
# The EU and Africa: a changing security partnership

by Thierry Tardy

One objective of the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy was to take the partnership between the two continents to a new strategic level, based on a Euro-African consensus on values, interests and strategic objectives. More specifically, the idea was to overcome the donor-recipient nature of the relationship and promote a more equitable partnership in which the African Union (AU) and other regional actors would emerge as true partners of the EU and not merely as aid receivers.

Almost ten years later, and with discussions starting on the post-Cotonou landscape, much has been achieved between the two institutions: they have become increasingly interdependent while in the security domain, the AU has reached a level of activity that now makes it an essential player on the African continent. But has the partnership become truly strategic?

## Africans (increasingly) in charge

African security institutions have deployed more than 100,000 personnel in peace operations on African soil over the last 12 years, demonstrating a genuine will to contribute to security governance on their own continent. Through these operations, the AU and other sub-regional institutions have become first responders to crisis management needs, and have developed a conception of peace operations distinct from the UN (and EU) approach through their tendency to resort to coercion as a means to create the conditions for peace (as opposed to operations deployed in support of an existing peace).

The AU has been most visibly engaged in the form of a large-scale peace mission (AMISOM) conducting openly coercive operations against al-Shabab in Somalia. This has come at a great human cost for the interveners: since its launch in 2007, unofficial estimates of fatalities among AMISOM ranks often exceed 1,000.

The AU and its sub-regional partners were also engaged in Mali – AFISMA, 2013 – and the Central African Republic (CAR) – MISCA, 2014 – with mandates that did not last but were nonetheless theoretically coercive. And a year ago, the AU authorised the creation by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) of a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), composed of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria to fight Boko Haram in the Lake Chad area.

In parallel, African troops now account for 58% of total personnel deployed in the nine UN-led peace operations in Africa (51,727 African blue helmets out of 89,568 deployed as of January 2016), and Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria are

**Table 1 – Ongoing EU and AU/AU-authorised operations**

| European Union | | African Union | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Operations** | **Personnel** (end of 2015) | **Operations** | **Personnel** (authorised) |
| EUNAVFOR Atalanta | 674 | AMISOM | 22,100 |
| EUTM Somalia | 176 | MNJTF – Boko Haram | 8,700 |
| EUTM Mali | 539 | Regional Task Force – Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) | 5,000 |
| EUMAM RCA | 70 | | |
| EUNAVFOR Med | 1,408 | | |
| EUCAP Nestor | 43 | | |
| EUCAP Sahel Niger | 47 | | |
| EUCAP Sahel Mali | 73 | | |
| EUBAM Libya | 3 | | |
| EUSEC RD Congo | 10 | | |
| **Total** | **3,043** | **Total** | **35,800** |

in the overall top ten troop- and police-contributing countries to UN peace operations.

Altogether, those regional efforts attest to tangible evolutions in the burden-sharing of security activities on the continent, and a shift away from the earlier ostensible dependency *vis-à-vis* non-African actors and external interventions.

## Europeans (increasingly) in support

The European Union has been a key partner in this process, not least because a stronger African role and capacity allows for alleviating what has been a costly and not necessarily consensual European engagement.

Moreover, the evolution and widening of security threats have made the two blocs more tangibly interdependent, particularly in relation to violent extremism, migration and forced displacement. This led, for example, the EU Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan 2015-2020 to identify these issues as ones which are 'affecting EU interests'.

Over the last ten years, the EU has deployed seven military operations and an equal number of civilian missions in sub-Saharan Africa and the Gulf of Aden. In three of these cases – Somalia, the CAR, and Mali – EU operations were deployed simultaneously alongside African-led operations, and the deployment in the CAR nearly became the first case of an EU operation being taken over by the AU (in the end the UN took over). As of today, with 10 of its 17 CSDP operations deployed in Africa and at its immediate vicinity, the continent is by far the main CSDP arena for the EU. Yet the EU deploys far less troops than African organisations (see Table 1).

In the meantime, the main instrument of the EU-AU partnership has been the financing of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and African peace operations. Since its creation in 2004, the African Peace Facility (APF) of the European Development Fund (EDF) has financed African operations to the tune of over €1.6 billion, with the largest share being allocated to AMISOM in Somalia (which absorbed €510 million for 2014 and 2015). The APF was raised to €900 million in late 2015 for the years 2014-2016 (from an initial amount of €750 million), yet an extra €150 million will be needed for the second part of 2016.

EU funds have mainly been used to pay the allowances of AMISOM soldiers on the basis of approximately $1,000 per soldier per month. However, this amount was reduced to around $800 in late 2015 in an attempt to incentivise African partners to look for alternative sources of funding for their operations. The APF will also cover €50 million worth of expenses of the MNJTF in the Lake Chad region in 2016, while another €30 million is due to be allocated for 2017. For its part, the AU announced at its June 2015 summit that it would cover 25% of its peace and security budget by 2020.

There are two other components of the APF. One aims at supporting the operationalisation of APSA through capacity-building of the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs), the financing of AU Commission staff salaries, support for the AMANI Africa training and exercise cycles, support for African Training Centres, etc. with about €55 million in 2014-2016.

The other one supports the AU Early Response Mechanism (ERM) through the immediate funding

**Table 2 – APF support to AU and AU-authorised peace operations (in €)**

| Operations | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MISCA in CAR | 55 million | - | - | - |
| AMISOM in Somalia | 226 million | 285 million | 240 million | - |
| Regional Task Force – Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) | - | - | 1 million | - |
| MNJTF – Boko Haram | - | - | 50 million | 30 million |
| Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Security Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) | - | - | 4 million | - |

of conflict prevention, mediation and crisis management activities with around €15 million over the same time period. A recent example of this kind of support provided by the APF is the financing of the Eastern African Community mediation efforts in Burundi.

Such support is indispensable for the time being and demonstrates the European commitment to African-led security governance. Yet shortfalls in the operationalisation of APSA are well known (*inter alia* non-full operational capability of the African Standby Force, uneven levels of operational capacity of RECs/RMs, AU-RECs coordination and decision-making problems) and Europeans remain by and large sceptical about African medium-term operational and financial real capacities. And as demonstrated in the cases of Mali and the CAR, Europeans were quick to look for alternatives to the African-led peace operations deployed there – be they national, EU-led or UN-led.

In more strategic terms, the question of the future of the APF is being debated. Beyond the question of its impact on African capacities, issues relate to: the total and increasing APF budget and the sustainability of the effort on the EU side; the fact that the APF is largely not eligible for official development assistance (ODA) while it is part of a scheme – the European Development Fund (EDF) – that has to be 90% 'ODA-eligible'; the hypothetical adaptation of the APF to allow for the funding of non-lethal equipment to African countries (in the context of the Capacity-Building for Security and Development initiative); and its possible 'budgetisation' – i.e. the integration of the EDF into the EU budget in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Also on the agenda is how the APF could be used in a more strategic manner in support of African crisis management capacities. This could, for example, be achieved by adjusting the allocation of funds between its three components (African peace operations, operationalisation of APSA and the ERM).

## Interdependence and partnership

Interdependence between Europe and Africa on both economic and security matters is theoretically conducive to a stronger partnership, and the last decade has indeed seen a general move towards a more balanced relationship.

At the political level, the EU and AU have to some extent institutionalised their relationship through EU-Africa summits (the next one to be held in 2017), as well as through high-level political dialogue between the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), and college-to-college meetings between the European Commission and the AU Commission.

These fora allow for political exchange on crisis situations and the two institutions' respective agendas. In 2015, the two PSCs also conducted their first joint mission – to Mali – as a further expression of inter-institutional cooperation in crisis management. These various channels also aim at promoting a broader dialogue on issues of common concern such as terrorism, organised crime, piracy, and migration. Meetings at ministerial level, which took place in the past, may also be reintroduced as an intermediate layer of communication.

Yet inter-institutional cooperation need not necessarily be too formal, and informal channels do have a role to play. Most importantly, the extent to which existing progress has indeed moved the relationship to a more equitable or even strategic level remains open to debate.

First, the notion of 'strategic partnership' that implies convergence on interests and methods cannot be easily applied to EU-AU relations. To start

with, although the EU has achieved a lot in terms of conceptualising its strategies in different parts of Africa, its ability to think and act at a strategic and pan-continental level remains limited. The Sahel and the Horn of Africa offer examples of progress in terms of comprehensive approach, as well as of the EU's willingness to prioritise its policies, yet the difficulties observed in the operationalisation of the 2015 Joint Communication on Capacity-building for Security and Development (CBSD) – which is heavily Africa-focused – also attest to lasting and latent intra-institutional tensions.

Second, on both sides, a state-centric approach and the prevalence of some key member states' foreign policies tend to limit what can be achieved at the institutional level. Examples abound of African countries where the EU presence is significant yet largely overshadowed – in both political and operational terms – by parallel activities of member states. EU-AU cooperation also needs to be compatible with partnerships that each institution develops with individual countries in the other continent. And there is a mismatch at the institutional level between the independence and prerogatives of the European Commission, on one hand, and the political and institutional weakness of the AU Commission on the other. The extent to which African states are willing to delegate power to the AU (for the use of the African Standby Force, for example) is also an issue.

Third, institution-to-institution talks tend to remain country-specific or technical rather than continental or cross-cutting (demography, climate change), let alone truly international. While the EU PSC can theoretically deal with any regional or global theme, the AU PSC confines its work to African affairs; as a consequence, international security issues have so far not entered EU-AU discussions. Furthermore, this difference also reveals the fact that while African security matters to Europe (or at least some of its member states), European security matters far less to Africa. In this context though, developments in Mali and the Lake Chad Basin over the last three or four years have shown how transnational terrorism is no longer considered a localised or European problem, something which may lead to some kind of strategic *rapprochement*.

Fourth, the very nature of the EU-AU partnership inherently creates ambiguity over its strategic significance. On the EU side, the African ownership principle *de facto* limits the level of control that could possibly have an impact. For example, the fact that the APF has by and large financed all African-led peace operations without linking the financial support to a particular EU political agenda attests to a certain acceptance of African ownership, but may also reveal a lack of strategic vision. The same applies to the EU support for the operationalisation of APSA: the relatively depoliticised manner in which it is being conducted may well be in the spirit of partnership, but it comes with the risk of losing control. In other words, the EU's financial strength has not been properly converted into political leverage.

In the same vein, the financing of AMISOM may be part of a broader EU policy of sub-contracting security governance in the Horn of Africa – the EU funds a third-party operation rather than deploying its own assets – yet this could hardly be spelled out in any EU policy document. Indeed, the 2015 EU Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan, as well as previous documents simply present APF funding as part of the strengthening of African capabilities and contributions to regional stability, not as one tool of particular strategic significance.

In the end, this tends to corroborate the idea of an EU that has remained a *payer* rather than becoming a genuine political *player* with interests that it intends to defend.

## Connectivity of threats

While the EU and Africa may not always think along the same lines and political divergences are unavoidable, as tensions over the International Criminal Court (ICC) or over Libya a few years back show, recent security developments in and around Europe are bringing the two continents closer together.

The more complex, contested and connected world depicted in the assessment of the EU's strategic environment that preceded the drafting of the forthcoming EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) not only creates risks for the EU as much as it does for Africa – it also makes them inevitably interdependent. The connectivity of threats means that a functioning AU in the face of major regional crises, and therefore a strong EU-AU relationship, are equally essential for the EU.

Beyond Europe, the EU's aspiration to remain engaged on the world stage and shape crisis management policies starts in Africa – and with the Africans.

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