

idn E-Briefing Papers

Compared experiences in CSDP missions in Africa

Report of the international conference organized at the National Defence Institute (IDN) on 3 March 2021 under the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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Os *E-briefing Papers* do Instituto da Defesa Nacional visam proporcionar o acompanhamento de temas e debates atuais nos planos da segurança internacional e das políticas de defesa nacional, incluindo resultados da investigação promovida pelo IDN, sobretudo na sua vertente aplicada e de apoio à decisão política, bem como contributos de outros analistas e investigadores associados do Instituto.

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Introduction

In recent years, CSDP missions and operations have become quintessential tools for executing the foreign and security policy agenda of the European Union (EU). A total of 17 missions and operations around the world, with close to 5000 women and men involved, have been deployed thus far, in tandem with the creation of key institutions such as the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) and the Military Planning Conduct Capability (MPCC), which have led to significant strides in terms of joint planning and coordination.

In this context, Africa remains by far the primary stage for CSDP. Out of the 17 missions and operations, 10 have taken place in the continent and the demand for new initiatives of this sort will likely continue unabated in the short term. This has led to two parallel developments. On the one hand, the EU is becoming better at doing and performing CSDP in practice, as the rapid expansion of its operational footprint demonstrates; on the other hand, because the EU is becoming better at doing and performing CSDP in practice, it is increasingly called upon to do more, to go beyond traditional mandates and recurrent geographic hotspots, and to take upon new duties not necessarily foreseen when a common security and defence policy in the near abroad was first devised.

Understandably, this turn of events has added sizeable pressure to existing capabilities and means that have been gathered for the purpose of CSDP. Bearing in mind the challenges the EU currently faces in its southern neighbourhood, from the Maghreb to the Sahel, among other regions, it becomes increasingly evident the need for an integrated, comprehensive and coherent approach that considers the regional nature of security challenges and prioritizes local capacity building, in cooperation with other multilateral organizations on the ground.

With the aim of addressing these issues, the National Defence Institute (IDN) organised a high-level conference on 3 March 2021, under the framework of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The event took place under Chatham House rule and promoted a reflection on how to better improve the effectiveness of CSDP missions and operations, with the purpose of

strengthening the credibility of the EU as an international security actor, as well as existing relations with African regional partners in security and defence matters, under a fast-changing security and geopolitical outlook. The event gathered over 200 registered participants from governments, EU institutions, academia and think tanks. This report outlines the main conclusions of the conference.

Framing CSDP in Africa

Due to its geographic proximity, but also to overlapping social, economic and historical elements, the EU has often been called upon to assist with resolving or preventing contemporary conflicts and crises in the African continent. To that end, CSDP missions and operations have played an essential role, particularly in terms of enhancing defence capabilities in partner countries through an integrated approach, while combining multiple military and civilian instruments. However, recurring interventions in Africa have also proven challenging endeavours, as many of the root causes of instability remain unabated.

The current pandemic context has accelerated four strategic trends that might impact this initial outlook. First, the increased geopolitical confrontation between China, Russia and the West will require increased European engagement both within and beyond the EU's borders, including in Africa. Second, the malicious exploitation of the informational dimension will lead to increasing disinformation and cyberattacks, with a corresponding impact on CSDP missions and operations. Third, increased poverty and instability in areas of interest located in the Southern neighbourhood might lead to an upsurge in terrorism, organized crime, and irregular migration, thus requiring further international engagement. Finally, the need to confront global pandemics while still maintaining the focus on such threats as climate change will require considerable adaptability to any incoming external deployment.

The institutional evolution of CSDP towards Africa

The prioritization of the African continent by CSDP missions and operations over the years was accompanied by important institutional developments, which strengthened the overall scope of CSDP. The European Union Global Strategy (EUSG), in particular, comprised both a milestone for the

external overtures of the EU and the starting point for the creation of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC).

The creation of the MPCC built upon key lessons drawn from the EU Military Committee. The first lesson included acknowledging that commanders at the theatre of operations level could not simultaneously play an effective role at the political-strategic level. The second lesson entailed recognizing that the integrated approach to civil-military cooperation is more dependent on functional cooperation rather than on existing structures. And the third lesson pointed to an initial risk of fragmentation if both the MPCC and the EU Military Staff (EUMS) were to be set out apart, given their inherent adjacency.

After incorporating these lessons and following nearly 4 years as fully operational, the MPCC managed to bring considerable added value to the CSDP by concentrating planning and conduct responsibilities in one single entity. Its accomplishments can be best evaluated through three different but interconnected levels. First, it has allowed to amass significant institutional memory over previous deployment experiences, thus preserving an important repository of lessons learned. Secondly, it has contributed to the harmonization of planning, while providing missions and operations with a permanent political strategical interface between EU actors and other third parties. Finally, it has led to the assignment of operational command level to the Director of the MPCC, which allowed Mission Force Commanders to exclusively concentrate on the theatre of operations level alone.

Compared experiences in CSDP missions in Africa

The issue of mandates stands out in discussions over the overall effectiveness of EU efforts in Africa. Ideally, CSDP missions and operation should aim to stick to their original mandate and to their pre-defined set up. However, possible changes in mandates can also be required in the face of evolving developments on the ground, operational gaps, or when confronted with bureaucratic bottlenecks. In the case of EUCAP Sahel Niger, for instance, the expectations of national partners over what was possible to achieve via the EU consistently went beyond the terms of the mandate itself. In the case of EUFOR CAR and EUTM Mali, the capabilities forecasted in their respective mandates were not

always made fully available, especially with regard to force generation. EUFOR CAR also lacked capacities in terms of psychological operations on the ground and in terms of information operations at the Brussels level, which undermined some of the expected goals that figured in its original mandate. A similar lack of initial clarity over rules of engagement on the use of force curtailed further operational options on the ground.

A second key component in this debate is often found in terms of the emphasis on cooperation and coordination with other actors present in each theater of operations (e.g. local and national authorities, armed forces and internal security forces, the UN, EU delegations, international organizations, NGOs, etc.). Effective communication and dialogue are essential to establish working relations and foment trust. In contexts with a variety of international actors involved, as in the case of EUTM Mali, synchronization of efforts and procedures should lead to a greater specialization of efforts. However, actual coordination remains difficult to achieve. In practice, short leadership periods in CSDP missions and operations hamper durable relations with local authorities and with other international actors, while specific mechanisms created to improve dialogue often need to be complemented by permanent contacts at all levels.

In terms of interoperability, proper communications and logistics channels are also equally relevant as evidenced during past participation of contingents from third parties in CSDP missions and operations (e.g. Georgia in EUFOR CAR). The financial mechanisms put into place can similarly prove inadequate to the realities on the field, and hinder further interoperability among civilian and military missions.

Overall, the incorporation of both civilian and military means in CSDP missions and operations has proved an asset whenever addressing complex situations. Fostering close relationships with national governments and populations, while partaking in a mediation and humanitarian role, has provided enough room to incorporate local concerns. Civilian missions are particularly well suited for this kind of roles. However, local ownership can only be effectively promoted with adequate means. In the case of EUCAP Sahel Niger, for example, the centrality of the development nexus was often subsidiary to security concerns, which affected the envisioned assistance to local populations. Inversely, projects that have had strong positive impact on local communities, directly contributed to the success of CSDP missions and operations, as in the case of EUFOR RCA.

Finally, in order to improve the effectiveness of these initiatives, regular evaluation remains paramount. Even though there has been substantial progress on this front, the transformation of lessons identified into lessons learned as well as the proper assimilation of best practices remains lacking. The fact that existing strategic review processes provide a relevant stage to discuss conflict drivers and operational focus, does not always translate into its recurrent use. The in-depth review desired in those occasions is also inhibited by the short mandates of missions and operations.

Prospects for future EU-Africa security cooperation

The execution of CSDP missions and operations in Africa is inexorably linked to the security outlook on the ground. In that sense, rising insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa represents cause for concern due to its toll on potential human and economic costs. Human costs include civilian deaths, forced displacement, food insecurity and famine, all of which have intensified in the last year. In this regard, the Lake Chad Basin and the Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique stand out as particularly worrisome. Economic costs, on the other hand, represent a threat to Africa's economic growth and may compromise the implementation of the novel African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Developments on both fronts can be attributed to two trends that are particularly relevant for the EU's strategic relationship with the continent.

The rise in violent extremism comprises the first trend. The resilience of deep-rooted terrorist groups (e.g. Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State) and the creation of new movements across the continent, have now reached places beyond traditional hotspots (e.g. Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Horn of Africa), such as the Gulf of Guinea or Mozambique. Their activity has greatly benefited from overlapping effects derived from climate change and technological developments.

A second trend can be identified in terms of increasing political violence, following state-based conflicts throughout Africa. Such indicators point to the fragility of democratic transitions and reforms, as demonstrated by the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these dynamics by providing opportunities for disruptive actors and leaving civilians more exposed to violence amidst sensitive peace processes.

Additionally, foresight analysis indicates two types of conflicts that are likely to emerge in the coming decade. The first concerns conflicts that may arise as a result of rapid urbanization without properly tackling underlying socio-economic disparities, thus undermining social cohesion and acting as a catalyst for urban protests and violence. The second concerns the new geopolitical dynamics in the continent as competition between global powers may lead new actors to project their influence and exacerbate a new 'scramble for Africa'. This can, in turn, generate several correlated disputes, from proxy conflicts, associated with militarization in areas such as the Horn of Africa, to an increase in battles for strategic narratives, in the form of hybrid threats, disinformation and foreign interference. Taken together, these cumulative trends are bound to impact EU-Africa security cooperation in the coming years.

How to adjust CSDP missions and operations in Africa

In light of accumulated past experiences and expected patterns of future engagement, incoming CSDP missions and operations deployed in Africa will be required to increasingly adopt an integrated, comprehensive, and coherent approach that considers the regional and local nature of the challenges addressed. In that sense, more clear political objectives are needed together with the full commitment of Member States to adequately contribute national assets and select new Mission Force Commanders. The backbone of this common vision resides in a strong European identity in the security and defence domain, which needs to be encouraged through further sharing of experiences and further promotion of interactions between military personnel of Member States. However, despite the EU's integrated approach, it is also essential to improve decision-making processes, so as to ensure greater operational coherence and effectiveness. Institutionally, given the geographical distance between Brussels and each theater of operations, it is essential to foment further trust between the two levels, so as to avoid micromanaging and interference. A good working relation between the MPCC Commander and the Mission Force Commanders is crucial to the success of each mission and operation. On the other hand, even though bureaucratic obstacles often hinder access to funding, the new European Peace Facility (EPF) is expected to generate a strong positive impact on the CSDP as a whole. This new instrument will close a gap in the EU's

capacity-building activities by allowing for the training of armed forces in tandem with equipment supply, which, in turn, may curtail the influence of third parties on the ground.

It is also important to promote further coordination between CSDP missions and operations and the actions of individual Member States in different theaters of operations. The extensive Portuguese experience in Africa, for instance, could hold considerable lessons in this regard. Along with a recurrent contribution to CSDP missions and operations, Portuguese forces have been engaged in comprehensive defence capability-building activities in Portuguese-speaking African countries for the last 30 years, with an increased focus on operational capacity-building of tactical units.

In order to address the impact of disinformation and foreign interference in CSDP missions and operations, it is also essential to boost shared communications capabilities so as to counter malicious strategic narratives, while promoting intelligence sharing to increase situational awareness. In this case, the possibilities made available by existing technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, should be better employed.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the success of missions and operations remains highly dependent on personal engagement with local political and military leaders. A comprehensive understanding of African culture and specificities is paramount for the effective promotion of local responsibility and ownership. In order to effectively identify current and future issues on the African continent and how to best tackle them, it is essential to approach security from a 360 degrees perspective. This means incorporating such domains as economics, governance and public service delivery, and engaging and cooperating with actors not traditionally involved in security discussions. In particular, the EU could support African ownership by improving early warning and conflict prevention instruments, not only from a regional or institutional standpoint, but also by investing in local projects that create the conditions for longer-term stability. Overall, the EU should continue promoting partnerships and cooperation at the political and operational level with every actor that is seriously engaged in contributing to the stabilization of the African continent.

Main takeaways

- Underscore key lessons-learned from previous missions and operations in order to turn them into useful markers and indicators of operational performance.
- Invest more in leadership and command structures, and ensure that their operational knowledge and experience is channelled towards improving subsequent missions and operations.
- Explore new ways through which military and civilian means can best complement one another in the pursuit of similar operational goals with regard to targeted countries or incoming crises.
- Upcoming mandates ought to foresee more flexibility so as to ensure that military capacity-building and assistance to key local structures goes hand-in-hand with structural reforms of local armed forces.
- Reinforce partnerships that bring about added value to overall CSDP missions and operations, while considering the extensive experiences of singular Member States in theaters of operations where the EU presence remains scant.
- Step up cooperation channels with regional security organizations and the African Union to ensure compatibility and local ownership do not remain rhetorical tools alone, and are translated into practical gains and even more concrete outputs.

Recommended readings

Council of the European Union, 2021. *The European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel - Council Conclusions, 7723/21 (Brussels, 16 April 2021)*. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7723-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

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International Conference - Compared experiences in CSDP missions in Africa

2 March 2021 – 9:00-12:30 (Lisbon time)

National Defense Institute, Ministry of Defense

In the context of CSDP missions and operations in Africa, it is evident the need for an integrated, comprehensive and coherent approach that considers the regional nature of security challenges and prioritizes local capacity building, in cooperation with other organizations. To that end, this conference aims to promote a reflection on how to improve the effectiveness of CSDP missions and operations, and to incorporate lessons learned, with the aim of strengthening not only the EU's credibility as an international security actor, but also the existing partnership with Africa in security and defense matters.

09:00 – 09:20 – Welcome remarks: Admiral António Silva Ribeiro, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Portugal

09:20 – 10:05 – The evolution of CSDP towards Africa

Lieutenant-General Esa Pulkkinen, former-Director-General, European Union Military Staff (EUMS) and Military Planning Conduct Capability (MPCC)

Moderator: Isabel Ferreira Nunes, Director of Research Centre, National Defense Institute

10:10 – 11:30 – Compared experiences in CSDP missions in Africa

Major-General Christos Drivas, former-Chief of Staff, EUFOR Central African

Republic Kirsi Henriksson, former-Head of Mission, EUCAP Sahel Niger

Major-General João Boga Ribeiro, former-Force Commander, EUTM Mali

Moderator: Pedro Seabra, Researcher, National Defense Institute

11:35 – 12:20 – Prospects for CSDP missions and EU-Africa security cooperation

Giovanni Faleg, Senior Analyst, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

Moderator: Pedro Seabra, Researcher, National Defense Institute

12:20 – 12:30 – Closing remarks: Helena Carreiras, Director, National Defense Institute