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WHY EUROPE MUST STOP OUTSOURCING ITS SECURITY

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SUMMARY

The EU claims to be in the business of “crisis management” – ready if need be to make “robust” military interventions to control conflict, especially in its neighbourhood. In practice, it now prefers to “outsource” such interventions to others, notably the United Nations and African Union (AU), limiting itself to supporting roles. This is not just shabby; it also saps Europe’s influence in a world in which European interests and values are increasingly contested. And it places too great a burden on organisations such as the UN and AU.

Unless the EU rediscovers a willingness to bear the costs and risks of military operations to control conflict, Europe can expect ever-intensifying refugee pressure on its southern borders. Although military force will not help in Ukraine or the turmoil of the Middle East, the EU could make a big difference if it were prepared to do more in crisis management in Africa.

The EU could contribute to or complement UN or AU efforts in a variety of ways. Responding to the crisis in UN peacekeeping, Ban Ki-moon has ordered a review. New EU High Representative Federica Mogherini should do the same, involving outside experts in a stock-take of international efforts to control conflict to Europe’s south and commissioning specific proposals to get the EU back to playing a properly responsible security role.

The European Union’s defence project has lost its way. Launched in the late 1990s in the aftermath of the Balkan wars, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was meant to enable Europeans to undertake crisis-management operations without always having to rely on American leadership through NATO. It envisaged a broad spectrum of operations from advisory and reassurance tasks to the separation of warring factions by force. But the reality is that the “comprehensive approach” has become a smokescreen behind which money and advice substitute for the “early, rapid and, when necessary, robust intervention” that was the chief aim of the policy as originally conceived.¹

The European defence project appealed to a wide range of constituencies: Europhiles saw it as a further step in the Union’s political “coming of age” and emancipation from American tutelage; military types hoped that it would act as a spur to make good the gaps in European military capabilities exposed in the Balkans; industrialists saw it as an incentive to build and consolidate a stronger European defence industry and accompanying technological base; strategists saw it as an appropriate instrument for a greater European contribution to global security, both in the neighbourhood and further afield; and idealists saw it as a way to ensure that, next time Europe found itself watching crimes against humanity as in Rwanda, it would have the means to intervene.

¹ “A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy”, European Council, 12 December 2003, available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

Yet all these hopes have been more or less dashed. CSDP boosters can point to the fact that, today, the EU has as many as 17 ongoing operations from Afghanistan to Congo.² However, the reality is that most of them are civilian, not military; only a few are much more than symbolic; and almost all have encountered huge difficulties in eliciting contributions from the member states. Today's spread of CSDP engagement suggests Europe is ready to collectively respond to security crises with small-scale training and advisory activity but completely unready to get into anything that might involve combat (though a handful of member states do more on a national basis).

Of course, military force is not always, or even often, an appropriate part of the answer to security crises: it would be futile to complain about CSDP's irrelevance in the Ukraine crisis or in the turmoil of today's Middle East.³ But the Ebola epidemic in West Africa has cried out for deployment of the sort of logistic capabilities that CSDP would have been ideally placed to provide. And the initial stages of the ongoing crises in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) might almost have been designed for the rapid-response intervention for which EU battlegroups were created. On all these occasions, Europeans collectively preferred to sit on their hands and wait for others – France and the United Nations in the CAR and Mali; the United States, the United Kingdom, and the World Health Organization and other UN agencies in West Africa – to do the heavy lifting before making a late and limited “supporting” contribution.

There are several reasons for the reluctance of the EU member states to act in accordance with their declared intentions: economic woes; “intervention fatigue” – a widespread disenchantment with military interventions as it becomes clearer how little has been achieved at such great cost in Afghanistan as well as Iraq; and the perennial European temptation to free ride in security matters. American coat-tails may be less available than in the past, but there seems to be an increasing number of regional security organisations that, like the UN, can be encouraged to put themselves in the front line. Whether it is through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Mali, or the African Union (AU) in Somalia, the EU now prefers to outsource combat operations and confine its role to logistic, financial, and training support.

This may not be how CSDP was conceived – but it has obvious attractions as a strategy. But this brief argues that life is not so simple. The UN and other regional organisations, even if paid and trained, cannot cope by themselves – not least when, as in Mali, they are fighting Islamist extremists

in Europe's strategic hinterland. “Early, rapid and, where necessary, robust intervention” by high-capacity armed forces will often be a necessary complement or precursor – and need not involve repeating the mistakes of the past decade. And, not least because it is in their own interests, it sometimes really ought to be Europeans doing the intervening – preferably collectively, through the EU. The flawed “outsourcing” model should therefore be converted into a more durable partnership approach.

Don't write off interventionism

The concept of “liberal interventionism” was born some 20 years ago in response to Western inaction in the Balkans and Rwanda. One of its most thoughtful expositions was in a speech by British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Chicago during the Kosovo war in 1999.⁴ He argued that global interdependence meant that “We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not. [...] We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure.” The high water mark of interventionism was the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in 2005. It was, therefore, very much a by-product of that period of post-Cold War Western hegemony that, in the wake of the Great Recession, is already history.

Recent interventions in Africa suggest that France is still convinced of the need for interventionism. But even Paris has its limits: President François Hollande held back from intervening in Mali's civil war until January 2013, when Tuareg rebels and their Islamist allies threatened to seize the entire country; he refrained from getting involved in the slaughter in CAR for even longer, specifically refusing requests from the beleaguered government to intervene in late 2012. France only launched Operation Sangaris a year later, when the evidence of a “pre-genocidal” situation was overwhelming. Even then, French planners may have underestimated the complexity and viciousness of the conflict they faced.⁵

Elsewhere in Europe, however, the chaos that has followed interventions in Iraq and Libya (and may, alas, be expected to supervene in Afghanistan) has soured attitudes. The British parliament shocked the government by refusing to support the bombing of Syria in response to Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons in 2013. Germany, despite the efforts of the Federal President and new foreign and defence ministers to argue the case for a more active international role, remains deeply averse to foreign military engagement, especially in Africa. (Germany's particular

² For a map of CSDP missions, see “Ongoing Missions and Operations”, European External Action Service, October 2014, available at <http://www.eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/>.

³ Five European states – Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, and the Netherlands – have joined the international coalition's air campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq. Yet their value-add has been slight – the US has carried out 85 percent of the strikes in the Iraq theatre – while heightening the terror threat at home, described in late November by the British Home Secretary as “greater than it ever has been”. See John Aglionby and Aliya Ram, “Terror threat ‘greater than ever’, says Theresa May”, *Financial Times*, 24 November, available at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/11bad636-73d2-11e4-92bc-00144feabdco.html>.

⁴ “Doctrine of the International community”, Speech by Tony Blair at the Economic Club, Chicago, 24 April 1999, available at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.number10.gov.uk/Page1297>.

⁵ See Richard Gowan, “Diplomatic Fallout: For France's Hollande, African Interventions a Strategic Failure”, *World Politics Review*, 9 December 2013, available at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13430/diplomatic-fallout-for-france-s-hollande-african-interventions-a-strategic-failure>.

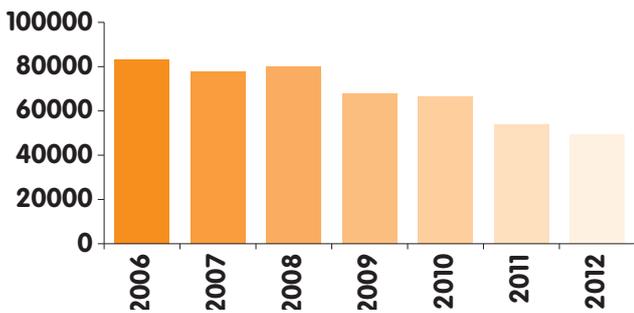
distaste for African interventions seems linked to suspicion of French neo-colonial machinations. They felt themselves manoeuvred by France into leading the 2006 EU operation in Congo, and seem privately to have vowed “never again”.)

The dominant European public view is that the military adventures of recent years have done more harm than good, both on the ground and in terms of the national interest (whether viewed from a security, an economic, or indeed a reputational standpoint). And, of course, there is some sense in this view. Too much of what has been done since the turn of the millennium has smacked of Western hubris and overreach. In Iraq and in Libya, an insufficient regard for international legality has left the West accused, not just by Russia and China but also by India, Brazil, and South Africa, of cloaking its regime-change agenda behind spurious proliferation or humanitarian concerns.

Even the intervention in Kosovo has left a legacy of internal division, with five EU member states still declining to recognise the new state, as well as providing Russian President Vladimir Putin with a handy pseudo-justification for his annexation of Crimea. Iraq and Afghanistan have undermined the West’s confidence in “nation building”. It is, therefore, unsurprising that European readiness to deploy armed forces for international peacekeeping efforts has sharply diminished. In 2006, EU member states had, on average, over 83,000 peacekeepers on operations; by 2012, the number was below 50,000, and it continues to fall (see figure 1).

Figure 1
EU Troops Deployed

Source: European Defence Agency



The danger, of course, is that with so much dirty bathwater to be got rid of, the baby gets thrown out too. Past failures should not be allowed to obscure past successes, such as the British intervention of 2000 in Sierra Leone and the CSDP’s very first operation in Macedonia in 2003 to disarm militia groups. Moreover, although the West’s actions in the Balkans in the 1990s (and subsequently) may have been controversial, as well as incomplete in terms of the evolution of several of the Balkan states involved, people are at least no longer killing each other. In similar fashion, as complements to the much more substantial stabilisation efforts of the UN, the EU’s repeated operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have assisted some gradual progress in

the right direction. And if intervention in Libya had been limited to its original purpose of preventing a massacre in Benghazi, it, too, would likely have been seen as a success.

So it does not follow that, because some interventions have been counter-productive in the past, all must be so in the future – especially if the lessons of past failure are taken to heart. The key is for politicians not to over-promise, and to explain that, although outside intervention can seldom be expected to “cure” conflict and instability, it may even if limited in aims and impact helpfully influence the course of the pathology.

War by proxy?

It is, anyway, misleading to suggest that Europeans have rejected interventionism as such. The more accurate truth is that they continue to recognise many situations in which outside intervention is both appropriate and necessary; they just do not want to do it themselves. Instead, EU member states have increasingly turned to the UN and AU to send soldiers and civilians to war zones from Darfur and Côte d’Ivoire to Somalia and Syria. Although these multilateral missions typically fall far below NATO standards in terms of personnel, equipment, and command-and-control systems, they have now become the standard international responses to crises in Europe’s near abroad.

The UN currently has over 100,000 soldiers and police officers and roughly 20,000 civilian staff worldwide at a cost of over \$8 billion. Virtually all of these are in Africa and the Middle East (the only significant UN mission elsewhere is in Haiti). The AU has over 20,000 troops in Somalia. Over the last two years, the AU and UN have been central to French-led efforts to stabilise both Mali and the CAR, compensating for the EU’s unwillingness to back up Paris with serious forces in both cases. In addition to these military forces, small teams of UN mediators are working along Europe’s flanks in Libya, Syria, and Yemen – although security concerns have limited their efforts.

This level of UN and AU activity was hardly imaginable just a decade ago. UN peacekeeping almost completely collapsed after the Balkan wars and Rwanda. The AU, founded in 2002, struggled badly when it deployed its first sizeable peace operation to Darfur in 2004. The fact that the two organisations have overcome these past failures is in part thanks to European financial support. EU member states pay two-fifths of the UN peacekeeping budget. The European Commission African Peace Facility has been a crucial source of funding to the AU’s missions over the last ten years, providing over €1 billion of funding, primarily for Darfur and Somalia.

More broadly, European governments have invested heavily – if not always efficiently – in training and equipping African troops to bear the peacekeeping burden on their continent. In strategic terms, both the UN and AU have provided

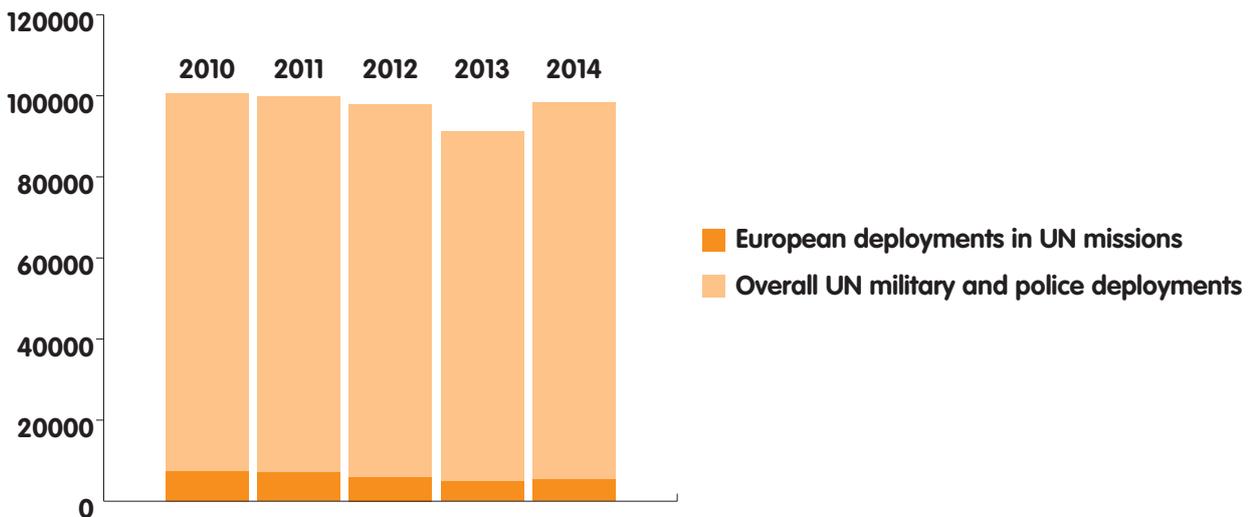
impressive returns on these European investments. In 2000 the Brahimi Report predicted that the UN would be able to field only one large-scale mission at a time; it is now managing six in Africa alone. A decade ago, analysts calculated that African countries could field only a combined total of 10,000 peacekeepers; they now have six times as many personnel in the field under AU or UN command.⁶

These hefty, long-term multilateral deployments have offered a framework for the EU's smaller, shorter-lived experiments in intervention. Military CSDP missions have deployed for short periods to pave the way for larger UN deployments (as in Chad) or get them out of trouble (as in Sierra Leone and the DRC). EU training teams are working alongside the UN in Mali and the AU in Somalia. When the UN sent a short-lived monitoring mission to Syria in 2012, the European External Action Service (EEAS) pulled together the armoured cars and communications kit necessary to speed up its deployment.

While boosting other nations' peacekeepers, most European governments and militaries have remained wary of putting large numbers of their own troops under UN command again. After an uptick associated with European bolstering of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) following Israel's 2006 invasion of Lebanon, European troop contributions to UN operations have more than halved, falling from around 13,000 in 2007 to under 6,000 today. In recent years, European soldiers and police officers have represented between 5% and 8% of total UN forces (see figure 2).

Figure 2
UN deployments

Source: UN peacekeeping website.
(Each year's figures are for 30 June. EU numbers include Croatia.)



Take Afghanistan out of the calculation, and France is the only European state to appear in SIPRI's list of the top ten contributors of troops to multilateral peace operations in 2013 – the others are all Asian or African.⁷ Major contributors to UN missions such as India insist that Europe's financial assistance does not compensate for its lack of troops in blue helmets – and threaten to do less themselves.

As NATO has drawn down in Afghanistan, there has been talk in some EU member state capitals of re-engaging in UN missions – and the Netherlands and Nordic countries have sent specialised units to Mali. Nonetheless, European planners typically assume that their future contributions to the UN will continue to involve niche assets, such as drones, rather than infantry battalions. These forms of cooperation point the way towards an era of “plug-and-play peace operations”, in which European governments can support other organisations' missions with specialised units, personnel, or kit rather than having to put together large-scale missions of its own.⁸

Others have even dubbed the joint AU-EU effort in Somalia – which also involves political and logistical support from the UN – “the EU's first proxy war”.⁹ The historical precedents for fighting wars by proxy are not wholly reassuring; paying German tribes to police the Rhine did not end well for the Roman Empire. But in today's world only a neo-colonialist would dispute the idea that the West should step back where possible so that international organisations and regional actors can step up. The issue is the pace and extent of such a transfer of responsibility – and how effectively it works. The EU's proxy wars may look effective and relatively cost-efficient from Brussels, but the reality on the ground is often much more ugly.

⁸ See Richard Gowan, “The Case for Cooperation in Crisis Management”, European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2012, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR59_CRISIS_MANAGEMENT_BRIEF_AW.pdf.

⁹ Edward Burke, “Europe's External Action Service: Ten steps towards a credible EU foreign policy”, Centre for European Reform, 4 July 2012, p. 3, available at <http://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/policy-brief/2012/europes-external-action-service-ten-steps-towards-credible-eu>.

⁶ Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Expanding Global Military Capacity for Humanitarian Intervention* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p. 71.

⁷ See *SIPRI Yearbook 2012* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2012), available at <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013/02>. Including Afghanistan, the UK and Italy also make the top ten.

The ugly reality of AU and UN missions

A good example is the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which has been fighting to roll back the Islamist al-Shabaab for almost a decade. It has received substantial financial aid from the EU (including European Commission funds) and the US. But by some estimates it has incurred 3,000 casualties in the fighting (African officials query this, but there are credible reports of over 70 Burundian troops dying in a single fire fight). And while al-Shabaab has lost major battles in the last three years, it is still far from defeated. In December 2014, the group killed over 30 civilians in the east of Kenya, a country that is a major troop contributor to the AU mission.

African forces also struggled to help restore order in Mali and CAR over the last two years. When France launched its attack in Mali in January 2013, regional powers were quick to join the fight, in contrast to the wary Europeans. But they were often profoundly ill prepared. Nigerian soldiers reportedly arrived with rations for just a few days and had to barter with locals for livestock. Chad has been reliably accused of deploying under-age troops.¹⁰ In CAR, a regional peacekeeping force effectively collapsed after the fall of the government in early 2013. Some units ended up selling protection services to wealthy local families; others almost certainly joined the country's Christian and Muslim militias in sectarian atrocities.

The UN has now taken over the peacekeeping lead in both cases, although French forces remain the most potent military actors in both. But the results have been mixed at best. The UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA), launched in mid-2013 in the wake of the French intervention, has suffered especially badly. African peacekeepers in the north of the country, inherited from the previous AU presence, remain poorly equipped: they have often had to ride between bases on open-topped pick-up trucks, leaving them easily vulnerable to ambushes and improvised explosive device attacks. Over 30 have died this year. UN patrols have also come under attack in CAR, and both missions remain far short of their planned strength.

Other UN forces along Europe's southern flank remain vulnerable to attack. One year ago, the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was caught off guard when the country collapsed into civil war. Many of its bases remain under de facto siege, with over 80,000 civilians sheltering in the compounds. To the north, the mission in Darfur – mandated after much political pressure from Europe and the US in 2007 – has been crippled by repeated attacks by pro-government militias. In the Middle East, the long-running peace operation on the Golan Heights (once a byword for sleepy, risk-free, old-school peacekeeping) has been plunged into crisis after Islamist rebels took many of its personnel hostage, driving it to the edge of collapse.

¹⁰ Lydia Lim, "Doubts linger over UN troops' preparedness to enter Mali", Inter Press Service, 5 July 2013, available at <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/07/doubts-linger-over-u-n-troops-preparedness-to-enter-mali/>.

Under pressure to get a grip, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced in June a comprehensive review of peace operations to address this "pivotal" moment in his organisation's history.¹¹ "UN launches policy process" is hardly big news. But there is a real sense amongst diplomats in New York that this review – currently being drafted by a panel led by East Timor's former president, José Ramos Horta – has to come up with something pretty good to stop the UN from sliding deeper into crisis.¹²

European officials are often snifty about the performance of AU and UN forces: French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian recently grouched that the UN had left a "void" in northern Mali by deploying too slowly.¹³ African and UN officials resent such criticisms: their peacekeepers may not be perfect, but many show great courage operating in hostile theatres like northern Mali with insufficient protection, and at least they are there, unlike most European armies. Le Drian can at least point to France's own losses in Mali and CAR in his defence. But most EU member states have avoided putting their own personnel on the line or actively manoeuvred to get them out of harm's way.

Europeans insist that they want to offer more operational support to UN and African peace operations under pressure, not just money. The UN's Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, is a regular invitee to EU defence ministers' informal meetings. The EEAS has developed strong working ties with their counterparts at the UN and in 2012 the two secretariats agreed a two-year Joint Plan of Action to streamline their cooperation. As part of this plan, UN officials outlined the capacities that they hoped EU countries could send them: engineers, medics, rapidly deployable headquarters, and rapid reaction units and other specialised units.

However, as Adam C. Smith, a peacekeeping expert who has analysed the European response, observes, "the plan did not represent 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."¹⁴ In April, the Political and Security Committee decided against responding to the UN collectively, leaving individual states to deal directly with New York. Some, like the Nordic countries, have done so, but, Smith concludes, "there is no coordinated and little sustained follow-up."¹⁵

¹¹ See "Peacekeeping at the Precipice: Is Everything Going Wrong for the UN?", Paper by Richard Gowan at the Challenges Forum, Beijing, 14–16 October, 2014, available at http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/peacekeeping_at_the_precipice_-_background_paper_beijing_30sept2014.pdf.

¹² See "Secretary-General's statement on appointment of High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations", United Nations, 31 October 2014, available at <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=8151>.

¹³ Adama Diarra, "France criticizes slow deployment of UN peacekeepers in Mali", Reuters, 27 October 2014, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/27/us-mali-france-idUSKBN0IG1O920141027>.

¹⁴ Adam C. Smith, "European Military Capabilities and UN Peace Operations: Strengthening the Partnership", Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, October 2014, p. 2, available at http://www.zif-berlin.org/fileadmin/uploads/analyse/dokumente/veroeffentlichungen/ZIF_Policy_Briefing_Adam_Smith_October_2014_ENG.pdf.

Recent crises have highlighted and exacerbated this lack of coordination. After Islamist militants seized a series of Filipino soldiers on the Golan Heights in early 2013, European governments including Austria and Croatia prudentially withdrew their units from the mission. Only a decision by Ireland to deploy a replacement contingent – and a big offer of troops from Fiji – kept the mission going. In August this year, another Filipino unit had to fight off an Islamist attack while Irish troops rushed to the rescue, successfully evacuating the besieged base. The Golan mission as a whole is now a token presence, relying on Israel to back it up if it faces more serious assaults.

A small group of EU member states have come forward with troops for the Mali mission, with the Netherlands in the lead. The Dutch have deployed intelligence officers, commandos, and – in a first for a UN mission – four Apache attack helicopters to add to its contingent's security. Denmark provided a C-130 cargo plane to ferry troops quickly around northern Mali, Norway has sent intelligence officers, and Sweden is planning to send over 200 troops in early 2015.

On paper, this is a good example of “plug-and-play” European military deployments boosting the UN. But, sadly, the flaws of the overall UN force – described by one veteran peacekeeping official as “the worst I have ever seen” – are too great for such a niche European force to offset.¹⁶ The Dutch Apaches and commandos have not been able to counter the Islamists' hit-and-run raids on lightly armed African units. European intelligence officers are still working out how to track events in a country riddled with organised criminal networks closely tied to the authorities. Some of their non-European counterparts are unfamiliar with how to put such high-end assets to work.

In the case of the CAR, the EU's support to the UN has had even less strategic impact. When the violence in CAR began to spiral out of control in late 2013, instigating the French intervention, the EU was split over how to react. The UK was sceptical of stumbling into a quagmire, so while British troops were on standby as part of the EU battlegroup system, London would not deploy this force.¹⁷ A number of EU member states were willing to offer small numbers of troops to a mission to assist the French but, apart from France itself, only Georgia was ready to pledge a full company (140 troops). Planners in Brussels hoped to get up to 1,000 troops on the ground, but in the event, “EUFOR RCA” only managed to put 700 personnel in the field in mid-2014. These troops confined themselves to securing the airport in the capital, Bangui, and some adjacent parts of the city. This was not a trivial task, as over 100,000 terrified citizens had fled to the airport area, but

while the EU tended to its small zone, sectarian clashes continued across the country. It is estimated that over a half a million of CAR's citizens are still displaced, while the UN is still deploying.

UN officials had higher hopes for the EU's role. Ban Ki-moon personally rang European leaders asking them to participate in EUFOR RCA. EEAS officials were originally optimistic that European contributors to EUFOR CAR would be prepared to transfer their contingents to UN command in late 2014. But just as EU member states lost interest in CAR as the Ukraine crisis peaked early in 2014, even those countries that did send some troops to Bangui quietly dropped any plans for long-term support to the UN. As of November 2014, there were fewer than 20 European soldiers serving with the UN mission in CAR (although a British diplomat filled the number two position on the civilian side of the mission).

If the EU's eventual deployment to Bangui under the CSDP banner was too slow and too small to make much of a difference, it is also unlikely to leave much of a legacy. The UN mission faces the challenge of maintaining order and starting the long work of restoring some semblance of normal life with very limited resources, mixed-quality troops, and little guarantee that the mission will remain even a second-order priority for the UN Security Council. Prior to the recent bout of conflict, the European Commission classified CAR as a “forgotten crisis”; it may, sadly, soon fall back into that category.

Why it is in the European interest to do more

It is in the European interest to do more. Generally speaking, if you have armed forces, it is beneficial to put them to use from time to time. Deployments are motivating and provide experience, including of inter-operating with others, as nothing else can. A demonstrated national readiness both to maintain effective military capabilities and to incur the risks and costs of operations is also good for deterrence; Vladimir Putin's recklessness in Ukraine has been encouraged at least in part by his view that Europeans have gone soft – in other words, by a failure of deterrence. As Walter Russell Mead has argued, “Europe's weakness and internal preoccupation has been a significant factor promoting President Putin's decision to move Russia down a path of confrontation with the West.”¹⁸

More broadly, in an increasingly contested world, when the apparent global dominance of the West's liberal values is now encountering serious pushback from authoritarian regimes from Moscow to Beijing to Cairo, Europeans can ill afford not to use of one of their best, and certainly most expensive, tools of international statecraft. Like it or not,

¹⁵ In 2014, the Italian presidency of the EU partnered with Germany and a group of research institutes (including the Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, EU Institute for Security Studies, International Peace Institute, and Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna) on a “EU-UN Partnerships Initiative” addressing the state of play after the Plan of Action. Information on the process, including a series of useful policy briefings, can be found at <http://www.euun2014.eu/>.

¹⁶ Private conversation, New York, November 2014.

¹⁷ The British have form here, having similarly refused to deploy their on-duty battlegroup when the UN appealed for emergency help in the DRC in 2008.

¹⁸ Walter Russell Mead, “The Risk of Nation-State Conflict”, *The American Interest*, 16 November 2014, available at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/11/16/the-risk-of-nation-state-conflict/>.

military affairs are still a dominant preoccupation of many, perhaps most, national leaders in today's turbulent world. A demonstrated military understanding and competence, not to mention military presence, are important attributes of any power that hopes to exercise global influence.¹⁹ Giving up on real military operations will also undermine efforts to bolster defence industries and technologies in Europe.

The problem for European leaders, however, is that such "realist" arguments are not much suited to Europe's current mood when it comes to making the case for any specific decision to send young men and women into harm's way. Unfortunately, humanitarian arguments cut equally little ice in the era of austerity. This is no doubt why European politicians still fall back on invoking the spectre of terrorism as the principal justification for any overseas deployment – despite the evidence from Afghanistan and now from the "Islamic State" that, whatever else fighting jihadis may achieve, it does not include increasing the safety of Europe's citizens.

Perhaps it is because the issue of immigration has now become so radioactive across the continent that European leaders fail to see, or choose not to talk up, one of the most urgent and compelling reasons to "contribute to global security", namely the enormous and growing refugee problem with which conflict in the Middle East and Africa is confronting Europe. "Frontline states", notably Italy and Greece, have been left more or less on their own to deal as best they can with the uncontrollable flows of desperate illegal migrants – and, when they can no longer sustain the effort, the collective European response prefers to concentrate on building a higher wall around the continent.

When Italy recently concluded that it could no longer afford to maintain its comprehensive search-and-rescue operation in Mediterranean waters (which has saved 160,000 ship-borne refugees in 2014 alone), the EU settled for replacing it with a modest "coastguard" effort – earning the rebuke from the Pope that "we cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast graveyard".²⁰ British (and no doubt other) ministers justified their reticence by arguing that too much life saving was a "pull factor" encouraging the refugee flow. They also murmured about their preference for tackling the problem closer to its source, in countries of origin and transit. And, of course, this last is potentially a fair point – or would be, if any European leader had any idea how to end the Syrian nightmare, or indeed the Libyan bad dream, and/or if Europe were really prepared to put its back into tackling the range of violent conflicts in northern and central Africa which are both enabling and fuelling so much of the refugee flow.

The problem is also likely to get worse. With fertility rates across most of the world now falling back to near "replacement levels" under the benign influence of rising prosperity, most experts expect the last great surge of population growth to occur in Africa. Over the next 15 years the global population may grow by around one billion – most of them in Africa. The outlook is not Malthusian: economic growth will help absorb and eventually cap this last explosion. Africa as a whole has been growing at some 5 percent a year over the last decade, and has all the natural resources (resources to which Europe will need reliable access) to sustain its escape from poverty if only it can achieve greater stability.

Here, then, is a ready-made, politically salient, and objectively compelling reason for Europeans to be ready, if needed, to deploy their expensive and under-utilised militaries in the cause of building stability and security to their south.

The EU's added value

In short, Europeans' resort to "outsourcing" to slide out of their crisis-management responsibilities is not good enough. But to say that Europe must do more is not, of course, the same as saying that it must be the EU that does it. We may lament the fact that the Polish/French/German battle group was not deployed to Mali, but Paris itself seems to have preferred to act unilaterally because it was quicker, safer, and more efficient. Similarly, as we have seen, other Europeans – notably the Dutch and some Nordics – have been content to provide specialist capabilities such as attack helicopters and intelligence direct to the UN force, on a "plug-and-play" basis. So what value does the EU add?

At the moment, the answer is: not much. But, if there were a revival of the will to make proper use of CSDP, a collective approach coordinated by the Brussels institutions – that is, a properly functioning CSDP – would have a number of advantages over ad hoc national efforts.

First, the EU is a good "brand". Whether fair or not, French military activity in Africa still carries that aura of the self-interested and ethically dubious machinations of an old colonial power conveyed by the term "Francafrique". Others – including other Europeans – then feel justified in keeping their distance; and the local resonances can be unhelpful, too. Many charges can be laid at the door of the EU, but not that of neo-colonialism.

Secondly, the EU should be able to draw on significant complementary resources, such as humanitarian aid, to match its military effort (in other words, the "comprehensive approach", properly done). It should be better placed than either individual member states or the UN to exploit such assets as the European Gendarmerie Force.

¹⁹ See Nick Witney, "How to Stop the Demilitarisation of Europe", European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2011, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR40_DEMILITARISATION_BRIEF_AW.pdf.

²⁰ Ian Traynor, "Pope Francis attacks EU over treatment of immigrants", *The Guardian*, 25 November 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/25/pope-francis-elderly-eu-lost-bearings>.

Thirdly, the EU should be able to facilitate rapid response by providing common funding for EU operations (this self-evidently desirable aim has so far eluded consensus) or at least readily available start-up finance.

Fourthly, the EU has the potential to be a useful “force generator” – that is, the agency that elicits and coordinates the contributions of a range of different force providers. Without a collective will to get an operation mounted, putting an EU badge on it will not prevent member states from dragging their feet. But once a critical mass of enthusiasm is achieved, peer pressure works to encourage laggards to step up. The question of coordination is vital, too – some central direction is needed to try to ensure that someone comes forward with such vital specialist capabilities as air mobility, or engineers, or reconnaissance and communications.

Fifthly, despite the recent reluctance of member states, the EU can provide the most efficient mechanism for discussion with the UN on how to use these capabilities to assist the blue helmets. A close dialogue with operational planners in Brussels should assist the UN in working out just what suite of European capabilities they can hope to mobilise in future – the more so if those European planners can then, in effect, act as agents of the UN in securing European contributions to plug the more specialist gaps.

The EU’s leaders say they want to do just that: the 100-odd priorities for this autumn’s UN General Assembly session identified by the European Council lead off with “support the reinforcement of EU-UN operational cooperation in crisis management” and “continuously enhance support to UN peacekeeping”.²¹ The trick now is to do it, in practice, on the ground.

A defibrillator for CSDP

This brief has argued that, if CSDP has a future, it will and should be, at least in the short- to medium-term, in operating in partnership with other international organisations, notably the UN. This will of course mean dealing with complexity, with flexibility. Deploying a rapid-reaction battle group with a view to handing off to slower-moving peacekeepers will remain an important option. But complementary EU efforts alongside a blue-helmeted force may sometimes be a better model – as may the “plug-and-play” provision of specialist units, whether provided on an EU or a national basis.

“Plug-and play” will also require a “mix-and-match” approach to the EU’s military capabilities, making creative use of the units and assets European governments are willing to deploy at any given moment rather than trying to devise complex rules and mechanisms that supposedly facilitate deployments but in reality obstruct them.

Among the reasons why the EU battle groups initiative has never achieved lift-off is the flawed premise that every member state should take part. The result has been composite groups, put together for political reasons, which are often simply not fit to fight. There needs to be greater recognition of the diversity of both attitudes and capabilities among the 28 member states. Not all want or are able to provide early-entry forces – just as not all can come up with top-quality field hospitals. What should matter is the commitment of the widest number of member states to contribute to CSDP operations in whatever way they best can.

In principle, there is no reason why a more operational and flexible CSDP, focused on cooperation with the UN and other international organisations, should not simply evolve along the lines we suggest. But in practice, we can be confident that nothing will change without a strong political impulse. For example, compare the fate of the 2012 EU/UN Joint Plan of Action, which, after much discussion between staffs, produced lots of planning but no action.

CSDP’s moribund culture requires the defibrillator. The new High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, should initiate a review of CSDP operations, with particular reference to the overall state of international peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts along Europe’s southern flank. Since defibrillation requires external energy, outside experts from the nascent EU Institute for Peace and established research hubs such as the International Crisis Group and Germany’s Centre for Peace Operations (ZIF) should be fully involved, and the UN and AU should be closely consulted.

As it happens, the timing could not be better to achieve this second condition. As we have noted, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has just launched a High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations to assess his own organisation’s performance and how to improve it. Diplomats and UN officials in New York are cautiously optimistic that this could offer fresh ideas on issues such as dealing with extremist groups and planning and launching more resilient missions. The AU is also considering a review exercise of its own to parallel and influence the UN effort. A simultaneous EU study could match these UN and AU exercises and generate ideas for more effective cross-organisational cooperation.

The involvement of outsiders would be necessary to ensure that the review did not duck hard questions about the quality and impact of CSDP missions in Africa and the Middle East, and the divisions within the EU over deployments and burden-sharing. It would also need to tackle some of the thornier inter-institutional issues, such as the lurking EU concerns about command-and-control when working with the UN. If it did so, it could both restart the pulse of CSDP military activity and precipitate the European reinforcement of UN and AU efforts on Europe’s southern flank that is so badly needed.

²¹ See “EU Priorities for the UN General Assembly 69th General Assembly”, European Union Delegation to the United Nations, 23 June 2014, available at http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_15238_en.htm.

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