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# Plug and Play

## Multinational Rotation Contributions for UN Peacekeeping Operations

Arthur Boutellis and John Karlsrud



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Arthur Boutellis and John Karlsrud

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

AMET	Aero Medical Evacuation Team
ASIFU	All-Source Information Fusion Unit
C2	Command and Control
C-34	Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations
COE	Contingent Owned Equipment
CSAR	Combat, Search and Rescue operations
CUH	Civilian Utility Helicopters
DFS	Department of Field Support
DM	Department of Management
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
EODs	Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialists
FGC	Force Generation Conference
FGS	Force Generation Service
ICM	Indicative Contribution Meeting
ISR	Intelligence/Information, Surveillance, Reconnaissance units
LOA	Letter of Assist
LSD	Logistics Support Division
MCS	Movement Control Section

MEC	Military Engineering Company
MEDEVAC	Medical evacuation
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Multinational Rotation Contribution
MTF	Maritime Task Force
MUH	Military Utility Helicopter
NSE	National Support Element
OLA	Office of Legal Affairs
OMA	Office of Military Affairs
PCRS	Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System
PD	Procurement Division (Department of Management)
PDV	Predeployment Visit
ROE	Rules of Engagement
SAR	Search and Rescue operations
SFGC	Strategic Force Generation and Capabilities Cell
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SOFs	Special Operations Forces
SUR	Statement of Unit Requirements
TA	Technical Arrangement
TCC	Troop-Contributing Country
UASs	Unmanned Aerial Systems
USG	Under Secretary-General



## Executive Summary

In 2016, Norway spearheaded the provision of multinational rotation contribution (MRC) of a C-130 transport plane, together with Belgium, Denmark, Portugal, and Sweden, lasting from January 2016 to December 2018. According to Hervé Ladsous, then Under Secretary-General (USG) for UN peacekeeping operations, speaking at the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in London on 8 September 2016, MRCs can be seen as a new and innovative partnership aimed at providing a predictable supply of niche capabilities to UN peace operations.<sup>1</sup>

MRCs marry the need for predictable provision of niche capabilities, conceptual continuity and strengthening the partnership for UN peace operations, with the limited availability of niche capabilities and enablers among troop-contributing countries (TCCs). The MRC concept capitalizes on already-existing close relations between partner countries and makes possible ‘plug and play’ contributions, with camp and maintenance infrastructure remaining on the ground while new TCCs rotate in. This enables greater flexibility in terms of the duration of the deployment, opening the door for contributions from member states that might otherwise not contribute due to the challenges of lengthy deployment expectations in UN peace operations, decreased defence budgets at home, parallel capability deployments to various situations, and the general strain on human resources in a continued environment of economic austerity. MRCs are likely to be conducted by countries that already cooperate militarily, and can thus also strengthen military cooperation, interoperability and field testing of niche capabilities.

In practical terms, the C-130 MRC consists of three components – the C-130 plane with flight crews, support staff, and the infrastructure on the ground. During deployment, Norway maintains the camp with a separate camp section of nine staff, while partner countries rotate their C-130s for an average of six months each, including flight crews, support staff, force protection, and in some cases national support elements (NSEs). For the UN, the increased transactional burden at the outset –

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<sup>1</sup> UN (2016) ‘London conference on UN peacekeeping sharpens focus on planning, pledges and performance’, *UN News Centre*, 8 September 2016.  
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54886#.WNkPBRmTLXM>.

having to negotiate agreements with several countries – is balanced by a significant decrease in deployment and redeployment costs when MRCs are deployed for longer periods. The added-value of MRCs – including gains on the logistics side – is not the same for all types of capabilities, and requires flexibility and ability to reform on the part of both the UN and member states.

## **Recommendations**

1. MRCs should include a significant infrastructure component (such as hangars in the case of aircraft and a camp, or a physical hospital in the case of medical contributions as well as a camp) provided by a lead nation or by the UN itself, and equipment and personnel rotating in and out should be readily plugged in/plugged out (i.e. compatible from one partner country to another).
2. Early planning and coordination of MRCs based on a Statement of Unit Requirement (SUR) prepared by the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) and good knowledge of operational and technical capabilities (and possible variations) offered by partner countries, including rotation durations and operational limitations, are essential for the UN to make informed decisions and avoid operational gaps between rotations.
3. Longer rotations (at least six months) of each partner country are desirable, and the MRC countries should agree to repeat the full rotation if the UN mission on the ground continues beyond the initial time commitment.
4. Regional organizations/groups like the EU, MERCOSUR and ECOWAS or small like-minded contributing countries should consider assembling an MRC as a single sustainable contribution, and propose it to the UN as a niche-capability package.
5. Predeployment visits (PDVs) are important for all TCCs involved in an MRC even if they have advanced military capabilities, because these visits are not only about equipment but also concern sensitizing, building relationship and mutual understanding between the UN and TCCs.
6. Attitude matters, and MRCs should be seen by TCCs as a way to support a UN mission with needed capabilities in a ‘one-mission’ spirit (avoiding a ‘green vs white’ or ‘military vs civilian’ assets language and mentality); the ongoing review

of the current UN policy for Command and Control (C2) should ideally help bridge positions on this issue.

7. MOU/LOA negotiation processes should be mainstreamed; it would be desirable to develop a 'joint negotiation model' whereby MRC partner countries could negotiate technical and operational capabilities (based in the SUR) as one with the UN, to limit transaction costs – however, still signing separate MOUs/ and LOAs with the UN, as these are bilateral contractual (including financial) arrangements agreed upon and signed by the UN and each individual TCC.
8. The UN should consider playing a greater role in 'match-making' TCCs into MRCs by identifying lead countries – which can in turn help the UN bring on board additional MRC partner countries – and making the force generation process more transparent. UN personnel capacities (OMA and DFS) should be adjusted accordingly.
9. A case-by-case approach to MRCs should be adopted. MRCs should be considered only in instances where the specific military capability could not have been generated through other means for a longer period (as was the case for the C-130 in MINUSMA);
10. A thorough and honest cost-benefit analysis of C-130 MRC should be conducted, comparing the MRC model with a similar contribution by one TCC only, and the option of a commercial aircraft.
11. Other possible MRC models should be explored, such as using TCC-provided or UN-procured infrastructure and equipment and rotating military personnel only from partner countries, and TCC interest in such alternative models should be assessed.

# Introduction

In an October 2016 briefing to the UN Security Council, Under Secretary-General (USG) for Field Support Atul Khare stated:

...modern peacekeeping operations like MINUSMA demand a range of new or stronger capabilities. To this end we have been working to put forward innovative solutions to enhance our capabilities. We continue to call on Member States to consider becoming 'COE contributing countries'; contributing to joint battalions; and/or partnering directly with troop and police contributing countries to provide the required equipment. One example of an innovative approach to ensuring the required capabilities is the collaboration between Norway, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal and Sweden who have jointly agreed to provide a C-130 aviation unit to MINUSMA through a mutually agreed multinational rotation concept. This will guarantee the continuous provision of this very critical air asset to MINUSMA for a period of approximately 2 years.<sup>2</sup>

In January 2016, Norway deployed a C-130 military transport aircraft to the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for an initial period of six months. Given the number of attacks on patrols and logistics convoys of MINUSMA, which has been called 'the world's most dangerous U.N. mission',<sup>3</sup> a military transport aircraft like the C-130 is considered a critical enabler to the UN mission, whose ability to operate safely and carry out its mandate has often been limited by the lack of air assets. From the beginning of the mission in July 2013, European troop-contributing countries (TCCs) have provided military aircraft (C-130s and smaller C-160s and C-295s) but for relatively short periods and with little predictability for the UN.<sup>4</sup> The difference with the 2016 deployment

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<sup>2</sup> UN (2016) 'Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in Mali – Statement by USG Atul Khare', 7 October 2016.  
<https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/briefing-security-council-situation-mali-statement-usg-atul-khare>.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Sieff (2017) 'The world's most dangerous U.N. mission', *The Washington Post*, 17 February 2017.  
[http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2017/02/17/the-worlds-deadliest-u-n-peacekeeping-mission/?hpid=hp\\_hp-headlines&wpisrc=nl\\_headlines&wpmm=1](http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2017/02/17/the-worlds-deadliest-u-n-peacekeeping-mission/?hpid=hp_hp-headlines&wpisrc=nl_headlines&wpmm=1).

<sup>4</sup> Sweden cancelled its planned deployment in 2013, and Ghana has been contributing one of its two CASA C-295 aircrafts to MINUSMA since the end of 2014 but on a permanent basis. See Marcel Burger (2013) 'Sweden cancels Mali C-130', *Airheadsfly.com*, 14 September 2013.  
<http://airheadsfly.com/2013/09/14/sweden-cancels-mali-c-130/>; and Emmanuel K. Dogbevi (2015) 'Ghana deploys C295 transport aircraft to support UN in Mali', *Ghana Business News*, 10 January 2015.

of a C-130 by Norway was that it would be part of a multinational rotation contribution (MRC) initiated by Norway, followed by Portugal, Denmark, Sweden and Belgium.

While Portugal and Denmark already deployed military air assets to MINUSMA between 2013 and 2015, there had been gaps between deployments, considerable variation in the capability provided, and little predictability for MINUSMA. The deployment of a predictable multinational contribution of a C-130 was thus very welcome.<sup>5</sup> The MRC enables the deployment of limited high-end capabilities in scarce supply, and opens the way for several contribution cycles, as the maintenance of planes and equipment can be done back home, and the crews, logistical support staff and national support elements (NSEs)<sup>6</sup> in some cases have time for rest and recuperation between deployments. Conceptual continuity increases the effect and efficiency of the capability deployed, yielding more flight hours for the operation. For some TCC governments, parliaments and ministries of defence, such time-bound short-term deployments to UN peacekeeping missions are also more politically acceptable.<sup>7</sup> From the perspective of TCCs, the MRC played an important role in reassuring these relatively small TCCs that they each had an exit strategy provided by the next rotation. Despite the initial legal, administrative, and practical/operational challenges with this new type of multinational contribution, both the UN and TCCs involved have praised the initiative as an innovative approach to peacekeeping contributions.

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<https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2015/01/10/ghana-deploys-c295-transport-aircraft-to-support-un-in-mali/>.

<sup>5</sup> With limited variation in capability between the planes provided by different TCCs.

<sup>6</sup> NSEs are composed of support staff not covered by the SUR, but that the TCC deems required to deploy together with the capability. This can include logistics, intelligence, technical support and other types of officers. However, there are some limitations as to how NSEs can be used, and contributing countries often point out that they do not get UN medals. See UN (2015) *DPKO/DFS National Support Element*. New York: United Nations.  
<http://dag.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/387380/2015.17%20National%20Support%20Element%20Policy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that different TCCs have different national motivations for contributing to UN peacekeeping, and while European TCCs may see an interest in contributing air assets over shorter periods, other TCCs such as Ghana in the case of MINUSMA, may see a national interest in providing a military aircraft over a longer period in Mali – for various reasons, including regional security considerations and the fact that crews may get more flying hours while deployed in UN peacekeeping missions. See country profiles on <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org>.

MINUSMA is the only UN peacekeeping operation in Africa with significant contributions by Western member states. Because of the asymmetric threat situation, the operation needs advanced and niche capabilities, several of which only a few TCCs are able to contribute. For many member states, MINUSMA is a prism of what may be facing UN peace operations in the future, and innovative approaches there could be replicated in other and future operations.

The present study looks at the lessons from the C-130 MRC in MINUSMA specifically from the perspectives of the TCCs and the UN (Secretariat and field missions) respectively. It then analyses the broader applicability of MRCs for various peacekeeping capabilities and the opportunities and challenges MRCs involve as a new modality for member-state contributions to UN peacekeeping. Finally, it offers recommendations for overcoming some of the current legal, administrative, and practical/operational obstacles to realizing the potential of such MRCs as a worthwhile and sustainable model, and examines broader considerations for UN force generation. This should be seen as a preliminary study, as only two MRC partners (Norway and Portugal) had completed their rotations at the time of the study. A follow-on lessons-learned study should be envisaged at the end of 2018, when all partners will have completed one rotation.

## Early lessons from the C-130 multinational rotation contribution to MINUSMA/Mali

### Why and how it came about

Norway has been part of MINUSMA almost since its inception in July 2013.<sup>8</sup> Norway established ‘Camp Bifrost’<sup>9</sup> for the All-Source Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) in January 2014 near the airport in the Malian capital, Bamako, and initially contributed about 20 of the 80 officers who comprised the ASIFU.<sup>10</sup> When the TCC contribution of officers to the ASIFU came to an end in November 2015, Norway was looking for options to continue its engagement in Mali. The decision to contribute a C-130 transport plane for six months was made official by Prime Minister Erna Solberg at the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping held on 28 September 2015 (the ‘Obama Summit’) at the margins of the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>11</sup>

Before the summit, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had reached out to Prime Minister Erna Solberg and asked whether Norway would consider extending its deployment from six to ten months, to which Norway agreed. Norway deployed the C-130 in January 2016. Although the pledge of the C-130 was initially conceived as an individual member-state contribution, Norway soon started to think about how to ensure that the C-130 capability gap in MINUSMA could be covered for a longer period. The idea of providing the C-130 in partnership with other member states was initially conceptualized at the Ministry of Defence in

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<sup>8</sup> Norway initiated its contribution with four staff officers in September 2013, and expanded this contribution as the ASIFU was set up. Norwegian Defence (2017) ‘Mali’. <https://forsvaret.no/fakta/aktivitet/internasjonale-operasjoner/Mali>.

<sup>9</sup> Bifrost is the rainbow bridge between Earth and the world of the gods in Norse mythology.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the ASIFU, see Alexandra Novosseloff and Olga Abilova (2016) *Demystifying Intelligence in UN Peace Operations: Toward an Organizational Doctrine*. New York: International Peace Institute. For more on Norway’s contribution to MINUSMA and more in general to UN peacekeeping, see John Karlsrud and Kari Osland (2016) ‘Between self-interest and solidarity: Norway’s return to UN Peacekeeping?’ *International Peacekeeping*, 23 (5): 784–803.

<sup>11</sup> UN (2015) ‘Norway: H.E. Mrs. Erna Solberg, Prime Minister. 30 September 2015 (70<sup>th</sup> Session).’ *UN General Assembly* [Video] <https://gadebate.un.org/en/70/norway>.

Oslo in February 2015. Norway consulted informally with traditionally like-minded Scandinavian partner countries in the NORDEFECO partnership, to gauge their interest. Portugal was also contacted, as it had already signalled its willingness to the UN to provide a C-130 to MINUSMA.

Interest was considerable, and after only a few weeks Portugal, Denmark and Sweden informally agreed to follow Norway as part of the multinational rotation contribution. Belgium joined the partnership only weeks later.<sup>12</sup> Both Denmark and Portugal had already contributed a military transport aircraft to MINUSMA before 2016, but not as part of the MRC. At their first meeting in March 2016, the partners agreed to send a joint Letter of Intent to the UN, outlining their proposal. Technical agreements between Norway and the other partners were developed in the following months; and in June 2016, the joint Letter of Intent was formally submitted by the Permanent Delegations of the MRC and received by the UN, jointly by USG Hervé Ladsous (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) and USG Atul Khare (Department of Field Support).<sup>13</sup> However, there had been informal talks between Norway and the UN about this MRC arrangement throughout the process. Then came the negotiations on Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) and Letters of Assists (LOAs) in New York between each of the partner countries and the UN.

### **Norwegian lead and camp management**

A determining selling-point in getting the partner countries to join the MRC was the fact that Norway would continue to provide the support infrastructure in the form of a camp and its management (accommodation for staff, canteen, staff for camp maintenance, etc.) as well as the hangar for the aircraft throughout the rotations, making it easier for other contributing countries to rotate their C-130 aircraft and crew(s), the maintenance equipment that comes with the plane, a small force protection unit for the camp and the aircraft, and medical support elements. The fact that Norway in a matter of weeks could fill a capability gap that MINUSMA had been struggling to fill for a long time shows the attractiveness of the 'plug and play' approach. The standards and rapidity with which Norway was able to prepare for the deployment of

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<sup>12</sup> All European TCCs and members of NATO, with the exception of Sweden, which is not formally a NATO member but whose military operates according to NATO standards.

<sup>13</sup> Norwegian Government (2016) 'New Norwegian led rotation in Mali for transport aircraft', *Government.no*, 20 June 2016.  
<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/new-norwegian-led-rotation-in-mali-for-transport-aircraft/id2505238/>.

its equipment to the mission was also considered a best practice.<sup>14</sup> While providing and maintaining basic infrastructure like a camp and a hangar is not a very prestigious thing for a TCC to do (without another component to its contribution providing visibility), it has proven essential for the MRC. This was made possible because the same hangar could be used for the different C-130s aircrafts, and the same tent accommodation and canteen (managed by Norway) could be used by successive TCC troops. Also, the MRC was a generally cost-efficient arrangement for the UN as well as the partner countries, significantly lowering the deployment and redeployment costs of each deployment, as the sunk costs of deploying and establishing the camp were spread out over a longer period and not repeated for each rotation.<sup>15</sup> Some MRC partner countries indicated that it could have been useful to have the force protection component as part of the camp management, instead of each country having to bring its own as part of the C-130 rotation.

### **C-130 standards and capabilities**

What made the MRC workable is the fact that C-130 military transport aircrafts are similar in configuration and size. That said, the TCCs contributing to the MRC brought slightly different C-130 models (C-130J Super Hercules for Norway, Denmark and Sweden; the C-130H Hercules for Portugal and Belgium). There have also been variations in the number of crews that the TCCs have brought, allowing more flying hours and night flights in the case of some TCCs, whereas others could only fly during the day because there was only one crew, who needed to rest at night. Different C-130 aircrafts also differ in their loading capacities, leading to variations in the amounts of goods and people that can be transported, as well as different tactical capabilities as to night-vision capability (NVG), tactical landing and take-off, aerial delivery, etc. But in the end, the MRC has made possible a sustained and predictable

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<sup>14</sup> The Movement Control Section (MCS) of DFS's Logistics Support Division (LSD) coordinates transportation for deployment, rotation and repatriation. The normal mode of transport for personnel is by air, and for equipment by mission support is by sea. The UN provides transportation to/from the mission area for TCC personnel upon deployment, rotation and repatriation and for COE upon deployment and repatriation only. In coordination with the UN, TCCs may provide this service via a Letter of Assist.

<sup>15</sup> That same camp and canteen infrastructure had previously been deployed by Norway in Afghanistan as part of ISAF operations; it had been maintained and repackaged in Norway before being redeployed to Mali. The tented camp was characterized as 'revolutionary' by former Assistant Secretary-General Anthony Banbury of the Department of Field Support when he visited the camp shortly after its establishment. It is durable, comfortable and cost-effective compared to the standard hard-wall accommodation in UN peacekeeping operations.

presence of a C-130 capability in the mission; and, as one interviewee put it: ‘there was no alternative to the rotational arrangement.’

### Rotations between TCCs

The rotation partners have committed to deployments of approx. six months, with the exception of Norway’s initial ten-month deployment. During rotations, additional camp capacity is needed, for at least one week per rotation between nations, to accommodate outgoing and incoming troops in parallel. The same goes for crew rotations within one country’s deployment, although this has required less extra space. The rotations also create temporary and insignificant capability gaps: the C-130 is non-operational for a few days as it carries out initial test flights, and will not operate at full capacity at the beginning and at the end of a rotation as it prepares to leave. However, our UN interlocutors did not see this as a significant challenge as long as they could account and plan for this well in advance. Thus far, C-130s deployed to MINUSMA have been filling the hours agreed in the MOUs/LOAs with the UN.

Country	Start	End
Norway	January 2016	November 2016
Portugal	November 2016	May 2017
Denmark	May 2017	November 2017
Sweden	November 2017	May 2018
Belgium	May 2018	November 2018

### Legal and financial aspects

Entering into agreements with the UN can be a lengthy process – especially when they involve presenting a new concept to the UN like the rotational system, and/or when TCCs involved may be new to the UN force generation process. The MRC has thus challenged many established ways of doing business.

Contributions of assets such as C-130s and personnel to peacekeeping are regulated by MOUs and LOAs. The MOU is a standard document approved by the General Assembly for typical capability contributions such as a C-130 and is not negotiated per se. What is negotiated are the annexes (B and C) to the MOU which relate to Contingent Owned Equipment (COE) – major equipment and self-sustainment. In addition to negotiating the annexes of the MOU, the TCCs also conclude LOAs with the UN. LOAs are support documents to the MOUs, including more specific provisions subject to negotiation between the TCC and the UN. Notably, these specify the number of flying hours that the UN will reimburse, what rules of engagement apply to the forces, what the status of personnel deployed is and the number of

military personnel for which a standard contribution will be reimbursed based on the Statement of Unit Requirements (SUR) agreed upon by member states in the COE Working Group.<sup>16</sup>

The reimbursement rates for military personnel attached to the C-130 unit are set, and governed by the standard troop-reimbursement rates negotiated every third year. The UN Department of Field Support (DFS) is responsible and accountable for negotiating the LOA and MOU, including operational, technical and financial aspects. The Field Budget and Finance Division (FBFD) plays an important role in the negotiations; both the MOU and the LOA are signed by the USG DFS or his/her designate, although acceptance of a TCC pledge may be done by the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) prior to the MOU/LOA negotiation. Reimbursement rates are negotiated in parallel between DFS and the TCC, with the support of the Department of Management (DM) Procurement Division (PD) (i.e. the rates are set, but how many kitchens, ablution, office, etc., are to be reimbursed is negotiated).

The MRC, as a new type of TCC contribution to UN peacekeeping operations, came with specific needs and brought some challenges. As mentioned, the TCCs involved in the MRC negotiated and signed MOUs/LOAs separately with DFS to enable reimbursement for the C-130 and the personnel (crew as well as force protection and medical support – other than NSEs, which size is negotiated as well but is not reimbursed by the UN). This was partly because each TCC brought slightly different aircraft models and crew numbers.

When Norway first deployed its C-130 to MINUSMA, the SUR included a total troop number of 55 personnel, but Norway negotiated this number up to 66 personnel. When it completed its C-130 rotation, Norway then negotiated a separate MOU/LOA (as of May 2017 not yet signed) with DFS for the camp it left behind to support the rotational partners consisting of nine camp management personnel, and a series of TAs with each of the partner countries of the MRC so that their troops could use the camp provided by Norway, making possible cost-sharing for the camp management/sustainment. At the time, a SUR for a stand-alone camp section did not exist separately, only as part of the deployment of a contingent. Initially the UN had been against negotiating a separate MoU for camp management because ‘it had never been done before’ and therefore it did not exist in the COE Manual.

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<sup>16</sup> The COE Working Group meets in New York every three years, most recently in January 2017. See UN (2017) *2017 Working Group on Contingent-Owned Equipment*. New York: United Nations.  
<http://www.un.org/en/fieldsupport/events/coewg2017/>.

However, in the end OMA managed to create a new SUR in the COE Manual for a 'Camp section' (nine people to support running of the camp) to fit the request from Norway. This led to an overall total of 75 personnel for the combined package (66 for the C-130 and nine for the camp). Although this increase was well understood by the UN, it points to the need to plan for the lead-nation infrastructure and camp-maintenance dimension of an MRC in advance, as well as the need for some flexibility on the part of the UN, in some cases being willing to adjust the SUR based on the operational concept.

Norway faced a special challenge after deploying its C-130 to Mali: the aircraft was grounded for ten days, because the MOU/LOA had not yet been finalized and thus not signed, and MINUSMA would (initially) not let it fly until this was done. The LOA negotiation process had been delayed by discussions on a clause stating that the aircraft should expect to have to fly to neighbouring countries for logistical and medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) purposes. Norway contested this clause as it had concerns about the rules of engagement (ROEs) and the legal status of the Norwegian troops if asked to fly to Mali's neighbouring countries in the absence of Status of Forces agreements (SOFAs). Due to Norway's opposition to this clause, the UN Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) had to be brought to the table to discuss an amendment to the standard LOA the UN had been using. In the end, the clause was removed as per Norway's request and after intervention from the USG DPKO, with Norway agreeing to review such requests on a case-by-case basis.<sup>17</sup>

Also, as the LOAs included internationally legally binding language, it had to be approved by Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not only the Ministry of Defence, which delayed the process as well. The result was that the LOA was signed long after being successfully negotiated and the C-130 and personnel had been deployed. In the end and after the intervention of the senior leadership of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the DFS, the C-130 was permitted to fly even though the LOA still had not been signed. In fact, the LOA was not signed until four months after the C-130 was deployed to Mali. Surprisingly perhaps, this is a challenge that many other TCCs face – up to 50% of LOAs are signed after deployment, according to one of our interlocutors.

If and when mission-specific amendments to the LOA are introduced that vary significantly from the standard LOA, particularly in terms of ROEs, SOFA, etc., then the OLA should be brought into the negotiation

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<sup>17</sup> Norway and the UN ultimately agreed to the following text in the LOA: 'any services outside MINUSMA AOR will be subject to case-by-case approval by the Norwegian authorities'.

process, as was the case with Norway. However, involving the OLA in more of the LOA negotiations would require additional staffing capacity. Given the current limited capacity of the OLA, the UN encourages TCCs to stick as much as possible to existing LOA templates. Also, several interviewees highlighted the variation in member states' approaches to such negotiations – with some bringing in large teams of military, legal (international law as well as mercantile law) and administrative experts, and with some more experienced with MOU/LOA negotiations negotiating better flying hours or slightly better reimbursement rates. In the case of the C-130 MRC, the fact that all partner countries requested the same reimbursement rate made it easier for the UN.

In sum, the transactional costs of the MRC are significantly higher for the UN as well as for the MRC lead nation, as the UN ends up negotiating separate MOUs and LOAs with each of the partner countries involved, as well as for the infrastructure component, to be able to muster a capability that normally only one or maximum two countries may provide for the same duration or longer. However, the costs diminish for the next nation that negotiates and enters into an agreement with the UN, since the lead nation has 'paved' the way. Denmark, the third partner in the C-130 MRC, used the MOU/LOA developed by Norway as a starting point; it also had prior MOU/LOA negotiation experience from earlier deployment with MINUSMA (before the MRC), which made the negotiation process with the UN much easier and faster. This shows that it is likely that the transactional costs will be high at the outset of an MRC, but should decrease as the partners rotate, and even more if a second full rotation of the MRC countries follows the first one (with the option of expanding the number of partner countries as well). This holds true in general as a TCC gets better acquainted with UN processes for MOU/LOA and the UN better understands the specific needs of certain TCCs. TCCs seconding officers to the Office of Military Affairs in New York also helps in this mutual learning process.

### **Other operational considerations in the field mission**

Interviews in Mali shed light on a range of issues, many of which are not specific to the MRC but which the authors deem important to capture in this study. While the C-130 MRC has been welcomed in MINUSMA, it was indicated that some misunderstandings could have been avoided if predeployment visits (PDVs) to the C-130 MRC partner countries had been undertaken. Here the assumption was that because these were advanced Europeans TCCs, PDVs would not be needed – whereas, TCCs like El Salvador were subject to a PDV before its military attack helicopters were deployed to MINUSMA in Timbuktu. However, interlocutors in MINUSMA indicated that PDVs could have helped in

building relations of trust and mutual understanding between the UN and the TCCs, relations that were missing at the beginning of the C-130 MRC deployment. Similarly, another interviewee from the Norwegian Armed Forces indicated that a PDV should have been carried out to enable better dialogue with the UN, to build relationships between Norwegian officers and UN officials and thus simplify or avoid some delays in paperwork later on. However, budgetary consideration also factored into MINUSMA's decision for the UN not to do PDVs to certain TCCs.

Some of the main criticism of European TCCs in general has been the lack of understanding of the specific UN context, including civilian–military relations (particularly as regards aviation, and the fact that there is no ‘green fleet’ versus ‘white fleet’<sup>18</sup> but a common UN fleet that is used to carry out both military and civilian tasks in support of the mandate) within an integrated UN mission and the relationship with a sovereign host country which controls its airports. This created considerable frustration among the MRC TCCs, as well as the UN mission. It was described as a certain ‘NATO arrogance’ that was later overcome, particularly as the second and third partner countries of the MRC rotated in after assessment visits to the UN mission on the ground. Attitude matters – and MRCs should be seen by TCCs as a way to support a UN mission with needed capabilities in a ‘one-mission’ spirit. While various types of aircraft deployed as part of the MRCs by the different partner countries had slightly different capabilities, the UN mission sometimes described the most important capability as the willingness of the C-130 crew to try to understand and fulfil the needs of the mission as a whole.

While none of the TCCs in the C-130 MRC have formal caveats (that would entail a formal document sent by the TCC to NY and/or attached to MOU/LOA), some TCCs have been reluctant to take operational risks despite the military capabilities of their aircraft – sometimes using the ‘red card’, which essentially means that the senior national representative ‘holds the authority to veto on given missions/tasks according to national directives.’<sup>19</sup> This reflects the fact that, in particular, certain European TCCs still do not trust the UN on the ground

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<sup>18</sup> Although all aircrafts, including military ones, are to be painted white in a UN mission, several TCCs in MINUSMA have refused to repaint their aircrafts white – because of camouflage with a radar-absorbent paint and cost considerations – despite UN requirements.

<sup>19</sup> NATO (2016) *NATO Standard AJP-3.3. Allied Joint Doctrine for Air and Space Operations*. Edition B Version 1 April 2016. Brussels: NATO Standardization Office (NSO): pp. 2–3. <https://www.japcc.org/wp-content/uploads/AJP-3.3-EDB-V1-E.pdf>.

in general, especially as regards providing an accurate security picture.<sup>20</sup> The scepticism of some TCCs towards UN C2 rules can have a great impact, not only operationally but also financially, as it could result in additional expenses on commercial assets that are willing to 'do the job' where some TCCs may be unwilling – for instance, night-time MEDEVACs. Moreover, the pressures on the UN to cut costs, also in aviation, tend to push it towards commercial options.

Some of the TCCs involved in the MRC have also complained that their aircraft have been used too much for civilian tasks (such as transporting cargo and personnel) instead of military tasks, which is a recurrent complaint concerning military aircraft across UN missions. In fact, this reflects the reality of UN integrated missions: they are very different in nature from NATO-type military operations, as a significant part of such operations is civilian in nature. Unfortunately, the message these TCCs may send back to their capitals is that their military capabilities are being managed by 'UN accountants' – because, in UN missions, keeping within budget is a key concern. There is thus ample scope for organizational learning for both the UN and European TCCs, in identifying and implementing mutually acceptable solutions, perhaps also through the ongoing review of the policy for Authority, Command and Control in UN peacekeeping operations.

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<sup>20</sup> This even though the ASIFU has, until now, been composed solely of European troops.

## Broader applicability of MRCs

The added value of MRCs to the UN will be highest where the capabilities are identical or most similar, where there is a longer-term commitment to sustaining mission capability (with the possibility of partner countries rotating multiple times) and where the lead country provides a significant infrastructure/support element likely to remain throughout the course of the MRC. The UN is also likely to consider only such MRCs in the case of niche and/or high-end military capabilities, which it is not able to generate from one single TCC for a longer time. In such areas, MRCs have the potential to provide UN missions with predictable and sustainable solutions.

### Applicability to different capabilities

#### **Fixed-wing aircraft**

Fixed-wing military aircraft such as C-130s are well-suited for MRCs, as they are fairly standard and can be rotated, with the crew using similar infrastructure (camp and hangars) on the ground. While the process of generating and negotiating MOU/LOAs for MRCs could be streamlined and improved, smaller TCCs with relevant fixed-wing capabilities can see a real benefit in contributing as part of an MRC to deploy for shorter periods, knowing that another TCC will be taking over. Short deployments do not deplete the limited specialized capacity of pilots and planes at home, and can contribute to organizational learning in terms of experiencing different mission environments and climates. Moreover, they entail predictable and limited financial, political and organizational costs. The UN sees value in such MRCs if they make it easier to generate capabilities that TCCs would not otherwise provide (and/or to bring on board 'new' TCCs), on a continuing basis and for a longer period than any single TCC would. Currently there are only three military aircraft in all UN missions (two in MINUSMA and one in the UN stabilization mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO)), but, as it is becoming increasingly difficult to get the commercial equivalent of the C-130 (called L-100 Hercules), UN demand for such fixed-wing military aircraft may increase in the future.

#### **Rotary-wing aircraft**

Air assets, particularly Military Utility Helicopters (MUHs) and military attack helicopters, are key enablers for many UN peacekeeping missions. They serve as force multipliers, but the UN has been

chronically unable to generate sufficient numbers of such assets to meet the force requirements of all its peace operations. Many TCCs are not capable of providing important military capabilities required by the SUR, whereas commercial vendors have been able to, especially as regards night-vision and MEDEVAC capabilities. It is largely Civilian Utility Helicopters (CUHs) that have been used, but they cannot cover all functions of the MUHs,<sup>21</sup> and military attack helicopters cannot be acquired by the UN under commercial contracts. The 2010 Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) noted the need for greater MUH contributions by TCCs, for the first time linking this to the review of the reimbursement system.<sup>22</sup> But despite attempts at incentivizing MUHs (including through a revised LOA with revised reimbursement structure), suitable MUHs and attack helicopters remain in short supply.

As the MRC used for the C-130 in Mali is becoming better known, and as the UN has found it challenging to generate rotary-wing military aircraft (both military utility helicopters and attack helicopters) in Mali as well as in many other missions, the UN and some TCCs have already started exploring the possibility of using a similar MRC for these types of capabilities. However, this is no simple matter, because helicopter types – unlike fixed-wing aircraft – tend to vary considerably, requiring significantly different kinds of infrastructures and support elements on the ground. Also, a ‘coalition’ of partner countries has yet to come together to contribute a rotary-wing package to MINUSMA. This seems to be a situation specific to Mali, where the threat level and harsh environment may dissuade TCCs from keeping their MUHs in-mission for long periods.

The Netherlands’ contribution to MINUSMA (2014-17), based in Gao, built infrastructures (hangars) for their CH-47 Chinook transport helicopters and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. When Germany took

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<sup>21</sup> An MUH’s mission is a function of its design or conversion; it may be armoured and fitted with weapons. The most common use of MUHs in UN missions is to transport troops, conduct search and rescue (SAR) operations, carry out air reconnaissance, conduct casualty evacuation and to provide an airborne command post. Depending on the requirements of the concept of operations (CONOPS), MUHs may be armed with weapons for their own force protection and support UN ground forces, as well as to conduct combat search and rescue (CSAR) missions. Tasks specific to civil and military aircrafts, as well as areas of overlap, are described in Section II of the UN Aviation Manual.

<sup>22</sup> UN (2010) *A/64/19. Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations: 2010 substantive session (22 February–19 March 2010)*. New York: United Nations. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/POC%20A%2064%2019.pdf>.

over from the Netherlands in 2017, it brought different types of helicopters – four NH90 transport helicopters and four Eurocopter Tiger attack helicopters.<sup>23</sup> This was not part of an MRC, and Germany ended up building its own support infrastructure in addition to what the Netherlands had left behind (Germany was able to take over some of the hangars). The transition between the Netherlands and Germany resulted in a gap of three months when the mission had no attack helicopters in the Gao region, considerably reducing its ability to provide air support for troops and logistic convoys. Germany and the Netherlands had organized and agreed on this rotation bilaterally and not through the UN, which limited the UN's ability to plan an effective transition.

In the future, like-minded TCCs with similar types of rotary-wing assets (many European TCCs as well as Canada own either European-made NH90s and Tigers, or US-made Chinooks, Black Hawks and Apaches) could decide to set up an MRC which would provide Germany with a viable exit strategy for its helicopters, also providing incoming TCCs with readily available support infrastructure adapted to the threat level and harsh environment, and MINUSMA with better predictability that, it is to be hoped, would prevent prolonged gaps in critical capabilities.

### **Navy ships**

Several operations have included riverine units (MINUSTAH in Haiti, UNMISS in South Sudan, MONUC/MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, MINUSMA, etc.) but the Maritime Task Force (MTF) deployed with the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in October 2006 was the first naval force to take part in a UN operation. This operation was initially commanded by Germany, who handed over the command of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force to the European Maritime Force (EUROMARFOR) led by Italy in 2008,<sup>24</sup> followed by France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Italy again, and Brazil etc. In all, 15 countries have contributed to the MTF: Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.<sup>25</sup>

To ensure effective interoperability of all UN Maritime Task Force elements and to formalize capability standards, the UN introduced a

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<sup>23</sup> Fiorenza, Nicholas (2017) 'Germany airlifts NH90s and Tigers to Mali', *HIS Jane's 360*, 31 January 2017. <http://www.janes.com/article/67329/germany-airlifts-nh90s-and-tigers-to-mali>.

<sup>24</sup> For more, see EUROMARFOR, <https://www.euromarfor.org/>.

<sup>25</sup> UNIFIL (2017) 'UNIFIL Maritime Task Force', <https://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-maritime-task-force>.

Peacekeeping Missions Military Unit Manual on the Maritime Task Force in 2015.<sup>26</sup> Based on the EUROMARFOR experience, should a maritime capability be required in future UN peace operations, an MRC may therefore be considered. Interesting in the case of the MTF is the diversity, where contributing countries from around the globe have been able to work together, a feature that may further incentivize the participation of certain member states (while perhaps also discouraging others). However, as naval assets in general are not in short supply for peacekeeping, the need for MRCs may not be as great as in other areas.

### **Medical capabilities**

Medical facilities are critical enablers for UN missions, particularly those facing high casualty levels. There is still too much variation in the standards of medical care provided from mission to mission, leading certain TCCs to question their deployment and/or to bring their own medical support elements. Member states have already experimented with partnerships and joint deployments of medical capabilities, like the Norway–Serbia Level II hospital deployed in Abeche with MINURCAT from 2009 to 2010.

An MRC could be used for a Level II hospital, with one lead country building the infrastructure, and leaving it behind for medical personnel from partner countries to take over in turn. This could also be applied to ‘high-capability’ mobile medical surgical units operating as ‘Level I Plus’ or to an Aero Medical Evacuation Team (AMET) which could be associated with various aircraft, on the basis of needs and availability. Long-term permanent arrangements would be ideal, but if MRCs make it possible for the UN to bring on board better adapted medical care, then the mission should consider these.<sup>27</sup>

### **Military engineering (including airfield and EOD specialists)**

Military engineering units are also critical mission enablers. They range in size from a platoon (25–30 troops) embedded within an infantry battalion to a full military engineering company (MEC) of up to 275 troops, with different platoons that can cover many specialized functions: well-drilling, airfield/ helipad construction and

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<sup>26</sup> UN (2015) *United Nations Peacekeeping Missions Military Maritime Task Force Manual*. New York: United Nations.

<http://dag.un.org/bitstream/handle/11176/387297/United%20Nations%20Peacekeeping%20Missions%20Maritime%20Manual.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>27</sup> See Lesley Connelly and Håvard Johansen (2017) *Medical Support for UN Peace Operations in High-Risk Environments*. New York: International Peace Institute. <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/IPI-Rpt-Medical-Support-Final.pdf>.

maintenance, or road/bridge construction. They could also include Combat Engineers and Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialists (EODs). Depending on the needs on the ground, the force requirements for a full MEC will involve various combinations of these platoons. Much of the engineering equipment - bulldozers, cranes, special vehicles, etc. - that MECs bring with them as COE is heavy, expensive, and difficult to transport to the mission and out again, but could be used by the personnel of different partner countries as part of an MRC.<sup>28</sup>

### **Other specialized capabilities (ISR, UAS, SOF, radar systems, etc.)**

As peacekeeping operations modernize and operate in increasingly complex environments, including asymmetric ones like Mali where the UN is directly targeted, the UN has expanded its outreach to TCCs able to provide certain specialized capabilities, to allow peacekeepers to have better environmental awareness and to operate safely. Such capabilities include Intelligence/Information, Surveillance, Reconnaissance units (ISRs) which generally include Unmanned Aerial Systems (UASs), Special Operations Forces (SOFs), radar and sensor systems, and others. In some of these areas the UN has been developing capability standards.

As such high-end capabilities are in short supply, with only few (mainly Western) TCCs able to contribute them (and then generally in small amounts and for limited periods), the possibility of incentivizing these TCCs through MRCs is being explored. However, the added-value and feasibility of the MRC for such specialized capabilities is less clear. First, these capabilities do not include important infrastructure components which could be used by rotating partner countries. Second, the issue of secrecy associated with ISRs, UASs, SOFs, and also radar systems, make it less likely that even like-minded countries would want to participate, except as part of a joint deployment (as Denmark did, embedding 30 SOFs with the Netherlands SOF component of MINUSMA in 2015). That makes it difficult for different TCCs to cooperate fully in handover-takeover of sensitive information or systems.

## **Key features of MRCs**

### **Lead nation, number of partners and rotation lengths**

As mentioned, a lead nation providing core infrastructure and support services and remaining throughout the rotations of partner countries is

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<sup>28</sup> See Arthur Boutellis and Adam Smith (2014) *Engineering Peace: The Critical Role of Engineers in UN Peacekeeping*. New York: International Peace Institute. [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi\\_e\\_pub\\_engineering\\_peace.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_engineering_peace.pdf).

almost a prerequisite for these types of MRCs to function properly and provide added value to UN peacekeeping operations. Lead nations will often carry somewhat higher costs and costs, shared with partner countries, for which the UN reimbursement system does not provide compensation,<sup>29</sup> but they also stand to gain considerable political recognition for doing the groundwork to make such partnerships possible.

To make an MRC worthwhile – weighing transaction costs for the UN against the delivery of a predictable and sustainable capability – having four to five partner countries is a minimum, particularly if some TCCs contribute only for six months. The rotation time for each partner should be made longer if possible – and no less than six months. Of course, maintenance and availability of crews are issues here. As each partner takes on a relatively light burden, and the infrastructure and cooperation is established, member states should consider several full rotations. A partner country rotating for a second time into the same mission is likely to achieve better performance, as it will better understand the requirements of the terrain and of the UN mission and plan in consequence. For instance, the Portuguese C-130 contingent indicated that, if it were to go for a second rotation as part of the MRC with MINUSMA, it would consider bringing in more than one crew to be able to fly at night, and to fly more hours per month overall.

Drawing on the C-130 MRC experience to date in MINUSMA, various partner countries have suggested several improvements, including that the lead country should ensure the presence of ICT technicians on the ground for each rotation. Norway had frequently to send a technician to Mali to support IT and security systems, but later upgraded the system to enable remote access and servicing from Norway. Moreover, in addition to the hangar, Norway made available to the rotating personnel several vehicles which they would otherwise have had to hire on the local market. It was also noted that it would have been useful if lead-country Norway had maintained its Level I hospital as part of the camp infrastructure (which would have required many more personnel to run it) as well as a force protection element, as it is not easy for every MRC partner country to bring its own medical personnel and force protection with the aircraft crew and maintenance team.

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<sup>29</sup> UN COE and troop reimbursements are the subject of many discussions and much frustration, but generally do not cover in full the cost of deploying, particularly for the more advanced TCCs, which in any case ‘do not do it for the money’, as one of our interlocutors explained.

**Small European states**

Thus far, the MRC model has been championed at the UN mainly by small European states. Since the end of the Cold War, European national armies have undergone deep and structural change and modernization. They have become drastically reduced in size, and have focused on developing high-end and resource-demanding capabilities, in financial and capacity terms. The modernization process, in conjunction with greater cooperation within the NATO and the EU frameworks, have made these forces interoperable, technically and culturally. They have adopted similar doctrines and standards, as well as an expeditionary mindset, after long deployments to Afghanistan and other out-of-area operations.

Contributing to UN peacekeeping is usually a political decision taken at the highest level of government, but it is also a military decision. And from the perspective of a ministry of defence and an army, a key part of the national decision-making process of contributing to international interventions in general is whether it contributes to the overall readiness and training of troops, and strengthens that country's interoperability with key partners. MRCs can tick both these boxes, increasing the perceived and real value also among the military cadre in TCCs. At the political level, MRCs can enhance and make visible military cooperation and burden-sharing. For UN peacekeeping, this means that while European countries may have capabilities that could be of great benefit to the UN, these capabilities are few and far between, and are difficult to sustain over time. In this sense, MRCs may be mutually advantageous, covering many of the needs of both the UN and European member states.

However, this like-mindedness, while positive for assembling MRCs, should not lead to the creation of 'cultural bubbles' within a UN peacekeeping mission. Such peacekeeping missions differ from coalitions of the willing, NATO and EU operations in many regards. UN missions are generally multidimensional (civilian, police and military) and integrated – a fact that may lead to misunderstandings between the UN and 'returning' European TCCs in particular. For instance, many European TCCs resent the Command and Control (C2) arrangements for air assets whereby aviation services for a whole mission are integrated (civilian and military together – except attack helicopters which are under the direct tasking of the force commander) and under the overall authority of the Chief of Aviation and the Director of Mission Support (both civilians). Conversely, the UN could try to address these TCCs' preference for flying 'military missions' (versus transporting goods and

civilian staff, for instance) and encourage TCCs to support a review of current UN policy on C2 so that it can best support operational needs.<sup>30</sup>

### **Would non-European TCCs be interested?**

Several of our interlocutors indicated that MRCs might be relevant and interesting for non-European member states that could have some of the same needs and challenges as regards contributing advanced capabilities such as military transport planes, utility and attack helicopters. For instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has a history of mounting regional peace operations (including ECOMIG to address the crisis in the Gambia) may see an interest in contributing helicopters as part of a ‘regional MRC’. The Chile–Argentina ‘Cruz Del Sur’ alliance could also serve as the basis for a MRC contribution, including air assets. Chile and Argentina have deployed air assets in Haiti and Cyprus, respectively, for many years, which gradually entails exhaustion of equipment and personnel. Some small TCCs might also welcome sharing of self-sustainment and co-location with larger TCCs in a camp, for instance.

That said, some TCCs also expressed concerns that ‘European MRCs’ may raise expectations as to the type of infrastructures and level of NSEs that these Western TCCs bring with them, possibly creating double standards and making it difficult for other TCCs to maintain such ‘high-end’ infrastructure later. Conversely, better infrastructure brought as part of these MRCs may encourage other TCCs to upgrade their own – if they had not invested in this when deploying to UN missions, despite the requirements of self-sustainment rules. For instance, certain TCCs providing air assets have not built aircraft hangars in the mission, even though these would be covered by the UN reimbursement regime.

### **Other rotation contributions are possible: TCC-provided or UN-procured equipment**

While the C-130 MRC is one possible model, other models are also possible. As discussed in connection with medical facilities, one lead-nation TCC might provide the capability, install the infrastructure and equipment, running it initially during a first rotation, and then handing over the full infrastructure and equipment to partner TCCs, which would

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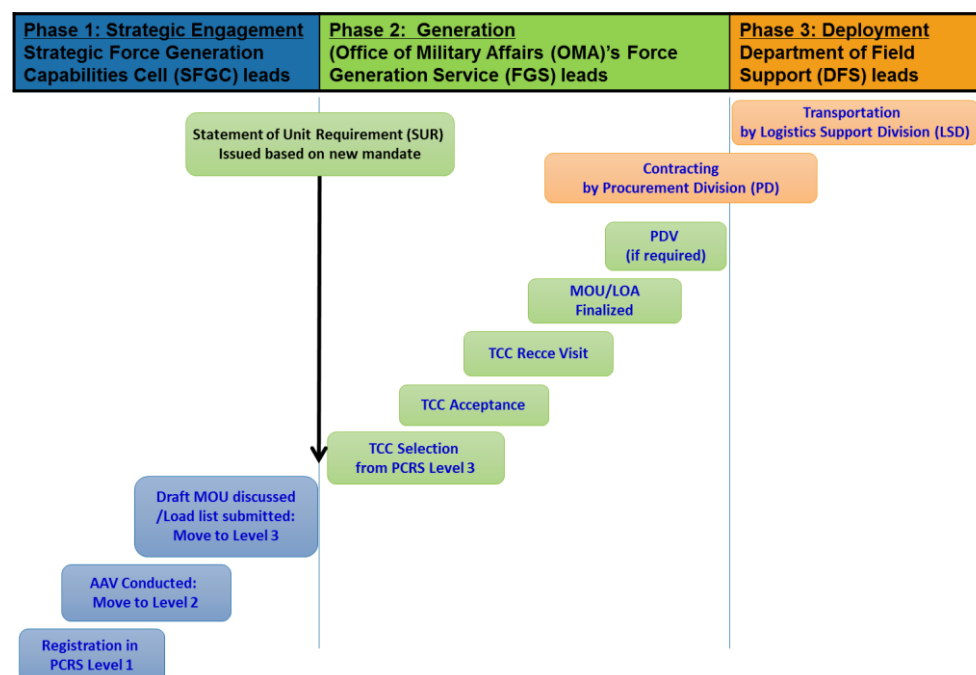
<sup>30</sup> This has been a persistent challenge in MINUSMA: see e.g. John Karlsrud and Adam Smith (2015) ‘Europe’s Return to UN Peacekeeping in Africa? Lessons-Learned from Mali’, *Providing for Peacekeeping*, No. 10.  
<https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/IPI-E-pub-Europes-Return-to-Peacekeeping-Mali.pdf>.

only need to bring in appropriately qualified personnel. Reimbursement issues and incentives would, however, probably need to be reviewed to make such arrangements viable.

Similarly, the UN has been discussing acquiring certain equipment such as aircraft (for instance the civilian equivalent of a C-130, L-100 Hercules, which the UN already uses as part of commercial contracts but is becoming rare on the market) or medical facilities. Similar arrangements as above could then be made, with TCCs providing only the military personnel to operate the capability in turn, with some initial familiarization training if the equipment is not the same as they use at home. Another model could be envisaged: using civilian contractors to build and run the infrastructure while TCCs provide the military personnel and assets, as is the case in many NATO operations. In this way, the MRC could serve inspiration for moving towards a more module-based rather than contingent-based way of stand-up capability contributions.

## Broader UN strategic force generation considerations

Figure 1 summarizes the key steps and stakeholders of the UN force generation process used by the UN since the establishment of the Strategic Force Generation and Capabilities Cell (SFGC) and of the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) in 2015.



Source: Adapted from internal United Nations document, received in personal communication.

### Two-step force generation process for MRCs

For TCCs, MRCs can represent a new two-step force generation process for UN peacekeeping. In the first step, a group of member states partner to provide an MRC, with one member state taking the lead as the framework nation. In the second step, this group of countries offers the MRC to the UN, assuming responsibility vis-à-vis the UN to deliver the capability in a predictable manner for a given period. For Western countries, this significantly increases the incentives to contribute: the MRC enjoys considerable flexibility in terms of deployment duration, the

contribution is time-bound, and the deployment threshold is low as the capability is plugged into existing infrastructure on the ground.

MRCs can thus enable smaller contributions, and lower the threshold for contributing to UN peacekeeping by making it more similar to other contributions they have made alone or jointly in recent history. MRCs also increase the incentives for many TCCs, as they can boost interoperability with key partners, and allow for testing niche capabilities under trying conditions.

### **Strategic military planning and force generation**

The creation of the UN Strategic Force Generation and Capability Planning Cell in 2015 was an attempt to address some of the shortcomings in earlier UN military planning and force generation.<sup>31</sup>

So far, the UN has played a limited match-making role as regards joint deployments and MRCs, but may be considering doing more, in connection with its shift towards more strategic force generation. It is considered a national prerogative to choose potential partner countries based on national interest and alliances. Historically the UN has disseminated requests to TCCs individually, making it difficult for TCCs to know which other TCCs may be interested in contributing similar capacity. Further, the UN might consider requiring TCCs to contribute for multi-year periods rather than as part of MRCs, as MRCs can be quite labour-intensive for the UN. Also, some TCCs may not want more transparency (particularly in the MoU/LoA negotiation process between DFS and TCCs), because of the political and financial interests involved, especially in the case of costly air assets.

As the UN is progressively shifting from a numbers-based approach to a capability-based approach to force generation, it may start considering more seriously the potential of MRCs based on the early lessons from the C-130 MRC in MINUSMA. The Strategic Force Generation and Capability Planning Cell could help to identify and encourage potential lead nations of MRCs. This would require a change of mindset regarding the conduct of military planning and force generation at the UN, regarding transparency in particular, by making information about interested TCCs more readily available to other TCCs

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<sup>31</sup> Adam C. Smith and Arthur Boutellis (2013) 'Rethinking Force Generation: Filling the Capability Gaps in UN Peacekeeping', *Providing for Peacekeeping* No. 2. [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi\\_rpt\\_rethinking\\_force\\_gen.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_rpt_rethinking_force_gen.pdf).

with similar capabilities who might be more forthcoming in contributing them as part of an MRC.

In the experience of some member states, there was a strategic disconnect between the political will and flexibility displayed by USGs Ladsous and Khare to make the MRC happen, and the ability of the Secretariat to follow up at the operational level. However, while organizational path dependency may account for some of this, it should be kept in mind that the UN has very limited capacity. For instance, staffing levels in some offices involved are at only 60%, leaving a handful of staff with the job of negotiating a myriad of capabilities for 16 ongoing peacekeeping operations. Similarly, the Air Transport Section (ATS) of the UN has only 20 persons, with seven of them currently dedicated to establishing commercial contracts and military LOAs.

### **Improved MOU/LOA negotiation processes**

The current MOU/LOA negotiation process, if all goes well, lasts a minimum of three to four months, and can last up to a year, with a labour-intensive process involving various UN offices having to sign off for reimbursements to be released. This also leads to a high rate of post-facto LOAs (signed after the assets are deployed to the mission) which the UN must justify. TCCs who have been working with the UN for a long time are familiar with this process, but new or 'returning' TCCs can find it frustrating.

LOAs are normally agreed for one year, with one optional additional year to reduce the workload. In comparison, commercial aircraft contracts are for three years and the UN can rescind the contract at any point. For the C-130 MRC, deployment lengths average at six months, leading to increased transaction costs that, at least at the outset, can be a very real burden for these officers. Also in the past, approximately 70% of the UN fleet was commercial and 30% was military (force-generated), whereas the weighting now is almost in balance with 55% of air assets being military. Part of the reason is that UN field missions now are perceived as more dangerous (South Sudan, Mali, and Central African Republic), leading to an increase in the number of LOAs negotiated, and hence a greater workload on OMA and Force Generation Service (FGS) personnel. Also, most TCCs do not comply with unit requirements as per the SUR, but propose reimbursement rates above the UN's accepted benchmark, leading to lengthy negotiations that must generally be resolved at the political level.

While there are historical reasons for the current legal and financial processes, some TCCs have indicated that the C-130 MRC could provide impetus for a needed reform of UN legal and administrative procedures

for force generation. MRCs may involve special features that require amendments to existing standard LOAs and/or of the process of negotiating these. Ultimately perhaps the UN could have one negotiation with all partner countries involved in the MRC, for instance, with the option of including more as the deployment continues. To ensure smooth negotiation processes, all the involved stakeholders, OMA, OLA, Logistics Support Division (LSD) and TCCs should initiate joint coordinated discussions on the LOA/MOU negotiations at least six months before deployment. Given the scale of UN aviation – the UN is the biggest aviation operator in Africa – the UN should consider including an aviation lawyer in the OLA and a military aviation expert in the OMA. LSD may also need a dedicated military aviation expertise, as there are currently only two or three OMA officers working on more than 45 LOAs.

An option for the future is to move towards more open invitations to member states, instead of approaching each one separately. This could foster greater transparency and encourage dialogue and cooperation among like-minded states. Several interlocutors from member states as well as the UN highlighted the idea of arranging Force Generation Conferences in a similar manner to NATO or EU, particularly for mission start-up. The UN is planning such a conference for MINUSMA in May 2017. Such conferences could enable for earlier recognition of potential capability gaps in a new mission, but would also mean an additional workload for OMA, which has limited capacity. The UN may also consider capability-specific force generation conferences, inviting only TCCs which possess a certain capability (there are, for instance, only about 20 TCCs which currently provide air assets to UN peace operations).

Beyond force generation, several TCCs have also indicated that the UN military planning process (and the UN mission planning process in general) should allow for more inputs from member states which may want to contribute certain capabilities that could achieve the same effect but which the UN would not specify in the force requirements. This could be done through ‘mission start-up capability planning meetings’ that would allow TCCs, at the very outset of the mission planning process, to give informal (non-binding) indications of the possible contribution of certain capabilities and how these would help achieve the mandated tasks. However, both Force Generation Conferences and Indicative Contribution Meetings like those that NATO organized every six months for ISAF are labour-intensive and would require additional capacities and resources which the UN does not have today. The FGS of the UN has only 21 officers, with 14 of these positions currently staffed, and only one of these officers following MINUSMA full-time. In comparison,

NATO headquarters has 4,000 full-time staff, half of them members of national delegations and supporting staff members of national military representatives to NATO.

### **Opening the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) to MRCs**

The development of the PCRS has been recognized as a great step in the right direction. While the system is not currently well suited to onboard MRCs, with only one TCC being recorded per unit required, it is possible to pledge MRCs into the PCRS. All partners of an MRC must then specify the (same) mission and the dates (in rotation) they would like to contribute. A Note Verbale from the lead/framework nation of the MRC indicating all the details and partners could then accompany the pledges.<sup>32</sup>

Recognizing the added value of MRCs, the PCRS may in the future need to be adapted more readily in key areas such as air assets, airfield and medical capacities, as long as the capabilities pledged in these MRCs are compatible in terms of capacities and infrastructure requirements, and the TCCs are willing partners as part of an MRC, with one partner country capable of rapid self-deployment taking the lead in constructing the initial support infrastructure in the mission.

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<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the PCRS, see UN (2015) *United Nations Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System*. New York: United Nations.  
<https://cc.unlb.org/UNSAS%20Documents/PCRS%20Overview%20Aug%202015.pdf>; and UN (2015) *UN PCRS Guidelines for Member States*. New York: United Nations.  
<https://cc.unlb.org/PCRS%20References/PCRS%20documents/Guidelines%20for%20TCCs%20on%20PCRS%2013%20Aug%202015.pdf>.

## Conclusions and recommendations

For some key capabilities, Multinational Rotation Contributions (MRCs) can complement traditional force generation for UN peacekeeping operations. For member states, the ‘plug-and-play’ characteristic can lower the threshold and increase the incentives for contribution; for the UN, they can enable predictable and cost-effective supply of niche capabilities in key areas. However, MRCs are not applicable to all capabilities, and require flexibility and the ability to reform among all concerned parties.

### Recommendations for making MRCs work

1. MRCs should include a significant infrastructure component (such as hangars in the case of aircraft and a camp, or a physical hospital in the case of medical contributions as well as a camp) provided by a lead nation or by the UN itself, and equipment and personnel rotating in and out should be readily plugged in/plugged out (i.e. compatible from one partner country to another).
2. Early planning and coordination of MRCs based on a Statement of Unit Requirement (SUR) prepared by the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) and good knowledge of operational and technical capabilities (and possible variations) offered by partner countries, including rotation durations and operational limitations, are essential for the UN to make informed decisions and avoid operational gaps between rotations.
3. Longer rotations (at least six months) of each partner country are desirable, and the MRC countries should agree to repeat the full rotation if the UN mission on the ground continues beyond the initial time commitment.
4. Regional organizations/groups like the EU, MERCOSUR and ECOWAS or small like-minded contributing countries should consider assembling an MRC as a single sustainable contribution, and propose it to the UN as a niche-capability package.

5. Predeployment visits (PDVs) are important for all TCCs involved in an MRC even if they have advanced military capabilities, because these visits are not only about equipment but also concern sensitizing, building relationship and mutual understanding between the UN and TCCs.
6. Attitude matters, and MRCs should be seen by TCCs as a way to support a UN mission with needed capabilities in a 'one-mission' spirit (avoiding a 'green vs white' or 'military vs civilian' assets language and mentality); the ongoing review of the current UN policy for Command and Control (C2) should ideally help bridge positions on this issue.
7. MOU/LOA negotiation processes should be mainstreamed; it would be desirable to develop a 'joint negotiation model' whereby MRC partner countries could negotiate technical and operational capabilities (based in the SUR) as one with the UN, to limit transaction costs – however, still signing separate MOUs/ and LOAs with the UN, as these are bilateral contractual (including financial) arrangements agreed upon and signed by the UN and each individual TCC.
8. The UN should consider playing a greater role in 'match-making' TCCs into MRCs by identifying lead countries – which can in turn help the UN bring on board additional MRC partner countries – and making the force generation process more transparent. UN personnel capacities (OMA and DFS) should be adjusted accordingly.
9. A case-by-case approach to MRCs should be adopted. MRCs should be considered only in instances where the specific military capability could not have been generated through other means for a longer period (as was the case for the C-130 in MINUSMA);
10. A thorough and honest cost-benefit analysis of C-130 MRC should be conducted, comparing the MRC model with a similar contribution by one TCC only, and the option of a commercial aircraft.
11. Other possible MRC models should be explored, such as using TCC-provided or UN-procured infrastructure and equipment and rotating military personnel only from partner countries, and TCC interest in such alternative models should be assessed.



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**NUPI** is an independent think-tank founded in 1959. Research in the Peace and Conflict Research Group at NUPI is grounded in empirics: it is evidence- and fieldwork-based and conducted both bottom-up and top-down. The Group provides theoretical and policy-oriented research and policy advice, with a capacity-building component, where appropriate. NUPI has worked on issues related to UN peace operations ever since its inception.

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conducted various studies exploring field support challenges currently facing UN peace operations – the topic of a seminar organized at IPI on 16 February 2017; see <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/new-issues-observatory/>.

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