that its membership now parallels that of SADC.

Until recently, the ISDSC was essentially an informal structure. It does not have an executive secretary or a permanent secretariat. In October 1995, during the Sir Pierre van Ryneveld Conference held at the University of Pretoria, Lieutenant General R.S. Shikapwashya, the chief of the Zambian air force, listed the objectives of the ISDSC as follows:

- prevention of aggression from within and outside the region;
- prevention of coups d'état;
- management and resolution of conflicts;
- promotion of regional stability;
- promotion of regional peace;
- promotion and enhancement of regional development.

The ISDSC has adopted, as a principle, unrestricted bilateral defense cooperation between member states as well as between member states and countries outside of the region. The ISDSC will therefore promote multilateral cooperation and provide intelligence support for preventive diplomacy initiatives in the event of pending or actual hostilities. It also intends to develop the capacity to plan combined operations, such as staff procedures, drills, tactics, and the deployment of telecommunications equipment. It appears that the ISDSC will become the formal mechanism for multilateral military, police, and intelligence coordination.

At a March 1996 conference co-hosted by the Johannesburg-based Institute for Defense Policy, the SANDF's deputy chief of staff of operations, Major General F.E. du Toit, said that "we have already started liaison for combined planning and exercises [with the ISDSC], which could also include combined exercises to prepare for participation in peace support operations."

In sum, developments within SADC at the institutional level provide a framework for cooperation and assistance within southern Africa, without which peacekeeping and cooperative security would not be possible. The region has demonstrated a strong consensus on the need for security coordination, but, impressive as the organizational developments may appear on paper, it is important not to overstate the contribution that can be made in the near future to peacekeeping, defense, and security by either SADC or the ISDSC.

Risks of Area-of-Influence Peacekeeping
In any analysis of the possible costs and benefits of a country's involvement in peacekeeping operations in its own backyard, the outcomes of the intervention of the Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States in Liberia and the Russian role in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) must inevitably cast a shadow over the prospects.

In the former case, the West African peacekeepers soon found themselves embroiled in an internal feud between a number of political groupings and criminal gangs, with their neutrality lost. In the case of the CIS too, area-of-influence peacekeeping soon degenerated into classic military interventions where restraint and due regard for human life and rights came a poor second to national political interests.

Two issues warrant elaboration here: (1) To what extent is it possible or politically advisable for the UN to devolve peacekeeping in (southern) Africa to a regional organization such as SADC or any of its organs? (2) Will area-of-influence peacekeeping in southern Africa degenerate into peace enforcement as in Liberia and the former Soviet Union?

Devolution of Responsibility. Whereas peacekeeping missions during the cold war were exclusively UN affairs, the UN has recently come to share responsibilities in the field with regional organizations, such as the CIS and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Georgia, and with a military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in the former Yugoslavia.

From the perspective of a cash-strapped UN, it might seem that having regional organizations assume some of the world body's peacekeeping responsibilities could alleviate its financial problems. But such a devolution of responsibility for action threatens to undermine the guidance and control of the UN, and thus its impartiality and legitimacy. Even the impact on UN finances might not be altogether positive. If a country such as South Africa, Botswana, or Zimbabwe were directly contributing to the peacekeeping activities of an organization such as SADC or...
the OAU, that nation might be hesitant to pay its share of assessments for UN peacekeeping on the grounds that it is already carrying a burden in this sector.

Matters can be particularly difficult in cases where the UN hands over authority and jurisdiction to a non-UN multilateral force (as happened in Somalia) or where the UN takes over from such a force (as in Haiti). Such arrangements have complicated the role not only of the UN, but also of peacekeepers in general. This development occurred largely as a result of the growth of UN involvement in situations where the world body’s humanitarian assistance and nation-building responsibilities have expanded dramatically in response to the collapse of normal state institutions.

The most important and potentially most dangerous consideration is that the use of a regional organization in peacekeeping operations could lead to loss of control over an operation by the UN Security Council and the UN secretary general. Although authority to establish a force rests solely on the sovereign powers of the overarching organ (e.g., the UN), authority to deploy is derived in part from the consent of the host country. The principle of consent and request by the host country is essential for the establishment of a peace support operation in any sovereign territory, except when the mandate of the responsible international organization indicates otherwise, or when (as in Somalia) there is effectively no host government to which the UN can turn.

A UN peace support force is strictly an impartial international force. Under the terms of the UN Charter, such a force, authorized by the competent organ of the UN and operating under its supervision, is a subsidiary organ of the UN—in effect, a UN agency. Clearly, the UN cannot easily transfer its responsibility for execution of a particular mandate to a regional organization and at the same time ensure that such a step will not undermine the UN and its integrity.

This challenge is compounded by the requirement for clear command-and-control relationships. Regional organizations are often unwilling to cooperate fully with the UN mission and may differ in their recommendations of what action is required, placing them at odds with the UN. Yet command and control of an operation should be clearly assigned to either the UN or the regional organization, not to both. Therefore, the UN may be hesitant to allow the regional organization much latitude. (In any case, the OAU, SADC, and the ISDSC do not as yet have the capacity to manage, coordinate, or direct anything beyond observers and diplomatic missions.)

Peacekeeping as practiced and taught by the UN is a demanding task, particularly given the self-restraint required and the need for the highest quality of leadership at the lower tactical levels. But there are vast differences in terms of skills, training, and education between the armed forces of the developed world and their counterparts in many African countries. African peacekeepers (unlike those from, say, Scandinavia) are not volunteers who are carefully selected and psychologically tested—the cream of a highly educated military force. Instead (at the risk of gross generalization), they are more likely to be run-of-the-mill soldiers, poorly trained and educated by international standards, and extremely conscious of their ethnic identity.

Finally, a regional organization operating under UN auspices (as it must) will inevitably be viewed as less impartial than a multinational UN force drawn from farther afield. There is always in such circumstances the risk that a perception will emerge of domination by a regional hegemonic power, a notion that could be applied to Nigeria in connection with the ECOMOG operation in Liberia, the United States in connection with the Organization of American States, and Russia in connection with the CIS. There can be little doubt that South Africa will suffer a similar fate in Southern Africa and perhaps even farther afield on the continent. Therefore, the military effectiveness of a regional organization (such as SADC or the OAU) might be outweighed by a reduction in its political effectiveness.

This having been said, there are some vital areas in which regional peacekeepers will have a decided advantage. One is that of local knowledge, acclimatization, and language. African culture, customs, and traditions are often foreign to troops from Europe or Asia. Equally important, a number of African countries (including Tunisia, Egypt, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Congo) have contributed or are contributing troops to peacekeeping operations. Within SADC alone, Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Tanzania have done so. Despite the fact that larger capacities and support systems may be lacking, therefore, the region has built up a considerable pool of experience.

Another advantage of regional involvement relates to the fact that it is often impossible to reflect upon the internal dynamics of any society, particularly in Africa with its notoriously porous borders, without looking at the larger regional situation. Few African intrastate conflicts are entirely internal affairs. More often than not there is a willing neighboring country or group that actively supports a particular faction, a regime that is willing to close its eyes in silent consent, or a government incapable of ensuring that its territory is not used as a refuge or support base by groups engaged in cross-border operations. The most common reasons for involvement in other countries’ problems are ethnic affinity and political sympathy. Within this context, and assuming that the required political will could be mustered, the OAU and SADC, working in tandem with the UN, should be able to bring considerable pressure to bear to reduce active meddling by neighboring countries in a conflict or potential conflict situation.

The few advantages of regional peacekeeping are perhaps negated by the complex nature of contemporary peace support operations and the doctrinal dilemmas that they pose for a region such as southern Africa.

**Doctrinal Dilemmas.** Neither effective mechanisms nor appropriate doctrine have yet been devised for responding
to the challenge of the “gray zone” in peacekeeping—the slippery slope between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Confusion between peacekeeping and enforcement action, including the tendency to shift from peacekeeping to enforcement action and then back again, has proven dangerous. This is essentially what was witnessed in the operations in Somalia, Liberia, and the former Yugoslavia (prior to the advent of the NATO Implementation Force [IFOR]), often with disastrous consequences. Examples of problems that can arise include the capture of peacekeepers as hostages, an attack on a “safe area” under UN protection, or a forcible attempt by a faction to redirect the distribution of humanitarian supplies to suit its own interests.

Such crises are likely where there is ongoing armed conflict among several contending factions, where there is no general agreement about the role of peacekeepers, or where initial cooperation has collapsed—in other words, the circumstances that could be expected in many African countries approaching the status of “failed states.” Here, the operational environment features factions, militias, and armed gangs with rudimentary and unclear command structures and little discipline. Combatants (if they can be called that) are often indistinguishable from the local population. Women, children, and the aged and infirm are more likely than the armed opposition to be targets of violence. As a result, there is no “front line” or clearly demarcated or identifiable areas controlled by opposing forces, no existing systems of local government, and no clear differentiation possible between refugees, displaced persons, and impoverished local residents. The remnants of the state security entities are likely to be biased and torn by factionalism—often acting and reacting with a callousness and brutality that is breathtaking in its disdain for human life and suffering.

Even highly trained and professional forces from the advanced countries have found it extremely difficult to respond in an appropriate manner to the challenges of peacekeeping in the gray zone. At the operational level, lightly armed peacekeepers normally lack the capacity for escalated armed response. At the same time, whatever reaction they do make carries the risk of undermining the moral authority conveyed by their multilateral presence. For peacekeepers to engage in a military confrontation with a particular faction is to compromise their impartiality and thereby forfeit their political usefulness. Any assessment of the potential reactions of African peacekeepers to such stresses is sure to be haunted by the specter of ECOMOG abuses in Liberia. Without considerable training and firm UN control, involvement by the member states of the OAU or SADC will inevitably slip from peacemaking to enforcement action.

Finally, the peacekeeping and donor fatigue so prevalent internationally may have inadvertently increased the likelihood of slides into peace enforcement. Given limited human and material assets, soldiers and commanders may well be tempted to replace consent with coercion, relying on more severe use of force to compensate for lack of resources.

Can SADC Do Peacekeeping?
The long-term enthusiasm of SADC member states for creating a standby peacekeeping capacity will depend largely on the extent to which South Africa demonstrates its willingness to take part in peace operations. As noted earlier, Pretoria’s ventures into conflict prevention and management have thus far stopped short of any commitment of troops. For example, in 1994 South Africa cooperated with Botswana and Zimbabwe in using diplomatic persuasion backed with a direct threat of military intervention to defeat an attempt to impose unconstitutional rule in Lesotho. The South African government has also cooperated in OAU efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts. A practical example is the role played by Minister of Foreign Affairs Alfred Nzo in visits to Burundi, Angola, and other conflict zones, although some skeptics have yet to be convinced of the utility of these interventions.

Aware that it will soon be expected to provide troops for international peacekeeping operations, the South African military is taking steps to prepare. Peacekeeping is now a topic of military education. A number of large peacekeeping-relevant map and field exercises have been held, with the next major exercise, MORNING STAR, scheduled for September 1996. Various research institutes and nongovernmental organizations are active in contributing to the debate and providing expertise on the subject of peacekeeping.

South Africa is planning to make its entry into peacekeeping in a cautious manner—ideally by first providing observers, then becoming involved in a noncombatant capacity (e.g., communications and logistics), and finally providing troop contingents.

Although the SANDF has no experience of participation in multilateral missions or of operating within the political constraints of UN peacekeeping operations, it is, by African standards, a highly competent and modern military. Moreover, many of its vehicles, systems, and equipment are tailor-made for deployment in the inhospitable African terrain, which is characterized by poor infrastructure, inadequate repair and maintenance facilities, and long distances.

On the other hand, the SANDF has suffered severe budget cuts since 1989 (about 50 percent in real terms) and is involved in a process of dramatic downsizing and restructuring that will obviously have an impact on its will and ability to contribute to peacekeeping operations. In fact, the SANDF has repeatedly emphasized the financial burden that peacekeeping would impose and has made it clear that the present defense budget would not be able to sustain anything but the most modest contribution. As a result, participation in peacekeeping operations will surely be used to argue for additional defense or foreign affairs funding.

Making the establishment of any viable regional
peacekeeping capacity uncertain is the fact that several of the larger countries in southern Africa (including South Africa itself) are wrestling with the problem of reshaping the military under conditions of drastic political change—in some cases a complete break with the old political order.

The process of military transformation is at an advanced stage in Namibia and Zimbabwe, although intramilitary ethnic tensions are still evident in the latter country. Mozambique and South Africa have barely completed the first phase of force integration, and the real challenge of creating effective and cohesive armies still lies ahead. Angola still has to run the full course of postconflict transition, under extremely adverse circumstances. Thus, four of the largest armies in southern Africa are at various stages of coping with the challenges of amalgamating diverse and previously adversarial armed forces into a single national military and at the same time fostering loyalty to a new political order.

It is not only the countries with large armies that face fundamental challenges. Civil-military relations in Lesotho are volatile, and it remains to be seen how the Swazi army will react to mounting pressures for democratization. Farther to the north, the forthcoming presidential election in Zambia carries a risk of increased violence and repression.

Given this background, it comes as little surprise that the 1996 White Paper on National Defense takes a cautious approach, stating that "the creation of a standing peacekeeping force in the region is neither desirable nor practically feasible. It is far more likely that the SADC countries will engage in ad hoc peace support operations if the need arises... It may... be worthwhile to establish a small peace support operations center, under the auspices of regional defense structures, to develop and coordinate planning, training, logistics, communications and field liaison teams for multinational forces."

Notwithstanding such pronouncements, there are some powerful realities and motives that could lead to South Africa's becoming involved in regional peacekeeping endeavors to a much greater extent than many would think desirable.

**Motives for Involvement**

In South Africa, public opinion is a factor that has not yet played a consistent role in foreign policy considerations. With many citizens still numbed by the deaths and atrocities from domestic conflict, the country has yet to experience the impact of public opinion aroused by a humanitarian tragedy abroad. Thus far, even nightly television news reports on the ethnic strife in Rwanda and Burundi have raised no more than a murmur of concern. As a result, South Africa escaped involvement with the token delivery of food and the excuse that it was still too preoccupied with its own transition.

This "easy way out" no longer exists, and in the future Parliament may not be able to ignore international pressure and domestic public opinion. During 1995, for example, a nationwide opinion poll, conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council and the Institute for Defense Policy, indicated that almost two-thirds of respondents wanted South Africa to have a peacekeeping force that could be utilized externally to help other countries maintain peace. Support for such a force was particularly strong among adherents of traditionally black parties, specifically the African National Congress (72 percent), the Pan-Africanist Congress (71 percent), and the Inkatha Freedom Party (69 percent). These results suggest that South African public opinion may underpin the tone of international morality with which South Africa attempts to portray its foreign policy dealings. (See "South Africa's Foreign Policy Priorities: A 1996 Update" by Greg Mills, CSIS Africa Notes no. 180, January 1996.)

Until fairly recently, some of the "older" peacekeeping countries (e.g., Canada, Norway, and Sweden) equated participation in peacekeeping with "good international citizenship." Now, however, it appears that considerations of altruism are on the wane, to be replaced by considerations of national prestige and self-interest—particularly with the entry, since the late 1980s, of literally dozens of "new" countries into peacekeeping. South Africa, aware of its human rights abuses under apartheid and the debt that it owes to the international community for the latter's help in bringing democracy to the country, has attempted to infuse its increasingly schizophrenic foreign policy with a particular moralistic tone. Peacekeeping is the epitome of international morality. Participation in peacekeeping, therefore, is a way of repaying the debt that the ANC feels it owes to the international community.

However, flirtations on the part of the new political incumbent in Pretoria with leaders such as Libya's Gaddafi and Cuba's Castro, and close relations with countries such as Iran, sit uncomfortably with appeals to morality in the capitals of the developed nations. In fact, it would probably be fair to say that South Africa's inconsistent and selective "morality" is watched with rising alarm and irritation by the country's more important trading partners.

Sometimes altruism and national interest go hand in hand. South Africa wants a permanent seat in an expanded UN Security Council or at least membership in a group of three or four African countries that would occupy in rotation a permanent seat assigned to the continent. With the expansion of the Council now firmly on the agenda, aspiring nations will have to demonstrate a solid commitment to international peace and security. Thus, South Africa's as yet unspoken ambition has been strengthened by the central role it has played in important international peace initiatives such as the extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the conclusion of the April 1996 Treaty of Pelindaba whereby more than 40 African nations pledged to remain nuclear weapons-free. Aspirations for international prestige and leadership necessarily make South Africa less resistant to requests and pressures to fulfill its international obligations. Security Council ambitions aside, South Africa is a continental leader and the dominant state in southern
Africa. Unavoidable responsibilities and commitments flow from its position of economic and moral strength. The other SADC countries (with the petulant exception of Zimbabwe) eagerly look to South Africa for both moral and material leadership. Because South Africa cannot prosper in a sea of African poverty and anarchy, Pretoria’s economic interests call for doing everything possible to stabilize the region. For South Africa, peacekeeping in southern and even Central Africa may therefore be directly relevant to its own national security and economic well-being.

There are a number of other reasons why countries participate in peacekeeping operations. Sometimes peacekeeping activities are seen as a way of giving the armed forces something else to do than plotting domestic coups and infusing them with professionalism and a respect for civilian authority that they often lack. It is difficult to estimate the influence that this consideration may have in South Africa, although the ANC views the security forces, still essentially under white senior management, with evident distrust. Meanwhile, the National Party and the Freedom Front, traditionally white parties, are increasingly concerned about what they perceive as a severe “lowering of standards” and the politicization of the armed forces. Keeping the men and women in uniform gainfully occupied may be a salient future consideration in the partisan political discourse on South Africa’s involvement in peacekeeping operations.

It is a truism that participation in peacekeeping operations will provide the SANDF with invaluable experience in its new peacetime role. The SANDF would benefit from the cross-fertilization that occurs during multilateral operations, leading to enhanced interoperability practices and an injection of new doctrine. It would also gain opportunities to show that many of its operational systems, such as its wheeled mine-protected vehicles, are indeed well suited to peacekeeping operations and deserving of close acquisition scrutiny by other countries.

For the SANDF, forced to justify itself to a skeptical public and a hostile parliamentary Defense Committee, peacekeeping provides a politically correct raison d’être—one certainly less ludicrous than the attempts of the Department of Defense to justify itself on the basis of its contribution to the Reconstruction and Development Program. In time this consideration will surely replace the view, prevalent among former officers of the apartheid-era South African Defense Force now serving in the SANDF, that too much participation in peacekeeping may detract from the primary focus of the armed forces, which these officers believe should be preparation for defense against an external attack. This notion that preparation against external attack should be the driving factor in SANDF force design is increasingly being contested. Eventually, the so-called “secondary functions” of the SANDF, such as its roles in support of the South African Police Service (SAPS) and in border protection duties, will inevitably come to dominate all other considerations.

In Sum
Sympathy and support for Africa within the international community is declining. Donor fatigue has become pervasive as Western governments and electorates grow markedly more reluctant to commit peacekeeping forces (and lives) to African wars. Clearly, Africa has to accept some responsibility for peace and security on the continent—not in isolation from the broader international community, but in partnership with its many friends and funders worldwide.

Regional security arrangements could play an important role in stabilizing the continent, although such arrangements are only part of the recipe that will eventually make sustainable development and stability possible. Organizations such as SADC have the potential to act as building blocks in a system of preventive action and early warning.

Neither southern Africa nor the continent as a whole can “go it alone” in achieving the stability essential for development—the means are lacking in terms of doctrine, training, trained manpower, finances, and resources. Tentative democracies and de facto one-party states will find it difficult to transfer the values of respect for human rights and impartiality to the armed forces of neighboring countries when they have been unable to inculcate the same within their own borders. Thus, Africa needs to forge partnerships and close relationships with specific developed countries in the provision of training, matériel, logistic support, and other special assistance. Another priority is enhancing the capacity of African military training institutions.

Should the international community attempt to delegate the international role of the UN in peacekeeping to either the OAU or a regional organization such as SADC, the result would be entirely predictable. The consequences of such abrogation of responsibility have been aptly illustrated by recent events in Liberia, where peacekeeping, peace enforcement, military intervention, and banditry have become synonymous with one another. Despite the infusion of capacity and resources that South Africa can offer, peacekeeping in Africa by Africans can only work if it occurs in close collaboration with the UN and the international community. This will remain the case for years to come.

The only feasible scenario for keeping the peace in Africa is the creation of a internationally sponsored UN rapid reaction force essentially manned by Africans. Such a force should consist of designated UN units that are placed on standby and trained in their respective countries by the UN, for common deployment by the UN, in collaboration with organizations such as SADC or the OAU, replete with the necessary infusion of international command-and-control structures, advisers, and observers.

Whatever preparations are made (or are not made), regional involvement in peacekeeping by African countries under the auspices of the UN, or even on the initiative of an organization such as the OAU or SADC, is inevitable. This implies that southern Africa must consider its
responsibilities in this regard and continue to move rapidly to put its own house in order. Discussion, negotiation, commitment, and cooperation should take place now at the level of the UN, the OAU, SADC, and individual countries before the next major crisis erupts. If decision-making bodies are necessary, if joint military ties must be established, if combined exercises must take place, then the time to act is now.

The major immediate challenge in the region, however, is not peacekeeping but designing mechanisms and practices that will effectively discourage coup attempts by the security forces, entrenching civil and legislative control over these forces, and inculcating a culture of accountability, transparency, and professionalism. This issue is much more important than peacekeeping, but will probably receive much less attention.

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