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You can't always get what you want – Logistical Challenges in EU Military Operations

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You can't always get what you want – Logistical Challenges in EU Military Operations

Within the framework of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU has to date carried out seven military crisis management operations. While two missions were launched in the EU's immediate neighbourhood (Concordia in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2003 and EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2004), the remaining five operations targeted conflict hot spots on the African continent. Two of these operations were carried out in the DR Congo (Artemis in 2003 and EUFOR RD Congo in 2006), a third operation was launched in Chad and the Central African Republic (EUFOR Tchad/RCA in 2008-2009), and the two most recent and ongoing operations seek to address regional conflict patterns in the Horn of Africa (EU NAVFOR Somalia since 2009 and EUTM Somalia since 2010). While the background of and parameters for these operations were of course different, they have all been particularly challenging. Among a variety of factors, the EU struggled in each case with the complexity and regional implications of the conflicts, special requirements and adaptations in the area of operation, weak infrastructure, vague and often short-sighted mandates, inefficient cooperation schemes with other actors in the field, and limited political will on the side of EU member states. As a consequence, the effectiveness of the EU's crisis management efforts has often been scrutinised.

This article focuses on logistical challenges and points to the experience of different EU operations in Africa. It starts with a brief overview of the context in which EU military crisis management operations are carried out. A second section introduces the field of logistics in crisis management and identifies logistical challenges – namely strategic and tactical airlift, the costs of logistics and the outsourcing of logistics. A concluding part suggests recommendations on how the logistics performance of the EU could be improved.

The EU's military crisis management context

The EU's Security and Defence Policy became operational in 2003. Since then, the EU has enhanced its experience in 24 civilian and military operations and

has positioned itself as a crisis management actor on the international scene. Crisis management operations have become a driver for the institutional and conceptual development of CSDP. CSDP is not primarily concerned with defence policy in its classical sense (i.e. territorial defence), as the name might suggest. It focuses on security and defence cooperation among European states, and between the EU's institutions and partner organisations such as the United Nations or African Union. Its overall objective is to strengthen the Union's autonomous crisis management capacities.

The spectrum of the EU's crisis management missions was first set out by the Western European Union in its 1992 Petersberg Declaration and was later integrated into the Treaty on European Union (TEU), by amendments made with the Treaty of Amsterdam. The so-called Petersberg tasks include humanitarian and rescue operations, peacekeeping missions and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking operations.¹ The 2003 European Security Strategy suggested to broaden the understanding of the EU's crisis management tasks and to expand the Petersberg spectrum to joint disarmament operations, security sector reform and support for third countries in fighting terrorism.² These recommendations and further revisions were incorporated into the Treaty of Lisbon. Article 43 of the Lisbon Treaty defines the task spectrum as follows: "The tasks (...), in the course of which the Union may use civilian and military means, shall include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation. All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories."³

The EU has so far operated across almost the full task spectrum, except for the very high end (tasks of

¹ See Article J.7 of the Treaty on European Union. This article was introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam, which had been signed on 2 October 1997 and entered into force on 1 May 1999.

² Council of the European Union, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, p.13.

³ Official Journal of the European Union, Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, C115/13, May 2008, p. 27. See also: Claudia Major, *Außen-Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik der EU nach Lissabon. Neue Möglichkeiten, aber kein grundlegender Wandel*. SWP Aktuell 7, Januar 2010.

combat forces, peacemaking). Most of the military operations were carried out autonomously, relying on assets and capabilities of the EU and its member states (except for Concordia and EUFOR Althea which were launched under the Berlin Plus arrangements with recourse to NATO assets). The idea of responding autonomously to crises has also been a driver for the development of CSDP, shaped by the experience of the Balkan wars and the EU's inability to act as mediator or security actor in its own backyard. A further characteristic of the EU's past autonomous operations is that they were all launched following a request of the United Nations, and often paved the way for follow-on UN missions.

The following details need to be kept in mind when discussing the logistics of EU military crisis management operations:

Firstly, CSDP is an intergovernmental policy. Decisions on EU operations are taken by unanimous vote and can be vetoed by all EU member states, with the exception of Denmark.⁴ While EU member states have created a number of institutions in the field of CSDP and conferred certain competences upon them, final control and decision-making powers lie with national governments. No EU member state can be obligated to participate in a crisis management operation. The deployment of troops and provision of capacities depend on voluntary contributions of EU member states and third countries (non-EU troop contributing countries).

Secondly, the EU's crisis management operations are multinational endeavours. It usually proves difficult to reach agreement on the mission's parameters in multinational frameworks. Multinational operations imply different national caveats such as varying constitutional and legal procedures for the deployment of troops but also different Rules of Engagement (ROE) or standards for equipment and logistics. It is challenging to harmonise national strategic cultures and logistical cultures.

Lastly, it is important to note that the EU does not dispose of permanent structures for logistics cooperation in crisis management operations. To the same extent as Operations Headquarters depend on the framework nation concept and are activated on a case-by-case basis, a different EU member state usually acts ad-hoc as lead nation for logistics.

Logistics in EU operations

Before identifying the main logistical challenges in EU military crisis management operations, it is helpful to approach the field of logistics in a general understanding. Logistics deals with the management (planning and implementation) of the movement of resources and support for the armed forces from the point of origin to the theatre of operation and, once the operation has been concluded, back to the point of origin. This includes the areas of transport; maintenance; supply (e.g. subsistence, ammunition, clothing); service life support (e.g. waste, camp operation, guarding and security); infrastructure engineering support (e.g. camp construction and civil engineering support); health and medical support, and other services such as the provision and maintenance of communication networks or surveillance. Logistics is essential for the success of crisis management operations. The timely and adequate provision of services is a crucial element of logistics. An operation will from the start struggle to fulfil its mandate if the troops and equipment are not in the area of operation in time, if the force cannot be moved once deployed or if supplies such as food and drinking water are not delivered in time. Moreover, sustainability is an important aspect: the flow of goods and services needs to be guaranteed. Logistics implies a chain of services whose interruption has immediate consequences on the efficiency and overall effectiveness of an operation.

The main challenges in the field of logistics are often summarised in the so-called 4D formula: demand, duration, distance and destination.⁵ These aspects need to be taken into account when planning the logistics of an operation and anticipating challenges. The logistical parameters differ for each crisis management context and need to be adjusted to the realities in the area of operation and to frictions in the support chain. Frictions are likely to appear – given the variety of actors operating at local, national and multinational levels (different governmental actors, contracting companies, NGOs, EU institutions and international partner organisations).

While distance and destination are two aspects that can be rather easily assessed and integrated into the logistical planning process, these two points present

⁴ Denmark has decided to opt out from any involvement in CSDP and does not take part in the decision-making process.

⁵ UK Ministry of Defence, Logistics for Joint Operations, Joint Warfare Publication 4-00, April 2003, [http://ids.nic.in/UK%20Doctrine/UK%20\(11\).pdf](http://ids.nic.in/UK%20Doctrine/UK%20(11).pdf).

nonetheless significant challenges: some destinations are not easily accessible, lack basic infrastructure and are in the midst of a warzone. Moreover the transportation of troops, equipment and services over a long distance is challenging and costly.

The issues of demand and duration are often difficult to evaluate. While the duration of an EU operation is defined in the mission's mandate (EU Joint Action, based on an UN Security Council Resolution), the mandate has in some cases been extended. One example is the EU's operation off the coast of Somalia (EU NAVFOR). Originally launched in December 2008 for a period of 12 months, the mission's mandate has recently been re-extended until December 2012. The extension of an operation needs to be backed by flexible and sustainable logistical support. In cases where the mandate has been renewed several times, the initial logistics concept is often insufficient and needs to be adjusted to new requirements. It is interesting to look at a non-EU crisis management example in this regard, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). AMISOM was launched as a bridging operation (to prepare the ground for a follow-on UN operation) for an initial period of six months in 2007. The mission's mandate has since then been renewed every six months. Given that AMISOM was conceptualised as an interim operation, its current mandate and shape are inadequate to deal with the situation on the ground. A renewal of the mandate puts significant strain on logistical support. Another challenging aspect is demand. It proves difficult to assess the exact quantity and quality of equipment and services needed.

The following part looks at the logistical performance of the EU in military crisis management operations and focuses on three core challenges: transport (strategic and tactical lift); the costs of logistics and the outsourcing of logistics.

Strategic and tactical lift

The transportation of a force via strategic and tactical lift is crucial for the success of any operation. Strategic lift involves the transportation from the area of origin to a point of strategic significance near the area of operation. Once the troops and equipment have been transported by strategic lift, they can then be deployed via tactical lift to the theatre of operation. Given that the tactical lift base is close to the conflict zone, there are different requirements for the final transport phase. Tactical transport needs more protection and involves usually a deployment of smaller contingents.

While strategic air lift is provided by transport aircraft (in most cases fixed and rotary wing cargo aircraft such as Boeing C-17, Lockheed C-130, Airbus A400M or Antonov aircraft), tactical sealift is provided by transport helicopters (for example Boeing CH-47 Chinook, Mil Mi-8 helicopters or Eurocopter Super Puma).

The biggest challenge for the EU is to provide sufficient and appropriate strategic and tactical transport capacities at short notice. Not only the availability but also the timely deployment is thus a problematic aspect. This is particularly challenging for rapid reaction scenarios as outlined in the EU Battlegroup concept.⁶ First elements of an EU Battlegroup are to be in the area of operation within ten days after an official EU decision has been taken. The EU's credibility as a crisis management actor depends to a large extent on its ability to provide the necessary resources within a short period of time. Once a crisis has erupted and once the EU has taken the decision to intervene, it cannot afford to lose time. The force generation phases for most EU military operations in Africa were, however, difficult and tedious. Important capabilities – as outlined in the Operation Commander's Statement of Requirement – were missing, especially in the area of strategic and tactical air lift. Sufficient air lift capabilities are crucial in order to operate in a distant and vast theatre of operation.

Most discussions revolve around the costs of strategic and tactical transport. Sea lift is less expensive than air lift but takes more time. In order to keep the costs down, EU forces are usually deployed in a combined way, involving air and sea lift. Air lift allows for a rapid deployment of advance units within a short period of time. This helps establish a first presence on the ground and prepare the infrastructure for follow-on troops. In past EU operations, most theatres of operation could only be accessed by air lift. Some airfields were, however, in a poor condition and were not adequately equipped, even for tactical aircraft. In the case of the EU's first autonomous operation, Artemis in the DR Congo in 2003, the airfield in Bunia was of crucial importance for the success of the operation: Artemis was carried out 6200 km away from Europe and could only be supplied by air support. After each landing, the air-

⁶ Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, *EU Battlegroups – Bilanz und Optionen zur Weiterentwicklung europäischer Krisenreaktionskräfte*, SWP Studie S 22, September 2010.

field had to be prepared for the next flight. Without the support of French and British engineers, the operation could not have taken place.⁷

Given that transport capabilities (for both sea and air lift) are expensive and rare, most EU member states support leasing and coordination initiatives. This is often considered as more realistic and economic than the acquisition of aircraft or ships. The planning process and procurement of the Airbus A400M shows, however, how long it can take until a joint procurement programme is up and running.

Leasing and coordination

There is no common EU framework for the leasing of air or sea lift capabilities. Instead, EU member states have launched several initiatives and have set up various capacity pools. One example is the Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) initiative, which has been agreed in autumn 2007. Two EU (Finland and Sweden) and ten NATO countries acquired three C-17 Globemaster III aircrafts and use them in common. The delivery of C-17s was completed in late 2009. The aircrafts have since then supported ISAF in Afghanistan but can also be used for the strategic airlift requirements of other operations, to which SAC members contribute.⁸

A second example is the Strategic Airlift Interim Solutions (SALIS) initiative, which has been created by sixteen EU and NATO states in 2006. Six Antonov aircrafts have been chartered from a Russian-Ukrainian company and are used for the transportation of outsize cargo. The participating countries can buy flight and stand-by hours. The Antonovs were among others used to provide air lift to the African Union peacekeepers in Darfur (AMIS). SALIS was established as an interim solution to meet shortfalls in strategic airlift capabilities until the A400M aircrafts would be delivered. Given continuing delays with the A400M, SALIS has been extended. The SAC and SALIS are complementary initiatives.⁹

⁷ Ulriksen, Stale et al. (2004). 'Operation Artemis: The Shape of Things to Come?' *International Peacekeeping* 11(3), p. 516.

⁸ European Parliament, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede061210airliftcapability/_sede061210airliftcapability_en.pdf; NATO,

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50105.htm.

⁹ European Parliament, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/natostrategicairlift/_natostrategicairlift_en.pdf.

EU member states also lease sea lift and civilian capacities. While several EU member states dispose of sea transport capacities, their capability and speed vary considerably. There is an increasing demand for strategic mobility while the transport capacities tend to be very limited. Beyond pooling and sharing as facilitated within the framework of SALIS or SAC, EU member states have established a number of transport coordination centres. One example is the Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE) which coordinates sea and air transport as well as air refuelling and assists EU member states with the strategic planning of their logistics. The MCCE was established in 2007 and is also based on a joint EU-NATO initiative.¹⁰ The European Air Transport Command (EATC) was launched in 2010 and coordinates the air transport activities of France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. These countries are also members of the European Air Group.¹¹ However, problems persist and cooperative frameworks are not able to overcome all obstacles: the Nordic countries set up the Nordic Movement Coordination Center (NMCC) in an attempt to coordinate the deployment of the Nordic Battlegroup. Their planning has shown that the NMCC needs to be activated at least a year in advance to assure that the tight schedule for deployment will be respected.

The costs of logistics

While the availability of capabilities presents a core challenge, further strain is added by the costs of logistical support. EU member states have to cover most parts of their operational expenditures on the 'costs lie where they fall' principle. This explains why states tend to be reluctant about their commitments. The ATHENA mechanism was created in 2004 to administer the financing of the common costs of EU military operations. EU member states contribute to ATHENA according to their gross national income. This implies that the bigger and more powerful a national economy is, the more it needs to contribute. This arrangement also implies that these countries have to pay a considerable part even if they do not take an active part in an operation. The following common costs are covered by ATHENA: most expenses of the preparation phase such as transport and accomoda-

¹⁰ Movement Coordination Centre Europe, <https://www.mcce-mil.com/>.

¹¹ European Air Transport Command, <https://eatc-mil.com/>; European Air Group, <http://www.euroairgroup.org/>.

tion costs for fact-finding and reconnaissance missions; the costs for Operation-, Force- and Component Headquarters; costs for common infrastructure, additional equipment and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC).

Moreover, the Council decides on a case-by-case basis whether the costs for transportation and accommodation are financed in common. To date, these expenses have never been paid in common but by the troop contributing nations themselves. The definition of common costs is very restrictive, less than 10% of the overall costs are usually administered through ATHENA.¹² It is important to note another crucial point with regard to the transportation costs. ATHENA foresees the possibility of covering the incremental costs for strategic lift for short notice deployments of EU Battlegroups, upon a decision by the Council.¹³ Sea lift is, however, not explicitly mentioned and unlikely to be covered by ATHENA – although the costs are lower in comparison to air lift.

The expenses for the deployment and maintenance of national contingents can – in addition to national contributions to ATHENA – be very high. In the case of EUFOR RD Congo for example, the respective costs of the two main troop contributors – France and Germany – exceeded the common costs. The overall expenses amounted to approximately €100 million. Roughly €23 million were paid through ATHENA, mainly for the headquarters and C³I systems (command, control, communications and information). Germany contributed about €26 million and France paid approximately €27 million.¹⁴ Given the narrow definition of the common costs, the bulk is shared between the main troop contributing countries.

Privatisation and outsourcing

In light of the high costs of logistics, countries tend not only to lease transport capacities but seek ways to

reduce costs in areas such as support or accommodation.

Given that multilateral pooling initiatives exist only for air and sea lift capacities, states seek to outsource other logistical tasks to private subcontractors. One prominent area is real life support. EU member states prefer addressing the commercial market individually and not within an EU framework, and they often favour national companies. There are different advantages and disadvantages to the outsourcing practice. On the one hand, it can be more economic and can thus help to reduce the overall costs. On the other hand, military contingents become dependent on external actors who follow primarily economic interests. Whether or not troops can be deployed also depends on how fast governments can activate the contracts they had previously signed with companies. Privatisation hence means less reliability and less security of supply compared to when states themselves would provide the services.

In most cases, private companies do not dispose of their own capacities but buy them on the international market when needed. In crisis situations and during the preparation phase for operations, the market usually reacts with an increase in price levels and a decrease in offers. In a worst case scenario, the purchased goods (for example helicopters or sealift / cargo) are not available. In spring 2010, the EU Battlegroup on standby carried out an exercise which revealed that the concerned Battlegroup would not have been able to deploy within the required time due to such contract restrictions. The Battlegroup would not have been able to activate the outsourced capabilities in time.¹⁵

The practice of outsourcing has so far had an ambiguous record. EUFOR RD Congo is usually described as the worst case scenario.¹⁶ 50% of the operational costs were spent on outsourcing, with another 50% of this sum spent on one single subcontractor.¹⁷ Infrastructure, engineering and real life support were the main outsourced features, followed by movement, transportation and maintenance. Next to local companies, a Spanish company, Ucalisa, was charged to assure most of the real life support. According to both the Force Headquarters and the contracting company

¹² EU Military Staff, ATHENA Operating Manual, March 2009; Assembly of the WEU, European Security and Defence Assembly, Assembly Fact Sheet No. 9, Financial Aspect of EU Crisis Management: the ATHENA Mechanism; EU Council Secretariat, Factsheet, Financing of EU Operations, June 2006.

¹³ EU Military Staff, ATHENA Operating Manual, March 2009, p. 83. See also: Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, EU Battlegroups (op. cit.), p. 21.

¹⁴ Claudia Major, The Military Operation EUFOR RD Congo 2006, in: European Security and Defence Policy - The First Ten Years (1999-2009), edited by Giovanni Grevi, Damien Helly and Daniel Keohane, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2009, p. 311.

¹⁵ Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, EU Battlegroups (op. cit.).

¹⁶ Interviews with officials involved in EUFOR RD Congo, between October 2007 and September 2009.

¹⁷ European Defence Agency, *Outsourcing Practices in EU-led Military Crisis Management Operations*, Brussels, 2009.

Ucalca, the outsourcing was a failure. The contractor met neither the deadlines nor the standards. Three months after the start of the operation and one month before full operational capability was declared, the planned level of services had not been reached. EUFOR staff complained about shortcomings, delays, the quality of the products and the performance of staff members. The operation also relied in many areas on logistical support provided by the UN operation in the DR Congo (MONUC).¹⁸

A variety of reasons explain the disastrous experience. Firstly, the process of identifying a lead nation and activating an OHQ for EUFOR RD Congo was very tedious. This hampered the strategic and operational planning process. Also, there was no EU lead nation for logistics which led to a last-minute outsourcing. Secondly, the contracts were not specific enough and the EU had little control over its contractors. Thirdly, the company lacked experience in Africa, had not carried out fact-finding missions and had failed to plan and coordinate its activities with EUFOR staff.

The outsourcing of logistics for subsequent operations, for example EUFOR Tchad/RCA, was evaluated as more successful. One EU official described the situation as “overall positive and satisfactory although not fully efficient”.¹⁹

Conclusions and the way ahead

While a variety of challenges exist, the costs are the biggest obstacle when it comes to enhancing logistics cooperation. Also, the EU struggled in most cases with the four Ds – duration, demand, distance and destination. The EU’s logistical performance would benefit from a number of improvements, as suggested below.

Several improvements can be made with a view to reinforcing the EU’s crisis management logistics. To start with, it is crucial to further develop the pooling and sharing of capabilities and to enhance EU cooperation and integration in this area. The European Defence Agency has already launched different initiatives but its role should be strengthened. The European Third Party Logistic Support (TPLS) Platform, launched in 2009, is an important step in the right

direction.²⁰ The EDA should be the lynchpin of all pooling and sharing activities and should as such encourage EU member states and third parties to develop a common understanding of multinational logistics cooperation. The current financial crisis has given a new dynamic to the ideas of pooling and sharing, as the recent Franco-British and German-Swedish initiatives show.²¹ The area of logistics can certainly benefit from closer bilateral and European defence cooperation.

A common conceptual framework is the basis for future joint activities in this area. It would also be advisable to establish a logistics centre where capabilities could be administered. The EDA could also be in charge of a deployable headquarters for crisis management operations and coordinate national activities in this regard. While a permanent EU Operations Headquarter would certainly be the most favourable solution, such an institutional development seems at present a distant prospect.²²

Moreover, EU member states need to exchange lessons learned and best practices on outsourcing practices. It would be commendable to agree on clear guidelines and an overarching framework to improve cooperation between EU institutions, national governments and contracting companies. This could include the adoption of framework contracts at the EU level, through which a better standard and more transparency could be achieved. The United Kingdom’s experience, specifically CONLOG (Contractor Logistic) and CONDO (Contractors On Deployed Operations) can provide important guidance. Outsourcing guidelines should, however, not be developed as stand-alone measures. They should be linked to other logistical tools and integrated into a comprehensive logistics strategy.

Beyond, EU member states need enhance the interoperability of equipment, training routines and standards (e.g. for real life support and transportation). This will not only facilitate cooperation among EU member states but also with national contractors.

¹⁸ Major, Claudia (2008). EU-UN Cooperation in Military Crisis Management: The Experience of EUFOR RD Congo in 2006. Occasional Paper No. 72. Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, p. 31-32.

¹⁹ Interview with EU official in Brussels, December 2007.

²⁰ European Defence Agency, European Third Party Logistic Support (TPLS) Platform, <http://www.eda.europa.eu/tpls/>.

²¹ See for instance: EU Business, EU defence chiefs back pooling assets amid budget cuts, 9 December 2010.

²² Claudia Major, A Civil-Military Headquarters for the EU – The Weimar Triangle Initiative Fuels the Current Debate, SWP Comments 31, December 2010.