

The EU Rapid Deployment Capacity: This time, it's for real?



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IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The EU's Strategic Compass (SC) calls for the creation of a 'European Rapid Deployment Capacity' (EU RDC) that would allow the EU to swiftly deploy up to 5 000 troops into non-permissive environments for different types of crises. The In-Depth Analysis (IDA) examines how this objective might be achieved successfully. It looks at the problems related to decision making and political will that have structurally hampered the deployment of the EU Battlegroups since their creation in 2007. It also looks at the conditions under which Member States might be willing to make first use of Article 44, which provides for small groups of Member States to act within an EU framework. Secondly, the IDA analyses operational questions, such as the Rapid Deployment Capacity's (RDC) possible tasks, force packages and illustrative scenarios, the concept and size, exercises, costs, and addressing shortfalls. Thirdly, the analysis discusses command and control challenges, especially how to rapidly develop the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) as the RDC's headquarters, and the role of Operational Headquarters (OHQ). The paper highlights the considerable potential for the RDC to substantially improve on the Battlegroups, strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy, and positively contribute to the EU's integrated approach to security and peace. Yet, the timetable is highly ambitious and will require Member States to give its achievement a high priority in their contributions. Furthermore, the RDC is only likely to succeed if the right lessons are learnt, not just in terms of improving operational readiness and capacity, but also crucially in terms of political signalling, commitment, and stronger sense of national ownership. The authors provide a number of recommendations for EU institutions on how this might be achieved in the short and longer term.

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1 Introduction

This In-Depth Analysis (IDA) examines the prospects and modalities for the creation and effective use of the European Rapid Deployment Capacity (EU RDC) envisaged in the Strategic Compass (SC) – a landmark medium-term plan adopted by the European Council in March 2022 to address the threats facing Europe¹. In 2021, 14 EU Defence Ministers called for HR/VP Josep Borrell to create a new rapid military response capacity for emergency response activities outside the EU. According to the SC, the purpose of the EU RDC is to allow the EU ‘to swiftly deploy up to 5 000 troops into non-permissive environments for different types of crises’². The capacity could be used in different phases of an operation, ‘such as initial entry, reinforcement, or as a reserve force to secure an exit’. The initial planning scenarios outlined in the SC focus on ‘rescue and evacuation operations, as well as the initial phase of stabilisation operations’³. The underlying aspiration for creating this new capacity is broader, and extends to other types of EU crisis management scenarios – potentially even defence under the mutual assistance and solidarity clauses. According to the ambitious timetable, the EU RDC is meant to be fully operational by 2025, with planning scenarios agreed for 2022, and regular live exercises to improve readiness and interoperability starting from 2023 onwards⁴.

The EU RDC is not a single force of 5 000 troops, but rather a toolbox of force packages with land, air and maritime components, plus strategic enablers (such as strategic airlift and intelligence for target acquisition). It is meant to consist of substantially modified EU Battlegroups and/or of pre-identified Member States’ military forces and capabilities, ‘in line with the single set of forces principle’⁵. For command and control, either national headquarters or the EU’s MPCC could be used.

A key question for the analysis will be how the EU RDC can avoid – or at least mitigate – the problems that have beset the EU Battlegroups which were originally created in 2007. These units were never used, despite requests and opportunities to do so (as discussed in more detail below). Even before the SC, the EU Chiefs of Defence in the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) called for a reinvigoration of the EU Battlegroups⁶. In order to achieve this objective, a nuanced and accurate understanding of the key underlying reasons for the problems is required. While EU institutions have already identified some of the contributing reasons (such as insufficient collective sharing of deployment costs) and begun to address them, other reasons are less well-understood; so how can the EU RDC avoid the accusation of being ‘old wine in new bottles’? And how can it avoid contributing to the ‘expectations-capability gap’ in EU foreign, security and defence policy?⁷

The structure of this IDA roughly follows the structure of the SC document by looking at questions of decision making and political will (decide), operational, planning and resource questions (act), and command and control questions (command). These three dimensions offer a useful way of analysing the different aspects of the expectation-capability gap in building an RDC that is fit for purpose and is actually going to be used. It emerges from the analysis that political cost-benefit calculations are linked to (and contingent on) operational and institutional design questions, such as the readiness of headquarters or the

¹ EEAS (2022). A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf.

² Strategic Compass, p. 11.

³ Strategic Compass, p. 25.

⁴ Strategic Compass, p. 30.

⁵ Strategic Compass, p. 25.

⁶ European Union Military Committee (EUMC), EU chiefs of defence, 19 May 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2021/05/19/>

⁷ Hill, C. (1993). The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31(3), 305-328.

expected speed of planning and decision making. Competition for scarce resources and the relationship and collaboration with NATO are also themes that cut across these headings.

The analysis draws on desk research from the relevant academic and grey literature, as well as official documents – in particular, the EU SC, as it is a key reference document for interpreting the aspirations of the EU RDC. In addition, the authors are very grateful for the insights of 14 officials, diplomats and military planners with relevant knowledge of the questions, not only in relation to the EU, but also to high readiness units in a national and multinational context (NATO, in particular – see Annex 2). These officials all asked for their identity not to be revealed. Furthermore, the authors also drew on their own expertise and knowledge which they acquired through research on closely related questions, but above all, they utilised the high-level and very relevant professional experience of LtGen ret Ton van Osch as former Dutch Military Representative in the EU Military Committee, and Director General of the EU Military Staff. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the authors. Please see Annex 1 for definition of the key technical terms used throughout this IDA.

2 Decision Making of RDC

2.1 The Battlegroup experience: Why weren't they used?

The EU's successful deployment of a multinational contingent of 1 800 troops led by France to the Democratic Republic of Congo (Operation Artemis) in 2003 was a significant catalyst for building support for the Battlegroup Concept, particularly between France and the UK. The UK initiative built on the stabilisation success of the 2000 Operation Palliser in Sierra Leone, which involved the rapid deployment of a reinforced battalion group plus special forces, backed up by an amphibious ready group⁸. The Battlegroup Concept was proposed and finally approved in June 2004 and the EU Battlegroups reached full operational readiness in 2007. The Battlegroups are six-monthly rotating multinational military units, usually consisting of 1 500 personnel, deployable within 15 days after a relevant decision for a wide range of purposes, which are listed under Article 43(1) Treaty on European Union (TEU). These include humanitarian and rescue tasks, as well as crisis management tasks of combat forces, including peace-making. The EU Battlegroups are provided by individual Member States as 'Framework Nations', or coalitions of Member States, including in some cases non-EU states, as in the case of the Nordic Battlegroup. Two such Battlegroups are meant to always be on standby.

The academic literature and most military staff with EU Battlegroup experience agree that the Battlegroup Concept has helped multinational defence cooperation and interoperability, as well as transformation for rapid deployment and force modernisation⁹. Yet, despite these benefits, the non-use of this asset over a period of 15 years has been politically embarrassing given the EU's aspirations in this area, and raises questions over the justifiability of its costs. The non-use is also intellectually puzzling, since there have been several occasions where some Member States suggested – or even demanded – its use (or parts of it), including¹⁰:

- 1) Chad in 2008, when the use of a Battlegroup as a 'strategic reserve' when no countries wanted to deliver one was suggested. One of the arguments which was used to block this idea was that 'strategic reserve' was not mentioned in the Battlegroup Concept as one of the possible tasks.
- 2) The Ivory Coast in 2010, when a Battlegroup could have been used to create a safe haven for evacuees. This appeared to be a non-feasible option because there was no military-strategic OHQ activated yet and the whole process would have taken too long.
- 3) Libya in 2011, when the OHQ in Rome was already activated, and a Battlegroup could have been used for the evacuation of key individuals from Misrata. The mandate existed¹¹, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) did not object, and the situation called for it. One of the reasons for non-use was that this required a joint effort with sea and air components, which was not yet prepared, and coordination with NATO's ongoing air operation appeared to be too complicated.

⁸ Dorman, A. M. (2016). *Blair's successful war: British military intervention in Sierra Leone*. Routledge.

⁹ EEAS (2017). Factsheet: EU Battlegroups, 5 October 2017,

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/factsheet_battlegroups.pdf; Reykers, Y. (2017). EU Battlegroups: High costs, no benefits. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 38(3), 457-470; Ringsmose, J. and Rynning, S. (2017). The NATO Response Force: A qualified failure no more? *Contemporary Security Policy*, 38(3), 443-456.

¹⁰ The first six examples in this paragraph have been selected for its relevance for the EU RDC and are based on discussions with individuals in Member States' delegations and EU Military Staff and on the personal experience of LtGen ret Ton van Osch as former Dutch Military Representative in the EU Military Committee and Director General of the EU Military Staff.

¹¹ Council Decision 2011/210/CFSP, EU Military Operation in support of humanitarian assistance operation in response to the crisis situation in Libya (EUFOR Libya), 1-4-2011.

- 4) Libya again in 2011 when, under the activated OHQ in Rome, parts of a Battlegroup could have been used for humanitarian assistance in line with the Oslo Principles at the request of UN OCHA. The mandate existed¹², humanitarian crises arose, but parts of the Battlegroup were never used. One of the reasons why this did not happen was that within UN OCHA, there were different opinions about possible military EU support, so the agency never came forward with a request.
- 5) Mali in 2013, when both Poland and Germany were reluctant to deploy the Weimar Battlegroup, as they perceived the conflict as primarily a French problem¹³.
- 6) The Central African Republic in 2014, when Greek resistance against the Greece-Bulgaria-Romania-Cyprus Battlegroup deployment was strongly inspired by the perceived financial costs, particularly given the political tension around the EU's role in imposing domestic financial austerity on Greece at the time¹⁴.

Root causes and potential lessons

The cases above offer potential lessons that have largely been recognised among EU Military Staff, and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. For instance:

- There has been confusion about the list of tasks for the Battlegroups, and particularly whether or not it should be treated as a limitative list of tasks. If the European Council, after positive EUMC advice, decides that it would be useful to use a Battlegroup, then that should be possible, even if that specific task is not mentioned in the list of possible tasks.
- It is only useful to have a Battlegroup on high readiness if its higher headquarters are too, or (preferably) these are permanently activated.
- In most situations, the Battlegroup would need air and maritime support and availability of enablers, which all should have at least the same readiness.
- The EU should never make a tool for the protection of its interests fully dependent on decision making by another organisation, such as NATO or the UN, as illustrated by the Libya 2011 case above.

The academic literature highlights further operational shortcomings of Battlegroups, the most significant of which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2¹⁵:

- Some consider the Battlegroups' size insufficient to operate successfully in hostile environments.
- The Battlegroups have also been considered not sufficiently adaptable to meet the variable needs of a range of crisis situations, including those that require deployment of sea and air components.
- The pace of political decision making and (potential) deployment have been criticised, particularly when compared with alternative national options to address quickly evolving problems on the ground.

¹² Council Decision 2011/210/CFSP, EU Military Operation in support of humanitarian assistance operation in response to the crisis situation in Libya (EUFOR Libya), 1-4-2011.

¹³ Faleg, G. (2013). Castles in the sand: Mali and the demise of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (pp. 1–3). Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies., 2013; Reykers, Y. (2016). No supply without demand: Explaining the absence of the EU Battlegroups in Libya, Mali and the CAR. *European Security*, 25, 346–365.

¹⁴ Reykers, 2017.

¹⁵ For an overview of the literature see Reykers, Y. (2017). EU Battlegroups: High costs, no benefits. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 38(3), pp. 460-462.

These and other operational issues and problems have been mentioned during discussions in the EUMC, Political and Security Committee (PSC) and Council, and during informal meetings¹⁶. However, not all of the reasons cited by Member State representatives at the time should necessarily be taken at face value. It was often representatives from countries contributing to the Battlegroups who advanced arguments as to why they should not be used, even if solutions to address the problems appeared possible. So, while it is important to learn operational lessons from the identified shortcomings of the Battlegroups for the EU RDC, the crucial challenge is to understand the underlying causes of the lack of political will.

The main insight from both professional experience and the significant academic literature on the topic is that the **EU Battlegroup Concept suffers from structural design flaws**¹⁷. In contrast to Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions – where Member States can opt-in according to whether they feel that significant national interests are at stake in a specific country, region, or in tackling a threat – Battlegroup contributor nations on standby are supposed to act in relation to needs on the ground, and to protect the Union's values and serve its interests as laid down in the EU's Treaties, EU strategic documents and concrete policies. In practice, Battlegroup contributor states still undertook national cost-benefit calculations each time a request for deployment was made, and did not hesitate to cast their veto even if they preferred to provide alternative justifications. One must, therefore, analyse the financial and political disincentives to explain why these contributors often said 'no', 'not in this case', or 'not yet'.

The cost-sharing issue

According to the professional experience of one of the authors and much of the academic literature on the topic, an underlying reason for vetoes by troop contributing Member States (or at least, delays in decision making) was the principle of 'costs lie where they fall'¹⁸. If the additional costs for the use of a Battlegroup are not covered largely, if not wholly, by common funding, the troop contributing countries tried to find reasons why the Battlegroup should not be used during their rotation turn. As the financial argument is often seen as embarrassing in foreign policy communities, Member States tend to advance other arguments as to why their Battlegroup should not be used. This originates mainly from the domestic assumption of 'non-use' of such high readiness forces in the national defence budgets. Powerful Finance Ministers are typically very reluctant to mobilise additional funds unless there is an important and urgent national interest at stake.

¹⁶ European Union Military Committee (EUMC). EU chiefs of defence, 19 May 2021, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2021/05/19/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=European+Union+Military+Committee+\(EUMC\)%2C+EU+chiefs+of+defence](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2021/05/19/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=European+Union+Military+Committee+(EUMC)%2C+EU+chiefs+of+defence).

¹⁷ See Reykers, 2016 and 2017, also Balossi-Restelli, L. M. (2011). Fit for what? Towards explaining Battlegroup inaction. *European Security*, 20, 155–184; Chappell, L. (2009). Differing member state approaches to the development of the EU Battlegroup concept: Implications for CSDP. *European Security*, 18, 417–439; Gowan, R. (2011). From rapid reaction to delayed inaction? Congo, the UN and the EU. *International Peacekeeping*, 18, 593–611; Granholm, N., & Jonson, P. (2006, March). EU-Battlegroups in context. Underlying dynamics, military and political challenges (FOI Report no. 1950). Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency; Hardt, H. (2009). Rapid response or evasive action? Regional organization responses to peace operation demands. *European Security*, 18, p. 383–415.

¹⁸ European Army Interoperability Centre (2021). Member States Advocate for the Relaunching of the Undeployed EU Battlegroups, 4 June 2021, <https://finabel.org/member-states-advocate-for-the-relaunching-of-the-undeployed-eu-battlegroups/>; see also Immenkamp, B. (2021). European Peace Facility: Investing in international stability and security, Briefing European Parliament Research Service, <https://epthinktank.eu/2021/06/04/european-peace-facility-promoting-peace-or-fuelling-conflict/>.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Council have formally recognised **financing of the Battlegroups** as '**the most significant obstacle**'¹⁹. In June 2017, the European Council took further steps to make full use of the Treaty of Lisbon's potential by calling for a broadening of the possibilities for common funding through the Athena Mechanism, which recently integrated in the European Peace Facility (EPF). While some progress has been made, financing remains a hurdle for the use of the existing Battlegroups, as discussed in Chapter 2.

NATO's experience with its NATO Response Force (NRF), though much bigger than the EU Battlegroups, has largely been the same²⁰. The NRF (at least, parts of it) was used only once. This happened during the big earthquake in Pakistan in 2005²¹. At that time, Spain was the lead nation for the Land Component Command of the NRF, and with only a few other nations bore the bulk of the costs. The troop contributing countries felt this was unfair²². After all, it was the North Atlantic Council that decided to use parts of the NRF, and it seemed unreasonable if only a handful of nations bore the bulk of the costs only because, by chance, it was their turn in the rotation scheme. This example dominated the discussion about common costs for a long time.

Still, there are positive examples too. In 2008, when the piracy problem in the Horn of Africa became a threat to western interests, both the EU and NATO started a decision making process for a possible counter-piracy operation. While the EU started its successful Operation Atalanta on 8 December 2008, NATO started weeks earlier by changing the mandate of one of its Standing NATO Maritime Groups (SNMGs), which are basically a permanent high readiness maritime force on a rotational basis²³. It appeared to be much easier to come to a decision if there are no additional costs for nations involved. After all, the rotational SNMGs are already afloat, as they are planned for in the national budgets and operate under a permanent maritime HQ. So, the additional costs outside the national defence budgets are not significant.

Structural political disincentives and the presumption of non-use

If the EU was able to effectively address the sharing of additional cost, as discussed in Chapter 2, this would substantially improve the prospects of the EU RDC compared to the history of the Battlegroups. Furthermore, addressing operational shortcomings identified earlier (such as insufficient size, adaptability and speed) and discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3 would reduce political actors' leeway to employ such reasons as a pretext, rather than a genuine concern. However, this would not be sufficient. The political reality of the Battlegroups was primarily driven by Member States seeking political credit and military recognition for filling roster slots, but this did not extend to a strong political expectation that they ought to be used. Whenever Member States were unwilling to authorise the use of their Battlegroups despite a clear need, opportunity and feasibility to do so, they were not publicly called out and were allowed to save face. This meant that each time the use of Battlegroups was discussed but did not materialise, a negative precedent was created that undermined the spirit of solidarity necessary to sustain a minimum amount of peer pressure in any future discussion of cases²⁴. Instead of creating a virtuous circle whereby the successful use of the Battlegroup in one case would create political incentives and mutual obligations for their future use, a vicious circle emerged that eroded political willingness to use the asset. A contributing factor was that the early years of the Battlegroups' existence were marked by declining

¹⁹ EEAS (2017). Factsheet: EU Battlegroups, 5 October 2017, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/factsheet_battlegroups.pdf

²⁰ Ringsmose, S. (2009). NATO's Response Force: finally getting it right? *European Security*, 18(3), 287-304. Ringsmose, J. and Rynning, S. (2017). The NATO Response Force: A qualified failure no more? *Contemporary Security Policy*, 38(3), 443-456.

²¹ NATO (2010). Pakistan earthquake relief operation, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50070.htm

²² NATO (2006). Lessons learned in Pakistan: NATO providing humanitarian aid, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/lessons-learned-pakistan-nato-providing-humanitarian-aid>, last three paragraphs.

²³ Later, this initiative became the NATO counter-piracy operation Ocean Shield as of 17 August 2009.

²⁴ Reykers, 2017, p. 466.

momentum for EU CSDP, particularly due to defence cuts after the 2008 financial crisis. Furthermore, actual convergence among Member States in terms of the priority of threats facing Europe and why Europe needed to be able to rapidly respond remained relatively limited, despite the first steps taken on paper with the first brief European Security Strategy of 2003. In such a context, many Member States remained concerned over being used by others that might be tempted to get their narrow national interests adopted at the European level.

The way forward

In order to substantially improve the prospect for the EU RDC, the underlying political bargain, assumptions and expectations of Member States, and the level of information among public observers, need to change. It is only natural that Member States have their own strategic cultures that still differ in key aspects, like perception of the most salient threats, willingness to use lethal force and accept risks, authorisation requirements and scrutiny by parliaments and public opinion, and attitudes to key partners, such as the United States, NATO or the United Nations²⁵. However, the concept of a rapidly deployable joint-arms capability for a collective purpose, but relying on national contributions, can only work if at least two conditions are met. First, there needs to be a sufficiently strong strategic consensus among Member States about the priority of threats and why the EU RDC is needed. The commitment for the RDC needs to be strong, precise and clear. EU actors need to be ready to mobilise substantial peer pressure and reputational costs if Member States violate these commitments and use their veto unreasonably. Secondly, Member State governments need to be clear and transparent vis-à-vis their national parliaments and publics about the nature of these commitments and what risks and cost they entail, and discuss the implications for parliamentary authorisation, rules of engagement, and potentially competing troop commitments to other bodies, such as NATO or the UN. Only if both conditions are fulfilled can Member State governments publicly justify, and potentially even gain credit for, the deployment of a Battlegroup at home. The European Parliament, with its links to national parties and publics, can greatly help in this process. It is essential that the EU RDC is not sold as improved or bigger Battlegroups, but as a new endeavour underpinned by a different political logic. To avoid slipping back into the old logic, it will be essential to create early positive precedents for their use, and avoid the negative precedents that hampered past decision making.

2.2 Is flexibility the answer? The use of Article 44 TEU

Even in cases when EU Battlegroups were not used, it was instead often individual EU Member States (in particular France) who then acted outside the EU framework, either on their own, or with other EU or non-EU states. Examples include the French *Opération Serval* in Mali in early 2013, or French troops sent to the Central African Republic (CAR) in December 2013²⁶. However, such operations could easily jar with the collective aspiration for the EU to implement an ‘integrated approach to external conflicts and crises’, whereby all policies, approaches and resources for specific countries and regions, or on key issues, are meant to be coherent and mutually reinforcing²⁷. The integrated approach is also meant to place a premium on prevention, and promote the human security of local populations over narrow self-interests. National operations conducted outside the EU framework – even if they can sometimes be successful by

²⁵ Meyer, C. (2006). *The quest for a European strategic culture: Changing norms on security and defence in the European Union*. Springer.

²⁶ Reykers, 2017, p. 463.

²⁷ The integrated approach was set-out in the EU’s Global Strategy of 2016 and endorsed by the European Council in 2018, see EEAS (2016). [Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy](#); Council of European Union (2018a) [Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crisis](#), 22 January 2018.

acting quickly, as in the case of Operation Palliser in Sierra Leone – inevitably constrain, if not undermine, the EU's stated aspiration for 'integration' across policy tools, institutions and actors in pursuit of common interests and values. Furthermore, such operations exclude both formal and informal democratic oversight and scrutiny through the European Parliament, and constrain pan-European debates, information and public justification of foreign policy. Furthermore, these groups of Member States cannot draw on any EU sources for funding through the Athena Mechanism (now the EPF), and cannot easily benefit from the technical expertise of the EEAS and European Defence Agency (EDA), coordination with Commission actions related to the same crisis, or information from EU instruments, such as the EU's Satellite Centre or the Satellite Navigation System Galileo²⁸. By bringing such 'coalitions of the willing' into the EU framework, one could gain effectiveness, coherence, and longer-term effects on the ground. It might also increase

Treaty on European Union, Article 44

1. Within the framework of the decisions adopted in accordance with Article 43, the Council may entrust the implementation of a task to a group of Member States which are willing and have the necessary capability for such a task. Those Member States, in association with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall agree among themselves on the management of the task.
2. Member States participating in the task shall keep the Council regularly informed of its progress on their own initiative or at the request of another Member State. Those States shall inform the Council immediately should the completion of the task entail major consequences or require amendment of the objective, scope and conditions determined for the task in the decisions referred to in paragraph 1. In such cases, the Council shall adopt the necessary decisions.

legitimacy in the eyes of local partners by ensuring that objectives are set with their interests and concerns in mind, and strengthen the legitimacy of the EU as a crisis manager. Against this background, it is not surprising that the European Parliament, but also the European Council in the recent SC, have called for exploring the potential of activating Article 44 of the Treaty of Lisbon²⁹. It could be used when normal CSDP operations would not be appropriate given the non-permissive environment, or would take too long given the difficulties with decision making, planning and force generation. It could be an alternative or complement to either the Battlegroups or the EU RDC.

Article 44 does not create any new tasks or CSDP competences, but allows for groups of able and willing Member States (at least two) to conduct (and potentially also plan) both military or civil operations on behalf of the EU and within the EU's legal and institutional framework, as long as it is

unanimously authorised by the Council, which must maintain political oversight. Article 44 does not bypass the unanimity requirement or provide carte blanche to these Member States, but it does potentially create an avenue for more flexibility and speed in decision making. The quid pro quo for coalitions gaining greater EU financial, institutional and political support is that non-participating EU Member States gain more control and oversight on the purpose, design and conduct of these operations. Yet, just like the Battlegroups, Article 44 has so far never been used, and leaves some ambiguity over how it would work in practice in specific cases³⁰.

²⁸ Scazzieri, L. (2022). Could EU-endorsed 'Coalitions of the Willing' strengthen EU security policy?, Centre for European Reform, Policy brief, <https://www.cer.eu/insights/could-eu-endorsed-coalitions-willing>.

²⁹ Strategic Compass, p. 26.

³⁰ Council (2015). Legal Service contribution on the conditions and modalities of recourse to Article 44 TEU (5225/15), 13 January 2015, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5225-2015-INIT/en/pdf>.

The fact that Article 44 has not been used suggests that Member States have had significant concerns over entering such an arrangement in the past. Potential participants in such coalitions of the willing apparently feared that the cost-benefit calculation is not favourable enough to justify the expected loss of control over the key parameters of an operation. It would be the Council that settles major questions, such as 'objectives, geographical scope, the political and military assumptions, limitations and rules of engagement, laid down in documents like the Crisis Management Concept (CMC) and the Operations Plan (OPLAN)'³¹. The expected loss of control was not outweighed by the rather limited opportunities for defraying costs via the Athena Mechanism, or some of the more intangible political benefits. On the other hand, those non-participating Member States may have sensed the risk of being trapped in operations with substantial reputational risk for the EU, or may have limited appetite to finance operations that appear to serve predominantly national objectives. Furthermore, if such delegated operations are seen as successful and become the norm, they might undermine rather than enhance the EU's stature in foreign affairs over the longer term, and detract from the central objective of building up the operational capacities of Brussels structures³².

In order to improve the prospects for the use of Article 44, the incentives need to change, as in the discussion of the Battlegroups. One lever will be allowing a greater proportion of the costs to be carried from the common budget. Precisely how much depends partly on resolving the more technical discussions about what might be legitimately called 'additional' or 'incremental' costs. In Section 2.6, we suggest that at least the costs which cannot be planned for should be covered by common funds, as a matter of principle. Here, interviews suggest that a compromise can be found. Politically more difficult, but equally important, is that the Council should seek to provide more freedom to these coalitions; for instance, by letting them write the OPLAN, especially in situations when speed is essential. Subsequent oversight requirements for operations should be proportionate and reasonable, rather than requiring such coalitions to seek unanimous agreement for every small operational change. This does not mean to move away from the principle that the PSC should be able to question when 'things go south', as one of our interviewees said³³. Simulating different scenarios well in advance to clarify the modalities for triggering Article 44 would help remove some of the uncertainty and political friction, and substantially speed up decision making in future crisis situations. It would be advisable, for instance, to clarify upfront that Article 44 should cover the whole operation, not just parts of it. Splitting tasks up would undermine the unity of command and create significant problems for coherence and the perception by partners in the region.

³¹ Bakker, A., Biscop, S., Drent, M., Landman, L. (2016). Spearheading European Defence, Clingendael Report, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Report_Spearheading_European_Defence.pdf, p. 17.

³² Novaky, N. I. (2016). [*Who wants to pay more? The European Union's military operations and the dispute over financial burden sharing*](#). European Security, 25(2), 216-236; Reykers (2016), Reykers 2017.

³³ Interview with diplomatic source, 12 September 2022.

3 Operational Development of the RDC

3.1 Possible tasks for the RDC, priorities and force packages

The SC³⁴ mentions five possible tasks, which partly overlap. They can be executed in different phases of an operation in a non-permissive environment. The initial focus for the development of the RDC will be on: (1) rescue and evacuation operations and (2) an operation at the initial phase of stabilisation operations. More generally, the SC also mentions (3) initial entry, which partly overlaps with the previous, (4) reinforcement (of other EU missions or those of partners), and (5) a reserve force to secure an exit. With the use of 'such as', the text clearly indicates that these are just examples which can help policymakers and commanders to develop the RDC. Also, when the SC says that the RDC 'can be used [...] in a non-permissive environment', this does not mean that it cannot be used if the environment is (temporarily) permissive. In order to make it clear that the list with possible tasks is not limitative, the future RDC concept might add 'and any other task for which the RDC (or parts of it) would be suited and the Council concludes that this task needs to be executed in the interest of the EU'. Still, it is important to have a common view on the possible tasks as a reference for the development of the RDC Concept. It seems logical to follow the guidance of the SC with regard to the following four tasks:

1. Rescue and evacuation operations often demand very specific equipment and units at a very high readiness. As the tasks of the RDC are foreseen to be within the context of a non-permissive environment, it can be assumed that the Council does not mean the units which most Member States have on a very high readiness for civil protection. So, the focus of the RDC would be on rescuing or evacuating people with the use of military means from a crisis area under a terrorist or conventional threat. Normally, these kinds of operations fall under national responsibilities, which is a complicating factor for the RDC. There is an existing international military coordination procedure in which the country with the highest number of evacuees and which itself has considerable means for evacuations takes the initiative in the creation of a Non-Combatant Evacuation Coordination Centre (NEOCC)³⁵. Most western countries would normally liaise with such an NEOCC in order to make evacuations as efficient and effective as possible. EU RDC development would do well to consider the positive experiences of evacuations from Libya in 2011, and the negative experience of those from Afghanistan in 2021. In the Libyan case, evacuation was excellently organised from Malta, which hosted evacuation experts and tools of many different (mostly western) countries³⁶. The RDC should not compete with such a procedure, but rather become part of it as a structure which could deliver the means to evacuate at short notice. In the case of Afghanistan, the aspirations of NATO allies and partners to carry out a prudent and confidential planning of evacuation preparations were frustrated by the unexpected public statement of the US to withdraw its troops, and thus emboldened the enemy and worsened the situation³⁷. Still, if the EU had been less dependent on US assets and the US more dependent on European contributions, European allies and the EU itself might have had a stronger political

³⁴ Strategic Compass, p. 14.

³⁵ See for example: UK MOD, Joint Doctrine Publications 3-51, Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/979907/20210412-JDP_3_51_NEO_web_V2-O_1_.pdf, p. 39.

³⁶ Reuters, MALTA: Twelve countries come together in Malta to coordinate the evacuation of their citizens from Libya, <https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/4952486>, March 2011.

³⁷ See for example Gehrke, J. (2021). Greatest debacle that NATO has seen': Biden stuns allies with Afghanistan mistakes expected of Trump. Washington Examiner, 18 August 2021, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense/national-security/biden-stuns-allies-afghanistan>.

voice in this case; 'Afghanistan has shown in a striking way that deficiencies in EU capacity to act autonomously comes with a price'³⁸.

In the future, one can expect situations in which the EU has a specific responsibility for the security of EU staff in delegations, Commission programmes and CSDP missions. If this staff needs to be evacuated, the EEAS should be able to have a leading role, with its consular unit coordinating locations of possible EU evacuees, and the RDC as a tool for the creation of a secure evacuation area and transport by land, air and/or sea. Even then, participation in the existing procedures for the coordination of evacuations would remain essential for coordination with other evacuation experts of both EU Member States and non-EU countries, which is in line with the guidance in the SC to strengthen cooperation with partners³⁹.

The necessary force packages for rescue and evacuation operations would very much depend on the circumstances (e.g. evacuation from a harbour/coast, or from a land locked area, with or without an airport, the kind of threat, etc.). Besides conventional means, this task would mostly require highly sophisticated Special Operation Forces (SOF) and a flexible command structure, as Member States are generally reluctant to place SOF capacities under EU command. A model could be developed whereby a lead nation (with a significant SOF capacity) would coordinate the common effort with other Member States at an NEOCC. The EU SOF-coalition would execute the rescue or evacuation and the MPCC, or the OHQ⁴⁰, could coordinate the RDC means used in support of the evacuation.

2. An operation at the initial phase of stabilisation operations/initial entry is very different from an evacuation operation, both in timeline and military requirements. The European Council would most likely take time to decide whether it wants to be involved and how. It would only be useful to use the RDC as a high readiness capacity if EU Member States or partner organisations, such as the UN or African Union, can guarantee that they will deliver the follow-on forces. Though there will always be time pressure, urgency for the Council would be less pronounced than with an evacuation, and units would have more preparation time.

Force packages will again be very dependent on the circumstances. Will it be the start of peace enforcing (so contested) or peace keeping (with the consent of the opposing parties)? What are the military capabilities of those opposing parties? Before a decision on involvement is made, the EU should assure itself that it will have escalation dominance. Experience shows that the force package to execute the initial phase of a stabilisation operation would, in most cases, require a land force of about an independent brigade⁴¹ (5 000 to 6 000 troops), plus the necessary air, sea, SOF and enabler support. This would be roughly comparable with the French *Opération Serval* (with up to 6 300 land troops), or the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force in NATO (with 5 000 to 6 300 land troops), but excluding SOF, air, sea and enablers in both cases. The EU RDC would need a brigade HQ to coordinate the land effort and a Forces HQ to coordinate the joint effort. Situations may arise in which an initial entry can be done with only one or two Battlegroups plus additional air, sea, SOF and enablers. This could keep the number of deployed troops under 5 000. In most cases, however, a commander doing an initial entry operation would need the flexibility, power and sustainment which are normally at a brigade level, though this can differ per country. In general, for this kind of operation, the number of 5 000 is too limiting, especially if it includes all land, air, sea, SOF and enablers.

3. Reinforcement of other missions. If developments are such that it can be predicted that a mission needs to be reinforced at a certain stage, this **reinforcement** would normally be planned for, including a

³⁸ EEAS/Blog HR/VP, <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/103745/reentr%C3%A9e-2021-afghanistan-and-beyond-en>.

³⁹ Strategic Compass, p. 4.

⁴⁰ The choice between MPCC and OHQ will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

⁴¹ A brigade would have 3 to 4 manoeuvre battalions, plus Combat Support and Combat Service Support.

regular force generation process. But in sudden unexpected crisis situations, the RDC could be a useful tool as a temporary reinforcement. This can be defined as being the strategic reserve for EU or partner missions. The required force package would vary per situation, but in general one or two Battlegroups with additional air, sea and/or enablers would often cover the minimum requirement.

4. Reserve force to secure an exit could have an overlap with both evacuation and reinforcement. If the end state of a mission is stable and secure, the mission commander would not need an additional force to secure their exit. They would make a redeployment plan and execute it. So, the RDC task here would arise when the mission's staff needed to re-deploy under pressure. In that case, the EU could send a joint force from the RDC to secure exit. The difference with an urgent evacuation is that this most likely can be pre-planned, and the force package from the RDC could then be a part of the redeployment/exit plan. The force package would need to be strong enough to secure an airport or seaport of embarkation. One or two Battlegroups with additional SOF, air and/or sea support would often be sufficient. For example, in the extremely difficult case of Kabul in 2021, the US sent 1 000 troops of the 82nd Airborne Division to Kabul, which brought the total American force specifically defending the International Airport of Kabul to about 6 000 troops⁴², not including other forces of the US and allies moving through the airport. The required package requirement depends on the threat and what mission forces itself can already be freed to secure the exit. It can be assumed that in most cases, the task will be suitable for a force package from the RDC.

3.2 Scenarios

For the development of new military capabilities, conceptual planners develop 'illustrative scenarios'. In order to facilitate operational planning with current capabilities to optimise doctrine and military concepts, conceptual planner use 'operational scenarios'. For the RDC, both kinds of scenarios should cover at least all the possible RDC tasks, have a 'non-permissive environment', and run in the most likely geographical areas.

In order to cover all the RDC tasks mentioned, conceptual planners would need to create scenarios which are suitable for the planning of:

- an unexpected urgent evacuation, with both a harbour and a land locked situation;
- a peace-keeping or stabilisation operation;
- a peace-enforcing operation;
- a reinforcement operation of another mission;
- a redeployment under terrorist and/or conventional threat.

Conceptual planners will not have to start from scratch, as they can build on already existing scenarios created for the conceptual development of the Battlegroups.

The scenarios should cover among others two guidelines in the SC. First, that it is about operations in a 'non-permissive environment', and second, the suggested role division with NATO and the related most likely geographical areas for the RDC to focus on.

The term 'non-permissive environment' as mentioned in the SC is quite vague. It can refer to a terrorist or a conventional threat, but this could also include all kinds of hybrid threats, such as cyber-attacks, information warfare or even weapons of mass destruction. The scenarios should cover these realistically as well, in order to determine the requirements to counter these threats.

⁴² Schnell, M. (2021). Pentagon authorizes sending additional 1,000 troops to Afghanistan. The Hill, 15 August 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210815210436/https://thehill.com/policy/defense/567952-pentagon-authorizes-sending-additional-1000-troops-to-afghanistan>.

The geographical areas for the scenarios follow logically from the SC. It stresses complementarity to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members (SC pp. 5 and 13). This makes it logical to assume that conceptual planning for the RDC should be focused on crisis management tasks in TEU Article 43 (SC p.13-17), though Article 42(7) and Solidarity Clause 222 are not excluded (SC p. 17-18). The RDC could be used for the support of EU interests in the eastern neighbourhood and the Balkans, but given NATO's focus and current threat assessments, it is most likely that it will be used in the Middle East and Northern Africa, including sub-Sahel, which are regions with high EU interests. It seems logical to create scenarios for conceptual development of the RDC in those regions. This does not exclude that in real life, the RDC could be used much more broadly, if the Council so decides.

3.3 Suggestions for the RDC concept and size

Based on the arguments thus far, the RDC could be developed into a multinational toolbox consisting of high readiness military land, air, sea and SOF modules (staff, units, enablers) from which tailor-made force packages can be composed for specific missions. These need at least to be able to execute the tasks as mentioned in the SC within the framework of TEU Article 43, not excluding any other task for which it is militarily suited and ordered by the Council. In most cases, the tailor-made force package from the RDC would need to be commanded by a (Joint) Force Commander, supported by a deployable (Joint) Force HQ⁴³. The increase in ambition of the RDC compared to Battlegroups is primarily in quality because it solves the shortfall of the Battlegroups, which lacked high readiness air and sea components and enablers. But **an RDC-Force package of 5 000 is hardly an improvement in quantity**. The current two Battlegroups each of about 1 500 land troops, so 3 000 in total, did not include the air, sea and enablers that are usually necessary for the success of an executive military mission. The old ambition, therefore, already came close to 5 000 troops, though not all were on high readiness, and until now they missed essential regular training together⁴⁴.

The number of 5 000 for a force packages should not include the enablers, which are already permanently deployed (such as intelligence assets and satellite capacity), or the supporting units and enablers, which will not deploy into the crisis area under the command of the Joint Forces Commander.

The RDC would need to be able to form different force packages for different tasks and regions. Numbers of land, air, sea, SOF and enablers will significantly vary per mission. This means that the number of high readiness military modules in the RDC must be considerably higher than the maximum of 5 000 troops for the individual force packages. An exact number can only be given after conceptual planners have analysed the illustrative scenarios and is, therefore, beyond the scope of this paper. However, as a rough indication it would most likely be somewhere between 7 000 and 10 000 troops.⁴⁵

The Battlegroups will need to become more modular. In order to create optimal force packages tailor-made for a specific missions, it would be preferable to have modules at company level (120 to 250 troops), certainly for the Combat Support⁴⁶ and Combat Service Support⁴⁷ units. Pending definition of the

⁴³ See Annex 1 in order to understand the difference in terminology between NATO and EU.

⁴⁴ See section 2.4 for more detail about exercises.

⁴⁵ This rough indication is based on discussions with military planners (land, air, sea, logistics and joint) who were asked how force packages within their area of expertise would look like if the task were performed in the direct EU southern neighbourhood with available harbours and if the same task is to be performed in a crisis at a longer distance to a land-locked crisis area.

⁴⁶ Combat Support forces provide direct support of the forces on the battlefield by providing intelligence, communications, engineering, and [chemical warfare](#) services of immediate impact on the course of the battle.

⁴⁷ Combat service support forces provide administrative and technical (logistical) services to ensure that the combat and combat support forces are adequately manned, armed, fed, fuelled, maintained, and moved as required.

requirements for a certain crisis, these modules could get different levels of readiness. The readiness concept for the RDC will determine the costs and the number of modules the RDC would need. The higher the readiness, the higher the personnel costs and the shorter a unit can stay on that high readiness. A readiness concept such as the Spanish Emergency Military Unit⁴⁸ for civil protection (with its units permanently on a very high alert) would be very costly and not necessary.

A readiness concept such as the French *Guépard* system, which proved to be very valuable during the French *Opération Serval* in Mali⁴⁹, would be a better option. The system provides French authorities with a reliable pool of forces from which they can rapidly draw units to form the French version of battlegroups, fully tailored to a specific mission (GTAI - 'Groupement Tactique Interarmes'). The system is based on units that are highly interoperable. Comparable units go through the same kind of training cycle as a single unit and as a part of a higher level of combined arms. Each time a unit has successfully reached the end of such a training cycle, it can be put on *Guépard* alert. Within one regiment, companies can be in different stages of the training cycle, but a regiment will mostly have at least one company at the highest training standard. In anticipation of potential tasks, these forces on *Guépard* alert can be put on a very high readiness like 30 days, but also on much shorter reaction times if the specific tasks require it. Being on *Guépard* alert is not a mission in itself. It just gives an order for increased readiness for a yet unknown mission. Because equipment and training are highly standardised, it is possible to form such high readiness company size units into temporary battlegroups (GTIA) at a very short notice. Depending on the specific mission there will be fully tailored combinations of company size units a GTIA will have, like tanks, infantry, artillery, engineers, communication and related logistical and medical support. French units which are permanently stationed in different African countries can also take part in the *Guépard* system. The first GTIA to rush to Mali during Operation Serval was mainly formed from these French forces already in Africa.

It should be stressed that while the French *Guépard* system is a good model for the EU RDC concept, this does not mean that all countries can easily adopt the same model. One would need additional study and discussions amongst the Member States on how best each participating Member State can contribute to the EU RDC. Following the French model, the bulk of the RDC modules would stay at a standard relatively low readiness, except those for high urgency tasks, such as rescue and evacuation operations. Member States which are not organised to plan in modules as small as company size should, of course, always be free to contribute with bigger modules (e.g. battalions or, even, a brigade). Pending the assessment of a security situation in the different crisis areas, the MPCC/OHQ could advise to increase the readiness of certain modules in order to have a tailor-made force package available in time. This would most likely involve the Council or PSC for agreement (with advice from the EUMC) because of the possible costs and political implications.

3.4 Exercises

A golden rule for military exercises is that the country which contributes troops to a multinational effort ensures that its troops are trained to the agreed standards. It would be impossible to have different military standards for every international organisation. Member States only have one single set of forces which can be used within different frameworks (e.g. national, EU, NATO, UN, Coalition). Since for most EU Member States NATO is the focus for collective defence, it is generally accepted that at the tactical and joint military levels, troops follow NATO standards and procedures. This simplifies multinational cooperation during training and operations. Still, if multinational units or headquarters (HQs) want to be effective, the modules within must have trained together at that higher level before they can become effective during real operations. The more they have trained together, the more effective they will become.

⁴⁸ Unidad Militar de Emergencias (UME), <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ume/>.

⁴⁹ Shurkin, M (2014). France's War in Mali, Lessons for an Expeditionary Army, Rand Corporation, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR770.html, 2014.

As the EU Battlegroups are multinational forces, it is essential that units within have trained together under their multinational EU Battlegroup HQ. Normally, this is done under the responsibility of the Framework Nation. Since it is now foreseen that two Battlegroups (or even three) will work together within an RDC-Force package, it is even more important that they are now trained in the same way. It would, therefore, be useful to discuss how the EU Military Staff (EUMS) or MPCC/OHQ could take this higher coordinating responsibility for the training of the Battlegroups.

The RDC, when completely or partly deployed, will be a joint multinational force. It will most likely not be cost effective to regularly train the different force packages from the RDC with all its possible sub-commands and units at the same time. NATO experiences show that a minimum training requirement would be that the Forces HQ is trained (and certified) by a higher level at least once every two years. As staff in an HQ normally rotate every two or three years, a lower exercise frequency would cause loss of experience. This would be akin to what NATO and nations do for the comparable Joint Task Force (JTF) HQs. NATO has a specific organisation for the development and execution of this kind of joint exercises. As these national or multinational JTF HQs can be used for both NATO and the EU, it is recommendable to not duplicate such an expensive organisation⁵⁰, especially because standards and procedures at those military levels are the same in NATO and the EU.

3.5 Enablers, shortfalls and how to cover them

Military enablers are units or means which enable another commander to achieve their mission. In the context of the RDC, it would be the means in support of the Force Commander commanding a force package from the RDC. Such a Force Commander would always need support of enablers, such as strategic intelligence (coming from different means, i.e. human intelligence and long-distance surveillance drones, airborne Joint Surveillance and Attack Radar systems, and satellite images), strategic air- and/or sealift, higher echelon medical care and strategic Medical Evacuation Capacity (MEDEVAC). When developing the RDC concept, some organisational principles should be taken into account.

First, strategic enablers would not come under command of a Force Commander. As they often serve more clients, they would rather stay under a higher strategic command (or agency) which covers more crisis areas. This higher strategic level would decide on the priorities.

Second, in order to ensure that a Force Commander from the RDC can sufficiently be supported by strategic enablers, this must be pre-arranged through agreements between the strategic commands/agencies and the RDC. Strategic means could (temporarily) be prioritised for the RDC, or it can be arranged through 'supporting-supported' relationships. An example could be that the European Air Transport Command in Eindhoven could (temporarily) prioritise a specific number of airplanes for the RDC and with that number become a supporting command for the Forces Commander.

The limited availability of the mentioned strategic enablers is still a significant shortfall among EU Member States. They still depend on the US, UK and/or the civilian market. Even a country such as France, with a strong military culture, was for *Opération Serval* in Mali dependent on allies for airlift, aerial refuelling and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)⁵¹. Additionally, as the focus for the RDC is on non-permissive environments, civilian options are limited. If the EU wants to be able to undertake military operations independently from the USA and the UK, more substantial investments are needed. But strategic enablers are mostly too costly for a single EU Member State. It would, therefore, be ideal to develop them under the regime of the Commissions' European Defence Fund, run by DG DEFIS, with EUMC

⁵⁰ NATO's *Joint Warfare Centre* has a permanent staff of 270, not including varying high numbers of contractors per exercise.

⁵¹ Rand Corporation, Michel Shurkin, France's War in Mali, Lessons for an Expeditionary Army, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR770.html, 2014, p. 2.

determining requirements and EDA facilitating the projects. Some Member States suggest that the investments in enablers for the benefit of all could be done under Article 44 TEU by a small group of able and willing Member States, which is comparable with projects under Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)⁵². The procedures and organisational structures exist within PESCO, in addition to relevant projects as discussed briefly below, but much more needs to be done to address the significant shortfalls.

3.6 Costs

Costs for military CSDP missions have been subject of intensive discussions in the EUMC, PSC and Council. Consensus was initially found for common funding of the EU OHQ⁵³. The logic is that all Member States can have their troops under such an OHQ, so it is reasonable that they all financially contribute. But for all other common funding of national contributions, it has been difficult to find consensus. Under the Athena Mechanism⁵⁴, which regulated the common funding for military missions, some improvements were made when strategic transport for deployment and later redeployment could come under common funding. But other operational costs continued to be difficult to agree on. The situation remained that the bulk of the costs for the operation would be borne by the troop contributing Member States. As discussed in the previous chapter, the lack of financial solidarity continued to be a major reason why Battlegroups were not used.

The introduction of the EPF⁵⁵ in March 2021 absorbed the Athena Mechanism and parts of the budget of the African Peace Facility. The Council Decision on EPF in Annex IV, Part A, defines a much broader range of costs which could be funded in common. It covers the costs for the different HQs and for the Battlegroups, not only the transport costs for deployment and redeployment, but also some running costs for logistic support. In Annex IV, Part B and C, the Council Decision also opens the door for common funding of some more running costs, but still under the condition 'if the Council so decides', or if 'approved by the [EPF-]committee'.

With the introduction of the EPF, the available budget significantly increased to a ceiling of EUR 5 692 million divided over ceilings per year for the period 2021-2027⁵⁶. In comparison, the sum of the administered budgets in the Athena Mechanism and the African Peace Facility in the seven years before was EUR 2 578 million⁵⁷. The budget can be used for Common Costs of CSDP Military Missions and also for Assistance Measures in support of third states or partner international organisations. The EPF is a non-EU-budget, paid for by the Member States and only the Council can decide on priorities. Proposals normally come from the HR/VP, but can also come from Member States. According to an official involved in the development of the EPF, the idea was that per year, the EPF Committee would first assess what part of the EPF budget would be necessary for military missions and operations, after which the Council could decide on priorities for assistance measures with the remaining part of the budget⁵⁸. The war in Ukraine changed this logic. The Council is giving such a high priority to the Assistance Measures for Ukraine that more than 50 % of the total EPF budget for 7 years has already been spent, with five more years to go. Council discussions on how to solve this financial problem have been postponed in order not to delay the decisions

⁵² For examples see <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/>.

⁵³ Council of the European Union (2020) Athena Financial rules adopted by Special Committee, 11 February 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44775/wk-1668-2020-init-act-of-the-sc-athena-financial-rules-website-version.pdf>

⁵⁴ Council decision (CFSP) 2015/528 of 27 March 2015 Article 32.

⁵⁵ Council decision (CFSP) 2021/509 of 22 March 2021 establishing a European Peace Facility, and repealing Decision (CFSP) 2015/528

⁵⁶ In comparison: In the seven-year period before the start of the EPF in 2021, the sum of the Athena Mechanism and APF budgets was

⁵⁷ Based on information from EPF Administrator for Operations and the African Peace Facility Annual Report 2020.

⁵⁸ Based on an interview with an official who has been involved in the development of the EPF.

on additional support for Ukraine. This, of course, only worsens the problem which might frustrate the process for the development of the RDC. At the time of writing, the Council Decision on EPF urgently needed an update. The budget ceiling for 2022 was EUR 540 million⁵⁹, while Assistance Measures for Ukraine alone already costed more than EUR 2.5 billion⁶⁰.

The RDC is not yet mentioned in the annexes about common funding. In order to make the RDC successful, it is essential that at least all incremental costs⁶¹ which could not be pre-planned and thus budgeted for by Member States can be funded in common. Examples of incremental costs are the additional costs of personnel on mission, transport, building of secure infrastructure, use of ammunition and fuels, significant higher maintenance costs, higher depreciation of equipment or even loss of equipment. Most of these are not yet automatically covered under common funding. The sum of these kind of costs can quickly go over EUR 200 million a year for a battalion size unit of about 500 troops, loss of equipment and long-term care for casualties not included. Exercises can be planned for, contributions to the RDC can be planned for, but the Council Decision itself to use those contributions for operations can mostly not be foreseen and therefore cannot be budgeted for in the national budgets. It can create huge financial problems for troop contributing Member States if these costs are not covered under common funding.

So, while introduction of the EPF was meant to be a considerable improvement it, until now, was not. It opened the door for a much wider common funding of military operations, especially for high readiness forces, and the budget increased significantly. Still, the positive effects are currently limited. The common funding for running costs still depends on a separate decision by the Council, and the current budget is already for more than 50 % absorbed by support to Ukraine.

3.7 EU RDC in relation to NATO high readiness forces

The development of the EU RDC concept will influence NATO's development of its high readiness forces, and vice versa. As all units and HQs at the joint level and below follow NATO standards and procedures, RDC exercises and the efforts of the Council and Commission to solve RDC shortfalls through capacity building will, therefore, directly strengthen the military capacity of both EU and NATO.

From the wording in the SC, it can be assumed that for planning purposes it seems logical that NATO focuses on collective defence (NATO Article 5) and the EU will focus on military tasks under TEU Articles 42.1 and 43. This also logically follows from the content of TEU Article 42.7. This logic further increased with the decision of Finland and Sweden to become a member of NATO. This does not exclude a possibility that NATO could also do non-Article 5 operations, nor does it exclude that the EU would need to act militarily for common defence if an EU Member State is attacked and NATO, in that specific case, cannot take the military coordinating role. But for planning purposes, it can be assumed that the RDC has to be prepared to act for tasks under TEU Article 42.1 and 43.

The tasks for common defence and crisis management are not in competition with each other. Both are essential for the protection of EU's interests. If NATO and EU were one organisation, it would also need to be able to cover both tasks. Still, the current situation is that NATO members do not yet have the troops to easily increase the NRF from 40 000 to 300 000, and the EU already has difficulties to fill the roster for the current lower ambition for high readiness Battlegroups. Though most Member States have increased their defence budgets, it will take time before this results in more troops and sufficient enablers. Industry has

⁵⁹ Council decision (CFSP) 2021/509 of 22 March 2021 establishing a European Peace Facility, and repealing Decision (CFSP) 2015/528, Annex 1.

⁶⁰ European Council site, European Peace Facility, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/>.

⁶¹ The Council Decision on EPF defines in Article 44 *incremental costs* as 'costs other than those which would in any case have been borne by one or more contributing Member States or third States, a Union institution or an international organisation, independently of the organisation of a Union Operation'.

difficulty to quickly respond to the higher demands, and Member States find it difficult to find enough recruits. In the short term they will have to choose which task to give highest priority.

Having the NRF in NATO and the RDC in the EU raises the question whether it is possible to double-hat high readiness units to contribute to both organisations at the same time. As crises in the east and south can happen at the same time, it is strongly recommended not to accept this double-hat solution.

4 Command and Control of the EU RDC

4.1 Risks and risk mitigation

Guaranteeing an adequately resourced and performant command and control (C2) structure on high readiness is an essential prerequisite for making the EU RDC work. C2 of military operations, in its most basic sense, is about 'the leadership and direction given to a military organisation in the accomplishment of its mission'⁶². The military chain of command of EU missions and operations involves multiple levels: the military-strategic level, for which C2 commonly takes place in an OHQ outside the area of operations, and the operational and tactical level, for which C2 is located in a Force Headquarters (FHQ) deployed in the area of operations⁶³. Both OHQ and FHQ need to be joint, so have staff capacities to coordinate land, sea-, air-, SOF components and enablers.

Providing C2 of multinational rapid reaction forces, such as the RDC, requires overcoming two inherent challenges⁶⁴. First, multi-nationality comes with a risk of a dispersed and politically contentious C2 structure. Although unity of command is the rule, because it 'provides the necessary cohesion for the planning and execution of operations/missions'⁶⁵, the integration of the command structure depends on whether troop contributing states prioritise national sovereignty (and control) or mission effectiveness. Contributing states need to be willing to delegate authority to a centralised and integrated command, which implies giving up some control over deployed national personnel, and eschew political interference. Second, rapid response requires short notice availability of the required resources at all levels (strategic, operational, and tactical), including HQ and agreed standard operating procedures. Interoperability of forces and personnel in the area of operations and in HQs is therefore essential, for which regular joint training and certification are means to an end. For rapid response, either a centralised and standing command structure or a high readiness Framework Nation command structure is therefore recommendable⁶⁶.

In the past, deployment of CSDP military missions and operations has repeatedly been hindered by the absence of a permanent EU military-strategic command structure, which could coordinate and lead the planning and deployment process⁶⁷. Proposals for creating such a permanent OHQ for military-strategic planning at the EU level have been a cause for political contestation, chiefly from the UK in the pre-Brexit era but also from other Member States, driven by concerns about duplicating NATO's command structure and giving up national control over deployed military forces⁶⁸. C2 has hence mostly taken shape in an ad hoc fashion, either by using the pre-identified national OHQs or, only once, by relying on NATO structures under the Berlin Plus agreement (Operation Althea). However, the absence of a permanent command structure is an obstacle to advanced planning. It can, furthermore, complicate swift political decision making (i.e. consensus in Council of Ministers), because the OHQ has to be selected in an ad hoc manner.

⁶² Netherlands Ministry of Defence. [Joint Doctrine Publication 5 Command and Control](#). 2012.

⁶³ EU terminology at these military levels differs from NATO terminology. See annex 1 (Definitions) for details.

⁶⁴ Karlsrud, J. and Reykers, Y. (2019). *Multinational Rapid Response Mechanisms: From Institutional Proliferation to Institutional Exploitation*. Abingdon: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781351005333.

⁶⁵ EEAS, [EU Concept for Military Command and Control](#), 23 April 2019, para. 10f.

⁶⁶ Framework nation command implies that the framework nation provides the command structure, communication and information systems and other necessary capabilities. Other member states can plug their forces in this command structure.

⁶⁷ This section discusses the military chain of command for CSDP missions and operations in general, and the EU Battlegroups in particular. Day-to-day political strategic C2 is in the hands of the Political and Security Committee (PSC), acting under the authority of the European Council (Art. 38 Treaty on European Union and EU Concept for Military Command and Control, 2019, para. 7), with the advice of functional sub-committees like the EU Military Committee (Council of the European Union, [Council Decision setting up the Military Committee of the EU](#), 22 January 2001).

⁶⁸ Tardy, T.. [MPCC: Towards an EU military command](#), *European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) Brief*, June 2017.

Advance planning and swift decision making are both essential aspects of guaranteeing rapid military deployment.

The Council Decision of 8 June 2017 to establish the MPCC was in that sense an important step in the right direction⁶⁹. Alike the OHQ, the MPCC is and must be a joint staff. Although the MPCC, located in Brussels in the EUMS structures, initially only filled a lacuna in the military command chain of EU non-executive missions (i.e. training and advisory missions, such as those in Mali, Mozambique, RCA and Somalia)⁷⁰, a gradual increase in ambition level has taken place⁷¹. In its Conclusions of 19 November 2018, the Council agreed that the MPCC should be ready by end 2020 'to take responsibility for the operational planning and conduct of the non-executive military CSDP missions and one executive military CSDP operation limited to EU Battlegroup size'⁷². EU Battlegroup deployment could then, in theory at least, be commanded by the MPCC, with the Director MPCC (who is also Director General of the EUMS) as Operational Commander at the military-strategic level. As will be discussed in Section 3.3, however, without a considerable and rapid increase in personnel and resource commitments, the MPCC is not (yet) ready to assume C2 responsibilities for executive operations, such as Battlegroup deployments or future RDC-F operations and live exercises, which is the ambition level of the SC⁷³.

4.2 National OHQs vs MPCC

The EEAS and the Council have set out two pathways for C2 at the military-strategic level of the RDC, as reflected in the SC. The first is to use the pre-identified national OHQs, which are located in France (Mont Valérien), Germany (Potsdam), Greece (Larissa), Italy (Centocelle) and Spain (Rota). The second is to rely on the MPCC as the standing command structure, which 'should be seen as the preferred command and control structure' once it reaches Full Operational Capability (FOC)⁷⁴.

Making use of one of the **pre-identified national OHQs** preferably builds on the EU's Framework Nation Concept, which envisages operations 'at an early stage of the crisis' or 'in which an important criterion is urgency'⁷⁵. A Framework Nation is here responsible for the establishment of the C2 structure, which implies providing the Operational Commander and OHQ outside the area of operations (and preferably the Forces Commander in the area of operations); the core of the mission command hierarchy; CIS; logistics and necessary military support packages. Contributing Member States can plug their forces into this C2 structure. The political rationale behind keeping the national OHQ option on the table is not to be ignored in future discussions about C2 of the RDC. Providing the Operational Commander can give the Framework Nation some influence on the operation's activities. Financial costs of setting up and running the OHQ are furthermore 'common costs' shared under the EPF, as determined by Council Decision of 2021/509, which offers the Framework Nation the prospect of financial burden-sharing⁷⁶.

⁶⁹ Council of the European Union (2017). [Council Decision Determining the Planning and Conduct Arrangements for EU Non-Executive Military CSDP Missions and Amending Decision 2013/34/CFSP on a European Union Military Mission to Contribute to the Training of the Malian Armed Forces \(EUTM Mali\)](#), 8 June 2017.

⁷⁰ Until June 2017, non-executive CSDP missions had to operate without a military strategic command capacity, which implied that the Mission Force Commander had to assume all levels of responsibility (military strategic, operational, and tactical).

⁷¹ Reykers, Y. (2019). A permanent headquarters under construction? The Military Planning and Conduct Capability as a proximate principal. *Journal of European Integration*, 41(6), 783-799. DOI: 10.1080/07036337.2019.1599882.

⁷² Council of the European Union (2018b) [Council Conclusions on Security and Defence in the Context of the EU Global Strategy](#), 19 November 2018.

⁷³ Interview with MPCC official, 22 February 2022; Interview with EUMS official, 9 June 2022.

⁷⁴ Strategic Compass, p. 28.

⁷⁵ EEAS, [EU Framework Nation Concept](#), 18 December 2015, para. 19.

⁷⁶ Council of the European Union (2021). [Council Decision establishing a European Peace Facility, and repealing Decision \(CFSP\) 2015/528](#), Annex IV; Immenkamp, B. (2021) European Peace Facility: Investing in international stability and security, Briefing

However, there are good reasons to consider these national OHQs only as a fall-back option, rather than as the preferred C2 structure. Activating and staffing a national OHQ is not necessarily the most rapid C2 solution⁷⁷. Liaison between the EUMS, MPCC/OHQ has to be guaranteed by deploying liaison officers as rapidly as possible. Following the governing principle of multinationalisation, which intends to turn national OHQs into European OHQs for the duration of the operation, activation of national OHQs furthermore implies populating them with augmentees from other EU Member States⁷⁸. Despite lists of earmarked augmentees being available (in the Primary Augmentees Database), deciding on memoranda of understanding and ensuring that staff gets acquainted with one another takes time. For European Union Force (EUFOR) Tchad/RCA, for instance, it reportedly 'took about three months time to get the HQ properly up and running'⁷⁹. The flexibility clause foreseen in the EU Framework Nation Concept could offer a solution to this problem, as it allows for a temporary deviation from the principle of multinationalisation in urgent situations. However, this might in turn increase the risk of politicisation – questions can arise about Framework Nation influence on mission objectives and actions. Moreover, activation of national OHQs remains subject to the political will of the host nation. In 2008, EU Battlegroup deployment to the Democratic Republic of Congo allegedly stumbled over, among others, a British refusal to make its national OHQ in Northwood available⁸⁰.

Because the RDC is a high readiness force, the OHQ would need to be on an even higher readiness in order to be able to create the conditions under which the RDC can operate. This is currently not the case for these national OHQs. If the EU is to use a national pre-identified OHQ to force generate and control the high readiness units in the RDC and be able to do the advanced planning for a possible mission in time, one of the pre-identified national OHQs would need to become a permanent High Readiness OHQ or they should become such on a rotational basis.

A **standing and permanent C2 structure for the RDC** at the EU level is, therefore, to be preferred. In theory, the **MPCC** should already be capable of fulfilling this role. The Council meeting of November 2018 increased the ambition level from providing C2 for non-executive military missions to also one Battlegroup-size executive operation⁸¹. Under the current terms of reference, it would imply that the Director MPCC assumes the role of Operational Commander. The MPCC would report to the Council/PSC, and it translates the political guidance into military guidance to the RDC-F FHQ in the area of operations. The MPCC would thus take the role of one of the pre-identified national OHQs.

In reality, however, the MPCC is not yet capable of fulfilling this role. Despite the German ambition to certify the MPCC for this objective during its Council presidency (July-December 2020), the MPCC has at the time of writing still not reached the required FOC status for the goals set in November 2018⁸². Interviews with MPCC and EUMS officials suggest that the MPCC lacks necessary resources and capabilities to reach FOC status for those goals, let alone for the ambitions set out in the SC to 'plan and conduct all non-executive

European Parliament Research Service, October 2021, <https://epthinktank.eu/2021/06/04/european-peace-facility-promoting-peace-or-fuelling-conflict>.

⁷⁷ Interview with MPCC official, 26 July 2022.

⁷⁸ EEAS, [EU Framework Nation Concept](#), 18 December 2015, para. 34.

⁷⁹ Mattelaer, A., 'Command and Control Requirements for CSDP Operations', in: L. Simón & A. Mattelaer, *EUnity of command - The Planning and Conduct of CSDP Operations*, Brussels: Egmont Institute (Paper 41), p. 18. ISBN 978 90 382 1713 0.

⁸⁰ Gowan, R. (2011). From rapid reaction to delayed inaction? Congo, the UN and the EU. *International Peacekeeping*, 18(5), pp. 601. DOI: 10.1080/13533312.2011.598324.

⁸¹ Council of the European Union, [Council Conclusions on Security and Defence in the Context of the EU Global Strategy](#), 19 November 2018, para 4.

⁸² During the SEDE meeting of 13 July 2021, then Director of the MPCC Hervé Bléjean expressed that the MPCC would reach FOC status by end of 2021.

military missions and two small-scale or one medium-scale executive operation/s, as well as live exercises' by 2025⁸³.

In sum, it is recommended to make a strengthened MPCC the preferred OHQ for the RDC, as mentioned in the SC. Yet, it is advisable to also keep one or more national 'High Readiness' OHQs as a fall-back option as long as the MPCC has not reached FOC for this broader role, but preferably also after the MPCC reaches FOC status to anticipate a scenario in which multiple crises present themselves at the same time – differentiation between the national OHQs based on operational scenarios and force packages is, in that case, worth considering.

4.3 MPCC shortcomings and needs

Making the MPCC the preferred military-strategic C2 structure for the RDC by 2025 is, however, unrealistic without the political will from the Member States to significantly and rapidly increase their investment in its further development⁸⁴. Expectation levels about the MPCC and investments in its development have so far not been in sync. Three crucial gaps can be identified, which all three need to be addressed in the course of 2023 if the target date of 2025 is to be reached.

First, the MPCC faces a **staffing shortage**. Scholarly research already pointed to problems of understaffing in the early stages of the MPCC's establishment⁸⁵. Although current staffing levels arguably do not hinder its day-to-day functioning (i.e. providing C2 of four ongoing non-executive operations), providing C2 of an additional RDC-F operation would require that Member States 'ramp up personnel contributions', as the SC acknowledges⁸⁶. For instance, according to an interview, the MPCC currently has only one officer in charge of exercises, while one needs at least 12 staff members for planning and running a live exercise that lives up to the ambition of C2 for RDC⁸⁷. Furthermore, the MPCC currently operates at a below 90 % staff level for the ambitions set in November 2018, which translates into less than 60 permanent staff members. If the MPCC is to assume C2 for any non-executive mission and two small-scale or one medium-scale joint executive operations, approximately 100 permanent staff members and 150 augmentees would arguably be required. Becoming the preferred C2 structure, including for the EU RDC, would translate into approximately 250 'permanent' staff members – a switch from a system of augmentees into permanent staff only would be required to guarantee readiness⁸⁸. Better follow-up and accountability of political commitments in terms of staff provision should, therefore, have priority, a goal to which the European Parliament can contribute by means of regularly asking for updates on political commitments.

Second, C2 builds on **Communication and Information Systems** (CIS), which is the system that guarantees secure and effective two-way communication between the various levels of command, between military forces and civilian counterparts and between troop contributing states⁸⁹. CIS furthermore guarantees situational awareness, which is essential in scenarios of RDC-F operations in non-permissive contexts. CIS for executive CSDP operations is currently provided on an ad hoc basis. Member States' interest in providing CIS to the MPCC have so far remained low⁹⁰. The European Parliament would do well

⁸³ Strategic Compass, p. 30.

⁸⁴ This assessment has been confirmed by several interviewees from the EUMS and MPCC.

⁸⁵ Reykers, Y. (2019).

⁸⁶ Strategic Compass, p. 28.

⁸⁷ Interview with MPCC official, 26 July 2022.

⁸⁸ Interview with MPCC official, 22 February 2022.

⁸⁹ United States Naval Academy, 'Chapter 20: Command, Control and Communication', Fundamentals of Navy Weapons Systems, <https://fas.org/man/dod-101/navy/docs/fun/part20.htm>.

⁹⁰ Germany has shown an interest in providing the MPCC with CIS by 2025 for its Battlegroup. It remains to be seen if this is a temporary offer limited to Battlegroup use. Interview with MPCC official, 26 July 2022.

in pushing for durable solutions embedded in ongoing PESCO projects, such as the Spanish-led project 'Strategic Command and Control (C2) System for CSDP missions and operations' or the European Defence Industrial Investment Programme 'European Strategic Command and Control System (ESC2)', even if they are not expected to materialise before 2025.

Third, if the MPCC is to expand its staff size, which would be required for providing C2 of the RDC, it will require more **office space and infrastructure**. The MPCC is currently located in the EUMS building at Avenue Cortenbergh 150. Plans to move to a new building at Rue d'Arlon are not going to meet the needs of an MPCC that is capable of assuming C2 of any executive operation and RDC deployment, because the building is too small and does not have secure communication infrastructure according to interviews⁹¹. Sufficient office space, facilities for secure communication and meetings are essential. Ideally, a new building also offers office space for the MPCC's civilian counterpart, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), to facilitate an integrated approach. This building should also be able to host the intelligence services, as these will need to use comparable CIS systems and the costs to make a building suited for secure CIS are high. The military intelligence directorate and the civilian EU Intelligence Analysis Centre (INTCEN) are currently also located in the EUMS building as they have to work closely together in order to ensure optimal results.

Besides these three main capability and infrastructure needs, several additional concerns need attention when developing the C2 structure for the RDC. One concern is that **the timing in the SC** is overly ambitious. Reaching FOC status of the RDC by 2025 with the MPCC as preferred C2 structure would, for instance, require that the MPCC increases its staff level from below 60 to 250 permanent staff preferably by end 2023, in order to lead a full-blown live exercise by 2025.

Moreover, at the time of writing, the MPCC still falls under the **terms of reference** of the EUMS. Turning the MPCC into a permanent structure for C2 of 'any non-executive operation', hence including RDC-F operations, can best be achieved under its own terms of reference, separate from those of the EUMS. For doing so, EUMS leadership would need to be separated from the position of Director MPCC⁹². Ideally, the position of DG EUMS is separated from the position of RDC-F Operational Commander, a role to be assumed either by the commander of the national OHQ or by the Director MPCC. Having its own terms of reference would have the benefit of a clearer division of responsibilities between EUMS and MPCC. The future role of the EUMS in the planning of operations should be given particular attention to avoid duplication.

RDC operations ideally take place following the governing principle of an **integrated approach**. This requires close consultation and coordination between the MPCC (or national OHQs) and its civilian counterpart, the CPCC, from the planning to the implementation stage. Also close coordination with Commission services active in the crisis region is desirable, which is another argument to have the MPCC (in, or close to Brussels) as the preferred C2 structure. C2 structures of both RDC and eventual, parallel civilian missions need close liaison. Tensions may arise here due to the various ways of funding and thus control, with military missions paid for by Member States with common funding through the non-EU-budget EPF, and civilian missions being funded by the EU budget (and hence under scrutiny of the European Parliament). So, the integrated approach is an additional reason why the European Parliament needs to be informed about military missions as well.

Coordination with NATO structures is a final point of attention. The creation of a permanent capacity like the MPCC, fit for command of executive joint operations and the planning, development and execution of live exercises would simplify the coordination with NATO. At the policy level, the counterpart for NATO HQ

⁹¹ Interview with MPCC official, 22 February 2022; Interview with MPCC official, 26 July 2022; Interview with EUMS official, 26 July 2022.

⁹² Interview with EUMS official, 09 June 2022.

would be the EEAS in its coordinating role for the integrated approach; this of course does not exclude direct contacts between NATO HQ and Commission services if so required. The counterpart of NATO International Military Staff would be the EUMS for military policy in the different military domains and capacity building. The counterpart for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) for coordination of joint issues would in that situation be the MPCC.

5 Recommendations

The general idea of the EU RDC as stated in the SC enjoys wide support, as it could solve some essential shortfalls of the Battlegroup Concept. The question is how to develop the RDC concept in a way that it meets the high expectations and avoids past design flaws with the Battlegroup Concept discussed above. It is essential the RDC is not sold as an improved or somewhat larger Battlegroup, but as a new endeavour underpinned by quite different political and operational logics. Against this background, we recommend addressing the following issues in order to give the RDC development the attention and resources it deserves and enable it to effectively contribute to the EU's integrated approach for external security.

5.1 Recommendations to implement in the short term

1. The use of Article 44 offers significant benefits compared to Member States acting outside the EU framework in situations where troop deployment needs to be rapid to prevent further escalation and where the risks to combat troops are at the higher end. In particular, EU authorisation and political oversight of such operations would strengthen the EU integrated approach to security and peace. The Article will, however, only be used if the political calculus of potential contributor nations changes fundamentally. This will require providing them with access to more common funding for their additional costs and, even more importantly, a greater willingness by the Council to delegate more of the planning beyond the CMC to these coalitions. In the medium term, it would also help to further develop EU-level planning capacity. One could reduce the current uncertainty over the precise meaning and modalities through simulations and scenario work, which would also speed up decision making in future emergent crises.
2. There is a risk that decisions about the creation and design of the RDC could become disconnected from the core aspirations of the EU's integrated approach. To avoid this, the HR/VP needs to regularly inform the European Parliament as stated in TEU Article 36, while the European Parliament should check and demand that all EU actions are sufficiently coordinated to maximise coherence and effectiveness. This means, for example, (1) no security without development cooperation and vice versa, (2) effective military capacity building can only happen through a common effort of the Council, EEAS, EDA and Commission, (3) all military actions need to be sufficiently synchronised with the civilian actions financed through the EU budget by close liaison between command structures of military and civilian operations/missions.
3. In order to address the financial disincentives on troop contributing countries and improve political willingness to use the new capacity, it is strongly recommended that incremental costs which cannot normally be budgeted and planned for by Member States are funded jointly. The EPF budget rules permit it, 'if the Council so decides', so the Council is advised to decide positively. Members of the EP could use their influence to strengthen this message in Brussels and at home. If not, this issue will continue to be a difficult and potentially fatal hurdle to take during decision making about the actual use of high readiness forces.
4. Rapid deployment requires flexibility in political decision making and high readiness of military modules. Lessons on the Battlegroups are that this implies not allowing oneself to be limited by conceptual task-lists or become dependent on decision making in other organisations and by non-EU members. It also implies having not only the land troops on high readiness, but also the necessary air, sea, SOF components and the strategic enablers.
5. More than 50 % of the seven years budget of the EPF has already been spent in helping Ukraine counter the Russian invasion with five more years to go. This can significantly frustrate the development and use of the RDC, so decisions need to be taken on how to increase the budget in order to come back to the agreed levels for the remaining years. While this is formally a Council issue, Members of the

European Parliament could raise it, as the RDC could be essential for the creation of security, an important pillar within the EU's integrated approach.

6. Insofar as the EU RDC relies on rotating units, and reformed Battlegroups, the rotation period of six months for Member States could be extended. This would thus remove incentives on Member States to delay decision making when it is 'their turn'. Furthermore, providing RDC modules on a rotational basis would create a huge burden for the MPCC and uncertainty about the filling of the slots. If a rotation system is preferred, it is advised to consider Force Generation at the MPCC/OHQ level once or for example every five years, with pre-identified Member States taking the responsibility for filling certain slots during that period. In order to lower the demands for personnel during long periods of high readiness, Member States could still decide to spread the high readiness over more units. For small countries this might be impossible, so it should remain possible for them to offer contributions for only 6 months. They could do so in combination with other countries and together fill a slot for a longer period of time. We also recommend that some of the existing Battlegroups need to become more modular in order to optimise the possibility to tailor the force packages for each specific mission.
7. The RDC, if compared with the Battlegroup, is a clear improvement in quality, but it is hardly an improvement in size. The analysis showed that the RDC could create force packages for most of the foreseen tasks, except for an initial entry operation in a non-permissive environment. The limit of 5 000 will in many cases be too small for this task. It is therefore advised to increase the limit for the force package to a minimum of 7 000, so that it can encompass at least one land brigade (about 5 000 troops) plus additional air, sea, SOF and enablers in support.
8. For the RDC to cover all possible tasks and the force packages demanded by each, the RDC toolbox needs to be bigger than 5 000 troops. Assuming the RDC needs to cover most potential cases of initial entry, an indicative size of the RDC toolbox would need to be around 10 000 troops. In comparison, this is still significantly smaller than NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force with comparable tasks (but possibly against a stronger opponent) has a total of 20 000 troops⁹³.
9. The transition from the current Battlegroup concept to the implementation of a new EU RDC concept will be challenging and subject to delays because of resourcing and staffing. Even though most NATO and EU members have decided to increase their defence budgets, it will take many years until this leads to more staff capacity and units. Against this background, many interviewees expressed concern that the timetable in the SC might be too ambitious. This applies particularly to the goals of the MPCC reaching FOC by 2025 for all tasks. If Member States are unwilling to give this the highest priority because of competing resource demands from NATO and national defence, it is better to adjust expectations and timetables soon.
10. For an effective EU RDC it is essential that the HQ above the RDC has a permanent status. It would need to be able to control the units in the RDC, command the non-executive military missions and one medium-scale executive mission. A clear choice between MPCC or national OHQ still must be made. Betting on both horses would most likely disperse efforts and thus delay both options. We recommend making a clear choice for the MPCC both because of its physical location (Brussels-based) as well as its expertise with non-executive missions. All investments should focus on this option, starting with a new building (in which EUMS, MPCC with up to 350 staff, CPCC and intel services can be co-located) and sufficient secure CIS support for all its roles. Member States are recommended to give these investments in the MPCC the highest priority. In the intervening period before the MPCC has acquired the necessary infrastructure, legal provisions and staffing, we recommend operating with a high

⁹³ NATO (2022) NATO Rapid Reaction Force, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49755.htm.

readiness Framework Nation C2 structure as a temporary fall-back option. This requires that one of the pre-identified national OHQs would need to become a permanent High Readiness OHQ.

11. As soon as the MPCC reaches the FOC status for the goals set out in the Council Conclusions of 19 November 2018, the Council is advised to reach an agreement on separating the terms of reference of the MPCC from those of the EUMS as this would provide a clearer division of labour and avoid either of them becoming overburdened. This would also require that DG EUMS is no longer double-hatted. These are necessary short-term prerequisites for the MPCC to then grow to a size that can meet the ambition level of the SC.
12. Planning, deployment, implementation and follow-up of any EU RDC operation should as much as possible follow an integrated approach. To this end, the C2 structures of the RDC and the CPCC should regularly liaise, from the planning to the follow-up phase and they would need to coordinate with Commission actions in the same crisis area. The European Parliament should be regularly informed about the implementation of the integrated approach.
13. A readiness concept like the French Guépard system could be a good option for the RDC toolbox. The bulk of the RDC modules would in that case stay at a standard (relatively low) standard, except those for high urgency tasks. Pending the security situation, the MPCC/OHQ could decide to increase the readiness of modules which might be necessary for a mission. Such a decision would also need to get the EUMC and PSC involved, given the costs related to a higher readiness.
14. In order to have professional high readiness forces, it is essential to have regular exercises at the strategic, joint forces, and tactical level. Given the specific EU procedures at the strategic level, exercises for Council bodies and the MPCC/OHQ need to be organised by the EU (EEAS). At the (non-strategic) level of joint forces and tactical levels, the HQs and forces should use the same standards as in NATO. As the (multi)national JTF-HQ's can operate under both NATO and the EU, it is advised not to duplicate the expensive organisation for the training of the joint level. Training of the tactical level can stay the responsibility of Member States, though it would be good if that is coordinated by the MPCC/OHQ in order to optimise their ability to operate together.

5.2 Recommendations taking longer to fully implement

15. To make the MPCC the preferred C2 structure at the military-strategic level for the EU RDC, Member States will have to step up their investment in its development. A significant increase of MPCC staff levels up to the level of 250 to 350 staff members is warranted. A strengthened MPCC, which is capable to force generate and control the high readiness units in the RDC and do the advanced planning for a possible mission in time, should consist of permanent staff only - the current system of augmentees should be considered as a temporary provision. The European Parliament should regularly follow-up on Member States' staffing commitments.
16. It is advisable to keep one or more national 'High Readiness' OHQs as a fall-back option to anticipate a scenario in which multiple crises present themselves at the same time. It is worth considering more differentiation between national OHQs based on operational scenarios and force packages.
17. Insufficient numbers of strategic enablers are still a significant shortfall and need to be urgently addressed. In general terms, the most severe shortfalls are in secure Command Information Systems, intelligence and target acquisition (human intel, cyber and high-tech airborne means), strategic airlift, air-to-air refuelling, higher echelon medical care and strategic Medical Evacuation. Even though some excellent projects within PESCO already start to cover parts of the shortfalls, the remaining shortfalls need high priority within the Capability Development Plan and the coordination between related Council bodies, EEAS, EDA, and COMMISSION/DGDEF. As the European Defence Budget (EDF) of the Commission is involved in facilitating related defence projects funded mainly by Member States, the EP

is advised to check whether these budgets are focused on the most essential strategic enablers, especially those which cannot be afforded by individual Member States.

18. EU RDC deployment depends on the short notice availability of CIS. Development of integrated CIS structures at the European level is advisable. The European Parliament would do well in closely following up on the progress of ongoing PESCO projects, such as the Spanish-led project 'Strategic Command and Control (C2) System for CSDP missions and operations' or the European Defence Industrial Investment Programme 'European Strategic Command and Control System (ESC2)'.
19. As the EU and NATO for a large part draw resources from the same Member States the substantial increase in NATO ambitions could delay the RDC development. Filling of the MPCC and the Battlegroup-roster already creates concerns. The aspirations expressed in the SC will only be met if Member States are able to increase their national defence capabilities. The HR/VP will have play a major role in synchronising actions with NATO such that the EU ambition is not frustrated by NATO and vice versa. Members of the EP could strengthen this message both in Brussels and at home that both NRF and RDC are essential for the protection of European interests. And as Member States have only one set of forces which can be used in both organisations, the improvement of the EU military capacity will directly strengthen NATO too.

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7 Appendix 1: Key definitions and acronyms

In this analysis the researchers stayed as closely to the definitions or descriptions in EU documentation as possible⁹⁴. Still, sometimes it was necessary to refine some descriptions in order to avoid confusion about how they interpreted the meaning of specific terminology.

Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC)

The RDC is not a fixed force, but a toolbox of high readiness military entities which will allow the EU to swiftly deploy a modular force, tailor-made for a specific mission, of up to 5 000 deployed troops, including the Force Headquarters, land, air, maritime and Special Operation Forces components, as well as required strategic enablers. The RDC will need to cover all foreseen possible tasks, which each require different compositions of force packages of up to 5 000 troops. Some entities can be used for all tasks and regions, others only for specific tasks and regions. The RDC toolbox therefore will need to be bigger than 5 000 troops.

RDC-Force (RDC-F)

An RDC-F is a military force, selected from high readiness military entities in the RDC (and if necessary re-enforced with other means). The size of this joint Force can go up to 5 000 deployed troops, with *joint* meaning land, air, sea, Special Operation Forces components and/or required strategic enablers. It will be commanded by a Force Commander who will be supported by a Force Headquarters which will deploy into the crisis area.

Operational Headquarters (OHQ)

An OHQ is the EU term for a HQ at the military-strategic level. It supports the Operational Commander. It reports to the PSC, translates the political strategic guidance into military orders, coordinates with other EU services and external organisations in order to create an integrated approach, coordinates the force generation process. In short, it creates the circumstances for the subordinate Force and Component Commander(s) to successfully execute the mission. The OHQ does not deploy into the crisis area. In the Strategic Compass it is foreseen that the EU MPCC should become able to act as an OHQ. (The role of the EU OHQ can best be compared with NATO's SHAPE⁹⁵, the military-strategic HQ in Mons, though the EU OHQ is for much smaller missions and therefore also much smaller than SHAPE.)

Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)

The MPCC is a standing command and control structure at the military-strategic level. In the Strategic Compass the MPCC is foreseen to have the following roles: preferred OHQ for non-executive military missions *and* executive military missions (up to medium-scale), and plan, develop and execute live exercises. From the context in the Strategic Compass it can be deduced that this includes force generation and control of the RDC toolbox as well, which cannot be done by a national OHQ, unless this would become a permanent EU OHQ.

Force Headquarters (FHQ)

An FHQ is the EU term for any headquarters at the joint level (in NATO also called the 'operational level'). It supports the Forces Commander to command their joint forces in the crisis area, with 'joint' meaning land, air, sea, special forces and/or enablers. (The EU term FHQ can best be compared with NATO terminology for national or multinational led Joint Task Force Headquarters, often developed from Rapid

⁹⁴ We follow here the EEAS-EU Military Staff '[European Union Concept for Military Command and Control – Rev 8](#)', EEAS(2019) 468.

⁹⁵ SHAPE = Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe.

Deployment Corps HQs. Several of these can be used as a FHQ for the EU or as a JTF-HQ for NATO. The only difference is the terminology.)

8 Appendix 2: Interviews (in chronological order)

1. Interview with MPCC official, 22 February 2022 (in person)
2. Interview with Spanish military official, 07 June 2022 (in person)
3. Interview with French military official, 08 June 2022 (in person)
4. Interview with EUMS official, 09 June 2022 (in person)
5. Interview with senior EUMS official, 04 July 2022 (in person)
6. Interview with Chairman EU Military Committee, General R. Brieger, 18 July 2022 (in person)
7. Interview with official involved in the development of the EPF, 18 July 2022 (in person)
8. Interview with MPCC official, 26 July 2022 (telephone)
9. Interview with EUMS official, 26 July 2022 (video conference)
10. Interview with diplomat, 12 September 2022 (video conference)

In addition, LtGen ret A.G.D van Osch benefited from four informal conversations with military planners about key aspects. These conversations do not amount to formal interviews, but were highly informative for their expert input.

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