

The EU in Africa: peacebuilding by proxy

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■ Executive summary

This study provides a status report on the peacebuilding role of the European Union (EU) in Africa ten years after it launched its first military operation in the DRC in 2003, raising hopes among some that this would be the shape of things to come. However, after this auspicious start, the EU's current operational activities in Africa are best described as *peacebuilding by proxy*. When it comes to military operations, the EU prefers to support the United Nations (UN) or African Union (AU) financially and politically rather than deploying European troops. Recent EU operations have been typically small civilian training and assistance missions, but have often included military expertise, where the aim is to support local capacity-building. By assessing what has been achieved in these operations, the report shows that the EU's presence in Africa has not come to an end. Rather, it may have an important role to play in the conceptual space between "hard" peacekeeping and long-term development. In this way the EU can become a useful partner to the AU and other African institutions, and to the UN, NATO and the U.S.

Introduction

Many expected a string of European Union (EU) military operations in Africa in the 2000s to be the shape of things to come for the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Ulriksen et al., 2004). The French-led 2003 Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was generally hailed as a welcome return of Western boots on the ground in Africa, after a series of traumatic experiences in Somalia and Rwanda in the early 1990s led to the almost complete withdrawal of Western military engagement in the region. However, member states' eagerness to deploy and sustain troops under the EU flag in Africa soon waned (see Norheim-Martinsen, 2011). After another short intervention in the DRC during the elections in 2006, led by Germany, and yet another French-led operation in Chad and the Central African Republic in 2008, the EU is currently only engaged in one executive military operation in the region, the naval Operation Atalanta off the coast of Somalia. Strictly speaking, the last EU peacekeeper left African soil in 2009.

However, this does not mean that the EU's presence in Africa has come to an end. As this report will show, it has rather evolved towards a heavier focus on civilian instruments and local capacity-building. Despite Brussels'

pledges of a comprehensive approach that combines civilian and military instruments in a unique EU security blend, the CSDP was – at least in its first ten years – all about the military (Norheim-Martinsen, 2013). The development of structures and capabilities for civilian crisis management remained the hidden "success story of the CSDP", while the EU got stuck in a discourse where military robustness was treated as the only or most important benchmark for success (see Kurowska, 2009: 34). One illustrative example is the criticism that the EU received for its lack of a military response to the Libyan crisis, when in fact it was quick to deploy civilian instruments under its civil protection and humanitarian assistance mechanisms. The recent stabilisation of the situation in Somalia is also arguably – at least in part – the result of the EU's comprehensive peacebuilding efforts and the turn towards building local capacity through the African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the training of local security forces as part of the EU Training Mission (EUTM) in Somalia, and the strengthening of the rule-of-law sector through EUCAP Nestor. The launch of the EUTM in Mali may be seen as another example of the emerging preference for local ownership in place of the largely French-driven efforts to establish an EU military footprint in Africa, although the EU has received just criticism for its low profile vis-à-vis the crisis in Mali,

especially considering its rather ambitious 2011 Sahel strategy (EEAS, 2011).

Indeed, the new hands-off approach has been seen as a step back from the ambitions that the EU had for its role in Africa, as signalled by the 2007 EU/Africa Partnership on Peace and Security.¹ However, by highlighting recent developments in the EU's activities in Africa, this report also illustrates how a more constructive relationship may be emerging among the EU, NATO, the United Nations (UN) and regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States in a strategically important region for both Europe and the U.S. It shows how the EU finally may be starting to carve out a role for itself in the conceptual space between "hard" peacekeeping and long-term development.

The EU and peacebuilding

The CSDP has been the subject of much attention since its birth with the Franco-British St Malo Declaration in 1998, which stated that the EU should have the capability for "autonomous action backed up by credible military forces" as part of a common defence policy. Since then, the EU has carried out more than 20 crisis management operations – a mere eight of which included a military component. Despite this, there are many reasons for why the military side of the CSDP has received the most attention (see Norheim-Martinsen, 2013). Part of the explanation is that it has been more controversial, while there has been a tendency among European political leaders to raise the EU flag to accompany "this is the hour of Europe"-type declarations whenever there has been a crisis that seemed to be a "perfect match" for the EU's ambitions as a military player. This has raised expectations, which have in turn not been met, giving rise to criticism and even ridicule by many commentators, who tend to focus on bureaucratic battles over issues such as, typically, the placement of military headquarters rather than on the perhaps more "boring" areas in which the EU has made steady advances.

One of these areas has been civilian peacebuilding, where the EU over the last 15 years has played a constructive role harvesting national experiences and creating a normative space in which civilian instruments have received a gradually and relatively more significant role compared to military instruments. At the time of the identification of the EU's first Civilian Headline Goal, agreed in Helsinki in 1999, both the EU itself and its member states had considerable

experience in sending police officers, observers and other personnel to various conflict zones, often in the aftermath of military interventions, and in the context of the presence of the UN, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and various non-governmental organisations (European Council, 1999). But the identification of civilian crisis management as a specific element of the CSDP initiated the gradual development of civilian operational capabilities and co-ordination mechanisms that "is indeed particular to the EU and has no equivalent in other organisations" (Nowak, 2006: 17). The EU has started to fill an operational and conceptual vacuum by gradually building an institutional framework into which nationally generated civilian capabilities can be plugged, while moving beyond the ad hoc character of previous practices in this area. It is the fruits of this work that we are only now starting to see in the EU's involvement in Africa.

The EU in Africa: local ownership as the new modus operandi

As mentioned above, Africa has been the theatre of several EU military operations, which in turn raised hopes among some that this would be the shape of things to come. That this did not prove to be the case was largely due to two factors: on the one hand, European states cannot afford such operations. On the other hand, and more importantly, there seems to be little support for these kinds of ventures among EU member states, Germany in particular.² This has forced France, which was always the frontrunner in terms of the EU's military ambitions in Africa, to intervene alone or with NATO over the past few years.

However, expectations are hard to change, which meant that the EU was accused of not doing enough (i.e. militarily) in a place like Libya, a situation that was hardly fit for the kind of limited military operations that the EU had carried out up to 2010 (see Brattberg, 2011). But once again Catherine Ashton the high representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy – and others were raising expectations and making promises that the EU could not keep. The U.S., on the other hand, was solely focusing on the six NATO countries (including Norway) that contributed to the bombing campaign, failing to recognise that others, with the EU at the forefront, also contributed. Neither approach was very helpful. By focusing on civilian instruments for crisis management the EU arguably played to its strength, but in the end it received little praise for its efforts.

1 The EU/Africa Partnership on Peace and Security is an integral part of the Africa-EU Joint Strategy adopted by the EU/Africa Summit in Lisbon in 2007 (EU, 2007). The objectives of this partnership are to enhance dialogue on challenges to peace and security in order to reach common positions and implement common approaches on such challenges in Africa, Europe and globally; strengthen the African Peace and Security Architecture in order to effectively address these challenges in Africa, including conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction; and ensure the effective funding of African-led peace support operations, including working together to establish a United Nations (UN) mechanism to provide sustainable, flexible and predictable financial support for UN-sanctioned peacekeeping operations undertaken by the African Union or under its authority. Within this framework, the EU also broadened the scope of its African Peace Facility (APF), established in 2004, through which it provides financial support for African-led peace support operations and capacity-building programmes. Since 2004 the EU has channelled €740 million through the APF.

2 In the past, Berlin has been sceptical of EU military interventions in Africa, which it has seen as a Franco-British foreign policy tool (e.g. see Martinelli, 2008). Other member states have also been hesitant to expand the CSDP's area of operations beyond Europe's immediate neighbourhood (Gowan, 2009). In the military operations that the EU has carried out it has also become progressively harder to get member states to supply troops and equipment, as seen, for example, in the case of EUFOR Chad/RCA, which required five force generation conferences before its belated deployment (Mattelaer, 2008).

These efforts included the FRONTEX Joint Operation Hermes to assist the Italians in coping with the inflow of refugees, and the emergency instruments deployed under the European Commission's civil protection and humanitarian assistance mechanisms. On May 22nd 2013 the European Council also decided to launch EUBAM Libya, a civilian CSDP mission aimed at improving the security of the country's borders. The mission will consist of some 100 international staff, but they will not have any executive functions. Rather, they will carry out mentoring and training of Libyan authorities in order to develop national capacity for enhancing the security of the country's land, sea and air borders in the short term, and to develop an integrated border management strategy in the long term.

As such, the EU has made good on its initial pledges of contributing to Libya's transition to a democratic and well-governed state. At the same time, it has stayed well away from military solutions, despite the temptation to go for the usual military stabilisation force for a post-war society such as Libya. Rather, the EU could be seen to have honoured its commitment to long-term peacebuilding by consistently supporting local and regional capacity-building through training and assistance missions that ensure the effective transfer of know-how, equipment and funding. This has happened while other actors quickly left the Libyan scene to concentrate on other, more pressing concerns.

Another African contingency in which the EU has received more praise for its engagement is Somalia, where the EU has run the naval operation EU NAVFOR Atalanta since December 2008. However, also here it is the EU's more recent efforts towards local and regional capacity-building that deserve attention. Whereas Atalanta has provided one part of a larger naval operation that has also included NATO vessels and the Combined Maritime Forces (a multinational coalition established to promote security in the international waters off the Horn of Africa), it is interesting to see how the EU's approach to the region has evolved.

Several factors contributed to the process that culminated in the defeat of al-Shabaab, the transfer of authority from the Transitional Federal Government in August 2012, and a sharp reduction in pirate attacks – from 237 reported attacks in 2011 to 75 in 2012, according to the International Maritime Bureau. But the EU has played a central role in tipping the scale in the right direction. On the one hand, it has financially supported AMISOM, thereby enabling regional peacekeeping capacity and ensuring political legitimacy for the operation. On the other hand, it has taken the logical step of extending its naval commitment to include onshore peacebuilding missions.

The first one, EUTM Somalia, was set up in April 2010 and is a combined effort by the EU, AU and U.S. to strengthen the Somali security sector. Training is conducted by 125 EU officers in Uganda, and the soldiers are monitored by

AMISOM when they return to Mogadishu, and eventually other parts of the country, to carry out their duties. The EU has again been met with the usual criticism for alleged risk aversion and the relatively small size of the training force. However, it has so far contributed to the training of some 3,000 soldiers of the Somali National Armed Forces, which have reportedly done a decent job of providing security to Mogadishu and fighting al-Shabaab (see Dønjar & Knutsen, forthcoming 2014).

The other mission, EUCAP Nestor, was established by a European Council decision in July 2012 and reached full operational capacity in February 2013. It is a civilian CSDP mission, but incorporates military officers acting as advisors. Its aim is to strengthen the rule-of-law sector in Somalia, with a particular focus on developing the coastal police and judiciary. Underlining the mission's complementary role to EUFOR Atalanta, it also aims to strengthen and enhance the maritime capacities of four countries in the region – Djibouti, Kenya, the Seychelles and Somalia – and eventually Tanzania. EUCAP Nestor thus reflects the gradual regionalisation of the EU's approach to the security situation on the Horn of Africa, alongside a move towards local capacity-building as part of tackling the root causes of the problems rather than merely treating the symptoms.

By also being the largest aid donor to Somalia together with the U.S. (€2 billion in the period 2008-13) and playing an important political role in facilitating the transition process, the EU, by virtue of its multipronged engagements in both Somalia and the region, has developed a practical comprehensive approach, thus meeting some of the criticism – including the present author's – directed at the EU for not delivering on its potential as an integrated civil-military actor (Norheim-Martinsen, 2013). These pragmatic efforts towards a comprehensive approach in place of the largely semantic pledges towards this end that have marked the EU's external relations portfolio so far should be seen as a most welcome development.

Conclusion: same story all over again in Mali?

In a sense, those who always doubted the EU's military capacity have been proved right upon a closer review of the EU's activities in Africa over the last ten years. From marking a welcome return of Western boots on the ground in the region, the EU's current operational activities in Africa are perhaps best described as peacebuilding by proxy. When it comes to military operations, the EU prefers to support the UN or the AU financially and politically rather than deploying European troops. Its own operations lately have been typically small civilian training and assistance missions, but often including military expertise, where the aim is to support local capacity-building as part of a comprehensive approach to Africa's subregions (the Great Lakes, the Sahel and the Horn) and the continent as a whole.

It is easy to criticise the EU for its new line of approach. This can be seen again in Mali, where the EU ended up sending EUTM Mali, which consists of 200 military personnel situated in Bamako, where it carries out training of Malian military forces. EUTM Mali is indeed a small contribution compared to the incoming UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali, which will consist of 11,200 soldiers and 1,440 police at full strength, or the French force that intervened in January 2013. It has also been remarked that better training cannot solve every situation. The Sahel strategy is a good example of the EU's comprehensive approach, but if the French had not moved in to halt the jihadist militias' advance on Bamako, "the whole strategy would have become meaningless" (Coolsaet et al., 2013).

Again, this is a matter of managing expectations or simply accepting that the EU's military ambitions – or the expectations that some member states had for them – will simply not be fulfilled, at least not for the time being. Or perhaps more correctly, the military side of the CSDP will probably take other forms, such as more collaboration in the area of defence acquisitions. This may change again in the future, but the current proxy thinking in the CSDP is clearly more in line with what is economically and politically feasible in European capitals nowadays. Put simply, the EU must stop making promises that it cannot keep, and must realise that with adopting strategies comes taking responsibility for applying them.

Instead of constantly returning to the military aspects of the CSDP, one should start focusing on the EU's comprehensive efforts in places like Somalia and Libya, where it has a role to play in the conceptual space between "hard" peacekeeping and long-term development. It can fill this role by typically combining financial support for African-led peace support operations through the African Peace Facility, as it has in Somalia and Darfur, with building local capacity, as it has done through a steady string of civilian CSDP training and support missions, but leaving it to the French to intervene unilaterally, or by joining with NATO, when rapid military action is needed. In this way the EU can become a useful partner to the AU and other African institutions, and to the U.S. and NATO, insofar as its approach corresponds with what seems to be a turn to more proxy thinking in the U.S. these days and plays to the EU's key strengths as a comprehensive civil-military actor. This will, in turn, distinguish it from NATO, while capitalising on the EU's legitimacy as originally a project for peace, for which it also received – and deserved – the Nobel Peace Prize for 2012.

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