



Breaking new ground: EU-US cooperation in crisis management

by Rafał Domisiewicz and Eva Gross

The recent EU-US summit held on 26 March 2014 focused on some of the most pressing issues facing the transatlantic partners: the crisis in Ukraine, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and concerns over data protection. Less prominently, but no less significantly, the two partners also used the occasion to further define and provide guidance for their increasing cooperation in international security. Such cooperation encompasses practical engagement in the realm of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). This reflects a greater alignment as well as compatibility of strategic, geographic and operational priorities in Brussels and Washington. Priorities include working with (and building up the capacities of) partners, and cooperation not only along the civil-military but increasingly also the military-to-military spectrum.

This has broken new ground in EU-US engagement in international security. In particular, crisis management in *Africa* offers a good case study of such burgeoning cooperation. Equally as important, cooperation in the sphere of CSDP is part of a broader framework that encompasses security and development as well as an emerging security-climate change nexus – one that draws on the 'comprehensive approach' for its operationalisation.

CSDP from the transatlantic perspective

In a statement released on the occasion of the EU-US summit, the White House referred to cooperation with regards to CSDP as taking place in a broader transatlantic framework that centres on NATO, thereby highlighting the enduring parameters in which EU-US cooperation is embedded. These assumptions are largely shared by 22 of the 28 EU member states that also belong to the alliance. Still, the current US position towards CSDP shows a significant relaxation of once hardened positions regarding the place of CSDP in transatlantic security. Initial hostility, fuelled by US concerns over the duplication of NATO structures, has gradually evolved into a qualified embrace of the EU's operational contributions to international crises and post-conflict interventions. It has also led to increasing exploration of new ground – and, over time, actual EU-US cooperation on the ground.

This shift has been partially due to a growing recognition of the added value of the civilian aspects of crisis management in the context of post-conflict engagement and situations of fragility. It also bears out the evolution of CSDP into a niche security provider. The 30 missions and operations conducted to date have not only generated added



value to crisis management through their focus on institutional reform and capacity-building. The tasks all these CSDP missions and operations fulfil, as well as their size, have also turned out to be fundamentally different from NATO. This has led both the alliance and the US to acknowledge the EU's unique contribution.

Finally, the acceptance of CSDP as an additional platform to induce European countries to get more serious about defence reflects a pragmatic expediency that began under the second Bush administration and that has been compounded by ongoing fiscal pressures. The likely reaffirmation of NATO's core functions at the summit in Wales in September 2014 can be expected to further strengthen the value added of CSDP in the framework of transatlantic security cooperation. The EU can certainly avail of niche capabilities for specialised CSDP crisis management missions and operations.

Strategic shifts

An additional shift has taken place under the Obama administration. The end of military engagement in Iraq and the drawdown in Afghanistan, coupled with an increasing US reluctance towards military interventions and the repercussions of the financial crisis – including domestic budget cuts and 'sequestration' – have allowed pragmatism to triumph over ideology when it comes to EU-NATO relations. And, in broader terms, a US geopolitical reorientation towards Asia and a reassessment of military priorities place a greater focus on European self-sufficiency.

The March 2014 Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) reflects this: it focuses on a reduction in military personnel to guard investments in research and development (R&D) so as to maintain US dominance, also in relation to the rebalance to Asia. Turning away from large-scale military interventions, and expecting future reductions in the defence budget, the US is moving towards developing a lighter military footprint, including by investing in special operations forces (that have been increased from 66,000 to 70,000). The tasks of such troops include training and equipping armed forces in partner countries. While current and evolving US military reassurance to allies – prompted by Russian aggression against

Ukraine – may in the short term delay the planned reductions in the US military presence in Europe, Washington has made it clear (also through the rebalancing to Asia) that it expects its European partners to shoulder more of the burden for security in their neighbourhood.

This ongoing US strategic reorientation places greater emphasis on European capabilities and transatlantic security concerns. At the same time, the emphasis on training and equipping armed forces in partner countries, as well as the ongoing and increasing US engagement and focus on Africa, have opened up avenues for increasing EU-US cooperation that both partners can build on. This is largely due to the fact that support for partners and other regional organisations has become a focus for the EU as well, and because of existing and expanding cooperation in the field.

A joint focus on Africa

When it comes to CSDP, at present 9 out of 15 ongoing CSDP missions (and, once the new civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Mali reaches initial operational capacity, 10 out of 16), including 4 out of 5 EU military operations (EUFOR RCA, EUNAVFOR Atalanta, EUTM Somalia, EUTM Mali), are deployed on the African continent. The EU regional strategies for the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea reflect the EU's ability to effectively coordinate a plethora of tools, in line with its 'comprehensive approach'.

With close to 6,000 of its troops on the ground across Africa and joint US-African military engagements, exercises and training operations, the US is no doubt a natural ally for the EU in crisis management on the continent. Beyond an increasing military, diplomatic and economic US presence in Africa, the intended method of implementation also shows affinities to the EU's approach.

The US Africa Command (AFRICOM), set up in 2008 and headquartered in Germany, is responsible for US military activities and relations with 53 African countries – and was the first US combatant command to fully embrace an interagency coordination or 'whole-of-government' approach. This approach mirrors the EU's increasing capabilities in addressing state fragility and terrorism in Africa.

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A focus on working with African partners was also highlighted by Chuck Hagel at the February Munich Security Conference with his appeal for “all of us to work closely together with African nations in helping them build their security forces and institutions.” Alignment and partnership are also reflected in EU and US support for African crisis management capacities as well as those of the UN – in the recognition that strengthening local ownership makes reforms more sustainable, more legitimate and also less costly in the long run. This is illustrated by, for instance, the African Standby Force concept, a key plank of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) – established by the African Union and African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and financed by the EU’s African Peace Facility to the tune of €1.1 billion since 2004.

In operational terms, EU-US cooperation in carrying out the EU training mission in Somalia has set a standard for complementarity of efforts. When the mission was still based in Uganda, the EU provided trainers to build up the Somali National Army (SNA), while the US vetted 8,000 of the trainees and provided transport as well as stipends. Even now that the mission has shifted to Mogadishu, EU and US officials on the ground continue to compare notes on training needs and to assess progress. While the US maintains its largest Africa-based footprint in Djibouti (the 2,500-strong Combined Joint Task Force – HoA), the EU maintains the largest non-African military presence in Somalia.

Cooperation also extends to political initiatives: as of 1st of January this year, the EU succeeded the US as the rotational chair of the multinational Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia. Less directly, but in synergy, US, NATO and EU naval vessels continue to work together with other international partners off the Horn of Africa to combat piracy. Combined with measures taken by the shipping industry, these efforts have yielded excellent results, with a 95% reduction in pirate attacks over the past year. Increasing cooperation between the two sides is also planned in the Gulf of Guinea.

Wider boundaries of cooperation

It is in the context of the EU’s most recent CSDP civilian missions and military operations – without a concurrent NATO presence – that a tendency towards pragmatic direct EU-US de-conflicting and coordination efforts has become most visible and pronounced. It is also here that EU and US activities match in terms of their strategic underpinning and operational focus. They have focused on the

Horn of Africa (for which the EU has activated its Operations Centre), Mali and the Sahel, as well as Libya and, increasingly (with a view to combating Boko Haram and a different kind of piracy than off the coast of Somalia), also the Gulf of Guinea.

Such ongoing and future operational engagement, complemented by a more pragmatic stance on inter-institutional cooperation (within but also beyond the NATO framework), has given way to more exchanges at both institutional and field levels. The recent designation of the US defence attaché to Belgium also as its representative to the EU attests to an upgrade of the relationship. It also signals acceptance that CSDP is here to stay and is unlikely to be folded into a European pillar within NATO.

Increasingly formalised military-to-military coordination, in particular, represents a sea change from what was previously a more narrowly circumscribed EU-US/NATO relationship. Working relations between EU Military Staff and US Combatant Command HQs (AFRICOM and EUCOM) now encompass regular staff and commander-level consultations, including reciprocal visits and video-conferences, to discuss issues of mutual concern. Beyond information sharing, this also serves to de-conflict respective activities in the same theatres of operations and to engender better coordination, also through the inclusion in those exchanges of other experts from the European External Action Service (including CMPD, CPCC, geographic desks, staff of EU Special Representatives). For instance, in November 2013 the EU Head of Delegation to Washington met for the first time with leaders of the US Pacific Command – at the same time, a similar precedent was set in Brussels when the Deputy Commander of US AFRICOM briefed the EU Military Committee (EUMC).

These latest developments are embedded in – but also constitute a point of departure from – previous work on EU-US institutional cooperation on crisis management, which focused on a) the work plan on technical dialogue and increased cooperation in crisis management and conflict prevention (2007); b) a security agreement that facilitates the exchange of classified information (2008); c) a 2011 Framework Agreement that regulates US participation in EU CSDP missions; d) information-sharing arrangements envisaged by the EU for non-EU NATO member states, including contributors to EU missions. Most of these agreements, including US participation in CSDP missions (EULEX Kosovo and EUSEC RD Congo), had until recently been largely limited to civilian aspects of crisis management.



A premium on flexibility

A flexible, ad hoc division of labour between the two partners might become the norm in the future – within CSDP and beyond. This is illustrated through the EU's CSDP mission EUTM Mali, where the EU stepped in relatively quickly to train the Malian armed forces while the US remained hamstrung in not being able to shore up the Malian security sector. Likewise, the EU has more freedom to operate in Libya than the US, which continues to suffer from the political fall-out of the attack on the US embassy in Benghazi in September 2012.

Flexibility also characterises 'traditional' formats of military interventions and institutional collaboration. US-French military cooperation underpins recent CSDP activities in Africa, and the strategic importance attached to the Horn and the Sahel on both sides reinforces the changed context in which EU-US cooperation takes place. The US has supported France in Mali through airlift capacities and the provision (together with MINUSMA) of intelligence and logistical support. Washington has also supported Paris' intervention in the Central African Republic (CAR). Similarly, this cooperation takes place outside the NATO framework and points, possibly, to broader changes in transatlantic security cooperation in light of a changing appetite for military intervention in individual European countries.

Franco-American cooperation has arguably facilitated EU-US cooperation, just as France has taken the lead in many of the CSDP missions and operations in Africa. US support to the CAR (and to UN and EU efforts there) includes the logistical and material contributions to the International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) – soon-to-become-MINUSCA; and funding for troop-contributing countries and airlift support for peacekeepers and equipment that will take over from EUFOR RCA. In addition to these efforts, Washington also continues to assist the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

A broadening agenda

When it comes to the operationalisation of EU-US security cooperation, exchanges on the security-climate change nexus have also gained in importance. The QDR 2014 amplifies the message about the need to address the impact of climate change, and the EU has invited US and NATO military representatives to the European Defence Agency's 2012-2013 'Military Green' initiative. These representatives have also been invited to the launch

of an EEAS-sponsored report, in Washington, on *The Climate and Energy Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities for Transatlantic Security*, drafted by experts from the defence policy community on both sides of the Atlantic. As part of measures to strengthen and expand transatlantic cooperation on energy and climate security, the report recommends, inter alia, that 'the effects of our changing climate and its implications for energy costs be explicitly included in government and military planning.'

That said, EU-US security and defence cooperation, even as it has moved into the military-to-military domain, is likely to cover only a part of transatlantic security needs. This is due to the specific value-added of CSDP, and to European military capabilities that remain limited – but also to the multi-faceted challenges facing transatlantic partners today, which call for more than one institutional venue to address them. Under the Obama administration, the US position has come to encapsulate, alongside a traditional emphasis on NATO and transatlantic security institutions, a more pragmatic stance that focuses on mutual, complementary contributions in pursuit of shared strategic interests.

These developments point towards a growing recognition of CSDP on the part of Washington – although they do not let Europe off the hook as far as defence spending is concerned, nor do they counter broader strategic trends that have the US look towards Asia rather than Europe (save for reassuring central and eastern European allies *vis-à-vis* Russia) and away from military engagements of the Afghanistan or Iraq type.

Yet they do point towards a growing alignment in the pursuit of shared strategic goals and understanding, operational complementarity, and the development of joint approaches. In his latest State of the Union address President Obama spoke of "the strongest alliance the world has ever known". The encouraging record of EU-US cooperation in CSDP, as part and parcel of a broader EU-US-NATO realignment now accelerated by the crisis in Ukraine, may turn that vision into a reality.

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