The African Standby Force: Confronting African Security Challenges?

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Since the African Union's decision, in 2003, to create an African Standby Force (ASF) at the continental level many questions have arisen. The creation of a force based on five regional standby forces is not without difficulties coming from numerous security challenges and a two levels model of regional integration (African Union / Regional Economic Communities (RECs)) that characterize the continent. The progress of the ASF regional components is uneven and the results modest to the point that it is possible to ask whether the operationalization of the ASF will be reached by 2015.

Hosted at the Ecole Militaire in Paris on the 26th and 27th of April 2012 by the Institute of Strategic Research (IRSEM), in partnership with the *Observatoire de l'Afrique*, this conference proceeded to a mid-term review of the implementation of the ASF, and to analyze future prospects of this component of the

African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The objective of these two days was to provide answers to the question as to whether the ASF is an appropriate tool to address African security challenges? This issue raises three more specific questions:

1. Is the ASF theoretical model or drawing from five regional components realistic with regards to political and operational obstacles within the various RECs and regional mechanisms (RM)?
2. What lessons can be learned from peacekeeping operations mandated by African organizations?
3. How do partners position themselves in order to support the ASF capacity building?

These questions were addressed by speakers from military, academic, international and regional organizations divided in 6 roundtables: an introductory table situating the ASF within

the APSA, 4 presenting a regional assessment for each REC, and a final table providing an update on African capacity building.[1]

Round table 1 – Situating the African Force within the African Peace and Security Architecture

The ASF project follows the creation of the AU on July 9, 2002 and the adoption of the Protocol on the establishment of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) entered into force December 26, 2003. In its Article 13, the Protocol refers to a Force "composed of standby multidisciplinary contingents, with civilian and military components in their countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment at appropriate notice." On May 15 and 16 2003, the African Chiefs of Staff adopted a framework document on the establishment of the ASF and the military staff committee (MSC). The ASF thus became a component of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) of which the PSC is the central body, acting under Chapter 8 of the UN Charter. The African force was divided into five regional forces following the geographical division of RECs. From the very beginning establishing a clear framework for cooperation between AU and RECs was a political and operational challenge for the implementation of the ASF.

Ten years after the creation of the AU one point is clear: despite significant progress in each region, the difficulties encountered by the AU to establish itself as the central actor of peace and security issues are linked to one specific characteristic of a two levels – regional and continental – African collective security.

Beyond texts, including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2008 providing for cooperation between the AU and RECs, it is possible to ask if there isn't a competition between the different African institutions, which impedes the project progress. As the ASF is based on the composition of five regional forces overseen by RECs, the limits of its operationalization, beyond capacity, are also linked to political choices.

The first hurdle to the ASF's operationalization is therefore the lack of political ownership from the AU at the continental level, and this despite the progress made after the Roadmaps 1, 2 and 3. The AU is struggling to build strong leadership, given the preference of some African States for a regional approach to conflict management like in West Africa and Southern Africa. This trend can be explained by historical, pragmatic and political reasons. Indeed, some regional integration projects precede the creation of the AU. For instance, the failures of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (1963-2002) forced the RECs to take charge of conflict management in their regions (ECOWAS in Mano River Union, Lesotho and SADC in DRC, CEMAC in Central African Republic). Thus although AU has a historical legitimacy as the successor of OAU, RECs have operational legitimacy. The huge challenge of the project of APSA is therefore to combine these two dimensions. Finally, given that APSA is a political tool among others used by States, the choice between the continental and regional levels depends on the interests they seek to defend.

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[1] Given the low level of progress of the Northern Africa Regional Capacity (NARC) it was agreed not to deal with this region.

The lack of political will demonstrated by States within the AU, with regards to issues of peace and security, is materialized in particular by the lethargy plaguing its military staff committee which makes its revitalization a necessity for the sustainability of APSA. Standing advisory military committee of the PSC of which it is the subsidiary body, MSC is supposed to be both a decision making instrument in support of the PSC and peacekeeping operations (PKO) deployed by the African organizations.[2] Currently, the MSC is underused by the AU which confines it to the role of automatic validation of AU Commission's decisions, with a very limited influence.[3] Strengthening the powers of the MSC and placing it at the heart of the decision making and control processes of PKOs are two major issues that the Pan African organization faces to benefit from the military expertise of its MSC.

Beyond the lack of capacity and political will of States, the shortage of financial means slows the ASF's operationalization. Funded largely by external actors like the United Nations, the United States and foremost by the European Union, these partners are in a position to impose the AU's calendars mission priorities and agenda. (Re) appropriation of the ASF project by the AU therefore requires increased funding from its members. The main challenge remains to overcome the logic of national interests that continues to prevail when the States are facing transnational threats.

The revision of the six scenarios is also a priority for those responsible for Roadmap 3. In the light of many challenges an operational African force faces, it is possible to question the future development of Roadmap 4 and 5 for 2015.

Round Table 2 – From ECOMOG to the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF)
The objective of this round table, focusing on West Africa, was twofold: to draw lessons from ECOMOG commitments toward its institutionalization as the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) as well as to assess current ESF capacity to meet regional security.

ECOMOG's interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau were followed by the deployment of UN operations. Even if the outcomes of these interventions were mixed, partly because of political and military difficulties, but also because of the behavior of the contingent made up largely of Nigerian soldiers, ECOMOG has become a reference. The adoption of the 1999 Protocol has enabled ECOWAS to establish a legal framework with regard to prevention and conflict management.

ECOWAS was once again seriously challenged by the 2002 Ivorian crisis. Although the regional organization tried to provide a political and military response to the conflict, the failure of mediations and the delays in the establishment of a force led to the intervention of France and the UN.

Four lessons can be learned from the ECOWAS action in the Ivorian crisis: The challenges it faced had a structuring effect much more than a weakening one: it is learning by doing. In fact, it is the field experience that enabled ECOWAS to move forward. It is therefore not excluded

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[2] All within the framework of promotion and maintaining of peace and security – here African – as defined in Article 13(8) of the UN Charter.
[3] Unlike its European counterpart, the Military Committee of the European Union, the MSC does not have the power of self referral and depends on the good will of the AU Commission.

that the next crises have a catalytic effect for the development of the ASF.

1. The AU's absence in crisis management has raised once again the question of its relationship with ECOWAS. Given ECOWAS' experience, was it a deliberate AU choice to leave ECOWAS in the front line to then align with its positions? What would the consequences of a disagreement between the two organizations be and could the AU have the last word?

2. As with other conflicts in the Mano River region, ECOWAS military intervention in Côte d'Ivoire was followed by the deployment of a UN mission. Could it be possible for this type of intervention, which gives primacy to an African regional action followed by a UN takeover, to become perpetual in the region, knowing that the ECOWAS action is still marked by difficulties in terms of funding, logistical and planning capabilities?

3. On the political-military side, the Ivorian crisis showed the limits of an action in matters of peace and security framed by a regional organizations whose member States can sometimes be stakeholders in the conflict because of their support to rebel movements.

Given a possible ECOWAS intervention in Mali, it was necessary to talk about ESF capacity to respond militarily to the security challenges in the Sahel. Although the military component is the only one truly developed, the ESF is not ready to intervene in the Sahel region. It suffers from a lack of capabilities in rapid deployment, of air cover and, more generally, in modern armaments. Above all, the force is not trained for fighting in a desert environment.

During the round table, some discussions were centered on the Africanization of peacekeeping. It was recalled that ECOWAS has focused on the issues of peace and security because they are a prerequisite to economic development in the region. Despite criticism, ECOWAS military action in the 1990s filled a security vacuum. Although police and civilian components are not formed, the ESF is among the most advanced regional forces.

The recent crises in Guinea Bissau and Mali revealed gaps in ECOWAS capacity to respond. They showed the need to improve the early warning system, particularly by calling into question the statistical approach currently favored, and to review the criteria used to trigger the alert. From the perspective of response capacities, they are first subjected to limited national resources which are insufficient to achieve the goals of early intervention. More importantly, this is a problem of political will that has been highlighted by ECOWAS hesitations facing crises, a problem heightened by the vagueness of ECOWAS mandate and objectives.

Round Table 3 – What Progress for the FOMAC?
Despite obstacles FOMAC, the African Standby Force of ECCAS, is being developed and two security operations are deployed under ECCAS mandates: a maritime security mission in the Gulf of Guinea and an operation of peacekeeping in Central African Republic (MICOPAX).

To understand the issues ECCAS faces regarding the architecture of peace and security, it is necessary to take into account interactions between different actors (AU and ECCAS, ECCAS

member States and individuals). For the ASF to work in Central Africa, a match between the capacity and willingness of these actors is essential. This constitutes a major challenge not only for ECCAS but also for other regional economic communities. From a global perspective, it appears that the AU has not yet been able to effectively conduct the construction of the APSA in the five regions of the continent. Its leadership lacks consistency, regularity and assertion which prevents it from giving clear directions and to perform follow-ups in the RECs. In the absence of a clear direction from the AU a gap may be created between capability development of the AU in comparison with those of regions, which go forward by setting their own standards.

Proper functioning of FOMAC depends on alignment between the various institutional levels, namely the secretariat of ECCAS, the department DIHPSS (Department human integration, peace, stability and security), the AU Peace and Security Department and the Peace and Security Commission, among others. COPAX decision making process (ECCAS Peace and Security Council) suffers from a lack of communication between these various institutions which are moreover plagued by tensions. This lack of exchange would be a significant barrier in a time of crisis when rapid deployment is required. Moreover, interactions between the AU and ECCAS are challenged by a different linguistic choice. The AU operates in English, while ECCAS employs mostly French. There is also the question of the willingness of member States to invest in ECCAS security initiatives. Indeed, some States sometimes prefer support operations outside the region. Thus, Burundi, which is not involved in MICOPAX, is one of the main contributors to

AMISOM. In addition, States need their forces at the national level, especially when time comes to act in the fields of justice and security system reform, electoral processes, etc. Indeed, individuals that are required for peacekeeping operations are equally indispensable for state-building at the national level.

FOMAC is currently under construction and ECCAS was able to capture the ASF project. It has the resources necessary to do this, as evidenced by the exercise "Kwanza" conducted in 2010 which saw the deployment of more than 4000 people and five vessels on the high seas. There is also political will, as demonstrated by the deployment of MICOPAX. In addition, ECCAS has developed in September 2009 a strategy to secure the Gulf of Guinea. A naval surveillance device provides an initial response to problems of piracy and maritime crime. However, many capabilities, such as strategic air projection, remain problematic.

The various components of FOMAC do not show at the same state of advancement. The military component exists and has been developed primarily within the first two roadmaps. For the police component, ECCAS innovates by working with both constituted police forces and integrated police forces. For the civilian component, it is very difficult to organize and deploy it because it is composed of multiple actors with varying capacities.

Logistical support also remains a concern although the AU for Douala as agreed to ECCAS request that it hosts the continental logistics depot. ECCAS has committed to a) set up the regional logistics depot and b)work on a concept of fast positioning at several levels. Each country would be able to have at least one

company in relation to the capabilities already deployed to address security risks at the national level. FOMAC is also confronted to training issues. It would ultimately be more suited to integrate peacekeeping training in the various courses at the national level to ensure that each individual is formed in accordance with his capabilities and the functions that he will perform in the context of a mission.

The creation of COPAX has given new impetus to ECCAS, and FOMAC is the backbone of regional unity and integration at the security level. Paradoxically this integration is partially blocked by security problems and the mutual distrust between the different member States. ECCAS cannot work following the logic of framework nations but the actions must be undertaken by all combined States, with the support of each other. This explains the particular institutional heaviness that affects FOMAC efficiency. Regarding revenue sources, ECCAS is not seeking funds from all sides but aims to establish genuine partnerships.

Today, we must question about the statue of the ASF. Is it a way for Africans to take charge of operations the UN does not want to undertake? Are they operations led within the RECs framework under AU endorsement? FOMAC must evolve and adapt itself according to issues such as terrorism, security sector reform and maritime security. Facing increasingly complex operations, would it not be appropriate for the six scenarios provided by the African Union to evolve? In terms of lessons learned, FOMAC has experience that should be shared by every stakeholder on the continent. ECCAS can boast of being the only REC to conduct simultaneously two security operations: MICOPAX in CAR and the pioneer operation of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Round table 4 – Peacekeeping assessment in the Horn of Africa

One of the major issues in the construction of the ASF is the vagueness surrounding its implementation beyond the underlying principles that frame it. This is particularly significant in East Africa, where mistrust is the central characteristic of relations between States, which profoundly influenced the development of the East African Standby Force (EASF). Security developments in the region – and namely the lessons learned from AMISOM – are instructive with regard to the ASF implementation and to challenges of military coordination between the AU and EASF.

AMISOM is the largest operation ever deployed by the AU and is a continuation of a series of international interventions which were considered failures. The Somali crisis is experienced a turnaround in 2006, when the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) militia took control of Mogadishu. Ethiopia then intervened to recover the capital and restore the authority of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) established in 2004 under the auspices of the UN. In 2007 it left the place to a multilateral African force whose mandate included the stabilization of the country and support to the TFG. In 2011, the mission adopted offensive strategy accompanied by the Kenyan interventions. It was reinforced in 2012 in order to regain control of the territories under Al-Shabaab influence. Today, this regional willingness to solve the crisis still faces many challenges.

AMISOM is totally dependent on external partners, namely the UN, the EU and the United States. The difficulties experienced by African actors to mobilize the necessary resources to carry out their mission have the effect of limiting their autonomy. Thus, if the increase in mission quotas is certainly due to the insistence of regional actors, the main factor has been the changes in the positions of international actors who were until then opposed to it. All participants agreed to say that the decisional autonomy of African actors cannot be guaranteed without autonomous financing of the mission.

The second obstacle is the lack of political will to sustain AMISOM. Indeed, the mission is primarily based on a military strategy to support a regime whose political legitimacy is limited. However a military victory over Al-Shabaab leaves a number of thorny political issues to solve, from determining the most appropriate institutional model for the future Somali state and the territories which seceded, to the role to be granted to the militias as part of this state, to the resolution of the parliamentary crisis that the TFG is currently going through. It is necessary to put the importance of the ASF in perspective. By itself the force will not bring a solution to political crises affecting the region and the wider continent, despite its civilian component.

During the discussion, it was further observed that AMISOM does not match any of the scenarios of action provided by the FAA, since it breaks with the principle of neutrality that characterizes UN peace operations. For this reason, the AU talks of Peace Support Operation (PSO). The actors who have so far intervened in the crisis have indeed vested interests. If it seems important to question the relevance of the scenarios and their possible redefinition, it is recognized, however, that opting for a framework of interventions specific to security threats in each region is obviously not feasible.

The last obstacle identified relates to the difficulty of establishing an integrated command for the mission, which now resembles a juxtaposition of military contingents cooperating and pursuing a common goal but obeying their respective Executives.

Round Table 5 – Challenges of Regional Cooperation in the Implementation Process of SADCBRIG
This panel focused on various issues essential to understand the way the SADCBRIG operates. It addressed the contemporary challenges of SADC, inherited from a complex historical background, and the adjustments that the organization should make in order to become more efficient.

The origins of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) go back to the creation of the organization of the Frontline States in the 1960s. This organization aimed to coordinate the actions of States struggling against apartheid and colonialism. Transformed into the Southern African Development Community Conference (SADCC) in 1980, it remained economically dependent of South Africa. In 1992, SADCC officially turned into SADC, in which South Africa adhered after the fall of the Apartheid regime. South Africa being perceived as a military and economic power, tensions with Zimbabwe, so far the leader in regional integration in southern Africa, were

numerous. The region has experienced many wars since the 1960s. These wars had for main purpose to oppose colonial powers, and thus bound together the member States of the Frontline, but they also revealed frictions between the political parties at the liberation. All these wars were perpetuated by the colonial presence and foreign meddling. This external interference is much less important today. Unlike other RECs, SADC is indeed very resistant to external financing. Western influence on its policies is therefore very low.

SADC is showing a double heritage through the wars that have affected countries in the region and attempts at economic cooperation by some countries to counter South Africa's clout. The historical context complicates the establishment of the SADC Standby Force as a result of a continuing lack of confidence between States, but also because of an exacerbated claim for a recently acquired national sovereignty.

The regional force would address various threats such as military coups, autocratic power management and maritime insecurity. But the difficulties faced by SADC in the implementation of the force are mainly due to the fact that the establishment of regional structures has been considered as an achievement, without questioning States political will and available capacities.

The challenges facing SADC are still numerous: conflicts, humanitarian crisis, weak regional economic development and poverty. The development of SADCBRIG is dependent on the economic situation of member countries. States, despite their economic differences, have a responsibility to endorse the regional force to respond to security issues that require considerable resources such as terrorism and piracy. Several weaknesses of SADCBRIG were identified, including a lack of synchronization of brigades, which prevents SADC to address some crucial issues (peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance etc.). These weaknesses highlight the need to strengthen SADC and SADCBRIG.

The funding issue remains complex since African countries prefer to decline external funding to maintain their independence. Beyond the financing of the SADC force, and despite the potential conflicts of interest, States must agree on a common doctrine, and must also accept a partial abandonment of sovereignty toward SADC. This would enable SADC to be more effective. As a trading partner, South Africa has already helped to work towards stability and the strengthening of SADC. The country appears as a central actor that Southern Africa crucially needs to deploy the SADCBRIG. As for cooperation between SADC and the AU, it proves difficult to establish, SADC keeping a stranglehold on security issues in the region.

Round Table 6 – Capacity Reinforcement of the African Force Regarding Security Issues
Awareness about the need to strengthen maritime capabilities follows the challenges resulting from the combined effects of piracy and drug trafficking with other forms of insecurity. Faced with unregulated fishing, pipeline attacks in the Gulf of Guinea and major environmental problems, the AU adopted the African Maritime Transport Charter in 2010. Since then, it has been developing a comprehensive approach to maritime issues. The African continent is faced with the enormous costs of trafficking (annual cost of 7

billion for piracy, 14 billion for drug trafficking), which require strong regional coordination and highlight the weakness of capacity and training of African navies. There is also a lack of political will to fight against certain problems. Piracy thus represents a major influx of money for Somalia, and Operation Atalanta may seem excessive in relation to other needs of the country that are considered priorities. All these maritime problems, however, directly threaten States and communities and require a global response and special attention.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) works in partnership with the AU PSC, with the specific objective of developing the civilian and police components of the ASF. The evolution of the AMANI AFRICA program is a good example of an Europeanization of programs such as RECAMP within the EU, which now intends to go beyond the notion of framework nation. The EU support for capacity building of the ASF goes primarily through the African Peace Facility and the Instrument for Stability, which enable the recruitment of staff for the AU, capacity building in conflicts prevention and planning, training programs for police and security sector reform. However, a still too limited share of the African Peace Facility is allocated to capacity building. The European Commission is currently proposing a pan-African project funding, which would fund operations, training centers and liaison officers.

The continued lack of African capacity for peacekeeping confirms the need for external support. Lack of coordination between Africa's various partners remains a major handicap for capacity development. Coordination of funding is thus needed. Coordinated funding provided by an institution such as the UN is not

considered an option because it is overly complicated.

The main issue is ultimately to make the ASF a flexible tool, able to cope with crises. Beyond principles, it is necessary to allow the ASF to be a coherent tool that can respond to threats that are not only military. Africa thus lacks a civil defense component to rescue the populations in case of natural disasters. While support to the people remains underdeveloped, the only noticeable changes, due to the development of the civil aspect of the ASF in recent roadmaps, is the strengthening of police and justice. Modernization of equipment is also a key issue for the ASF to be able to be deployed in situations where the actors of the conflict are well equipped.

It was recalled that it is the developments within member States which determine the success of the roadmap, and that the regional organization is not a substitute for state responsibility to provide security on their territory. This requires the inclusion of security sector reform in an approach to conflict management to establish democratic control of armed forces. The lack of national transport capacity, especially aerial, is thus a major impediment to rapid deployment of an intervention force.

Conclusion

Given the initial question – is the African Standby Force an appropriate tool to address African security - we can say that a range of issues is still under debate. First, when reference is made to the ASF, what are we talking about? Indeed, beyond the texts, there is a blur on the implementation of the ASF project. To the extent that the AU could call

upon either the RECs (ECOWAS) or States directly States (AMISOM), the ASF could now be characterized in two ways. It is defined in the texts as the sum of five regional forces and will only be operational when the five components will also be, projected in 2015. However, it can also be modeled on the AMISOM, a force supervised by the AU drawing its contingents in each state without going through the RECs. Ultimately, in this rising phase of the ASF, the framework does not matter. It is essential to keep in mind that the ASF will not remain the only answer to all security problems on the continent after 2015. It is to be one tool among many others and can only be deployed from flexible action frameworks.

In 2012, the record of the ASF is certainly uneven across regions, but the attempt to establish the ASF has already had some positive effects. First, African countries find themselves fully engaged in the realization of the project and the political decision making is theirs. Second, the ASF project has allowed an assessment of States capacities in real-time. To that effect, it is even possible to say that the regional capacity building has accelerated national capacities. Finally, as demonstrated by the cases of ECOWAS or AMISOM, being confronted to crises is structuring for African actors. ASF's future therefore also depends on future crises and how African countries will succeed in managing them, while defending their interests. Beyond the operational obstacles, the only limit to such deployments remains that in conflicts many States are both part of the problem and the solution. In other words, the ASF is an ambitious project but will be effective only if the conflicts' structural factors are addressed upstream.