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The European Union's Aviation Security Mission in South Sudan: Successes, Shortcomings and Lessons Identified

By Gitte Højstrup Christensen, Royal Danish Defence College
Arnold Kammel, Austrian Institute for Europe and Security Policy
Annemarie Peen Rodt, Royal Danish Defence College

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Royal Danish Defence College

Ryvangs Allé 1

DK-2100 Copenhagen

Denmark

Phone: +45 728 17000

E-mail: fak@fak.dk

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Introduction¹

On July 9, 2011 South Sudan gained independence from the Republic of Sudan,² but just two years after the separation the young country broke into civil war.³ Following its independence, many international actors, including the EU, declared their support for the new state and its ambition of achieving justice, liberty and prosperity.⁴ In Brussels the hope was that assisting South Sudan during this difficult transition phase would help prevent regional conflicts with Sudan from arising. However, it was not the tension with Sudan that posed the biggest threat to the overall security situation in South Sudan; instead the country's stability deteriorated due to internal turmoil and clashes within local tribal structures.⁵

Upon request from the South Sudanese government, the EU established a comprehensive Single Country Strategy,⁶ and in July 2012 the EU's Aviation Security Mission in South Sudan (EUAVSEC) was launched as a non-executive civilian mission to strengthen the security at Juba International Airport and set up civil aviation security structures.⁷ This was the first aviation security mission launched by the EU. In late 2013 conflict broke out in South Sudan and quickly escalated. Fuelling the conflict were ethnic tensions and personal disagreement between the president and vice-president over the imprisonment of government officials and accusations of corruption, and the situation eventually escalated into a civil war marked by violence against the civilian population.⁸ More than one and a half million South Sudanese citizens were internally displaced and hundreds of thousands fled to neighbouring countries.⁹ This escalating violence and worsening of the overall security situation severely compromised the EUAVSEC mission and in January 2014 led to the evacuation of all personnel. After its

1) This brief is based on the research and findings of the IECEU project deliverables: 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7. To see the full deliverables, go to: http://www.ieceu-project.com/?page_id=197

2) For an in-depth analysis of the international actors' concern about rising conflicts in the region, see G. Curless & A. Peen Rodt "Sudan and the Not So Comprehensive Peace", Civil Wars, volume 15, issue 2, 2013. Routledge. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13698249.2013.817844>

3) Central Intelligence Agency "The World Factbook: South Sudan". Accessed on November 29, 2017. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/od.html>

4) The Republic of South Sudan Motto Statements: Justice, Liberty, and Prosperity. <http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/index.php/2012/12/13/the-republic-of-south-sudan-motto-statements-justice-liberty-and-prosperity/>

5) A. Kammel "EUAVSEC South Sudan – a relatively unknown EU mission in a difficult environment" in K. Hyttinen, P. Hario & P. Österlund (eds.) IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CAPABILITIES (IEC) IN EU CONFLICT PREVENTION , 2017. Laurea University of Applied Sciences, p. 30. [file:///C:/Users/00461869/Desktop/Hyttinen%20et%20al%20\(2017\)%20Improving%20the%20Effectiveness%20of%20the%20Capabilities%20in%20EU%20conflict%20prevention.pdf](file:///C:/Users/00461869/Desktop/Hyttinen%20et%20al%20(2017)%20Improving%20the%20Effectiveness%20of%20the%20Capabilities%20in%20EU%20conflict%20prevention.pdf)

6) EU Single Country Strategy (Response Strategy) for South Sudan 2011-2013. https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/single-country-strategy-south-sudan-2011-2013_en.pdf

7) IECEU D3.7 "Africa: Conclusion Report", 2017.

8) IECEU D3.2 "South Sudan Review", 2017, p. 18. http://www.ieceu-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/IECEU_D3.2_South_Sudan_review.pdf

9) Ibid., p. 20.

mandated deployment period the mission came to a halt.¹⁰ Even though the mission managed to accomplish part of its mandate by training 350 local personnel, it was not able to provide the support that the South Sudanese government had requested in terms of strengthening airport security sufficiently so the country could increase the flow of goods and people. Therefore, the mission's contribution to the overall security situation was limited.¹¹

This brief builds on the empirical data gathered and analysed by the IECEU, which includes in-country fieldwork and interviews.¹² The structure of this brief is as follows: First, it provides a short review of the South Sudanese history, the foundations of the current conflict in the region and the EU's involvement herein. Second, it introduces the mission's main objectives and obstacles in terms of the internal and external challenges encountered. Third, it analyses and discusses the mission's strategic and operational shortcomings and the lessons identified. The objective of this brief is to analyse the contribution of the EUAVSEC mission to the overall security situation in South Sudan. Based on these intentions, the following question is raised: **Why did the EUAVSEC mission in South Sudan fall short of achieving its goals, and can anything be learned from the mission's shortcomings?** This study does not consider or include all factors and elements needed to answer this question, but highlights the IECEU project's most significant findings in this case.

Historical Context – Mapping the Conflict

In order to analyse the current conflict in South Sudan, it is essential to understand the historical context and the road to independence. The 21st-century conflict in South Sudan is rooted in a long and complex history of civil wars and tensions in the Sudanese region. On the surface the Sudanese conflict is often explained as having evolved from religious and ethnic tensions between an Arab-Muslim North and a predominantly Christian, African and Animist South.¹³ However, the root cause of the Sudanese civil wars is the tension between economically and politically marginalised groups living in the outer areas of the region and the elites living in the urbanised capital centre, respectively.¹⁴ Since colonial times there have been tensions between the northern and southern parts of Sudan, which have evolved into two civil wars. The first civil war was between 1955-1972, five years after Sudan had gained independence from colonial rule. The civil war was ignited by southern separatists and eventually led the government to concede a measure of autonomy for the southern parts of Sudan.¹⁵

10) IECEU D3.7, 2017.

11) IECEU D3.2, 2017, p. 8.

12) See D1.5 "Conceptual Framework", 2017. http://www.ieceu-project.com/?page_id=2978

13) IECEU D3.2, 2017, p. 12.

14) J. Ryle, J. Willis, S. Baldo & J. Madut Jok (eds.) "The Sudan Handbook", 2011. James Currey papers, Suffolk.

15) BBC NEWS "South Sudan profile – Timeline", 2017. Accessed on November 28, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14019202>

The second civil war took place in the years between 1983-2005 when the Sudanese president abolished South Sudan's autonomy, which caused fighting to once again break out between the northern and southern parts of Sudan.¹⁶ The second civil war ended in 2005 with the signing of the North and South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which provided for a permanent ceasefire between the two parts. Four years later leaders of the two regions reached a deal on the terms of a referendum on independence, which led to South Sudan gaining independence in July 2011.¹⁷

After more than two decades of civil war a division of Sudan into two sovereign states was expected to lay the foundations for peaceful coexistence in the region.¹⁸ However, this expectation was not fulfilled. On the contrary, South Sudan is now one of the most fragile countries in the world, and with 17 different ethnic groups and two official languages and serious religious, gender and tribal divides the South Sudanese is a severely fractured society.¹⁹ Despite the assumption that most of the tensions between Sudan and South Sudan would continue to exist after the division, it was clashes and turmoil within the tribal structures of South Sudan that weakened the stability of the country.²⁰ Rebel factions have attacked towns and forced large parts of the civilian population to flee the country, causing more than five million people to be in need of humanitarian aid. In the beginning of 2014 there was a brief moment of hope when a ceasefire was signed, but it was subsequently broken and the violence continued.²¹ The conflict is rooted in long-standing political issues, a dysfunctional political system, different interests among the leading actors and their competition for power, weak institutions, state corruption and tensions over oil reserves, all of which have added to an escalation of the situation in the young state.²²

The Mission Objective and Challenges

In 2012 the South Sudanese government requested the EU's assistance in strengthening the security at Juba International Airport, since the country has no direct access to the sea and the flow of goods and people therefore depends heavily on air transport.²³ In response the EU launched its EUAVSEC mission as part of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

16) Ibid.

17) Ibid.

18) IECEU D3.2, 2017, p. 12.

19) Ibid., p. 18.

20) A. Kammel "EUAVSEC South Sudan – a relatively unknown EU mission in a difficult environment" in K. Hyttinen, P. Hario & P. Österlund (eds.) "IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CAPABILITIES (IEC) IN EU CONFLICT PREVENTION", 2017. Laurea University of Applied Sciences, p. 30.

21) Ibid., p. 25.

22) Enough Project "South Sudan, background", 2017. Accessed on December 1, 2017. <https://enoughproject.org/conflicts/south-sudan>

23) IECEU D3.2, 2017, p. 40.

The CSDP mission was established by the EU Council Decision of 18 June 2012 with a mandate for 19 months and was initiated three months later.²⁴

EUAVSEC was the first aviation security mission deployed by the EU,²⁵ and it faced several challenges due in part to its novice nature. A central challenge to the mission was the lack of similar establishments in the region upon which this mission could learn and build. Furthermore, the mission was challenged by the South Sudanese government's unwillingness to build a new passenger terminal that would satisfy international security standards.²⁶ Additionally, the complex nature of constantly changing alliances and partnerships based on tribal, religious and politically motivated forces at work on the ground challenged mission deployment.²⁷ All in all, the mission was unprepared for the reality in the field, consisting of missing infrastructure and scarcity of security officers at Juba International Airport due to the severe economic situation and lasting insecurity in the country caused by many years of civil war.²⁸

Successes and Shortcomings

The EUAVSEC mission in South Sudan had limited success, but it is worth mentioning that the mission partly fulfilled its mandate by successfully training 350 personnel.²⁹ This was despite the high illiteracy rate among the people being trained, a factor which had not been taken into account during mission planning.³⁰ Furthermore, due to its limited mandate the mission 'did no harm' and reportedly cooperated well with other actors.³¹ However, the mission did encounter several operational and strategic shortcomings, many of which were related to a disconnect between Brussels and the situation on the ground in South Sudan. First, the mission was based on wrong assumptions about what was needed the most. Second, there was no long-term strategy in place, and finally, no proper evacuation strategies or lines of command had been established.³² The EU had fallen victim to the euphoria following the 2011 independence and designed an overambitious mission that did not address the primary challenges of the context in which the mission was to be deployed. This was in part due to a report from a pre-deployment mission, which led to incorrect assumptions about the situation on the ground, as the timespan between the fact-finding mission and the political decision-making was close to

24) Ibid., p. 41.

25) EEAS, 2014. https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/csdp/missions-and-operations/euavsec-south-sudan/pdf/factsheet_euavsec_south-sudan_en.pdf

26) Kammel, A. in K. Hyttinen et al., 2017, p. 31.

27) IECEU D3.2, 2017, pp. 8-9.

28) Ibid., p. 40.

29) Gurtong "Immigration Officers Train for Better Service Delivery", 2013. Accessed on October 28, 2017. <http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/cil/ArticleView/mid/519/articleId/13162/categoryId/7/Immigration-Officers-Train-For-Better-Service-Delivery.aspx>

30) Kammel, A. in K. Hyttinen et al., 2017, p. 31.

31) IECEU D3.6, 2017.

32) IECEU D3.2, 2017.

six months. During this period the situation in Juba changed significantly, seemingly without Brussels noticing.³³

The mission's successes and failures depended on the EU's relationship with the South Sudanese government as well as the union's influence on the new country's transition towards independence. However, the EU had already taken a subordinate role in this matter, while the United States and China led the international part of the independence process.³⁴ According to the IECEU project, the EU and its member states simply wanted to have a stake in this new-born country, but had limited ambitions and political will to go for a more robust CSDP mission.³⁵ The EU member states' initial euphoria surrounding the new state disappeared when the situation did not improve.³⁶ As a result, the EUAVSEC mission encountered both internal and external challenges, which meant that it could only work in a small section of the intended comprehensive approach³⁷ and, therefore, was unable to have a significant impact on the overall security situation.³⁸ Internal structural challenges included difficulties in finding and recruiting skilled aviation personnel, and because this mission was a first of its kind, the recruiting process had to start from scratch.³⁹

Conclusion

Looking back, several lessons can be learned from the EUAVSEC mission's strategic and operational shortcomings. This brief has not included all aspects of the mission or taken into consideration the contribution of other EU initiatives in the region, as part of the EU's comprehensive approach. The objective of this brief was exclusively to identify lessons which have influenced the EUAVSEC mission's effectiveness. In conclusion, it points to five significant shortcomings: (1) The EU was not fully prepared to launch its first-ever aviation security mission into a hostile environment, as knowledge of the situation on the ground had not been sufficiently gained prior to mission planning and launch; (2) the EU designed an overambitious and misguided mission due to wrong and dated assumptions based on a report from a pre-deployment mission; (3) there was a mismatch between the EU's comprehensive approach and its implementation on the ground, which meant that the mission could only work in a small section of the intended approach; (4) wrong assumptions by the EU about who to train and for what, as the mission was never intended to include the broader civil society, which resulted in reluctant ownership of the mission by the locals being trained; (5) there was a lack of support from member states to deploy a more robust mission, which was what South Sudan needed, and therefore the EU missed its chance to play a significant role in

33) IECEU D3.7, 2017.

34) IECEU D3.2, 2017, p. 9.

35) Kammel, 2017, p. 32.

36) Ibid.

37) EU Single Country Strategy (Response Strategy) for South Sudan 2011-2013. https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/single-country-strategy-south-sudan-2011-2013_en.pdf

38) Ibid.

39) IECEU D3.6, discussion report, 2017.

securing South Sudan. These five shortcomings contributed to the reasons why the EUAVSEC mission in South Sudan fell short of achieving its goals and consequently did not contribute significantly to improving the overall security situation in South Sudan. However, despite its shortcomings, the EUAVSEC mission has provided valuable experience and lessons for future EU CSDP missions and operations.