European Perspectives on
Military and Policing Aspects of UN Peace Operations

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While European Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) have been at the forefront of the creation and establishment of United Nations Peacekeeping since the 1950s, the strains and challenges of the early post-Cold War years led to a reduction of direct European participation in UN-led peacekeeping operations during the 1990s, followed by a growing focus on Western security organizations, such as the European Union and NATO, during the last decade. European commitments to NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan since 2001 and to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) have often been cited as reasons for European TCC's limited available resources for UN peacekeeping.

With the wind-down of major combat operations in Afghanistan and a general re-orientation of the EU's CSDP (with less emphasis on high-tempo military operations and more on 'comprehensive' missions), there have been some hopes that there might be a window of opportunity for 'Europe's return' to UN Peacekeeping.

Yet, recent changes in Europe's security landscape (most notably the crisis in Ukraine and instability in the MENA Region) will also affect Europe's defence and security priorities and spending within NATO and the EU. The "post-ISAF dividend" of European resources to be redeployed for UN Peacekeeping might not materialize to the extent some observers originally hoped. Current plans for a NATO rapid reaction "spearhead force", for example, might once again drain resources from a strongly needed revival of UN rapid reaction / standby mechanisms. Recent changes in the security landscape and in European strategic prioritization should also be seen in the context of more long-term and more structural constraints on a full-scale "European return to UN Peacekeeping". These include skepticism (and misperceptions) towards the UN's Command and Control arrangements; issues related to the use of force and the protection of civilians; and concerns over rapid reaction capabilities, policing and SSR.

Yet, recent developments, such as the robust participation of 14 European member states in the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) as well as the potential for inter-organizational synergies between the EU, NATO and UN in matters of military and civilian (i.e. policing, DDR and SSR) approaches to peacekeeping paint a more optimistic picture and offer substantial opportunities for a reinforced European pillar in UN peacekeeping. The current momentum should be used to engage in a frank discussion of some of the core issues that may still (rightly or wrongly) keep European TCCs from a more comprehensive engagement and to tackle them as far as possible.

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Concerns and Expectations

During the last two decades, European TCCs have predominantly carried out their international crisis management and peace operations in the NATO- and EU-framework. As a result, more common (but by no means fully compatible) cultures and expectations have in particular formed around the issues of the use of force, command and control, and common training standards. Particularly in the field of training, much more could be achieved if European member states also facilitate exchanges and common approaches to UN-focused training. European member states remain largely skeptical towards the UN's Command and Control arrangements (see below) – partially because of a different set-up and culture within NATO and the EU (where the possibilities for close monitoring and national political intervention at every stage of the operation cycle can be more easily carried out), but also because of a lack of a sustained dialogue between European TCCs and the UN peacekeeping community. European states have not only invested heavily politically and financially into EU/NATO-led multinational cooperation schemes and initiatives (e.g. EU Battlegroups, NATO Response Force, IFOR/KFOR, ISAF as well as 30 CSDP operations) but they also share more commonalities as a result of shared NATO standards and practices. Lack of familiarity with UN procedures and realities on the ground, but also skepticism towards the UN's capabilities for force protection, medical evacuation, the selection of force commanders as well as shared standards in equipment and intelligence-gathering capacities still affect European expectations at various levels.

Politically, only few European member states have comprehensively countered the past impressions of "UN peacekeeping failures" of the early 1990s. As a result, public opinion – even though often in favour of the UN system and UN Security Council mandates as such – is still seen as a constraint on committing to UN operations in volatile and dangerous environments. UN peacekeeping is often perceived as too risky and not directly tied to many European geostrategic interests. By contrast, advances at the inter-organizational levels (e.g. NATO-UN dialogues and education days, EU-UN Steering Committee and Action Plans) have led to stronger ties and more far-reaching understandings of each others' different systems, approaches, procedures and cultures.

A final trend affecting European expectations and approaches is the increasing reliance on "indirect peacekeeping" by reinforcing capacity-building partnerships (such as EU-AU capacity building schemes). Linking NATO, the EU's and UN's capacity-building initiatives more systematically would create opportunities for mutual reinforcement.

An updated and frank discussion on Command and Control in UN Peacekeeping

Since the mid-1990s, an ongoing debate has taken place about European perceptions of Command and Control (C2) in UN peacekeeping operations. European member states often compare their experiences of C2 arrangements in NATO and the EU to the UN's arrangements and procedures. Yet important advances have been made in the UN's C2 approaches since the 1990s . Hence, an open and updated debate on the UN's approaches to, and reform of, Command and Control would help to clarify some concerns.

Between 2012 and 2013, the senior leadership of DPKO and DFS carried out a comprehensive evaluation of the UN's Command and Control mechanisms in order to examine its effectiveness and provide suggestions for strengthening elements related to authority as well as decision-making and implementation processes. Yet, despite this far-reaching review little follow-up consultations with European partners have been carried out. Indeed, apart from a few ad hoc initiatives there has so far not been a comprehensive dialogue between European partners and the UN. More awareness of both the advantages, peculiarities and limitations of the UN's approach to C2 (and how it differs from European experiences and expectations in the EU and NATO context) is needed and a structured dialogue would therefore be recommendable.

Such a structured exchange should work both ways: the UN informing European partners about the intricacies of its (recalibrated) C2 arrangements as well Europeans feeding back their experiences from NATO and the EU into the debate. In the most ideal case, this should result in commonly agreed training and awareness initiatives.

UN Peacekeeping and the Use of Force

A long-held concern (mostly emanating from the experiences of the 1990, but also more recent examples) amongst Europeans is the issue of the "use of force" in UN peacekeeping operations – both as a deterrent and as part of the strongly emerging "Protection of Civilians" (POC) norm. Blue helmet approaches to the use of force have come a long way since the 1970s. On various occasions, UN Force Commanders have resorted to robust actions in order to deter 'spoilers' of impending militia attacks on civilians (various examples can be found in MONUC/MONUSCO during the last 10 years). Yet the tensions between 'impartiality' and the protection of civilians/deterrence also means that the extent, effectiveness and desirability of the use of in UN peacekeeping operations is still and ongoing debate. In additional, concerns have been raised that UN troops might lack the right capabilities or capacities for sustained deterrence or for coping with asymmetrical threats.

While European experiences within the EU and NATO also differ starkly among European TCCs with respect to the use of lethal force, a more open discussion needs to take place about national caveats and cultural differences in terms of willingness and capacities to use force on the one hand as well as the desirability and capacity of forceful action within UN operations on the other. European experiences in MINUSMA provide an important opportunity for such reflections – as do UN force commander reflections from their experiences with respect to the use of force should be drawn on.

Capacity-Building

Europeans have been heavily engaged in capacity-building during the last 12 years. While the transition strategy of NATO with respect to Afghanistan entails a heavy reliance on mentoring and capacity-building, the European Union has been strongly engaged in the build-up of the African Union's peacekeeping capacities. Problems remain in terms of duplication and implicit competition between national and multinational

approaches to capacity-building (particularly on the African continent). Here a stronger coordinating role by the UN could bring added value. Successful efforts by SHIRBRIG's (the Standby High Readiness Brigade for UN Operations) capacity-building programme towards the African Standby Force (ASF) have demonstrated the added value (and cost-effectiveness) of multinational approaches to African capacity-building. The UN and Europeans should engage in a stronger dialogue about potential common capacity-building initiatives. The recent efforts by the European Union to advance a harmonization of guidelines and standards related to mentoring and advising should act as a further incentive for a UN-EU-NATO-AU debate on capacity-building and mentoring.

Policing and SSR

"Civilian approaches" (in EU jargon) to peacekeeping and crisis management include the effective use of police forces and long-term approaches to Security Sector Reform (SSR). While the UN has reinforced its emphasis on policing and SSR within OROLSI, NATO and EU initiatives (within ISAF and CSDP respectively) provide important opportunities for cooperation, coordination and reinforcement. Yet, while SSR and police missions has become an important aspect of the EU's CSDP there have been long-standing and chronic shortages of resources. Police and SSR experts have to be seconded from member states, which themselves suffer from shortages. A reinforcement of the European Gendarmerie Force (EGF) based in Vicenza and increased cooperation with the UN's Standing Police Capacity (SPC) in Brindisi could act as a catalyst. On the SSR front, Slovakia's "Friends of SSR" initiative within the UN could serve as a stronger platform to bring together EU, NATO and UN experiences in this field.

Rapid Reaction

The outbreak of large-scale violence and resulting mass killings, such as most recently in the Central African Republic and South Sudan, often bring back discussions about rapid reaction and rapid deployment. Often, the UN has been criticized for in adequate reaction and deployment time – which can be traced back to both a cumbersome and drawn-out force generation process as well as the lack of an adequate "start-up" capacity to build-up force headquarters once a Security Council mandate has been given. European experiences during the last decade, however, highlight that rapid reaction proves not only to be a challenge for the UN system, but also for Europeans. Both the EU Battlegroups and the NATO Response Force (NRF) were launched with high ambitions and great expectations that had to be subsequently down-scaled. Current plans of a revamped NRF focus on a smaller scale (the so-called "spearhead force"). The UN's own institutional experience – the Standby High Readiness Brigade for UN Operations (SHIRBRIG – with 16 out of 23 member states and observers having been European) – fared only slightly better. Its biggest deployment was 1,300 troops strong: a Chapter VI mission in 2003 (UNMEE in Ethiopia/Ertirea). All rapid reaction tools share one problem: member states have the final say on the "green light" of their contributions and the force generation process is normally as cumbersome as in "non-rapid" contexts. A more workable solution could be a permanent "Rapidly deployable Mission Headquarters" within DPKO and with European contributions. Plans for this have existed since 2006 and a concerted UN-European push to achieve this goal could provide an important step forward.