

The Challenges of Europe-Africa Relations: An Agenda of Priorities

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The Artemis operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Lessons for the future of EU Peace-keeping in Africa

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Introduction

The Artemis operation, which took place in Bunia, north-eastern Congo, between June and August 2003, was the first EU peace-keeping mission in Africa. Artemis was Authorised by a UN Security Council resolution to restore order in the town of Bunia and to re-establish security at the local airport. The operation was a short-term bridging facility designed to allow the UN Mission in the Congo (MONUC) to deploy itself in Ituri, after the withdrawal of the Ugandan army two months before. Artemis, codename of the International Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF), involved approximately 1,500 men of eight different countries (France, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, UK, South Africa, Canada). France, the lead nation, was the only country to have men engaged in direct military operations on the ground. France also provided the headquarters for operational planning. Other countries provided logistics, health facilities, units of engineers, etc.

Artemis was a success. It managed to restore order in the town of Bunia, it secured its airport and allowed the following deployment of a full brigade by MONUC to take-over the situation. Artemis showed that European countries, together, could intervene in some of the most disastrous conflict situation in Africa and contribute not only to save lives but simultaneously to put a peace and reconciliation process back on track. Yet, Artemis also illustrated a number of shortcomings in the EU's capacity to intervene in peace-keeping operations. These shortcomings are important for the future of EU-Africa relations and for the future of EU peace-keeping in Africa.

After providing some elements on the origins of Artemis, this paper will try to evaluate its contribution to the debate on EU common foreign and security policy and identify the hurdles that will need to be overcome for the EU to develop a genuine peace-keeping capacity in Africa.

I. The origins of Operation Artemis

Under the Luanda agreement signed in September 2002 between the governments of Uganda and of the DRC, the withdrawal of the Ugandan army was scheduled to take place after the holding of an Ituri Pacification Commission (IPC), setting-up a peace-building strategy for the troubled district of Ituri. The IPC – which included representatives of all the Ituri communities, civil society organisations and the militias - took place in April 2003 under the supervision of MONUC. It provided a peace-building and reconciliation roadmap for Ituri, which was to be led by a newly created Ituri interim administration (IIA). MONUC committed itself to provide security for the IIA.

Yet, after the early May withdrawal of the Ugandan army from Ituri, the militias immediately fought for the control of the town committing large-scale atrocities on civilian populations. Two weeks of total chaos unfolded in Bunia and led to an international outcry about UN irresponsibility and the risk of a new genocide in the Great Lakes.

Under its chapter VI mandate, MONUC was already in the obligation to protect civilians under imminent threat. Yet, its 700 strong Uruguayan battalion completely abdicated its responsibilities to protect civilians, and only a handful of peace-keepers and humanitarian workers succeeded in keeping alive 5,000-8,000 civilians who had sought refuge at a market located next to the UN compound and near the Bunia airport.

In the two weeks of chaos that followed the Ugandan withdrawal, civilians were executed meters away from the UN compound. Desperate mothers threw their babies over the barbed wire protecting the UN compound in order to save them from the militias. Thousands of civilians were systematically killed by both Hema and Lendu militias, who buried them hurriedly into mass graves around the town. The Hema dominated and Rwanda supported *Union des Patriotes Congolais* (UPC) which had managed to take control of Bunia by mid-May, reinstated a reign of terror on its inhabitants, cleansing any non-Hema from its perimeter, while the Kinshasa supported Lendu militias revenged on Hema civilians in the countryside. 12 – 16 year old child-soldiers high on drugs while carrying small arms patrolled around town, racketeering the population.

By mid-May, the UN Secretary General had appealed to all countries of goodwill to help the UN restore order and stop the massacres in Bunia. France agreed to intervene, provided that 1. it would be granted a UN Chapter 7 mandate – authorising the use of force -, 2. that countries of the region involved in the fighting (namely DRC, Rwanda and Uganda) would officially support its intervention, and 3. that the operation would be limited in time and scope, i.e. it would involve the restoration of security in the town of Bunia and its surroundings only, and would last no more than three months.

After two weeks of diplomatic consultation and the reception of official letters of support from Rwanda and Uganda, UN Security Council resolution 1484 was passed on 30 May. A week later, on 7 June, the first troops in charge carrying out operation Artemis started their deployment at Bunia airport.

II. A lot for Europe and a little for Congo: what Artemis did and what it did not do.

By the end of June, the 1200 strong French contingent had completely deployed. It had first secured Bunia airport and soon established a ban on visible arms in the town. Mirage 2000 fighter-jets patrolling Ituri airspace stopped the supplies of arms and ammunitions to the militias from Rwanda and Uganda by threatening to shoot down any unidentified plane landing on secondary airstrips. The remaining European contingent based at Entebbe, provided logistics, engineers and health facilities. At the end of August, MONUC could start the deployment of its Ituri brigade made of Bengladeshi and Pakistani battalions, which would take-over Bunia from Artemis and slowly deploy outside Bunia.

Artemis contributed greatly to restore security inside Bunia, banning the militias from carrying arms in town and forcing them to retreat on its outskirts. In doing so, Artemis allowed the humanitarian NGOs to gain access to internally displaced within the town and contributed to relieve them from their suffering. The Hema dominated UPC in particular was severely weakened by the peace-keeping operation.

Yet, one could probably not expect anything else from the French army facing militias composed up to 60% of child soldiers. With a very limited objective, very limited means, Artemis obtained a significant but still relatively marginal result. Its contribution to the saving of lives in Ituri was minimal. Massacres continued in the countryside, a few kilometres away from Artemis positions. By the end of the operation, French special forces intervened up to 40 km away from Bunia for short term exploratory missions, but they never succeeded in stopping large scale massacres and contributed only marginally to the establishment of the Ituri interim administration outside Bunia.

The French army did not want to get involved in Ituri. Some of their officers feared it would become a new “Dien bien phu”. They feared Rwanda would do everything they could to have them trapped in Bunia, and take the blame for anything that could go wrong. They reluctantly planned and prepared operation Artemis because they had been ordered to do so by president Chirac, who had committed himself to Kofi Annan after the UNSG called him personally at the beginning of May. The French military reluctance to get involved is obvious in the pre-conditions presented to the UN secretariat in order to intervene.

Yet, Artemis soon developed a political life of its own, when the Cellule Africaine de l’Elysée proposed that it became an EU operation. The offer was taken up by the European Union as a fantastic political operation. Artemis became an opportunity to show the need of a permanent European force capable of intervening in Africa and the possible prospects for its common foreign and security policy. Its success would be an example of the EU’s capacity to become a genuine actor on international security issues and therefore a genuine foreign policy actor capable of supporting its foreign policies with a military intervention capacity.

The Council of Foreign Ministers hence stated on 21 July, that “The military operation by the European Union represents further tangible evidence of the development of the European security and defence policy and of the European union’s contribution to the international community’s efforts to promote stability and security in Africa”.

In Artemis, many saw the beginning of an EU military alliance that was destined to rival, if not replace NATO, totally pre-occupied by the future of transatlantic relations and the war on terrorism. The EU could indeed become a leader and built its military capacity for peace-keeping missions in Africa, an area of Foreign Policy where the US dominated NATO had little chance to be interested in.

French Major General Bruno Neveu indicated by mid-September that the use of NATO assets for EU operations could in the future become the exception rather than the rule. The “Framework nation” model could become a blueprint for future EU operations and an alternative to the recourse to NATO assets and capabilities.¹

III. Lessons from Artemis for future EU peace-keeping missions in Africa.

The “Framework nation” model carries unfortunately a number of shortcomings, which will need to be addressed in the future for such operations to be repeated.

First, Artemis was more a French operation with an EU cover, than an EU operation led by the French. Without French leadership, the EU operation would not have happened. France could have gone to Bunia alone, with a UN mandate, and without EU input. Artemis became an EU operation because of the political weight it could have to prove the value of an EU military capability for peace-keeping. It did not become an EU operation because of Africa related considerations. The EU currently has no capacity to answer a call from UNSG Koffi Anan, provide operational planning and mobilise troops in a short period of time to answer African crisis situation. Hence, it will have to rely on National capacities for the foreseeable future.

Second, only the French and the British (and maybe Germany) have today the operational capacity to deploy a sizeable force in an far-away African field of operation, and to support it with the necessary aerial cover (fighter-jets). Success of a peace enforcement missions also lie heavily on the operational command and control structure established on the ground and on the political determination of the countries involved to take the political risks to have casualties. This means that if France and the UK are overstretched because of their national involvement in other field of operations or, if they are not interested in leading such an operation, there will be no EU capacity to intervene in the short term. The sharing of national assets and capabilities in an EU framework will have to be developed in the future to guarantee EU interventions. Such interventions may also take place provided that other EU countries than France or the UK may decide to play the role and have the capabilities to be the “framework nations”.

Third, the availability of financial resources is a major problem for peace-keeping operations. One of the key reasons why France demanded that Artemis remained limited and be ended by 1 September was budgetary. In a context of rising French deficits and with other peace-keeping involvements in Côte d’Ivoire and Central African Republic, France could simply not afford to pay for a stronger or longer mission. Currently, under the Laeken treaty,

¹ « Congo success paves way for EU military option », Reuters, 19.09.03.

countries participating in EU missions pay for their own costs. If the EU intends to develop a permanent intervention capacity, it will have to find ways to share the burden of peace-keeping or the “framework countries” will increasingly become reluctant to lead.

Fourth, the UK and many other European countries do not want the EU to develop a military capability alternative or rival to NATO. Operational planning for the British, has to remain within the NATO framework. But would NATO have any strategic interest in Africa? If the EU is to develop its own security and defence policy, it needs to have its own military capability. Yet, such military capability should also be able to make use NATO assets, within a joint framework.

Fifth, and most importantly, unless EU operations in Africa are planned and organised in relation to African crisis needs and not primarily guided by European internal politics, they are unlikely to make a difference at all to control African crisis and may in the end, have only marginal effects.

Conclusion

Operation Artemis shows that the primary need for EU peace-keeping in Africa should be to develop a rapid reaction force, capable of preventing massive loss of lives either as ridging facilities for UN peace-keeping missions or as a first step before the deployment of stronger, long-term multinational forces.

In view of: 1. the EU decision-making constraints; 2. the national political risks involved in sending men who will put their lives at risk in far away foreign conflicts; 3. financial constraints; 4. the need for rapid intervention: **Can the EU really afford to entertain an ambition to develop a military capacity rival to NATO?**

-Can the EU afford it politically? Artemis was a very limited operation. It will take years before the EU has the capacity to build a sizeable (20,000) intervention force. Would it be politically acceptable to reject an intervention because the EU capacities are not ready when the NATO framework could be used? How helpful would this be for African countries?

-Can the EU afford it financially? Are the EU countries ready to devote a far greater part of their budget on defence and for the purpose of building and independent military capacity?

The answer to these questions is negative. There is too little interest in Africa and there are too little military assets available in Europe for a rivalry to exist between the EU and NATO. The priority is to find the operational planning mechanisms and the sharing of assets and military cooperation mechanisms to be able to use all means available for peace-keeping in Africa, NATO included.

The EU needs to emerge as a genuine defence and security world player but if it is to fulfil its commitment to support its partnership with Africa by providing military and peace-keeping capabilities when a crisis unfolds, it will need to do it within a joint EU-NATO framework, maximising on the use of the assets available. There is probably no realistic alternative option in the short term. The EU Africa partnership should not pay the price of a counter-productive EU-US rivalry.