BULLETIN

EUFOR RCA and the Future of Polish Engagement in Crisis Management Missions

Maria Radziejowska, Marcin Terlikowski

Amidst the Ukraine crisis, the closest security challenge to Polish territory in 25 years, Polish soldiers are being deployed in an EU-led military operation in the war-torn Central African Republic. Contradictory though it may seem, this step proves that threats to European security are multifaceted, and no country can focus only on its closest security environment. For this reason, and for the sake of its credibility in the EU and NATO, Poland should continue its engagement in crisis management operations, elaborate new forms thereof, and develop broader policy in the area of deployment.

CAR—a Failed State. Launched on 1 April 2014, the EUFOR RCA operation is an EU response to the escalation of sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims in CAR. The violence erupted with new force in March 2013, as an immediate result of attacks and looting by largely, although not exclusively, Muslim Seleka rebels, supported by groups from Chad and Sudan, and dispersed throughout the country following their seizure of Bangui. The majority Christian population took up arms and fought back. Over two days in December 2013, more than 1,000 people were killed. Still, the roots of the conflict are far more complex, and derive from a number of long-lasting problems. During 53 years of independence, CAR has been ruled by seven heads of state, the majority of whom gained power by force. Practically none of the governments have managed to exercise control over the entirety of CAR's territory, largely due to the policy of centralising state administration in Bangui, inherited from colonial times. Meagre security resources, an army strongly affected by the country's internal politics, and non-existent infrastructure in many parts of the territory, are among the factors contributing to persisting political instability and the current crisis. In addition, CAR is located in the heart of a region torn by political, religious and ethnic conflicts, which, together with its lack of strong governance, and the security and infrastructure issues mentioned above, means that it continues to attract foreign rebel groups, which cross into the country for economic gain or in search of safe haven.

Mission: Impossible? It is hoped that the interim president and the new transitional government appointed in January 2014 bring a political solution to the conflict, and prepare CAR for democratic elections in 2015. To make this happen, security across the country must be established. The EUFOR RCA operation is meant to provide direct military support to MISCA, a bigger, African Union-led international peacekeeping force (6,000 troops), initially supported by the French operation SANGARIS (2,000 troops). UN Security Council Resolution 2127 mandated MISCA to protect civilians, stabilise the country and restore state authority over the territory, as well as to create conditions conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance. As of 15 September, it will be replaced by the UN peacekeeping operation MINUSCA, which is to comprise up to 10,000 military and 1,820 police personnel. EUFOR RCA, with about a 500-strong force, was established to provide temporary support for up to six months in the Bangui area, and most likely will conclude when MINUSCA takes over. To what extent these efforts will provide a timely response to requirements on the ground will be seen in the coming months, as, over the past two decades, CAR has hosted numerous UN and regional peace-support operations.

From Poland to Africa. The focus of EU operational activity in Africa is now a proven trend. Of the 29 CSDP operations established to date, 16 were deployed in Africa. Out of eight military missions, only two were European (Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina). The last time CSDP missions were launched by the EU outside Africa was in 2008, in Kosovo and in Georgia; every CSDP mission since then has been in Africa. The lack of consensus among

Member States, over increasing the CSDP level of ambition, means that the EU will probably not launch large military operations where the interests of global powers clash, for example, in the Middle East. At the same time, weak state institutions, persisting regional conflicts, and increasing terrorist group activity, are among the factors that may create new, or exacerbate existing conflicts in many states in Africa. The impact that security crises in Africa may have on Europe, along with the robust record of the EU with regards to military advisory/training operations and advanced development assistance, mean that the EU is often seen as a crucial player in solving African security crises. Consequently, Poland is likely to be called upon to support CSDP military operations in Africa, as it has been before.

Poland has contributed to African CSDP military missions ever since they began. In 2006, in the DRC and in 2009 in Chad, Polish military contingents were the third biggest. In 2013, Poland participated in the training operation in Mali, while in 2014, prior to EU engagement in CAR, the Polish army provided air transport for the French operation SANGARIS. Although the security situation in Equatorial Africa or Sahel has little relevance to Poland's direct interests, limited, specialised, yet meaningful support for EU operations has served as a political reminder that Poland is cognisant of and gives consideration to the CSDP. It was also a rational way of gaining political clout within the EU, and to confirm Polish aspirations to be a part of the union's defence "big six." Yet, over the past three years, following Poland's relatively heavy and costly military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been an open tendency to divert from expeditionary missions and to use the dividend from the concluding ISAF operation to strengthen national territorial defence capacity. On a political level, Poland has been calling for shifting the focus of NATO from crisis management back to the traditional tasks of the alliance, related to Article 5 obligations. This raises questions among Polish partners in the EU and NATO, as to the country's readiness to support future crisis management missions in the European neighbourhood.

Many EU Member States consider stability in Africa to be vital for European security (just as Poland views Eastern Europe). They perceive asymmetric threats as the key challenge to their security, and see expeditionary operations as the correct means to address them (unlike Poland, which focuses on traditional military threats and territorial defence). Since solidarity in European and transatlantic security policy is built around mutual recognition of individual threat perceptions, Poland's gradual departure from participation in crisis management missions may seriously reduce its capacity to build coalitions around its own interests, within both the EU and NATO. This may, in the longer term, undermine not only Polish but also regional security in Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, stability in Africa does impact Poland indirectly, as it is part of a single European economic and social space, and therefore exposed to the challenges that have a direct effect only on southern EU Member States (such issues include, for example, migration, and economic downturns following the denial of access to mineral resources in Africa). For these reasons, Poland should continue to engage in expeditionary operations in the EU's wider neighbourhood, including Africa. However, this engagement should be redrawn, and complemented with a broader policy.

Poland: Towards a Role as Enabler. The experience of EU operations in Africa to date shows that the key challenges are about providing intelligence, reconnaissance and logistics, as well as building new regional military capacity, or using existing resources more efficiently. This opens the door for Poland to elaborate new forms of engagement in such operations, presenting itself as an "enabler."

By contributing capabilities that, while key for the success of the operation, are relatively less prone to combat losses and less costly to deploy, Poland may maintain its image as a country supporting expeditionary policies, while avoiding the risk of entanglement in kinetic action. The current armed forces modernisation programme includes procurement of capabilities that may very well be suited for and used in expeditionary missions. Fixed wing aircraft, and, most importantly, helicopter transport, might become an effective form of such contributions. In the future, Poland could offer reconnaissance drones, extremely helpful in gathering intelligence about the situation in the region of deployment. Building on the experience in Mali, it could also attempt to specialise in military training and play an advisory role.

Polish military engagement in expeditionary operations could, moreover, be complemented by tightening political, economic and social ties with countries and regions of deployment. Technical assistance in political and economic transformation, development projects, empowering local communities, and financial instruments that conditions for partnerships between Polish and local businesses are all forms of post-operational engagement that have been applied successfully by many EU Members States, including those without a significant colonial past, such as Germany and Italy. Such policy may open new perspectives for both individual companies and for the country's economy as a whole. Finally, such a broad strategy would strengthen recognition of Poland in Africa. This would benefit Polish foreign policy, particularly in the areas in which it builds, or could build, on Poland's unique transformation experience.