Strategic Airlift in Africa

Understanding Challenges and Opportunities for the Movement Coordination Centre Europe

Ben Caves, Pauline Paille, James Black
This report presents findings emerging from a short study investigating the challenges associated with coordination of strategic airlift in and around Africa. The African theatre of operations is of increasing strategic importance to militaries across Europe and North America, and is home to a growing variety of national and multinational operations (including deployments of national assets and contingents as part of larger European Union and United Nations missions). At the same time, the geographical, political and practical constraints of operating in the African continent, as well as enduring barriers to cooperation among partner nations, present barriers to the efficient coordination of airlift and other logistic support in the region.

To understand these various challenges, in July 2020 the Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE) commissioned RAND Europe to conduct a scoping study. This focused on gathering insights from a targeted literature review and stakeholder perspectives from across the MCCE and representatives of selected Member Nations. This report outlines the findings of that scoping exercise, and identifies implications for the MCCE and areas for potential further investigation and analysis.

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Executive summary

Background and purpose of this scoping study

The African theatre has long been viewed as being logistically challenging to operate in; its geography is characterised by its sheer size and scale, and a diversity of different terrains. The challenge of coordinating logistics support to military operations in this theatre is only made more difficult by the continent’s complex web of nations, with differing political and diplomatic allegiances and frictions based on historical backgrounds, post-colonial affiliations and regional conflicts. Many of the MCCE’s 28 Member Nations currently have military forces deployed across Africa as part of a variety of national and multinational missions. This includes concentrations in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. While a significant number of these deployments are relatively small and with a light footprint, interest in the African theatre of operations is growing and the logistics effort required to support future deployments is only likely to increase. Physical barriers to logistics support solutions in Africa are compounded by lack of regional hubs or forward bases, meaning that there is an over-reliance on inter-theatre and strategic airlift direct to point of requirement. Strategic airlift assets are overstretched and in short supply globally.

Against this backdrop, RAND Europe was commissioned by the Director MCCE to carry out an initial scoping study into the challenges associated with coordination of strategic airlift in and around Africa, ahead of the main Africa Distribution Network Forum (ADNF) meeting in December 2020. Whilst this study was to focus primarily on airlift, it was also tasked with considering other modes of transport as part of possible multi-modal solutions. The aim was to identify any potential transferrable lessons from other campaigns, along with areas that would merit further detailed investigation beyond this initial study. To address these objectives, the study team carried out a review of key documentation, mainly provided by the MCCE, and conducted interviews with officials from across the MCCE and selected Member Nations.

Understanding the complexity of the challenge

Multiple challenges were identified in relation to the Member Nations’ and MCCE’s ability to provide logistics support in Africa. These could broadly be divided into global challenges affecting the MCCE’s overall mission to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and those that are specific to the African theatre of operations. Indeed, this scoping study characterises the current situation surrounding airlift in Africa as one resembling a ‘wicked problem’ in that it is: understood differently by multiple stakeholders; suffers from lack of data; involves considerable uncertainty and ambiguity; is multicausal, multiscale and interconnected, with many interdependencies; is socially complex; is subject to political and economic constraints; involves multiple stakeholders with competing agendas who are potentially resistant to change; straddles the
boundaries between organisations and areas of responsibility, with no one actor able to affect a solution to all problems, given limited resources and levers of influence; necessitates social, cultural and behavioural change, not just technical solutions; and has no fixed ‘end point’ in time.

Some of the key challenges facing the MCCE and Member Nations are broken down in Figure 0.1 below.

**Figure 0.1 Overview of challenges to coordination of airlift in Africa as identified in scoping study**

**Figure 0.1 Overview of challenges to coordination of airlift in Africa as identified in scoping study**

**GENERIC OR GLOBAL CHALLENGES:**
- **Different approaches to and capabilities for burden sharing:** The MCCE must balance competing demands on finite assets available to support lift and logistics missions in Africa and elsewhere around the world, relying on nations’ goodwill to coordinate their efforts.
- **Information-sharing deficits:** A key challenge and source of tension is the lack of timely sharing and transparency of national information, hindering co-ordination and long-term planning; national information-technology systems are also not configured to enable this.
- **Planning and timing issues that limit the use and benefits of multi-modal solutions:** Difficulties in planning beyond short-term requests for M&T, compounded by a lack of timely information sharing, inhibits the use of multi-modal solutions that often have longer lead times than airlift.
- **Different approaches to and capabilities for burden sharing:** Though the ATARES mechanism provides a means for exchanging services, differences in national priorities, capabilities and capacity pose challenges for burden sharing on national and multinational missions in Africa.
- **Gaps and overlaps between the responsibilities of multiple organisations:** The MCCE straddles the seams between other organisations with overlapping remits; it must continue to promote its unique selling point as a coordinator of spare capacity and repository of best practice.

**GEOGRAPHICALLY SPECIFIC CHALLENGES:**
- **Light footprint of most forces deployed in Africa and the limited assets to support them:** Though Africa is becoming an increasingly important theatre of operations, many Member Nations (especially beyond the US, France, UK) have only a limited footprint and assets in the region.
- **Physical geography of the African theatre of operations:** The African continent’s size and diverse topography, along with the austere conditions of many airfields and bases, pose challenges to military logistics, with MCCE nations’ forces spread over dozens of locations.
- **Complex political landscape and variable diplomatic relations with host nations:** Reliable coordination of sea and ground LoCs or access, basing and overflight approvals for airlift are made difficult by the fact some MCCE nations enjoy closer ties with host nations than others.
- **Prevalence of national missions with bespoke logistic support solutions:** While all MCCE Member Nations support the principles of pooling and sharing, the political and practical realities of competing national priorities across Africa can impede coordination.
- **Limited complementarity with United Nations missions and capabilities:** Enduring political and bureaucratic barriers to cooperation with UN missions – including those co-located at key hubs such as Gao in Mali – add further inefficiency, hindering more effective cooperation.

Source: RAND Europe analysis.

Compounding these difficulties is the way that the MCCE and Member Nations are set up to respond to Movement and Transport (M&T) requirements in the African theatre. Stakeholder engagement suggests that the existing system of planning does not provide effective multinational solutions at the point and time needed. This lack of efficient multinational coordination leads to a disorderly response and has made it challenging for nations to deliver timely military effect within their existing resource limits. This creates the risk that Member Nations will be unable to respond to an escalating crisis at short notice in the African theatre due to a lack of airlift. If action is not taken collectively to enable these different national systems to work more coherently, the only other potential option would be a significant upscaling in resource by Member Nations at the time of requirement to offset inefficiency – a course of action that, for many countries, is not an option at all.
Opportunities for improving coordination of airlift

Based on these challenges, the study team consulted with the MCCE to identify a series of different potential areas for short-term action, long-term consideration, or further investigation, as summarised in Figure 0.2.

**Figure 0.2 Overview of areas for action or investigation as identified in scoping study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Promoting greater sharing and transparency of information on national taskings in Africa: A key priority is to promote greater sharing and transparency of information on national taskings in Africa, not least given the limited assets available to support operations in the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enabling increased interoperability through use of common information-technology platforms: Promoting use of a common information architecture and exploring new ways to leverage information technology and advances in AI/ML can further support this information sharing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identifying and promoting regional pooling and sharing options aligned to shared goals: Promoting pooling and sharing initiatives aligned with priorities for a given region or mission should help to secure sustained buy-in from a lead nation to drive collaborative initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Leveraging Member Nations’ relationships with African host nations to benefit other partners: The MCCE should encourage Member Nations to leverage contacts and relations with African host nations to benefit other multinational players.</td>
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<tr>
<th>OTHER POTENTIAL AREAS FOR THE LONG TERM:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Making improved multinational use of national contracts with commercial operators: Greater use of commercial freight forwarders for low-risk, low-urgency shipments could reduce pressure on lift assets already in high demand and leverage commercial networks and experience in Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Exploring opportunities for long-term synergies around use of common platforms: Recent or planned acquisitions of common AT and AAR platforms provide an opportunity to leverage commonality of platforms as a basis for cooperation (e.g. building on joint training, exercising).</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Expanding and iterating on the success of the ATARES mechanism: For the long term, the MCCE could also consider promoting expansion of the ATARES mechanism to facilitate exchange of services between more actors (e.g. other nations, the EU or NATO).</td>
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<tr>
<th>AREAS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Development of an improved CLOP for the MCCE to draw upon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Research into new approaches to common information architecture.</td>
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<td>- Research on how to unpick ‘wicked problems’ in a multinational setting such as Africa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Deeper analysis of transferrable lessons from regional pooling and sharing initiatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Additional stakeholder engagement and research into African host nation perspectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Development of an assumptions-based planning exercise or serious game to understand the logistics enablers required to deliver given initiatives successfully.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Deeper analysis of challenges and barriers to more efficient coordination of lift in specific countries, regions or operations in Africa (e.g. a deep dive on Mali or South Sudan).</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Facilitation of workshops or other engagements with other relevant organisations, such as AFRICOM, the EU, NATO or the UN, to explore areas for enhancing collaboration.</td>
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Source: RAND Europe analysis.

Crucially, any action should recognise some key principles to guide implementation, namely: i) there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution; ii) even within specific regions in Africa, there tends not to be one ‘silver bullet’ solution, but rather a need for a layered approach; iii) demonstrating tangible improvements can help to build the business case for further investment or change; iv) addressing problems for airlift in Africa does not happen in or benefit Africa alone, but will also bring efficiencies to missions elsewhere; and – most crucially – v) the MCCE cannot solve this problem alone, but needs Member Nations to do their part.
Table of contents

Preface ....................................................................................................................... i
Executive summary ........................................................................................................ iii
Table of contents .......................................................................................................... vi
Abbreviations ............................................................................................................. vii

1. **Introduction** ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.1. Background ......................................................................................................... 1
   1.2. Research scope, objectives and methodology ..................................................... 3

2. **Challenges for coordination of airlift in Africa** ....................................................... 5
   2.1. Understanding the complexity of the coordination challenge ............................. 5
   2.2. Understanding the costs and risks of poor coordination ..................................... 7

3. **Implications and areas for further investigation** .................................................... 9
   3.1. Developing an implementation plan to enhance coordination ............................ 9
   3.2. Priority areas for action ..................................................................................... 10
   3.3. Other potential areas for action to consider ........................................................ 13
   3.4. Areas for further investigation .......................................................................... 14

References .................................................................................................................. 17

**Annex A. Further information on challenges for coordination** ................................. 19
   A.1. Global challenges to coordination of military assets and movements .................. 19
   A.2. Specific challenges to coordination in the African theatre ................................. 21
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAR</td>
<td>Air-to-Air Refuelling</td>
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<td>ABO</td>
<td>Access, Basing and Overflight</td>
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<td>ACSA</td>
<td>Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement</td>
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<td>ADNF</td>
<td>African Distribution Network Forum</td>
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<td>AFRICOM</td>
<td>United States Africa Command</td>
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<td>AI</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Air Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATARES</td>
<td>Air Transport, Air-to-Air Refuelling and Other Exchanges of Services</td>
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<td>CLOP</td>
<td>Common Logistics Operating Picture</td>
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<td>EATC</td>
<td>European Air Transport Command</td>
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<td>EDA</td>
<td>European Defence Agency</td>
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<td>EFH</td>
<td>Equivalent Flying Hour</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>EUTM</td>
<td>European Union Training Mission</td>
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<td>HADR</td>
<td>Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief</td>
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<td>HAW</td>
<td>Heavy Airlift Wing</td>
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<td>IST</td>
<td>Inland Surface Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>LoC</td>
<td>Line of Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOGFAS</td>
<td>Logistics Functional Area Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOGFS</td>
<td>Logistics Functional Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCCE</td>
<td>Movement Coordination Centre Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>MINUSMA</td>
<td>United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali</td>
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<tr>
<td>ML</td>
<td>Machine Learning</td>
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</tbody>
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RAND Europe

MRTT  Multi Role Tanker Transport
M&T   Movement and Transport
NATO  North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCI Agency  NATO Communications and Information Agency
NORDEFCO  Nordic Defence Cooperation
POD    Port of Disembarkation
POE    Port of Embarkation
SALIS  Strategic Airlift International Solution
SB     Steering Board
SOMR   Statement of Movement Requirement
ST     Sea Transport
TRANSCOM  US Transportation Command
TTP    Tactics, Techniques and Procedures
UK     United Kingdom
UN     United Nations
UNMISS United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNPKO  United Nations Peacekeeping Operations
US     United States
WB     Working Board
1. Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. The Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE) serves to coordinate and optimise the use of its 28 Member Nations’ land, airlift and sealift assets

The MCCE’s primary mission is to foster increased coordination between its Member Nations to help access irreducible spare capacity across existing air transport, air-to-air refuelling, sea transport and inland surface transport fleets.\(^1\) This mission goes beyond the provision of logistics support to traditional warfighting, and extends to other activities including military exercises, peace-support operations and humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) missions.\(^2\) The Air Transport, Air-to-Air Refuelling and Other Exchanges of Services (ATARES) mechanism facilitates international cooperation on this logistics support by functioning as a cashless exchange-of-services tool between ‘requesting’ and ‘providing’ nations.\(^3\)

Since its formation in 2007, the MCCE has seen a significant growth in demand for its services, spurred on by multinational military campaigns, such as in Afghanistan. These campaigns have demonstrated the MCCE’s utility as a multinational and multi-modal movement-control centre,\(^4\) contributing to the strategic, policy and capability ambitions of both the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) through enhanced deployability and logistic support.\(^5\) The MCCE’s ability to act as broker, to build coalitions for movement coordination and to provide subject-matter expertise, make it unique in this field.\(^6\)

The MCCE has also developed a niche role in providing advice and sharing best practice to build efficiencies when using Member Nations’ capabilities.\(^7\) However, it cannot direct or compel Member Nations to provide transport assets, and relies instead upon their willingness to cooperate to deliver these efficiencies; balancing opportunities to free up capacity with competing national priorities, sensitivities and caveats.

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\(^1\) MCCE (2019a).
\(^2\) MCCE (2019a).
\(^3\) The reference used to price services within ATARES is the Equivalent Flying Hour (EFH), i.e. one flying hour of a C130/C160. EFH are balanced between all participating nations to meet requirements.
\(^4\) MCCE (2020).
\(^5\) NATO (2010).
\(^6\) MCCE (2020).
\(^7\) MCCE (2019a).
1.1.2. The MCCE faces increasing demands associated with airlift in Africa, given the growing number, scale and complexity of operations on the continent

The growing importance of Africa as a theatre of operations has highlighted the unique set of challenges inherent to the region. Indeed, Movement and Transport (M&T) requests are increasing for operations in Africa, with a focus on the Sahel region and Horn of Africa.

Problematically, there are concerns among the MCCE’s stakeholders that the collective planning and tasking mechanisms of the various Member Nations are not configured to respond coherently and quickly enough to meet multinational requests for multinational logistics solutions. This has made it challenging to deliver timely military effect and power into the African theatre, and creates the risk that Member Nations will be unable to respond effectively to a crisis, such as a short-notice surge in combat or non-combat operations. This is especially important given the size and scale of the region, and the limited resources that are dispersed across this area – presenting the challenge of balancing ‘high demand with low density’.

Many of the MCCE’s 28 Member Nations currently have military forces deployed across Africa, but these support a range of diverse and disparate national or multinational missions; each based around discrete regional concentrations of activities and interests and involving different challenges and stakeholders.\(^8\) While most of these deployments are relatively small, with a light footprint, force sizes are growing, and demand for strategic lift is increasing year-on-year, stretching national resources to the limit – especially beyond the largest Member Nations (e.g. the United States). Operations in Africa now account for about 25 per cent of MCCE air transport requests from European Member Nations, as shown in Figure 1.1.

![Figure 1.1 Breakdown of air transport requests to MCCE from European Member Nations, 2019](image)

Source: RAND Europe adapted from MCCE (n.d.a).

The complexity of the African theatre makes it more difficult to employ the MCCE’s softer, more informal, model of cooperation to full effect, and with the demand for lift only likely to increase, the need to investigate ways to improve coordination of limited airlift to support these activities is all the more pressing.

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\(^8\) Includes Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the UK and the USA. See IISS (2020).
Indeed, in a 2019 MCCE survey submitted to national capitals, several Member Nations highlighted the importance of airlift into Africa and reported that they would benefit from increased MCCE support there.9

1.2. Research scope, objectives and methodology

1.2.1. The MCCE commissioned RAND Europe to conduct a scoping study to gather insights from literature and stakeholders on challenges for airlift in Africa

Within this context, the Director MCCE commissioned RAND Europe to conduct a short scoping study to examine the challenges facing the MCCE and its Member Nations in providing strategic lift into the African theatre, to inform the ongoing work of the African Distribution Network Forum (ADNF). Whilst this study focuses primarily on airlift, it also considers other modes of transport (e.g. sealift, road, rail) as part of potential multi-modal solutions. The aim was to identify transferrable lessons from other campaigns, along with areas meriting more detailed investigation beyond this scoping study. To address these objectives, the study team reviewed key documentation, mainly provided by the MCCE, and conducted key informant interviews with ten officials from across the MCCE and selected Member Nations (e.g. US Africa Command (AFRICOM)). Findings of this scoping review are summarised in this report, comprising:

- **Chapter 1** – Introduction;
- **Chapter 2** – Challenges for coordination of airlift in Africa;
- **Chapter 3** – Implications and areas for further investigation;
- **References** – List of documentary sources;
- **Annex A** – Further information on challenges for coordination (supplementing Chapter 2).

1.2.2. The data and findings presented in this report are subject to several caveats

Given the limited time and resource available, and the nature of the subject matter, the study relied heavily on documentation from the MCCE or on expert insights from the stakeholders consulted. These provide an understanding of selected viewpoints on the challenges and opportunities for airlift in Africa, but do not necessarily capture all Member Nations’ perspectives or reflect host nations’ concerns within Africa. While the study team has, to the limited extent possible, sought to draw on lessons from previous studies of multinational campaigns and pooling and sharing initiatives, further data collection, triangulation and analysis would be required to generate a concrete roadmap for the MCCE on how it might address all the complex challenges outlined in this scoping report. Chapter 3 nonetheless outlines several areas meriting more detailed investigation. It is also likely that solutions to some of the MCCE’s challenges may lie, partly or in full, beyond its remit and resources, thus requiring political action at the Member Nation level instead.

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9 MCCE (n.d.a).
2. Challenges for coordination of airlift in Africa

2.1. Understanding the complexity of the coordination challenge

2.1.1. Though difficulties coordinating and optimising airlift are not unique to the African theatre of operations, the region presents some specific challenges

Two broad categories of challenges for coordination of airlift in Africa emerged from this scoping study’s desk-based research and interviews, namely:

- **Generic or global challenges** affecting the MCCE’s overall mission to increase efficiency and effectiveness when pooling and sharing lift assets and capabilities; and
- **Geographically specific challenges** relating to the African theatre of operations.

Importantly, many of these challenges are overlapping; multiple challenges interact to mutually reinforce each other, increasing the complexity of tasks before the MCCE and Member Nations. In the formal terminology of social sciences and systems thinking, the current situation of airlift in Africa bears many of the features of a ‘wicked problem’ or ‘social mess’, as outlined in Box 1 below. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, a ‘wicked problem’ requires a combination of different policy, organisational, behavioural and technical measures to address it and does not have a simple solution. In the case of airlift in Africa, this includes measures that fall outside the MCCE’s control and instead require collective action at the political level by Member Nations, as well as engagement with African host nations and other government, military and commercial actors.

**Box 1 – Definition of a wicked problem and social mess**

A wicked problem or social mess is a problem that: is difficult to define, or else is understood differently by multiple stakeholders; suffers from a lack of data; involves considerable uncertainty and ambiguity; is multicausal, multiscale and interconnected, with many interdependencies; is socially complex; is subject to political constraints; is subject to economic constraints; involves multiple stakeholders with competing agendas who are potentially resistant to change; involves problem solvers working far removed from the affected end users; straddles the boundaries between organisations and areas of responsibility, with no one actor able to affect a solution to all problems, given limited resources and levers of influence; necessitates social, cultural and behavioural change, not just technical solutions; requires that solutions be implemented in the real-world without the benefit of large-scale testing; requires complex solutions that may have unforeseen consequences, including cascading effects that cause other problems within complex bureaucratic and operating systems; and, has no fixed ‘end point’ in time.

Source: adapted from Rittel & Webber (1973) and Churchman (1967).
2.1.2. Generic or global challenges include reliance on goodwill to share national assets and information, limiting scope for long-term and multinational planning

Military planners tasked with coordinating and optimising the use of land movement, sealift and airlift assets face several major challenges, agnostic of where on the globe those assets are deployed. These challenges affect operations in Africa directly, by reducing the ability of multinational logistics solutions to meet national or multinational requirements, but also indirectly, by increasing the demands for finite assets to be used to support other operations elsewhere around the world. This is an acute problem that has often resulted in Africa, while an area of growing strategic interest to MCCE Member Nations, losing out due to competing demands for M&T from operations in Europe, Central Asia or other theatres.

Major generic or global challenges include:

- Competing priorities and the reliance on Member Nations’ goodwill;
- Different approaches to and capabilities for burden sharing;
- Information-sharing deficits;
- Planning and timing issues that limit the use and benefits of multi-modal solutions; and
- Gaps and overlaps between the responsibilities of multiple organisations.

These issues are described in more detail in Annex A.1.

2.1.3. Geographically specific challenges include the disparity between increasing demand for M&T and the low density of operations in the African theatre

Coordination of lift – and more specifically, airlift – into the African theatre is linked to various challenges for Member Nations because of the scale and complexity of the African continent. Problematically for the MCCE, there is a disconnect between the increasing demands for M&T emerging in the African theatre and the limited agility, coherence or resilience of the system for multinational logistics support – both in terms of the numbers of available assets and the limited efficiency and coherence of multinational planning. This is compounded by the low density of MCCE Member Nations’ operations and deployments in Africa, with many different national or multinational missions spread across a large geographical area, and only limited efforts to consolidate logistics support and airlift through key regional hubs (e.g. Gao in Mali).

Major geographically specific challenges include:

- Light footprint of most forces deployed in Africa and the limited assets to support them;
- Physical geography of the African theatre of operations;
- Complex political landscape and variable diplomatic relations with host nations;
- Prevalence of national missions with bespoke logistic support solutions; and
- Limited complementarity with United Nations missions and capabilities.

These issues are described in more detail in Annex A.2.
2.2. Understanding the costs and risks of poor coordination

The lack of more effective coordination of airlift in Africa imposes direct and indirect costs on Member Nations. Ultimately, the way the MCCE and Member Nations respond to airlift requirements in the African theatre is judged by many of the stakeholders consulted to be incoherent and inadequate, given the growing operational and financial pressures stemming from national and multinational commitments in the region. The existing system of disparate national and multinational planning mechanisms is not configured to allow different actors to work together quickly or far enough ahead of time to pull together more cost-efficient multinational or multi-modal solutions, rather than relying on last-minute use of finite national air transport fleets. This has made it challenging to deliver timely military effect and power – within existing resource limits – into the African theatre, creating the risk that Member Nations will be unable to respond effectively to a future crisis at short notice due to a lack of lift, or else will have to make painful trade-offs between redirecting assets to meet the demands of operations in Africa or support missions elsewhere in the world.

The impact of this incoherence and inefficiency is felt on both operations and the financial bottom line (see Figure 2.1). Any lack of available lift capacity at the point and time required directly affects operations in Africa. The most committed Member Nations could risk losing operational tempo, which could ultimately lead to loss of life or mission failure if the theatre becomes more kinetic; the contributing nations similarly risk losing flexibility and resilience due to a lack of logistics options given their small national fleets. Besides coordination and optimisation among multiple nations, the only other option is a significant upscaling of resource and sovereign capability by individual countries to buy their way out of this inefficiency – a course of action that, for the overwhelming majority of the MCCE’s 28 Member Nations, is no option at all.

**Figure 2.1 Costs and risks associated with a lack of optimisation of logistics support in Africa**

**DIPLOMATIC:**
- Challenge to credibility of national and multinational commitments in Africa.
- Increased pressure on relations between MCCE Member Nations and African host nations.
- Barrier to participation in multinational operations by nations with limited sovereign lift capability.
- Barrier to delivery of EU and NATO initiatives to increase readiness and deployability.

**INFORMATION:**
- Area of weakness and division for adversaries to exploit via influence and information operations.
- Reduced sharing of information between different national and multinational missions in Africa.
- Limited ability to forward-plan and resultant reliance on finding logistics solutions at short notice.
- Lack of a common operating picture for MCCE Member Nations to understand supply or demand.

**MILITARY:**
- Direct risk of loss of life and possible mission failure due to lack of reliable re-supply.
- Potential loss of operational tempo, ceding the initiative to more agile adversaries’ forces.
- Limited capacity to deliver HADR and other non-combat missions in Africa or elsewhere.
- Cascading impact on availability and maintenance cycles for finite national airlift assets.

**ECONOMIC:**
- Growing financial pressures on national budgets to deliver sovereign airlift capability.
- Increased reliance on lastminute airlift rather than more cost-efficient use of road, rail or seafreight.
- Reduced sharing of costs through use of cooperative ATARES mechanism to exchange services.
- Cascading impact on availability of funding to meet other non-logistic costs of operations.

Source: RAND Europe analysis.
3. Implications and areas for further investigation

3.1. Developing an implementation plan to enhance coordination

3.1.1. This scoping study has found evidence of shortfalls in the coherence and efficiency of multinational coordination of logistics support in Africa

As outlined in Chapter 2 (and discussed in detail in Annex A), a complex mix of global and geographically specific challenges inhibit the coordination and optimisation of MCCE Member Nations’ assets for airlift into the African theatre. Desk-based research and stakeholder engagement from this scoping study suggest a widespread perception across the MCCE and national representatives consulted that the current approach to national and multinational delivery of M&T in Africa is inadequate. This reflects a potentially damaging and seemingly increasing disconnect between the operational and financial pressures associated with a growing tempo of operations in the African theatre, on the one hand, and the relative lack of assets and low density of deployed forces, on the other. As discussed in the previous chapter, this ‘wicked problem’ and ‘social mess’ imposes both direct and indirect costs on the MCCE and its 28 Member Nations. Furthermore, the risk of a significant negative impact on operations – or on the viability and credibility of specific missions or actors – is only likely to increase the longer that known issues go unresolved.

To begin to address the challenges identified through the literature review and interviews, the study team also collated stakeholder inputs on potential actions or areas for further investigation that might help to address these challenges and generate efficiencies in future. The following paragraphs provide a summary, along with some reflections on implementation priorities and barriers for the MCCE. They also suggest further areas of research and analysis that the MCCE and Member Nations could investigate to build on the outputs of this scoping study and inform any interventions made to ameliorate the situation.

3.1.2. This scoping study has identified priority areas for action by the MCCE and Member Nations and some core principles to guide any implementation plan

Before discussing those areas where the MCCE and Member Nations might consider taking near-term action, it is useful to flag some high-level principles that should guide how any implementation plan or roadmap is designed and rolled out. These are outlined below in Figure 3.1.
These principles should inform the overarching approach adopted by the MCCE and its Member Nations to address the challenges identified in this scoping study, in line with the existing principles and good practice of the MCCE’s governance. The following paragraphs address each of the identified priority areas for action in more detail (Section 13.2) along with secondary areas for consideration (Section 3.3).

### 3.2. Priority areas for action

The literature review and stakeholder engagement suggest the following priorities for action:

- Promoting greater sharing and transparency of information on national taskings in Africa;
- Enabling increased interoperability through use of common information technology platforms;
- Identifying and promoting pooling and sharing initiatives aligned to shared goals; and
- Leveraging Member Nations’ relationships with African host nations to benefit other partners.

#### 3.2.1. Promoting greater sharing and transparency of information on national taskings in Africa, not least given the limited assets in the region

Central to accessing more capacity from existing multi-modal lift assets across Member Nations and partners is the need to improve the way information on national logistics programmes and supply chains is

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**Figure 3.1 Implementation principles for addressing challenges identified in scoping study**

- **There is no “one size fits all” solution** to address the myriad challenges of the African theatre – the continent is too large and operational activity too concentrated in specific regions with different sets of challenges and interests (e.g., France, the UK and Sweden in Mali and the Sahel, and the US in Somalia and Djibouti as part of the Horn of Africa). Treating regions separately – with bespoke solutions tailored to meet specific requirements – may be more effective.

- **Even within specific regions, there tends not to be one “silver bullet” solution** that will solve the coordination problems or dramatically improve efficiencies. Rather, a series of layered solutions packaged together has the potential to produce much greater efficiencies and will help build trust and momentum between nations. As such, every opportunity to improve the coordination process and access additional capacity should be explored to deliver cumulative marginal gains over time.

- **Demonstrating tangible improvements, even at a low level, will build the business case** for further investment of political, financial and human capital in relevant initiatives by making the benefits clear (e.g. in terms of platform availability/utilisation, shipment times and costs, remuneration through the ATARES mechanism, or operational outcomes). This ‘walk before you run’ approach may prove more sustainable in the long term than more ambition but under-resourced reforms.

- **Addressing problems for airlift in Africa does not affect or benefit Africa alone**, but rather should drive generic efficiencies between Member Nations that benefit national and multinational deployments elsewhere in the world. Similarly, it is not enough to address the challenges – such as the lack of a central port of disembarkation in West or East Africa, or the lack of intra-theatre shuttle services – if payloads cannot be brought together efficiently in Europe in the first place.

- **The MCCE cannot solve this problem alone; Member Nations must do their part.** The MCCE’s size, governance model and reliance on voluntary contributions from Member Nations all mean that it can play a vital coordinating and advisory role, but it lacks the mandate or resources to address all challenges on its own. Building working groups among likeminded Member Nations to tackle specific problems, with designated lead nation(s), is likely to prove more effective and sustainable.
Strategic Airlift in Africa

shared. This includes – at the most basic level – nations being willing to contribute towards a more transparent and accurate Common Logistics Operating Picture (CLOP) that the MCCE can plan against; this should show which nations are operating in various locations across the African continent, including their deployment footprint. This also includes sharing information on planned taskings, Statements of Movement Requirement (SOMR), national movement plans and logistics capabilities, all of which drive the design of lines of communication. Sharing information should also cover national contracts with commercial providers to help access other distribution networks.\(^\text{10}\)

Stakeholder engagement suggests that some nations are more willing than others to share their information, fostering greater trust between Member Nations and the MCCE and therefore collectively enhancing all nations’ capabilities. In addition, timely information sharing is likely to allow sufficient planning lead times to allow the MCCE and nations to make maximum use of available capacity and multi-modal solutions.\(^\text{11}\)

Nations choosing to work with the MCCE to synchronise their planning cycles would also contribute added value, a choice that requires a greater willingness to trust that this will lead to more capacity for all.

The key lesson from previous campaigns and initiatives, and a factor that remains an outstanding question for the MCCE, is how the MCCE can motivate and incentivise Member Nations to share relevant information more readily. Whilst there is a political and cultural element to this in fostering stronger cooperation and trust between nations over time, there is also a practical case that needs to be satisfied in terms of demonstrating the clear cost-benefit advantage of closer information sharing. Given the political sensitivities and constraints of the MCCE and its reliance on the goodwill of Member Nations, this case must be articulated clearly and ideally backed by tangible evidence (operational data, vignettes on ‘success stories’, etc.) of the costs and benefits of proposed initiatives to enhance information sharing and the coordination of lift more generally.

3.2.2. Information sharing could be improved by a common information architecture and making more innovative use of technology

Facilitating more complete and timely sharing of information between Member Nations and the MCCE is not just a question of trust and will. It also requires access to common information platforms that enable the seamless communication of up-to-date planning data that can be consolidated into a complete picture. Currently, Member Nations utilise many different systems that are not necessarily interoperable and require labour-intensive conversion of information into common formats. This time-consuming and prohibitive process impedes cooperation in relation to time-critical tasks. Utilising standardised multinational planning systems – such as NATO’s Logistics Functional Area Services (LOGFAS), or its replacement Logistics Functional Services (LOG FS) programme, which will accommodate multi-modal solutions – may greatly enhance Member Nations’ abilities to share information and help coordinate deployment planning.

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\(^{10}\) The MCCE’s IST Nations’ Contracts offer already covers a series of national contracts that are open to other users, but not all Member Nations may be fully aware or making optimal use of these mechanisms (compounded by the wider barriers to consider multi-modal solutions in the first place). See: MCCE (n.d.b.).

\(^{11}\) As discussed in Chapter 2, late notifications can remove the chance to consider multi-modal solutions – from both a supplier and demander perspective – because sea, road and rail options generally require longer planning lead times.
The MCCE should track developments in this area and engage with the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCI Agency) to understand how improved systems could best be utilised to support the MCCE with its mission. It should similarly explore the potential benefits that might be accrued through ongoing innovation in data science, data analytics, information communication technologies, and artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML), including in both the defence and commercial logistics sectors.

3.2.3. Promoting pooling and sharing initiatives aligned with priorities for a given region or mission should help to secure sustained buy-in from a lead nation

From the review of previous multinational programmes and pooling and sharing initiatives, it emerged that regional solutions have often evolved between clusters of nations organically where they share similar operational challenges, interests and capabilities. The willingness to cooperate – and the stamina to sustain this over time – often comes from a shared goal, so identifying specific regional solutions of direct relevance to existing ‘mini-lateral’ groupings of Member Nations is a key opportunity. The MCCE could look to existing models, such as NORDEFCO, as examples of best practice to follow for other groups of nations with shared regional interests in Africa; it could also monitor relevant developments in other groupings over time (e.g. among the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, or other examples of NATO’s framework nation concept) to identify further lessons and opportunities for cooperation as they emerge.\footnote{The Nordic Defence Cooperation framework (NORDEFCO) involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. This cooperation framework across a broad range of operational capabilities has included centralised coordination of strategic airlift and shared scheduled services to Afghanistan, where success has raised the prospect of NORDEFCO providing similar coordination of airlift in other areas, such as in the Sahel, supporting France under Op BARKHANE. See: Government Offices of Sweden (2020).}

To stimulate development in this area, the MCCE could focus initially on one or two potential lead nations who could be encouraged to take the initiative, and around whom other partner nations could start to gravitate; AFRICOM, France and the UK could be potential candidates. Once initiatives have proved successful at a small scale, and after initial action among a working group made up of a limited number of highly motivated partners, these initiatives could be expanded to include other Member Nations as momentum and interest builds and success stories are shared.

3.2.4. The MCCE should encourage Member Nations to leverage their contacts and relations with African host nations to benefit other multinational partners

As outlined in Chapter 2 and discussed in Annex A, Africa is characterised by a diverse array of nations with divergent national interests, whose external relations with each of the MCCE’s 28 Member Nations are influenced by historical, social, cultural, linguistic and economic ties. Whilst this is part of the problem in that it makes it more difficult to coordinate when nations have competing aims or a lack of diplomatic presence, it also presents an opportunity for the MCCE to leverage historical relationships and contacts that exist between certain Member Nations and African nations of interest, for the benefit of other members and partners. This will rely on Member Nations’ willingness to share their contacts and facilitate access.\footnote{Examples of opportunities to capitalise on existing ties enjoyed by a lead nation include France in the Sahel – such as Chad, Mali, Niger and Ivory Coast – or the UK in nations such as Kenya, Nigeria and Somalia.}

Being able to ‘piggyback’ on bilateral relationships and draw upon nations’ experience with gaining
permissions and expediting agreements is an area the MCCE and Member Nations could explore further; similarly, working more closely with the UN in areas of common interest is also worth considering.

3.3. Other potential areas for action to consider

In addition to the priority areas identified through desk-based research and stakeholder consultation with the MCCE, this scoping study also identified several other areas for the MCCE and Member Nations to consider that might have less of a short-term impact, but could nonetheless contribute long-term benefits.

3.3.1. Greater use of commercial freight forwarders for low-risk, low-urgency shipments could reduce pressure on airlift assets already in high demand

As discussed in Chapter 2 and Annex A, there are enduring barriers to progressing shipments in and around Africa. However, the use of commercial freight forwarder networks – such as DHL, FEDEX and Cargolux – could be explored by the MCCE and Member Nations as part of a mixed solution to gain additional lift capacity and to focus on low-risk, low-urgency consignments where the impact of tampering or loss is less of an issue. Established freight forwarders would also be able to bring to bear economies of scale from the size and volume of their networks, along with years of experience and local contacts across the African continent. Information sharing on existing framework contracts in place with commercial providers at the national level that could be leveraged by other Member Nations and partners is also likely to be beneficial.

3.3.2. Recent or planned acquisitions of common AT and AAR platforms provide an opportunity to leverage commonality of platforms as a basis for cooperation

Though significant levels of duplication and fragmentation persist across European defence, there is a growing trend towards commonality of AT and AAR platforms as Member Nations group together to achieve economies of scale for procurement of ever-more-expensive equipment programmes. There are opportunities for efficiencies beyond the simple pooling and sharing of platforms, i.e. if nations are intent on deploying together, they must develop standardised Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), along with shared training and exchange programmes. The development of intangible efficiencies – such as a CLOP – may then follow over time, and there are a number of related initiatives nations can learn from.

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14 These include bureaucratic and security risks associated with host-nation customs systems that consignments transit through (e.g. lack of standardised processes for customs and exoneration, such as NATO Form 302). ADNF (2019).
15 Examples include the ongoing purchase of the A400M and AAR platforms based on the A330 MRTT.
16 ADNF (2019).
17 The EATC’s shared programmes to homogenise its members’ processes is another example of good practice. The MCCE could look to build cooperation with the EATC on this since it shares many of the same members, and both organisations are co-located in Eindhoven. The EDA has similarly had success promoting a European training programme for helicopters; there may be opportunities for the MCCE to engage with the EDA to understand lessons learned that might be transferrable to other pooling and sharing initiatives, or from rotary to fixed-wing aircraft. The MCCE and Member Nations could also look to other examples of successful multinational airlift capability-sharing, such as the Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS) and the way assured access to Antonov AN-124 airlift aircraft is delivered, as well as the Heavy Airlift Wing (HAW) operating from Papa Airbase in Hungary, which provides assured airlift access for participating nations to a central pool of C-17 aircraft.
3.3.3. For the long term, the MCCE could consider promoting expansion of the ATARES mechanism to facilitate exchange of services between more actors

In the long term, expanding use of the ATARES mechanism – in terms of both membership and flexibility – could also facilitate greater efficiencies by enabling wider numbers of supplier and demander nations, thus increasing options. The MCCE could investigate how it could be made easier for non-ATARES members to purchase services directly with cash, without going through a Member Nation to act on their behalf. This could also extend to other multinational organisations, such as the EU, who require access to services but do not possess assets with which to exchange. Widening access to ATARES to non-MCCE partners and allies around the world could also offer potential solutions to other challenges by providing leverage and encouraging broader collaboration on other issues, such as permissions or customs.

3.4. Areas for further investigation

3.4.1. This scoping study has provided initial data collection and analysis, but the MCCE could benefit from more detailed exploration of certain issues

This initial scoping study and the findings listed in this report are intended to inform ongoing analysis and discussions within the MCCE and the ADNF. Based on the evidence collected, it has been possible to indicate potential areas for action by the MCCE and its Member Nations (see Sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3). Nonetheless, further investigation is required to gain a more complete understanding of specific issues, or to develop robust implementation plans for any new initiative that aims to address – at a high level – the challenges identified in this report.

As such, the study team also identified several areas where the MCCE and Member Nations could consider further ‘deep dive’ studies into specific topics of interest. These include:

- **Development of an improved CLOP for the MCCE to draw upon**: This could consider research into barriers and opportunities – in terms of policies, processes and structures – to enabling greater and more timely information sharing on national logistics programmes, taskings and supply chains within Africa; improved transparency of information, subject to national caveats, would allow additional efficiency to be gained from within existing lift capacity without additional resource. Research could include how national and international planning structures could be redesigned to achieve greater efficiencies. Tackling this issue could help achieve better access to spare lift capacity and improve collective capabilities, benefiting all Member Nations irrespective of size.

- **New approaches to common information architecture**: Linked to the previous research area, further research could examine the range of current national and multinational logistics information planning systems, such as LOGFAS (and its successor), to identify best practice. Recognising that it may be challenging to select one system that all nations would agree to, a more innovative approach may be required such as the latest advances in data analytics, AI/ML and commercial software in place of – or to augment – desk officers and spreadsheets to help speed up sharing across all 28 Member Nations; this could help national platforms to interface more easily.
• **How to unpick ‘wicked problems’ in a multinational setting such as Africa:** Recognising that no one solution will solve the complex layering of challenges associated with logistic support in the African theatre, further research could be carried out into providing a more focused, group approach, with different groups of Member Nations looking at different aspects of the problem in parallel, similar to a Campaign Plan approach. This could involve groups of like-minded nations coming together to innovate on specific issues, with lead nations stepping in to drive progress forward. Working groups could provide staff capacity to research different aspects of the ‘wicked problem’, as well as promote greater diversity of thinking, pattern identification and experimentation.

• **Deeper analysis of transferrable lessons from regional pooling and sharing initiatives:** The aforementioned low density of military operations across a vast area such as Africa calls for further research into use of a regional small-group approach to sharing airlift, which focuses on key locations such as the Sahel or the Horn of Africa. This research could consider pooling and sharing initiatives between key stakeholder nations with a vested interest in regions where there is a national incentive to take part, and a critical mass of activity to justify collaboration. This could draw lessons from other successful campaigns and partnerships, such as NORDEFCO, the EDA’s Pooling and Sharing and NATO Smart Defence initiatives.

• **Additional stakeholder engagement and research into African host-nation perspectives:** Further research could seek to better understand bilateral relationships of interest between Member Nations and African host nations in particular areas of interest. This could start to map local networks of contacts, relationships of importance, bilateral agreements or commercial contracts in place, and areas of best practice. By developing a regional map of influence and best practice, the MCCE and Member Nations could start to leverage their positions for the wider benefit of all participants in multinational operations.

• **Development of an assumptions-based planning exercise or serious game to understand the logistics enablers required to deliver given initiatives successfully:** This could involve the use of scenarios that aim to test various logistics assumptions for Africa to identify the key risk areas and critical failure points along with the potential impact on mission success. This would help prioritise different recommendations to address the ‘wicked problem’ and focus Member Nations’ attention on the costs of inaction, helping to unpack the difficult question of nations’ individual incentives.

• **Deeper analysis of challenges and barriers to more efficient coordination of lift in given countries, regions or operations within Africa (e.g. a deep dive on Mali or South Sudan):** A deep-dive case study could be carried out on particular regions or countries of interest to analyse all of the competing factors that influence the (un)successful delivery of logistics support in a multinational context. This could include stakeholder relationships, LoCs, host nation support, deployment footprint, commercial freight forwarder networks, regional liaison officers and legal processes. Lessons could be drawn that may be transferrable to other regions within the African theatre.

• **Facilitation of workshops or other engagements with other relevant organisations – such as AFRICOM, the EU, NATO or the UN – to explore areas for enhancing collaboration:** More detailed
research could focus on other multinational agencies and actors within Africa to better understand their processes and to identify opportunities for closer collaboration with the MCCE and its Member Nations. For instance, this could focus on UN Missions in key areas of interest to evaluate whether additional lift capacity could be accessed through closer coordination.

3.4.2. Ongoing research and analysis should be used to inform an evidence-based approach to new initiatives and the MCCE’s communications strategy

Continuing use of research and analysis of these types, along with efforts to monitor and evaluate any future MCCE initiatives to address the challenges highlighted in this scoping study, should collectively contribute to building evidence-based interventions to enhance the coordination of lift in Africa. Capturing data on what does and does not work should also help to identify, understand and demonstrate success stories that enhance the goodwill and participation of the MCCE’s 28 Member Nations.

To build the necessary political will and understanding of the costs and benefits of such long-term interventions, the MCCE should also continue to execute a communications strategy that raises awareness among its Member Nations of the challenges facing lift in the African theatre; the practical impact that inefficiencies have on national and multinational operations on the continent; and examples of the gains that have been made through successful interventions to enhance coordination and optimisation of multi-modal solutions to address the problems of lift in Africa. Similarly, the MCCE should continue to engage with other multinational bodies to promote its work and explore opportunities for deepening collaboration. Along with the recommendations outlined in this final chapter, such efforts would continue to position the MCCE as a source of expertise and best practice for Member Nations to draw upon, as well as to build and sustain the necessary awareness, goodwill and political momentum to implement those more ambitious initiatives that fall outside the direct control or resources of the MCCE.


———. N.d.b. ‘Movement Coordination Centre Europe: Maximising the Capacity of Limited Strategic Lift’. Unpublished.


This technical annex provides additional information on each of the high-level challenges for coordination of airlift in Africa, as introduced in brief in Chapter 2. This draws on the literature review and interviews.

A.1. **Global challenges to coordination of military assets and movements**

Military planners tasked with coordinating and optimising the use of land movement, sealift and airlift assets face several major challenges, agnostic of where in the world those assets are deployed. These include:

- Competing priorities and the reliance on Member Nations’ goodwill;
- Different approaches to and capabilities for burden sharing;
- Information-sharing deficits;
- Planning and timing issues that limit the use and benefits of multi-modal solutions; and
- Gaps and overlaps between the responsibilities of multiple organisations.

These issues are summarised briefly in the paragraphs below.

A.1.1. **The MCCE must balance competing demands on the finite assets available to support lift and logistics missions in Africa, and rely on the goodwill of nations**

To fulfil its mission, the MCCE relies on Member Nations to voluntarily share assets and information. It must also compete with other national and multinational commitments; use of assets will often be prioritised for M&T across theatres. Assets may therefore become unavailable or be pulled at short notice if a higher priority national tasking emerges. This uncertain availability of assets reflects the MCCE model, which relies on the trust and goodwill of supplying nations rather than the more formal transfer of tasking authority.\(^\text{18}\) Any attempt to replicate the latter to try and guarantee access to Member Nations’ lift could backfire in the long term due to the risk of Member Nations becoming less willing to cooperate; the MCCE’s informal scheme therefore only works if national authorities know they can still retain ultimate control over sovereign assets, while also tangibly benefitting from the voluntary pooling of assets in times/places of their choosing.

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\(^{18}\) This compares to the more direct influence the European Air Transport Command (EATC) has over multinational use of national assets, though Member Nations still remain able to withdraw their assets if they wish. See EATC (n.d.).
A.1.2. Though the ATARES mechanism provides a means for exchanging services, differences in national capabilities pose challenges to burden sharing

The MCCE Member Nations do not all possess the same logistics assets (either in terms of the number, scale or capabilities of those assets), which limits the ability to use them interchangeably. This leads to differing levels of both political appetite and practical ability to cooperate; though the ATARES mechanism does provide a structured framework for multiple Member Nations to exchange services directly or indirectly, even where they might not all be involved in the same mission or theatre of operations.

In this sense, three broad groups of nations can be distinguished (see Figure A.1), each with differing levels of sovereign capability, freedom of action and exposure to cost and risk due to poor coordination of assets.

![Figure A.1 Broad categories of MCCE Member Nation by scale, capability and ambition](image)

Source: RAND Europe analysis.

The MCCE seeks to promote cooperation between these groups and must account for tensions between differing motivations for cooperating in any pooling and sharing, such as to support airlift in Africa.\(^{19}\) Besides ATARES, leveraging the US Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) system is also an option, with ACSAs in place with 46 European entities and 26 African nations\(^{20}\); however, barriers cited include lack of understanding of procedures among Member Nations, cost, complexity and bureaucracy.\(^{21}\)

A.1.3. Information sharing remains a key challenge and source of tension, with a lack of transparency hindering coordination and long-term planning

Significant disparities exist between participating Member Nations regarding the information they are willing to share with the MCCE and when, particularly in Africa. Some are more willing to advertise available assets, seats and cargo space, fostering greater trust in the system, while others plan in isolation.

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19 MCCE (2020).
20 AFRICOM (2019).
Overall, the MCCE struggles to maintain a common logistics operating picture (CLOP) detailing where nations are deployed, limiting visibility of spare lift capacity or probable future demand levels. Previous efforts to promote a common platform, such as through the ADNF or AFRICOM, have led to difficulties due to a lack of staff capacity or interest from some Member Nations, and disagreements over scope. Information sharing is often incomplete and limited to the monthly cycle of returns to the MCCE, whereas greater transparency and early access to long-look national planning forecasts would greatly improve the MCCE’s ability to plan multi-modal solutions, as acknowledged by many Member Nations.

A.1.4. Difficulties in planning beyond short-term requests for support inhibit the use of multi-modal solutions, which often have longer lead times than airlift

To maximise efficiencies, the MCCE should not be limited to one mode of transport when planning lift and movement options; rather, multi-modal options should be available to ensure flexibility, as operations overseas may require different modes depending on urgency, distance and cost. However, lack of timely information sharing by both demanding and supplying nations often means that certain modal options that require longer planning lead times are rendered unavailable. This increases pressure on limited airlift capacity as the ‘option of last resort’ due to the superior speed and range of air assets.

A.1.5. The MCCE straddles the seams between organisations with overlapping remits and memberships, bringing opportunities but also political sensitivities

The MCCE could be perceived as duplicating functions of other multinational organisations given that many of its members are also signatories to the likes of NATO and the EDA; its headquarters is also physically adjacent to the EATC in Eindhoven, another multinational airlift pooling and sharing initiative. Whilst the MCCE’s structures and voluntary nature – coupled with its niche role as the provider of specialist M&T planning advice – keep it distinct from other institutions, it must continue to differentiate itself to ensure its utility is fully appreciated and exploited. Promoting awareness and uptake of MCCE initiatives and capabilities is doubly important given the absence of a formal MCCE enforcement mechanism.

By increasing its multi-modal responses to requests from Member Nations, the MCCE can maintain its unique position for Member Nations despite their commitments to other organisations, such as NATO.

A.2. Specific challenges to coordination in the African theatre

As introduced in Chapter 2, coordination of lift – and more specifically, airlift – into the African theatre is linked to various challenges for Member Nations because of the scale and complexity of the African continent. This presents the difficulty of managing high demand alongside low density in a multinational logistics system with limited agility, spare capacity or resilience. Challenges include:

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22 ADNF (2019).
24 MCCE (2020).
25 MCCE (2020).
26 MCCE (2020).
• Light footprint of most forces deployed in Africa and the limited assets to support them;
• Physical geography of the African theatre of operations;
• Complex political landscape and variable diplomatic relations with host nations;
• Prevalence of national missions with bespoke logistic support solutions; and
• Limited complementarity with United Nations missions and capabilities.

These issues are summarised briefly in the paragraphs below.

A.2.1. Though Africa is becoming an increasingly important theatre of operations, many Member Nations have only a limited footprint and assets in the region

Historically, the African theatre has attracted lower priority when compared to other regions – such as the Middle East, Europe and Asia-Pacific – due in part to enduring multinational campaigns (such as the International Security Assistance Force and NATO missions in Afghanistan). This has translated into significant restrictions to accessing what is already a limited global pool of strategic lift assets. Unlike the resilience and flexibility enjoyed by the US due to its sizeable sea and airlift assets, most European nations are unable to pool their capabilities or to provide support to other nations in Africa because of higher national priorities elsewhere, which is also likely to further constrain cooperation between Member Nations, focusing only on those operating in the same locations (e.g. in the Sahel or the Horn of Africa).

With the drawdown of other theatres, Africa is likely to attract higher priority due to the growing number of deployments there, and the MCCE may be able to exploit this to improve future regional coordination.

A.2.2. The African continent’s size and diverse topography, along with the austere conditions of many airfields and bases, poses challenges to military logistics

The sheer size and diverse nature of Africa’s terrain exacerbates the challenges identified in Subsection 2.1.3, creating specific logistical challenges for coordination of inter- and intra-theatre lift.27 The lack of forward basing areas or regional logistic hubs also forces a dependency on more inter-theatre and strategic airlift direct to the point of requirement, reducing the options for multi-modal solutions. The greater distances involved also increases pressure on a limited pool of strategic airlift assets, removing other modes of transport due to their longer planning lead times. Furthermore, US, European and other partner troops are spread across over 20 different sub-Saharan African locations; this amplifies the effect of these distances. Lines of communications (LoC) are required for each of these sites, which increases the complexity of the logistics network (i.e. presenting the challenge of ‘high demand, low density’).28 Establishing these LoCs can also prove difficult given the absence of a functioning ground transport network in between deployment locations and beyond the point of entry, thus establishing airlift as the default option. In addition, there are also security concerns related to intra-theatre M&T that are likely to work in favour of airlift solutions.

27 AFRICOM (n.d.).
28 AFRICOM (n.d.).
A.2.3. The complex geopolitical landscape and varying diplomatic relations enjoyed by Member Nations affects the ability to secure clearances and permissions

Africa is a complex map of nations with different political and diplomatic allegiances and frictions. Reliable coordination of sea and ground LoCs or access, basing and overflight (ABO) for airlift is rendered more difficult as a result. For instance, aircraft will often route through several African nations requiring multiple diplomatic clearances with long lead times (e.g. 30 days for approval of certain clearances in Cameroon). Clearances for multinational aircraft are even lengthier, with each country’s consignment requiring separate clearances; this increases planning lead times, reducing the MCCE’s agility compared to single-nation solutions. Some nations have historical links that bring greater diplomatic ties and leverage in certain regions than others (e.g. France in the Sahel). This could prevent negotiating overarching multinational agreements with African nations for all participating nations within the MCCE compared to the UN, EU or NATO. Typically, every country must negotiate individual bilateral agreements with host nations, increasing complexity and disparities between agreements. They must also engage with each nation they pass through on operations, increasing bureaucracy. MCCE Member Nations with closer political, economic or cultural ties are more likely to negotiate comprehensive agreements, while smaller nations may be disadvantaged.

A.2.4. While all Member Nations support the principles of pooling and sharing, the reality of competing national priorities can impede coordination

Connected to the previous point, the complexity of the African theatre means Member Nations operating there have a variety of different interests – often based on historical ties, with some African nations prioritised over others – as well as related to political and economic relations that have developed over time. Multinational cooperation may be impeded by political interests of nations who wish to see their own flag on the ground, and display a greater reluctance to share information on what they are doing. There are also tendencies to prioritise national capabilities and assets, as nations wish to retain control over their logistics.

A.2.5. Enduring political and bureaucratic barriers to cooperation with UN missions, including those co-located at key hubs such as Gao, adds further inefficiency

Whilst several well-established UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) exist in Africa – such as MINUSMA in Mali and UNMISS in South Sudan, which might offer opportunities for lift collaboration with the MCCE – the UN brings its own unique challenges. The lengthy UN timelines for approval and implementation of movement requests are often incompatible with the short-notice requests received by the MCCE and the timely delivery of cargo and personnel that is required for African operations; the UN can reportedly often take up to a year to deliver consignments. The UN operates prioritisation lists that do not fit with the multinational setting of the MCCE. The UN is also restricted by neutrality requirements that prevent its equipment being used by a single nation, and can place constraints on the transhipment of arms via UN assets or infrastructure. The UN’s lift capabilities are also mainly limited to intra-theatre movements, and it lacks any strategic inter-theatre lift capability. Nonetheless, cooperation with the UN may present a partial solution alongside multi-modal options and commercial freight providers.

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29 AFRICOM (n.d.).