



EUFOR Tchad/RCA – A Cautionary Note

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In late January 2008, the European Union launched its largest and most ambitious military operation in Africa - EUFOR Tchad/RCA – to protect civilians in eastern Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) through the deployment of 3,700 troops from 14 EU countries. But there are serious questions about the operation and the EU has little time to reflect on these for fear of losing the narrow window of time available for deployment prior to the rainy season.

Introduction

In late January 2008, the European Union launched its largest and most ambitious military operation in Africa. Taking place in the institutional framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the operation has the purpose of protecting civilians in eastern Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) through the deployment of a force (EUFOR Tchad/RCA) of 3,700 troops from 14 EU countries.¹ As a bridging operation, the duration of the mission is 12 months – the intention being to give the United Nations sufficient time to assemble a follow-on force to take over the operation.

Presently, the European Union finds itself in an awkward position. Despite serious questions about the operation – further highlighted by the latest developments on the ground – the EU has little time to reflect on its operation for fear of losing the narrow window of time available for deployment prior to the rainy season.² The following analysis concludes that the EU needs to re-assess its operation and the way forward.³

1. Recent developments

The past few months have witnessed three important developments that have an impact on EUFOR Tchad/RCA:

- First, the continued delays plaguing the deployment of the hybrid UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). Despite taking over the mission in late December 2007, only 9,000 out of the proposed 26,000 peacekeepers have been deployed as of February 2008.⁴ Worse still, the deployed troops are poorly equipped and lacking vital assets such as helicopters and ground transportation. Ongoing differences between Khartoum and the UN over the composition of the force have further complicated the deployment.⁵ The likelihood that UNAMID comes close to reaching full operational capability in the near future appears

¹ Out of the 3,700 troops, the majority will be French (2,100) followed by Ireland (400), Poland (400), Austria (250), Sweden (200).

² The rainy season starts around mid-May and makes overland transport – which is required for deployment – near impossible. As the main force will use a combination of strategic sealift (to Douala port) and extensive overland transport, deploying prior to the onset of the rain season will already be very challenging given the recent delays.

³ The author would like to thank Dr. Stephen Pullinger and David Lanz for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

⁴ See Jane's Defence, 'Africa's Peacekeeping Challenges in 2008', *Foreign Report*, 31 January 2008.

⁵ Khartoum has already rejected troops from Norway and Sweden and expressed reservations about troops from Thailand and Nepal; arguing that the force would otherwise not be "predominately African in character" as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1769 (2007). See Thalif Deen, 'Differences remain over composition of Darfur Peacekeeping Force', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 20 February 2008.

increasingly remote. As EUFOR is meant to complement UNAMID; this prospect should raise serious concerns in regards to EUFOR.

- Second, the escalation of Chad’s internal power struggle. A peace agreement brokered by Libya in October 2007 (known as the Sirte Agreement) proved short-lived, with clashes between several rebel groups and the Chadian Armed Forces (ANT) resuming within weeks. After heavy fighting in eastern Chad, three rebel groups (RFC, UFDD and UFDD/F)⁶ formed an alliance against President Déby, and in late January/early February 2008 they launched a lightning assault on Chad’s capital N’ djamena. While this attempt to overthrow Déby failed, the rebels did manage to withdraw from the capital in an orderly manner, thereby ensuring that the power struggle within the country will continue.
- Third, the deteriorating relationship between Chad and Sudan; fueled over the last few months by the support of each country for the rebellion in the other. While President Déby, in December 2007, ordered air strikes on Chadian rebels inside Darfur, Khartoum assisted the formation of the aforementioned rebel alliance and facilitated the assault on N’ djamena. In response, Déby has promised retaliation against Sudan. At the same time, as some of the Darfurian rebels had rushed to Déby’s support in N’ djamena, Khartoum stepped up its counter-insurgency campaign in western Darfur. The consequent increase in fighting in Darfur also caused further population displacement, with several thousand additional Darfurians seeking refuge in eastern Chad.

These developments were not unanticipated. A leaked situational assessment from the Austrian Armed Forces from November 2007, discusses at some length the possibility of a renewed rebel assault on N’ djamena as well as further destabilization of Darfur as a result of the non-deployment of UNAMID.⁷ It is unclear, however, whether the impacts of these developments were fully understood at the time.

2. Conceptual flaws

At present EUFOR’s mission appears to suffer from conceptual flaws, as its objective became increasingly detached from the broader context. The following section will briefly outline how the broader regional conflict gradually receded into the background.

Over the past several years, the situation in Darfur (the western region of Sudan) - and not in Chad and CAR - has been a serious concern for European policy-makers. The deaths of thousands of Darfurians and the displacement of millions more created political pressures in Europe to resolve the humanitarian crisis. As a direct intervention in Darfur proved difficult, however – largely due to Khartoum’s objections, the alternative was to act on the margins of the crisis.⁸ Eastern Chad and northeastern CAR, where thousands of Darfurians had sought refuge, thus became the alternative focus.

⁶ Rally of Forces for Change (*Rassemblement des forces pour le changement: RFC*) led by Timane Erdimi; Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (*Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement: UFDD*) led by Mahamat Nouri; Union of Forces for Democracy and Development-Fundamental (*Union des forces pour le développement et la démocratie /Fondamentale: UFDD/F*) led by Abdel Wahid Aboud Mackaye.

⁷ Bundesministerium der Landesverteidigung, *Militärstrategische Weisung Nr.2* (GZ S93304/134-Evb/2007). Concerning the possibility of renewed rebel attack, the assessment reads: "Unter dem Gesichtspunkt, dass sich die noch aktiven Rebellengruppen den Sturz von Präsident DEBY zum Ziel gesetzt haben, ist mit der Möglichkeit eines Wiederaufflammens der bewaffneten Auseinandersetzungen zu rechnen. Dabei ist nicht auszuschließen, dass die Rebellen – wie bereits im April 2006 – auch die Hauptstadt NDJAMENA angreifen. Die Vorwarnzeit für einen derartigen Angriff würde dabei voraussichtlich einige wenige Tage betragen. Ob in einem derartigen Anlassfall auch dieses Mal die französischen Streitkräfte auf der Seite der Regierungstruppen in die Kämpfe eingreifen würden, kann derzeit nicht beurteilt werden."

⁸ See Damien Helly, ‘Crisis in Chad: Implications for the EU’, *EUISS Analysis*, 5 February 2008, p.1.

From the initially intended purpose of resolving the Darfur crisis, the European mission’s objective hence became the prevention of the crisis from spilling over into the wider region. Yet again, this proved unattainable, however, when President Déby - despite French pressure - only agreed to the European force on the condition that it would not deploy on the border between Chad and Sudan.⁹

As the regional dimension of the crisis could not be effectively addressed, the mission’s objective was further narrowed to the protection of civilians in danger, particularly refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside eastern Chad and northeastern CAR. However, when the objective was narrowed there appears to have been little appreciation of the linkage between the humanitarian crisis in eastern Chad and the power struggle within Chad.¹⁰ Thus, it appears that the possible implications for Chadian politics of deploying a European force were not well understood.

Today, the EU finds itself in the awkward position of being drawn into the intra-Chadian power struggle – while refusing to admit it – and at the same time, unable to address the Darfurian crisis or its regional implications.

3. Short-term problems

In addition, and linked, to these problems at the conceptual level, EUFOR is also likely to face implementation problems. In fact, recent developments have further highlighted some already existing challenges for the operation. According to the operational commander of EUFOR, Lieutenant General Patrick Nash, the current key objective of EUFOR is to establish a “safe and secure environment” in the area of operation. Achieving this objective is likely to prove difficult, however, for a combination of reasons:¹¹

- The vastness of the area of operation – 350,000 km² (an area as large as Germany), combined with the difficult terrain and severe climate conditions, form a great challenge for military operations.¹²
- The relatively small size of EUFOR, which in essence comprises three battalions and a quick reaction force, coupled with a short supply of helicopters – which act as a force multiplier.
- The increased insecurity in eastern Chad and north-eastern CAR as a result of the latest rebel attack on N’djamena and the deteriorating security situation in Darfur.

Achieving the requisite security presence in the area of operation, which is necessary to prevent attacks on civilians, aid-workers or UN personnel, will thus be very difficult. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to conclude that EUFOR will have *no* impact on the security situation in eastern Chad and north-eastern CAR. Indeed, it is very likely that EUFOR will be able to improve security in parts of the area of operation – especially in the Dar Sila department in the Ouaddaï region where a robust EUFOR presence was announced.¹³

⁹ Not having the European force deployed directly on the border enables President Déby to continue to freely intervene in Darfur.

¹⁰ Damien Helly, *op. cit.*

¹¹ For a more detailed analysis see: Bjoern H. Seibert, ‘African Adventure? Assessing the European Union’s Military Intervention in Chad and Central African Republic’, *Working Paper*, Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), November 2007, pp. 30-35, available at: http://web.mit.edu/ssp/Publications/working_papers/WP_07-1.pdf

¹² According to Lt. Gen. Nash, the area of operation comprises the following regions: Wadi Fira, Ouaddaï, Salamat in Chad and Vakaga and Haute-Kotto (above latitude 8°) in CAR.

¹³ This is where Lt. Gen. Nash has announced a robust security presence of EUFOR. See European Union, ‘Summary of Remarks by Lt General Patrick Nash: Operation Commander EUFOR Tchad/RCA’, *Press Conference*, Brussels, January, 29 2008.

But even this may cause problems. If EUFOR’s presence establishes zones of greater security, its absence will, by definition, create areas that are less secure. Such security imbalances on the ground are very likely to trigger further displacement from the less to the more secure areas.¹⁴ Given the high volatility of the region – and the increased insecurity in Darfur – cross-border population movements are possible, if not likely. Such an outcome would not only be undesirable in its own right, but also create additional challenges for EUFOR and aid-delivery.

Further population displacement is not the only possible adverse side-effect of EUFOR’s presence, however. Once deployed, EUFOR will also lift the burden from the Chadian Armed Forces, which have thus far been responsible for the protection of the refugees and IDPs. This will enable President Déby to use his forces instead to step up his campaign against the rebels and possibly also to retaliate against Sudan. Despite the oft-repeated claim that EUFOR is neutral, the reality, therefore, is that EUFOR does not – and will not – have a neutral impact on the conflict.¹⁵ Aside apparently from the EU, no other party to the conflict is under any illusion about these effects.¹⁶

4. Medium-term problems

The potential problems associated with the mission do not end there. Over the medium term, two problems loom especially large.

First, the EU appears to lack a coherent political strategy to deal with the power struggle inside Chad. This problem is a direct result of the aforementioned unwillingness to admit that EUFOR’s deployment will have an impact on the intra-Chadian conflict. Having effectively entered the conflict on behalf of President Déby, the EU has also weakened its position as arbitrator for a political compromise in Chad. Additionally, the conflict parties currently appear unwilling to agree to a political compromise, especially in the aftermath of the assault on N’djamena, as all sides feel that they have more to gain than to lose from the continuation of hostilities. Thus, the intra-Chadian power struggle will very likely continue, thereby ensuring that the humanitarian crisis in eastern Chad and northeastern CAR will also continue.

Second, the likelihood that EUFOR will be able to hand over its mission to a credible follow-on force is questionable. EUFOR is meant to be a 12-month bridging operation, initially intended to allow the UN sufficient time to assemble a follow-on force. However, even before the recent developments, the probability that a sufficiently sized follow-on force would be able to take over the mission from EUFOR within one year was slim. There are now four main reasons for doubt:

- First, the EU took several months to assemble its force, despite the limited timeframe of the operation and its members being among the wealthiest and militarily most capable countries in the world.

¹⁴ The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) had a similar experience, as pointed out in Bjoern H. Seibert, ‘African Adventure? Assessing the European Union’s Military Intervention in Chad and Central African Republic’, *Working Paper*, Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), November 2007, p.32.

¹⁵ This is of course aside from the oft-mentioned fact that France, which played a crucial role in securing Déby regime in the past, is the largest troop contributor of EUFOR.

¹⁶ President Déby made this point clear in a recent interview with France’s Europe 1 Radio: “Cela nous aurait aidé si l’Eufor était déjà installée, parce que j’aurai eu la possibilité de démonter les unités qui sont à la frontière et qui jouent ce rôle. Je lance un appel solennel à l’Union Européenne, à l’initiatrice de cette opération, la France, de faire en sorte que cette force vienne s’installer le plus rapidement possible afin de nous alléger du poids que nous supportons, nous, aujourd’hui, à savoir être garant de la sécurité de 300.000 réfugiés soudanais, 170.000 Tchadiens déplacés. C’est un poids important et cela occupe beaucoup de nos forces.” See transcript of the interview, available at

<http://www.presidentdutchad.org/Activites/Interviews/Interview%20du%20PR%20Europe%201.htm>

- Second, peacekeeping operations in Africa are currently already short of 20,000 troops (65,000 are deployed instead of the 85,000 pledged).¹⁷ The majority of the current shortfalls apply to UNAMID.
- Third, recent developments have also underscored the fact that the area of operation is among the most unstable in Africa. Hence, the number of countries willing to volunteer forces for this dangerous, expensive and potentially open-ended mission is likely to be very small.
- Fourth, to date, President Déby has rejected the idea of deploying an international follow-on force to eastern Chad.

As a result, once the initial twelve months has expired, the EU is likely to find itself confronted with an ongoing conflict and the absence of a credible follow-on force to take over the mission. The EU would thus be faced with difficult choices: either stay, or leave in the absence of such a replacement force. As things stand today, it appears more likely that the EU will choose to leave. Aside from France,¹⁸ few other participating countries seem willing to contemplate extending their stay on the ground.¹⁹ Therefore, even if the EUFOR mission achieves its self-defined goal of enabling “the beginning of the return of IDPs”, this success would almost certainly evaporate once EUFOR withdraws and, more importantly, leaves the conflict unresolved.

Concluding remarks

The problems described above raise serious questions about the European operation in Chad and CAR, which need to be addressed. Of particular concern are the possible adverse side-effects of EUFOR’s presence, which could potentially create more harm in an already troubled region.

The EU, therefore, seriously needs to reflect on its mission and the implications of its involvement in the region. This mission is too important to be allowed to fail, and serious consideration is needed to address its underlying problems. As EUFOR will likely only reach full operational capacity during the rainy season, when traditionally armed conflict decreases, the EU will have a window of opportunity to reassess and plan ahead accordingly.

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¹⁷ Jane’s Defence, ‘Africa’s Peacekeeping Challenges in 2008’, *Foreign Report*, 31 January 2008; Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series, ‘African Peacekeeping’, Vol. 44 Issue 12 (January 2008): 17361A.

¹⁸ One alternative would be that France would take over the mission completely after 12 months. However, it is unclear if France would be willing to shoulder the burden of the entire mission for an extended period of time, especially as France appeared to be planning to reduce its presence in Africa.

¹⁹ Sweden, one of the largest force contributors, has, for example, announced that its force would only deploy for a period of four months. See Sveriges Radio International, ‘No Extension of Swedish Chad-Mission’, February 21, 2008. Sweden’s decision might affect the willingness of the other participating states to stay for the entire 12 months.