Trilateral Cooperation in Peace Operations: Strengthening AU, UN and EU Cooperation in Africa

The international responses to the conflict situations in Somalia, Mali, and the Central African Republic (CAR) recently illustrated the advanced levels of trilateral cooperation between the UN, the AU and the EU in addressing conflict situations in Africa. How cooperation, coordination and coherence between these three multilateral organisations are achieved, and how unique comparative advantages in response to each distinct conflict situation can be leveraged, are questions of increasing importance. Within this context, the role of the G7/G7+ is key, as the Member States work through these multilateral organisations in support of peace and security in Africa, while also maintaining bilateral initiatives in support of the same objectives. Important questions therefore arise as to how the G7/G7+ could enhance their engagement with, and within, these three organisations to strengthen the trilateral partnerships for peace and security in Africa between them.

International responses to conflict situations in Africa have become complex, involving a broader array of multilateral actors and interventions than before. In particular, the UN, the AU and the EU have come to deploy different types of operations in response to conflict situations in Africa which operate in the same area of operations under different mandates and with different objectives, as the table below highlights.

The attainment of successful outcomes requires high levels of cooperation, coordination and coherence to ensure that mandates, operations and outcomes are sequenced. Where cooperation, coordination and coherence are weak, strategic outcomes become much harder to attain, as operations run the risk of running parallel to one another, or indeed even of being counter-productive. These and other lessons from the field are being viewed with growing importance in New York, Addis Ababa and Brussels. The experiences gained by the UN, the AU and the EU in Somalia, Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) over the course of the past few years in particular influence thinking on the future of peace operations partnerships, as these are the first instances where all three organisations have deployed operations operating alongside one another simultaneously or consecutively.

Somalia

When the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM II) closed in 1995, a UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) was established in neighbouring Kenya to advance the cause of peace and reconciliation in that country. In 2004, following a protracted period of international support, a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was established, and in January 2007, the AU authorized the deployment of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), mandated to provide protection to the TFG. From that time onwards the mission’s mandate evolved significantly, and by early 2015, AMISOM had become the largest peace operation in the world, charged with addressing the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and providing support to the security of the country and its government, as well as to stabilization efforts in Somalia. The EU for its part in April 2010 established an EU Training Mission (EUTM Somalia), based in Uganda, mandated to provide military training to the Somali National Army (SNA). In July 2012, the EU established a second, regionally-focused, operation (EUCAP NESTOR) designed to enhance the maritime capacities of countries in the Horn of Africa as a direct response to the threat of piracy in the region. In February 2013, the EU relocated its EUTM operations to Mogadishu. In June 2013 the UN closed UNPOS and established the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), a special political mission mandated to support the unfolding political processes in the country, based in Somalia. The EU and the UN are also providing critical support to AMISOM, as the EU provides financial support through the Africa Peace Facility (APF) and the UN provides a logistical support package funded on the basis of assessed contributions through the United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA), which was established in 2009.
Mali

In response to the events in Mali from early 2012 onwards, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU commenced planning for the deployment of a peace support operation. As ECOWAS, the AU and the UN were not able to reach agreement on the mandate for such an operation, and as events escalated, France, at the request of the Malian authorities, in January 2013, launched Operation Serval, designed to halt the advance of armed movements in the north of the country. A month later the AU and ECOWAS launched the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), and
the EU deployed a military training mission (EUTM Mali). In June 2013 AFISMA was re-hatted into the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), a peacekeeping mission mandated to support the peace process and stabilization efforts in the country. Following the transition from AFISMA to MINUSMA, the AU established a political mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), mandated to provide ongoing support to the political processes in the country and the region, and also launched a regional security cooperation initiative, known loosely as the Nouakchott process. The UN had already established a Regional Office for West Africa (UNOWA) in 2002, and in 2013, adopted an “Integrated Strategy for the Sahel”, with the Secretary-General appointing a Special Envoy for the Sahel in April 2013. The EU followed the same regional approach, adopting a strategy on the Sahel in March 2011, launching EUCAP Sahel Niger in mid-2012, and appointing a Special Representative for the Sahel in March 2013. In April 2014 the EU established a further civilian mission in the region, EUCAP Sahel Mali, mandated to support the internal security forces in Mali.

Central African Republic

In July 2008 the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) deployed an operation to provide support to the security sector in the CAR, known as MICOPAX. As the security situation deteriorated, MICOPAX was in December 2013 re-hatted into an AU operation, the African-led International Support Mission to Central Africa (MISCA). That same month, at the request of the CAR transitional authorities, France launched a military operation, known as Operation Sangaris, designed to bolster the security situation in the country. In January 2014 the EU also launched EUFOR RCA, a security operation to support Operation Sangaris and MISCA, and to serve as a “bridge” for the commencement of operations of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA). Following nine months of operations MISCA was re-hatted into MINUSCA in September 2014, mandated to provide support to the political and security processes in the CAR. Following this handover, the AU established the Mission for the CAR and Central Africa (MISAC), a political mission mandated to provide support to political processes in the country and the Central African region. In March 2015 the EU closed EUFOR RCA and launched the EU Military Advisory Mission in the CAR (EUMAM RCA), a security sector reform advisory mission, while France continued to maintain its Sangaris operations in the CAR into early 2015.

From Practice to Policy: Strengthening Cooperation

The international responses to the conflict situations in Somalia, Mali and the CAR have served to highlight the growth in triangular cooperation between the UN, the AU and the EU in relation to addressing conflict situations in Africa. Paying greater attention to the manner in which the UN, the AU and the EU shape and implement their actions, both as individual organizations and collectively, will be key if existing gaps and overlaps are to be addressed, responses are to be comprehensive, and, importantly, timely action is to be taken.

African Union

The importance of these peace operations partnerships has increasingly come to be recognized by all three organizations. The AU, for instance, in January 2012 released a report of the Chairperson of the Commission titled “Towards Greater Strategic and Political Coherence”, which started to shift the narrative on the relationship between the AU and the UN on peace and security away from one of capacity-building for the AU towards one of partnership between the two organizations, outlining principles of cooperation and outlining modalities for cooperation at the strategic and operational levels. Specifically, the AU called for (1) support for African ownership and priority-setting, (2) flexible and innovative application of the principle of subsidiarity, (3) mutual respect and adherence to the principle of comparative advantage, and (4) a division of labour underpinned by complementarity. This was followed up in September 2013 by a similar report titled “The Need for Greater Coherence”, where the AU continued to elaborate on its vision of partnership with the UN in peace and security in Africa.

African Union and United Nations

The UN Security Council, building on this engagement and also taking stock of the practical lessons being learned from its partnership with the AU requested the Secretary General to draft a report on lessons learned from AU-UN transitions in the cases of Mali and the CAR. The report, released in January 2015, took note of the various models of cooperation which had gradually emerged between the AU and the UN, anchored in the principles of complementarity and comparative advantage. The report noted that the specific circumstances of each conflict should determine the particular model of collaboration between the AU and the UN, and that the issue of subsidiarity needed to be addressed with renewed vigour, as partnerships work best when there are common strategic objectives, political coherence and a clear division.
of responsibilities. The report further made specific recommendations in relation to joint planning, benchmarking, transitions, and the re-hatting of personnel. Specifically, the report recommended that the AU and the UN jointly develop a creative and flexible transition toolbox, which would include guidance and standards on (1) joint assessments and planning, (2) pre-deployment visits and force generation, (3) coordination mechanisms, (4) continuity in command and control, as well as re-hatting (5) transfer of civilian capacity, (6) support mechanisms, and (7) arrangements to increase troop standards.

**United Nations and European Union**

The UN and the EU have over the course of the previous years also worked to better structure their partnership on peace operations and crisis management, which resulted in the development of a “Joint Declaration on UN-EU Cooperation in Crisis Management” in 2003, a “Joint Statement on UN-EU Cooperation in Crisis Management” in 2007, and a “Plan of Action to Enhance EU Support to UN Peacekeeping” in 2012. In March 2015, building on this cooperation, the EU and UN presented the “Priorities 2015-2018” which are designed to strengthen the UN-EU strategic partnership on peacekeeping and crisis management. Importantly, one of the seven priorities is the “Support to the African Peace and Security Architecture” which highlights that closer trilateral cooperation with the AU, including making contributions that enabled the AU to improve its own rapid response capacity, are a key aim of the UN-EU cooperation.

**2015: The Year for Peacekeeping Partnerships**

A further contribution to the discussion on partnerships was made when the UN in April 2015 released its report titled “Partnering for Peace: moving towards Partnership Peacekeeping”, which recognized that the engagement of regional partners in peacekeeping alongside UN operations had become the norm, rather than the exception. The report noted that this most evident in Africa, where the engagement of the AU and sub-regional mechanisms, as well as the EU, alongside UN operations was present throughout all phases of conflict. It was noted however that the potential for closer trilateral engagement and cooperation among the UN, the AU and the EU had yet to be fully explored.

Building on the experiences and strategic discussions on peacekeeping partnerships, the report of the UN's High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations of June 2015 called on the UN to further strengthen its partnerships with regional organizations as part of an increasingly global and regional peace and security architecture. With regard to the UN-AU relationship, the panel made three specific recommendations. First, that the use of UN assessed contributions be provided on a case-by-case basis to support UN Security Council-authorised AU peace support operations, including the costs associated with deployed uniformed personnel to complement the AU's own funding. Second, that any AU peace support operation receiving UN assessed contributions should provide regular reporting to the UN, and should comply fully with UN standards, including for instance the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, and conduct and discipline frameworks. And third, that the UN-AU strategic partnership should be underpinned by the principles of (1) consultative decision-making and common strategy, (2) division of labour based on respective comparative advantage, (3) joint analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and (4) integrated responses to the conflict cycle, including prevention, transparency, accountability and respect for international standards.

**Next Steps**

In a context where it can be anticipated that such cooperation will happen more often it would be important for these three organizations to invest both politically and operationally in strengthening the mechanisms for collaboration. It is in this light that the UN Secretary-General in his report of 2 September 2015 noted that the UN needed to move away from improvisation in the manner in which it worked with regional organizations, and that it needed to build on its experience to establish standing arrangements and procedures which can be applied flexibly when operations are sequenced or parallel. The Secretary General further noted that the establishment of effective global-regional partnerships will be a critical undertaking for member states, regional partners and the UN in the coming years. Precisely how this can be achieved in meaningful ways is the key question: one that will require collective action by all stakeholders in support of strengthened peace operations in Africa for the future.