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Can the United Nations Unite Ukraine?

Richard Gowan

February 2018



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
<i>Military Factors</i>	3
<i>Police Factors</i>	4
<i>Political, Civilian, and Economic Factors</i>	5
<i>Mission Impossible?</i>	6
1. Introduction	7
2. Primary Challenges and Longer-Term Tasks	11
3. Planning and Launching the Peace Operation	15
<i>Underlying Politics</i>	15
<i>Planning an Operation</i>	16
<i>A Strong or Weak Mandate?</i>	17
4. Military and Police Options	21
<i>Force Requirements and Force Generation</i>	23
<i>Who Would Be in Charge?</i>	25
<i>Police</i>	27
5. Civilian Tasks: Elections and Socioeconomic Issues	29
<i>Fulfilling Minsk: Elections</i>	30
<i>Offering the Donbas a Future: Socioeconomic Issues</i>	31
6. Conclusion: Could It Work?	34
Appendix A: Abbreviations and Acronyms	35
Appendix B: Biography	36
Appendix C: Acknowledgments	37

Executive Summary

In February 2015, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko made calls for United Nations (U.N.) peacekeepers in Eastern Ukraine as a means to facilitate a resolution to the conflict. Almost two years later, the war lingers on with almost daily casualties and no end in sight.

In September 2017, President Vladimir Putin of Russia floated the idea of a light United Nations force which would have a limited mandate to protect existing international monitors in eastern Ukraine. In its original form, the proposal was seen as a non-starter by Kyiv and its western partners, who saw it as an attempt to cement and legitimize Moscow's de-facto control over a significant part of the Donetsk Basin (Donbas) region.

In response, American and European officials proposed far more ambitious ideas for a peacekeeping force that would have a broad mandate to protect civilians and return the breakaway region to Kyiv's control as per the Minsk agreements.

American-Russian talks on the issue have made little progress to date. U.N. officials are skeptical about the project, while few countries seem keen to offer peacekeepers. This paper assesses the potential for an international peace operation in eastern Ukraine, drawing on precedents from missions in the Balkans, Lebanon and elsewhere. While the present stage of diplomatic talks justifies skepticism about the current prospects for such a mission, the paper sketches out what a potential deployment would entail in practice.

A North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or European Union (EU) mission is currently politically inconceivable, given Russian sensitivities. More credible alternative options include: an operation under U.N. command involving military, police and civilian components; a mission involving an independent military Multinational Force (MNF); and U.N.-led police and civilian elements. Whatever its precise structure, such a mission would need to fulfill three basic tasks:

- *Ensuring a stable and secure environment throughout the Donbas, including reassuring Kyiv that Russia will desist from direct military interference;*
- *Enabling elections for representatives to the Ukrainian Rada in eastern Ukraine to unlock progress on the Minsk Agreements, which link these polls to the reassertion of Kyiv's sovereignty in the region;*
- *Supervising public order and the civilian dimensions of reintegration in the wake of elections, maximizing the local population's trust in the process.*

Military Factors

The primary challenge to any international force would be the immediate security situation in eastern Ukraine. Moscow would need to withdraw its own regular forces from the region and pressure the leaders of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk

People's Republic (LNR) to accept the peacekeepers and wind up their own military operations.

Even if this is possible, peacekeepers could face violent and non-violent resistance, and Russia could stir up a fresh insurgency or send its own forces if it wished to disrupt the process of regional reintegration.

International forces, whether under full U.N. command or an MNF under a U.N. political umbrella, could not realistically fight to control eastern Ukraine against sustained Russian-backed military challenges.

However, a force could contribute to stability in more permissive (though still dangerous) conditions by:

- *Reassuring Kyiv through a constant presence at the Russian border*, keeping watch for any potential incursions by regular Russian forces and acting as a tripwire to deter such actions;
- *Cantoning separatist weaponry and personnel*, concentrating DNR and LNR personnel, arms and armor in secure bases, as a first step towards demobilization or retraining in non-military roles;
- *Using limited force to protect civilians and the peace process*, taking action to deter and if necessary confront spoiler groups from all sides ready to cause disruptive violence.

This paper argues that either a well-equipped U.N. force or an MNF could undertake such roles, but the force's credibility would depend on raising 20,000 or more high-quality forces. Large-scale deployments by NATO countries are unlikely. Credible alternatives include units from non-NATO European countries; former Soviet states acceptable to both Moscow and Kyiv like Kazakhstan; and experienced peacekeepers such as Latin American states. Nonetheless, a coherent and viable force may only be possible with some NATO nations' involvement, and Western negotiators would need to persuade Russia of this.

Police Factors

Experiences in cases such as Kosovo show that international military forces cannot maintain public order alone, and require police support. A peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine would need police to:

- *Monitor DNR and LNR security officials* in the first phase of deployment;
- *Deploy Formed Police Units (FPU's, or riot squads)* to respond directly to public disorder;

- *Vet and retrain DNR and LNR personnel* for law enforcement under eventual Ukrainian control.

The U.N. has significant policing experience, and both the EU and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have worked on police training and reform since the 1990s. The three organizations could cooperate in this field in Ukraine under overall U.N. authority. But police officers and gendarmerie from NATO members such as Italy, Portugal and Romania would probably be necessary to enable this, again requiring sensitive conversations with Russia.

Political, Civilian, and Economic Factors

The civilian role of a mission could be as sensitive as its security role. A full-scale international administration of DNR and LNR on the Kosovo model is unlikely to win Kyiv's support. Nonetheless, Ukraine would need to accept a high level of international oversight of elections to the Ukrainian parliament stipulated by the Minsk Protocols and longer-term socioeconomic reintegration efforts.

A dynamic international political leader – probably a Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General – would be necessary to broker compromises between Kyiv and the DNR and LNR leaderships.

To enable the Minsk-mandated *elections*, the peacekeepers would need to:

- *Create a secure environment* for candidates of all valid parties to campaign before elections;
- *Deter intimidation and electoral abuses* on polling day itself;
- *Ensure that the final results are credible and fair.*

While a fully internationally-run electoral process might be unacceptable to Kyiv, the U.N. and OSCE could take operational responsibility for the polls under the aegis of an electoral commission involving representatives of all parties. The EU could deploy an independent observer mission to review the polls.

To address *socioeconomic issues*, a mission would need to deploy:

- *Humanitarian agencies* to deal with the inevitable flows of people out of and into DNR and LNR in the first phase of the deployment, when many civilians would feel highly insecure;
- *Lawyers, economic experts and civilian outreach experts* to work with communities in DNR and LNR on medium-term recovery after the conflict and reintegrating into Ukrainian state structures;

- *Public administration experts and mediators* to sit in joint committees involving Ukrainian and DNR/LNR representatives on returning specific sectors (health, schools, etc.) to Kyiv's control.

Mission Impossible?

The chances of a peacekeeping force successfully deploying to eastern Ukraine are currently low. But if broader political circumstances created an opening with Moscow for this option, there is sufficient evidence to suggest an international force could manage the basic security, policing and political dimensions of reintegrating the Donbas under Kyiv's control. It would be a risky and stop-start process, but it may be the best way to end what is Europe's deadliest ongoing conflict, and remove one of the main obstacles to normal relations between the West and Moscow.

1. Introduction

Could an international peacekeeping operation help reintegrate the Donbas into Ukraine? Since the beginning of the Ukrainian-Russian war in 2014, officials from both Kyiv and Moscow have sporadically raised the possibility of a United Nations mission to help end the war in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. While Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine endorsed the idea as long ago as February 2015, discussions of the issue kicked into a higher gear last September, when Russian President Vladimir Putin unexpectedly suggested that he could be open to a limited U.N. force to protect existing international monitors.¹ The Trump administration and European powers responded cautiously, but with some real optimism that Putin might want a way out of a costly conflict. Their enthusiasm may have been premature. Talks on the issue between U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker and Russian Presidential Representative Vladislav Surkov have made little to no progress, and violence spiked in the Donbas in late 2017. In December 2017, Russia also withdrew its officers from the Joint Center for Control and Coordination (JCCC), a conflict management mechanism with Ukraine – not exactly the behavior of a power looking to build up stronger formal de-escalatory structures.

It is possible that President Putin simply raised the U.N. as a distraction, or that Western analysts read too much into his original proposal. Nonetheless, his gambit has at least stimulated some fresh thinking about peacekeeping options in Ukraine.²

This thinking is worthwhile, even if the immediate prospects for a credible peace operation are uncertain. Political circumstances in Moscow, Kyiv, or the Donbas could shift again, creating further openings to explore the issue.³ It is worth thinking through options and obstacles in advance, for in virtually any conceivable scenario, deploying a peacekeeping force would be an operationally and politically hazardous undertaking. The failure of the U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s casts a long and baleful shadow over further proposals for peacekeeping in Europe. Western officers and analysts retain a strong preference for NATO or European Union (EU) missions over any deployment relying on the U.N.

U.N. officials are almost equally unenthusiastic about undertaking a high-stakes mission in Russia's shadow. While former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon tried to help defuse the

¹ Carl Bildt, "Putin's New Ukraine Gambit Suggests a Shift in the Kremlin," *The Washington Post*, 7 September 2017.

² See, for example, Frederik Wesslau, "Putin's Peacekeepers: Beware of Russians Bearing Gifts" (European Council on Foreign Relations, 11 September 2017); Andrey Kortunov, "The Price of Peace: The Parameters of Possible Compromise in the Donbass" (Russian International Affairs Council, 2 October 2017); International Crisis Group, *Can Peacekeepers Break the Deadlock in Ukraine?* (Brussels, Crisis Group, December 2017); and Alexander Vershbow, "How to Bring Peace to the Donbas (Yes, It's Possible)," (The Atlantic Council, 5 January 2018).

³ As this report was being finalized, for example, the Russian newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which is closely aligned with the Russian government, published an op-ed by a group of well-known foreign policy commentators calling for a U.N. peacekeeping in Donbas on a far greater scale than Putin's original proposal. See <https://www.rg.ru/2018/01/15/kak-prodvinutsia-v-uregulirovanii-konflikta-na-iugo-vostoke-ukrainy.html>.

Ukrainian crisis in 2014, armed men forced a U.N. envoy out of Crimea, and the organization has only played a very limited political role in the Donbas.⁴ The Normandy Group (France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine) have managed most high-level diplomacy and the OSCE has monitors on the ground. In the wake of Putin's September proposal, U.N. peacekeeping officials did some contingency planning for a mission, but worried that Russia and the U.S. could effectively push them into running an impossible operation.⁵

Yet it is clear that a NATO or EU operation is out of the question in eastern Ukraine, given inevitable Russian objections. At a minimum, any large-scale international force in the region would need to have a Security Council mandate to satisfy Russia. This could mean a blue helmet mission under direct U.N. operational command (comparable to the organization's forces in the Middle East and Africa) or an operationally autonomous MNF politically accountable to the Security Council. In a hybrid arrangement, a non-U.N. commanded MNF could work alongside U.N. police and civilian officials, and a Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General (SRSG) could provide overall political direction to the operation.

Regardless of the merits of these different models, *any* force in eastern Ukraine would face severe challenges. The risks of operating in proximity with Russian units are possibly the most daunting for potential troop contributors. But there would also be considerable political and operational challenges involved in dealing with the representatives and militias in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, which field approximately 35,000 to 40,000 fighters, and hundreds or even thousands of tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery pieces (see Box 1). Moscow has largely directed events in DNR and LNR to date, and could easily use these proxies to disrupt any peacekeeping efforts (equally, some splinter groups in the region could stir up trouble regardless of Russia's directions).

Box 1. Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCA) in Eastern Ukraine: Basic Facts.

Area	17,486 km ²
Overall border	908 km
Border with Russia	409 km
Separatist forces	35,000-40,000
Russian regular forces	Approximately 3,000
Current population of NGCA	2.3 million
IDPs in Ukraine	1.6 million
Asylum-seekers from Ukraine in Russia	0.42 million

Sources: Ukrainian government estimates, U.S. Agency for International Development, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

⁴ U.N. relief agencies have been heavily involved in humanitarian operations in eastern Ukraine, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has tracked abuses in Crimea and the Donbas. U.N. political officials have engaged in behind-the-scenes diplomacy, but only in quite marginal roles.

⁵ Author's informal conversations at the U.N., third quarter of 2017.

Furthermore, the peacekeepers would have to damp down excessively high expectations among Ukrainian politicians and public about their ability to quickly restore the Donbas to Kyiv's complete control.

This paper explores how a U.N.-commanded force or U.N.-mandated MNF could provide a framework for bringing the Donbas back into Ukraine in line with the existing roadmap for reintegration set out in the Minsk Protocols. The recent debate over peacekeeping options, though inconclusive, clarified the basic strategic issues at stake. As Section 2 of this paper argues, any mission will need to address three concerns:

- ***Ensuring a stable and secure environment*** throughout the Donbas, including reassurances to Kyiv that Russia will desist from military interference;
- ***Enabling local elections*** in the region to unlock progress on the Minsk Agreements, which link these polls to the reassertion of Ukrainian sovereignty;
- ***Supervising public order and the civilian dimensions of reintegration*** in the wake of elections, maximizing the local population's trust in the process.

Having established these basic demands on any potential international presence, this paper goes on to look at the political, security and civilian dimensions of a U.N. mission or MNF (as Section 3 notes, the differences between these forces may be overstated). In doing so, it looks back at peacekeeping deployments such as recent U.N. operations in Lebanon and Haiti and the NATO-U.N. presence in Kosovo. Looking for precedents, it also highlights the lessons from a slightly older U.N. mission that wrapped up two decades ago: The U.N. Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES).

Although largely forgotten, UNTAES is particularly relevant to the Ukrainian case. Eastern Slavonia was a breakaway region of eastern Croatia held by Serb forces throughout the Balkan wars. In 1996, while NATO took on stabilization duties in Bosnia after the Dayton Accords, a relatively small U.N. force of 5,000 troops took responsibility for preparing the region for reintegration into Croatia.⁶ The mission's tasks included overseeing local elections, suppressing small-scale spoilers, and monitoring the border with Serbia. The U.N. also took responsibility for police reform and public services. Although imperfect, UNTAES achieved its basic goals. No two peacekeeping operations are alike, and Eastern Slavonia was a smaller and ultimately less challenging case than eastern Ukraine presents, not least because Croatia was in a far stronger military position vis-à-vis the Serbs than that which Ukraine enjoys now. Nonetheless, UNTAES offers a partial template for a Ukrainian operation.

Overall, this paper shows that, given a minimum of political support from both Russia and Ukraine and sufficient military and non-military resources, an international

⁶ For an overview of UNTAES and summary of reviews of the mission, see Richard Gowan, "United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) and UN Civilian Police Group in Croatia (UNPSG)," in Joachim A. Koops, Norrie MacQueen, Thierry Tardy and Paul D. Williams, *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p519-531.

peacekeeping force could create the necessary framework to reunify Ukraine. None of the preconditions for its success are guaranteed. But the idea is worth exploring, as it offers a credible if difficult way out of Europe's only hot war.

Before going forward, it is worth recalling two points. First, in peacekeeping as in war, no plan survives first contact with reality. What follows offers guidance for a future mission in Ukraine, not absolute answers about how to run it. Second, there is no question that any mission in eastern Ukraine would involve some uniquely difficult dilemmas. Above all, Russia's active involvement in the war, the risk that it could launch another large-scale intervention and its willingness to threaten nuclear first use in an escalating conflict are all daunting obstacles to potential peacekeepers. But almost every peacekeeping mission involves specific difficulties, albeit of differing types. A U.N. peacekeeper working in the chaos of the Central African Republic, where the state is non-existent, might well wish that he or she could at least engage with the comparatively well-developed Donbas. Peace operations are always complex, but that does not mean it is not worth risking them.

2. Primary Challenges and Longer-Term Tasks

All peace operations, a 2015 high-level U.N. review noted, should be based on a political strategy that directly responds to the specific challenges they are meant to solve.⁷ This may sound obvious. But the Security Council and other international organizations can fall into the trap of deploying peacekeepers to mitigate or freeze an ongoing conflict without a clearer long-term strategy. In cases such as Kashmir and Cyprus, blue helmet missions have been in place for decades as a result. The Security Council was guilty of throwing peacekeepers at the Balkans in the early 1990s with only vague humanitarian mandates and no real path to success, and it has arguably been guilty of the same error more recently in trouble spots like Darfur and South Sudan.

The current Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine run by the OSCE is arguably another peace operation operating without a clear political strategy. SMM teams play an important and courageous role in monitoring the still-active conflict, but lack the leverage or top-level backup to resolve it. When President Putin invoked the U.N. in September 2017, he was suggesting a U.N. force that might protect the OSCE mission, rather than replace it.⁸ While this could arguably ease the SMM's security concerns – although OSCE officials say that they do not require a protection force –it would not address its political limitations, and could thus reinforce and legitimize the current deadlock.⁹ It is essential that the U.S. and its allies do not support any further operation in Ukraine without a clear sense of its specific political and social goals.

One limited option would be for a U.N. force to deploy to the current line of contact between Ukrainian and Russian-backed secessionist forces in the Donbas; they might help create short-term stability. There may be circumstances, such as a very severe deterioration of the security situation which could culminate in Kyiv losing more territory, that would justify such a limited force. But this would risk freezing the line as a permanent de facto border, similar to those in Moldova, Georgia and Cyprus.

Even if it were possible for U.N. military personnel to have free access to the whole of the Donbas, they could end up observing and reporting on the situation without being able to affect the political situation. From 1993 to 2008, U.N. observers monitored the secessionist region of Abkhazia in Georgia, for example, but this small mission (UNOMIG, or United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia) found itself “substantially dependent on

⁷ The High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, *Uniting Our Strengths For Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People* (New York: United Nations, 2015), p26.

⁸ A draft Russian Security Council resolution circulated on 5 September underlined that U.N. forces should be “equipped with small arms and light weapons mandated exclusively to protect the [OSCE monitors].” Draft resolution on file with author.

⁹ Indeed, a protection force of the type Moscow proposed would not qualify as a *peacekeeping* mission by U.N. standards, as the troops involved would solely be involved in protecting other international staff. The U.N. has deployed protection forces or guard units of this type to support civilian missions in cases including Iraq, Somalia and Libya but does not count them as peacekeepers.

Russia's policies and preferences."¹⁰ During the 2008 Georgian war, the peacekeepers were harassed and abused, and Moscow vetoed the mission's continuation in 2009.¹¹

Any large-scale and long-term peacekeeping force in eastern Ukraine should, by contrast, be designed to deliver on a clear strategy with well-defined goals. Fortunately, the basis for such a strategy already exists in the Minsk agreements, which sets out a detailed if as yet undeliverable roadmap for reintegrating the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics under Ukrainian control. The pivotal issue in the accords (contained in Point 9 of Minsk II) is an explicit connection between the completion of local elections throughout the conflict zone, on the basis of a process of decentralization and constitutional reform, and the restoration of Ukrainian control over the international border with Russia. In simple terms, Kyiv's right to regain sovereign control of its borders is conditioned on the conduct of elections that are never likely to take place without some external catalyst.

The primary political goal for any peace operation should be to create the conditions for these pivotal elections to take place, possibly even administer the polls, and thereby revitalize the Minsk process.¹² But such polls cannot take place overnight or in a security vacuum. A long history of peacekeeping cases has shown that elections are lightning rods for violence, as parties on all sides resort to violence to block, disrupt or overturn voting. (See Box 2 for an overview of the death toll to date.) In the case of eastern Ukraine, credible polls are only likely to be possible if there is a sufficient international presence on the international border with Russia to reassure Kyiv that Moscow will not intervene in the polls or their aftermath by force, and a security presence across DNR and LNR to minimize the threat that local armed groups will block polls, intimidate voters or stuff ballot boxes.

Box 2. War-Related Casualties (All Ukraine), April 2014-November 2017.

All fatalities	10,303
Civilian fatalities	2,523
All wounded	24,778
Civilian wounded	8,000-9,000

Source: U.N. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The need for security guarantees is reinforced by concerns in both Kyiv and Moscow over public stability in the Donbas. President Putin has repeatedly raised worries that Ukrainian regular or irregular forces could run rampant over the region if Kyiv were to

¹⁰ Bruno Coppieters, "United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)," in Koops, et al. *Oxford Handbook*, p446.

¹¹ Russia objected to the continued use of the word "Georgia" in the mission's name after Moscow had recognized Abkhazia, but "at heart, Russia was not at all keen to have a new U.N. mission observing its military activities on Abkhaz territory." (Ibid, p450.)

¹² In the context of this paper, "the Minsk process" always refers to the attempts to bring peace to eastern Ukraine. It should not be confused with the OSCE's Minsk Process, their ongoing effort to find a peaceful solution in Nagorno-Karabakh.

reclaim control of the territory, resulting in “Srebrenicas.”¹³ While this may be an overstatement, the risk of radical or angry Ukrainian factions currently based on the line of separation committing atrocities is real. DNR and LNR forces will still pose a threat even if they give up positional warfare on the current line, potentially going underground to launch an insurgency while preying on local communities.

In this context, it is clear that any peace operation in the Donbas will need to establish a security presence sufficient to minimize external and internal security challenges, and enable elections in line with the Minsk Protocols on this basis. It is, however, almost certain that a peace operation would need to take on additional duties to make the reintegration of the Donbas into Ukraine possible. Maintaining public order is unlikely to be solely a military matter, and is likely to involve a significant international police presence. There is no guarantee that the current police and security services in DNR and LNR will hold together or be willing to cooperate with the process of bringing the regions back under Ukrainian control. Past experience shows that where public order breaks down, international military forces are often poorly placed to respond: The deployment of NATO troops in Kosovo in 1999 was marred by widespread ethnic violence that many military units were not prepared to halt. A peace operation in Ukraine would almost certainly require a substantial police component, both to work with local forces where possible – and potentially to help reintegrate them into the Ukrainian system – and to, if necessary, deploy FPU to stop outbreaks of disorder if nobody else will.

Finally, it is necessary to take a broad view of “security” in the breakaway regions, looking beyond both armed groups and public disorder. Many civilians in these areas, including teachers and public servants, will fear not only physical violence but that their livelihoods will be taken away upon reintegration into Ukraine. Some Ukrainian politicians have called for those who have worked for the breakaway governments, even in these civilian capacities, to face punishment or prosecution. In parallel with the risk of violence, such threats could well lead inhabitants of the Donbas to pack up and flee into Russia in large numbers before or during any reintegration process.

Only Kyiv can truly allay these fears, by making sincere promises to the population in the breakaway areas that they will not face collective punishment. A peace operation could play a significant role through civilian means to assist in this process. Large “multi-dimensional” U.N. peace operations typically involve considerable civilian components including civil affairs officers, human rights experts and other officials to work with communities. The OSCE and EU also have experience in community support and reconstruction. A future peace operation in eastern Ukraine will almost certainly have to provide the framework for such a civilian presence to help manage the overall reintegration of the war-damaged area, and potentially plan to leave a civilian presence in place for years after the end of military peacekeeping.

The basic strategic requirements for a credible peace operation in eastern Ukraine, including the fundamental triad of security tasks, enabling elections and facilitating a

¹³ See, for example, Damien Sharkov, “Vladimir Putin says he Fears ‘Srebrenica-Like’ Massacre in Ukraine,” *Newsweek*, 20 October 2017.

Richard Gowan

broader process of reintegration into Ukraine, are thus reasonably clear. Given the scale of these challenges, how could such a peace operation get underway and work?

3. Planning and Launching the Peace Operation

Underlying Politics

Before asking how to launch a peace operation in eastern Ukraine, it is first necessary to underline how *not* to launch it. There can be no question of an international force of any type entering the region without a prior political agreement. It is impossible to imagine any force attempting a “hard entry” into the Donbas over Russian objections, given the risks of a military incident that could escalate out of control. Equally, the deployment of the mission would require full agreement from Kyiv, to ensure cooperation between Ukrainian and international forces, to guarantee that the Ukrainian government continues the overall process of implementing Minsk II to legitimize elections and decentralization in the Donbas, and to reduce the inevitable fears among the population in Luhansk and Donetsk over their future security.

Finally, an operation would also need the acquiescence of the de facto DNR and LNR authorities. This could be the hardest to win, given the recurrent splits between the secessionists (as demonstrated in the November 2017 “coup” in Luhansk) and the probability that reintegration will mean the end of their political careers, such as they are. Russia has insisted that DNR and LNR give formal consent to a mission.

The Minsk Agreements set out proposals for an amnesty for the secessionists and political decentralization within Ukraine. Kyiv could pave the way for the reintegration of the Donbas by making concrete promises concerning the region’s economic future and administration. Nonetheless, a precondition for a successful peace operation and reintegration of the region would be for secessionist leaders to publicly accept the peacekeepers, to acquiesce to the cantonment of fighters and the steps necessary to secure their armor and artillery, and to ensure their demobilization.¹⁴

It is very likely that at least some secessionists will attempt to halt reintegration by force. However, studies of the secessionists imply that if Russia chose to accede to a peace operation, they would have no choice but to comply. The International Crisis Group holds that secessionist leaders are “expendable” and “all major political and military decisions are taken in Moscow, and their implementation is overseen by Russian officials on the ground.”¹⁵ If this is correct, then the baseline for a peace operation to succeed is still essentially a bilateral commitment between Kyiv and Moscow (backed by other powers) to keep local actors in line, although this will still not preclude the danger that disaffected DNR and LNR factions might go rogue.

¹⁴ Exactly how the DNR and LNR authorities could formally express consent is problematic, as Kyiv refuses to recognize them as valid interlocutors. A diplomatic solution should, however, be feasible. Russia could transmit a declaration of consent by DNR/LNR to the Security Council, for example, rather as Turkey has transmitted Turkish Cypriot statements in the past. See Lorraine Sievers and Sam Daws, *The Procedure of the UN Security Council* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), p440.

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, *Russia and the Separatists in East Ukraine* (Brussels: Crisis Group, 2016), p3.

There are precedents for such agreements both proving robust and falling apart. In the case of eastern Slavonia noted above, UNTAES faced violent challenges by aggrieved local spoilers and widespread public disorder among ethnic Serbs. But the mission was ultimately successful because the Croatian leadership in Zagreb and Yugoslav government in Belgrade both concluded that it was in their strategic favor, and did not let any crises escalate. By contrast, the U.N. observers in Georgia were effectively neutralized by worsening relations between Moscow and Tbilisi through the 2000s, rendering their presence largely meaningless even before the 2008 war.

In the Ukrainian case, Kyiv and Moscow would have to show strategic restraint to make the work of a peace operation possible. In Kyiv's case, this would mean not only continuing to fulfill its Minsk obligations but also keeping its own forces out of the separatist areas while the peacekeepers secured the area. In Russia's case, it would mean committing to avoid direct intervention or fostering a "follow-on" insurgency, while undertaking its own obligations under Minsk to secure its border with Ukraine.

Exactly how Russia and Ukraine could reach such an understanding lies outside the scope of this paper. Four sets of factors may conceivably motivate Moscow to deal:

- Credible Western promises to ease at least some of the most painful **sanctions** imposed after the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014, with a clear timeline.
- A significant increase in **disorder within DNR and LNR**, which might raise the political and financial costs associated with maintaining Russia's grip on the area.
- **Domestic pressures in Russia** emanating from sanctions or public discontent in the wake of the 2018 presidential elections, motivating Putin to de-escalate.
- A **"package deal" with Moscow** involving détente in Ukraine tied to Western concessions over Syria, and perhaps other crises like that over North Korea.

Even if one or more of these sets of factors eventually push Russia towards making a fairly sincere bargain, Kyiv and Moscow are not going to reach perfect trust at any time in the foreseeable future. The reason to deploy a peace operation to the Donbas is precisely to reassure both countries that they can make some compromises without unacceptable risks. All of the operational suggestions that follow are based on the assumption that the two sides can achieve enough trust to make an operation feasible.

Planning an Operation

Whatever the diplomatic channels necessary to forge agreement on a peace operation, the basic framework for a deployment will need to be approved by the U.N. Security Council. Russia is very unlikely to accept a peacekeeping operation that is not subject to Council control, and Ukraine has interest in ensuring U.S., British and French oversight of the mission as well. Relations between Russia and the West in the Council are currently very poor due to ongoing differences over Syria. Planners from both sides could forge the

fundamentals of an agreement away from New York, then bring it to the U.N. for final endorsement, as was done with the Iranian nuclear deal in 2015.

To date, discussions of a possible peace operation have largely taken place bilaterally between the U.S. and Russia, although U.S. Special Representative Volker has coordinated closely with Kyiv and consulted with European powers. If a mission began to seem likely, it might be possible to run planning through an initial committee involving the U.S., the members of the Normandy Format (France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine), plus other essential parties. Britain and China, as the remaining permanent members of the Security Council, could reasonably demand a seat at the table. Additionally, countries willing to play a significant role in providing peacekeepers (a group that we will return to below) could claim a role in a “Normandy Plus” format.

One key consideration for this planning group would be to what extent to involve the U.N. Secretary-General and secretariat in planning and running a peacekeeping operation. As we have observed, the fact that the Security Council must play a role in authorizing an operation does not mean that this will inevitably fall under U.N. command. The Council regularly gives mandates to operations run by other organizations, such as the EU military force in Bosnia, and could authorize a non-U.N. commanded MNF for Ukraine. Nonetheless, it seems probable that the U.N. Secretary-General will ultimately have responsibility for running at least part of a peace operation, if only because no other actor is likely to prove acceptable to all parties.

The Secretary-General could appoint a Special Representative or Envoy to liaise in the planning process, and potentially send assessment teams to the Donbas to start technical surveys (as a precedent, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a senior envoy for post-conflict planning for Libya in 2011.) If and when a peace operation became possible, this Special Representative would likely morph into the overall head of mission, either directing all components of the operation, or acting as the main strategic coordinator of both U.N. and non-U.N.-led elements.

Even if the U.N. was not tasked with planning the military and/or police components of a mission, it would almost certainly need to prepare to supply a civilian element, including contingency planning for elections. The U.N. bureaucracy is notoriously slow to appoint civilian staff, sometimes taking 200 days to fill a post. But it can move more promptly when – as in its recent deployment of a small mission to oversee the end of the Colombian civil war – it has time to prepare and there is a high level of political will to make the mission work, as there should be for Ukraine. U.N. planning would relate to a further crucial decision for the Security Council: What level of authority should an international mission have in the Donbas, and how would it share duties with Kyiv?

A Strong or Weak Mandate?

Discussions of the scope of a peace operation in Ukraine will need to cover its authority to use force, and the level of its authority over political and civilian affairs.

On the use of force, analysts often assume that U.N.-mandated operations fall into just two categories: relatively weak consent-based missions under Chapter VI of the U.N. Charter, and more aggressive operations under Chapter VII of the Charter, which authorizes enforcement action. This dichotomy is misleading, as even Chapter VI missions such as the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) now have mandates that authorize them to use force in certain cases, primarily to protect civilians. Given the risks of a collision with Moscow that we have already made clear, a force in Ukraine (whether a U.N. mission or an MNF) is not going to be a full-scale peace enforcement operation similar to NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) in the Balkans. Three realistic alternatives are:

- **A traditional peacekeeping mission** (closest to general impressions of a Chapter VI operation) mandated to observe the security situation, facilitate humanitarian aid, work out local ceasefires and offer protection to international civilian actors.
- **A robust peace operation** mandated and equipped to use force to protect local communities and deter or halt threats by spoilers, but in defense of a credible political process rather than as part of a military-led strategy to restore order.
- **A stabilization mandate** including authorization to use force to “neutralize” spoilers as part of a concerted military strategy, although falling short of a full-scale counter-insurgency campaign comparable to NATO in Afghanistan.

As we will note in Section 3, the specific military tasks for a peace operation would involve complex responsibilities, such as border monitoring and cantonment of weapons and fighters, that go beyond basic use of force questions. Overall, a traditional peacekeeping mission would only be a feasible option if all potential spoilers in DNR and LNR sincerely committed to halt all violence, which is improbable. The likeliest course is a robust mandate authorizing the peacekeepers to use force on a limited basis, to deter spoilers. It is hard to imagine Russia supporting a stronger mandate that authorizes a military-first stabilization approach to its DNR and LNR proxies.

Turning to political and civilian issues, we have already set out the core strategic factors to take into account: Any mandate should include a clear timeline for elections, and clear guidance for the peace operation to establish its presence on the Russian border and use force to deter and counter public security threats. But political agreement would also be necessary on what overall authority a peace operation should have to deliver these goals. At least three levels of authority are conceivable:

- **Extension of state authority:** A relatively “light” option, by which the peace operation would not have executive authority over any part of the transition, but would have a strong mandate to assist and monitor the Ukrainian authorities as they regain control over their territory, in addition to the right to use force to protect civilians. Such “extension of state authority” mandates are now the norm for large-scale U.N. peacekeeping missions that do not have executive powers.

- **Supervised transition:** A “medium” option, by which the Ukrainian government and international officials would share decision-making on key political and administrative questions in formal terms; and in operational terms Kyiv would agree for the U.N. and/or other international actors to take responsibility for tasks including electoral matters as well as security provision.
- **Transitional administration:** The “heaviest” option would be for the Security Council to put eastern Ukraine under full international administration, with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General acting effectively as governor of the region at least until the local elections were complete. This was the model the council applied to Eastern Slavonia and Kosovo and East Timor in the 1990s. It would mean that the U.N. and other international actors would take full responsibility for managing the regional elections and overseeing other governance issues, either for a fixed period or until certain conditions are met.

All of these options have strengths and weaknesses. From a Ukrainian point of view, a fully-fledged transitional authority (especially without a fixed end date) would most likely be unacceptable, as it would effectively place the Donbas under Russian supervision via the Security Council. Conversely, Moscow might argue that a mere “extension of state” authority mandate would offer both it and the population of the Donbas too few guarantees. Some version of a supervised transition – giving the peace operation formal leverage over key elements of the process, but recognizing Ukrainian sovereignty - might be the best compromise. In operational terms, the peacekeeping mission would need to be granted specific authorities in four areas:

- De facto authority to run the **elections** required to fulfill the Minsk Protocols;
- Responsibility for **military security** in eastern Ukraine and along the Russian border;
- Responsibility for **public order and policing issues**, possibly in parallel with Ukrainian personnel and the de facto forces (see Section 4 below);
- The right to monitor the Ukrainian authorities’ resumption of control over **public administration**, possibly including the power to veto potentially disruptive policy choices by national officials, while allowing Ukraine to make routine choices.

A further question is *how long* the U.N. should plan to undertake these tasks. In the case of Eastern Slavonia, UNTAES had a time-limited mandate of two years to arrange elections and oversee the region’s return to Croatia (Zagreb thought even this was too long). By contrast, the mandate for the U.N. and NATO in Kosovo was open-ended, and Russia has refused to wind up the U.N. mission there after nearly two decades. Kyiv will presumably insist that any period of “supervised transition” should be as short as possible to avoid similar Russian meddling. The best compromise might be to agree that the peacekeeping operation would change mandate after the elections envisaged by Minsk II, stepping back to allow Kyiv to assert more control over its territory. However, the Security

Council could indicate its intention to maintain a follow-on force to ensure security and monitor Ukrainian behavior after the polls.

The precise balance of authorities between the peacekeepers, Kyiv and local authorities would inevitably be contentious. One possible way around the inevitable tensions could be for the Council to approve a “phased mandating process.” Under this option, the Security Council could give the peace operation a three or six-month mandate to get on the ground, establish order and assess the region’s needs. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General could then come back to the Council with recommendations on the timing of elections, level of international authority and other factors. U.N. officials argue that such processes are optimal, in that they make it possible to develop a longer-term mandate on the basis of close-up analysis.

While this is generally true, a phased approach could carry risks in the Ukrainian case. The mission would have to tailor its recommendations to address what all permanent members of the Security Council would be willing to bear. Specifically, it would be necessary to offer proposals satisfactory to Moscow, and the Russians could easily manipulate the phased mandating process to slow down or push back on the peace operation’s efforts. Russian diplomats have in the past shown frank disrespect for the findings of senior U.N. officials that they find unpalatable. In the Ukrainian case, it may best to settle on a plan of action at the start rather than leave it open to unpredictable debate.

A further planning question would be to what extent to involve other organizations, like the OSCE and EU, in planning for a peace operation, and to what extent this should be formalized in any Security Council mandate. In the short term, advocates of a U.N. mission or MNF should be wary of taking steps that undermine the existing OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. While imperfect, the SMM is at least “a fact on the ground” while a larger peace operation is still only a hypothetical possibility. Even if a major peace operation becomes feasible, it would be prudent to keep the SMM in place as a fallback in case the new force stumbles. Planners are unlikely to give these issues much heed anyway, unless they can see a way ahead for deploying troops and police to ensure basic security in the Donbas in the first place.

4. Military and Police Options

Peace operations are not solely military affairs. But in a case such as Ukraine, the credibility of the military component will be critical to operational success. Again, it is necessary to be clear about what credibility does *not* mean in this case. The goal of a peace operation in the Donbas should not be to act as a force to defend Ukraine from any current or future Russian interventions. Such a positioning could be a spark for a wider war, and few if any governments are likely to deploy their personnel in such a risky situation. Instead, a military component of a peace operation should broadly be expected to play three roles:

- **Reassuring Kyiv through a constant presence at the Russian border:** Peacekeepers may not fight to defend Ukraine, but they could play an important role by monitoring the border to assure Kyiv that Russian units are not exiting or entering the Donbas. In this they would play a similar role to the long-standing U.N. missions on the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon vis-à-vis Israel and its neighbors. Through a mixture of fixed observation points at major crossing points, mobile patrols and helicopter patrols along the border, and observation technologies such as movement sensors, a peacekeeping presence could offer Kyiv confidence that significant Russian incursions are not taking place. Past U.N. experience in cases including Eastern Slavonia and Timor-Leste shows that it is very difficult for outside forces to completely seal a border. But if Russia did plan any new major incursions, Moscow would have to factor the political costs of overrunning an international “tripwire” force of this type into its calculations.
- **Cantoning separatist weaponry and personnel:** In the early phase of a peace operation, the single greatest task would be removing the threat of secessionist armed groups and their arms, including heavy weapons. Some recent peace operations have succeeded in persuading large numbers of fighters to give up their arms and enter holding areas: At the start of this year, U.N. officials working with the Colombian government oversaw the passage of some 7,000 FARC rebels to cantonment sites in a few months. Any process of cantonment in eastern Ukraine would, however, be considerably more challenging. Western analysts have estimated that there are approximately 40,000 fighters on the rebel side, and these forces have significant quantities of heavy weapons, armored vehicles and tanks. To have any chance of bringing such a fighting force under control without serious violence, there would need to be a clear political agreement with separatist leaders on the process. It might also be necessary to phase the handover of arms, with separatists first giving up tanks and artillery but retaining light arms.¹⁶ But some resistance is certain.

¹⁶ The International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan took a similar approach to disarmament in Afghanistan, and secured over 8,000 serviceable heavy weapons from cooperative armed groups between 2003 and 2005, even if warlords also turned in “obsolete, incomplete and nonfunctioning weapons.” See <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/ddr.htm>.

- **Limited use of force to protect civilians and the peace process, especially around local elections:** A credible operation would also need the capacity to use limited force to protect civilians and neutralize recalcitrant armed groups. Previous operations have shown that “demonstrative” shows of force can persuade spoiler groups to back down. At the start of the U.N. mission in Eastern Slavonia in the 1990s, peacekeepers (including Ukrainian attack helicopters) evicted a notorious mercenary group with a show of force, and other armed gangs proved more willing to negotiate with the U.N. thereafter. In eastern Ukraine, peacekeepers with a “robust” mandate, as outlined in Section 2 above, would need to be ready to use limited force against both recalcitrant rebel groups and Ukrainian radicals aiming to infiltrate the region. Both sides could be especially provocative in the run-up to and aftermath of the critical elections.

A number of contextual factors would also have a significant bearing on peacekeepers’ capacity to play these three roles in the Donbas. The first would be the terms under which they entered. The current situation in the region means that there would likely be a “run up” period before the deployment of any international force, while the exact terms of the mission were clarified. In this period, Russia would have to quietly lay the groundwork for the peacekeepers by withdrawing its own remaining personnel and materiel from the region, and possibly taking diehard separatists with them, to reduce the overall threat to the incoming peacekeepers. Mercenaries from countries including Belarus and Serbia would also need a chance to melt away.

In theory, U.N. personnel could monitor this murky process, possibly in conjunction with the OSCE’s SMM. Blue beret peacekeepers observed the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan at the end of the 1980s.¹⁷ But given Moscow’s history of prevarications and falsehoods about its presence in the Donbas, it would be unlikely to welcome such oversight. A more realistic plan might be for an informal team of military intelligence officials from Moscow and countries committed to contributing peacekeepers to survey the area, quietly giving the Security Council a green light for deployment when they are satisfied the conditions are ripe for a deployment.

Russian officials have reportedly also mooted ideas for a rolling deployment, by which U.N. forces would gradually take over territory in the course of months, rather than assume immediate control of all of eastern Ukraine at once.¹⁸ This makes some operational sense, but it would be very easy for Moscow or its proxies to stall the deployment at a moment of their choosing, trapping the peacekeepers in an incomplete deployment that the Security Council might be unwilling to terminate.

While peacekeepers could not deploy in an instant, and would unquestionably need to send advance teams to liaise with the separatists about cantonment questions, they should still aim to implement the fastest roll-out possible.¹⁹ Given the likelihood of a

¹⁷ Adam Baczkowski and Gilles Dorronsoro, “United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP),” in Koops et al., *Oxford Handbook*, p269-274.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Can Peacekeepers Break the Deadlock in Ukraine?*, p23.

¹⁹ For one potential timeline for a phased deployment see “Potential UN Mission in the Donbas,” Rasmussen Global External Memo, 13 September 2017, p2.

significant run-up period before actual deployment, there should be time for the peacekeepers and their international supporters to preposition the necessary forces and stocks in Ukrainian-held territory to permit a rapid launch. The mission might also need to deploy extra engineering units in its first months to build camps and repair essential infrastructure to ensure that it could deploy in full. Military and civilian demining specialists would also need to start work on clearing explosives from strategically significant routes and areas, although this will be a lengthy process (demining in Bosnia, begun in the mid-1990s, continues today.)

Once the peacekeepers finally entered the Donbas, Kyiv would need to ensure that the Ukrainian military did not cross the former line of separation and that no paramilitary groups attempted to outpace the peacekeepers and carry out reprisals. Peacekeepers could also expect to receive regular violent and non-violent challenges, ranging from confrontations with armed separatists to civilian protestors blocking roads. The new mission's capacity to handle these challenges would depend on its own posture and ability to project force in line with a robust mandate, but also the willingness of Russian officials to keep up pressure on separatists behind the scenes.

During this period, the peacekeepers would need good intelligence to locate and secure the main stocks of separatist heavy weapons. Optimally, the operation would be able to deploy specialists to disable such weaponry in this early phase, although this would raise the risks of confrontations with separatist forces. Over time, the overall level of threat to the peacekeepers would depend in considerable part on Russia's attitude towards the Donbas. Although numerous, the separatist fighters' apparent lack of strong command and control without Russian supervision means that – individually or in small groups – they could represent a manageable threat. In cases such as Haiti, the U.N. has managed to wind up ill-coordinated and feuding armed gangs through targeted military actions. By contrast, if Moscow were to aim to keep Ukraine off-balance by fomenting continued instability in eastern Ukraine, it would have the capacity to run networks of separatists that even a well-equipped operation would struggle to contain consistently. Insurgent tactics could include roadside bombs and ambushes, which the U.N. struggles to handle in Mali, as NATO did in Afghanistan.

In addition to tacit cooperation with Russia to keep DNR and LNR diehards from causing trouble, the peacekeepers will need to offer early incentives for former fighters to stand down. Experience in other conflict zones shows that job creation schemes for ex-combatants, often in labor-intensive and tiring fields such as rebuilding roads, can help in this regard. As noted below, a percentage of former DNR and LNR personnel may transition into post-war law enforcement services. But even if such incentives and processes placate some malcontents, there will always be a percentage that will only back down in the threat of a firm response.

Force Requirements and Force Generation

Given these contextual factors, what sort of military capacities and support would a peace operation require, where should they come from and who should command them? Estimates of the possible size of the force have been as high as 50,000 troops. Such a

presence would be comparable to that which NATO deployed in the smaller area of Kosovo, which numbered just over 40,000 in-country troops at its peak in 1999. Nonetheless, this number was designed to deter a conventional Yugoslav attack into the province and NATO reduced the figure by a quarter with 18 months. As we have noted, a peace operation in eastern Ukraine could not be expected to play such a conventional deterrent role against Russia. Instead, it makes most sense to calculate the force's needs on the basis of the need to maintain a significant presence on the Russian border and project limited but credible force across its area of operation. It is assumed that the force would not patrol the former line of separation with the rest of Ukraine at the same level as it would the Russian-Ukrainian border, instead relying on liaising with the Ukrainian armed forces maintaining a presence at main potential crossing points to prevent any radical incursions.

As a comparator for the forces required on the Russian border, we should note that the U.N. Disengagement Force on the Golan Heights long managed to patrol a border area of roughly sixty kilometers with 1,000 personnel (although the mission has since been crippled by jihadist attacks). Ukrainian officials calculate that the border between the separatist-controlled areas and Russia is just over 400 kilometers. This would suggest that in order to achieve a high density of peacekeepers along the border similar to that necessary to reassure Israel and Syria, some 5,000 to 6,000 personnel might be required to establish a clear "tripwire" on the Russian flank. It might be possible to lower this figure if the peacekeeping force could make considerable use of drones and other observation technologies to supplement human observers, but OSCE drones over eastern Ukraine have frequently been disabled by electronic attacks. Further, this is a case where the symbolic presence of significant numbers of observers is of political significance to, at least, Ukrainian political and public opinion.

The broader needs of the force in terms of the deterrence and limited military actions to deal with spoilers would depend on the mission's threat assessment. To reach KFOR's ratio of troops to population (21 soldiers for every 1,000 members of the population) would indeed require over 50,000 personnel, when measured against the current war-depleted population of the Donbas.²⁰ A more modest force of roughly five to six brigades, deployed on the assumption that the separatist threat would dissipate relatively quickly, would still demand 15,000 to 18,000 more troops in addition to those on the Russian border. Overall, the minimum number of soldiers required to both put up a good showing on the Russian border and give the peacekeepers sufficient clout within the Luhansk and Donetsk regions would be somewhere just over 20,000 personnel – although this presumes that they would also have sufficient helicopters and other assets. This figure is in line with reported U.S. assessment of possible force figures.²¹

It should be noted that this force could also have de facto "over the horizon" support from units in Europe in case of emergency. The current, much reduced, NATO and EU presences in Bosnia and Kosovo rely on one another and rapid reaction forces to come to

²⁰ John J. McGrath, *Boots on the Ground: Troop Density in Contingency Operations* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), p55.

²¹ Laurence Norman and Julian E. Barnes, "U.S. to Seek Russian Approval for Peacekeepers in Eastern Ukraine," *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 November 2017.

their aid in case of a crisis. It might be possible for some countries in the EU to at least earmark some standby forces, such as the EU Battle Groups, as potential reserves to assist a mission in the Donbas, even if this was not an automatic pledge.

Nonetheless, the real challenge could be to generate sufficient troops and assets for the basic in-country mission, especially given the need to rotate troops rapidly. Most analysts assume that there would be strict political limits on the possible nationalities of the forces involved. On the one hand, Moscow is likely to resist any significant presence of personnel from some or all NATO members. On the other hand, Kyiv and its Western allies will insist that the force should be made up of relatively capable militaries, and not rely on the poorly equipped personnel from developing nations that make up a large part of UN missions in Africa. There has been a particular focus on the possibility that non-NATO European nations (such as Sweden, Finland and Austria) could provide a leading part of the force in parallel with troops from states closer to Russia, such as Kazakhstan and Belarus. It is not yet clear that enough countries from either group would be willing to take on such a high-stakes mission.

If it were possible to at least develop a core force from these types of countries, however, it might be possible to add on well-qualified troops from other regions to make up the numbers. Mongolian troops have, for example, won praise for their performance in both Afghanistan with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the U.N. in South Sudan (one U.N. official says that “they are the one troop contributor I’ve never heard anyone complain about”). Latin America could be another source: Argentinian and Chilean units served under NATO command in Bosnia in the 1990s, and Brazilian marines acquitted themselves well on behalf of the U.N. in Haiti. Now that the Haitian mission has closed down, the Latin Americans are looking for options further afield for peacekeeping openings: Brasilia has proposed sending a battalion to the Central African Republic.

So, it might be possible to cobble together decent troops from a variety of regions. Language issues, a lack of common operational experience and a lack of local knowledge would all reduce their combined effectiveness. A mix-and-match approach to peacekeeping forces is not always a disaster. The U.N. operation in Eastern Slavonia involved Pakistanis, Jordanians, and Belgians, along with Russians and Ukrainians. But it is hard to see how a truly coherent operation could come together in Ukraine without the involvement of at least some NATO countries to help strengthen the core of the mission. Future negotiations with Russia on the force may have to involve long-term efforts to make the case for a peacekeeping force including some NATO personnel, perhaps from countries with good ties to Moscow, like Greece, or with little direct stake in the conflict such as Portugal.

Who Would Be in Charge?

The question of personnel leads to a further dilemma: Who should command the mission? As noted at the outset, a NATO or EU operation is politically unviable, and the obvious alternatives are: an operation under U.N. command as well as a U.N. mandate; or an MNF with a U.N. mandate under the authority of a “framework nation” which could provide

the necessary core of headquarters staff, as well as a substantial group of troops. Analysts have cited Sweden as a well-qualified leader, although Stockholm has been vocal about Russian aggression in recent years, and could fear that personnel in the Donbas could be pawns in Baltic security disputes.²²

As we have noted, staff working for U.S. envoy Kurt Volker reportedly concluded that a MNF would be preferable to a U.N.-commanded mission.²³ There are a number of possible reasons for this:

- European and other NATO militaries have a strong distrust of U.N. command and control practices, and note that U.N. units frequently fail to follow orders;
- U.N. missions rarely have strong military intelligence capabilities, although the organization has made some progress on this in recent years;
- The U.N. relies on civilian logistics system that can significantly slow down deployments.

In some cases it has taken the U.N. a year or more to get blue helmets on the ground after the Security Council mandated them, letting violence escalate, although the organization has been improving its rapid reaction capability.

While all these factors argue in favor of a MNF, it should be noted that the politics of the Ukraine mission could place some limits on its options. A European force contributor like Sweden might prefer a command-and-control structure based on EU and NATO models, with the field commander reporting to an Operational Headquarters in Europe. But Russia could object to such an arrangement, arguing that it could open the force to Western manipulation. While the force will certainly need strong intelligence capabilities, Moscow would surely oppose it developing any NATO-type intelligence gathering (more likely the force will have to rely on friendly powers for much of its information, as many U.N. operations already informally do).

One option could be to develop a U.N.-commanded force with some special structures to supplement usual U.N. systems. There is a precedent for this from the case of UNIFIL in 2006. When the U.N. mission in Lebanon needed rapid reinforcement after the Israeli-Hezbollah war that year, potential force contributors including Italy also questioned the U.N.'s command and control arrangements. To meet their concerns, a special "Strategic Military Cell" of staff officers, based on NATO models although on a smaller scale, was set up in New York to oversee UNIFIL.²⁴ This backstopped the mission quite effectively during its most intense operations through the late 2000s.

²² International Crisis Group, *Can Peacekeepers Break the Deadlock in Ukraine?*, p22.

²³ Norman and Barnes, "U.S. to Seek Russian Approval for Peacekeepers in Eastern Ukraine."

²⁴ Ronald Hatto, "UN Command and Control Capabilities: Lessons from UNIFIL's Strategic Military Cell," *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (2009), p186-198.

In the UNIFIL case, European troop contributors also circumvented U.N. logistics systems to get their units on the ground quickly. Something similar, or even more systematic, could be possible in Ukraine. By the standards of some of the places the U.N. currently operates, such as Darfur, eastern Ukraine is remarkably easy to access. Nonetheless, European countries hoping to facilitate a mission in the Donbas – especially including those that Russia could not accept as direct troop contributors – could make a major indirect contribution by setting up a Logistics Support Mission, possibly under an EU flag, to help supply the peacekeepers. Such a mission could combine airlift, sealift and overland services to get personnel and materiel as far as Ukraine, where the peacekeepers could arrange for the final stage of their journey.

Police

While the military challenges of peacekeeping in eastern Ukraine would be considerable, troops alone are unlikely to guarantee public order. In Eastern Slavonia, UNTAES was able to deal with armed spoilers relatively quickly, but struggled to handle repeated Serb riots (one mob attacked then-U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during an official visit). The U.N. turned to Poland to deploy 500 police to fill the gap. Similar problems arose in Kosovo, where the U.N. was very slow to get police on the ground in 1999, forcing NATO troops to maintain order. Since then, the U.N. has placed a greater premium on strengthening the police components of its operations, often using them to greater effect than military units.

Even if the main separatist forces in eastern Ukraine agreed to cooperate with a peacekeeping force, the risks of public unrest would be high, especially around elections and other major political milestones. In a scenario in which Russia chose to orchestrate an ongoing insurgency in the region, pre-planned outbreaks of rioting could be used to undercut the international presence (just as the U.N. and NATO missions in Kosovo lost a huge amount of credibility after a well-planned outbreak of violence by the Albanian community in 2004). Any peacekeeping mission would have to make getting sufficient police on the ground an early operational priority.

In addition, the peacekeepers would need to work out a viable relationship with the de facto police forces in DNR and LNR at an early stage in the mission. The first Minsk Protocol recognizes the right of the Luhansk and Donetsk authorities to set up “people’s militias” to maintain order, and they are likely to hold onto this jealously. While the Ukrainian authorities and police are liable to be highly suspicious of this proposal, it will most probably fall to the peace operation to oversee its implementation, while also assuring Kyiv that the militia are not a long-term threat.

In this context, the peace operation can play three roles:

- Deploying FPU to undertake public order duties, especially in major cities and towns;
- Placing individual international police officers to monitor the behavior of the existing local police;

- Establishing a process to retrain those local police who are willing to reintegrate into the Ukrainian system over time.

In parallel with this last task, it would probably be necessary to vet local police officers to ensure that they were not war criminals or linked to organized crime. This is a sensitive task, but the U.N. has experience of vetting and retraining processes for police in cases such as Haiti, which could be transferred to Ukraine.

American planners reportedly calculate that these tasks could involve up to 4,000 international police officers, and believe that the U.N. should take direct control for this element of the mission alongside an MNF.²⁵ The scale of the proposed deployment is daunting: Global demand for international police officers is high, and the U.N. regularly struggles to find enough FPU and individual police officers to fill its ranks. In some cases, it has had to work with sub-standard FPUs that lack the equipment and training necessary for even basic police work. Ukraine could be a partial exception.

A significant number of European countries (including Italy, Poland, Portugal and Romania) have considerable experience of deploying gendarmerie and FPUs in U.N. and EU-flagged missions, most notably in Kosovo. The European Gendarmerie Force, an inter-governmental organization affiliated to the EU in Vicenza, Italy, has helped coordinate these in the past. The bulk of these countries do not currently have their police units deployed abroad, and could act as a resource in Ukraine. They are unlikely to produce all the necessary personnel, but could offer key units for the first stage of the mission. Russia might be less concerned by the presence of police officers from NATO countries than that of troops, although this would need confirmation.

European countries and their allies could also proffer individual police officers to work on mentoring, training and vetting local forces. The UK has specialized in police training in the past, as has Germany, although language issues could pose a problem for many officers. Given the potential police requirements, it might be necessary for the U.N. to adopt innovative recruitment techniques, such as employing recently retired police officers to work on lower-risk mentoring and training tasks (the pool of former policemen with relevant experience from the Balkans is quite large).

If the U.N. struggled in this field, it could turn to both the EU and OSCE for assistance, as both organizations also have history of deploying police and rule of law operations. The OSCE, for example, ran a widely-praised police school in Kosovo while the EU has made police reform a regular priority in cases including the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. As the EU already has a Security Sector Reform mission in place in Ukraine, it could take responsibility for guiding the process of demobilizing DNR and LNR fighters and transforming them into a credible militia. Having the Europeans lead on this under a U.N. umbrella might increase Kyiv's confidence in the process, as EU officials should (in theory) be less susceptible to Russian pressure than their U.N. or OSCE counterparts.

²⁵ Norman and Barnes, "U.S. to Seek Russian Approval for Peacekeepers in Eastern Ukraine." A more modest force of approximately 2000 police could still include ten FPUs and monitor local personnel, although less closely and consistently

Previous experience shows that reforming and guiding police units is a long-term task, often outlasting military operations. In the eastern Slavonian case, the U.N. and OSCE set up follow-on missions to support police development after UNTAES closed. While the most immediate policing task for peacekeepers in eastern Ukraine would be ensuring public order, the U.N. and its partners would need to prepare for a long-term commitment to the rule of law in the region, and the Ukrainian authorities would need to signal their willingness to accept this to reassure the local population.

5. Civilian Tasks: Elections and Socioeconomic Issues

Fulfilling Minsk: Elections

The practicalities of deploying peacekeepers and ensuring security could easily consume the peacekeeping mission in its early months, especially if it faces considerable resistance. Nonetheless, as we have noted, the operation's political strategy should also pivot on moving as rapidly as feasible towards the local elections required by Minsk II. Kyiv and Ukrainian public opinion would surely become concerned if there were signs of the peacekeepers letting this priority slide.

In some ways, preparing the polls should be one of the easiest parts of the process. The U.N. has grown accustomed to overseeing elections in environments vastly more complex than eastern Ukraine. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, it ran polls involving 25 million people in a country the size of Western Europe. In purely technical terms, the Donbas should not be too tough by comparison. In political and security terms, however, the elections would pose a major challenge.

To make the polls work, it would first be necessary to update the voting registry, working with suspicious local partners. This would be complicated by the need to permit as many refugees from the Donbas (about 2 million in total, spread across Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere) a chance to vote. In addition, the peacekeepers would have to: create a security environment in which all candidates, including candidates representing mainstream Ukrainian parties can campaign more or less freely, and there is media freedom; maintain security on polling day itself; and ensure that the voting and counting process is demonstrably free and credible to all parties.

These are all enormously difficult tasks. A further complication is to decide what level of authority the peacekeeping mission should have over the process. There is a spectrum of possibilities. The most extreme option would be for the international mission to have full responsibility for all aspects of the process, including counting and the results. This might be the best technical approach, and the U.N. should look to the OSCE for support – the Minsk accords already stipulate that independent OSCE officials should verify and endorse the results. But an entirely internationally-run process may be unacceptable to both Kyiv and local political actors, even if it is credible.

In theory, it would be possible for the peacekeepers to step back and let the Ukrainian authorities and local political actors in Luhansk and Donetsk manage the polls between them. This is very unlikely to work in practice, and could lead to delays and instability. The best compromise might be for the U.N. to assume operational responsibility for the polls under the aegis of a special electoral commission including representatives from the Ukrainian authorities, Luhansk and Donetsk to offer political legitimacy, ultimately reporting to Kyiv. (To ensure the polls are given adequate attention, the U.N. could also appoint an election commissioner independent of the overhaul head of mission to push preparations through.) To reinforce the credibility of the vote, the EU could mount an autonomous electoral observation missions to back the OSCE.

Even if the local elections proved relatively successful, the days and weeks after the polls would be an especially sensitive period for the peacekeepers. Multiple experiences, from Angola to East Timor, have shown that the most dangerous period in an electoral process can come after the results are in, as dissatisfied political leaders and voters take to the street. The Minsk Protocols are almost perfectly designed to maximize the dangers of such violence as – regardless of the actual election results – the vote should lead to Ukraine’s reassertion of control over its border with Russia.

This paper has argued that the entire point of a peace operation in eastern Ukraine should be to make this moment possible. But there should be no doubt that many armed groups and citizens in the region would respond to this prospect by ratcheting up riots and violence potentially encouraged by Russia. The peacekeepers would need to be on alert to handle this threat, and the Ukrainian authorities well-advised to move slowly to reassert its rights. While successful elections should also trigger revisions of the peacekeepers’ mandate, to reflect the progress on Minsk, a “cooling off period” of roughly three months might be necessary to allow all sides to absorb and accept the changed political situation.

Offering the Donbas a Future: Socioeconomic Issues

While local elections in DNR and LNR could unlock progress on the Minsk process, they would only precipitate a much longer process of reintegration involving all sectors of administration, the economy and society. Even if the polls went of reasonably well, the chances of political and social tensions resurfacing are 100 percent.

Large-scale movements of people in and out of the region could compound these tensions in the months after the vote, and indeed long after. There are currently a million former inhabitants of the Donbas living elsewhere in Ukraine, and a similar number of refugees in Russia. In a post-conflict situation: a considerable percentage of those displaced in Ukraine would be likely to return to reclaim their former properties and livelihoods; a smaller percentage of those in Russia might also return, possibly with Moscow’s encouragement to test Kyiv’s tolerance; and significant numbers of residents of DNR and LNR who have clung on so far will consider leaving, on the assumption that they face looming discrimination by Kyiv.

The resulting churn of incoming and outgoing displaced persons and refugees cannot be avoided entirely (thousands of ethnic Serbs quit Eastern Slavonia during and after the UNTAES deployment). Peacekeeping troops and police will need to ensure that these groups do not clash over housing, jobs and other property. The U.N. refugee agency UNHCR may need to organize temporary accommodation for the displaced, although both Kyiv and the U.N. will want to avoid creating long-term holding camps.

If Kyiv’s reassertion of authority over eastern Ukraine is ever to win local acceptance, it will have to be associated with guarantees on the socioeconomic future of the region. Many Ukrainian politicians have called for public servants who have worked for the separatist authorities to be punished or prosecuted. Such talk is only liable to increase popular resistance to the reintegration of the Donbas, and/or persuade many residents to migrate to Russia (just as many ethnic Serbs in Eastern Slavonia moved to Yugoslavia as

the end of the UNTAES period). This would be an enormous propaganda victory for Moscow, or even an excuse for a new Russian intervention.

While it might be unpopular, the only way to prevent this ugly scenario is for Kyiv to begin to rebuild the trust by offering strong reassurances to the population of the Donbas that their livelihoods will be preserved, and for the peacekeeping operation to deploy a significant civilian presence including lawyers, economic experts, and civilian outreach specialists to support this offer. In a “supervised transition” scenario, these staff would not have executive authority for administering the territory. But they would accompany and advise Kyiv’s representatives and help them work out the terms for reabsorbing the Donbas into the Ukrainian state with officials from Luhansk and Donetsk.

One mechanism for such a process would be to establish tripartite committees, chaired by U.N. officials and involving officials from Kyiv and the separatist regions, to discuss the reintegration of sectors such as education, health, tax collection, and other services. (Committees of this type were set up in Eastern Slavonia, although too late to be fully effective.) It would also be possible for international officials to exert more direct influence over Kyiv’s representatives by giving them a right of veto over policy decisions that were palpably dangerous to public order or the population’s welfare.

Large-scale U.N. missions now regularly include hefty civilian components as a matter of course. The recent closure of some major operations (including those in Haiti and Liberia) has freed up technical experts who could move to Ukraine. Nonetheless, few of these officials have much knowledge of Ukraine. It is important that the civilian component of a peacekeeping mission mainly consists of Russian and Ukrainian-speakers, although there is a risk that some will be biased.²⁶ To ensure this is the case, the U.N., OSCE, and EU should work together to pool civilian expertise. The OSCE has particular experience in local-level engagement in post-conflict countries, while European Commission officials are likely to play a key role in directing funding into the Donbas along with counterparts from the World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and national development agencies.

Optimally, planning for a peace operation should include agreements on how the U.N., EU and OSCE should cooperate on the ground. In the Kosovo case, the OSCE and EU ran semi-autonomous “pillars” of the U.N. administration under the strategic direction of the Special Direction of the Secretary-General. It might also be theoretically possible to “double hat” or “triple hat” one individual as a joint representative of the U.N., EU, and/or OSCE presences in the region. However, this could also create difficulties should the different organizations’ overall political positions on Ukraine diverge – and Russia could object to any “EU takeover” of the international presence.

²⁶ Bias among civilian officials is a recurrent problem for peacekeeping missions: In Kosovo, for example, U.N. staff in ethnically Serb-majority areas typically favored the minority’s claims against the ethnic-Albanian majority, and there were suspicions that outside powers such as Russia encouraged this tendency. (Equally, U.N. officials in ethnic-Albanian areas tilted firmly to their hosts’ views too.)

While all parties should agree to give the U.N. Special Representative a “primus inter pares” status in political affairs, it might be most prudent to at least begin with a relatively loose coordination mechanism in case of political frictions. Nonetheless, it is critical that all major development actors get behind a single reconstruction plan for eastern Ukraine, and that they be ready to release their funds quickly.

6. Conclusion: Could It Work?

This paper has shown that it is possible to set out the main strategic criteria of a peace operation in Ukraine and envisage a pathway to the local elections that are key to unlocking the Minsk process. What would follow those elections is another matter. As this paper has suggested, some sort of security presence would remain necessary after the polls, and police and civilian presences for even longer. These are issues that could only ever really be addressed once the initial mission was underway.

The more urgent question that hangs over the paper is whether even this initial mission would be feasible. It is clear that there are at least three major obstacles:

- The need to engineer a background, bilateral strategic bargain between Russia and Ukraine to make the mission work;
- Coaxing or pressuring potential local spoilers in eastern Ukraine to accept the operation;
- Identifying and bringing together a credible police and military force from disparate sources.

It is not clear that any of these preconditions can be fulfilled in the near future. Achieving Russian-Ukrainian consensus in favor a mission will require grinding diplomatic work. Finding peacekeepers, and bargaining with Moscow over which countries are acceptable sources of peacekeepers, is also liable to take longer than some advocates of peacekeeping in Ukraine hope.

The only way to know if a peacekeeping force could manage local spoilers is ultimately to deploy them and respond to whatever happens. Peacekeeping is an uncertain business. Nonetheless, there is also sufficient reason to believe that – judging by previous peace operations – a U.N.-led or non-U.N. force could handle the situation in the Donbas if the political conditions are ever suitable. But that is still a very big *if*.

Appendix A: Abbreviations and Acronyms

DNR	Donetsk People’s Republic
Donbas	The Donets Basin region of eastern Ukraine
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
FPU	Formed Police Units, or riot squads of roughly 100 personnel
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (2001-2014)
JCCC	Joint Center for Control and Coordination, a joint Russian and Ukrainian tool based in Soledar, Ukraine, designed to help implement Minsk II and ceasefires.
KFOR	Kosovo Force, led by NATO (1999-Present)
LNR	Luhansk People’s Republic
MNF	Multinational Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGCA	Non-Government Controlled Areas
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SMM	Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE in Ukraine (2014-Present)
SRSG	Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General
U.N.	United Nations
UNHCR	U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees
UNIFIL	U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (1978-Present)
UNOMIG	U.N. Observer Mission in Georgia (1993-2009)
UNPROFOR	UN Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995)
UNTAES	U.N. Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia (1996-1998)
U.S.	United States

Richard Gowan

Appendix B: Biography

Richard Gowan is an expert on the United Nations and peacekeeping based in New York. He is a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations and teaches conflict resolution at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. He was based at New York University's Center on International Cooperation from 2005 to 2015, and remains a non-resident fellow there. In recent years, Gowan has worked as a consultant for the International Crisis Group, the United Nations and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He writes a weekly column ("Diplomatic Fallout") for *World Politics Review*, and has also written on the U.N. for *Aeon*, *The American Interest*, and *Politico*.

Appendix C: Acknowledgments

This report was commissioned by the consultancy Rasmussen Global.

The author thanks Richard Atwood, Jana Kobzova, Harry Nedelcu, Jake Sherman, Hannah Thoburn, Alexander Vershbow, and Fredrik Wesslau for comments on drafts of this text. Fabrice Pothier, Bart Szewczyk, and Paul D. Williams offered detailed advice at the planning stage, and a number of international officials have also offered very useful thoughts.

All opinions and errors remain the author's own.

Looking further back, the author is grateful to the staff of the OSCE office in Vukovar who helped him learn about peacekeeping in Eastern Slavonia fifteen years ago, and in particular the late Steve Degeneve, a truly dedicated international civil servant.

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