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The European Union in Sudan: A Missed Opportunity?

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ABSTRACT   *International organisations active in Africa are often criticised for their ineffectiveness. So too is the European Union (EU), which is also accused of failing to assume a more prominent conflict management role in war-torn countries. This article examines the EU's capacity and readiness to take on such a role in one such country, the former Republic of Sudan, home to Africa's longest-running civil wars and the first 'genocide' of the 21st century. It begins by outlining the EU's record in Darfur and the North–South Peace Process. Drawing upon 25 interviews and Hill's 'capabilities–expectations model', it then questions whether the EU's 'capabilities' (resources, instruments, unity) were 'fit for purpose' in Sudan's hostile target setting. It concludes by identifying settings that have been more propitious for a conflict-related management function and by suggesting that the EU should better manage expectations about future security roles.*

Introduction

International organisations operating in Africa are often subject to criticism. The Commonwealth and United Nations (UN), for example, are regularly accused of being ineffective, indecisive and even irrelevant (Knight, 2000; Watkins, 2014). While the European Union (EU) is also criticised on these grounds, it is perhaps more commonly belittled for 'punching below its weight' (Thomas, 2012) and failing to assume a more high-profile conflict management role in war-torn countries (Williams and Bellamy, 2005; Olsen, 2009).[1]

This article examines the EU's capacity and readiness to act as a conflict manager in one such country, the former Republic of Sudan (1956–2011), home to Africa's longest-running civil wars (1955–72, 1983–2005) and to the first 'genocide' of the 21st century, in Sudan's western province, Darfur. It asks whether the EU missed chances to take on a prominent conflict-related role in Sudan or whether, with its nascent common security and defence policy (CSDP) and faced with a hostile Sudanese context, the EU was simply not in a strong enough position to assume such a function.

This question is at the heart of this research, which is significant in two main ways. First, it provides a fresh perspective on what Christopher Hill (1993, 1998) has called

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the 'capabilities–expectations gap' by viewing this through the prism of contexts or 'target settings', taken here to refer to the empirical reality on the ground. Second, it sheds new light on the way that the EU dealt with major challenges facing Sudan over an extended period. In so doing, it makes a meaningful contribution to the existing literature, which has tended to focus more narrowly on the EU's response to the Darfur Crisis: its role in supporting the African Union (AU) mission in Sudan's western province (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2005), its policy on conflict mediation (Middleton *et al.*, 2011) and its failure to intervene militarily in Darfur (Williams and Bellamy, 2005; Toje, 2008; Gya, 2010).

To answer the above research question, this article makes use of Hill's (1993, 1998) 'capabilities–expectations model', which identifies the future functions that the EU as a foreign policy actor might be expected to fulfil, and examines its capabilities (in the form of resources, instruments and unity) to meet these expectations. It sets out the EU's record in Sudan from the time of the Darfur Crisis in 2003 through to the North–South Peace Process culminating in the 2011 referendum, with brief consideration also being given to subsequent developments in the states that emerged from that referendum: Sudan and South Sudan. Drawing upon 25 interviews in Khartoum, London, Paris and Brussels, it then explains this record in terms of the 'fitness for purpose' of the EU's capabilities for Sudan's hostile target setting. It concludes by identifying settings that have been more propitious for a conflict-related management function and by suggesting that the EU should better manage expectations about future security roles.

Research Focus and Methodology

Before proceeding, it is worth sharpening the research focus. First, the emphasis here is primarily on the EU and its institutions rather than on individual European member states. While it is hard to disentangle the two, the role of the latter will be largely confined to our analysis of 'unity' within the EU. Second, the main focus is on two key aspects of the Sudanese case, namely the Darfur Crisis as from 2003 and the North–South Peace Process as from the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. Space constraints do not allow for discussion of the whole gamut of Sudanese disputes over the last decade and a half, whether in the East, the 'Three Areas' (Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and Abyei), or indeed between different ethnic factions in the new state of South Sudan (ICG, 2015).

Third, this article does not assume that the EU should necessarily be 'raising its flag' (Hazelzet, 2006, p. 569), enhancing its 'actorness',[2] or strengthening its 'presence'. Indeed, there may be good reasons for the EU not to raise its profile (taken here to equate to 'image' or 'standing'), particularly if that helps 'get the job done' (Hazelzet, 2006, p. 569) or if it creates space for 'coordinated bilateral diplomatic efforts by EU member states' (Vines, 2010, p. 1,091).

Finally, my intention is not to develop a new theory or even an alternative to Hill's model, which has survived, relatively unscathed, in the fast-moving world of international relations.[3] Instead, my aim is to apply the model in a more nuanced way by viewing the EU's 'capabilities' through the prism of specific 'target settings' and by giving greater consideration to ways in which the EU manages 'expectations'. On the first point, there will clearly need to be some discussion of the wider context, or what

Bretherton and Vogel (2006) term 'the opportunity structure'. However, the real emphasis here will be on the target setting, that is, the reality on the ground, and the way that these 'local' political, geographical and strategic factors affect the EU's 'fitness for purpose' for particular challenges.

On the second point, regarding expectations, word limits do not allow for consideration of whether Hill's (1993, pp. 312–315) predictions about future EU roles have held true. Such an analysis would no doubt reveal that the EU nowadays is not a 'superpower' (a position reserved for the US and increasingly China), a 'global intervenor' (as its limited influence in the Israeli–Palestinian dispute demonstrates), or indeed a 'mediator of conflicts' (as shown by its inability to secure a place on the Mbeki Panel, discussed later). The EU has arguably fared better as a 'bridge between rich and poor' (the EU is the world's largest donor), 'regional pacifier' (the EU has played an important role in stabilising the Balkans) and 'joint supervisor of the world economy' (the EU is a major player in World Trade Organisation) (Toje, 2008, pp. 138–139). Whatever the findings of future research on this topic, the key point to emphasise here is that expectations regarding the EU's role as a conflict manager have remained high, particularly among the public, in most European countries (interview with European Institute of Security Studies, January 2012). This is perhaps not surprising considering some of the statements issued by the EU. A case in point was the 2003 European Security Strategy ('A Secure Europe in a Better World'), which stressed the 'need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and when necessary, robust intervention'. Nor is it particularly remarkable given that a 'strong focus on ... conflict management is ... exactly in line with crucial values and ideas that contribute to the EU's identity' and is consistent with its 'goal of turning the Union into a significant international actor' (Olsen, 2007, p. 12).

The EU's Record in Sudan

The European Community (EC)/EU had little chance to play a visible role in Sudan over the early post-colonial era. Before even achieving independence in 1956, this former Anglo-Egyptian condominium had lapsed into the first of two protracted civil wars. The EU's profile in Sudan was further reduced when, in March 1990, it suspended development assistance, expressing concern about the recent military coup and human rights violations. This suspension put EU–Sudanese relations formally on hold for over a decade, even if the EU did manage to channel €450 million in humanitarian assistance between 1992 and 2002 (European Commission, 2005, p. 14).

It was not, however, until November 1999 that relations began to thaw. In recognition of progress made by the Sudanese government and the Sudanese Popular Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA: John Garang's southern political group) towards a peace agreement, the EU began a formal political dialogue with the regime in Khartoum. By January 2002, following progress in these talks, the EU had launched the Humanitarian Plus programme providing monies for rehabilitation-related activities.

Darfur Crisis

It was then against this backdrop of improved EU–Sudanese relations that fighting erupted in March 2003 in the Darfur region between government forces and rebels from

the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). On the face of it, the Darfur Crisis presented the EU with a real opportunity to go beyond dialogue and establish itself in a conflict management capacity. In this context, Williams and Bellamy (2005) have contended that the EU was one of the few actors that could have intervened militarily, while Toje (2008, p. 135) has claimed that 'With the UN deadlocked, and having declared the European Security and Defence policy (ESDP) operational just one month' earlier, the EU was 'always the most likely candidate to carry out such a mission', not least since Darfur was 'exactly the sort of question that the ESDP was created to handle', as it fell 'within the narrow confines of where the EU states have agreed that the use of force can be necessary'.

By mid-2004 there were indeed signs that a military option was being considered by the EU, whose top military official, Gustav Hagglund, affirmed that this was 'very possible' (Channel News Asia, 12 April 2004). In July, British Prime Minister Tony Blair stressed that he was 'ruling nothing out', while UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw revealed that Britain and its EU partners were discussing the despatch of 'a joint EU civilian and military team', which might include troop deployments (*The Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 2004). In August, Blair suggested the UK had a 'moral responsibility' to help and placed 5,000 troops on standby (Williams, 2006, p. 172). The following month saw US Secretary of State Colin Powell opening the door to military intervention—though not by the US—by labelling the killings in Darfur 'genocide'. By December, however, the number UK troops on standby had fallen to 3,000 (Agence France Presse, 26 December 2004) and by June 2005 the UK government was emphasising that it had 'no plans to send UK troops to Darfur' (Williams, 2006, p. 172). The UK's backtracking reflected its concerns over British military overstretch, NATO's reluctance to become involved other than in a support capacity (BBC, 2005), the opposition by Russia and China to any intervention without a firm UN mandate, the concern of smaller EU member states to find alternative options, and France's unwillingness to 'shoulder a significant part of the burden' or to 'support coercive measures' (Toje, 2008, p. 137).

Thereafter the EU, while not abandoning its quest for visibility, fell into a supporting role. One aspect of this involved backing non-EU civilian–military missions. In this context, the EU became the main funder of AMIS, an AU observer mission deployed in June 2004 to monitor compliance with the N'Djamena ceasefire agreed two months earlier. Recognising the mission's lack of capacity to operate in such a hostile region, the EU helped to transform AMIS into AMIS II in October, thereby allowing the enhancement of the African force with more troops, including a civilian police component. But the shortcomings of AMIS II soon became equally apparent, and the EU joined other northern donors in pressing Khartoum to accept a successor mission, UNAMID. Authorised by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in July 2007, UNAMID was a hybrid force involving the AU and UN and designed to include 19,000 troops and 3,700 civilian personnel (Reuters, 13 June 2007). Three EU member states—Britain, France and Sweden—contributed a small number of military personnel, while several others provided civilian police officers (Gya, 2010, pp. 12–13).

Another feature of the EU's supporting role was sanctions. Thus, the EU backed UNSC resolutions (1,556 in 2004 and 1,591 in 2005), which placed arms embargoes on non-state actors operating in Darfur. In 2005, it also imposed autonomous sanctions on the Sudanese government (Sicurelli, 2010, p. 67). These included restrictions on

admission and freezing the funds of targeted individuals. Thereafter, the EU was a key supporter of the indictments, issued in March 2009 and July 2010, by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Sudan's sitting head of state, President Omar al-Bashir. It called upon the Sudanese government to respect this ruling and publicly criticised states refusing to arrest Bashir on their soil.

A final dimension of the EU's back-up function involved conflict mediation. Here, the EU sought to carve out a role for itself by assigning a special envoy, Sten Rylander, to assist with peace negotiations on Darfur. In July 2005, it raised its profile by appointing an EU Special Representative (EUSR), Pekko Haavisto, to 'achieve a political settlement in Darfur' (Middleton *et al.*, 2011, p. 19). Haavisto was then 'heavily involved in mediating' what was a 'rushed and badly organized process' (Middleton *et al.*, 2011, p. 21) that led to the failed 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement in Abuja. The next EUSR, Torben Brylle, played a lower key role, sitting in on the joint AU–UN mediation talks in Doha from 2007 (Middleton *et al.*, 2011). The EUSR from 2010–13, Dame Rosalind Marsden, also engaged in the Doha talks and, as one of the E6 (envoys from the EU, UK, US, France, Russia, China, who first met in May 2009), played a part in ensuring that Doha was not eclipsed by Darfuri mediation processes and that it brought about the signature of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur in July 2011 (interview with Nordic official, Brussels, June 2013). To this day, however, fighting has continued in Darfur, with Darfuri rebels now forming, together with northern-based SPLA units, a broad anti-Khartoum coalition known as the Sudan Revolutionary Front (ICG, 2015, p. 1).

The North–South Peace Process

Turning to the North–South Peace Process, this was of course going on at the same time as the Darfur Crisis, even if donors generally sought to keep the issues separate and often prioritised the former (interview with French official, Khartoum, May 2010). The peace negotiations made headway in the early 2000s with the signing of protocols (on wealth-sharing, power-sharing, security and the Three Areas), which, taken together, constituted the CPA. The CPA was a six-year roadmap for peace, granting the South a degree of autonomy, promising elections and a referendum on secession, and establishing a UN mission (UNMIS) to monitor the ceasefire. The agreement was signed in Naivasha in January 2005 by Sudan's government and the SPLM, as part of a regional (Intergovernmental Authority for Development or IGAD-led) process, reinforced by international observers. Yet while the EU had not sent a special envoy to the negotiations, it was invited to 'guarantee' the CPA and sit on the Assessment and Evaluation Commission (AEC), which monitored the implementation of the CPA.[4] The EU's invitation to the top table did not, however, imply that it was being taken seriously by other AEC members (the US, Norway, UK, Holland and Italy). Rather, as one Nordic official explained: 'It was accepted that it was more useful to have the EU round the table in an observer role because of its large donor commitment and its coordinating function, more on the donor than the political side' (interview in Brussels, June 2013).

Rather than force its way into the foreground, the EU dutifully implemented the terms of an agreement that had been crafted by other, more influential players. Thus, in 2005, the European Commission produced a Country Strategy Paper, offering a comprehensive €400 million development assistance package aimed at supporting stability,

education, food security, peace-building, demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration operations (European Commission, 2005, p. 3).

While the EU continued in this back-seat role over the next five years, it nonetheless had opportunities to raise its profile, notably at the time of the April 2010 elections, the January 2011 referendum and in the early post-referendum period. In the case of the elections, the EU provided technical and logistical support, co-chaired (with Holland and the UK) the UN Development Programme-managed election basket-fund, and contributed €12.5 million to it (Middleton *et al.*, 2011, p. 21). The EU also impressed on the Sudanese government the importance of 'an open political space' (interview with EUSR, Brussels, November 2011), as well as sending a huge election observer mission. As regards the referendum on the secession of South Sudan, here too the EU played a visible role. It contributed €3.25 million to the UN Development Programme referendum basket-fund (Middleton *et al.*, 2011, p. 21). It also deployed long-term observers in Sudan from November 2010 as well as a large observer mission in January 2011.

In the wake of the referendum, which resulted, six months later, in the inauguration of Africa's 54th state, South Sudan, the EU had a unique opportunity to raise its profile as a conflict manager and mediator. Against a backdrop of continuing North–Sudan disputes and growing violence in Abyei, South Kordofan and the Blue Niles States (ICG, 2015), the EU adopted a 'Comprehensive Approach', which was supposed to allow it to mobilise all the instruments at its disposal in support of 'peace, justice and democratisation' (personal communication, European External Action Service (EEAS), November 2011). In line with this approach, the EU launched, in June 2012, an 18-month CSDP civilian mission (EUAVSEC) to bolster airport security in Juba, South Sudan. It did, however, have to shelve other potential operations—a medium-term border policing mission and a longer-term patrol of the Nile (Bloch, 2011)—following the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in December 2013.

The EU was also beset by problems in its attempts to establish its credentials as a conflict mediator. Believing that Thabo Mbeki had privileged access both to President Bashir and to South Sudan's President Salva Kiir (Zwan, 2011, p. 18), the EU invested heavily in the (Mbeki-led) AU High-level Implementation Panel, which was charged with resolving outstanding CPA and post-CPA issues. It provided the bulk of the funding and even offered three technical experts. However, two of these experts were subsequently declined (on nationality grounds), as was a request from the EU High Representative Baroness Catherine Ashton that the EUSR should participate in the work of the panel (Middleton *et al.*, 2011, p. 20).[5]

Faced with these setbacks, the EU has, unsurprisingly, sought to foreground its developmental rather than conflict management role, particularly in South Sudan. It transformed its sub-office into a full embassy in Juba in May 2011 and, in June, began a joint programming process, whereby the EU coordinates the bilateral aid efforts of its member states. However, the EU's actions have been constrained by two recent developments. The first was South Sudan's refusal to sign the Cotonou Agreement—Europe's aid and trade convention with former African, Caribbean and Pacific colonies—for fear of SPLM figures being indicted by the ICC (Olsen and Furness, 2014, p. 10). The second was the outbreak, in December 2013, of large-scale fighting between President Kiir's Dinka community and Vice-President Riek Machar's Nuer supporters. The EU delegation has now largely suspended its long-term development programmes and gone back to concentrating on humanitarian assistance (Olsen and Furness, 2014).

EU Capabilities: 'Fitness for Purpose'

It follows that the EU did not carve out a high-profile conflict management role either in Darfur or during the North–South Peace Process. In part, this can be explained by a lack of political will but in part it is also linked to the 'fitness for purpose' of the EU's 'capabilities' (resources, instruments and unity) for raising its profile in this target setting.

Resources

The EU has had vast resources to spend on Sudan. Indeed, 'EC aid to the Sudan jumped by ... 1000 per cent from 2001 to 2005' (Olsen, 2007, p. 13). With the signing of the CPA in 2005, the EU promised a €400 million development assistance package and continued providing €100 million annually in humanitarian assistance (personal communication, EEAS, November 2011). The EU maintained flows of development assistance even after the Bashir government refused, in July 2009, to ratify the Cotonou Agreement, potentially turning its back on €336 million pledged under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) (Olsen, 2007, p. 13). Significantly too, the EU remained the second largest donor to the Multi Donor Trust Fund-South Sudan, while European member states continued to pay more than 40% of the costs of UNMIS and UNAMID (Zwan, 2011, p. 19).

The above 'soft power' resources were enough to secure the EU a place at most top tables. But they afforded only limited leverage in a target setting such as Sudan, where oil revenues were high (Patey, 2007) and where the regime in Khartoum had no interest in resolving humanitarian crises, even going so far as to expel, in March 2009, 16 relief agencies operating in Darfur (IRIN, 2009).

As regards 'human resources', EU staff operating in Sudan displayed 'a bit of inexperience on the political side' (interview with European official, Khartoum, May 2010). They were more comfortable dealing with technical development issues than strategic questions and, when the European Commission was charged with chairing the N'Djamena ceasefire monitoring commission, they had to rely entirely on member states for military advice (ICG, 2005, p. 10).

The same cannot be said of the EUSRs, who were much more politically astute. However, these envoys did not all attach the same importance to raising the EU's profile. The first EUSR was 'the politically proactive and independent Haavisto [who] failed to acknowledge the limits of his mandate' (Ferhatović, n.d., p. 7). He was succeeded in 2007 by Danish diplomat Torben Brylle, 'who respected the limitations set by leading member states', but was widely regarded as an observer and who never actually met the Sudanese president (interview with Whitehall insider, June 2013). The next EUSR, Marsden, was highly respected, even if her appointment in August 2010 was problematic in the eyes of some European ambassadors in Khartoum given that she had just been UK High Commissioner (interviews, May 2010). In the end, all these EUSRs were hampered by the fact that their advisors were seconded for short periods by member states, were thought to 'remain loyal to the seconding structures that pay their salaries' (Ferhatović 2009, p. 51) and were not in post long enough to move beyond a 'reactive approach to conflict management' (Zwan, 2011, p. 22).

Instruments

Turning to instruments, here the EU has also had a vast array of tools with which to assume a more prominent conflict-related role. To begin with CSDP military missions, these are arguably the EU's most conspicuous instrument, offering the immediate prospect of enhanced visibility. However, as noted earlier, the EU failed to launch an operation in Darfur, and the explanation for this lies at least partly in the target setting in Sudan, where a brutal regime, backed by China and Russia, was resisting any international military engagement. By contrast, the EU's subsequent success in undertaking a civilian CSDP mission (EUAVSEC, 2012) in Juba can also be understood in terms of changes in the target setting: South Sudan was a new state, which desperately needed to boost its trade, regionally and internationally, and whose leaders had long been pushing for an operation of this kind (interview with EUSR advisor, January 2012).

The EU's other conflict management tools were more low-key, often serving to support other actors. To illustrate, the EU contributed €3 million, via its Instrument for Stability (IFS), to the trust fund that finances the AU–UN-led peace process in Darfur (House of Lords, 2011, p. 42).[6] Similarly, the EU made contributions to the AMIS and UNAMID missions. While these were more sizeable (some €440 million between 2004 and 2007 and over 100 military personnel (confidential personal communication, EEAS, November 2011)), they did not raise the EU's profile in Sudan for several reasons. First, AMIS was under-resourced and had no established mediation capacity (ICG, 2005). Second, it was financed by the Africa Peace Facility (APF), which is itself funded by the EDF and hence precludes expenditure on military equipment. Finally, in the case of UNAMID, the EU was only allowed to supply a tiny number of military personnel and was subsequently required by the Sudanese government to withdraw all of them (interview with defence attaché, Khartoum, May 2010).

Another measure that could have marked the EU out as a serious player was sanctions. However, in practice, the EU hid behind the UN on arms embargoes and adopted economic sanctions that were 'less restrictive than those imposed by the US' (Sicurelli, 2010, pp. 49, 67). The EU's reticence was largely the result of a lack of political will but also reflected a recognition that sanctions were unlikely to sway an oil-rich Sudanese regime and might even afford other players greater influence at a point in the peace process when the EU had to remain engaged (interview with former EUSR advisor, Brussels, January 2012). The precedent for this had already been set in the 1990s when 'Western' sanctions had allowed China, Malaysia and India to become the dominant investors in Sudan's oil sector (Patey, 2007, p. 5).

The same reticence did not mark the EU's approach to the ICC's 2009 indictment as it soon became the donor that was most systematic in refusing to meet Bashir. However, the ICC was a double-edged sword. As one EUSR advisor made clear: 'The EU is perceived as a strong actor by sticking to its principles. But this ties our hands politically. We can't engage with Bashir. The AU is also very "anti" the ICC Resolution. Paradoxically, every time Bashir travels to another country, our influence diminishes' (interview in Brussels, November 2011). In practice, this self-denying ordinance meant that the EU was excluded from high-level negotiations with the president and had to find other interlocutors. According to one EEAS official (interview in Brussels, 2012), 'these could be Heads of State within the region' or 'the circle around the president'

who 'then pass on messages'. The ultimate irony of the EU's principled stand is that the continuing threat of arrest by the ICC is now the main obstacle to Bashir stepping down and opening the door to meaningful national dialogue (Confidential communication, London, July 2015).

Other EU instruments have included missions to observe the elections and referendums. While these were high-profile, their findings were never going to be allowed to derail the North-South peace process. They also exposed the EU to criticism. The EU was accused of 'losing momentum in the period building up to the referendum' (interview with Nordic official, June 2013) and, before the elections themselves, of arriving too late for the original census, by which time much rigging had already been done. According to one election advisor (interview in Khartoum, May 2010):

> The Carter Center had been on the ground with four teams since February 2008. We were pushing the EU to have its observers on the ground in time for voter registration starting on 1 November. Brussels is non-functional in summer. If you want to be a major player here, you can't take the summer off.

Finally, another soft power instrument was EU declarations. These were arguably the EU's preferred approach but had no obvious impact on the Khartoum regime. On leaving office, the Finnish EUSR Haavisto commented on the futility of the EU expressing, for the 54th time, 'verbal concern' about the situation on the ground in Darfur (*EU Observer*, 1 May 2007).

Unity

Turning to the question of unity, the following analysis will argue that, while there were disagreements between European member states that reduced the EU's prospects of assuming a more prominent EU conflict management role, there was also a 'basic underlying unity' (interview with American diplomat, Khartoum, May 2010) that enabled the EU to play a low-key but vital supporting function.

The clearest example of disunity was over the possible CSDP military mission to Darfur. This is not surprising given that this is where the EU is most dependent on member states for military contributions and 'political direction' (Gya, 2010, p. 12). Crucially, the EU3 (Germany, the UK and France), whose agreement is usually required to launch an operation, were not united (Toje, 2008, p. 135). Germany, which is never an enthusiastic supporter of such missions (interview with French Foreign Ministry, November 2011), was seeking alternatives. The UK favoured a NATO lead, while France opposed this (Sicurelli, 2010, p. 61). The fact that Britain and France were supposed to be cooperating more closely in line with the 1998 St Malo II Agreement was ignored by the UK, which jealously guarded its status as part of the Troika (Norway, US, UK), the most influential northern players in Sudan.

Other disagreements were much less in the public spotlight. There were, for example, divergences over the EU's support for AMIS, with some member states pushing for APF funds to be used to finance this mission, while others saw this as a '"slippery slope", with development funds being increasingly called upon to fund military work' (Olsen, 2007, p. 10).

Equally, there were differences over the ICC indictment. While this was supported rhetorically across the EU, whose members had all signed the Rome Statute on which the ICC was founded, member states had different interpretations of what was meant by 'essential contact'. The Dutch took the toughest line, with their ambassador even absenting himself from Bashir's swearing-in ceremony in 2010, while the UK adopted a more relaxed stance: the British High Commissioner paid her respects when leaving office (interviews with Whitehall insider, June 2013). As a rule, AEC member states were keenest to leave channels open to Bashir. As one of their officials explained: 'If you want to push implementation of the CPA, you need to leave [a] door open to the different parties—SPLM and [the government's] National Congress Party' (interview, Khartoum, May 2010).

Other disputes were kept even further out of public view. These included disagreements over who should pay the cost of transporting ballot papers from Khartoum to Juba, then on to polling stations. Some member states argued that this was the responsibility of Sudan's electoral commission but AEC members pushed the EU to make these payments, which they eventually did (interviews, Khartoum, May 2010). More significantly, there were 'different sensibilities' on how rigorously the EU should judge the 2010 electoral process, with 'the Dutch at the hard end, the UK much softer and the EU somewhere in the middle' (interview with Whitehall insider, June 2013). According to one European official (interview in Khartoum, May 2010), 'Nobody in the EU disputed the criticisms by the observer mission. But ultimately the election was needed for the CPA. In the end, we all signed up to … semi-credible, D-minus elections'.

Finally, there were even differences over EU declarations. According to one European official (interview in Khartoum, May 2010), 'Some countries such as Sweden and Romania were pushing for declarations' as a way for them 'to be visible'. Others, such as the UK, preferred to 'go it alone on a declaration unless it [was] a very controversial thing'. They would 'then ask for the cover of the EU and … share the blame with others'.

The above analysis certainly suggests disunity, with 'bilateral donors all feel[ing] that they need to be seen or heard', 'all wanting to claim success' and some preferring 'a bilateral approach to the North–South dialogue and Darfur' rather than 'stronger coordination by the EUSR' (Zwan, 2011, p. 24). Ultimately, however, many of the differences should not be overstated as they were less about interests (discussed later) than divergent norms (House of Lords, 2011, p. 116). These included differences over the order of priority in which different Sudanese challenges should be tackled. According to one Whitehall insider (interview, June 2013), there was a 'division between the EU, whose focus was on Darfur especially under Brylle, and growing concern in London and Holland about the North–South process and drift on the CPA'. As the same interviewee made clear: 'The issue was not so much a lack of consensus since everyone was broadly agreed on the need for peace, democratic transition and fair and free elections. But there were different perspectives on norms and pace and who got the credit for state-building'. This point was reinforced by an American diplomat (interview in Khartoum, May 2010), who noted that EU positions displayed 'a lot of crucial common ground': on the priority attached to CPA, the need to move towards democracy, and the importance of the referendum. This underlying unity was linked to a fear of doing anything that might derail the peace process. In this sense, Sudan's hostile target setting appears actually to have facilitated difficult compromises and made it easier for the EU to assume a low-key supporting role.

Target Setting

The above analysis has shown how, despite having a range of resources, an array of instruments and a degree of unity, the EU has been unable to carve out a high-profile conflict management role. The explanation for this lies at least partly in the target setting in Sudan. In other words, it may be questioned whether the Sudanese context was ever really propitious for a CSDP military mission. Was it the kind of place that the EU might have been expected to emerge as a power broker or might the EU have done better to reframe expectations?

Before homing in on this setting, it is worth remembering that EU–Sudanese relations were playing out in a wider context or 'opportunity structure' (Bretheron and Vogel, 2006). This external environment was clearly important in establishing the tone of these relations and, as such, some of its key features are outlined below. At the risk of over-simplifying, the early 2000s can be said to have offered a favourable climate for a more prominent EU conflict management role. In December 2001, the EU had declared its rapid reaction force (50,000–60,000 troops available at 60 days' notice) to be operational. In June 2003, the EU launched the first CSDP mission in Africa and, in December, adopted the European Security Strategy. Equally, European leaders at this time, notably Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, were prepared to invest in an interventionist strategy towards Africa. They were aided in this by support from civil society groups across Europe, keen to ram home the lessons of the Rwandan genocide, as well by growing acceptance of the right of states to intervene in line with the UN's Responsibility to Protect doctrine (Williams and Bellamy, 2005).

By the end of the North–South Peace Process, the EU was institutionally better equipped to take on a conflict management role. It had ratified the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, established the EEAS in 2010, introduced two EU–Africa strategies (2005, 2007) plus specific strategies for the Sahel and Horn (2011), as well as issuing a joint communication on the 'Comprehensive Approach' in 2013 (European Commission/High Representative, 2013). At the same time, however, the EU was in the grip of a major global recession, its leaders were wary of CSDP military missions—having been press-ganged by France into European Force (EUFOR) Chad in 2008—and the UK's Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron was even mooting the possibility of a UK exit from the EU. In addition, Africa had been 'bumped down the agenda by the Arab Spring' and the AU was, in line with the mantra 'African solutions to African problems', pressing harder to take the lead on missions and negotiations across Africa (interview with former EUSR advisor, November 2011, Brussels).

While the international climate may have become less favourable over time, it was not a block on CSDP military missions across much of Africa, as will be seen in the conclusion. So what was it about the target setting in Sudan that curbed the EU's capacity to project itself as a major player in the conflict field, particularly in the period from the 2003 Darfur Crisis to the end of the peace process in 2011? The first factor was the brutality of the Khartoum regime, its unresponsiveness to soft power and its vehement resistance to hard power. In this context, one former EUSR advisor stressed that: 'To do a CSDP mission [in Darfur] without the consent of the government of Sudan was impossible. We needed their consent. We needed a UN Security Council Resolution. The Sudanese regime was blocking our efforts to intervene' (interview in Brussels, January 2012). Another EUSR advisor claimed: 'We were not allowed a logic

of European engagement by Khartoum. Was it really a missed opportunity?' (Interview in Brussels, January 2012.)

The second element was the hostility of the physical terrain and the scale of the challenge. Sudan was, until 2011, Africa's largest country, and its Darfur region was the size of France but with no major surfaced road network and dirt tracks that were at the mercy of the summer rains. Furthermore, Sudan was home to multiple significant conflicts, most notably in the East and the Three Areas, not to mention many localised disputes over pasture rights and access to water, that could trigger large-scale conflicts (Zwan, 2011, p. 23). Importantly too, Sudan was a strategic hotspot surrounded by nine neighbouring countries, all of which stood to be affected adversely by any breakdown in the Sudanese peace process. In such a setting, it is hard to see how the EU, which had 'only started getting involved in "crisis management" operations in 1999' (Gya, 2010, p. 10), could have assumed a power broker role or sustained the kind of open-ended interventions that were needed in Darfur and other Sudanese conflict zones. Its chances of doing so would doubtless have been increased by the availability of NATO assets and planning facilities, but NATO's engagement in Sudan would, of course, have been anathema to the Bashir regime.

The third feature was the 'crowdedness' of the political space. Sudan was described by one European ambassador as 'a competitive environment', with a large number of external players pursuing different interests (interview in Khartoum, May 2010). As noted earlier, these actors included emerging powers, such as China and Russia, whose interests centred on oil and arms, respectively (Patey, 2007). The US, with equities across the region, was also heavily involved, as was Norway, with its oil interests. The AU, which 'always wants to run everything' (interview in Khartoum, May 2010), and IGAD were two of the key regional players. The EU arrived late on this scene, even if the UK, the former colonial power with major equities in East Africa and Egypt, as well as Holland and Italy had all been heavily involved in the Naivasha talks. This meant there was competition between individual EU member states and between these states and the EU. According to Middleton *et al.* (2011, p. 24):

> The UK has been the pre-eminent EU member state voice on Sudan and along with the Netherlands has rather crowded out the EU. In a situation where foreign players have tended to adopt areas of specialty (oil for Norway, security for the UK, the Three Areas for the Netherlands) the EU's generalist approach without the hard political clout of the US has led to it finding itself on the sidelines.

This crowding out was sometimes justified on the grounds that it helped channel support to a country which received 'a lot of supply driven assistance' (interview with American diplomat, May 2010). It was also deemed necessary to ensure that the CPA ran its course. Such a competitive approach was, however, harder to defend in post-referendum South Sudan. Yet it continued, as can be seen from the divisions over the EU's adoption of joint programming in Sudan. This approach, which seeks to harmonise the development policies of European member states and minimise the strain on local Sudanese capacity, has been resisted by some EU states, which see it as 'an add-on to their bilateral engagement rather than as an overarching coordination mechanism, and even as a chance to get EU money to support bilateral programmes' (Olsen and

Furness, 2014, p. 8). The UK has been the worst culprit and has, together with the Netherlands, published a detailed country strategy that barely mentions the EU (Olsen and Furness, 2014, pp. 8, 10).

Conclusion: Looking Beyond the Sudanese Case

This article began by noting that international organisations active in Africa frequently face criticism. The EU is no exception and is often accused of missing opportunities to assert itself as a conflict manager. This study asked whether these claims were borne out by the EU's record in Sudan from the time of the Darfur Crisis through to the transition to a two-state solution. It found that there was indeed a lack of political will and quite high levels of disagreement among member states that militated against a more prominent conflict-related role. At the same time, however, it questioned whether the EU had really missed chances to undertake CSDP military missions or emerge as a power broker. It suggested that, while the EU did have a range of resources, an array of instruments and a reasonable degree of unity on fundamental issues, it was always going to struggle to translate these 'capabilities' into actual 'muscle' in a target setting as hostile as Sudan.

The above conclusions are not intended to absolve the EU of responsibility for not trying harder to surmount the obstacles it faced in Sudan. They do, however, help to relativise criticisms of the EU as well as opening out on to wider questions on settings and expectation management. The first question concerns the influence of target settings on the EU's readiness to take on conflict management roles, specifically CSDP military missions. Several features of these settings affect the prospects of such an intervention taking place. The attitude of an African regime is clearly important. Where the host government has requested support (as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003 and 2006), it is easier for the EU both to muster member state contributions and to secure UNSC authorisation. Where, however, the regime is opposed, this is more problematic, as the case of Libya in 2011 demonstrated, even if the EU did eventually offer military support for humanitarian operations (EUFOR Libya, 2011).

Proximity should, in theory, increase the likelihood of an EU mission, as the EU's interests are often geographically 'closer to home'. This was certainly true of the EU's Operation Atalanta (as from 2008) off the Somali coast. However, proximity can mean the presence of other important actors, who may be wary of interventions (e.g. China and Russia in Libya and Sudan). Urgency, too, should increase the likelihood of a CSDP mission. This was indeed the case in the DRC where Operation Artemis in 2003 halted the killings in eastern Congo. However, this is often not enough, as evidenced by the EU's initial paralysis over Libya in 2011 and the delays in launching its 2013 mission to the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA).

The scale of the challenge is another crucial element. A mission is more probable if the issue is likely to resolve quickly, as was the case in eastern DRC (2003), the Congolese elections (2006) and to a lesser extent Chad (2008), where the aim was to create the security conditions needed to hand over to a UN force. It is less likely where the challenge is more open-ended (as in Mali), deep-rooted as in Côte d'Ivoire or linked, as it is today in Sudan and South Sudan (ICG, 2015), to a whole series of interrelated disputes.

The key factor is arguably some kind of historical or political connection, with a potential 'lead nation', such as the UK or France. This linkage really takes effect where

the mission serves wider EU economic or security interests. The Atalanta operation is a case in point. So too is the naval intervention to intercept migrant smuggler ships from North Africa which has just been agreed by EU foreign and defence ministers (*New York Times*, 18 May 2015). Historical ties can also work where a lead nation is prepared to invest enough energy into persuading other EU states into supplying troops. This was how France ensured the launch of the 2013 EUFOR RCA mission, despite the fact that the EU had virtually no wider strategic interests at stake (Olsen and Furness, 2014, p. 15).

Turning, finally, to the issue of how best to manage expectations, this is the dimension of the Hillian model that is most neglected. There is, of course, a limit to how far the EU can frame expectations in contexts such as Darfur where the US had, by publicly recognising the 'genocide', encouraged speculation about a strong-armed international response.[7] However, expectation management should be easier in other African contexts and would bring EU discourse more into line with the undeniable reality that the EU has, over the last five years, been moving away from a hybrid approach involving military interventions and civilian missions towards one that is heavily skewed towards capacity-building (the European Union's Capacity Building mission or EUCAP Sahel Niger, 2012; EUCAP NESTOR, 2012) and training (the EU's training mission or EUTM Mali, 2013 and EUCAP Sahel Mali, 2014).[8]

The EU has made an important contribution to conflicts across Africa by assuming many of these low-key functions. Despite this, the EU has felt the urge to continue fuelling unrealistic expectations as to its future conflict management roles. The most recent example is the EU's 2013 Joint Communication on its 'comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises'. This includes a promise to 'coordinate and where possible combine the use of a *full range of EU tools and instruments* … to craft a flexible and effective response *during and after the stabilisation phase and in case of risks of conflict*' (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, p. 9, italics added).

It is easy to see why the EU is seeking a 'whole-of-Union' strategy that makes 'its external action more consistent' (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, pp. 2, 12). What is, however, less clear is why the EU has not sought to qualify the 'comprehensiveness' of this approach by laying down specific criteria—geographic, political and logistical—that could trigger 'CSDP missions and operations' (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, p. 9). By tightening up its discourse in this way, the EU would take an important step towards bridging the capabilities–expectations gap. It would discover the benefits of under-promising and over-delivering, while also building more solid foundations on which its future aspirations as a conflict manager could be based. Furthermore, the EU need not be alone in this process. A similar approach could be adopted by other international organisations active in Africa, not least the Commonwealth and the UN, each of which has its own capabilities–expectations gap and each of which has a need to restore its image in the 21st century.

Notes

1. This article avoids the broad definition of conflict management employed in some EU circles which includes conflict prevention and crisis management (Sicurelli, 2010) and is closer to Olsen's (2009) definition, which focuses on military missions, mediation and supporting instruments.
2. 'Actorness' refers to the EU's 'capacity to act' (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998, p. 214), while 'presence' equates to 'the ability to exert influence externally' (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, pp. 24–30).
3. There have, for example, been alternative empirical approaches (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998) and theoretically informed models focusing on preference-formation (Thomas, 2012).
4. Before the Lisbon Treaty, the EU had one chair for the European Commission and one for the presidency/EUSR (interview with EU Delegation, Khartoum, May 2010).
5. By contrast, the US, Norway and UK have roles within this process (Power, 2015).
6. The IFS is a flexible mechanism that funds short-term crisis management responses.
7. The European Parliament only labelled Sudan's actions as 'tantamount to genocide' (Gya, 2010, p. 10).
8. European member states have contributed troops to MINUSAM, the UN force established in northern Mali in April 2013. The Dutch have deployed 450 peacekeepers. Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland have also sent troops.

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