

SDA DISCUSSION PAPER

The EU's Africa Strategy: What are the lessons of the Congo Mission?



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EUFOR RD CONGO, UNIFIL AND FUTURE EUROPEAN SUPPORT TO THE UN

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In 2006, the European Council gave its approval to two military operations to reinforce the UN. The first was EUFOR RD Congo. The second was the urgent deployment of European troops to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from August onwards.

Although the Lebanese mission was not an ESDP operation, it showed that EU governments can find the political will and military means to handle major crises. Using their own logistical arrangements rather than those of the UN, European ground and naval forces moved rapidly into the theatre – in the third quarter of 2006, UNIFIL looked like an EU-led multinational force with a UN logo, not a traditional UN mission.⁵ The Council

⁵ A point made by this author and others in the *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2007* (Rienner, 2007,

congratulated itself on achieving “a leadership role for the Union in UNIFIL.”⁶

This innovative arrangement upset a number of assumptions about the future of European military support to the UN. Since the success of Operation Artemis in 2003, many analysts appeared to believe that EU-UN cooperation would now take the form of “Artemis II”, “Artemis III” and so forth. That meant ESDP missions that would (i) be in Africa; (ii) involve a brigade-strength force with a robust mandate; (iii) deploy for a fixed period of three to six months; (iv) operate firmly outside UN command structures.

These projections became the new orthodoxy in ESDP circles, encapsulated in the Battle Group concept. And they were reasonable assumptions: up to 2006, four-fifths of the UN's deployments were in Africa – and recurrent crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Côte d'Ivoire underscored the UN's need for rapid reaction forces.

If EU members are interested in providing those forces, most seem allergic to putting their troops under UN command in Africa. As of January 2007, there were nearly 10,000 troops from EU states in UN missions worldwide – but 80% of these were in Lebanon. By contrast, fewer than 3% of the UN's troop deployments *in Africa* came from the EU.

But the presumption that EU forces will not wear blue helmets in Africa obscures the variety of mechanisms by which European troops have contributed to UN operations there in recent years. These include the Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG), which involves elements from thirteen EU members and three non-EU countries and facilitates new UN deployments.⁷ This has been deployed to Ethiopia and Eritrea, Liberia and Sudan. And in Liberia, an Irish-Swedish Quick Reaction Force (QRF) provided a robust reinforcement capacity *under UN command* from 2003 to 2006.

While EUFOR RD Congo provided reinforcements for the UN mission in DRC

p9). Later in 2006, non-European forces deployed to Lebanon through standard UN structures.

⁶ Council Conclusions on Lebanon, 25 August 2006

⁷ The EU contributors are: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. The non-EU three are: Argentina, Canada and Norway.

last year, the UN Secretariat hoped to shift the 500-man QRF to other trouble-spots: Côte d'Ivoire and Darfur were both considered. The failure to negotiate a UN deployment to Darfur meant that the unit was eventually repatriated – but it should be a reminder that there are ways for EU states to reinforce UN missions other than repeating the Artemis model.

Indeed, if EUFOR RD Congo is an interesting precedent for future EU-UN cooperation, it is because it bore some resemblance not only to Artemis, but also (much less remarked upon) to the QRF. Artemis was an emergency force, deployed to hold ground, protect civilians and shoot bad guys in the midst of a crisis in the eastern DRC that had run out of the UN's control. By contrast, EUFOR RD Congo was a deterrent force, intended to offer extra firepower alongside pre-positioned UN forces in and around Kinshasa – forces that, although limited in reach and unpopular with the public, were still in control.⁸

In this, EUFOR RD Congo played a role analogous to that of the QRF: a reinforcing element in the strategic framework of a functioning peace operation, rather than a response to that framework's collapse. While the EU and UN had separate lines of command, the EU presence required close coordination with the UN mission (MONUC). In this it improved on Artemis, during which EU-UN coordination in the field was poor.

That does not mean that EUFOR-MONUC cooperation was perfect. At the planning stage, there was frequent frustration over the lack of formal coordination structures. Irritations arose over issues such as sharing documents. In the field, a particularly worrying problem arose from the fact that the two missions generated independent threat assessments – creating differences over precisely when deterrent action was necessary.

But the *ad hoc* collaboration that emerged proved reasonably effective. In Kinshasa, it was helped by good chemistry between the senior officers on both sides. When, in late August, it looked like militia fighting in the city might explode, EUFOR and MONUC troops

mounted an effective joint action to contain it. At times, EUFOR seemed to be constrained less by the UN than the range of national caveats among its own contingents.

EUFOR RD Congo thus proved that an ESDP operation can operate within the strategic framework of an existing UN deployment. It also suggests some fairly obvious ways to enhance future co-deployments: the development of standard joint operating procedures for coordinating operations at the strategic and tactical levels, and in particular methods of generating joint threat assessments to act as the basis for joined-up decision-making.

But it should also be noted that just as EU and UN officers were learning to collaborate in DRC, their political masters were debating how European troops should be commanded in Lebanon. Prior to 2006, UNIFIL was commanded from UN Headquarters like any other mission (even if it was one in which certain EU members had a special interest).

But in enlarging the force, European negotiators insisted that it should be commanded through a new multi-national Strategic Military Cell in New York. Although this reports to the UN's Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping (and so to the Secretary General), it gives the troop contributors significant control over the mission. Of the twenty-seven officer-level posts in the cell, nineteen were initially assigned to EU member-states.

So while EUFOR RD Congo was being inserted into a UN framework on the ground, a European element was being inserted into high-level strategic decision-making at UN Headquarters. To some critics (both in the South and the UN Secretariat) these are both proofs that EU members get to run "privileged" missions under the flags of their choice, in contrast to the African and South Asian countries that provide the bulk of UN forces.

But another important test of inter-institutional flexibility has now emerged in Africa. While the EU has been supporting the African Union presence in Darfur financially and operationally since 2004, the AU and UN are now moving towards a "hybrid" joint deployment there. The EU and NATO are considering how best to help sustain this new amalgam – potentially drawing them into another complex relationship with the UN.

⁸ Although the UN had over 16,500 troops in DRC during EUFOR DR Congo's deployment, most were concentrated in the east of the country. A November 2005 survey for the UN found that its forces were popular in the east, but that clear majorities in Kinshasa and western DRC wanted it to see them depart.

Such relationships lack the simplicity of the Artemis model. The Battle Group concept is now a reality, and there *will* be a need for an “Artemis II” sooner or later. But even good models need updating. EUFOR RD Congo and UNIFIL – like the QRF and SHIRBRIG before them – suggest that the EU’s members are likely to contribute most effectively to peace operations not through fine concepts, but to adapting to facts on the ground.