

# Plug and Play

## Multinational Rotation Contributions for UN Peacekeeping Operations

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### Introduction

In January 2016, Norway deployed a C-130 military transport aircraft to the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Given the number of attacks on patrols and logistics convoys of MINUSMA, which has been called ‘the world’s most dangerous UN mission’,<sup>1</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 aircrafts (C-130s and smaller C-160s and C-295s), but the difference between these and the 2016 deployment was that the latter was longer term, providing more predictability for the UN since it would be part of a multinational rotation contribution (MRC) initiated by Norway, followed by Portugal, Denmark, Sweden and Belgium.<sup>2</sup>

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>3</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>4</sup> in some cases have time for rest and recuperation between deployments. Conceptual continuity increases the ability to plan predictably and 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>5</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. 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.

### Background

Norway has been part of MINUSMA almost since its inception in July 2013. In January 2014, Norway established ‘Camp Bifrost’ for the All-Source Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) near the airport in the Malian capital, Bamako, and initially contributed about 20 of the 80 officers who comprised the ASIFU.<sup>6</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 70th Session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>7</sup>

Before the summit, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had reached out to Prime Minister 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 and consulted with like-minded member states.

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>8</sup> 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>9</sup>

### Key features of MRCs

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

A lead nation providing core infrastructure and support services and remaining throughout the rotations of partner countries is 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 for which the UN reimbursement system does not provide compensation,<sup>10</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.

Drawing on the C-130 MRC experience to date in MINUSMA, various partner countries have suggested several improvements. In addition to the hangar, Norway made available to the rotating personnel several vehicles which partners otherwise would have had to hire on the local market. Interlocutors 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.

#### 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, the cultural 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>11</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**

The C-130 MRC is one possible model among many. 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 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.

#### **Conclusion**

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**

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 TTC interest in such alternative models should be assessed.

#### **Notes**

1. 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/?wpisrc=nl\\_headlines&wpm=1](http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2017/02/17/the-worlds-deadliest-u-n-peacekeeping-mission/?wpisrc=nl_headlines&wpm=1).

2. This is an abridged version of Arthur Boutellis and John Karlsrud (2017) *Plug and Play: Multinational Rotation Contributions for UN Peacekeeping Operations*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. <http://www.nupi.no/Publikasjoner/CRISTin-Pub/Plug-and-Play-Multinational-Rotation-Contributions-for-UN-Peacekeeping-Operations>. The authors conducted field work in Mali in January/February and in New York during the first quarter of 2017. A draft of the report was shared for comments and discussed during a validation workshop in New York on 4 May 2017. The final report was published in May 2017.
3. With limited variation in capability between the planes provided by different TCCs.
4. 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. 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>
5. 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>.
6. 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.
7. UN (2015) 'Norway: H.E. Mrs. Erna Solberg, Prime Minister. 30 September 2015 (70th Session).' *UN General Assembly [Video]* <https://gadebate.un.org/en/70/norway>.
8. 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.
9. 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/>.
10. 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.
11. 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>.



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