

Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Summary

In June 2003, the EU sent Operation Artemis, its first military mission outside Europe and independent of NATO, to the Democratic Republic of Congo. While it ultimately received an EU badge, its origin, command and control were French. The objective of Operation Artemis was to contribute to the stabilisation of the security conditions in Bunia, capital of Ituri, to improve the humanitarian situation, and to ensure the protection of displaced persons in the refugee camps in Bunia. Its mandate was to provide a short-term interim force for three months until the transition to the reinforced United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (UMMOC). Although the EU can be said to have passed the first "test" of its the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mechanisms for the conduct of an autonomous operation, this test was a limited one. Operational constraints were caused by inadequate strategic lift capabilities, inadequate communications systems between headquarters and staff, and the lack of a strategic reserve.

Operation Artemis

This chapter focuses on the EU-led International Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF), codenamed Artemis, in the Democratic Republic of Congo in summer 2003.

In Ituri, an unstable region in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), some 50 000 people were killed in factional fighting between 1999 and early 2003, and a further 500 000 fled the district to other regions of Congo or to neighbouring states. Ituri has a long history of ethnic conflicts over access to land, mineral resources and control of local positions of power. The conflict shaped up as a proxy war, with sponsors from Kinshasa, Goma, Rwanda and Uganda backing rival factions, and shipping in weapons.

Under the Luanda agreement signed in September 2002 between the governments of Uganda and the DRC, the withdrawal of the Ugandan army was scheduled to take place after the holding of an Ituri Pacification Commission (IPC), setting-up a peace building strategy for the troubled district of

Ituri. The IPC was held from 1-14 April 2003 with an all-inclusive involvement of the Iturians, the participation of the DRC and Ugandan governments, and the support of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and the broader international community. It provided a peace building and reconciliation roadmap for Ituri, which was to be led by a newly created Ituri interim administration (IIA). MONUC committed itself to providing security for the IIA. Unfortunately, the grave crisis that took place in Bunia and Ituri following the withdrawal of the Ugandan Peoples' Defence Force (UPDF) units in early May 2003, made it impossible for the IIA to function normally.

As the last Ugandan troops left Bunia on 6 May 2003, Lendu-based militias and the predominantly Hema Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) attempted to take control of the town. In an attempt to escape the ensuing violence, thousands of civilians either abandoned the town or gathered around MONUC Sector 2 headquarters and the airport, where the Uruguayan battalion had established its base.

Tensions in Ituri mounted again and the local militias were fighting at a growing cost in civilian lives. The militias fought for the control of the town, committing large-scale atrocities on the civilian population. Two weeks of total chaos unfolded in Bunia and led to an international outcry about UN irresponsibility and the risk of a new genocide in the Great Lakes region.

Under its Chapter VI mandate, MONUC was already obliged to protect civilians under imminent threat. Yet its 700 strong Uruguayan battalion completely abdicated its responsibilities to protect civilians, and just a handful of peacekeepers and humanitarian workers succeeded in keeping alive 5 000-8 000 civilians who had sought refuge at a market located next to the UN compound and near Bunia airport.

Proposed French deployment

During the weekend of 10 and 11 May, the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, spoke with President Jacques Chirac, who indicated that France would be willing to deploy a force to Bunia.

In his letter of 15 May 2003, the Secretary General called for “the rapid deployment to Bunia of a highly trained and well-equipped multinational force, under the lead of a Member State, to provide security at the airport as well as to other vital installations in the town and to protect the civilian population”.¹

The force would temporarily relieve the UN peacekeepers from Uruguay until 1 September, when a larger UN force led by Bangladesh could be in place.

France agreed to intervene, provided (a) it was granted a UN Chapter VII mandate, (b) countries in the region involved in the fighting (DRC, Uganda and Rwanda) officially supported its intervention, and (c) the operation was limited in time and scope. On 28 May, France officially announced its intention to lead such an operation, with the contribution of other nations, and serve as Framework Nation.²

Operation Mamba as it was initially called by the French, was already being prepared, when French President Chirac realised this intervention would be the ideal case to prove

the capacity of the EU to act autonomously from NATO and the operation was renamed “Artemis” when “Europeanised” in the context of the ESDP. The decision by the Elysée to create an EU mission was strategic.³

On 30 May 2003, the UN Security Council authorised the deployment, of an Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF) in Bunia until 1 September 2003, when a reinforced UN mission in the Congo (MONUC) could be deployed. The mission of the IEMF was “to contribute to the stabilisation of the security conditions and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Bunia, to ensure the protection of the airport, the internally displaced persons in the camps in Bunia and, if the situation requires it, to contribute to the safety of the civilian population, United Nations personnel and the humanitarian presence in the town”.⁴

EU launches ESDP operation

On 12 June 2003, the Council of the European Union adopted a decision to launch its first fully autonomous (outside the “Berlinplus” framework agreed with NATO) crisis management operation outside Europe.⁵ It was the first ESDP operation in Africa, which took place within the framework of UNSC Resolution 1484 adopted on 30 May 2003, and the Council’s Joint Action adopted on 5 June 2003.

While the French forces represented a large majority of the military personnel involved in the operation it is important to note that the planning of the operation and the rules of engagement were decided by the EU-15. In a very brief space of time, EU Member States committed staff officers and troops to work with Paris. Apart from the French troops on the ground (90% of the force) a special operations unit from the United Kingdom and a medical team from Belgium were involved on the ground. The operational headquarters, where the operation was planned and conducted, was based in Paris and included 80 officers drawn from all European countries. The force headquarters was set up in Entebbe, which served as a logistical hub to dispatch the necessary forces to Bunia.

The Political and Security Committee, under the responsibility of the Council to which the PSC reports regularly, exercised the political control and strategic direction of the operation, including the power to amend the operational plan, the chain of command and the rules of engagement.

The first French forward elements had been deployed to Bunia on 6 June 2003, closely followed by engineers to help maintain the very poor airfield for the numerous strategic and tactical airlifts of personnel and equipment. As Bunia was plagued by rival militiamen openly carrying small arms, an initial measure of the IEMF was to declare the town and a 10 km area around it a “weapons-invisible” zone.

Starting with some initial skirmishes with Lendu militia on 14 June, through to more serious clashes with the UPC in early July that reportedly left 20 militiamen dead, the IEMF left no doubt as to its willingness to use force, not against one party in particular but against any challenges to its authority or threats to the security of the population.

By early July, all elements of the operation were in place. The operation was managed by French Major-General Neveux (Operation Commander) and French Brigadier-General Thonier (Force Commander). It should be noted that MONUC had been present in the region since November 1999, which facilitated the deployment and some operations of the IEMF.

Ultimately, the IEMF re-established security in Bunia and weakened the military capabilities of the rival Lendu and Hema militias, including by cutting off military supplies from abroad, through monitoring of airfields. As a result, the political process in Ituri was allowed to resume some activity as political offices reopened in Bunia and 60 000 refugees returned. To a certain extent, economic and social activities were resumed.

Beyond its immediate military tasks, Operation Artemis delivered more than 3 000 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Bunia. After the demilitarisation of the city, more than 50 000 refugees were able to return.

The transition in September to the Bangladeshi-led MONUC forces, nicknamed the Ituri brigade, took a further two weeks, during which time the EU-led multinational force continued to take part in common patrols, provided logistical support and participated in the MONUC planning programme.

MONUC has subsequently had mixed success in continuing the pacification of Ituri. Arms smuggling continued and on 6 October 2003, 65 people, primarily women and children, were massacred in an attack in Katshele, about 60 km northeast of Bunia. Given its numerical constraints, however, it is doubtful that an extended EU mission would have had very different results.⁶

Lessons learned

Although limited in time, scope, geographical area of action and the number of forces involved, Operation Artemis was nevertheless significant in many different ways.

The operation was, for several reasons, not typical of an autonomous EU operation with future reference. Both operational and force planning were already well underway at a national (French) level, even before the EU actually became involved. As a consequence, important aspects of the EU rapid response planning process were not tested.⁷

In fact, Artemis was more a French operation with an EU cover, than an EU operation led by the French. Without French leadership, the EU operation would not have happened. Artemis became an EU operation because of the political weight it could provide in proving the value of an EU military capability for peace-keeping. According to a Nairobi-based analyst of Africa's Great Lakes region, the political motivation behind Operation Artemis was to show unity after the European foreign policy debacle of Iraq.⁸

In the military field, some military shortcomings were already known prior to the start of the operation, in particular a shortage of strategic transport. This problem was solved by leasing an aircraft from Ukraine.⁹ The availability of strategic airlift puts a premium on any rapid response capability.

Other shortcomings were the need for better and secure means for long-distance communications, better information technology, intelligence sharing and the need to improve the interoperability of European armed forces. From the strategic level downwards, effective and secure communications and liaison for planning, as well as Command and Control (C2) and the passing of intelligence with the designated operational Headquarters (HQs) should be guaranteed. Identifying a shortfall in operation Artemis, the EU has taken the necessary action to solve this issue, guaranteeing the availability of secure data links with potential operational HQ in future operations.

The bulk of the forces on the ground in Bunia were French. The ability of the forces to communicate with the local population was widely considered an asset for facilitated cooperation and improved intelligence.

However, the strict insistence on a very limited area of operations - Bunia - merely pushed the problem of violent aggression against civilians beyond the environs of the town, where atrocities continued.

Another factor to note is that none of the participants in the IEMF were willing to rehat with MONUC. This placed the mission's credibility at risk since MONUC lacked the special forces, intelligence and overflight capabilities that were crucial to the IEMF's success.

The very strict insistence on the three-month period of deployment signalled clearly to all, including the armed belligerents, the transitory nature of the force.

The arrangements for political-military direction in Operation Artemis provided maximum flexibility for the Operations Commander on scene. Although this was highly appreciated by him, there is a valid question as to whether the EU should be satisfied with similar arrangements in future operations.

UN-EU links

Operation Artemis has been a remarkably positive experiment in cooperation between

the UN and a regional organisation, in the domain of peace and security.¹⁰ It has provided a stopgap to the UN, limited in time and space, which has allowed it to prepare the transition from peacekeeping to peace enforcing better, in a situation where there was not much peace to keep, but rather a war in progress (which had to be stopped) and a peace to build.

At the highest level, direct reporting from Javier Solana to the UN Security Council was also seen as an improvement over the mechanism used to report on UN-mandated operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, which involves the submission of a three-page written report to the Security Council every three months.¹¹

One of the aims of the operation was to allow humanitarian assistance to resume and extend further, and therefore help and facilitate the humanitarian community in its work. Relations between military and humanitarian organisations can often be difficult, as they do not always share the same perspective and above all use very different means. According to those directly or indirectly involved in Operation Artemis (certainly so in the opinion of the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and the humanitarian community in general) the cooperation between Artemis and humanitarian agencies went remarkably well.

The French command of Artemis had placed a civil-military liaison officer on the ground immediately, along with the first French troops that arrived in Bunia. His role was to link with those providing humanitarian assistance in Bunia and the region, which went very successfully.¹² Experienced in the humanitarian world, the liaison officer was able to create a good dialogue and cooperation with the humanitarian agencies, including those that were less cooperative at the beginning. According to ECHO, there was an almost immediate understanding that each could be valuable to the other. The advantage of the humanitarian agencies from the point of view of the military was undoubtedly their deep knowledge on the ground.¹³

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¹ S/2003/574, 28 May 2003, letter from the Secretary-General tot the Security Council.

² Faria, F., (April 2004), "Crisis management in sub-Saharan Africa, the role of the European Union", Occasional Paper No. 51, The European Union Institute for Security Studies, p. 40. In July 2002, the EU endorsed the concept of "framework nation" as a conceptual basis for the conduct of autonomous EU-led crisis management operations.

³ In an interview with Catherine Gegout it was mentioned that: "France badly wanted a mission to show the EU was capable of acting alone, where NATO would not be involved" (see: Gegout, C., "Causes and Consequences of the EU's Military Intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A realist Expanation", *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10: 427-443, p. 437, (2005).

⁴ Security Council Resolution S/RES/1484 (2003), 30 May 2003.

⁵ Council decision 2003/432/CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy).

⁶ EU Crisis Response Capability Revisited, International Crisis Group, Brussels, 17 January 2005, p. 47.

⁷ "Strategic and operational planning: perspectives for fielding rapid response forces", Conference on International Military Co-operation, Improving capabilities: a shared responsibility, Wassenaar, 11 and 12 October 2004, p. 42.

⁸ "Congo mission tests Europe's military policy". *Tapei Time*, 17 June 2003.

⁹ Of note, French military officials reportedly informally asked US officials if US transports would be available to airlift European troops to Bunia. The US advised that such requests should come under Berlin Plus. The French soon dropped the matter and opted to lease Ukrainian transports. The incident reinforced perceptions in Washington and elsewhere that Paris was determined, for political reasons, to conduct an autonomous mission (Michel, L., (Winter 2004) "NATO and the EU, Stop the Minuet; it's Time to Tango!", *EuroFuture*, p.90.

¹⁰ Sow, A., "Achievements of the Interim Emergency Multinational Force and future scenarios", in Malan, M. and Gomes Porto, J. (eds.), *Challenges of Peace Implementation, The UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, p. 210, The Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria.

¹¹ Gourlay, C., (October 2003), "Operations update: past, present and future", *European Security Review*, No. 19, p. 2.

¹² See Faria, (2004), pp. 44-45.

¹³ See Faria, (2004), p. 45: Interview with Francois Goemans, ECHO field expert in Ituri at the time of Operation Artemis.