The African Conference of Commandants

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The aim of the African Conference of Commandants (ACoC) is to enhance harmonization, interoperability, commonality, standardization and cooperation between African Staff colleges as it is contributing to African peace and security through mechanisms such as the African Standby Force (ASF) and Peace Support Operations (PSOs). The membership of ACoC, like its philosophy, is still evolving. ACoC established a portal to improve communication between staff colleges and decided to found a Pan-African College on the model of the NATO Defense College.

The origin of African Conference of Commandants[1] (ACoC) may be traced back to a number of events and factors. The first is the long tradition amongst military colleges on the African continent to visit one another through student visits and exchanges. This has increased over time and it has been consolidated by the attachment of instructors and directing staff.

The second is the lessons learned from visits to the Conference of Commandants of the NATO Defense College (NATO CoC), and the African Centre for Strategic Studies (ACSS)[2] that have all played a significant role in the philosophy and conduct of the ACoC.

The NATO Conference of Commandants was set up in 1972. At the establishment of the Conference of Commandants (CoC)[3] hardly anybody thought what a splendid and magnificent initiative had started. The purpose of the conference was to foster cooperation in the field of higher defense education and training between colleges in NATO countries, permit the exchange of information between military authorities who shared identical responsibilities in the field of higher defense education, and encourage improvements in curricula and educational methods.

There were three historically important enlargements of the Conference of Commandants when Partnership for Peace program in 1992, Mediterranean Dialogue in

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[1] African Conference of Commandants official website, http://www.acoc-africa.org/ viewed on November 17, 2010.
[2] African Center for Strategic Studies official website http://africacenter.org/ viewed on August 1, 2010.
[3] See origin and purpose of the Conference of Commandants.
http://www.ndc.nato.int/outreach/outreach.php?icode=1 viewed on November 12, 2010.

2000, and Istanbul Cooperation Initiatives nations in 2006 were invited to join the initiative.[4]

In the line of the continuous revival of the initiative, the confident response to the new challenges of the security environment there was a logical step that the representatives from the African Conference of Commandants were invited to attend the 37th Conference of Commandants' held in Toledo from 21 to 22 April 2008.[5] This gave a unique opportunity to the ACoC to get acquainted with the history, the evolution, the philosophy and the organization of the NATO CoC.

Initial steps of the African conference

The 1st African Conference of Commandants was hosted by South Africa, in Pretoria from 6 to 8 November 2007. The theme of the conference was "Developing and transforming education in the military, a contribution to African security".

The aim of the conference was to enhance harmonization, interoperability, commonality, standardization and cooperation between African staff colleges and Academies in order to contribute to joint, multinational and multi agency cross governmental African Standby Force (ASF)[6] peace support operations, thus to peace and security of the continent.

In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were identified in Pretoria:

1. Establish co-operation amongst African staff colleges by enhancing benchmarking;
2. Sharing college curriculum best practices; exchange programs; academic accreditation; exploration of the feasibility of an annual Combined Joint African Exercise (CJAX).
3. Develop and transform education and training in African militaries; explore the commonality of curricula with the intention to facilitate Combined Joint African Exercises (CJAX).

[4] About the NATO Conference of Commandants see Klára Siposné Kecskeméthy: History of the Conference of Commandants, *AARMS*, Volume 6, Issue 2, 2007. p. 281–299, Siposné Kecskeméthy Klára: A NATO-tagállamok katonai akadémiái parancsnokainak konferenciája, *Humán Szemle*, 2006. 3. szám p. 44–61.

[5] Conference of Commandants 21–22 April 2008 NATO Defense College, Conference Report, Supporting a Comprehensive Approach to Security – the role of Education, Rome, p. 8.

[6] http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/AUC/Departments/PSC/Asf/asf.htm African Standby Force, viewed on July 20, 2010.

4. Facilitate and improve understanding and general coordination amongst the African staff colleges with regards to development of the African Standby Force (ASF).[7]

The 2nd ACoC was held in Accra, Ghana from 27th October to 31 October 2008. It focused on thematic areas like: the AU Constitutive Act, Peace and Security Protocols, Common African Defense and Security Policy (CADSP) Training and Doctrine of African Standby Force.

The commandants discussed also the role of non-military participants (civilians and police) in PSO, the CJAX and the funding of ACoC, establishment of ACoC website,[8] and standardization of curriculum and PSO doctrine. The ACoC identified the task of the establishment of a Pan-African Academy based on the experience of NATO Defense College.[9]

The 3rd African Conference of Commandants was held in Cairo (Egypt), 9–13 November 2009 hosted by the Egyptian Command and Staff College, (ECSC). The topic of the 3rd ACoC was "The role of African staff colleges in training for AU peacekeeping operations".

The conference focused on the challenges of managing and reforming the defense sector, the role of think-tanks in military education, the role of REC's in the implementation of ASF doctrine (training methods and combat doctrine of the ASF), Egypt's contribution to African peace and security, progress on CJAX, and the role of non-military partners in PSO.[10]

The 4th Africa Conference of Commandants was held in Jinja (Uganda), from 1–4 November 2010. Fourteen military institutions and twenty-four other observers from Staff organizations attended the Conference. The 4th ACoC's theme was: "Towards developing a Common, Continental Force for Better Efficiency in a Multinational Environment". The Uganda Senior Command and Staff College hosted the participants.

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[7] 1st African Conference of Commandants (ACoC) 05–09 November 2007, Conceptual Programme for the 1st ACoC, Pretoria, p. 4.

[8] The Institute for Security of Studies (ISS) is a pan-African applied policy research institute headquartered in Pretoria, South Africa. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS http://www.issafrica.org) served permanently as the ACoC Secretary and helped to launch the new web portal. The portal has public and restricted areas, which are designed to act as the public 'face' for the activities of this body of the general membership of the military command and staff colleges on the African continent. The portal is user-friendly and provides useful information, linkages and resources for colleges. The restricted area can only be accessed by the commandants.

[9] About the history of the NATO Defense College see KLÁRA SIPOSNÉ KECSKEMÉTHY: History of the NDC, Academic and Applied Research in Military Science, *AARMS*, 2005. Issue 3. Volume 4. p. 463–474.

[10] African Conference of Commandants: an overview, NDC Manuscript, Istanbul, 2010. p. 3.

African Union and the ACoC

The AU Constitutive Act signed at Luma provided for the establishment of an African Union to succeed the then Organization of African Unity (OAU).[11] It was agreed that the OAU needed to be revamped so as to be able to intervene in the internal affairs of a state.

The African Union most probably in a long term will not be able to cope alone with the challenges (famine, water scarcity, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, migration, corruption, lack of good governance, religious and tribal rivalry, war etc.) and to effectively address the new social, political and economic realities in Africa. Last years the AU depended upon regional resources, and tried to build-up his own peacekeeping capabilities. The AU is committed to take over peace support operations from the UN on the continent. One of the evidences is the establishment of the African Standby Force, and its quick equipment and training.

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) constitute the framework for crisis management on the African continent. The African Standby Force (ASF) is considered the operational arm of this framework. The African Union's ambition is to make the African Standby Force operational in 2010.

At its 3rd meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 15–16 May 2003, African Chiefs of Defence Staff (ACDS) agreed on the document titled: "Policy Framework for the establishment of the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Military Staff Committee (MSC)," which provides a framework for the establishment of the ASF.[12]

The ASF[13] is to be prepared for rapid deployment for a range of peacekeeping operations, including observation and monitoring missions, other types of peace support mission, preventive deployment in order to prevent conflict from spreading to neighbouring areas or states, or the resurgence of violence after peace agreements are

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[11] The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established on 25 May 1963. The organization had two primary aims: to promote the unity and solidarity of the African states and act as a collective voice for the African continent. The OAU was also dedicated to the eradication of all forms of colonialism, as, when it was established, there were several states that had not yet won their independence or were minority-ruled. The Organization of African Unity was successful in some respects, worked with the UN to ease refugee problems. It set up the African Development Bank for economic projects intended to make Africa financially stronger. Many of its members were members of the UN to safeguard African interests. Total unity was difficult to achieve, the OAU was largely divided, there was a split between those that supported the USA and those that supported the USSR in the Cold War of ideologies. As a result of these divisions, it was difficult to take action against states involved in internal conflicts. It was disbanded on 9 July 2002 and replaced by the African Union (AU).

[12] Roadmap for the operationalization of the African Standby Force, Addis Ababa, 22–23 March 2005, EXP/AU-RECs/ASF/4(I) p. 22.

[13] A Vision for the African Stand-by Force? A Draft Document for Discussion, Second Draft for Bereng Mtimkulu, Addis Ababa 23 September 2005. p. 16.

achieved, peace-building, including post-conflict disarmament and demobilization and humanitarian assistance in situations of conflict and major natural disasters.[14]

The AU with the support of the ASF can achieve political stability, protection of human rights, the principles of good governance on the whole continent. The organization alone would hardly find solutions to African risks and challenges, it has to have and build effective political and military methods and techniques to handle them.

There is a long and bumpy road to success. One of the biggest challenges is that ACoC has not been fully introduced, recognized and accepted by the African Union. The key issue is the funding of the conference of commandants, which remains a huge challenge and it might be the one factor that may hamper the progress and success of this initiative.

Pooling and sharing might be one of the solutions for the ACoC countries.[15] It is based on the necessity of cooperation, the need of increased interoperability, pooling of resources, sharing roles and tasks to be solved.

The ACoC is on the right track of sharing capabilities; countries provide national capabilities for common use. The co-operation amongst African staff colleges, sharing college curriculum best practices; exchange programs, development and transformation of education and training in African militaries are the first steps. It is necessary to pool national capabilities for common use with multinational overhead and integrated structure of the ACoC. It might improve coordination amongst the African staff colleges with regards to development of the African Standby Force.

Evolving initiative

The membership of ACoC, like its philosophy, is a matter that is still evolving. ACOC is a voluntary association of military institutions and defense education centres working in Africa in capacity building, whose principal core activity or function delivers practical training. Nine staff colleges attended the 1st conference in 2007, followed by eleven at the 2nd Conference in 2008 but more impressing, the 3rd hosted by Egypt in 2009 was attended by eighteen of the twenty-five staff colleges on the continent.

During the ACoC's short history the circle of the participating nations and organizations has been continuously widening. The involvement of the African Peace Support Training Association, (APSTA), and the International Association of

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[14] http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/african-standby-force-to-bring-security-1, viewed on July 15, 2010. PETRUS DE KOCK: African standby force to bring security? March 22, 2010.
[15] The EU Parliament published a study, which identifies four types of pooling. Pooling of EU Member States Assets in the Implementation of ESDP, Brussels, 27 February 2008.

Peacekeeping Training Association, (IAPTA) is a clear sign. Engagements at the continental level, particularly with the AU Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) are imperative.

The main reason for the annual organization of the conference is to provide forum for military educational institutions for consultation, harmonization and synchronization of curricula, educational methods, to enhance information exchange and communication between he staff colleges. The presidency of the conference has been functioning in troika system; the organizers of the previous, actual and future conference regularly consult and help each other.

It was suggested that the main topic, subject areas, deadlines and responsibilities should be set before the next ACoC during the conference. A decision was taken to package the final report, minutes, background notes and formal invitation for the next ACoC, which should be sent out to the commandants of all the staff colleges on the continent.

In the continuously changing world security, defense has been continuously changing, too.[16] In the modern world where the pace of change is fast, education and training must keep up with those changes. This is the only way to carry on quality education in the civil and military higher educational institutions.

Between the most important elements of each nation's armed forces are preparedness, education and training of personnel. The academic community has a long-term vision, collective wisdom and experience, the internal and international exchange of information, and interactions provide new and effective help.

The idea of the African Conference of Commandants and the establishment of the Pan-African Academy have been following the models of NATO Defense College and the European Security and Defense College of the European Union.

The mission, the role and activities of the African Conference of Commandants is important, because of the guiding idea that for African problems African solutions must be found.

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[16] See JIM BARRETT: *Rapid change, defense education and advanced distributed learning*, NATO Defense College Manuscript 2003. June p. 4.

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