

**Stefan Plenk, M.A. Faculty for Political and Social Science,
University of Munich**

***Paper Tiger or Veto Player? - The Role of OPDS in Southern African
Security Polity Architecture***

Abstract

Since the reorganization of the African Union (AU), African regional integration organizations (RIO) obtained a more important role, not only within the African Economic Community, but also for regional security reasons.¹ Hence parallel to the RIOs becoming columns for an African economic integration process, their meaning as regional security clusters has to be mentioned too.²

Through the establishment of regional standby forces (SADCBRIG)³ and the reformed regional security architecture namely the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS), Southern African Development Community (SADC) tries to build up the regional security column for a new African security and defence architecture.⁴ Since 2001 OPDS is the SADC answer to the claims of AU, but does the Organ really play an important role on regional security matters⁵? Is OPDS more or less a 'paper tiger'⁶ without any influence on regional crisis prevention and security policies, or is it able to have a real impact on the national and regional decision-making processes⁷? Is it just an ineffective 'spirit'⁸, has it yet transformed into a non active regional arena, or turned OPDS out to become a real active political actor even with some veto player abilities⁹?

After a short definition and distinction between the various roles OPDS could theoretically have and an introduction to the Organ, four case studies are consulted in which the Organ participated.¹⁰ Hence the most important aim of the Organ is to prevent crisis and open (regional or intra-state) conflicts¹¹, the majority of the cases are:

- (a) The Lesotho crises 1998 (before the Organ's reform in 2001)¹²
- (b) The 'first African World War'¹³ in the Democratic Republic of the Congo¹⁴ and
- (c) The enduring decline of Zimbabwe¹⁵.

Finally together with (a, b, c) case (d) the importance of the Organ during the establishment of SADCBRIG, will show us, that OPDS is still a Paper Tiger with some tendencies to become a more important regional security arena without greater actors quality¹⁶. Furthermore the results will also underline most of the gravest recent problems regional African security policies have.¹⁷

Introduction: Theme, Methods and Thesis

Since the reorganization of the African Union (AU), regional integration organizations (RIO) on the continent obtained a more important role; thus not only within the African Economic Community, but also for regional security reasons. Hence parallel to the RIOs becoming columns for an African economic integration process, their meaning as regional security clusters has to be mentioned too¹⁸.

Through the establishment of regional standby forces (SADCBRIG)¹⁹ and the reformed regional security architecture, namely the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS), Southern African Development Community (SADC) tries to build up the regional security column for a new African security and defence architecture.²⁰

Question: Since 2001 OPDS is the SADC answer to the recent claims of AU, but does the Organ really play an important role on regional security matters?²¹

Method: This paper explores if OPDS is firstly either more or less a '*paper tiger*'²² according to classical Neorealism without any influence on regional crisis prevention and security policies.²³ Is it just a hardly existing '*spirit*'²⁴ or has OPDS secondly yet transformed into an important regional *arena* without actors quality according to regime theory,²⁵ or turned OPDS out to become a real active political *veto player* abilities comparable to Neoinstitutionalism?²⁶ Using three different types of theoretical definitions for institutions, this paper tries to answer the questions stated before.

Definitions: "paper tiger", "arena" and "veto player"

1. Paper Tiger:

Firstly, according to Neorealism, regional or international institutions do of course exist within international relations, however their influence on the nation states decision making processes are not given.²⁷ Their role within international or regional decision making is therefore normally very low²⁸, as long as non state actors do not develop to the point of rivalling or surpassing the great powers.²⁹ Combined with the idea that a '**paper tiger**' is an institution that hardly has any influence on e.g. regional integration processes³⁰, OPDS (if it refers to this definition) would have a weak status of little influence, being not more than a means to an end for the state actors.

2. Arena:

Taking secondly into account the theory of international regimes however, international or regional institutions can have a soft influence on the realization of the nation states interests.³¹ It is important to note, that they are not able to influence the interests themselves, but offer an important framework for the nation states to improve their decision making.³² If OPDS was able to offer such a framework for the SADC member states (and later on a reduction of the transaction costs was possible), the institution would be a regional '**arena**' that might be part of a bigger regional security regime.³³

3. Veto player:

Thirdly with a focus on the veto player theory, OPDS could also be a real regional '**veto player**', with real actors quality and relevant influence on the decision making of the nation states.³⁴ According to Korte and Fröhlich 'a veto player is an individual and / or collective actor, whose agreement is a condition for a political change.'³⁵ Thus, a regional institution like OPDS must have a decisive influence on the decision – making processes at least on the regional level to reach this status.

During the last two decades various regional institutions were built up in Africa South of the Sahara. Hence, it could be very useful to analyze their competences and activities. Through the combination of different IR definitions for regional institutions, this article tries with the example of OPDS to outline an attempt for further regional institutions' activities' analyzes.

Case Studies: Hence the most important aim of the Organ is to prevent crisis and open (regional or intra-state) conflicts³⁶, its role should be proved on the following conflict cases:
(a) The Lesotho crisis 1998 (before the Organ's reform in 2001)

- (b) The 'first African World War' in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- (c) The establishment of the new SADC standby forces.
- (d) Zimbabwe's inner conflict
- (e) The current coup-d'état in Madagascar

Thesis: The five cases will show us, that OPDS is still a paper tiger with at least some tendencies to become a more important regional security arena but without greater actors' quality (according to the veto player theory).

Main Part: The Organ's role on different matters

Even though SADC member states ratified a security protocol in 1994, cooperation within OPDS remained a quite complex terrain before the 2001 reform³⁷. The **Lesotho crisis 1998 (a)** e.g. underlined the Organ's problems during that period. Botswana and South Africa (RSA) intervened in the name of OPDS, hence the King of Lesotho asked for external support, however without including other national institutions like the parliament in the decision. The intervening troops were harshly criticised by NGOs and the Lesotho government, since their mission was neither legitimated, nor well coordinated and just justified by the crown.³⁸ It was also called a 'South African Invasion'³⁹, because the intervention in Lesotho⁴⁰ was merely post priori legitimated by the regional security Organ OPDS, while provoking scepticism and fear especially within smaller member states, being confronted with a new hegemonic dominance of RSA.⁴¹ *[However t]he success of the intervention can be measured by the fact that it was of relatively short duration and that it paved the way for mediation*⁴². Even if, later on the Lesotho mission was counted as a success for OPDS, showing strength, unity and a regional crisis prevention tool. However, post priori legitimated, not coordinated action, which caused several deaths, as well as irritation concerning the sovereignty of Lesotho, showed up the problems the regional security Organ had.⁴³ It became clear that SADC member states used OPDS until 2001 merely as a means to an end for regional legitimating of bilateral or unilateral nation state decisions not as regional arena or even acting institution.⁴⁴ A concerted regional and foreign security polity was hitherto not possible, hence the main conflict lines between the member states were interference ~ non-interference, sovereignty ~ regional security harassment, principle of consensus ~ intervention without consensus and the question how OPDS could act in cases like Lesotho or Congo conflict.⁴⁵ While former Apartheid rival RSA argued for a more supranational security Organ⁴⁶, especially Zimbabwe and Angola were not willing to accept any violations of national sovereignty.⁴⁷ Beyond the new economic hegemony of RSA, politically powerful states like Angola or Zimbabwe could not go ahead with such dominance also within the security policy sector.⁴⁸ Another main conflict line lay in between more militarily and progressively acting hawks (Angola, Zimbabwe but also Namibia) and more diplomatic and regressive oriented pigeons (Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania). Furthermore, until 2001 the exact contents and duties of OPDS were not clarified, so the Organ was incapable to act on its own.⁴⁹ Thus, OPDS seemed to be, even in cases of successful crisis prevention, not more than a regional arena with more tendencies towards being a neorealist means to an end for national actors.

The Organ and its 2001 Reform: New perspectives and old deficits

Reform 2001: Hence, the results of regional security cooperation in Southern Africa were quite unsatisfying, especially during the civil war periods in Angola and Mozambique, the 2001 reform aimed at to clear the way for a better cooperation body. OPDS was institutionally revised and interwoven with other SADC institutions nevertheless; the content questions (principle of consensus, weak institutions, and powerful influence national decision-makers) could not be dissolved.⁵⁰ Since 2001 intergovernmental OPDS Inter-state defence and Security Committee and the Diplomacy Committee (mostly secretaries or state – secretaries) became mainly responsible for regional security cooperation. A new troika of rotating committee chairpersons had the duty to report the SADC Heads of Government, but the Organ did not get any supranational competence.⁵¹ The main decisions remained among national decision makers supported by all member states, fearing a loss of sovereignty. „*Although the organization recognizes the strict respect for sovereignty and the territorial integrity of each member state (...) it has a mandate to prevent, contain and resolve not only inter-state but also intra-state conflicts.*“⁵² Hence, the new Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ (SIPO) described all-embracing functions for the new OPDS.⁵³ In theory, SIPO prescribed a broad defensive regional security approach, including civil and military security, human rights and norms. On paper and compared to other African regional security policy architectures, the reform of OPDS seemed to be a revolution.⁵⁴ For example for „*promotion of peace*“⁵⁵ it shall be used „*non militaristic security*“⁵⁶ methods like development policy or direct investments, as well as all necessary military devices.⁵⁷ Thus, the organ got a new peace keeping tool, a conflict alert institution and the challenge to observe elections, for its broader but still vague defined businesses.⁵⁸ The committees could not launch their work, hence the implementation of SIPO turned out to become a new basic conflict on status, duties and strategy matters.⁵⁹ Especially the hawks were not in favour of the potentially supranational intervention possibilities, OPDS should gain through the new regional standby forces and the peace promotion tool. Beyond this, the non-interference problem and question of prospective institutionalization of the new OPDS functions were not dissolved neither.⁶⁰ There was at least the basic consensus that „*the security of each SADC state is as critical for the development and survival of each state in much the same way than it is also crucial for its neighbours [.]*“⁶¹ Although that consensus mixed with a regional security requirement paved the way to a general reform, but it was not strong enough to avoid further conflicts on details of the new regional security agenda.⁶² Therefore also after 2001 OPDS as well as the parallel reformed SADC remained a paralysed ‘*intergovernmental association of sovereign states*’⁶³ hampered by diverging national interests. Even though on low politic areas like the struggle against cross-border crime worked relatively well⁶⁴, the main problems of OPDS still endured. Especially RSA and Zimbabwe provoked further disagreement, since both tried to push their own ideas of a NATO alike Organ versus a pure intergovernmental authority forward.⁶⁵

Shadows of the past – The OPDS role during the Congo Conflict

During the **war in the DR Congo 2002-2006 (b)** the interest conflict escalated⁶⁶, although personal animosities between the new South African president Thabo Mbeki and Robert Mugabe did not play a role any more.⁶⁷ Through SIPO and the regional Mutual Defence Pact (MDP), the 2001 reform offered international law measures for ‘*significant inner state conflicts*’⁶⁸ guaranteeing OPDS to get an active actor for deepening regional security.

However *[u]nlike the AU and ECOWAS, the SADC does not, therefore, have a peace and security council, or a committee with reduced membership that acts on behalf of member states*⁶⁹. In reality, the smouldering conflict concerning the work of OPDS evoked that neither MDP nor the other regional security capacities were rapidly implemented by all member states (especially those who were against a stronger organ like Zimbabwe or Angola).⁷⁰ Without a regional consensus and military capacities and through the lack of an OPDS security council Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe decided to create a flexible tri partite coalition, to intervene in the Congo conflict in favour of the government in Kinshasa⁷¹. The rash decision of the hawks to intervene militarily, parallel to soon collapsing diplomatic attempts lanced by the pigeons, provoked a deep rift between the two main OPDS groupings.⁷² Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia acted so promptly since national security requirements, solidarity feelings, resource interests and an elementary distrust against the capabilities of the Organ dictated their decision.⁷³ RSA was not able or willing to transfer its economically hegemonic power to the security sector, so as that the interest conflict mainly with Zimbabwe disabled any real influence of OPDS on the main decisions to prevent the conflict.⁷⁴ The Organ was incapable of action while the new functions could not be used, thanks to the implementation gap.⁷⁵ It seems that the main conflict was not a battle of different political systems namely democracies and autocracies but it was fought between states with former strongly militarised movements of liberation (now one ruling party systems)⁷⁶ and those who had more civilian based ruling parties.⁷⁷ This more militarily operating governments yet prefer ad hoc coalitions with other hawks during conflict crises, instead of choosing the more complicated and fewer flexible way of a regional decision making process,⁷⁸ while avoiding a direct violation of the SADC treaties.⁷⁹ OPDS just served like in 2001 as a post priori juridical legitimation of a progressive intervention by states which cynically argued during the reform process about the risk of challenging the non-interference paradigm through the Organ.⁸⁰ Compared to the Lesotho crisis, OPDS was even no longer a regional arena to communicate and coordinate, but just a paper tiger with only one function: to legitimise de jure trilateral and national interests of three member states.⁸¹

The Fate of the SADC Standby Force

Another expression of the ongoing conflict on the non-interference paradigm broke out during the MDP based generation of the planned SADC **Standby Force (SADCBRIG) (c)**. This regional military unity is a rapid deployment force of 4-6000 soldiers which is also demanded from the AU. The troops are organized until this day, though it can only be inserted in cases of an external threat.⁸² One third of the troops is combat-ready since 2001⁸³, *however the finishing of the Standby-concept and the service schedule, as well as the funding and the logistic support are not yet clarified*⁸⁴. The OPDS / SADC secretary, responsible for the implementing of the conflict alert system and the SADCBRIG training centre, was up to now not able to organise the forces durably.⁸⁵ The Training Centre in Harare just functioned for one year, thanks to Danish funding, however the political crisis in Zimbabwe stopped the donors' generosity.⁸⁶ At least 1300 soldiers (from 6000 planned) participated in the training⁸⁷, so SADCBRIG is a small but active unit, not only during regional military practices e.g. in Tanzania, Botswana or Zimbabwe, but also to take over UN missions.⁸⁸ After the end of the foreign funding, SADC member states were not willing to support the Training Centre on their own, while the secretary seemed to be unprepared for its responsibilities to organize the standby force.⁸⁹ Especially caused by the institutional reform from 2001 a

newly established rivalry between OPDS troika, the technical committees and the secretary, hindered the implementation of the regional military forces.⁹⁰ In this case, the Organ again had many similarities to a weak institution without actors' quality and any supranational abilities, although SADCBRIG can be treated as a success, based on external funding.

Towards a new OPDS security role – Or Backwards?

The main reason for discordance and weakness of OPDS is, also one of the main problems concerning conflicts in the region: The inner **conflict of Zimbabwe (d)** perpetrates more and more disagreement and stasis. For example *[t]he 2005 parliamentary elections were considered one of the most cynical frauds perpetrated on the international community in the electoral history, but the SADC endorsed the elections as free and fair*⁹¹. Although OPDS would have been forced to denounce the voter fraud and the completely situation in Zimbabwe according to § 5 of the SADC Charta, it still took into account flimsy attempts to influence the evil situation in the country.⁹² According to the 2001 ratified *Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation* - which is one part of the RISDP⁹³ - a legitimized intervention like in Lesotho 1998 would have been possible, but it happened almost nothing.⁹⁴ The postcolonial regional feeling of solidarity, fear of provoking a power vacuum and Zimbabwe itself as regional actor and problem at the same stage, stopped any attempts towards a resolute decision.⁹⁵ Mugabe is using its nimbus in being a hero of liberation also on the sympathetic regional decision table, to conserve his regime stability and national sovereignty in a hostile international environment.⁹⁶ The challenge of Zimbabwe however also shows that some strings of behaviour of OPDS having been changing after the war in DR Congo in 2002.⁹⁷ Until 2007, the Africa Yearbook attested OPDS to play a very passive part concerning the political escalation of the situation in Zimbabwe.⁹⁸ After 2009 a new strategy to gain diplomatic negotiations between the counterparts while simultaneously trying to carefully criticise and isolate Mugabe, could be observed.⁹⁹ SADC and OPDS, *showed much activity during the complex negotiation process*¹⁰⁰, although the establishment of a government of national unity failed.¹⁰¹ Using OPDS as a regional framework and arena, other SADC members, especially RSA, Mozambique and Botswana¹⁰² were able to increase the political pressure on the Mugabe regime gradually, while also the danger of a Zimbabwean civil war was reduced.¹⁰³ Other authors developed a more interest group based argument,¹⁰⁴ to explain the new position of OPDS via new and younger national elites governing some SADC countries (RSA, Zambia, Malawi), which diminished the historically based solidarity.¹⁰⁵ However, this argument does not go far enough, hence the last successes of OPDS can also be interpreted like Ressler by the final implementation of SIPO, clearing the way for a deeper cooperation within better working regional security architecture¹⁰⁶. Following this argumentation without neglecting the argument of personality changing it seems that during the last three years, the 2001 OPDS reform in fact has generated some important changes, concerning the role of OPDS as a more active regional actor.¹⁰⁷ The institution was at least used as a regional platform or better to say an `arena` for regional negotiations, without developing any veto player abilities because of its institutional weakness.

New national leaders for a new OPDS role?

After 7 years of tenacious ratification and implementation process, it appears that after 2008 OPDS might transform into a more important regional arena, in which cooperation goes

beyond low politics and now touches real high-level security problems like conflicts and crisis too.¹⁰⁸ OPDS is acting more consensually and critically even against member states like Zimbabwe or **Madagascar after the coup d'état in 2009 (e)**. For the first time sanctions and a suspension of membership were imposed on a nation state for inner conflict reasons¹⁰⁹, however it took more than half a year to find a regional strategy.¹¹⁰ Especially since Mozambique took the chair of the Organ in fall 2009, SADC turned out to become the international leading arbiter between the conflict parties.¹¹¹ The example of the new behaviour towards conflict provoking national actors, also underlines that, OPDS members can find a regional consensus beyond national interests.¹¹² It was possible to find a regional consensus in the case of Madagascar in order to implement sanctions and simultaneously being an intermediary within the conflict.¹¹³ Although this is a surprising success, it must also be critically admitted, that the reaction against long timely well integrated, economically more attractive¹¹⁴ and politically more important member Zimbabwe was rather carefully.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, *"[t]he states – and the presidents – act in mutual support of support each other and certainly would not like to see the contagion of non-constitutional overthrow of an incumbent president, as happened in Madagascar."*¹¹⁶ In case if the approaches to act still remain dependent on mutual and national interest questions like in the case of Madagascar, it must be said that OPDS still remains sluggish, sometimes hopelessly divided and often without a clear policy.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, its importance in being a regional platform to discuss and negotiate continued to be useful for the nation states, even if OPDS is still far away from a veto player status. *'Therefore, sovereignty acts as a stumbling block to the Organ members' belief in the importance of international co-operation and collective decision-making and implementation'*¹¹⁸.

Conclusion: More deficits than perspectives

Altogether, the Organ does not offer a clear regional conflict management policy;¹¹⁹ furthermore, it has not enough financial and personal capabilities, while being hampered by the still existing main cleavages generating frictions between SADC member states.¹²⁰ *"[I]t remains a politically weak organization in the peace and security sector, serving mostly as an umbrella for member states to advance their interests, or legitimize their actions."*¹²¹ Therefore *'even if the reforms now seems to grip, it can be said, that SADC [and especially OPDS] suffers since the institutions remain structurally weak'*¹²². Beyond regional military trainings and some improvements concerning the struggle against cross border crime,¹²³ the Organ could not fulfil its new amplified security duties.¹²⁴ The political will of national decision makers to realize and implement the chapters and paragraphs of MDP, SIPO and RISDP is hardly evident in any case. Especially the authoritarian regimes like Zimbabwe or Angola, but also some of the more democratic states like Namibia¹²⁵ tend towards using OPDS in order to stabilize their own systems and national sovereignty.¹²⁶

In conclusion it must be taken into account a mixed result. Hence, the 2001 reform was not able to dissolve the main problems.¹²⁷ Regional norms and values like the struggle for human rights and peace¹²⁸ still exist only in theory, but in reality, well written treaties and protocols just have a minimal meaning.¹²⁹ The major part of cooperation in the security area is yet done beyond OPDS on bilateral or multilateral decision-making tables.¹³⁰ Therefore, it is not astonishing that until now, OPDS has not outreached any actors' quality, while being part of a hardly defined Southern African security regime, however with a high degree of institutionalisation and without other regional concurrence.¹³¹ Thus, the organ is clearly no veto player at all, according to the definition stated at the beginning.¹³² However, the Organ

eases the cooperation and ensures national interests on a regional level through a commune organization, values and principles, in times of crisis however, the national actors usually bypass such decision-making principles.¹³³ OPDS eases the negotiations between the different interests however; it has yet neither developed an enduring minimization of national transaction costs, nor created a straight influence on other regional policies according to regime theory.¹³⁴ In cases of relatively stability, OPDS can be seen as a regional `arena` for security matters in the SADC security regime of OPDS, SADCBRIG, MDP, RISDP and other rules, institutions and norms¹³⁵ turning out to become a `paper tiger`¹³⁶ in times of bigger security crises.¹³⁷ Nowadays it seems to transform slightly to a regional arena also during severe crisis, hence since 2008 „*more security cooperation on the functional than the political level*“¹³⁸, can be observed. However, the neoliberal inspired definition of OPDS being a `paper tiger` was more valid than the other stated definitions during the analyzing of the case studies. Thus, Southern Africa is far away from a commune foreign and security policy with an Organ on Defence and Security Polity that is more like a `paper tiger`¹³⁹, than a veto player.

List of Abbreviations:

MDP Mutual Defence Pact (A Nato alike regional defence treaty)
OPDS Organ on Politics Defence and Security
RSA Republic of South Africa
RISDP Regional Integration Security and Defence Plan
SACU Southern African Customs Union
SADC Southern African Development Community
SADCBRIG (Regional Brigades of the SADC)
SIPO Strategic Indicative Plan for the Organ

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