

The paradoxes of EU crisis response in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali

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Introduction

This chapter is based on extensive field research carried out within the framework of the EU Horizon 2020-funded project EUNPACK by four of the partner institutes: the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), the Middle East Research Institute (MERI) in Erbil, the Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa (ARGA) and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). In close cooperation, researchers from these institutes engaged with EU interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali over a period of three years. This engagement including a mixed-methods approach of qualitative interviews and surveys of target populations of supposed beneficiaries of EU programming. In total, more than a hundred qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali with members of the EU delegations, European training personnel, local and national government representatives, civil society organisations, academics and other stakeholders. Surveys targeting supposed beneficiaries of EU programming were also implemented in each country with a sample of together five hundred respondents (see Bøås *et al.*, forthcoming).

In this chapter we use the substance of all these data to conceptualise the obstacles that EU crisis response currently is facing through five paradoxes that permeate these operations. While all five paradoxes are not equally present in all cases, they characterise EU crisis response efforts and demand more attention from research and policy. These paradoxes are (1) that the EU strives for local ownership, but often fails to achieve this beyond national government consent, (2) that it aims for conflict sensitivity but creates

Brussels-based designs that are rarely tailor-made to local contexts, (3) that it seeks demand-driven crisis response, but ends up with a supply-based one, (4) that it intends to do statebuilding, but in reality pursues much narrower security objectives, and (5) that it preaches long-term solutions, but practices short-term conflict management efforts. What this suggests is an EU that in its external crisis response operations is not necessarily as norm-oriented as much of the EU literature suggests, but has increasingly moved towards a more realist and securitised approach to conflict management (see Bøås and Rieker, 2019). What is happening on the ground is therefore more an attempt of conflict management driven to a large extent by external security concerns that make the EU states' ambitions of contributing to conflict resolution and transformation hard, if not impossible to achieve. The main reason for this is that the five paradoxes that permeate these operations create a lack of local ownership and conflict sensitivity that leads programming of EU crisis response to become supply-driven and focused on short-term security objectives. This trend is present in all these three cases, but its manifestation is not uniform. It is most present in Mali, where narrow European security concerns with regard to terrorism and migration is a lead narrative for an international operation that in practice is becoming increasingly focused on achieving state stability through conflict management. It is less present in Afghanistan, where at least at times the EU has taken a slightly different approach than the United States (e.g., in police reform that we highlight in this chapter), while in the case of Iraq, the EU has never had a really visible presence due to the role of the United States.

An important finding explored in this chapter is that many of the challenges that the EU is facing relate to the inner functioning of the Union, including its ability to act as a unitary actor. That these key obstacles are primarily internal barriers is at the same time both discouraging and promising, in that the EU struggles to practice what it preaches – for example, conflict resolution and eventual conflict transformation – but that the potential to enhance the effectiveness of its crisis responses is significant. However, for this to take place substantial changes to the way the EU works are necessary.

At the heart of the EU's crisis response in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali lies the restoration of state authority, primarily through efforts related to SSR. In theory, SSR concerns crucial elements of conflict

resolution and transformation through the provision of human and state security with appropriate democratic oversight and control (Hänggi, 2004). Sedra (2010) moreover, suggests SSR processes are people-centred, locally driven and includes civil society. The extent to which practice dovetails the formal objective of SSR is, however, very limited. SSR processes are frequently criticised for not being people-centred, to be externally imposed, and to exclude – beyond the political and security elite – local actors like civil society (Gordon, 2014: 129; Mobekk, 2010; Jennings and Bøås, 2015). Indeed, according to Sedra (2010: 201), successful examples of SSR are in short supply. While numerous handbooks and guidelines exist (most prominently OECD DAC, 2007), and many efforts have been made, three key factors render most SSR programmes unsuccessful: lack of adaptation to local contexts, the blurring of what SSR really is, and a short-term perspective (Sedra, 2010: 103). Moreover, SSR becomes increasingly difficult when a particular security sector in question is engaged in wars. This is very much the case of Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali, and as Loschi *et al.* (2018: 18) argue, such cases, ‘which often have short-term perspectives and occur in the absence of a more all-encompassing SSR ..., may well lead to the unwarranted legitimisation, co-option and institutionalisation of highly controversial security actors’.

EU crisis response in the extended neighbourhood

The EU has over the last two decades deployed several missions in conflict theatres far beyond its immediate borders. Its missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali all have elements of humanitarian aid and SSR, including provisions for a potential move from conflict management to conflict resolution and transformation, but this potential is by and large not reached and while important similarities exist between these cases, the missions and their mandate are particular to each.

Afghanistan

The EU’s intervention in Afghanistan followed the US entrance in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks. Between 2002 and 2007, European

countries were primarily engaged bilaterally, where Italy (rule of law), Germany (the police) and the UK (counter-narcotics) all had their individual responsibilities (Suroush, 2018: 7). Many other European countries were involved through the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In the reform of the police, the key priority of the German Police Project Office (GPPO) was the Kabul Police Academy (KPA), where senior police officers were trained. The rationale for such a top-down approach was the belief that only with professional and well-trained senior officers would the reform be effective (see International Crisis Group, 2007).

In 2006, the London Conference on Afghanistan had provided a new framework for cooperation between the Afghan government and the international community. Following a joint assessment mission to assess the 'Afghan needs in the rule of law sector' at the fall of 2006 (see European Court of Auditors, 2015), another fact-finding mission suggested that the EU should establish a mission to rebuild the Afghan National Police (ANP) (see EU, 2007). A year later, the EU approved EUPOL in Afghanistan. It was based on the same 'train the trainer' approach of the German programme that preceded it and was supposed to coordinate and benefit from the contributions of all European countries, essentially drawing together 'all non-US efforts' (Larivé, 2012: 191).

The first EUPOL was to be a non-executive mission, primarily to monitor, mentor, advice and train (EU, 2007). The mission was mainly involved with Afghanistan's Ministry of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Office of the Attorney General. The EUPOL mission was extended two more times: first in May 2010 and in December 2014 (until December 2016). The EUPOL budget from 2007 to December 2015 was around €457 million (European Court of Auditors, 2015).

EUPOL was to serve as a potent symbol for the EU's stated ambition to become a global security provider aiming beyond conflict management and security narrowly defined to become a key provider of a comprehensive civilian approach (see Fescharek, 2015). Therefore, the EU prevented donation of equipment which could have dual use, for instance, walkie-talkies. EUPOL was designed for the formation of viable, sustainable and effective civilian policing arrangements, under Afghan ownership that would

guarantee proper interaction with the wider criminal justice system (Echavez and Suroush, 2017: 5). The outcome is as we will see much more mixed and much closer to a narrow approach to conflict management.

Iraq

Prior to the ousting of Saddam's Ba'athist Regime in 2003, the EU had no political or contractual ties with Iraq besides adhering to UN sanction mandates and extending humanitarian aid in the aftermath of the 1991 Uprising. The EU was the second largest contributor of humanitarian aid behind the UNHCR.

The 2003 Iraq War unearthed faultlines within the EU since key EU member states failed to unify under one banner, thus calling into question the viability of having a common EU foreign policy (Spyer, 2007). Gradually, EU-Iraq relations warmed, underpinned by two agreements: Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Cooperation and Partnership; and a Cooperation Agreement. The former, signed in January 2010, pertains to developing energy ties and collaborating on mutually beneficial projects, while the latter, signed in 2012, deals with partnering on vital political, security, human rights and environmental issues, among others. Once the EU established a permanent presence in Iraq, its engagement there increasingly involved collaborating with international and national actors to enhance the nation's capacity in several realms, including rule of law, capacity-building, development assistance, and – most recently – SSR. Thus, initially the EU's aspirations in Iraq boiled down to two key interventions, namely the EUJUST LEX-Iraq and interventions on reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid.

EUJUST LEX-Iraq sought (a) to promote closer collaboration between the different actors across the criminal justice system, (b) strengthen the management capacity of senior and high-potential officials for the police, judiciary and penitentiary, and (c) improve skills and procedures in criminal investigation in full respect for the rule of law and human rights (Peters *et al.*, 2018).

The backdrop for the EU's work on reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid lies in the EU's emphasis on identifying a more comprehensive approach than purely conflict management to support political and economic reconstruction, which included

development and humanitarian aid. The need for humanitarian aid was evident, as the EU pointed to the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Iraq, which was closely linked to the level of violence. The need for longer term development aid was clear too, which had the EU pledge support for improving basic state services to the people. In these efforts, the EU's projects were primarily directed at human rights and rule of law, capacity-building in primary and secondary education, and sustainable energy for all (see Peters *et al.*, 2018).

Mali

While the EU has been active in Mali earlier, its most recent engagement with the security sector in Mali started in February 2013 with the establishment of the EUTM to Mali. Its engagement was expanded with the establishment of EUCAP Sahel Mali in 2015. These missions form part of the EU's efforts to restore state authority in Mali. While the EU, along with other donors, has long been present in Mali as a development partner, these programmes have a stronger emphasis on conflict management through security in their approach than previous ones, a result of increasing instability in Mali since 2012. Both EUTM and EUCAP arose from a request from the Malian Government and are based on the UN Security Council resolution 2085 of 2012.

EUTM Mali seeks to enhance the leadership skills within the Malian Army by providing 'legal and leadership skills education as well as on tactical and strategical education, training planning process, basic military principles and International Humanitarian Law' (EEAS, 2016:1). The EUTM's third mandate given in March 2016 expanded operations northwards towards the river Niger loop, and hence intended to expand trainings to the regions of Gao and Timbuktu. Per 2017, the EUTM consists of 575 officers, with participants from 27 countries (EUTM, 2018). In 2018, the EU Council almost doubled funding from €33.4 million in 2016–18 to €59.7 million for 2018–20 and amended the mission 'to include in its objectives the provision of advice and training support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force, as part of the EU's ongoing efforts to support the G5 Sahel process' (EUTM, 2018). Most of the EUTM personnel are stationed in the Koulikoro training camp 60 kilometres north-east

of Bamako. EUTM Mali remains a non-executive mission and does, therefore, not participate in combat nor accompany the Malian army in operational zones (EEAS, 2016).

In 2015, the EU expanded its engagement in Mali with the establishment of EUCAP. This provides ‘assistance and advice to the national police, the national gendarmerie and the national guard in the implementation of the security reform set out by the new government’ (EUCAP, 2018: 1). It has, until October 2017, trained around 3,400 officers in, among other subjects, command structure, professional methods, human rights and gender issues (EUCAP, 2017). Its mandate was in January 2017 renewed until January 2019, with a budget of €29.7 million the first year of operations. In its second mandate, there is a greater emphasis on Mali’s counter-terrorism services as well as support to Malian authorities concerning irregular migration, including trafficking, as well as border control (EUCAP, 2017).

Another component of the EU’s efforts within the Malian security sector concerns borders and border management. The EU perceives the ‘problem of porous borders’ to be one of the key challenges in Mali, and in the Sahel region more broadly, and is therefore involved in a number of such projects. While border control became part of EUCAP’s second mandate in 2017, the EU also funds mostly security-focused programmes through the newly established EUTF. One important programme is PARSEC, a EUTF programme that aims to support enhanced security and of the management of border areas in the Mopti and Gao regions. However, it is currently only focusing on Mopti and the border to Burkina Faso. This programme is working in coordination with EUCAP and EUTM but is also operating as a supporting component of a larger Malian plan for enhancing state forces and supporting local governors’ capacity to protect and administer security.¹

The five paradoxes that characterise EU crisis response

The red thread in the EU’s performance in its crisis responses is the gap between intentions and implementations. While it wishes to conduct its operations based on principles close to conflict resolution and conflict transformation that many – per 2020 – believe are

laudable (like local ownership and conflict sensitivity), it continuously fails to walk the talk, thus mainly remains a provider of attempts at crisis response through conflict management tools and approaches. This section analyses the five paradoxes the EU faces in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali. These are analysed in a loosely defined chronological order – from ideas and intentions to implementation and results.

Lacking local ownership

Local ownership is generally seen as a precondition for effective third-party intervention (Osland, 2014), and therefore crucial for conflict resolution and transformation, but international institutions struggle to achieve this (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Bøås and Stig, 2010). This is also the case for the EU, which remains reluctant to get involved with local actors on the ground, and which struggles with balancing the interests and desires of local populations with those of its own.

Local ownership and conflict sensitivity are interlinked concepts and often analysed together. This concern, in short, is the extent to which local forces own and work to implement any programme, and the extent to which external actors tailor-make their response to a specific setting. In other words, while local ownership is here thought to create the framework within which actions and programmes are implemented, conflict sensitivity concerns more the content of those actions and programmes. For example, while an external actor may garner support from local governments and interest groups for a border management programme on the Mali-Niger border, it may – because it is not conflict-sensitive – serve to increase tension in the area and not contribute to resolving root causes, thus not only quite effectively preventing conflict resolution and transformation, but also highly likely being counter-productive for conflict management.

Local ownership concerns the extent to which actions and programmes are anchored in and driven by local forces, where the government typically plays a central role. The opposite of local ownership, then, is essentially the imposition of actions and programmes by external actors. The consequences of lacking local ownership include lacking political support and willingness to drive

through these changes, a lack of actors and agents to implement any programme, and probably ill-adapted programmes which are – as we see in the next paradox – not intended to solve underlying issues but address one’s own agenda.

In Mali, the EU policy has been to leave a ‘light footprint’ through building ownership with local partners and with people on the ground. However, the programme designs seem predominantly to arise from policy-makers in Brussels concerned with terrorism, trafficking and refugees. While there is significant interest in Mali in tackling both the issues of terrorism and migration, the relevance and local rooting of policies are limited. According to Peters *et al.* (2018: 82) there seems to be a ‘lack of clear distinction between the different groups in Mali in the respective Council documents’, suggesting a lack of grounded conflict sensitivity. This is likely partly a result of a tendency to develop policies in Brussels with limited consultations with local partners in Mali – sometimes even the EU delegation itself.² As the National Platform for Civil Society in Mali (an organisation that coordinates civil society in Mali) suggest: ‘They ask our opinions, but then don’t want to further engage with us. They ask us to comment about pre-conceived needs, not about our needs.’³ Indeed, the EU has already acknowledged the need for local ownership of external assistance programmes, but this has rarely been employed in practice (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Bøås and Stig, 2010).

Similarly, in Iraq, the EU has proclaimed its desire for local ownership, but has ended up supporting international NGOs in their work. While, ideally, local NGOs with extensive knowledge, networks and belonging are hired for its humanitarian aid projects, international NGOs are the ones receiving most of the EU’s support. The predominant logic is that local NGOs do not have the operational capacity to implement large projects, and – which often goes unstated – do not always have the trust of international actors to handle resources given with enough accountability.⁴ However, there are exceptions, including the efforts of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) to train local NGOs (Mohammed, 2018).

Finding the right actors to cooperate with is challenging in a polarised conflict zone like Iraq. However, to be effective, it is key to be cognisant of local power dynamics and the limited

control of the central government in Baghdad (Mohammed *et al.*, 2017).

In Afghanistan, the EU's police mission EUPOL was implemented with little local ownership, and with limited support even from the Afghan police officials themselves. Afghan officials were involved only to a limited extent with design and implementation and were often not aware of EUPOL activities. While there were significant efforts to include national stakeholders, confidentiality of, for example, documents prevented further cooperation and joint benchmarking (Suroush, 2018: 19). A Ministry of Interior official stated: 'It was not clear to us how much budget they had and how they were spending their budget.'⁵ In general, police officials were unhappy with EUPOL's 'long and complicated procedures' of decision-making, including 'too much reliance' on individual member states.⁶ Moreover, the EU was criticised for not having built any relationship with Afghan civil society organisations.⁷

Indeed, '[d]espite their rhetoric of national ownership, the US and other Western donors' control SSR processes on the ground' (Baranyi and Salahub, 2011: 50). The intervention in Afghanistan was, in general, largely externally driven, and the Afghan government was given little power to impact the designs. In Afghanistan, then, as in Iraq, 'hard' security priorities in line with a narrow conflict management – like training and equipping security forces – have displaced or undermined 'soft' justice and governance reforms (Baranyi and Salahub, 2011). While the US preference for a military approach largely dwarfed the EU's more civilian attempts, the EU also failed to cooperate extensively with local actors. While this is understandable given the dire security situation and the high levels of corruption, such an approach also has consequences. 'Western actors have not invested enough in understanding local complexities and have therefore made costly mistakes: the West is fuelling conflict by aligning itself to certain elites, ethnic groups and paramilitary forces in each society' (Baranyi and Salahub, 2011: 50). As has been alluded to earlier, SSR in post-authoritarian and post-conflict societies remains challenging (Hänggi, 2004) if not 'impossible' in cases of protracted wars like Afghanistan and Iraq (Wulf, 2004: 6), thus also suggesting the huge challenge of achieving much more than relatively benign conflict management at least in a short-term horizon.

Elusive conflict sensitivity

Conflict sensitivity is, in the literature, often lauded as key to success and an essential component of any crisis response. However, while ‘recognised as an important priority from systemic and organizational perspectives, it nonetheless remains conceptually elusive’ (Handschin *et al.*, 2016: 4). APFO *et al.* (2004: 1) has suggested a generic definition where conflict sensitivity is the ability of an organisation to understand the context in which it operates; to understand the interaction between its intervention and the context; and to act upon the understanding of this interaction, in order to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts. The real challenge of conflict sensitivity, however, is to transform generic claims of being conflict-sensitive into concrete conflict-sensitive analyses and programming.

In Mali, the EU intends to be conflict-sensitive, but does not manage this in a coherent manner. While the minimal requirement – the government’s consent – was obtained in Mali, the ‘EU’s output effectiveness has also been hampered by a low degree of conflict sensitivity and encountered problems in creating local ownership in qualitative terms, although the quantitative metrics show a more positive result’ (Peters *et al.*, 2018: 83). Indeed, our summary of perception studies in Mali suggest that over half of the respondents found the EU to be conflict-sensitive. This probably implies that the respondents benefited from the EU’s support, and that the support was needed. Perhaps it also mattered that interviews were conducted in the capital city Bamako only, where the conflict may not be felt as directly, and where many might in any case prefer the current situation over the highly tumultuous times in 2012–13 (Cissé *et al.*, 2017: 7). In other parts of Mali, however, where the security situation has made needs assessments impossible and where local beneficiaries are not consulted, projects often lack relevance.⁸ Hence, we have reason to suggest that EU conflict sensitivity is limited, and thereby its potential for conflict resolution and transformation.

Indeed, the EU’s real intentions to tailor-make policies to the Malian context was questioned by respondents. One informant with intimate knowledge about the EU in Mali suggested Mali may be a ‘laboratory for EU crisis response policies’.⁹ While the EU may

wish to be conflict-sensitive, it seemed like the EU system left programme designs rushed and without the necessary (and ideally sought-after) local consultations. An example is the EU's border management efforts in the larger Sahel region, where the objective is to stop transnational terrorism and cross-border illicit trafficking while facilitating legal trade (Bøås *et al.*, 2018: 21). These efforts are curious, however. For example, 'terrorists and agents of organised crime' are already on Malian territory, and securing Mali's vast borders requires more personnel than Mali can provide – and EU personnel may hardly help, as they are restricted from much of the relevant areas due to security concerns. Moreover, these border posts will be easy to tackle for smugglers who can bribe the officers – as they did in Niger (see Molenaar *et al.*, 2017) – or simply enter through less-protected and peripheral crossings. It is hard to believe, however, that half a day of human rights training or counter-corruption training at EUCAP would counteract this livelihood strategy (see Bøås *et al.*, 2018: 21). Rather, this may lead to further securitisation, cross-border trafficking and smuggling (see Strazzari, 2015). Many interviewees were sceptical, noting that these projects were missing key smuggling routes,¹⁰ saying that 'these projects are designed to fail'.¹¹

While improved border management in the Sahel is a high priority for the EU, this may not necessarily be the case for local stakeholders and communities. In fact, for some local communities who depend on cross-border trade and other types of economic activities, it may seem more like a threat to their livelihoods than beneficial. This approach has also to take into consideration the ECOWAS protocol of free movement and trade (Raineri, 2018). Rather than seeking to accommodate local populations, the EU's approach seems more designed to solve its own potential problems, primarily migration, trafficking and terrorism.

Similar dynamics were identified in Iraq, where beneficiaries found the EU's crisis response conflict-sensitive, while key informants suggest the EU lacks this: indeed, judging by the results of perceptions studies conducted, 81.3 per cent of beneficiaries of EU humanitarian aid in Iraq say they find the EU's crisis response conflict-sensitive. The same beneficiaries also found that the EU's crisis response helped alleviate the crisis (82.4 per cent) (Mohammed *et al.*, 2017: 6). These data, most likely, suggest that at least some of

these people's needs were met by the EU's crisis response. However, this may not be the case beyond the four Kurdish cities (Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk, Kirkuk) in which the survey was carried out. Indeed, key informants interviewed were more critical, suggesting the EU considers 'Iraq as one unit, while on the ground such a thing does not exist. There is no reason to have a project on how to swim where there is no sea in that place', while a civil society activist explained that 'the EU has been influenced by their one Iraq policy. They cannot do any project in Kurdistan Region unless the same is done in Baghdad or another part of Iraq. Different governorates (provinces) may require different needs. But the EU does not have this approach' (Mohammed, 2018: 16–17).

Also, in Afghanistan we see several examples of a lack of conflict sensitivity. On the more fundamental level, the originally German approach of rebuilding the ANP was flawed, as police structures were for all practical purposes non-existent (Larivé, 2012). Later on, in Italy's lead efforts on judiciary reform (Larivé, 2012), they hardly understood the issue at hand, and its efforts faced a lack of political will in the Afghan government to reform (Burke, 2014: 1). Furthermore, few international advisors knew Islamic law well – critical in a justice system with large influence from this (Burke, 2014: 12). These examples illustrate how the EU seems very far away from building local ownership and making interventions conflict-sensitive, lowering any hope that it might achieve its higher ambitions of conflict resolution and transformation.

Demand or supply?

Some of the reasons for which local ownership, but primarily conflict sensitivity, remain elusive can be found in another paradox; while the EU's crisis response seeks to be demand-driven, it is rather supply-driven. While conflict sensitivity, per our definition above, asks interventions to minimise negative impact and maximise positive impact, interventions are seldom planned and designed around the interests of the local population. Rather, interventions arise from a complex web of reasons, many (or often most) of which are external to the conflict itself. Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali are certainly no exceptions.

Taking Afghanistan as an example, we see that external powers engaged in the first place as a US and consequently NATO response to the 9/11 attacks. The intervention, then, was driven by external actors' – notably US – efforts to fight terrorism. The interests of the United States, then, drove policy and the external intervention in Afghanistan, making Afghanistan the key example of the 'war on terror'. While on widely different scales, then, in Afghanistan the external interventions in SSR were either the US quick train-and-equip strategy, which prepared policemen also to conduct counter-insurgency, or the German (and later EU) approach of three year-long trainings but only for a few people (International Crisis Group, 2007).

Despite talk of the United States and its more militaristic approach undermining the EU's civilian ones, one should keep in mind the EU's intentions to – contrary to what they saw the United States doing – conflict resolution. The intention, in other words, seemed 'right', but the strategy to get there was – as we have seen – characterised by numerous flaws. Understanding the reasons for the EU's entrance, though, cannot be taken by their stated intentions. Their entry was – as often is the case – more based on their readiness to supply rather than meet Afghanistan's needs (Peters *et al.*, 2018). When the United States increased deployment around 2006, moreover, the EU faced a dilemma: not sending any forces (and damaging transatlantic relations) or launching a civilian EU mission (Peters *et al.*, 2018).

Member states' diverse interests explain the supply-based approach. France, for example, is key in many francophone countries, such as Mali. Such interests, however, are not necessarily of negative value, as it could also foster the necessary willingness to conduct important interventions. However, as with France in Mali, it enters with its own agenda, which in few ways corresponds with Malian priorities. However, the French success in generating sufficient support for international interventions in the country, also suggests the international community's interests were substantial, seeking to manage a conflict that security experts already in 2013 feared could spill over to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger (see Bøås *et al.*, 2020). It was indeed the UN Security Council resolution that laid the basis for the French and UN operations, which also formed the background for the EU mission. The EU, however, also

entered with their agendas, which were heavily influenced by the French insistence, but also on the overall issues of migration, trafficking and terrorism (Bøås *et al.*, 2018).

In Afghanistan, European countries engaged in the first place with the United States as a response to the 9/11 attacks. Later, it sought to carve out a different approach in Afghanistan. Its rhetoric was one of providing a more civilian approach to the US paramilitary approach, where policemen were supposed to engage in counter-insurgency efforts (Suroush, 2018: 11–12). While this has been hailed by some as necessary and important, others suggest that the EU's approach has made little impact given the massive military strength of the United States. Moreover, also within the theme of civilian policing in Afghanistan, the EU has supplied more of what it finds important, rather than basing their approach on the needs and requests of Afghans. The EU's two flagship initiatives in Afghanistan, for example – the Crime Management College and the Staff Management College in Kabul – were both funded through intense German pressure (Fescharek, 2015: 49). Indeed, the content of the EU's crisis response is very much based on the willingness of individual member states to provide funding and personnel.

The main implication being that the interests of EU member states, such as France in Mali, trump efforts to build local ownership and conflict sensitivity. Such constellations, showing the diverse interests of EU member states, also have operational challenges – for example, in Afghanistan, where member states are reluctant to merge or even cooperate their police missions with that of the EU one (see, e.g., Kaldor *et al.*, 2018). This was also a key challenge for EUPOL in Afghanistan as key member countries decided to contribute to the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) instead of EUPOL (Peters *et al.*, 2018). 'When push came to shove,' as Buckley phrases it, 'most countries prioritise their national interests' (Buckley, 2010: 3), making a narrow approach to conflict management the only likely outcome.

Securitisation v. statebuilding

Since 2015, the liberal peace agenda has been waning in importance and support, paving the way, rather, for a more realist and securitised approach to conflicts, focusing on state stability to conflict

management. This development is illustrated by the UN's three so-called 'stabilisation' missions in the DR Congo, Central African Republic and Mali. Hence, Karlsrud (2018: 1) argues that 'Western states are shifting their strategy from liberal peacebuilding to stabilisation and counterterrorism'. The consequences, Karlsrud warns, is that 'by primarily providing military support to suppress what is defined as security threats, states like the United States and France are not addressing root causes like weak and corrupt governance, marginalisation and lack of social cohesion' (Karlsrud, 2018: 11).

The question is therefore whether the EU only is trying to manage conflicts without any real attempt at tackling root causes. We argue that the answer to this is not yes or no, but more blurred. On the one hand, the EU seeks to, more than the direct involvements of France in Mali and the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, tackle root causes. On the other, however, while these intentions are good, its programming and implementation are not apt to achieve the intended impact. Rather, they seem more and more to follow a securitisation approach, where its own interests in combating terrorism, trafficking and tackling migration come first. Indeed, more than building the state and securing the people, the EU increasingly secure a disputed state with potentially counterproductive consequences for the people, but also in the long run for Europe's interests and security.

The EU recognises the importance of long-term capacity-building of the Malian security apparatus, and it recognises the importance of civilian policing in Afghanistan. Efforts to build capacities and a civilian police force seem, on paper, valuable, but several elements prevent an effective implementation. First, its efforts seem ill-adapted to building the state and seem rather to build up under a securitisation agenda which does not solve underlying efforts, making conflict resolution and transformation almost impossible to achieve given current approaches. In all the cases examined, the security apparatuses the EU seeks to contribute to building, are not strong and lacks legitimacy at least among segments of the populations. As has been argued in the case of Mali above, deep-rooted changes in the composition of the police force and military and in the management culture is necessary in the long run. As we elaborate on below, the EU's efforts seem hardly sustainable in the long run in Mali. In Afghanistan, the inclusion and support of women

police is important, and may have planted some seeds for the development of a more civilian and women-friendly police in the future. However, the small-scale trainings – both in terms of length of training and number of policewomen trained – is small and can easily be reversed.

Second, there is already a tendency that the EU's and other external actors' own security agenda and securitised approach undermine Malian and the five neighbouring countries' own agendas. The G5 Sahel, it seems, is developing into an instrument that external actors use to get more boots on the ground (Bøås, 2018). Here, reducing migration flows and combating groups labelled jihadist terrorists seem key priorities over peace and development in the Sahel. Securitisation may not only be an ill-advised approach, it may also make a 'bad situation worse', and reflects a general lack of understanding of 'what these states are and how they work' (Bøås, 2018: 5). Indeed, both training an army and a police force with limited legitimacy on the ground and attempting to restore a state that did not work, may both have counterproductive effects (Bøås *et al.*, 2018; Craven-Matthews and Englebert, 2017).

In Afghanistan, the external intervention was securitised from the beginning, where the United States put their own COIN agenda ahead of statebuilding. However, the EU is not necessarily providing what is necessary either – and is by some argued not to do enough (and not be able) to counteract the United States (Fescharek, 2015). Trainings, on the other hand, take too much time, which translates into few people actually trained, and hence limited impact in the short term. The EU has been commended for infusing 'some Afghan leaders with professional policing skills that a different Afghan regime may be able to draw upon in the future' (Burke, 2014: 16). However, these have also been found too cumbersome: indeed, there seems to be no middle option between the long-term civilian approach of Germany and (later) the EU, and the quick-fix COIN-approach of the United States (International Crisis Group, 2007: 8). Thus, as Friesendorf and Krempel argue (2011: i), 'militarisation cannot solve the problem of the weak legitimacy of the Afghan state.... The militarisation of the ANP is therefore at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive. Only a police force which the people trust can be effective'.

Long-term aspirations; short-term perspective

The securitisation v. statebuilding paradox can also be viewed as, respectively, short-term and long-term solutions to similar problems, while ambitions of conflict resolution and transformation at the same time requires a long-term perspective. While securitisation generally refers to actions that are needed now to tackle the symptom – the use of violence – statebuilding is what is needed to create a strong and legitimate state that can tackle these threats itself in the long run. Are the EU's efforts long-term or short-term in nature? And what are the differences between stated intentions and practice?

In Afghanistan, several authors argue (e.g., Kaldor *et al.*, 2018; Peters *et al.*, 2018) that the long-term approach of the Europeans – and Germany in particular – was victim of the United States' more short-term goals. As has been mentioned previously, the United States' more short-term and securitised approach, where the police would support the military in its COIN, did not merge well with the Europeans' civilian approach. Essentially, while here represented by the intervention of the United States, this brings us back to problems related to doing SSR in times of war. First, the conflicts themselves suggest that – in most cases – there is already an issue of legitimacy within the state security apparatus. Second, it implies that the police and soldiers one wants to train will often be occupied and in the field. Indeed, while long-term training is ideally what the Afghan police would need, it was also in need of the rapid training of many police officers, something the German approach (prior to the EUPOL-Afghanistan intervention) did not include (Gross, 2012: 116).

The EU has long-term aspirations in line with conflict resolution and transformation perspectives, but its interventions' design and implementation signal more a short-term approach. Several reasons across cases explain this. One reason why the EU's desire for long-term impact falters in practice is that while the EU approach of 'training the trainers' and training leaders (in, e.g., international humanitarian laws or gender issues) may be appealing and theoretically sound, changing the culture of management requires a long-term commitment, the training of larger numbers of personnel, and more local ownership. In Mali, the EUTM starts from 'our

[European] experience in needs assessment, acknowledges top-down approach, and only then attunes to Malians' feedback'.¹² Indeed, for a longer term SSR, one needs an inclusive Malian process that tackles deep-rooted problems in the security apparatus.

Another problem is that trainings have been found to be too short – from a couple of weeks for standard military training to the human rights and gender course to train the trainers that only lasts for three days. Moreover, as the police and armed forces are spread thin in general and are needed in combat, the time they have available for training is limited. According to a EUCAP staff member, this necessitates 'replacing a wheel while the car is going at full speed'.¹³ Trainings are also found to be ineffective for other reasons, including limited ownership and high staff rotation. In Mali, in particular, the EU is not able to track the soldiers it trains in the field; hence it is unable to follow-up on their human rights approaches and other trainings. Here, rather than considering the necessary actions that a restoration of the Malian security apparatus implies, it fails to provide necessary follow-up, and its efforts, therefore, end up having little if any impact.

Also, in Afghanistan (Burke, 2014) and Iraq (Christova, 2013), the low number of trained officers is an issue. In Iraq, the 'EU had impacts on the individuals who benefited from the EU programmes, for example as the judges at individual or single institution level. These individuals, in most cases, have failed to impact their organisations and institutions'.¹⁴ Especially faced with the inertia of post-authoritarian states, the influence of a low number of officers will remain limited (Hänggi, 2004). The challenges EUPOL has faced in Afghanistan speak to similar challenges, including the security concerns that come with operating in a theatre of war along with weak domestic institutions (Suroush, 2018: 18).

Lessons learned: SSR in theatres of war

From these paradoxes, several lessons learned arise. In this section we address some of the internal obstacles the EU faces, and which can – theoretically – be amended by the EU itself. However, it is important to keep in mind that many of these also concern

external obstacles, including the challenges brought about by operating in theatres of war, with states with limited legitimacy and capacity.

While, in some ways, Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali are in the post-crisis phase, none of these contexts have a functioning peace agreement or extended ceasefire in place. This places considerable pressure on whatever intervention the EU has in place in these countries. Take the example of Mali: the current conflict started in 2012, but despite a huge international engagement the security situation is not improving. Rather, it is worsening with the spread of conflict not only from the North to the Central region, but also across borders to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. This does not allow for much development work or make capacity-building of the security apparatus any easier.

Similarly, the non-fulfilment of key requirements put forth for effective reform of the security sector significantly complicates EU efforts in the cases. While a minimal capacity and size of the state and the security sector along with legitimacy within large parts of the population is required, this has not been the case in neither Afghanistan, Iraq nor Mali. This is a key trap into which the EU has fallen, and will likely continue to fall, as it attempts to do SSR in theatres of war: the strengthening of a security apparatus that is hardly legitimate and may participate in abuse and be characterised by impunity. In Afghanistan, the US paramilitary/militarised approach undermined the EU's intentions of contributing to a civilian police force (Kaldor *et al.*, 2018). Also, in Iraq, the EU contributed to security and justice sector reform without having much of an impact, and its efforts to solve root causes of conflict as corruption and impunity had limited effects. In Mali, finally, the EU struggles with a similar issue, where the security apparatus has been found implicated in several human rights abuse scandals (Amnesty International, 2018). While the EU cannot be blamed for these abuses, it must to a greater extent recognise these challenges, and consider changing its approach. For the moment, not being able to track the soldiers and police it trains, and hence not able to provide follow-up, critically diminishes the EU's ability to ensure sustainability in Mali. Indeed, while the EU did not create the conditions of these countries in crisis, it did make the decision to enter in the first place.

Another internal obstacle which has important consequences for the impact on the ground is the EU's risk averseness, a result of strong pressure at home to avoid casualties in far-away countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali. In Mali, EU trainers are not allowed to follow their trainees in the field, while in Afghanistan, police officials were disgruntled by the security restrictions EUPOL took and their reluctance to move outside their camps.¹⁵ Thus, without the ability to see if training has its desired effect, a drastic change in approach may have to follow.

Importantly, to have its desired impacts, coordination and stronger cooperation with other national and international actors is vital. On an overall level in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali, the variety of efforts can both have a larger effect given greater cooperation, and is currently suffering from duplication, sometimes having counterproductive effects. In Afghanistan, results were severely limited by a lack of coordination and cooperation between international actors involved with police reform. A prominent example is the 2002 initiative that put five states in charge of five tasks in Afghanistan: Japan in charge of DDR, the United States of the army, Germany of the police, Italy of justice and the UK of narcotics. These were rarely linked sufficiently.

A key challenge the EU thus continuously must deal with, is the cacophony of Member State interests. These voices prevent a clear and strategic engagement in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali, and lead to a 'Brusselisation' of programme design, to the detriment of consultations with local actors. Others relate to the challenging theatres in which the EU chooses to operate. This includes a challenging security situation, weak and fragmented state institutions, and states with limited legitimacy. At the core of these two types of obstacles, then, lies the gap between what the EU seeks and intends to do and what it manages to implement, namely mainly conflict management. While the EU has the potential to tackle obstacles related to its inner functioning, it has – due to its size and the lack of large-scale impact of its crisis response itself – a limited potential impact on the situation itself. Then, one would ask if its aspirations are realistic, and if its approach is, really, sustainable.

Moreover, the EU still struggles with identifying strategic objectives, and to conduct coherent operations. In Afghanistan, for

example, mandates remained like ‘job descriptions’ (Fescharek, 2015). Despite being a ‘must win’ mission (Larivé, 2012), no real comprehensive approach was formulated. Neither did it clearly and decisively counteract the US militarisation of the ANP, nor did it have clear goals for what it wanted to do. More than based on strategic objectives, its actions depended on what member states could provide of funding and personnel (Fescharek, 2015). Moreover, to point to technical problems – like payment systems – rather than how departments were running, and underlying issues of corrupt and partly criminal departments (as these issues) is considered too ‘complicated and political’ (Bolle, 2017). Overall, then, the EU quest for ‘security autonomy’ from the United States has remained elusive (Fescharek, 2015).

Conclusion

Drawing on our extensive empirical data, we argue that both a drastic change in EU approach and a re-consideration of the EU’s added value is necessary. While similar to advice offered before, this is becoming more acute, specifically in Mali, where the EU is getting further committed to an approach that seems – eight years after its onset – not to have the desired impact.

This chapter has sought to point to some of the inner obstacles the EU faces in its crisis response. While they are internal obstacles, this do not make addressing them easy. In fact, a key one – its member states’ diverse interests – is an integral part of the European idea. The key point made is that while the EU will never intervene based only on the interests of host states, its potential positive contribution suffers from minimalist concepts of conflict sensitivity and local ownership. This is further impacted on by the tendency of the EU’s crisis response to prioritise securitisation as a supply-based and short-term process that leaves what the EU does in practice firmly in the conflict management sphere. The EU has, as we have shown, larger aspirations towards a more comprehensive approach that includes perspectives akin to conflict resolution and transformation, but so far this remains by and large a rhetorical stance. One important reason for this is the Union’s inability to deal constructively with what we have identified and defined as the five

paradoxes of EU crisis response. What this leads to is that in the internal balancing in the Union, the needs and interests of conflict resolution and transformation lose out against more narrow security concerns that favour conflict management.

In all cases examined here (Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali), the EU struggles with reconciling its intentions and abilities to satisfy these. The consequence is not only that bridging the gap between aspirations and performance is necessary, but also that addressing internal obstacles can enhance the impact of its crisis response on the ground and ultimately – perhaps – its aspiration to be a norm-based global security provider that privileges conflict resolution and transformation in its approach. If this remains a central objective of the Union, it clearly needs to rethink the current drive towards a more realist, narrow security approach and rethink an approach to conflict-sensitive conflict management that promotes grounded local ownership and a knowledge-based approach to conflict sensitivity that is mainstreamed throughout the Union's crisis response mechanisms.

Notes

- 1 Interview with EUCAP official, Bamako, 20 October 2017.
- 2 Interview with EU officials, Bamako, 26 October 2017.
- 3 Interview with National Platform for Civil Society, Bamako, 26 October 2017.
- 4 Interview with Republic of France representative in Erbil, Erbil, 31 July 2018.
- 5 Interview with a then Deputy Minister for MOI, Kabul, 20 December 2017.
- 6 Interview with a high-ranking police official, MOI, 13 December 2017.
- 7 Interview with the head of a leading civil society organisation, 18 November 2017.
- 8 Interview, Segdi Ag Rhally, ONG GARDL, Malian civil society from the region of Kidal (President of the CSO committee of the Region of Kidal), 22 October 2017.
- 9 Interview, EUCAP official, Bamako, 20 October 2017.
- 10 Interview with MNLA (Movement for the National Liberation of Azawad) member, Bamako, 25 October 2017.
- 11 Interview with GAITA (Groupe d'Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés) member, Bamako, 26 October 2017.

- 12 Interview EUTM officer, Bamako, 25 October 2017.
- 13 Interview EUCAP, Bamako, 26 October 2017.
- 14 Interview Iraqi scholar, Erbil, 30 July 2017.
- 15 Interview with a high-ranking Afghan police official, MOI, Kabul, 13 December 2017.

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