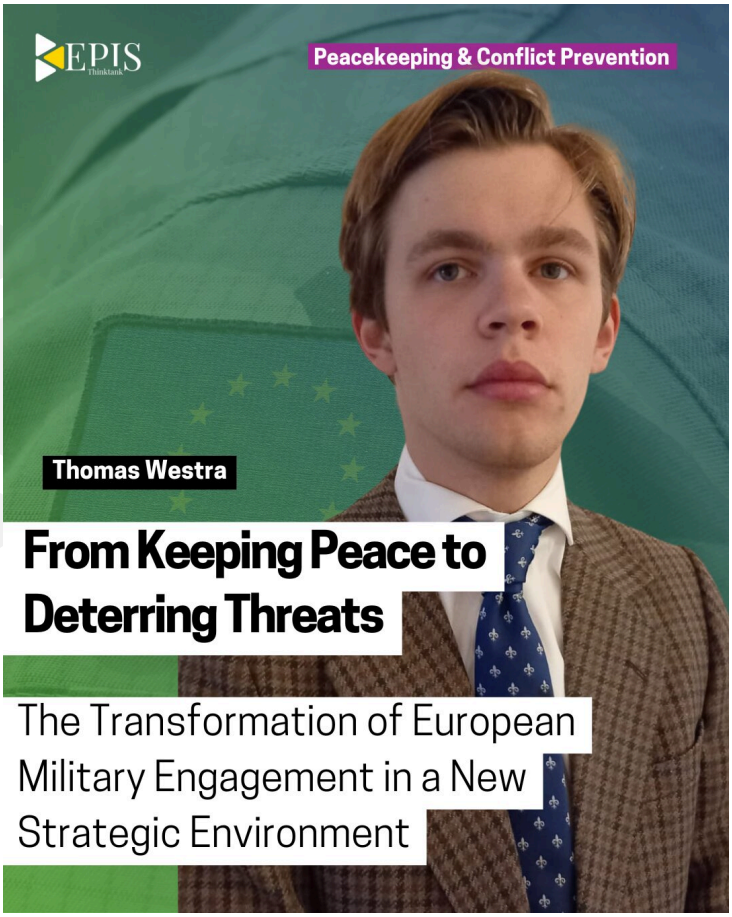
From Keeping Peace to Deterring Threats

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Introduction:

In the recent past, certain areas around Europe have become increasingly unstable, leading to conflicts in Ethiopia, Yemen, and of course, Ukraine, just to name a few (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). These conflicts, both old and new, are becoming increasingly important in their impact on global connections and trade, but also on the general instability in these regions

(Snyman, 2024). The tradition to combat these explosions of violence has always been to send peacekeepers either under the banner of the United Nations or through individual nations (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). These peacekeeping efforts could then depend on the efforts of single countries or the combined efforts of multiple countries (European External Action Service, 2025).

The shift in global security, combined with a new status quo within the first world, where large-scale warfare is seen as a more realistic possibility, tests the will of "Peacekeeping States" to commit their military power towards peacekeeping operations (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). This article will attempt to analyse the attitude towards peacekeeping operations, attempt to ascertain the cause of developments in the security situation for "Peacekeeping States," and predict possible trends and outcomes of these events.

Part 1: Peacekeeping States, Peacekeeping Developments

MINUSMA was the United Nations' attempt at stabilizing Mali after ethnic rebellions in the Northern regions of Mali (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). This led to clashes with the Malian army followed by a coup d'état by the military (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). It was decided through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2100 to stabilise the country and develop a way in which democratic elections could be held again (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). In general, one could say that this was a "stereotypical" peacekeeping operation for the United Nations (Snyman, 2024). However, it is not so far-fetched to say that MINUSMA was a failure. These are the words of the Malian government at the time, stating that the UN forces should leave the country, as they were incapable of responding to security challenges (Al Jazeera, 2023).

The UN mission in Mali consisted out of rotating contingents of Western, Asian and African militaries (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2025). Concerning this article, what is important to understand is that the development of the political will of contributing nations to send peacekeeping forces, what motivates them to commit to long-term operations, and what dissuades them from staying (Snyman, 2024). One should remember, however, that the MINUSMA mission ended on the request of the Malian government, not because there was a lack of political will within the UN (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). However, there still was something akin to a "peacekeeping fatigue" among the contributing nations (de Hek, 2025). Triggering articles such as The Mali Mission: Was It Really Worth It? in the Netherlands (de Hek, 2025), followed by German articles stating that "Russia's attack on Ukraine has changed German policymakers' view of the world. The alliance's eastern borders are now the top priority. With the withdrawal from Mali, a 30-year era of major foreign deployments is ending. What matters most now is the defence of Germany and NATO" (Nogueira Pinto, 2024).

This is an example of how a changing worldview by the Western powers, combined with the lack of a peace guarantee within Europe, and seemingly ineffective peacekeeping operations can lead to a shift in attitude away from peacekeeping and towards a focus on possibly dangerous nation states (Snyman, 2024). This is best seen in the way EU defence spending has been treated in the past compared to the present (European External Action Service, 2025). While in 2015 European defence spending was seen as a "toolbox for the enforcement of hard power," a generally vague description of anything to do with defence spending and perhaps indicative of the lack of purpose and direction, today the white paper for European defence, Readiness 2030, resembles a general mobilisation to combat a defined, dangerous threat: The Russian Federation (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). This is a hard shift in attitude, which means can have many possible outcomes for the future of peacekeeping (Snyman, 2024).

To Layouter: Here please a digram showing the development of defence expenditure (2005: 25 billion €, 2014 24 billion €, 2022 58,1 billion €, 2024 102 billion €) Source: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-numbers/

Part 2: Changes in the Security Situation for "Peacekeeping States"

When one takes a look at Europe, there is a core group within the EU which partakes in peacekeeping operations to such an extent that it becomes notable (European External Action Service, 2025). For example, the French military has a long tradition of operations in Africa, primarily in former colonies (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). The Germans, Dutch, Belgians and Irish can also be seen in these operations (Snyman, 2024). We will therefore focus primarily on these nations in order to limit the study and to create a clear comparison between countries.

What has changed for these nations when it comes to peacekeeping commitments? The EU member states seem to be concerned with the military threat posed by the Russian Federation, a fear which has its origins in 2014, but peaked with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). This threat has changed significantly and rapidly in the past ten years (Nogueira Pinto, 2024).

While European nations were more committed to combating the possible growth of terrorism in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, the priority for most of these Western armed forces has switched completely towards a capability more suited for large-scale warfare (Snyman, 2024). Not only does this mean that the military budget of these relevant nations has to be spent differently, but also that the presence of combat troops, air and sea assets has achieved a political value with regards to deterrence (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). For example, the stationing of combat units in the Baltic States on the Russian border is not only a military move, but also

meant to send a political message (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). The location of military assets has been politicised (Snyman, 2024).

Military equipment has also been tailor-made towards counter-insurgency or low-level intensity operations, which fit the bill well for peacekeeping missions (Klep, 1998). Helicopters for patrols, light vehicles and infantrymen are more useful for socially oriented patrols and rapid responses to armed militias than, for example, tanks or jets (Klep, 1998). A telling example is when the Dutch military sold all of its Leopard 2 main battle tanks, considering them too expensive and unimportant for future conflicts, only to regret this decision after the 2022 Ukraine war started, and the role of the tank was reinforced on the modern battlefield (Snyman, 2024).

The use of personnel, the equipment purchases, doctrine, training priorities and the stationing of units throughout the globe make it more difficult for the European peacekeeping nations to seriously consider peacekeeping operations without also having serious difficulties concerning their capability for conventional warfare (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). Besides Ukraine, other security threats around Europe are emerging, making it even more difficult to efficiently spread out military resources (Lewis & McAllister, 2023). Examples of these emerging threats are Houthi missile strikes on Red Sea shipping (Associated Press, 2025) and the emergence of new ways of warfare such as cyber warfare and drone warfare (Snyman, 2024).

To the Layouter: Please modify so that it illustrates the timeline from 2015 Peacekeeping involvement with light weapons to today's focus on deterrence with heavy weapons.

The increase in the production capacity of military equipment, something which small-scale operations do not require, is indicative of the war that the Western nations are preparing for – not a foot-patrol controlling border checkpoints, but thousands of rounds of artillery, tanks, and conscripts (Nogueira Pinto, 2024).

Part 3: Possible outcomes and effects

There are multiple possibilities concerning the change in military mentality within European countries, which have for a long time prioritised peacekeeping (Snyman, 2024). On the one hand, the large-scale investments in capability may mean that eventually, these nations can commit to peacekeeping operations just as effectively as before, successfully combining the responsibilities of a major peacekeeper with the responsibility of deterring the Russian Federation, among other threats (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). At the same time, we might see a decrease in the willingness and effectiveness of these nations with regards to peacekeeping (Snyman, 2024). This may lead to sacrificing the idea of flexible, lightly armed forces and equipment for a more "heavy-duty" conventional cold war doctrine-focused military (Snyman, 2024).

The idea that these forces will be less suited to handle peacekeeping operations is not purely speculation, however (Klep, 1998). In the Dutch military for example, there were peacekeeping operations in former Yugoslavia and Lebanon (Klep, 1998). The Dutch military at the time had a small cadre of professional soldiers, combined with a large base of conscript troops lacking military experience, motivation, governmental trust and top-notch equipment (Klep, 1998). Compared with today, the Dutch military at the time was more quantity-focused than quality-focused, at least compared to the current Dutch standard today (Klep, 1998).

The point of this divergence into Dutch military history is to show that there is indeed a historical precedent for this problem, and at the same time the issue is becoming more relevant all the time (Klep, 1998). There is a call for conscription within the Netherlands and other EU member states in order to better counter the scale of Russian mobilisation (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). However, when the Dutch conscripts were also sent to Yugoslavia and Lebanon where they were ill-equipped and unsuited towards the subtle nuances of peacekeeping operations (Klep, 1998). Within the Dutch military history, there is the idea that conscripts in Lebanon could do nothing but get shot at, achieving little, and generally being in danger (Klep, 1998). Furthermore, the unsupported conscripts defending Srebrenica were not up to the task of handling the situation effectively, as they were underequipped and poorly trained for the task at hand (Klep, 1998). This, of course, combined with a lack of external support, led to the fall of Srebrenica (Klep, 1998).

Perhaps this is a problem of the past, or a uniquely Dutch problem. However, the possibility of reintroducing conscription within EU militaries might still negatively affect the perceived effectiveness of these militaries with regard to peacekeeping operations (Snyman, 2024). There is a possible solution namely to keep a cadre of professional soldiers ready for such operations (Klep, 1998). However, in a time of crisis, uncertainty and apprehension, it seems that at the time of writing, the best professional soldiers are now in Eastern Europe, functioning as a credible deterrence, training Ukrainian soldiers, and trying to expand their capabilities (Lewis & McAllister, 2023).

The possibility of a change in the way the mentioned EU member states fight wars might also change the wars they are committed to fighting (Snyman, 2024). Large-scale and long-term investments into military power might lead to a European military might which is capable of peacekeeping and deterrence at the same time (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). Furthermore, the possibility that a European power can engage in long-term peacekeeping missions without draining too much of the military budget or capabilities might lead to an increased willingness to partake in these expeditions (Snyman, 2024).

In conclusion, we can see that peacekeeping by EU nations has come under strain (Snyman, 2024). The European military mentality has shifted for a large part away from peacekeeping obligations (Nogueira Pinto, 2024).

This means a new mentality about what the military is used for, but also in what a military should be able to do best (Snyman, 2024). In the past we have seen nations which have been capable of conducting large-scale operations and low-intensity operations at the same time, but we have also witnessed countries that have failed in this task (Klep, 1998). In the future, a choice must be made about exactly how these goals are going to be achieved, but also where the priorities lie (Snyman, 2024). In the past few months, there have already been some developments in this field. The escalation between Iran and Israel, which led to direct American military involvement, has heightened tensions within Europe, but also divided the voting European concerning cooperation with the United States (Associated Press, 2025). Of course, the European NATO members will increase their defence spending gradually in the coming years, which will give the European military the resources to better achieve their goals (European External Action Service, 2025). Once these goals concerning peacekeeping have been defined, we can judge the effectiveness of these nations in achieving them (Snyman, 2024).

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