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IN DECEMBER 2018, the RUSI Military Sciences research group organised its annual wargame to examine some of the challenges of establishing a peacekeeping mission in Eastern Ukraine. Senior political figures from both Russia and Ukraine have suggested the deployment of such a mission by the UN in recent years. In September 2017, the Kremlin suggested deploying peacekeepers along the line dividing Ukrainian and Russian-backed separatist forces.¹ In contrast, Ukraine's Interior Minister Arsen Avakov outlined his 'small steps' strategy for de-occupation of the region in spring 2018.² This envisaged security responsibilities being gradually returned to the Ukrainian authorities with a small force of peacekeepers deployed to assist with border security and policing.

These contrasting visions of the scope and roles of a potential peacekeeping mission are accompanied by an international political context in which one of the P5 is a party to the conflict – making agreement at the UN Security Council and hence the deployment of such a mission very unlikely in the immediate future. However, that two of the parties to the conflict have suggested such an option indicates that it should not be quickly dismissed. Arguably, there is a real risk that if there were to be a dramatic change in the political context, there has been insufficient thinking about the nature of the mission for peacekeeping to be implemented effectively.

While there has been some excellent and valuable analysis conducted by both academics and NGOs,³ it was decided that the 2018 Martial Power Programme wargame would be used to consider some of the key decisions and challenges that designing such a mission would face.

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1. Andreas Umland, 'UN Peacekeeping in Donbas? The Stakes of the Russia–Ukraine Conflict', European Council on Foreign Relations, 8 June 2018, <https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_un_peacekeeping_in_donbas_the_stakes_of_the_russia_ukraine_confli>, accessed 28 January 2019.
 2. *Ukrainian Independent Information Agency*, 'Ukraine Interior Minister Elaborates on Plan to Return Occupied Donbas', 16 April 2018, <<https://www.unian.info/politics/10082279-ukraine-interior-minister-elaborates-on-plan-to-return-occupied-donbas.html>>, accessed 28 January 2019.
 3. For example, see Richard Gowan, 'Can the United Nations Unite Ukraine?', Hudson Institute, February 2018, <<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/files/publications/UkraineJan29.pdf>>, accessed 28 January 2019; Andrey Kortunov, 'Will Donbass Live to See the UN Peacekeepers?', Russian International Affairs Council, 11 December 2017, <<http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/will-donbass-live-to-see-the-un-peacekeepers/>>, accessed 28 January 2019; Alexander Vershbow, 'How to Bring Peace to the Donbas. (Yes, It's Possible)', Atlantic Council, 5 January 2018, <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/how-to-bring-peace-to-the-donbas-yes-it-s-possible>>, accessed 28 January 2019; International Crisis Group, 'Can Peacekeepers Break the Deadlock in Ukraine?', Report No. 246, 15 December 2017, <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/246-can-peacekeepers-break-deadlock-ukraine>>, accessed 28 January 2019.

The wargame took the Minsk II agreement and the current OSCE deployment as the background against which to consider aspects such as the potentially mandated tasks, the mission structure and potential troop and police contributors. It also considered some of the risks and opportunities of a peacekeeping mission, with the overall aim of identifying further research opportunities. It was based on small group work conducted by invited experts with experience in military planning, peace-building and the region itself, and was conducted in three sessions: Tasks and Mandate, The Peacekeeping Force and Risks and Opportunities.

Session 1: Tasks and Mandate

The first session's aim was to identify what sort of tasks a peacekeeping mission in the Donbas might be mandated to undertake. While it was deliberately not a formal mission analysis in the military planning sense, in addition to potential tasks, the groups sought to consider what end state the mission would contribute to and what assumptions might underlie the identification of tasks. It was noted that while there were in effect two main parties to the conflict in the armed forces of the self-declared autonomous republics (Luhansk People's Republic [LNR] and Donetsk People's Republic [DNR]) and the government of Ukraine, the position of Russia, which has troops on the ground but denies this, is a complicating factor. However, it was felt that a political settlement would return Ukrainian political sovereignty to the territories, but with some form of devolved administration. A peacekeeping mission could manage the security situation such that space could be created for a meaningful political dialogue.

In addition to a clear political end state, the participants also identified several preconditions that must be in place before a peacekeeping mission could be deployed. There must be a clear political will and consent to the deployment on the part of all parties to the conflict, whether declared as such or not, and parties must be supportive of a viable ceasefire. This was based in part on the assumption that the mission was never likely to be authorised to conduct peace enforcement, and indeed only a mission limited to peacekeeping was likely to generate the numbers of troops required. There was further discussion that the mission should not be temporally fixed, but rather it should have an evolving mandate designed to support the developing political process.

The participants identified some key potential tasks for the mission:

- Protection of the civilian population. This would be both a military and a policing task.
- Enabling the delivery of humanitarian aid and the reconstruction of key infrastructure.
- De-mining to enable freedom of movement for both the force and the civilian population.
- Confidence-building measures, including support of the delivery of policing services.
- Separation of the warring parties to ensure continuing de-escalation.
- Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.
- Re-establishment of rule of law.
- Support to the delivery of medical and public health services.
- Administration of internally displaced persons.

There was discussion as to whether the UN was the best organisation to lead such a mission and concern expressed about its ability to manage a potentially large multidisciplinary mission of this sort. While this was in part based on the problems experienced by the UN missions in the Balkans in the 1990s,⁴ it was recognised that NATO, which replaced the UN on that occasion, would not be accepted by all parties in this case. It was also noted that there was a requirement to consider whether the mission would need a border control element on the Ukraine–Russia border and a maritime element in the Sea of Azov.

Session 2: The Peacekeeping Force

The intent of this session was not to create a detailed structure for the mission or the force, as this would need to reflect the mandated tasks. Rather, it was to consider some of the factors that would impact on the capabilities that the force would need to bring to bear. There was some discussion that extant Western counterinsurgency thinking could lead to a force of up to 80,000, but it was recognised that this was not realistic and also not reflective of approaches to peacekeeping which generally requires a lower-profile presence than peace enforcement. However, it was felt by participants that at least initially the force could be substantial, in the vicinity of the largest UN peacekeeping missions of around 20,000, given the nature of the conflict.

The participants highlighted a range of capabilities that would be essential to the effective functioning of the mission. These included:

- **Communications:** It is important that all elements of the mission are able to communicate effectively with each other and with key players such as the parties to the conflict and the humanitarian community.
- **Engineers:** Military engineers are necessary both to enable and ensure the mobility of the force but also to contribute to security through the reconstruction of essential infrastructure.
- **Force protection:** There was considerable debate about the precise extent of the force protection required if the parties were supportive of the mission, but it was accepted that there may be spoilers and there would need to be capability to deploy infantry in protected mobility.
- **Military police/gendarmes/civilian police:** A mix of military, paramilitary and civilian police would be needed to contribute to countering organised crime and confidence building.
- **Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR):** In order to minimise the footprint of the force, ISR assets including surveillance drones would be essential to identify issues before they degenerated.
- **Strategic communications:** The participants felt that it would be key to the success of the mission that it be able to communicate effectively with the local population. As

4. For example, see Paul C Szasz, 'Peacekeeping in Operation: A Conflict Study of Bosnia', *Cornell Journal of International Law* (Vol. 28, No. 3, 1995), pp. 685–99.

well as strategic communications skills, this would necessitate cultural and linguistic capabilities among the force.

In considering potential troop and police contributing countries (TCCs) for a mission in the Donbas, it was noted that geopolitical realities meant that Russian troops and many NATO countries would be unacceptable to one or other of the parties to the conflict. Suggestions for alternatives included the non-NATO Nordic countries and countries such as Kazakhstan, Mongolia, India and Pakistan. Some participants suggested that the parties might agree to trade-offs where perhaps a Belarusian contingent would be balanced by one from the Baltic states. Noting previous concerns about the UN's capability to manage such a mission, one group suggested that an EU mission might be possible as long as it was led by southern European countries such as Greece that have cultural links via the Orthodox Church. The potential was also noted for integrated liaison teams which comprised individuals representing the parties to the conflict as well as peacekeepers who work together to deal with issues as they arise and contribute through their existence to confidence building. This approach has previously been used successfully in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan.

Session 3: Risks and Opportunities

The participants identified both risks and opportunities for a peacekeeping mission in the Donbas. It was noted that the potential for the mission not to be led by the UN provided an opportunity for creative approaches to both mandate and mission design, but equally risked the loss of both legitimacy and peacekeeping experience. A related issue was the potential problem of identifying sufficient TCCs with capabilities of both sufficient quality and quantity given the likely geopolitical constraints from the parties as to who would be suitable. This in turn might require a creative approach to the shape of the mission which might need to reflect who is available rather than what is desirable.

A further risk was identified in the desire not to place a time limit on the mission, which could lead to mission drift. Some participants cited the example of the UN mission in Cyprus which has been in place in different forms for over 50 years. It was agreed that the key was to ensure that any mission in the Donbas must accompany a meaningful political process and that there needed to be contingency plans developed to deal with problems with that process. However, it was also felt that consideration of a peacekeeping mission potentially presented an opportunity for 'Track 2' or back channel diplomacy with civil society organisations and think tanks from Russia and Ukraine, coming together to consider the issues and thereby establishing dialogue.

Conclusion and Further Research

It was accepted that a brief event of this nature could only scratch the surface of the potential issues that require further understanding and, potentially, research. While some of these are specific to the context of the Donbas, such as the acceptability of various TCCs to the parties,

some valuable general research questions were also identified which will be the subject of further consideration in due course:

- What makes for a successful peacekeeping mission and what causes failure?
- What are the political conditions that would make for a successful peacekeeping mission in the Donbas?
- What might a maritime peacekeeping mission in the Sea of Azov look like?
- What is the experience of integrating policing into a multidimensional peacekeeping mission?

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