EASBRIG/EASF of the African Standby Force – shortcomings and prospects for the future

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Summary

The aim of the paper is to examine the shortcomings and prospects for the future of the East African Standby Force (EASF), one of the regional elements of the African Standby Force (ASF). The author begins with a brief analysis of origins of the concept, place of the ASF within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and mission scenarios. The next section is devoted to presenting the EASF in the light of some of the challenges and accomplishments in the process of its operationalization. Subsequently, the most important features of East African regional security complex are presented. In this context the author discusses the adequacy of the EASF to current and future security threats, as well as addresses the question of possibility of use of the Force. The paper concludes with considerations on the possible influence of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and recently proposed African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) for the ASF project.

The African Standby Force – the origins of the concept and its place within the African Peace and Security Architecture

The concept of a 'pan-African army' dates back to the 1960s when Kwame Nkrumah proposed the establishment of the 'common defence system with African high command' [Nkrumah 1963]. Despite many situations in which the existence of such a system could help in keeping the peace and preventing crises from escalating into conflicts, the Cold War logic, personal ambitions of leaders and structural weakness of both the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its member states hampered the ambitious ideas of the founding fathers.

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The concept was revitalised in the 1990s in the completely different political context. The competition among two superpowers – USA and USSR – came to an end. As a result, many African dictatorships (such as Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia and Muhammad Siad Barre in Somalia) lost support and were overthrown by armed opposition groups. The number and scope of internal conflicts increased dramatically. At first, the international community, driven by the concept of 'New World Order' and encouraged by the success (both in political and military terms) of the Operation 'Desert Storm' in the Persian Gulf, reacted very actively and comprehensively, at least in East Africa. In case of internal tensions in Ethiopia and Eritrean independence struggle, Western powers mediated successfully [Metaferia 2009: 77-80]. In Somalia the international community engaged militarily, organizing formidable military operations. The spectacular failure of UNITAF and UNOSOM II resulted in the reluctance of external powers to take robust actions on the continent [Sitkowski 2006: 97-110]. Apart from the Somalis, among the first victims of these policy were hundreds of thousands of Rwandans slaughtered during the 1994 genocide.

The indifference of the international community combined with the growing awareness of inefficiency and inadequacy of the OAU to the new, post-Cold War security environment ignited heated discussions among African political elites. The changing attitude toward peace and security was symbolised by the establishment of OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in 1993 [van Walraven 2010: 51]. What is more, some underpinnings concerning the creation of early response force were presented in the recommendations of the second meeting of the African Chiefs of Defence Staff in Harare in 1997. Such a force, based on five sub-regions, should be able to react in the crisis situations before the UN would engage [Bachmann 2011: 24].

More importantly, on the Extraordinary Summit of the OAU in Sirte, Libya (September 1999) the leaders agreed to introduce an essential reform of the OAU. In 2000 *The Constitutive Act of the African Union* has been adopted. This document marks a fundamental shift in many aspects, *inter alia* in the values and principles concerning political, economic and social activities. *The Constitutive Act* underlines the attachment of the Union to democratic practices, rule of law, good governance and human rights [Engel and Porto 2010: 1-3]. The member states agree 'to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation [of our] development and integration area' [African Union 2000]. To achieve peace and security, the up to date absolute value – sovereignty of a state – has been questioned and challenged. Article 4(h) of *The Constitutive Act* gives the Union the right 'to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave

circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity' [ibid.]. In 2003 this article has been amended and 'serious threat to legitimate order' has become the fourth circumstance justifying the AU intervention with or without the consent of the member state [African Union 2003a].

The critical importance of peace and security issues has been further underlined in the adoption of two documents: *The Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union* in July 2002 and *Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy* in February 2004. The PSC Protocol provides a legal base of African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) – a system of conflict prevention, management and resolution tools. The five pillars of the system include:

- Peace and Security Council (PSC) – a standing decision-making organ, composed of 15 members, elected from five regions for the period of two (10 members) and three (5 members) years. East, South and Central regions elect three members, North – two members, whereas West – four members of the PSC,
- The Panel of Wise – an advisory body with the tasks in the fields of conflict prevention and peacemaking. It is composed of 'five highly respected African personalities from various segments of society who have made outstanding contribution to the cause of peace, security and development of the continent',
- Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) – a body created 'in order to facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts'. The main task of CEWS is to collect and analyse the data concerning (potential) conflicts on the continent,
- The Peace Fund – created 'in order to provide the necessary financial resources for peace support missions and other operational activities related to peace and security',
- Military Staff Committee (MSC) – an advisory body 'composed of Senior Military Officers of the Members of the Peace and Security Council' and The African Standby Force (ASF) [African Union 2002].

The African Standby Force is a core element of the APSA. Apart from *The PSC Protocol*, other important regulations are included in *Policy Framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force and the Military Staff Committee* adopted in May 2003. As stated in Article 13 of *The PSC Protocol*, the ASF 'shall be composed of standby multidisciplinary contingents, with civilian and military components in their countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment at appropriate notice' [ibid.]. The ASF concept is based on three levels: continental (in particular the AU Commission), regional (Regional Economic

Communities – RECs or Regional Mechanisms – RMs – in the regions in which there are no RECs that encompass all states) and national (individual member states that contribute troops and train individuals in a way that allow for interoperability) [Franke 2010: 180-181].

On the regional level there are five standby brigades: the East African Standby Force (EASF), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Standby Force (ESF), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Standby Force (FOMAC), the North African Regional Capability (NARC) Standby Force and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Standby Force (SSF) [Kasumba and Debrah 2010: 14]. The number of troops in every brigade differs, for example in ESF there would be around 6500 troops [Fisher et al. 2010: 44] while the countries of FOMAC pledged around 4800 troops [Bachmann 2011: 31].

According to paragraph 3.17 of the *ASF Policy Framework* the PSC is 'the sole authority for mandating and terminating AU peace missions and operations' [African Union 2003b]. The interventions indicated in Article 4(h) of the *Constitutive Act* are only recommended by the PSC to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government that takes the ultimate decision [Cilliers and Pottgieter 2010: 123]. Therefore, the AU has political control over peace operations and interventions, whereas the role of the region is to generate and prepare force, as well as to provide planning, logistic and other support during deployment [Cilliers 2008: 2-3]. 'RECs/RMs are, however, not excluded from undertaking their own PSOs within their respective regions – but these would be classified as Regional Standby Force (RSF) operations' [Kasumba and Debrah 2010: 14-15].

As indicated in Article 13 of the *PSC Protocol*, the ASF could perform various functions: observations and monitoring missions, peace support operations, interventions in accordance with Article 4(h) and 4(j) of the *Constitutive Act*, preventive deployments, peace-building (including post-conflict disarmament and demobilization), humanitarian assistance in conflict areas and in case of natural disasters, as well as any other tasks given by the PSC or Assembly [African Union 2002]. In the *ASF Policy Framework* six possible deployment scenarios were pointed out:

1. AU/regional military advice to a political mission (deployment timeframe – 30 days),
2. AU/regional observer mission co-deployed with a UN mission (30 days),
3. Standalone AU/regional observer mission (30 days),
4. AU/regional peacekeeping force for Chapter VI and preventive deployment missions and peace-building (30 days),

5. AU peacekeeping force for complex multidimensional peacekeeping mission, including those involving low-level spoilers (90 days with the military component deploying in 30 days),

6. AU intervention in grave circumstances as those highlighted in Article 4(h) – 14 days with robust military force [African Union 2003b].

As indicated by very short deployment timeframes, especially in case of the scenario 6, the core attribute of the ASF would be its speed of action and deployment. Therefore, a lot of attention has been drawn to development of the Rapid Deployment Capability. In the RDC deployment concept it is assumed that 1000 personnel must be ready to deploy within 14 days and should be strengthened within next 14 days by 1500 strong follow-on force. 'During a third phase, the 'normal' ASF deployment would take place and the RDC would either be integrated into the force or rotate back to its base(s)' [Cilliers and Pottgieter 2010: 126-127].

The ambitious timelines set up in 2003 provided that the ASF would be ready to conduct all types of missions by 2010 [Cilliers 2008: 4]. However, the date had been postponed due to relatively slow progress in some regions and fields of cooperation. According to *Roadmap III for the Operationalization of the African Standby Force* the ASF will achieve Full Operational Capability by 2015 [African Union 2012].

East African Standby Force in the light of achievements and impediments to its operationalization

The road to operationalization of the EASF has been rather rough and marked by an immense array of challenges. The first problem has been the absence of Regional Economic Community covering all 14 countries of the region. In 2004 the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) assumed the coordination role in the establishment of Eastern Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG). As IGAD consisted of only seven states (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda), non-IGAD countries of the region protested against this move. As a result in 2007 the EASBRICOM (EASBRIG Coordination Mechanism) – the separate regional coordination mechanism – has been established. The structure is located in Nairobi, Kenya, so is the Planning Element (PLANELM) and Standby Force Headquarters. The Logistic Base (LOGBASE) and Brigade Headquarters are both located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia [Fisher et al. 2010: 40-42].

Second, the EASF has a relatively weak legal basis: two most important documents are *Policy Framework for the Establishment of EASBRIG* (adopted in 2004) and

Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the Eastern Africa Standby Brigade (signed in 2005). As the legal force of these documents is relatively low, the EASF depends largely on changing political will of states involved. On the basis of PF and MoU, the governance structure of the Force is as follows. The highest organ is the Assembly of Heads of States. Lower in the structure there are Council of Ministers of Defence and Security, as well as Committee of Chiefs of Staff. They supervise the EASFCOM (EASF Command) that coordinates the work of LOGBASE, PLANELM and Brigade Headquarters [ibid.: 41]. The independence of the structure of governance could be considered as both strength and weakness. Strength – because it makes it easier for a country to join EASF without joining any REC. Weakness – because signing out of a RM is less problematic and has minor consequences when compared to the suspension or limitation of membership in a REC.

The third main impediment to the development of the EASF (new name has been adopted by during the 6th Extraordinary Council Ministers meeting in June 2010) must be the ambivalence of some states. Out of 14 members of the Eastern Region, only 10 states take an active part in the EASF. These are: Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. Eritrea – the regional *enfant terrible* – has suspended its engagement in the process due to hostile relations with some of the other countries, most notably Ethiopia. In the same time Tanzania, Madagascar and Mauritius have chosen to join the Southern region [Cilliers and Pottgieter 2010: 134].

Fourth obstacle, in many aspects connected with previous three, has been political tensions between the countries of the region. The history (and present days) of international relations in Africa is marked by numerous conflicts, crises, changing alliances and support of armed opposition groups in the neighbouring countries. All these factors create a climate of mistrust between 'partners'. Since the concept of ASF (as multinational armed forces that could be used in any country, sometimes against the national interest of a troop contributor) touches the very core of sovereignty and national security, such an atmosphere 'successfully' limits the commitment of the governments.

Fifth problem is the structural weakness of most of states in general and national armed forces in particular. The concept of EASF could be truly materialized only by strong, formidable contingents from the member states that are capable of mobilizing resources to prepare such units and sustain them in the long period of time. At the same time most – if not all – states in East Africa are far from internal stability – in 2012 three countries that could be viewed as pillars of the EASF (Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) were classified in *The Failed States Index* at the positions 17, 16 and 20 respectively. Another three countries taking part in

the EASF – Burundi, Somalia and Sudan – are also in the top twenty (positions 18, 1 and 3 respectively) [Foreign Policy and Fund For Peace 2012]. Keeping in mind all limitations of this ranking, the fact that 6 out of 10 contributors are considered as highly dysfunctional states justifies questioning their ability to prepare and sustain rapid reaction forces. What is more, the core challenge in the operationalization and future actions of the (E)ASF seems to be the interoperability. In East Africa where there are different colonial backgrounds and indigenous traditions of the organization of armed forces, the achievement of full interoperability would be especially difficult.

As the sixth problem the lack of resources could be pointed out. This hindrance should be understood broadly, not only as a scarcity of funds, by also as a lack of military, police and civilian experts that could contribute to the project of the EASF. It creates a problem of dependence on external support, undermines local ownership of the Force and as a result calls into question the role of the ASF as an 'African solution to African problems'. The EASF is supported in various ways by number of countries and organizations associated in the forum of 'Friends of EASF' established in 2007 [Bachmann 2011]. For example 'the Government of Netherlands has played a very instrumental role in the development of C2 CIS Support capacities and capabilities since the year 2008' [Bouhuys 2011: 29].

Notwithstanding abovementioned problems, hurdles and shortcomings, there is a significant progress in the operationalization of the EASF. First of all, the independent regional coordination mechanism – EASBRICOM – has been created. It has also been proposed that EASBRICOM will be reconfigured as an Eastern African Peace and Security Secretariat (EAPSS) acting in the framework of Eastern Africa Peace and Security Mechanism (EAPSM) [Cilliers and Pottgieter 2010: 135]. These developments, as well as adoption of new roadmap documents, such as *The EASF Strategic Development Plan*, show that despite political tensions, states are willing to develop the project. The question of motives of such engagement remains unanswered.

EASBRIG/EASF successfully conducted several exercises, such as CPX 08 (Command Post Exercise), FTX 09 (Field Training Exercise), MAPEX '10 (Map Exercise), Njiwa '12 and most recently FTX Mashariki Salam 2013 [Bouhuys 2011: 28; Jobson 2012; Xinhua 2013]. The last training, translated as 'Peaceful Eastern Africa', took place in May 2013 in Uganda. Summarising the exercise, the EASF Brigade Commander, brig. Gen. Jack Bakasumba declared that its Force would have Full Operational Capability by 2015 which means that it 'will be able to undertake any mission assigned by the United Nations or the

African Union.' [Xinhua 2013]. Initial Operational Capability has been achieved in 2009 [Bouhuys 2011: 28]. Taken into account this fact, as well as the scale of 'Peaceful Eastern Africa' (over 1200 troops, police and civilian personnel from all 10 contributing countries), the 2015 goal seems to be attainable.

A very interesting development within the EASF, both in the context of its possible future activities, as well as in the light of possible changes in main six scenarios of the ASF, is the establishment of a Maritime Cell within the Military Planning Element [ibid.: 28]. It seems that it is a reaction to the problem of piracy, as well as to the broader issue of a growing importance of maritime transport. It is worth mentioning that the construction work in Lamu, northern Kenya, are underway. The port, due to be used not only by Kenya, but also by Ethiopia, Uganda and other countries, will be among the biggest and most important in Africa. As a result the ability to react to threats to maritime security on the waters surrounding East Africa will become a crucial one for the countries of the region.

As next (relative) success of the EASF one can mention the development of police and civilian component. According to many authors, a very slow progress in that field is one of the main shortcomings of the entire ASF project. In 2011, there were 176 Civilian Personnel registered in the EASF Standby Roster. Up to this date, 635 police officer had also been trained [Bouhuys 2011: 28]. In the abovementioned exercise Njiwa '12 there were over 100 police and civilian participants, working on the development of skills in capacity building for the rule of law institutions [Jobson 2012]. On the other hand, it seems that there is a growing awareness among the decision-makers that military component should assume some tasks other than 'hard' military functions. For example in May 2013 the EASF troops rebuilt a clinic in Uganda [Nambogga 2013].

Moreover, the EASF is engaged, yet to a limited extent, in the African Union Mission in Somalia. The Force deployed a 231-strong police component to AMISOM, although it is composed not only of East African countries' troops. The core of the component are 142 Ugandans but there is also the personnel from Nigeria and Ghana. In the senior leadership team of six there are officers from Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Burundi and the Gambia. 'Albeit small (…) the EASF police mission is significant in the development of the police dimension of the ASF' [Aboagye 2012: 2]. What is more, the EASF has been also incorporated as a part of United Nation Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) and United Nations Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA). Additionally, on the request of the African Union, it carried out a fact finding mission in Somalia [Bouhuys 2011: 28].

The achievement of Full Operational Capability by the EASF by 2015 seems possible. The Eastern region has signed framework documents and memorandum of understanding, established PLANELM and Brigade Headquarters, identified centre of excellence. Ten countries constantly develop military, police and civilian component of the EASF, i.e. through numerous exercises. They also pledged around 5500 troops. External donors permanently express their support to the project, filling the resource gap by sending advisors and significant amounts of money. In the same time, there are numerous shortcomings and challenges. Many of them, such as lack of resources and problems in coordination with the AU and RECs (IGAD and EAC) have already drawn attention of scholars and practitioners. However, these investigations are largely focused on more 'technical' issues concerning operationalization of the ASF. The more fundamental questions – such as the adequacy of the EASF to the current and future security situation in the region, as well as the real possibility of use of the Force, has been neglected. These issues will be discussed in the next sections of this paper.

East Africa as a regional security complex and the (in)adequacy of the ASF to conflicts and crises in the region

According to Buzan and Weaver, regional security complex is "defined by durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of sub-global, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence" [Buzan and Weaver 2003: 45]. Its main elements, separate yet interrelated, are: boundaries, anarchic structure, polarity and socially constructed patterns of amity and enmity [ibid.: 53]. Clearly, the concept of the ASF is to some extent connected to the understanding of regions as security complexes. The hidden assumption behind the project is that specific security threats and challenges in every region are different and should be addressed in a tailored manner by countries of this region.

The boundaries of all five African regions are blurred and volatile. In the Eastern region this feature could be depicted by the examples of Tanzania and Burundi. Tanzania balances between South and East which is symbolised by membership in both East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). The country is no longer engaged in EASF and takes part in the SSF. On the other hand, Burundi, traditionally considered more as a central than eastern African state, has joined both EAC and EASF. As indicated by these examples, the countries' membership in a region could change relatively quickly.

There is also another understanding of boundaries in the context of regional security complex, namely the one of the their 'character' and influence on regional security. The common feature of most African borders is that they are comparatively permeable in the sense that they are not an effective barrier to various threats to national and regional security. In fact most of past and present conflicts and crises on the continent has been transboundary in their very essence. This has been particularly evident in the case of conflict in Darfur that has spilled over the borders with Chad and Central African Republic. Therefore, any instrument (including the ASF) aimed at addressing the threats to peace and security should be designed in a manner that takes into account this essential feature.

Another elements of the regional security complex are: anarchic structure, polarity and socially constructed patterns of amity and enmity. The first of them – understood as the existence of minimum two autonomous units in a system – is rather not controversial. The two others need further discussion. Polarity refers to power distribution in a region that can be uni-, bi-, or multipolar. In the context of peace operations it is connected with the concept of a lead nation – a state that assumes primary responsibility for providing a lion share of troops and other resources for an operation. In East Africa the term 'power' is very relative. As mentioned above, 6 out of 10 EASF countries are among 20 most failed states in the world. Even countries perceived as regional powers – Ethiopia and Kenya – are only the strongest among the weak ones. It seems that in East Africa (and in Africa in general) the more important than the distribution of power is 'the distribution of weakness'. As a result, there is no state that could assume the role of a lead nation in the EASF, as Nigeria does in the ESF in West Africa.

The last element of a regional security complex are socially constructed patterns of amity and enmity. In (East) Africa these patterns are constructed more by the elites than by societies, mainly because almost all states are authoritarian and thus social influence on foreign policy remains limited. Nevertheless, as in every region, there are relatively durable alliances and rivalries between states. Probably the longest and strongest alliance is the one between Ethiopia and Kenya. At the same time, there are also political tensions and rivalries between some states, most notably Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In a regional security complex, every country plays more or less important role. In East Africa, understood as 14 countries that were or are involved in the EASF project, these roles are distributed as follows:

- regional powers and possible pillars of the EASF: Ethiopia (the strongest military) and Kenya (the strongest economy),
- regional peacekeepers: Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and to visibly lesser extent Djibouti and Comoros (countries with minor military and economic potential than Ethiopia and Kenya, yet willing to contribute troops to peace support operations),
- the islands of instability: Sudan and Somalia (considered as the most failed states in the world yet involved in the project. Their ability to contribute to the EASF remains highly questionable as their militaries are not able to provide internal security),
- *enfant terrible*: Eritrea (a country conflicted with virtually all of its neighbours and not involved in the EASF),
- South Sudan (still out of the EASF project)
- regional bystanders: Tanzania, Madagascar and Mauritius (countries located in the outskirts of the region and involved in the SSF).

As indicated in this brief analysis, the East African regional security complex has a specific character and involves numerous threats and challenges to peace and security. The most important are: interstate and intrastate tensions and conflicts, the existence of *de facto* sovereign political units (most notably Somaliland), permeability of borders, structural weakness of all states and internal instability, authoritarian character of political regimes that violate human rights (causing resistance – sometimes armed – of parts of a society), extreme poverty and low human development, mass migrations, maritime piracy and maritime (in)security in general, terrorist activities, environmental challenges, such as desertification (Sudan), deforestation (Somalia) and periodic drought (Ethiopia-Kenya-Somalia-Djibouti cluster).

An immanent feature of every concept, including the ASF, is that it is a reaction on previous events, types of conflicts and crises. In the same time it is created to deal with threats that will emerge in the future. In the context of the ASF as an instrument of conflict management the fundamental question is a following one: could the ASF provide an efficient answer to abovementioned conflicts, crises and challenges? And – more importantly – would it be adaptable to future developments in the field of peace and security in the region?

It is extremely hard, if not impossible, to predict future events in any region, including East Africa. But certainly there are some challenges that the sub-regional and regional community will face in the mid- and long term perspective. In my opinion the biggest challenge for regional security in the long run would derive from the combination of socio-

economic and environmental factors that authoritarian regimes could only 'freeze' but not deeply and comprehensively addressed. The recent economic growth in many countries of the region is in a large part 'consumed' by growing population. Combined with ethnic divisions, this mix would probably further destabilize situations in already weak states. The key to maintaining regional peace and security would be the ability to address these issues. It means that peacebuilding, rather than peacekeeping and peace enforcement, would be of critical significance. This would require further development of police and more importantly civilian components of the ASF that are currently neglected, as well as modification of the concept in the way that allow for long term military and civilian presence in a destabilized country.

Probably the most prominent threat to regional peace and security in the near future, as shown by the 'Arab Spring', would be the problem of unconstitutional changes of government in the context of the existence of authoritarian regimes and undemocratic political systems created by them and strengthened by undemocratic constitutions. Article 4(j) gives the Member States 'a right to request interventions from the Union in order to restore peace and security'. Article 4(h), on the other hand, provides the AU with a right 'to intervene in a Member State (…) in respect of (…) a serious threat to legitimate order to restore peace and stability to the Member State (…)' [African Union 2003]. On this legal basis an authoritarian regime will have the right to ask for help in case of social unrests similar to these in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. As the 'elbow-lickers' protests in the mid of 2012 in the Sudan has shown the mass demonstrations are possible also in East Africa. What would the PSC and the Assembly do in such a situation? Would the ASF be used against protesters representing a significant part of a society demanding human rights and social justice? If not and if social unrests become a civil war, like in Syria – at which stage of a conflict would the PSC and Assembly send the ASF to cease the hostilities? Would the ASF be an impartial force mandated to separate the belligerents or would it support one side? If so – which one: the 'legal' government slaughtering their citizens or 'illegal' pretenders to power?

In fact the AU never invoked the provisions of Article 4 to justify military intervention in a member state. Williams mentions three main reasons of this reluctance in cases such as Sudan/Darfur, Libya and Ivory Coast: the strength of the host state, the residual power of the principle of non-interference and lack of practical military capacity for humanitarian intervention [Williams 2011: 5]. This brief list of factors could be amended by at least four additional elements:

- the culture of consensus among African states that would limit the use of 2/3 majority rule in decision-making organs, as well as internal 'arithmetic' within both the PSC and the Assembly,

- the interests of external powers (such as former colonial powers, the US or China) in a given state that limits the possibilities of action of regional community,

- the fear of disturbing regional balance of power expressed by neighbours,

- the concern of other states for being the subject of similar intervention in the future ('solidarity' of states/governments understood in a very specific way).

All these factors justifies calling into question the possibility of use of the (E)ASF. Even if the Force would be well-trained, equipped, interoperable and self-sustainable, it could never be used because of the network of interconnected and interrelated interests of African and external actors.

In my opinion the situation when the PSC and Assembly would make a decision to send the (E)ASF to a country affected by a crisis or internal conflict remain relatively unlikely. But even if the political climate would be favourable, the main asset of the (E)ASF, namely the speed of (re)action, may not be used. Apart from political calculations, there would be also financial ones. An ASF mission, especially covering the scenarios 4, 5 and 6 would be very costly. As a result African states, as well as bureaucrats in Addis Ababa would be rather reluctant to use ASF, simultaneously expecting a reaction from the United Nations. Additionally, many steps would have to be taken before the ASF would be mandated with specific tasks. As Cilliers and Pottgieter noted: 'it is important to recognize that a number of preparations will precede a mandate, including fact-finding mission, development of a concept of operations and various warning orders to troops on standby to improve levels of readiness' [Cilliers and Pottgieter 2010: 126].

AMISOM experience – what does it mean for the ASF project?

Another significant issue that should be consider when assessing the feasibility of the ASF and the prospects for its operationalization is the case of the AMISOM. This operation conducted by multinational coalition of African countries (most notably Uganda, Burundi and Kenya) with a massive financial, logistic and political support of international community (mainly the EU) is often referred to as a success story. Undoubtedly, the mission has helped to bring a ray of hope for stability in Somalia, forcing Al-Shabaab militants out of main cities and helping in the establishment of permanent state institutions, even when one invokes the

lack of self-sustainability and an alarming death rate (probably as many as 3000 soldiers since 2007 – Charbonneau 2013). What does the AMISOM experience mean for the ASF?

First of all, AMISOM indicates that to stabilize a failed state a huge and long term military presence is needed. In comparison with most African countries, Somalia with its 10 million inhabitants is relatively small. The AMISOM area of operation is inhabited by even smaller number of people. Currently, the mission has more than 17 700 soldiers and police officers (a number approximately equal to three ASF regional brigades) and operates since 2007 [AMISOM 2013]. Thus, the current AU experience in Somalia indicates that only one mission of a size and complexity similar to AMISOM 'could easily bind the whole ASF for years, leaving no operational reserves for a second ASF mission' [Bachmann 2011: 42].

Second, AMISOM example shows that the AU and its member states operate efficiently on the *ad hoc* basis. It justifies the question whether it would not be better to react to conflict and crises using this flexible model at least in conducting complex and prolonged peace support operations, at the same time confining the ASF to the RDC – a rapid reaction force ready to take immediate action in a situation similar to this described in scenario 6.

Third, it is important to keep in mind that one of main assumptions in the ASF concept is that the exit strategy is a transition to a UN-led multidimensional peace support operation. In this context the AMISOM example could and should be alarming – according to first UN Security Council Resolutions and Communiques of the PSC the AU Mission was to be replaced by a UN peacekeeping operation after only six months since its beginning. After almost six years there is still no indication that an UN mission would take over the task of stabilizing Somalia in the near future, mainly because the UN has a very restrictive entry criteria. Thus in the process of conceptualizing the ASF the possibility that the UN would not be willing to follow-on the AU efforts should be taken into account.

ACIRC – 'transitional stop-gap measure' or an alternative to the ASF?

A very interesting recent development in the context of operationalization of the ASF is the decision made at the African Union summit in Addis Ababa in May 2013. The leaders agreed to create the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) that would be 'a transitional stop-gap measure pending the full formation of the planed Standby Force' [Maasho 2013]. The ACIRC would be a rapid response force 'formed from voluntary contributions of troops, equipment and funds by member states currently in a position to provide these' [ibid.]. This decision could be seen as a part of larger and deeper conceptual confusion concerning the ASF project. As veteran observer, cited by Bachmann, puts it: the

ASF is 'a moving target built on a swamp of non-addressed issues and high expectations' [Bachmann 2011: 42].

The recent proposal is not only a further development of the RDC. In my opinion it could be considered in three different yet interconnected ways. First, ACIRC could be seen as an alternative to ASF. As a force formed from 'voluntary contributions' made by states 'currently on position to provide these', the ACIRC is another symptom of *ad hocism* – a very popular way of addressing complex issues by the AU. The very essence of this concept is the establishment of a rapid reaction force that would not be bound in a relatively rigid structures of the RECs/RMs but would be based on an *AD HOC* contributions and agreements. ASF with its *Peace Support Operations Doctrine*, chain of command and permanent structures is a complete antithesis of the ACIRC. Second, the proposal could be perceived as hang out of the white flag by African leaders disillusioned with the ASF. Third, it may also be a kind of 'tactical withdrawal' that serves national interests of African states. ASF and regional brigades has been supported by external donors as a multinational project. A lion share of donations goes for preparation of interoperable regional standby brigades and coordination mechanisms on international level. On the other hand, ACIRC – based on voluntary contributions – would be supported more on the basis of bilateral cooperation between donors and recipients. Clearly, it would serve the national interests of the states in a better way, i.e. because it would allow the development and modernization of national armed forces under the guise of enhancing capacities to preserve regional peace and security.

Conclusion

The struggle for conceptualization and operationalization of the ASF could be described as a process of raising the expectations toward the ASF to constantly higher levels. Throughout its relatively short history, the ASF has been assigned with new tasks to be carried out in ever shorter periods of time. Simultaneously, apart from minor positive developments, such as the establishment of a Maritime Cell within the Military Planning Element of the EASF, it seems that the ASF is wrongly confined to some conflicts and crises scenarios while missing to develop concepts for addressing future threats and more importantly – peacebuilding and stabilization capacity that would be crucial for ensuring peace and security on the continent. Probably the APSA should be amended by the establishment of the African Peacebuilding Capacity while assigning the ASF to strictly rapid reaction force tasks. In this context the recent AU summit decision to establish ACIRC could

be a promising development. Further extension of the already broad and ambitious ASF tasks could lead to higher vagueness and in consequence fallacy of the entire project.

The challenges for operationalization of the ASF in general and the EASF in particular remains significant. In East African among the most important one can mention the lack of resources, the ambivalence of some states, political tensions among governments, the unstable political will of state elites, weak legal base, as well as structural weakness of states and national armies. The EASF countries have also some accomplishments, most notably the establishment of the independent coordination mechanism, the deployment of small number of personnel in Somalia and cooperation with the UN in this country, the establishment of a Maritime Cell, successfully conducted exercises, as well as slow but steady development of civilian and police components.

In my opinion apart from impediments to operationalization, the biggest threat for the ASF is that it may become a hostage to network of interconnected and interrelated intra-African and external interests. When the financial calculations and fear that the UN would not be willing to engage after short period of time would also be taken into account by African leaders, the AU may never authorize the deployment of the Force. As indicated by the AMISOM experience, the reliance on the UN follow-on mission could lead to a prolonged AU involvement in an extremely complex conflict. With no doubt, the ASF is a concept worth developing, but it does not address the problem that it was design to address – the over-reliance on broader international community in keeping the peace on the continent.

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