



The African Union's military missions reviewed

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In the current issue of the “Pulaski Policy Papers” our Research Fellow Jędrzej Czerep analyses the importance of the military missions launched by the AU. “Often the officers in charge improvise, the countries act unilaterally, and missions' goals are being re-defined with the change of the situation on the field. There is a general agreement in the AU that in some cases it must intervene, but its member states usually differ in opinions about what actually has to be done and what kind of forces are needed. The experience of the three missions to the conflict areas – Sudan (Darfur), Comoros and Somalia – are very different. The result of the latter, still ongoing, would envisage the actual military potential of the African Union in 2012.”

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The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is an independent, non-partisan think tank with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out such activities as conducting scientific research, preparing publications and analyses, organizing seminars and conferences, providing education and support for leaders in Poland and abroad. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation is one of only two Polish institutions that have a partnership status with the Council of Europe and is a member of the Group Abroad – an umbrella organization of top 40 Polish NGOs working outside of Poland.

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The African Union (AU) was formed in 2002 to deepen the political and economic integration in Africa. Its founding fathers believed in the continent's collective responsibility – the AU has to react if crisis puts the citizens of one country or region into danger. The organization plans to set up a permanent African Standby Force which would intervene whenever is needed. But even now, the military missions are being sent to the crisis areas. This way, the AU gains military and political experience. It is being done despite the lack of equipment, soldiers, and a cohesive strategy. Often the officers in charge improvise, the countries act unilaterally, and missions' goals are being re-defined with the change of the situation on the field. There is a general agreement in the AU that in some cases it must intervene, but its member states usually differ in opinions about what actually has to be done and what kind of forces are needed. The experience of the three missions to the conflict areas – Sudan (Darfur), Comoros and Somalia – are very different. The result of the latter, still ongoing, would envisage the actual military potential of the African Union in 2012.

The African Union Mission to Darfur (AMIS / UNAMID)

Its history starts in April 2004 when Darfurian factions signed a cease-fire which was to be monitored by the EU and the AU observers. 150 Rwandan soldiers came to secure their work. Soon next countries (Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Gambia, and Senegal) sent their troops. In the mid-2005 there were some 7 thousands African soldiers in Sudan which has just signed a peace treaty with the South, under the AMIS (African Union Mission in Sudan) flag. Their mission was to let the humanitarian organisations do their work and to monitor the AU-established no-fly zone over Darfur. Practically, the AMIS was exposed to the attacks of the armed militia.

The mission faced the shortages of people, supplies, and the lack of proper founding. It was overwhelmed by the size of the territory and the strength of militias hostile to any foreign forces. 2005 brought first victims among the AU soldiers. In 2006 the AMIS mission was to be absorbed by the planned UN force, but the Khartoum government did not let it into the country. The African troops found themselves stuck in Sudan, unable to act and handle its commandship to the UN. The West was not sending promised the funds and supplies. The soldiers stayed unpaid, and first countries (like Senegal) declared they withdraw.

The UN managed to send its troops in by the end of 2007 and the 9 thousand AMIS soldiers formally joined them December that year. The new hybrid AU-UN mission was inaugurated under the name UNAMID. Practically, its AU component does not play any vital role. The commandship and the strategic planning are in the hands of the UN.

The AU went to Darfur unaware of the challenges and risk that it later faced. It should not have been expanded spontaneously without securing its founding. It was clearly short of strategy, not prepared for the confrontation with the hostile forces. There was no political will to overcome these difficulties. In effect, the AU leaders preferred to cease the mission's tasks to the UN.

The Comoros intervention

The military action undertaken by the AU on Comoros in 2008 looked differently. Its main goal was to bring back the constitutional order on the Anjouan island that belongs to the

archipelago. Colonel Mohamed Bacar took power there in 2007. He ignored the legal central government of the Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, organised elections, and declared himself its winner – the president. The AU, which does not accept coups, decided to assist the Comoran government in re-taking Anjouan. It sent 1500 troops from Tanzania (750), Sudan (600) and Senegal (150) which would join the 500 soldiers from Comoros. Libya and France offered logistic assistance. The operation was very well planned and prepared. Invasion started April 26, 2008, African troops came close to Anjouan on French boats. The intervening forces were much stronger than the rebels. The goals of the action were clearly defined and could be achieved with no victims on the AU side, and among civilians. The island was taken within one day. M. Bacar left for the French territory of Mayotta.

What was particularly important, the rebels were defeated by the very African forces, with the AU mandate. France, which role was very important, did not want to carry out the action by itself, but let the AU mission win the battle. Bernard Kouchner, French Foreign Affairs Minister, stressed that Paris did not hold with any of the sides of the political dispute on Comoros, but supported the AU's position.

The intervention was the first combat mission of the African forces under the AU flag. It was limited to a very local conflict and politically safe, but it was a milestone in the AU military history. Soldiers from several countries fought under one command. The signal was sent that an African mission, if properly planned and organised, can be effective. The Anjouan success had a big impact on the parallel mission in Somalia. The AU leaders became confident that the organisation can intervene on its own.

The AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM)

The mission in Somalia, a failed state since 1991, started in February 2007 on the basis of the UN mandate and continues until today. It had replaced the previous mission, that IGAD (6 countries from the Horn of Africa) tried to form. It was only Uganda that was accepted as an intervening force by all its members and willing to send troops. The AU decided to support it with contingents from other member states, and took the whole action under its wings. The AU countries, namely Malawi, Nigeria, Burundi, Ghana, Tanzania and Rwanda, declared they would send soldiers. However, those promises remained unfulfilled. The mission remained in the hands of Uganda, which only got some limited help from Burundi.

Meanwhile, the situation on the ground in Somalia changed radically. Originally, the mission was about to counterbalance the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) forces, which controlled most of the country. The West described them as Somali Taliban (from the today's perspectives they are seen as moderate Islamists). To get rid of them, the U.S. convinced Ethiopia to intervene. The Ethiopian action brought many unnecessary deaths and political mistakes. In the result, new powerful force, Al-Shabaab, emerged. The organization with links to Al-Qaeda was far more fanatic than the UIC and hostile to the AU mission. It quickly took control over most of the country, including Baidoa, where AMISOM tried to put a government that would be accepted by the world (Transitional Federal Government, TFG). The enthusiasm of the countries that previously declared willingness to send troops quickly evaporated. The Ugandans and Burundians who stayed on the ground could only operate within a very limited territory in the capital, constantly attacked by the Al-Shabaab.

The mandate of the mission, which was peacekeeping, came to an end in July 2011, when Al-Shabaab put bombs in two restaurants in Ugandan capital Kampala. The explosions killed 74 people who watched the final of the World Cup in football. The AU let the mission attack Islamists directly, even when not attacked. It promised the Djiboutan and Guinean troops would soon join. In the same time the military situation on the ground started to

improve. While in the beginning of the 2011 AMISOM only controlled some districts of Mogadishu and desperately tried to prevent the expected fall of the TFG, it started to regain territory. This was possible thanks to the alliance made with local sufi militia Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamma (ASWJ) and the fact that Al-Shabaab lost popular support when it did not want to let in humanitarian aid to the hunger-affected areas. In July 2011 AMISOM and TFG pushed the Islamists out of the capital, and started to win battles in the interior. The U.S. discretely joined the fight by bombing the Al-Shabaab camps by drones. AMISOM itself got enough experience to avoid most of the mistakes it used to make on the ground. With the progress observed the AU countries became more willing to send troops – first soldiers from Djibouti arrived in December 2011. By the early 2012 AMISOM had 10 thousand soldiers in Somalia and there was a feeling that the war is being won.

However, back in October 2011 new problems occurred. Al-Shabaab abducted several Westerners (including Britons and Spaniards) in Kenya. Nairobi felt threatened and did not want its tourist industry to suffer loss of clients. It ordered unilateral intervention. Quickly Ethiopia did the same coming in from the North. The Kenyan action was not properly discussed with the TFG and AMISOM. Its military goals were not clear. Kenya did not declare if it only wanted to create a buffer zone by its border, to take main Al-Shabaab port of Kismayo, or to defeat Islamists in the whole Somalia. Ethiopians, on their side, were again seen by Somalians as enemies and occupants. The memories of the previous Ethiopian rule in 2006-2009, which caused hundreds of deaths, were still very fresh in Mogadishu. The political success of the AMISOM was again under threat. Finally, by December 2011 Kenya agreed to put its troops under AMISOM command, even if it went against the reasonable principle that the neighbouring countries should not take part in the authorised AU interventions. In January and February 2012 Kenya negotiated the conditions under which the transfer would be made (it expected the EU to help fund the war). By early January 2012 Ethiopia agreed to have its troops in Somalia replaced by more African forces under AMISOM umbrella. To make it real, the UN Security Council, February 22, 2012, authorised expansion of the mission to 17,7 thousand soldiers.

Summary

The African Union gained some experience in managing military missions in the conflict areas. Well designed Comoros intervention was a breakthrough that brought much needed optimism and faith in success of future missions. Contrary to the Darfur, countries sending troops to Somalia are aware of the difficulties they will face, and accept the fact that some might die. The AU becomes assertive; it does what it can to maintain the home-grown and legal character of its missions. It does not want the work to be done by strong and experienced regional powers if they do not fall to its framework. However, as for now it is not ready to face financial and logistic challenges of interventions on its own.

Recommendations for the European Union

1. The defeat of Al-Shabaab is in a vital interest of the EU, whose citizens risk of being attacked by its members in the Horn of Africa. To achieve this goal it is needed to support the AMISOM mission.
2. Trainings and supplies for the AMISOM contingents should be carried out discretely. The EU cannot make an impression that the AU flag serves as a disguise to the intervention of external powers that have their own interests in Somalia.

3. The home-grown African character of the mission has to be maintained and its political success secured. This would encourage AU to react to the future conflicts effectively by its own (and not West's or EU's) hands. To achieve these purposes it is needed to:

- a) Use all means of pressure to Kenya to put its forces in Somalia under the mandate and command of AMISOM,
- b) Support the replacement of the Ethiopian forces with the fresh AU troops financially and logistically,
- c) Press those African countries that have professional armed forces (such as South Africa) to join the AMISOM mission.

4. The EU should not host talks of the Somali political factions and donors, such as February 23, 2012, conference in London, which raises questions (in Eritrea, or Somalia) about the open meddling in the affairs of the Somali people. Such a role should be played by such African countries that do not have their own interests in Somalia (e.g. South Sudan, Mozambique).

The Casimir Pulaski Foundation

is an independent think tank which specializes in foreign policy, with a mission to promote freedom, equality and democracy, as well as to support actions of strengthening civil society. The foundation carries out activities both in Poland and abroad, among others in Central and Eastern Europe and in North America.

The Casimir Pulaski Foundation was founded due to political changes that took place in Poland after 1989. The principal values of Casimir Pulaski (freedom, justice and democracy) are an inspiration for every initiative undertaken by the Foundation. A few of the Foundations activities include: conducting scientific research, preparing publications and analyses, organizing seminars and conferences, providing education and support for leaders (www.instytutprzywodztwa.pl).

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