



## European Military Capabilities and UN Peace Operations: Strengthening the Partnership

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The United Nations (UN) has made no secret of its desire to see greater numbers of European troops in its peacekeeping operations, especially those in Africa. It also desires European Union (EU) cooperation to bridge key capability gaps, like rapid deployment. Despite the need for European armies to stay operationally engaged after leaving Afghanistan, however, their rapid integration into UN operations or rapid deployment in support of UN operations will not happen automatically or without effort on all sides. This paper assesses progress on several areas of recent European military cooperation with the UN and offers recommendations for consideration by the EU, the UN and European governments in discussing the opportunities for collaboration in the coming years.

In June 2014, the Council of the European Union adopted its priorities for the coming UN General Assembly session. The first two priorities listed were to support the reinforcement of EU-UN operational cooperation in crisis management and to continuously enhance support to UN peacekeeping, through a structured dialogue based on concrete needs and with a view to optimizing the use of available resources.<sup>1</sup> This pronouncement is the latest reminder of the European Union's explicit promotion of EU-UN cooperation in peace operations. Certainly the trajectory and momentum of EU-UN cooperation has been inconsistent over the years, with the most comprehensive

– and ambitious – attempt at developing strategic cooperation being the 2012 *Plan of Action to enhance EU CSDP<sup>2</sup> support to UN peacekeeping*. That plan committed the EU to a set of ambitious actions over the course of two years.

### The EU's Plan of Action

For a number of reasons, the implementation of the *Plan of Action* has been uneven to date. In general, technical areas have progressed, such as the development of modalities for cooperation in the planning of EU and UN missions in the same theater. But areas which required further member

<sup>1</sup> "EU Priorities for the UN General Assembly 69th General Assembly," Brussels, 23 June 2014. [http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_15238\\_en.htm](http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_15238_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Common Security and Defence Policy



#### Summary of the key elements of the *Plan of Action* related to military capabilities

- 1 Define a list of military capabilities the EU Member States (MS) can potentially put at UN disposal;
- 2 create a concept on EU facilitating coordinated MS contributions to UN operations (clearinghouse model);
- 3 create a concept on EU providing a component to a UN operation (modular approach);
- 4 create a concept on EU autonomous military deployment in support of UN operations;
- 5 establish technical arrangements with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS) on cooperation in: capability development, doctrine development, training and exercises, and lessons-learned; and
- 6 develop a general framework agreement between the UN and EU on operational aspects of cooperation in peacekeeping, in particular the modular approach.

Source: Plan of Action to enhance EU CSDP support to UN peacekeeping, 2012

state action at a political level have seen less progress, such as identifying EU member state capabilities for possible use in UN missions. Despite limited progress on the related provisions of the *Action Plan*, however, the UN has recently seen important contributions of enabling capacities from European states to its mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the EU deployed an autonomous peacekeeping force to the Central African Republic (CAR) to assist the African Union (AU) and the French forces there until the UN could deploy. Importantly, as well, European member states, led by Italy, France, and Spain, have remained steadfast contributors to the UN peacekeeping operation in Lebanon. Such events were not necessarily facilitated, however, by the institutional cooperation processes envisioned in the *Plan of Action*, since EU member states have expressed a strong preference in favor of dealing with the UN directly when it comes to their own contributions to UN missions, rather than using the European External Action Service (EEAS) as a go-between.

Despite the EU member states' agreement to the *Plan of Action* in 2012, it did not reflect a genuine high-level political consensus to move towards a more reliable and joined-up mechanism for EU (military) crisis response or an interlocking peacekeeping mechanism with the United Nations.

### Increasing European Participation in UN Peacekeeping

The EU does not currently provide capabilities directly as a component to a UN mission (the so-called modular approach), but as of 1 September, 2014, European countries individually were contributing 5,667 troops to UN peacekeeping operations, led by Italy's contribution of over 1,100 troops. European contributions constitute 6.7 percent of the total number of UN troops deployed, up from 6.0 percent at the end of 2013, but down from its most recent high of 13.8 percent in 2007.

### Focus on Africa and the Middle East

Currently, 1,254 European troops are deployed to the UN's missions in Sub-Saharan Africa. The largest concentration of blue-helmeted European troops in Africa serves in MINUSMA (684) where the Netherlands has deployed 370 military personnel supported by four Apache attack helicopters and three Chinook helicopters. The Dutch are leading an *All Sources Information Fusion Unit* (ASIFU) jointly with a contingent soon to be deployed from Sweden. European forces are present in large numbers in three other UN operations outside Africa: UNIFIL (Lebanon, 3,716 troops), UNDOF (Golan Heights, 136 troops) and UNFICYP (Cyprus, 561 troops). In Lebanon, Italy provides over 1,000 troops, Command and Control assets for other national units, critical enablers and four helicopters – search and rescue and medical evacuation – in support to the UNIFIL HQ. Collectively, European states are deployed in four EU military operations in Africa working alongside UN and AU operations: EUNAVFOR Atalanta (Horn of Africa); EUTM Somalia; EUTM Mali, and EUFOR RCA (Central African Republic).



Of course, in looking toward the future of European contributions to UN peacekeeping or to the deployment of new EU military missions, one must also consider how continued instability in the Middle East and Ukraine will affect the picture. Two recent events are of note in this regard. First, some have blamed the lackluster force generation of EUFOR RCA on European preoccupation with the Ukraine crisis. Certainly continued interference of Russia in that region would drop sub-Saharan Africa conflicts down the list of EU member state security priorities. Second, in terms of the Middle East, and specifically the spillover of the Syrian conflict, the UN is likely to need more high-capacity European armed forces participating in its missions in the region. In UNDOF, the deterrent capability of the UN has been compromised by the capture of the mission's Filipino and then Fijian troops. It was the Irish contingent that successfully assisted in the escape of a Filipino contingent from their besieged compound. It may be that the mission's reinforcement with more high-capacity European troops is the only thing that can save UNDOF.

Top 10 European Contributors to UN Peacekeeping Operations (as of 31 August 2014)

1	Italy	1,104
2	France	875
3	Spain	591
4	Netherlands	548
5	Finland	353
6	Ireland	336
7	United Kingdom	282
8	Serbia	195
9	Germany	175
10	Austria	173

Source: Department of Peacekeeping Operations

## What the UN needs from the EU: The capabilities list

Apart from the UNDOF scenario, the UN clearly needs and has repeatedly requested more European military capabilities for its missions. In

December 2013, the UN collated and relayed a list of specific capability needs to the EEAS, which conveyed the list to EU member states. The UN list included current missing military capabilities but also other “predicted requirements to address emerging threats”. The main categories of needs as described by DPKO include: 1) informational and situational awareness; 2) command and control (e.g., forward deployable headquarters); 3) standby and quick reaction forces; 4) logistics and enablers (e.g., helicopters, fixed wing aircraft, engineering, signals, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defense, medical and counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)); 5) high-tech equipment; and 6) trainers and (French and Arabic-speaking) personnel .

In April 2014, the EU decided it would not respond by sending a list of potentially available member state capabilities to the UN, as envisaged in the *Plan of Action*. Member States decided that they would prefer to continue to use existing bilateral mechanisms with the UN. While many EU member states have engaged with DPKO bilaterally since they received the list of December 2013, including at the political level, there is no coordinated and little sustained follow-up, not least because of the lack of a strategic force generation capacity in DPKO. However, assistance from the EU Military Staff (EUMS) would certainly have helped the UN identify and target potentially useful European member state contributions.

This decision also makes it less likely that the EU would decide to move forward with developing the clearing house model of cooperation whereby the EU facilitates European contributions to a specific UN mission. In this scenario, the EU would develop an efficient process to help solicit EU member states for such capabilities (based on mission-specific force requirements or a list of capability needs provided by the UN). While there may be skepticism from both the UN and the EU on the necessity of an EU clearing house mechanism, something less ambitious than that concept, but more focused, aimed at identifying and joining up potential European capacities, could prove worthwhile. The potential value of such a mechanism would not be in generating infantry battalions

## European Troop Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations, 1991–2014



Source: International Peace Institute (IPI)

from a single nation, but in finding two or three nations willing to join together to provide a niche enabling capability that otherwise may not be available from just one of them, such as a specialized engineering company, a helicopter unit, or a counter-IED team.

### Strategic Force Generation

In the event that these more formal mechanisms do not prove palatable to EU member states, the UN should develop a strategic force generation capacity to improve their outreach to and force generation planning with EU member states at the capital level and the EUMS. At the end of the day, EU member states will contribute to UN peace operations if there is political will and strategic interest in doing so. And in many if not most cases, the decision to contribute significant capabilities will be driven by the relevant member state's political interest in a specific mission, as was the case in Mali.

However, there are two key issues that hinder more European contributions. First, military contributions take time, planning, and confidence-building to put together, and at present, the UN does not have the capacity to engage EU member states in long-term strategic discussions to realize those potential contributions. A strategic force

generation cell could help capitals plan, join up, and think of creative ways to overcome specific obstacles they may have (e.g. missing capabilities, length of deployment concerns, mandate issues, training, etc.<sup>3</sup>). The UN should also hold an annual force generation conference, in the spirit of the September 2014 UN peacekeeping summit hosted by the United States.

A second issue for increasing – and sustaining – European contributions to UN peacekeeping is that European states need better support and adaptation from the UN when they deploy. As some contributors quickly find out, in many ways the UN peacekeeping system is designed with other types of troop contributing countries (TCCs) in mind. The European TCC experience in Mali will be an important opportunity for the UN to learn exactly how to integrate and support European armed forces with new technologies and capabilities into a high-tempo mission context. In early 2015, a closed-door meeting between the European contributors to MINUSMA and UN leadership should be held to assess their shared experience with the objective of finding quick solutions to persistent TCC concerns. European contributors to UNIFIL should also be invited to share the best practices and lessons-learned from their experience, especially in relation to the key issues of self-deployability

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed explanation of why a more strategic approach to force generation is necessary in the UN and what tasks a strategic force generation cell should undertake, see Adam C. Smith and Arthur Boutellis, "Rethinking Force Generation: filling the capability gaps in UN peacekeeping," New York: International Peace Institute, May 2013.



and sustainability, cooperation with other missions in the region, and operational partnerships to build the capacities of other TCCs.

## Enhancing Rapid Deployment

A UN capability gap that has been both persistent and is costly with regard to rapid deployment. Deployment speeds in the UN context suffer from a host of interrelated reasons that are political, institutional, and financial. The latest example was the deployment of a new UN mission in CAR. While intercommunal violence erupted in March 2013, agreement in the UN Security Council to send a UN operation was not reached until April 2014 and initial deployment was planned for a full five months later, that is, 17 months after fighting started. In the interim, a French force (Opération Sangaris), an AU force (MISCA), and an EU force (EUFOR RCA) were all dispatched to the affected country. By the time the UN mission (MINUSCA) took over from MISCA on 15 September 2014, the UN was able to re-hat most of the AU force and add around 1,000 more troops from outside the continent. While the UN Security Council seemed to accept this long deployment timeline, to most observers this timeline is still too long.

One promising development has been the agreement of UN member states to fund a financial incentive for states to deploy enabling capabilities quickly to UN missions. TCCs would be given a premium, up to 25 percent, for deploying within 30 days. For European contributors with niche capacities, this premium could prove to be a modest incentive to enhance preparedness and contribute to UN missions.

## EU Battle Groups for UN Peacekeeping?

Starting in 2007 with the operationalization of the EU Battle Groups concept there was initial hope that the EU could serve as a predictable, rapidly deployable bridging force for the UN. But the EU has not deployed a Battle Group yet and had problems deploying a much smaller force to CAR, not least because the Battle Group mechanism

was not used. While EUFOR RCA reached full operational capacity of 700 troops and police by 15 June 2014, this was approximately four months after it was agreed to by the European Council, and the authorized strength had to be decreased from an originally envisioned 1,000 due to lack of member state offers to provide the troops or support elements.

### EU Battle Groups

[...] At the 1999 Helsinki European Council meeting, rapid response was identified as an important aspect of crisis management. As a result, the Helsinki Headline Goal 2003 assigned to member states the objective of being able to provide rapid response elements available and deployable at very high levels of readiness. [...] In 2004 the Headline Goal 2010 aimed for completion of the development of rapidly deployable Battle Groups, including the identification of appropriate strategic lift, sustainability and disembarkation assets, by 2007. [...] A Battle Group is the minimum militarily effective, credible and coherent, rapidly deployable force package capable of stand-alone operations or for the initial phase of larger operations. It is based on a combined arms, battalion-sized force, reinforced with combat support and combat service support elements. In their generic composition, but depending on the mission, Battle Groups are about 1,500 personnel strong. [...] Battle Groups are on standby for a six-month period, or multiples of it, and should be initially sustainable for 30 days, extendable to 120 days if resupplied appropriately.[...]

Source: Official CSDP Info Sheet on EU Battle Groups, April 2013

An obvious question is why the EU Battle Groups were not used to provide the force for EUFOR RCA. An oft-cited criticism of the financial modalities of the Battle Groups is that those countries that deploy as part of a Battle Group are forced to bear the majority of the additional costs for the six-month deployment, with only 10 to 15 percent of costs financed jointly through the ATHENA mechanism. Relieving this financial burden could make smaller EU countries more eager to deploy as part of an EU Battle Group in the future, how-



ever it is unlikely to change the fundamental limitation of the Battle Group concept, namely that at any point, the decision to use the battle groups lies heavily on the strategic interests of the one lead nation (the “framework nation”) on standby at the moment rather than the interests of the majority of EU states.

Given the structural limitation of the Battle Groups, and the failures to deploy them even once (in particular during the Goma crisis in 2008/09 or in CAR in 2013/14) some re-examination of the EU Battle Group as a concept may be necessary. Does the rotating lead nation mechanism give too much power/responsibility/burden to one, unlucky member state? Can the financial burdens of deployment be shared more equally (e.g. a trust fund)? Should the EU’s ambitions be greater (e.g. a standing EU force) or lesser (e.g. a standby deployable field headquarters or combat engineering company)? An answer may also lie in looking at other mechanisms for EU rapid deployment that do not have to call on the current Battle Group on standby, and in also taking into account recent developments in NATO. Several small groups of nations have already trained together, enhanced their interoperability, and gone through exercises as past standby EU Battle Groups. These groups, or other like-minded groups (e.g. the Nordic countries) can develop concepts to deploy rapidly either under a UN flag, an EU flag, or a coalition.

### Pooled Enabling Capacities

In the UN context, one seemingly promising development on the support side of rapid deployment took place earlier in 2014 when a contingent of the Norwegian Theatre Enabling Force (16 military engineers) arrived in Mali and rapidly constructed the headquarters base for the ASIFU. (The Norwegians are also contributing military intelligence analysts to ASIFU). However, this success was largely a product of improvisation made necessary by the UN’s failure to have the base prepared in time for the Norwegian arrival. The Norwegians were forced to scramble to construct the base using a mixture of UN owned equipment and local labor on their own initiative.

The same unit will support the construction of the Swedish base in Timbuktu later in the year.

Assuming one cannot expect Norway to provide a permanent base construction unit for the UN, capabilities like these are perhaps one of the most useful pooled capabilities that the EU could provide to the UN and should be explored. This can be done under the modular approach envisioned in the Plan of Action, or, more simply, as a direct contribution under a Letter of Agreement (LoA) arrangement. To date, implementation of this element of the Action Plan – the creation of a concept and a framework for an EU component to a UN mission – has been minimal due to envisioned technical difficulties on the UN side and concerns about command and control and preserving EU decision-making authority on the EU side.

If these concerns are insurmountable at present, a more promising line of action is to further develop the concept of autonomous EU deployments alongside and in support of UN missions. Independent EU missions working alongside UN missions, or bridging missions, that implement or complement a specific part of the UN’s mandate are now common. Notably, the success in 2003 of the EU’s Operation Artemis, which rapidly reinforced the UN’s mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), was one of the driving forces behind the development of the Battle Groups concept. Coordination between the UN and EU for these types of missions has been adequate in practice. Importantly for the EU, these types of arrangements allow it to retain command and control of its missions, and they have been time-delimited, allowing the EU to exit on its own timetable, another stated concern of EU member states.

While training and Security Sector Reform (SSR) missions are now common, and have become something of an EU specialty, the EU should develop concepts for other types of missions, such as intelligence, engineering, transport and medical support. Ideally, these would be rapidly deployable missions that serve as 12–18 month bridging forces until other TCCs can deploy.



With regard to intelligence, it will be necessary for the UN to develop a more advanced and reliable system for classifying and sharing sensitive information. This is one key factor currently limiting the useful cooperation with the EU or NATO (and their member states). In addition, there are and will continue to be growing pains with regard to the new ASIFU unit in Mali and how the UN will take advantage of this capability to improve mandate delivery and protect its forces. Understanding and addressing the challenges from this experience should be a high priority for both UN leadership and EU member states.

Some of the lessons of the difficult transition from EUFOR Tchad/RCA to MINURCAT in 2008/09 have been incorporated into the newly drawn up “modalities for coordination between the UN and the EU during the planning of UN missions and EU civilian missions and military operations” (*Plan of Action*). The improved coordination between the current EU and UN missions in CAR also seems to suggest that some inter-organizational learning has taken place in this regard.

## Furthering Cooperation Mechanisms

Operational partnerships between European TCCs in UN peacekeeping operations is a recent trend. Within the UN mission in Mali, the Dutch and Swedish, joined by Norway, Denmark, Finland and others, have created a military intelligence cell aimed at allowing the mission to function in an asymmetric threat environment. In theory, ASIFU will improve the mission’s force protection capacities as well as its ability to protect civilians. In UNIFIL, Ireland and Finland have joined up to create a co-deployed infantry battalion, with a rotating lead nation arrangement but integrated command and control arrangements. Other examples from UNIFIL include a Slovenian platoon attached to Italy’s battalion and a Serbian platoon attached to a Spanish battalion. Such arrangements are important burden-sharing mechanisms for countries that find it hard to deploy an entire battalion, but also provide ways

for smaller countries to increase their contribution to UN peacekeeping while gaining valuable insights to modernize their forces based on their co-deployed partners. As mentioned above, a modest EUMS mechanism to facilitate pairings between two European forces could prove to be a good investment.

## North-South Partnerships

In addition to co-deploying, the EU and European states should further explore bilateral partnerships with non-European TCCs in a variety of other ways to build capacity, equip, train, or co-deploy. North-South partnerships are a strong component of the peacekeeping strategy of the United States, which spends over \$100 million annually to equip, train, and provide strategic lift to TCCs for AU and UN operations. European states already pay a hefty share of the troop costs for the AU mission in Somalia, amounting to roughly € 600 million in 2013, in addition to partly funding other missions by the AU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). However, there is no substitute for direct capacity building and training. EU states could each pick a southern TCC to partner with, i.e. to train and equip to deploy a specific capability at UN standards, and closely coordinate these efforts with each other and the UN. The UN reimbursements for deployed equipment could be paid back to the EU state, somewhat reducing the financial burden. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for a conference to be held that would explore lessons-learned from, challenges of, and potential opportunities for, “twinning” or mentoring bilateral partnerships.

## Conclusion

Following the withdrawal of most European forces from Afghanistan, Europe’s predicted enhanced military role in UN peace operations is still not a certainty. For instance, no country currently participating in EUFOR RCA has agreed to be re-hatted to join the UN mission in the Central African Republic. Some major defense ministries seem keenly interested in increasing their UN contributions, many countries are still undergoing



reviews of this option, and two, the Netherlands and Sweden, have stepped forward as the first to offer the kind of niche capabilities for the UN's missions in Africa that the UN increasingly needs. At the same time, countries like Italy, France and Spain, as well as Finland and Ireland, continue their steadfast contributions to UNIFIL.

That participation and any increased participation from other states will surely be impacted by the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. It will also be affected by the UN's ability to successfully integrate European states into a system that is accustomed to and, in some ways, designed for other types of TCCs. A learning process and period of adaptation must therefore take place in the UN and in European capitals. As mentioned above, UN officials must hear about and learn the lessons from the experience of the European contributors to MINUSMA and UNIFIL.

The UN must develop some capacity to better facilitate European participation, in terms of strategic planning, operational support, flexible mission designs, confidence-instilling mission leadership, and, importantly, providing support to help governments win the difficult domestic political battles in their capitals.

For its part, Europe must be patient with the UN, where reform is a process, not an event. In addition, reforms and improvements in the overstretched UN system cannot be resource-neutral, but rather will require political and financial investments, as well as targeted support to key areas, such as is currently the case with European support to UN standards development.

Cooperation between the EU and the UN, on a political and a technical level, has never been better, with good intentions and working-level dialogue between both Secretariats, and continued rhetorical support from EU presidencies. However, limits to the operational partnership continue to exist. For some EU member states, sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of UN missions are located, is not enough of a strategic priority to send their troops and spend their money there. Thus, the EU Battle Groups will never be a predictable resource for the UN as long as the determining factor for deploying them is the current motivations of the lead nation on standby at the time and the consensus of all EU members. If the Battle Groups are meant to be used, a re-assessment of the concept must take place and a more equitable mechanism for financing and decision-making must be found. Alternatively, concepts should be developed for other, smaller groupings of member states to make a formed unit, perhaps those with prior experience exercising together in Battle Group formations.

In addition to this, to be of most help to the UN, the EU should further develop concepts for autonomous missions that serve a niche capacity operating alongside UN missions. EU member states should also look to partner with each other and with developing states for co-deployments, and/or to help TCCs equip and train for future operations.

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