

TASK 7

UNDERSTANDING THE PROSPECTS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS IN AFRICA⁹

Task

- 104 In any discussions on the modalities for PSOs in Africa, it would be unwise to disregard the contribution (real or potential) of existing continental conflict resolution mechanisms. At the very least, the formulation of new doctrinal guidelines will have to take account of the overarching political resources found in intergovernmental organisations at the continental, regional or subregional level.
- 105 If, for example, there is a low level of consensus among the states of a region on intervention, a low level of endorsement of common doctrinal approaches can be expected. However, military officers should try not to worry too much about the political weaknesses of mechanisms – they should focus on the military deficiencies of mechanisms. The discussion in syndicate was therefore initiated and guided by the following questions:
- *What would military professionals like to see in global, regional and subregional conflict resolution mechanisms?*
 - *What is the way ahead for the OAU, the various regional and subregional mechanisms?*
 - *How can obstacles to the development of better conflict resolution be removed?*
 - *How is political direction to ongoing operations sanctioned and arranged by regional (and subregional) organisations, and how could it be improved?*
 - *Would standby (or earmarked) forces help, perhaps under OAU control, for preventive deployment into trouble spots?*

Summary of points made in discussion

- 106 The military always wants to be able to operate in an environment that it can understand, and for this reason would like to see unified international structures, and unified policy and approaches from all levels of national and international bodies. Military officers can obviously not prescribe structures for regional organisations such as the OAU or SADC. They also have to accept the fact that governments will not put the interests of these

⁹ Tasks 7-10, involving questions with a policy 'flavour', were dealt with by Syndicate B.

organisations above their own interests. However, there is a need, above all, for regional trust to develop if regional organisations are to succeed. This is all too often compromised by the fear that stronger states within regional groupings will have hegemonic ambitions.

- 107 Mutual trust does exist among African military officers who, after all, face the same essential concerns wherever they come from. However, the same degree of mutual understanding and trust is not yet evident at the political level. There is some degree of integration between national and regional policies; but what is necessary is to acquire the art of integrating national, regional and global interests.
- 108 Joint training, conferences and the whole range of confidence-building measures that are increasingly a feature of regional military interaction are moves in the right direction, but there is a widespread feeling that the process of formalising military co-operation is moving too slowly. In Southern Africa, it is very unfortunate that the development of a SADC defence and security co-operation capability (including the formation of a standby SADC peacekeeping formation) has been virtually suspended due to regional involvement in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the absence of elaborate structures, however, some simple but positive practical measures can be taken to deepen defence and security co-operation. For example, mutual understanding can be greatly enhanced through institutionalising the practice of exchanging directing staff at the various command and staff colleges.
- 109 There should also be more continuity and regional representivity in the staff structures of regional and subregional organisations, with governments providing long-term postings to multilateral bodies. For example, the SADC Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC) would benefit from the creation of a permanent secretariat. As in all policy areas, there is also a need to evaluate SADC policies and then to fine-tune them. This is not presently being done. Similarly, there is a need to evaluate and refine the various training and planning innovations related to international peace forces. This may best be accomplished by putting a multinational regional force together and sending it to attend to a crisis. The establishment of regional standby forces may be regarded as a positive move in this direction.
- 110 Perceptions about other countries that belong to the regional security network are shaped by national media reports that are often highly critical of other countries. Because this militates against confidence-building and closer security co-operation, there is a need to develop a co-ordinated and constructive media strategy aimed at advancing the ideals of closer co-operation. There is also a general need for better interaction between the military and 'other government departments' (OGD) generally, and for

more direct lines of communication between military practitioners involved in preparation for PSOs. The Nordic Co-ordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS) was cited as a good example for regional co-operation, with its frequent meetings at all levels for participating militaries.

- 111 It was noted that within NATO, the simple long-term goal of opposing the erstwhile USSR provided an extraordinary degree of cohesion. Indeed, the integration of military policy among members was the most valuable real achievement of NATO during the Cold War period. It may be useful to find some similar unifying mission for African countries, in order to achieve a similar degree of military integration. At this stage, however, it appears that the OAU can only be regarded as a political mechanism, and its contribution to peace operations is therefore limited to preventive diplomacy and other non-military options. Only subregional organisations offer the promise of multilateral military action in support of broader peace initiatives.

Unfinished business/Recommendations for further research

- 112 Because the questions posed for this task had a very strong policy flavour, the syndicate did not get to grips with some of the more substantive issues. For example, the question of political direction to ongoing operations by regional organisations was not addressed. It was felt that useful research could be conducted to determine the real record and the potential contribution of African conflict resolution mechanisms, and to link these findings to the debate on emerging doctrine for future PSOs in Africa. It was also noted that the debate has hitherto focused on 'backyard' peacekeeping in Africa, and that little had been done to analyse the potential for regional contributions to extraregional PSOs.