

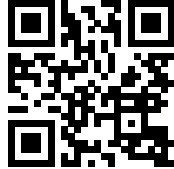
UNDER THE RADAR

Twenty years of
EU military missions



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AUTHORS: Josephine Valeske

EDITORS: Deborah Eade, Niamh Ní Bhriain

DESIGN: Evan Clayburg

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Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
BiH	Bosnia-Herzegovina
CAR	Central African Republic
CMC	Crisis Management Concept
CMPD	Crisis Management and Planning Directorate
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
Concordia/FYROM	EU Mission in North Macedonia
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EC	European Commission
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPF	European Peace Facility
EU	European Union
EUAM	European Union Advisory Mission
EUMAM	European Union Military Advisory Mission
EUMPM	European Union Military Partnership Mission
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
EUPM	European Union Partnership Mission
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FACA	Forces armées centrafricaines (Central African Armed Forces)
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
LCG	Libyan Coast Guard
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
MNC	Multinational Corporation
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defence and Security
PSC	Political and Security Committee
RACC Sahel	Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell for the Sahel
RCA	République centrafricaine (Central African Republic)
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UN MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
UN MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Summary

At the time of writing in May 2024 preparations are underway across the 27 member states of the European Union (EU) for parliamentary elections to be held in June. Among the issues that may sway voters on polling day is the EU's public embrace of war politics, which has been at the forefront of events in Brussels during the previous five-year cycle. The EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and more recently to Israel's genocide in Gaza, has not gone unnoticed by Europeans, many of whom have taken to the streets to protest the EU's complicity in war and genocide. Far from public view, however, the EU has, in fact, been driving a war agenda for decades. Its deadly borders regime has led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people desperately seeking asylum, while others have been detained, tortured, enslaved or disappeared in third countries as a result of policies enacted in Brussels. Similarly, the EU has channelled tens of billions of euros to militarised policies, much of which funds the supply of arms to warzones or lines the pockets of lucrative companies that produce lethal arms. Furthermore, for the past two decades, the EU has been deploying military-mandated missions overseas that have gone virtually under the radar and generally evaded public scrutiny. This research sheds light on these missions.

In 2003, the EU deployed its first-ever foreign mission to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In the 20 years since then it has undertaken more than 40 operations across Europe, Africa and Asia with 24 currently active, 13 of which are civilian, 10 of which are military and are the focus of this report, as well as one hybrid mission. The stated objectives of these missions include laudable aims, such as preventing conflict, strengthening international peace and security, supporting the rule of law, and crisis management, among others. According to the EU's diplomatic service these missions are driven by the EU's commitment to improving the security situation in host nations. They are described as low to middle intensity, offering EU services that are tailored to local circumstances and usually involve the provision of military training and equipment to national armies. In reality, as this report shows, these missions have little to do with 'promoting peace, prosperity and security', and are rather far more concerned with achieving the EU's final stated aim of promoting 'the interests of Europeans' to the detriment of local populations in host states.

While the EU's overseas missions are relatively small in terms of personnel and presented as low-level interventions, their impact over the previous 20 years has, at best, had no impact in resolving conflict, or served to exacerbate it – the latter being the case in most of the missions examined as part of this research. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which hosts the EU's most long-standing mission, underlying tensions rooted in unresolved political questions have not been – nor could they ever have been – resolved by deploying military personnel. Moreover, as previous TNI research has shown, for decades the EU has treated the Balkans as its own backyard, using it as a testing ground for border and security strategies that are honed and perfected before being deployed elsewhere. The EU's military presence in the Balkans may, therefore, be better understood as a self-serving mission for EU interests, rather than being focused on the needs of the local population.

There is no standard methodology to assess the effectiveness of EU missions, and evaluations as well as the decision-making process to launch new missions appear to take place in an ad hoc manner. The material on which this research draws shows that even the EU admits that it has achieved few of its stated aims. Even so, it continues to approve and deploy missions that in a best-case scenario have no impact beyond costing millions to European taxpayers, and indeed often contribute to destabilising the very contexts that they have been tasked with securing. The Sahelian region, where the EU has deployed seven military missions over the last two decades, is a case in point. Since the EU began deploying such missions, *coups d'état* have become commonplace, not only in the countries where there are EU missions but also in neighbouring states. Clearly, the EU presence cannot be held solely responsible for these events but it certainly raises questions about its stated aim of preventing conflict and strengthening security, especially since some of these missions provided financial support to the armed forces involved in the coups. Moreover, across the Sahel global power struggles play out through the presence of an array of actors including troops from the US, EU member states, and African countries, all operating under different national, regional and United Nations (UN) mandates, as well as the presence of the Russian state-supported Wagner Group and its successor.

For the last 20 years, military personnel operating under the aegis of the EU have trained tens of thousands of troops across Africa, many of which have subsequently perpetrated serious human rights violations or participated in military coups. Mozambique is perhaps the most recent and most notorious example, but it is far from exceptional. Similarly, tens of millions were channelled to the Nigerien national army, with a tranche worth €5 million for the purchase of lethal weaponry transferred in the weeks immediately preceding the *coup d'état* in 2023. Regardless of the states to which the EU supplies arms or the guarantees given, the reality of the arms trade is that once lethal weaponry leaves the EU, it cannot be tracked and controlled and there are no effective mechanisms to prevent its being used to perpetrate human rights violations, to violently curb dissent, or to enforce military rule. Moreover, the governments with which the EU collaborates are often embroiled in serious allegations of corruption or have a very poor record on human rights; and yet, despite its own stated principle of upholding the rule of law, the EU has continued to hand over tens of millions to often corrupt, authoritarian or volatile governments for investment in military training and equipment. This is reckless and irresponsible and a betrayal of the values that the EU claims to uphold.

Despite its poor track record in bringing about peace and stability, the EU has forged ahead with deploying its missions, eager to defend its economic interests and present itself as a relevant actor on the global stage. The EU's two Somali-focused missions operating on land and patrolling coastal waters have indeed contributed to exacerbating the problems that they were mandated to alleviate, and culminated in driving people from their livelihood of small-scale fishing directly into the hands of non-state armed groups. Moreover, the EU's most recent mission in the Red Sea, launched in response to Houthi disruption of shipping lanes to bring pressure to bear on Israel's assault on Gaza, is a further example of the EU protecting its own interests while projecting itself as a reliable actor in the Western axis of power. It is noteworthy that the only concrete action the EU has taken in relation to Gaza was the deployment of this mission, which has done nothing to address Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinian people.

For years the EU has evolved legally and politically into a militarised union, developing a common foreign and security policy that has allowed it to portray itself as an emerging global power in its own right, of which these missions are the tangible expression. This image is completely at odds with reality, however. Since 2002 the EU, through the Berlin Plus Agreement, has had formal relations with NATO and, as this research shows, many of these missions are intertwined with NATO and/or US operations. It has become abundantly clear since Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine and Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, that the EU has no intention of setting out its own independent political agenda and using whatever political clout it might have to push for diplomatic solutions. Rather, it has fallen into line with the US agenda, and any slight differences have been purely rhetorical with the actions of NATO-affiliated entities on both sides of the Atlantic remaining broadly aligned. This is unsurprising given that there are US military bases located across EU member states, some of which – as well as the UK – host US nuclear weapons. While the EU's military power pales in comparison to that of the US, it continues to 'play catch-up' and forge ahead with plans to become a 'hard power' actor rather than seeking to provide a counterweight by promoting diplomacy. This stance is unsurprising given that some of the EU member states were central in the colonisation of Africa, Asia and the Americas, and continue to operate from a colonialist, imperialist logic today, as evidenced in the approach taken towards Israel, a settler-colonial state. The regime of economic extraction and the great power mentality has not changed and has been on full view in recent months.

The EU's consolidation both as a regional power that deploys its own 'peacekeeping' missions, as well as its subservience to US interests, poses a direct challenge to multilateralism. Specifically, it serves to weaken, undermine and jeopardise the legitimacy and actions of the UN. Both the EU and the UN were born out of the ashes of World War II, when efforts were made to develop regional and multilateral institutions to protect future generations from the scourge of war. Though the UN system is far from perfect, it still offers the best opportunity to preserve multilateralism and to work out differences diplomatically rather than spiralling downwards towards military aggression and war. The only plausible reason for the EU and its member states to deploy their own missions, operating outside or on the margins of the UN's experienced peace support operations, is that this makes it easier to achieve the stated aim of 'promoting European interests' and territorial control. This is borne out in the overlap between the locations where the EU has deployed military missions and the prevalence of natural resources or access to shipping lanes vital for protecting economic and commercial interests. If the EU were truly interested in building peace, it would support the multilateral structures that were designed to protect it, not directly undermine them by establishing parallel structures with scant oversight and accountability mechanisms. Through its actions, the EU is testing and stretching the limits of multilateralism at a time when international law and the structures that underpin it are hanging on by a thread.

Key findings

For two decades, the EU has been gradually moving towards becoming a de facto military power. This has happened beyond the sight of the European public, with scant oversight from democratic institutions or judicial accountability. This briefing critically reviews 20 years of the EU's CSDP military missions, with a focus on the 10 most recent or current missions (at the time of writing all missions referenced appeared as active on the EEAS website, although some were temporarily suspended).

It finds the following:

The EU is expanding rapidly as a military power and consolidating its presence in African countries, especially in the Sahel region. The number of active military missions has doubled from five to ten since 2018. Similarly, the common costs (roughly 10-15% of the total costs) of these missions have almost doubled since 2019 and stand at €150 million for 2024.

While the official rhetoric suggests that the military missions are aimed at increasing stability in the respective countries, in reality the EU is driven by its own interests and the development of these missions and their deployment exemplifies a colonial logic, focused on controlling access to crucial raw materials, important trade routes, securing profits for the military-industrial complex, and the EU projecting itself as a 'hard power'.

The EU chooses to prioritise short-term goals over addressing the root causes of violent conflicts. These can often be found in colonial power structures that benefit the EU and are perpetuated by it. Examples range from the extraction of raw materials, to overfishing that destroy local livelihoods, to the export of arms to authoritarian and violent regimes.

- Some of the soldiers trained by the EU missions have been responsible for severe human rights violations, as well as coup d'états, and some of them have joined non-state armed groups. In 2020, the Malian national security forces, which received training and finance from the EU, were responsible for the killing of hundreds of civilians. Many of the military missions have failed to increase security in the countries in which they are based and have often had detrimental effects.
- The countries most involved in military missions are often former colonial powers that want to maintain their influence in their former colonies. In six out of 11 missions before 2017 for which there is data, it was the former colonial power that provided the most troops, with France heading the list.
- Seven of the ten currently active missions take place on the African continent or in its waters, three of which are in the Sahel. The competition for access to resources and raw materials seems to be the key driving force behind the EU's focus on the Sahel region.
- The military missions in both Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) have been partially suspended since the end of 2021 – not because of the well-documented human rights violations perpetrated by state forces, but because it was discovered that the Russian state-sponsored private military Wagner Group was highly active in both countries, raising concerns that soldiers trained by the EU might join the militia.

The partnership mission in Niger ended less than a year after it started because the new military government ordered European, French and US forces to leave the country.

- While 'terrorism' is often cited as the justification for US and EU military presence in the Sahel, evidence suggests a reverse causality – military interference provokes non-state armed groups, which in turn is used to justify further militarisation.
- Rather than learning from these past failures, the EU is busy establishing new missions in the Sahel and beyond.
- There is a severe lack of systematic evaluation of the missions regarding whether they achieved their stated aims as well as of the broader context of their deployment. Furthermore, they reportedly suffer a lack of personnel and resources, a high turnover of staff, bad coordination and insufficient information-gathering from the outset, and there seem to be no clear criteria for whether and when to launch a mission in a given country.
- Decisions on this seem to be taken ad hoc, under pressure of certain countries that have (often neo-colonial) interests in the regions where the missions take place.
- The EU is establishing itself as a military power that is both part of, but also separate from, NATO, and that works in conjunction but also independent of member states. By doing this, the EU is undermining multilateral structures like the UN as well as national and regional states and systems.
- The missions suffer from a serious lack of democratic oversight and judicial accountability. The European Parliament, the only democratically elected European institution, has very limited decision-making power in relation to foreign policy. For several years, military missions have been financed through the European Peace Facility (EPF), an off-budget fund that is beyond any democratic scrutiny.
- The missions also escape judicial scrutiny, as there is no internal or external legal review of the CSDP in the EU – it falls neither under the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the EU nor the European Convention of Human Rights, which applies only to states. There is also a lack of publicly available information about matters such as detailed expenses, the number of casualties, and others.
- The conflicts in the countries where the missions take place have already led to forced displacement and are expected to drive even more people from their homes, contrary to the EU's stated aim of 'fighting the root causes of migration'. Some of these people will once again be confronted with EU military apparatus when they try to cross the increasingly militarised borders into the EU.

Introduction

This briefing examines the EU's military missions currently deployed in Africa, Europe, and patrolling the waters of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. It is clear from the research that the EU is driven not by a willingness to promote peace, prosperity and security, but rather to promote 'European interests'.

This report begins by detailing how its military missions are an attempt by the EU to present itself as a global player with 'hard power' ambitions. This is followed by an overview of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and how the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy evolved, and a mapping of past and present civilian and military missions. The legal framework that underpins the EU's overseas deployment focuses on the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and on the process that takes place for the establishment and deployment of a mission. This is followed by a section that details the cooperation between the EU missions and other relevant bodies such as NATO and the UN. Finally, there is a brief discussion of the budget used for these missions, exposing the transparency gaps regarding the use of public funding for such purposes.

The second part of this briefing details the military missions, which the EU listed as active at the time of writing, beginning with the EU's force operation Althea to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in 2004. Four years and three concluded missions later, in 2008 the EU deployed its Naval Force Operation Atalanta to the Gulf of Suez, Gulf of Aqaba, Red Sea, Somali Basin, and Gulf of Aden. The EU's training mission to Somalia, which complemented this mission, was deployed in 2010. Not only did these missions fail to bring about any improvement for the local population, many of whom are driven into the arms of non-state armed forces by a combination of poverty and lack of government support. The briefing then focuses on the Sahel region, which is where the EU has invested much of its efforts in designing and deploying both military and civilian missions. It looks specifically at the military missions in Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Niger, while drawing attention to the natural resources in the area – including deposits of gold, oil, diamonds, iron ore, copper, uranium, among others – which may well be the underlying reason for the EU's interest in the region.

The briefing also examines the EU's military operation Atalanta in the southern central Mediterranean, patrolling waters off the coast of Libya. Though the mission claims to be enforcing an arms embargo on Libya, there are serious questions about its success in doing so, its failure to rescue the thousands of people who drown in the same area every year, and its cooperation with the so-called Libyan Coast Guard.

Similar to the missions in the Sahel, the EU's recently deployed mission to Mozambique raises serious questions about its training of military personnel who were subsequently involved in human rights abuses. The presence of European military personnel seems more concerned with protecting the interests of European oil and gas companies operating in the region, to the detriment of the local population.

Closer to home, the EU has deployed a military assistance mission in support of Ukraine. This mission operates inside the EU, namely in Germany and Poland, and trains Ukrainian soldiers who are actively involved fighting against Russia, following its full-scale invasion in February 2022 and annexation of part of Ukraine's territory from 2014. This mission poses serious questions about the extent to which the EU is an active agent in Ukraine's military defence of its sovereign territory, by arming the Ukrainian military and training its soldiers on EU soil. The final mission covered in this briefing is the EU's naval force operation ASPIDES, deployed in 2024 to the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea in the context of Houthi disruption of global shipping lanes.

Over the past 20 years the EU has deployed civilian and military CSDP missions in 22 countries. This briefing focuses solely on the 10 currently active military missions, or which are listed as active on the EEAS website in May 2024, since they are the most relevant for the EU's current development. An area for further research are the EU's civilian missions, in view of the militarised nature of their mandate and their relevance especially for the externalisation of EU borders. The figures cited in this briefing were accurate as of 1 May 2024, though these missions are constantly evolving and readers should check the EU's updated versions.

PART I:

Military Missions as part of the EU's 'hard power' ambitions

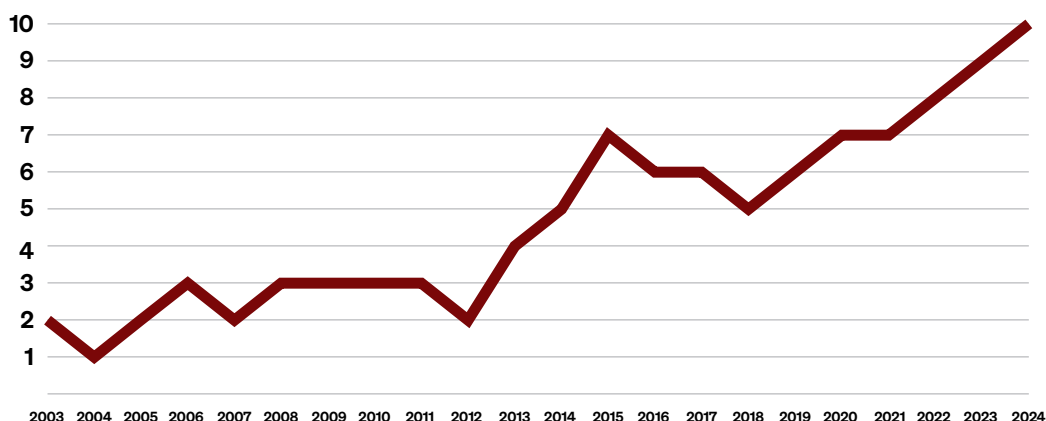
The European External Action Service – An Overview

In 2011, the European Union (EU) formally launched its diplomatic service known as the European External Action Service (EEAS) following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.¹ Broadly, the EEAS represents the EU diplomatically in much the same way as an embassy represents its nation on foreign soil. There are currently EEAS representations in 134 countries around the world.²

The EEAS is tasked with implementing the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which formally aims to 'promote peace, prosperity, security, and the interests of Europeans across the globe'.³ Under the umbrella of the CFSP, the EU has developed a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which has included establishing military-mandated missions in various countries around the world, moving the role of the EEAS beyond that of being a diplomatic service and raising questions about the motives underlying these military deployments.⁴ Prior to the Treaty of Lisbon, the missions were part of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) under High Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana. Mr. Solana, who was Secretary General of NATO from 1995 until 1999 when he took up the position of High Representative, significantly shaped this policy.

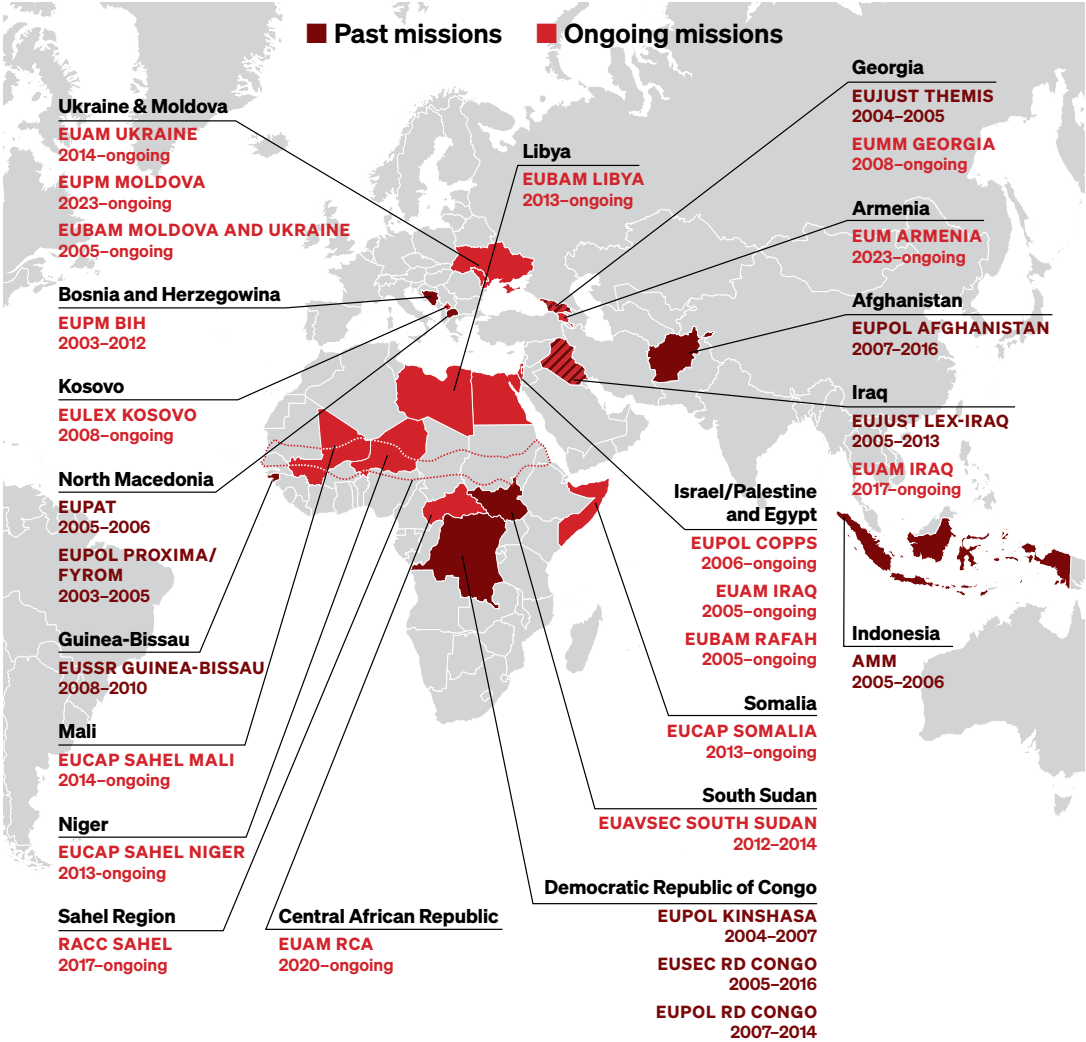
This briefing paper sheds light on the mandate and operations of these missions and questions how far they contribute to the EEAS' overarching objectives of contributing to 'peace, prosperity and security' or whether they are in fact solely concerned with the other objective of protecting the 'interests of Europeans across the globe' to the detriment of local populations in the countries in which they are based.

**Number of military missions
2003–2024**



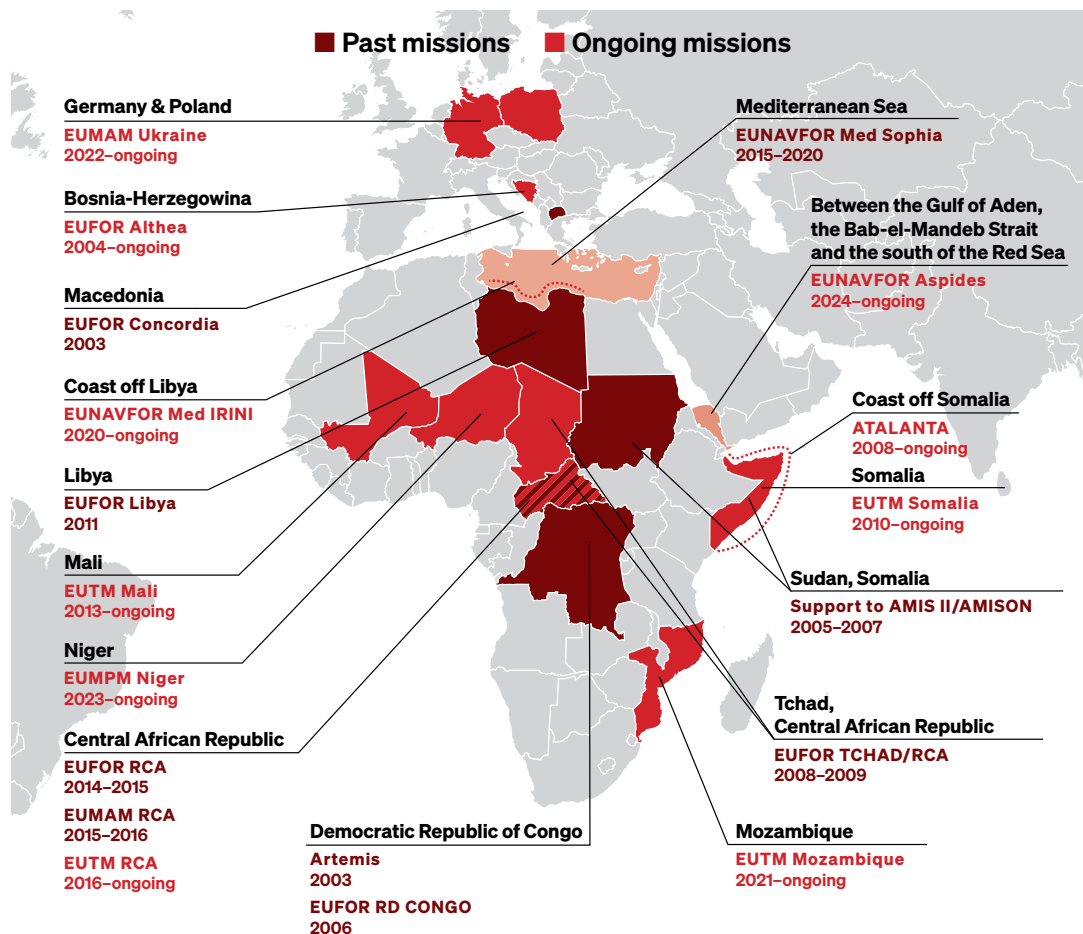
The EU's first military mission, Concordia/FYROM, was deployed to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now formally called North Macedonia) in 2004. Since then, the EU has undertaken more than 40 such missions across Europe, Africa, and Asia. Currently, there are 23 ongoing CSDP missions, ten of which are military missions, with a staff of around 5,000.^{5,6} The increasing number of military-mandated missions overseas has been matched by the EU's growing emphasis on building up military capabilities and 'hard power' at home, as evidenced in the ever expanding public funding pools being made available for military related research and development, or being channelled directly to arms companies. These trends have been documented in previous TNI reports.⁷ For two decades the EU has gradually moved towards becoming a de facto military power and the development of military-mandated missions, the focus of this report, forms a significant piece of that strategy.

Past and ongoing CSDP civilian missions



Note: RACC Sahel and EUBAM Moldova and Ukraine are not technically CSDP missions but are included here because of their similarity with these missions.

Past and ongoing CSDP military missions



The CSDP formally differentiates between civilian and military missions with the former focusing on, among other areas, policing, security reform and borders. This distinction might well be merely rhetorical, however, given that in recent years policies concerning policing, security and borders have become overwhelmingly militarised. While this briefing report alludes to these civilian missions, it is beyond its scope to analyse them in detail and examine how far these rely on militarised strategies to fulfil their mandates.

Military missions involve the deployment of military personnel seconded by EU member states and focus mainly on training, advising or otherwise supporting a country's armed forces, or patrolling a specific territory. The EU describes its military missions as typically 'low- to middle scale' compared to NATO or US high-intensity missions,⁹ which means they attempt to avoid direct military or armed confrontation, focus on peacekeeping and are seldom involved in direct combat, although the armies they train might be. This assessment is echoed by Trinke Palm and Ben Crum, academics at Utrecht University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: '... the EU, throughout, remains a rather risk-averse military actor that is quite selective in the missions it engages in and has a strong preference for missions with relatively low levels of military robustness'.⁹ Although some may argue that EU mandated low intensity risk-averse missions are preferable, this report shows that their deployment raises serious questions on what drives the EU to create a military structure in the first place, when member states can already deploy their military personnel to the UN's peace-keeping operations, as opposed to a regional organisation often operating very far from home.

Legal framework

Civilian and military CSDP missions are underpinned by Section 2 of Chapter 2 of Title V of the Treaty on European Union.

Article 42 (formerly Article 17 TEU)

1. The common security and defence policy shall be an integral part of the common foreign and security policy. It shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets. The Union may use them on missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The performance of these tasks shall be undertaken using capabilities provided by the Member States.

[...]

3. Member States shall make civilian and military capabilities available to the Union for the implementation of the common security and defence policy, to contribute to the objectives defined by the Council. Those Member States which together establish multinational forces may also make them available to the common security and defence policy.

4. Decisions relating to the common security and defence policy, including those initiating a mission as referred to in this Article, shall be adopted by the Council acting unanimously on a proposal from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy or an initiative from a Member State. The High Representative may propose the use of both national resources and Union instruments, together with the Commission where appropriate.

[...]

Article 43

1. The tasks referred to in Article 42(1), in the course of which the Union may use civilian and military means, shall include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation. All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories.¹⁰ [our emphasis in every case]

EU Militarism and Military Missions

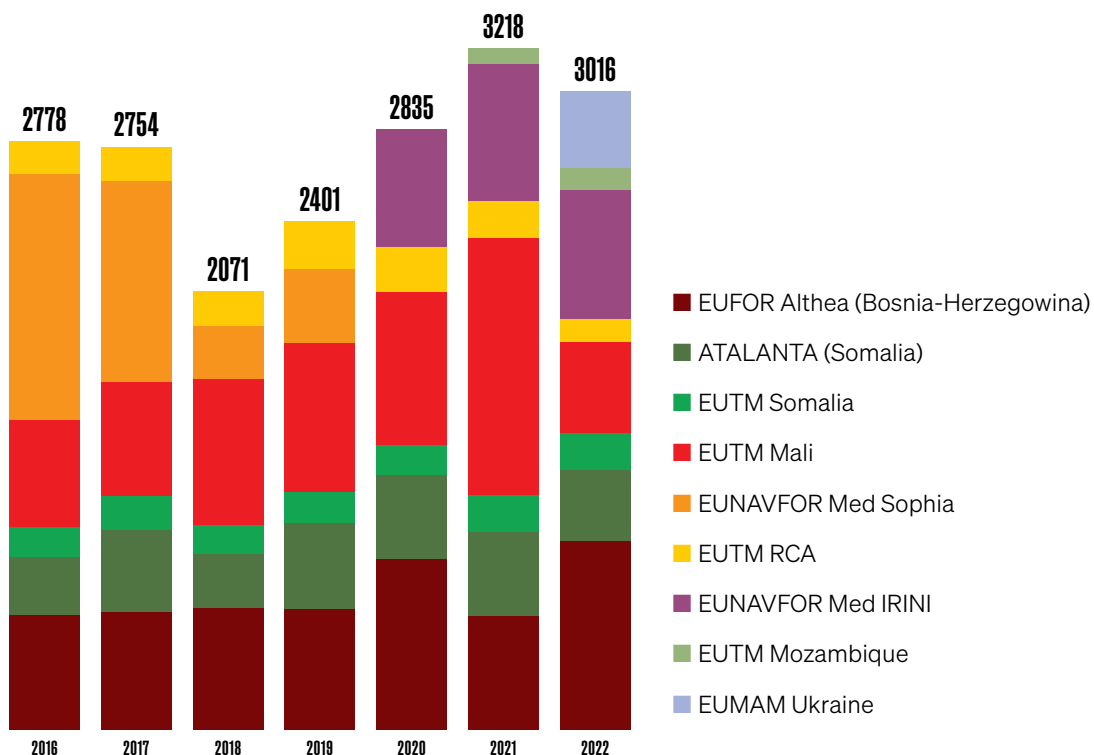
Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the EU's identity has evolved from what was initially solely a political and economic union arising from the ashes of World War II to also being a de facto military project. Although the EU does not (yet) have its own autonomous military force, efforts are underway to establish one. For example, the European Border and Coastguard Agency – Frontex – is mandated to develop and eventually be able to deploy 10,000

an EU army already exists in all but name

armed officers operating under an EU mandate and acting autonomously of member states. Furthermore, as part of the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defence and Security (PESCO) the EU established so-called 'Battlegroups', which are 15 multinational military units, each comprising 1,500 soldiers that theoretically could be deployed anywhere within five to ten days following a unanimous Council decision.¹¹ While they have never been deployed, they mark a further step in the development of the EU's 'hard power'.

In parallel to the advancement of initiatives such as the Frontex standing corps, EU-mandated military missions have also been evolving, though they still rely on the deployment of military personnel and equipment from EU member states, even though they operate not under a national but an EU mandate. Essentially, trained military personnel whether from EU projects such as Battlegroups or Frontex, or seconded from member states, wear uniforms bearing the EU insignia, and operate under an EU military mandate – an EU army already exists in all but name, while the vast majority of European citizens are entirely unaware of or poorly informed about the EU's consolidation as a military power.

Number of personnel active in military missions 2016–2022



Information from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

Deployment of a Military Mission

EU military missions conducted outside the EU require either United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorisation or the explicit request of the government of the country in which the mission is deployed, albeit countries are sometimes put under international pressure to accept them, as reported by academics Ginsberg and Penska.¹² Country consent to a mission is typically expressed through a letter of invitation, such as in the case of the EUTMs Mali and Somalia or EUMAM RCA, in the Central African Republic.¹³ In addition, all EU member states need to agree unanimously on the mission through a European Council decision.¹⁴ In practice, almost all missions to date were backed by a UN Security Council Resolution, with the notable exception of Operation Sophia, which was authorised by the UNSC only after it had already begun.¹⁵ Trineke Palm from Utrecht University notes that while UNSC backing lends legitimacy to the EU missions and helps the EU position itself as a normative power, UNSC Resolutions are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the EU to start a mission.¹⁶ In 2015, the EU deployed Operation Sophia ‘to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks’ – in other words, facilitating the illegal forced return of people fleeing war-torn Libya in search of safety. The mission had neither a UNSC mandate nor was it invited by Libya, in whose waters the operation was ultimately supposed to take place—Libya had no legitimate government that could have sent a request.¹⁷ The UNSC eventually authorised the mission after the event, but, as Palm notes: ‘While the EU has not taken operational action beyond UN-authorization, the EU performance at the UN in this case suggests an emerging great power mentality. The inclination to stretch the limits of multilateralism questions the EU’s willingness to be constrained by international law’.¹⁸

The process of establishing a military mission

Typically, the process begins with the initiative of a member state, often following relevant conclusions of the EU’s Foreign Affairs Council, which comprises foreign ministers from member states.¹⁹ The EU sets out the steps as follows:²⁰

- An assessment of the situation in a particular country and its effects on EU interests is made by diplomatic and military committees, including the Political and Security Committee (PSC). The PSC, composed of ambassadors from each member state, plays a crucial role in overseeing and directing the process, as well as the missions once they are launched.
- The Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), a military/civilian department in the EEAS, drafts the Crisis Management Concept (CMC) in exchange with partners, international organisations, local authorities, the European Commission, and other relevant actors.²¹ The CMC outlines a preliminary plan for the operation, which is then subject to the approval of the PSC and the Foreign Affairs Council. Subsequently, the Council makes a decision, officially establishing the mission or operation. While civilian missions share headquarters, military missions usually rely

on an operational headquarters provided by a member state. The military training missions in the Sahel region, however, operate under a common command located within the EEAS in Brussels. The EUFOR Althea (formally the European Force Bosnia and Herzegovina) mission uses NATO infrastructure.²²

- The European Union Military Staff, the military department within the EEAS, in collaboration with the commanding officer, establishes the Concept of Operations.²³
- An operational plan is developed, including logistical details. At this point, member states are requested to contribute equipment and personnel. It is often difficult for the countries pushing for a certain mission to find enough other countries willing to contribute staff and equipment.

As becomes clear from the complicated process, there is a significant lack of democratic oversight, transparency, and accountability. The main decision-making institution for military missions is the Political and Security Committee, which comes under the oversight of the Foreign Affairs Council; as already stated, this comprises the foreign ministers from member states. The European Parliament, the EU's only democratically elected body, has little to no involvement, and is primarily restricted to asking questions, receiving reports, and exercising limited budgetary oversight over the EEAS. Transparency is also compromised, as it is almost impossible to obtain specific details such as mission costs because the financing is decentralised with each country covering its own expenses. Recently, the financing of the common costs of the missions was shifted to the European Peace Facility (EPF), an off-budget fund designed to 'prevent conflicts, build peace and strengthen international security', although in reality it channels billions of euros to fund military equipment and missions that fuel and prolong warfare and armed conflict from Ukraine to the Sahel. The off-budget aspect of this fund is designed specifically to circumvent EU Treaty article 41.2 that explicitly prohibits the Union from funding warfare while also evading the democratic scrutiny in the European Parliament to which other public spending is subject.²⁴

But beyond the intricacies and critique of the EU's internal structures that often cloud more than clarify the panorama, it is important not to lose sight of the bigger picture. The EU has set in motion a procedure through which it deploys military forces to a non-EU country to conduct military operations. The following sections raise serious concerns about whose interests are being served and whether this is in fact an extension of European colonialism by another name.

Josep Borell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (commonly known as HR/VP), under whose command the EEAS operates, exemplifies how colonial and racist mindsets are shaping EU foreign policy. He made headlines in 2022 when he remarked that

‘...Europe is a garden. We have built a garden. Everything works. It is the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that humankind has been able to build - the three things together. ... Most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden. The gardeners have to go to the jungle. Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us, by different ways and means.’²⁵

These remarks were made by the man who oversees the deployment of European troops outside the EU, quite often in African countries, where a deeply entrenched colonialist power dynamic continues to shape how many European leaders regard their African counterparts.

Cooperation with NATO, the UN, and third countries

As stated earlier, EU military missions are not limited to EU member states; more than 45 non-EU countries have participated in missions to date, subject to the PSC’s approval.²⁶ Framework cooperation agreements (FPAs) between a third country and the EU provide the general political and legal basis for the latter’s participation in missions.²⁷ According to the December 2022 EEAS records, 15 non-EU countries were contributing nearly 250 military personnel to EU missions, namely Albania, Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Switzerland, and Türkiye.²⁸ Although these countries contribute personnel and finance and are integrated in existing command structures, they are accountable to their own governments and are not involved in the initial planning or have decision-making powers. However, countries that contribute ‘significantly’ can take part in a mission’s day-to-day management through a Committee of Contributors that is set up by the PSC on a mission-to-mission basis. Non-EU countries are typically invited at a late stage to fill gaps, since EU countries have often struggled to staff and finance their own missions,²⁹ and bear the costs of their own participation. According to Simon Duke, Professor at the European Institute of Public Administration, their motivations for joining vary:

[T]he EU candidate countries and a number of neighbourhood countries with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements [...] do so to demonstrate solidarity with the EU. A second group includes non-EU NATO members [...] who share the same security challenges with the EU’s members. A third group include important regional actors [...] who may wish to associate with the EU’s objectives in a specific case and who may wish to be seen as operating at the regional level. A final group includes those who have made primarily symbolic contributions, but who may wish to associate themselves with the broader international values and principles that the EU stands for.’³⁰

Although the EU describes these missions as driven by a desire to take ‘a leading role in peacekeeping operations, conflict prevention and the strengthening of international security’ there are already multilateral structures under the auspices of the UN that do this. It is therefore important to examine whether the EU military missions have specific goals that could not readily be achieved through the UN system, particularly when the missions often operate with

a Security Council Resolution. One clear objective is to bolster the EU's standing as a military power capable of defending its political and economic interests by force if necessary, as is the case with its naval mission *Aspides* securing EU trade interests in the Red Sea. This approach favours 'hard power' and expansive militarism over 'soft power' politics and diplomacy.

As explained earlier, the vast majority of EU military missions operate under a Security Council Resolution, even if it is only necessary in cases where the government of the country in question does not issue an invitation, and otherwise seems mainly to serve to increase its legitimacy.³¹ Many missions closely cooperate with the UN, whether by succeeding (e.g. EUFOR Althea), coinciding with (e.g. EUTM Mali and MINUSMA; Artemis/EUFOR Congo and MONUC; EUFOR/EUMAM RCA and MINUSCA), or laying the groundwork for UN peacekeeping or special political missions (e.g. EUFOR Chad/RCA).^{32,33,34}

The same is true for the cooperation with NATO. The 2003 Berlin Plus agreement allows the EU to use NATO infrastructure and capabilities such as personnel, equipment, and headquarters³⁵ for its military missions. This close collaboration serves to avoid that the EU would establish parallel structures. The Agreement also stipulates that NATO has the first right to intervene in a conflict and that the EU will intervene only if NATO prefers not to. However, the invocation of this agreement has gradually lapsed, with EUFOR Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina now the only mission still making use of this provision. Apart from NATO cooperation, the EU and US cooperate across the African continent by filling gaps in each other's missions and in patrolling the sea off the Somalian coast in their stated aim of fighting piracy.³⁶

Budget

Although the EEAS supports both the Commission and the Council, it is independent from them in that it has its own staff and budget. While civilian missions can be funded by the EU's CSDP budget,³⁷ EU Treaty provisions prohibit the Union from funding 'expenditure arising from operations having military or defence implications' (art. 41.2).³⁸ Thus, in principle every participating state covers its own costs.

Since 2011, the European Peace Facility (EPF), known in its previous iterations as the Athena Mechanism and the African Peace Facility, has served as a cost-sharing mechanism to cover common costs such as

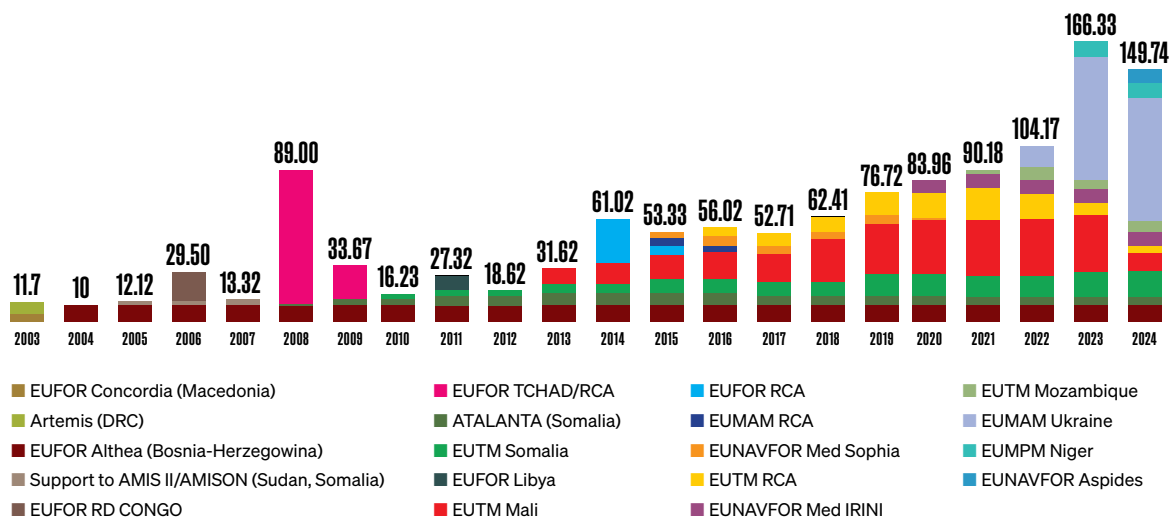
‘...headquarters implementation and running costs, including travel, IT systems, administration, public information, locally hired staff, Force Headquarters (FHQ) deployment & lodging, infrastructure, medical services (in theatre), medical evacuation, identification, acquisition of information (satellite images), reimbursements to/from NATO or other organizations (e.g. the UN), costs specific for the deployment or redeployment of an EU Battlegroup.’³⁹

The EPF, as described in the joint TNI-Statewatch report *At What Cost*,⁴⁰ operates as an off-budget fund subject to no oversight, essentially a trick the EU uses to circumvent the no-military-funding rule. Thus, between the member states and third countries funding themselves and the EPF funding common costs, military missions under the EU's banner are subject to no EU financial oversight – which raises huge questions regarding democratic control and accountability.

Under the EPF, shared costs are divided among countries in proportion to their Gross National Product (GNP). Prior to the approval of the EPF, missions were funded under a mechanism known as the Athena mechanism with a similar cost-sharing structure.⁴¹

The decentralised manner of budgeting for EU military operations makes it almost impossible to determine their true costs. The common costs (see graph below) are, however, generally estimated to comprise 10-15% of the total costs, which makes it possible to estimate that the total costs of all military missions since the first one in 2003 until early 2024 must have ranged between €6.8 and €13.5 billion.⁴² A conservative estimation by Ulrich Krotz and Katerina Wright from 2018⁴³ estimated that EU states had spent upwards of €4 billion on these operations by then, with EUFOR Chad/RCA, the most expensive at the time at around €1 billion.

Common costs of CSDP military missions 2003–2024 (in million €)



Note 1: The common costs of EUFOR Althea could not be found in official documents but were estimated by Pejić and Boštjančič Pulko (2016) to be €10 million annually. Footnote: Pejić and Boštjančič Pulko (2016) *Analysing the Effectiveness of EUFOR Althea Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318502143_Analysing_the_Effectiveness_of_EUFOR_Althea_Operation_in_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina

Note 2: No data could be found for Operation Atalanta from 2011-2012, EUTM Somalia from 2015-2018, and EUTM Mozambique for 2024. For these periods, the annual average common cost of the respective missions were used.

Although exact costs remain elusive, this estimation clearly indicates a rising trend that aligns with broader EU developments: military spending at the EU and national levels is increasing dramatically, particularly since 2019. The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has been used as a pretext to further expand military spending, as discussed in *Smoke Screen*, a previous TNI report, published with Stop Wapenhandel.

Besides covering shared costs of EU military operations, the EPF also finances military equipment, including arms, for third countries. It often replenishes the inventory of countries with active military missions. Before the war in Ukraine a large part of the 2021 EPF funding went to Sahelian countries, with €24 million earmarked for the Malian Armed Forces and €35 million to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force. In 2023 it financed arms and other support to the tune of €45 million for the Nigerien Armed Forces, only months before the government was

overthrown in a military coup d'état. While the disbursements stopped after the coup, some of these arms are now likely to be in the hands of the military junta (more in the section on Niger below), showing once again the problematic nature of arms exports and the flawed logic of providing military support rather than addressing root causes and political problems through diplomacy. The EPF has previously supported Mozambique, Mali, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and in 2023 also financed the provision of arms for Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Gulf of Guinea and Somalia. Most of its funding, however, has been to Ukraine as the Russo-Ukrainian war enters its third year.⁴⁴



tni.org/publication/at-what-cost-EU-security



tni.org/publication/smoke-screen

PART II: The Missions

EUFOR Althea

European Union Force Operation Althea
in Bosnia and Herzegovina

LAUNCH DATE: 2 December 2004

NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022:
892



Operation Althea, the EU's most extensive and longest-running military operation, was launched in 2004 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, nine years after the end of the wars that brought about the break-up of Yugoslavia. In essence, it represents a continuation of the preceding NATO operation under a different name. The mission consists of an executive and a non-executive component, the former deriving from a UNSC mandate to assist the BiH authorities in maintaining a safe and secure environment. In practice this means capturing war criminals and combating organised crime. The mission, which initially comprised about 7,000 troops, currently has around 1,100 personnel, including 500 added since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Althea is also the only operation that makes use of NATO assets and capabilities under the Berlin Plus agreement. Critics argue that this is the main reason the operation continues: to keep visible ties between the EU and NATO (and by extension the US).⁴⁵ The challenges facing BiH require political, social, and ethnic solutions rather than military intervention. As a member of the Political Military Group, the preparatory body of the PSC, said, **'We have been in Bosnia for 15 years without much progress. And the problems in Bosnia, for years, are no longer military. They are political, ethnical, and economical – that is where we should act. Because we did not handle this well from the beginning, we are now running into huge problems'**.⁴⁶

The ongoing tensions in BiH show that 20 years of external military presence have not resolved the underlying issues.⁴⁷

Although supporters of the mission underline its value in 'deterrence'⁴⁸ and 'psychological'⁴⁹ aspects, there are no clear structures for evaluating its successes, failures, or contribution to BiH's safety.⁵⁰ Rather, the mandate's inclusion of the fight against organised crime has led to

blurred responsibilities between the military and the police, resulting in a militarisation of law enforcement – contrary to the EU’s own recommendations in its Security Sector Reform.⁵¹ The mission also suffers from organisational inadequacies: ‘The composition of the force in terms of personnel is a weakness also in a broader sense; participating nations do not provide staff with the background and skill sets needed [...]. The short rotation cycle, in turn, undermines institutional memory and has a negative effect on the lessons-learned process’.⁵²

In conclusion, Operation Althea seems less aimed at contributing to the permanent stability of BiH and more at projecting the EU as a robust military power, particularly in the aftermath of the war following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia war, and at showcasing its links to NATO. It also fits into the trend of the EU using the Balkans as a backyard to try out different strategies that is also visible when it comes to its migration policies.⁵³

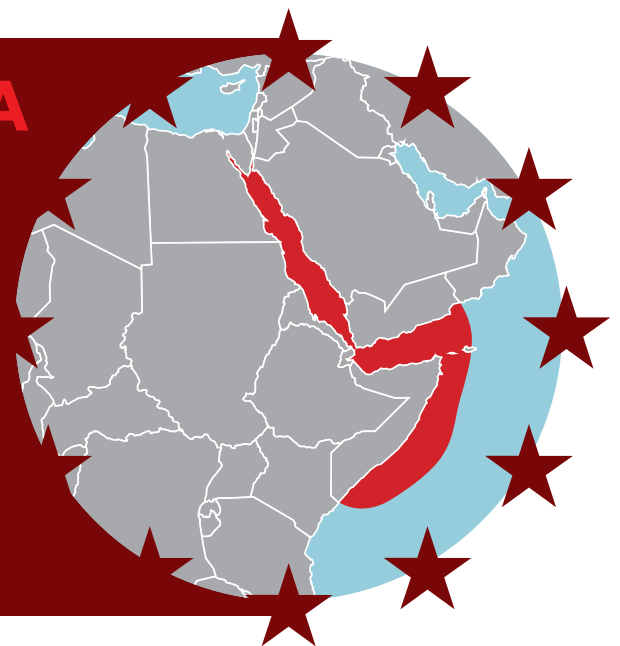
EUNAVFOR ATALANTA

European Union Naval Force Operation ATALANTA

LOCATIONS: The Gulf of Suez,
the Gulf of Aqaba, the Red Sea,
the Somali Basin, the Gulf of Aden

LAUNCH DATE: 8 December 2008

NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022:
332



The EU Naval Force Somalia Operation ATALANTA, initiated in 2008, has as its stated aims to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia, safeguard the World Food Programme’s (WFP) vessels delivering aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Somalia, and protect commercial sea routes.⁵⁴ The mission was thus clearly set up to protect economic interests, particularly of western powers. Filip Ejdus at the University of Belgrade summed it up well: ‘Somalis do not see piracy as their own problem; it is the problem of the West’.⁵⁵

The Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia is a strategic route for commercial vessels on the way to or from the Suez Canal, used by 12% of global trade and 30% of container traffic. It is estimated that 21,000 ships pass through the Gulf of Aden annually, mainly transporting oil from the Gulf, much of it being shipped to Europe.⁵⁶ The brief interruption in the supply chain caused by a container ship stuck in the Suez Canal in 2021 offers a glimpse of the potential problems for global trade a disruption in the region could create. It became evident that EUNAVFOR’s main concern over piracy attacks was for European trade, rather than WFP vessels – a conclusion bolstered by the fact that three times as many protected ships were commercial rather than those of the WFP or AMISOM.⁵⁷

The mission boasts having been successful in achieving its stated objectives, since it correlated with a significant decline in piracy attacks – from 176 incidents in 2011 to just four failed attempts in 2018. Moreover, 166 pirates have been arrested since 2011.⁵⁸ Atalanta was not the only mission countering piracy, however, as NATO and US missions also patrolled the waters from 2008 to 2016. In February 2022 Somalian authorities asked the UN not to extend the resolution allowing foreign navies to enter its territorial waters beyond March 2022, saying it had achieved its objectives and Somalia was building up its own maritime security capabilities. The UN complied with the request, and the EU relocated its mission to international waters.⁵⁹ Since then, it seems that piracy is increasing again with four attacks reported since November 2023 and only one surface vessel left with the mission, casting doubt on its supposed success at resolving longer term issues that drive piracy in the first place.⁶⁰

The EU recently broadened Atalanta's mandate to ensure that the mission can 'contribute to the implementation of the UN arms embargo on Somalia, reduce drug traffic, support the ongoing fight against Al Shabaab and its funding stream, and the progress of the government of Somalia', in a possible case of mission creep.⁶¹

Who benefited – and who lost out from ATALANTA?

Private shipping corporations profited from Atalanta, as the costs of piracy for the shipping industry plummeted from \$7 billion in 2011 to \$1.4 billion in 2017.⁶² Another group that profited were foreign fishing trawlers. Somali fisherfolk have long endured the illegal overfishing of their seas by foreign trawlers, including some from European countries. Foreign vessels capture up to three times as much fish as Somali ships, at a level that was found to be unsustainable and leave nothing for the local population.⁶³ Apart from overfishing, foreign vessels, including some from Europe, have dumped nuclear and toxic waste, polluting the sea water and further depleting the fish population.⁶⁴

Indeed the actions of foreign fishing trawlers was one of the reasons why former fisherfolk, left with no livelihoods amidst the overall insecurity, violence, and economic deprivation prevailing in Somalia after years of foreign military interference, often feel they had little choice but to join the non-state armed groups that are often behind the attacks carried out on foreign vessels.⁶⁵

'If the illegal fishing doesn't stop, people will look for alternatives – like piracy, joining al-Shabaab, becoming criminals, or migrating', said Ali, a former fisherman in an interview with Al Jazeera.⁶⁶

As piracy declined due to the EU and NATO missions, foreign fishing vessels began returning, but combating illegal fishing falls outside the mission's mandate. While it was present in Somali waters the EU mission reduced piracy attacks, but this meant that space opened up for illegal largescale fishing operations. This in turn meant that local fisherfolk could no longer make a living from fishing and were therefore left with little choice but to become involved in the very type of piracy activity that the EU was aiming to prevent.

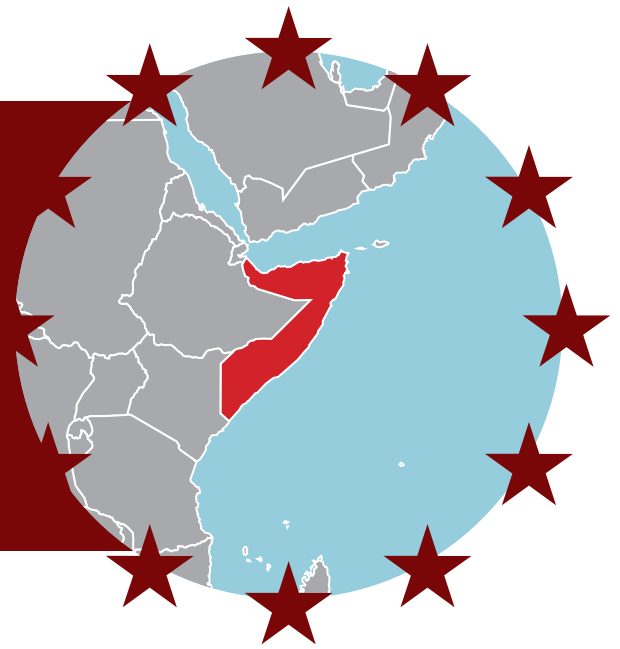
EUTM Somalia

European Union Training Mission Somalia

LAUNCHED ON: 7 April 2010

**NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022:
179**

RELEVANT RESOURCES: Natural gas, oil



The EU's anti-piracy mission off the Somali coast is complemented by a military training mission for the Somali army and a civilian advisory mission called EUCAP Somalia. The European Union Training Mission (EUTM)-Somalia was established in 2010 to train the Somali National Army in their fight against the non-state armed group Al-Shabaab. The training initially took place in Uganda for security purposes and was later relocated to Mogadishu. The mission has trained over 12,000 soldiers since its inception, but questions hang over the effectiveness beyond consolidating European military presence in Africa.

History, US interference, and motives

Somalia is a politically fragmented country with no unified government or cohesive army. Similar to other countries across Africa whose boundaries were demarcated by colonial powers establishing arbitrary frontiers with scant regard for local dynamics, Somalia has suffered continual external interference since its various regions achieved independence and the current nation state was created. The nation's history is marked by prolonged internal conflict.

Owing to its geographical location and largely untapped natural resources, including potentially large oil deposits, Somalia is of strategic importance to the United States, which has conducted numerous military interventions in the country. 'From the Cold War to the "war on terror," the United States has used Somalia as a battleground for its geopolitical schemes, with profoundly destructive consequences for Somalis'.⁶⁷ The EUTM joins the (EU-financed) African Union mission AMISOM, along with at least 500 US troops active in the country.⁶⁸

Issues – lack of oversight, disorganisation, reliance on militarised approach

One problem with this mission is the EU's inability to adequately track the soldiers after they complete their training courses, although improvements have been reported in recent years. This lack of oversight raises concerns that soldiers may defect and join Al-Shabaab. Roy Ginsberg and Susan Penksa stated, '**In effect, the EU could be training Somali soldiers to kill Somali citizens more effectively**'.⁶⁹ The military approach fails to address the socioeconomic problems plaguing the country, with Somali non-state armed groups having provided social services in some regions, thereby gaining the support of the local population.⁷⁰

The mission also appears to be plagued by disorganisation and coordination issues, both with other missions (EU and non-EU) and internally, leading to EEAS forging its own militarised approach disconnected from a wider non-military agenda. Gerald Aherne, a former commander of the mission, testified to the UK parliament that ‘the greater challenge was within the EEAS as it was unwilling or unable to robustly achieve coordination of the much-vaunted EU’s Comprehensive Approach, the intermeshing of the political, diplomatic, military/security, humanitarian and development instruments of the EU. It was the usual challenge of everyone advocating robustly of the need for coordination and everyone, including those advocating for coordination, being themselves unwilling to be coordinated. There was the irritating unwillingness of EEAS personnel to be held accountable, even in the minutes of scheduled meetings.’⁷¹

Sahel

Overview

The Sahel region has been a focal point for the EU’s military engagement, with training missions in Mali (since 2013), the Central African Republic (since 2016) and a partnership mission in Niger, launched in February 2023, which was unilaterally ended following the military coup in July 2023. Civilian missions currently active in the region, aimed at reforming the security sector and border control, include the EU advisory mission EUAM RCA (since 2019), EU capacity-building missions EUCAP Sahel Mali (since 2015) and EUCAP Sahel Niger (since 2012, also on hold since 2023), and the EU’s Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell for the Sahel (RACC Sahel, since 2019) supporting G5 Sahel. The military missions in both Mali and the CAR have been partially suspended since it was discovered that the Russian state-supported private military Wagner Group was highly active in both countries, raising concerns that soldiers trained by the EU might join the militia. Following the coup in Niger in July 2023, EU High Representative Borrell declared ‘all security cooperation activities are suspended sine die with immediate effect’.⁷² Shortly after, the Nigerien military government, in place since the coup, ordered the mission to leave the country.

Missions and operations in the Sahel region 2013–2023







■ Former G5 Sahel coalition members




EU military missions:

-  EUTM Mali (since Feb 2013)
EU military training missions based in Bamako
-  EUMPM Niger (since Feb 2023, suspended due to coup)
EU military partnership mission based in Niamey
-  EUTM RCA (since 2016)
EU training mission in Central African Republic based in Bangui
-  EU SDI (since 2023)
EU Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries of the Gulf of Guinea


Completed French-led multinational operations:

-  Crisis management Operation Serval
(from Jan 2013 to July 2014) – Mali
-  Multinational mission Takuba (2020–22)
Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger
-  Operation Barkhane (from Jan 2014 to Nov 2022)
Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger
-  Chad – logistical support for Operation Serval, Barkhane and the Takuba mission, as well as the location of troop deployment following coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

Anti-Western Coups:

-  • Burkina Faso (Jan 2022, Sept 2022)
-  • Mali (Aug 2020, May 2021)
-  • Niger (July 2023)

EU civilian missions:

-  EUCAP Mali (since Jan 2015)
civilian capacity-building mission based in Bamako
-  EUCAP Niger (since July 2012)
civilian capacity-building mission based in Niamey

UN operations:

-  MINUSMA – UN Multidimensional Stabilisation Mission in Mali (since June 2013, in the process of withdrawing)
-  MINUSCA – UN Multidimensional Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (since 2014)

Sources: OPEX – Opérations extérieures, Ministère des Armées, defense.gouv.fr; EUTM Mali, eutmmali.eu; EUMPM Niger, eeas.europa.eu; EUCAP Mali, eeas.europa.eu; EUCAP Niger, eucap-sahel.eu; MINUSMA, UN Information Centre Warsaw, unic.un.org.pl.

The EU's motivation in the Sahel

Three out of ten ongoing and four of the former military missions take place in countries across the Sahel. In the decade before 2023, the EU spent €600 million on civilian and military missions in the Sahel and trained 30,000 members of the security forces in Mali and Niger. This raises the question of why the EU is so interested in the region.⁷³ France, a former colonial power in many of the countries across the Sahel, has been instrumental in pushing for military interventions in the region: 'The "Europeanisation" of France's approach to this region is aimed at reducing the costs of this policy as well as neutralising the persistent accusations that France remains in the paradigm of a neo-colonial approach'.⁷⁴

The stated intention to improve human rights and the security situation as a reason for involvement in the Sahel is at odds with the outcomes, since while the various European military interventions have been in place, the human rights and security situation has in fact worsened rather than improved. Military coups have taken place in two of the Sahelian countries where EU military missions are based in the years after they have been established. Moreover, the EU continues to plan new operations, even when previous initiatives have failed to achieve their intended outcomes and rather than create stability have seen instability spiral.

The EU had established a Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell for the Sahel (RACC) to coordinate its actions and provide support to the Joint Task Force, the security arm of G5 Sahel. The G5 Sahel was a regional organisation that originally included Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, but Mali withdrew in May 2022, and Burkina Faso and Niger in late 2023, which prompted the remaining two members to dissolve the alliance in December 2023.⁷⁵ The stated aim of the support was to address 'terrorism, trans-national crime, resurgence of armed rebellion and inter-communal conflicts',⁷⁶ as well as to 'support border security'.⁷⁷

'Border security' is indeed one reason behind the EU's sustained interference in the region, which plays a crucial role in the EU's strategy of border externalisation, the outsourcing of border control to countries far removed from its physical boundaries, and exemplifies the European colonialist mindset towards the African continent that sees it as the EU's backyard.⁷⁸ While border control falls under the EU's civilian missions, the militarisation of borders shows the blurring of the lines between supposedly 'civilian' and military realms. As the case study on Niger will illustrate, the EU's activities have had devastating consequences for migrants, escalating the number dying in the desert and undermining the traditional economy based on mobility.

Even more than imposing EU border 'management' policies, the competition for access to resources and raw materials seems to be the key driving force behind the EU's focus on the Sahel. The region is rich in critical raw materials, and US and European companies have a long history of exploitation there, perpetuating the violence of French colonialism. Until recently 25% of European uranium imports were from Niger, of significant importance for France, which sources 75% of its energy from nuclear power plants.⁷⁹ Beyond uranium, Mali, the CAR, and Niger are rich in oil and gold,⁸⁰ and the CAR in diamonds, iron ore, copper, and manganese.⁸¹ It is believed that there are also untapped oil and gas reserves in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.⁸² Over the past decade, the number of North American and European mining companies in

Africa has risen sharply, with French corporations such as Orano and TotalEnergy being major players in the Sahel region.⁸³ The EU's Critical Raw Materials Act intends to reduce the EU's dependence on China for raw materials, and the EU is already negotiating with the DRC and reportedly planning talks with other African nations to boost its supplies from there.⁸⁴ In its 'coherent EU strategy for the Sahel' written for the EU Parliament, the authors from the Institute for European Studies write

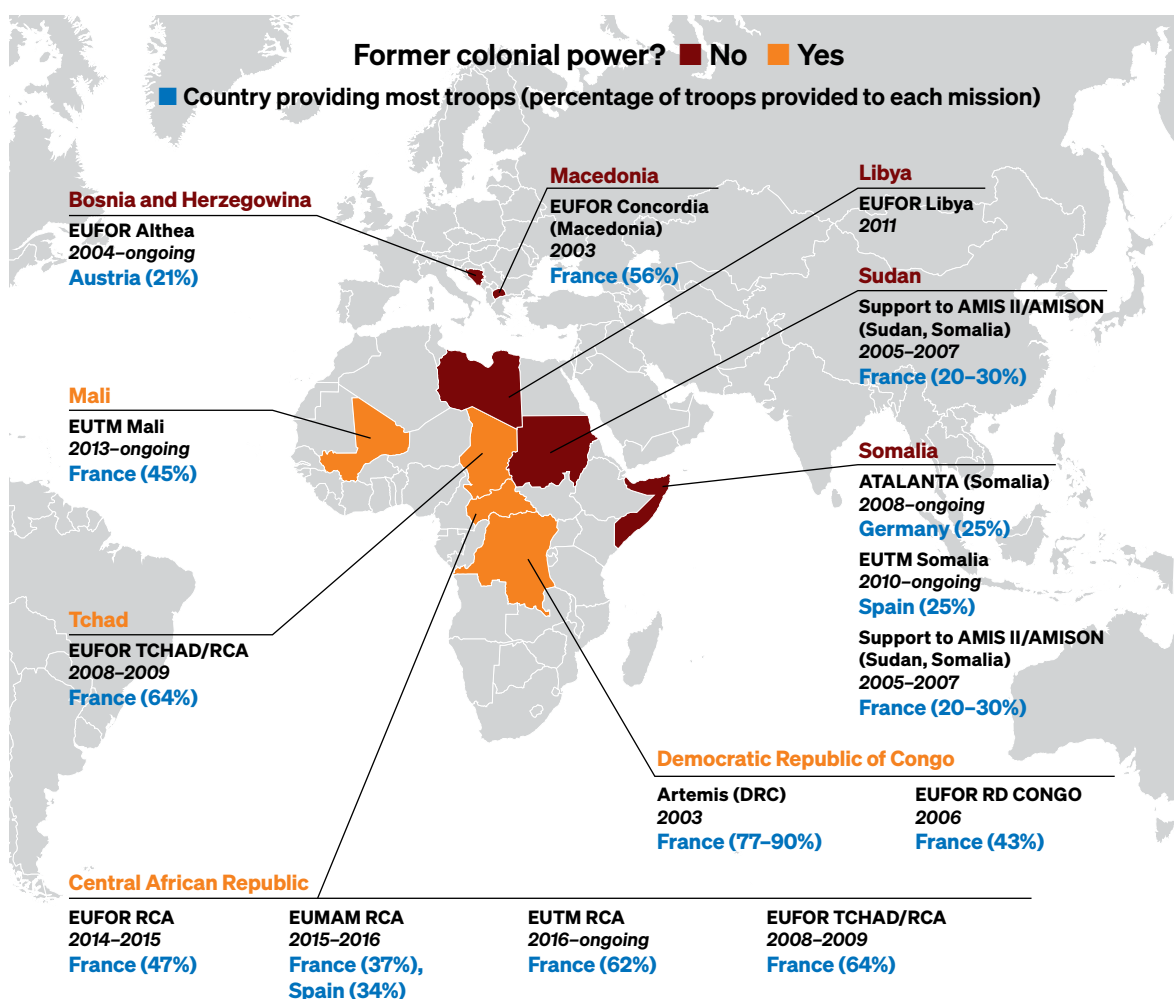
'[The Sahel region] offers considerable potential in terms of energy and mineral supplies. Mauritania is an important source of iron ore imports, critical to Europe's steel industry. Niger is the fourth largest uranium producer in the world. It controls some 8,7% of global uranium production and provides 12% of the EU's consumption. Untapped reserves promise a second uranium boom (Grégoire 2011). The region also hosts considerable oil potential. [...] The region also plays an important role in European plans for solar energy projects such as Desertec (Brix 2009) and is a critical transit route in the Trans Sahara Gas Pipeline project, expected to bring Nigerian gas into Europe.'⁸⁵

It is thus evident that military engagement is aimed at ensuring the access of large corporations to these raw materials and, particularly for France, deterring other countries such as China from doing so. Hama Ag Mahmoud, a former Malian minister, stated, 'There's a war over mining resources'.⁸⁶ Academics Howard Nicholas⁸⁷ and Aoife McCullough⁸⁸ have argued that maintaining turmoil in the Sahel region – and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa – enables European businesses to profit from access to cheap raw materials, critical to the prosperity of wealthier countries, while arms companies benefit from lucrative weapons contracts from governments in the region and European countries involved in the conflicts.

The history of foreign interference

It is an open secret that EU military missions are typically pushed by one country with a vested interest in the specific region, nowhere clearer than in the case of France and the Sahel. Between 1962 and 1995, France intervened militarily in francophone African countries 19 times to support friendly governments.⁸⁹ Most recently its 'anti-terror' Operation Serval took place in Mali (2013-2014), followed by Barkhane (2014-2022) that saw 5,100 French troops stationed across the region, with 3,000 remaining even after it ended.⁹⁰ Operation Barkhane integrated the multinational task force Takuba into the mission in an attempt to internationalise the military interference, which can be seen now as a first step to the now larger missions in the region. EU missions continue the long tradition of French military intervention in its former colonies, which many observers see as an attempt to make this look less neo-colonial by giving it an official EU stamp.⁹¹

Neocolonialism? Countries that contributed most to CSDP military missions up to 2018



Note: Data from Di Mauro, Danilo; Krotz, Ulrich; Wright, Katerina, 2017, "EU'S GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT: A DATABASE OF CSDP MILITARY OPERATIONS AND CIVILIAN MISSIONS WORLDWIDE", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/BD80QM>, Harvard Dataverse, V2, UNF:6:n8pByWdwk8SuzV72xax6WQ== [fileUNF] and Krotz and Wright (2018) 'CSDP Military Operations' in Meijer and Wyss (eds), *The handbook of European defence policies and armed forces*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018.

France and the EU financially supported the establishment of the G5 Sahel as a more European-friendly and terrorism-focused alternative to the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) despite this creating an institutional overlap with existing security infrastructure: 'France's assistance in forming the G5 Sahel is hardly surprising given that the organisation effectively serves its interests and that of its Western partners. It enables Paris to subcontract security and control migration without shouldering too much risk.'⁹² The troops of the G5 counter-terrorism force fought alongside Operation Barkhane.⁹³

The US has also interfered in the region. In 2002, predating the creation of AFRICOM, the US military command department responsible for Africa, the US government launched a terrorism-prevention campaign in the Sahel although there was virtually no 'terrorism' to prevent at that time. But it initiated a process of the US framing local rebel groups within its logic of terrorism.⁹⁴ Gradually increasing its military footprint, the US operated a drone airbase in Agadez in Niger from where it coordinated missions across the region as far north as Libya, right until it was expelled from Niger in March 2024.⁹⁵ This US, French, and EU military engagement further

militarised a region that already has active national, pan-African and UN peace-keeping infrastructure: the UN's second largest mission United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which was terminated by the military government in Mali in December 2023, comprised more than 14,000 troops.⁹⁶

Finally, Russia too is attempting to secure its access to resources in the region. In recent years the Russian state-funded private military company Wagner Group has gained influence in the Sahel, offering its services to governments discontent with the lack of military success by the US and European missions. The Wagner Group was active in Mali and the CAR, leading the EU to suspend its missions there due to reputational concerns. Following the military coup in Niger, the late Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin pitched the group's services on social media as a solution to unrest.⁹⁷ After Prigozhin's death, the Russian government is now reportedly planning structures to replace the Wagner Group in these countries.⁹⁸

Detrimental effects

There is a proliferation of military and security forces in the Sahel region. But rather than improving the security of local people, this militarisation has had the opposite effect. *The Intercept* reports a staggering rise in violent events in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Western Niger – by over 30,000% since the US initiated anti-terrorism efforts in the region.⁹⁹ **In 2002 and 2003, there were nine so-called 'terrorist' attacks claiming 23 lives across Africa, whereas in 2023, there were 11,643 fatalities in the Sahel region alone – an increase of more than 50,000%.¹⁰⁰** Violent attacks by non-state armed groups have struck nearly two-thirds of the districts in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, leading to a surge in internally displaced persons (IDPs), from fewer than 100,000 in 2018 to 2 million in 2023.^{101,102} The EU has been training military forces during a time when military coups have been a frequent occurrence: in 2020 and 2021 in Mali, in 2021 in Chad, in 2022 in Burkina Faso, one failed attempt in The Gambia (2022)¹⁰³ and mostly recently in Niger in July 2023. Some of the officials instrumental in these coups had previously benefited from US security cooperation – this is the case for at least 15 officers involved in 12 coups in West Africa and the greater Sahel during the Global War on Terror.¹⁰⁴

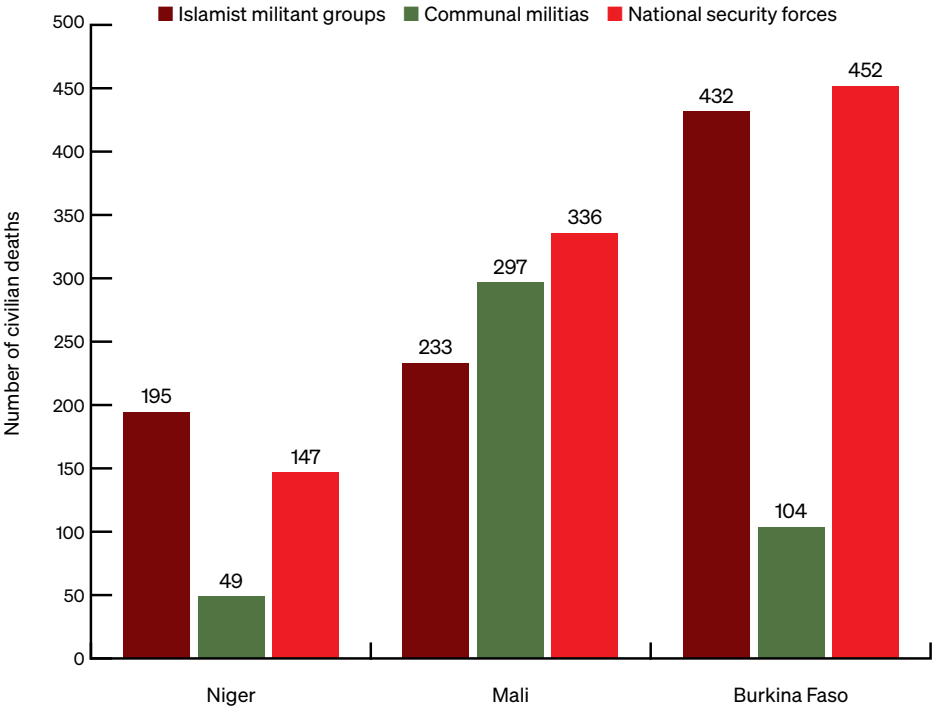
In each of these countries, democratic transitions have been offset by strengthening and further entrenching a military logic eventually leading to the installation of military power through coups. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the new governments in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have positioned themselves as anti-imperialist challengers to a western-dominated economic order and were consequently suspended from ECOWAS at the end of January 2024.¹⁰⁵

While 'terrorism' is often cited as the justification for US and EU military presence in the Sahel, evidence suggests a reverse causality – military interference fuels or provokes non-state armed groups, which in turn is used to justify further militarisation. A UN study found that the main motivation for people to join non-state armed groups is the perpetration of human rights abuses by state forces coupled with unemployment and economic deprivation.¹⁰⁶ These non-state armed groups often fill gaps left by the failing state, providing public goods and protection from state forces, and thereby gaining public sympathy. And they are now better armed than a decade ago: the post-2011 fallout from the western-backed assassination of the Libyan

dictator Gaddafi saw an influx of small arms from Gaddafi’s large arsenal (originally supplied by western states) into the Sahel region. Simultaneously, former Gaddafi mercenaries from the region returned home, further fuelling conflict.¹⁰⁷ Essentially, the western-led operation to remove Gaddafi from power destabilised not only Libya but the entire north and west African region and set in motion a downward spiral of violence.

The national armies trained by the EU frequently commit severe human rights abuses – as reported in the EU’s own review of EUCAP Sahel and EUTM Mali.¹⁰⁸ In 2020, national security forces in Mali, some potentially trained and financed by the EU, killed more civilians than did militias or non-state armed groups.¹⁰⁹ These forces were also involved in the 2020 coup, while the armed forces of Mali, the CAR and Somalia stand accused of human rights violations, gender-based violence, and extortion.¹¹⁰

Civilian fatalities by perpetrator, 2020



Source: ACLED acleddata.com

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)’s comprehensive evaluation of the EU military missions in Mali, CAR, and Somalia SIPRI identified even more issues:

‘None of the missions has access to a tracking and reporting system, either host government-owned or its own, that indicates where trainees are deployed having completed their courses, or whether trainees have been decommissioned or defected. This impedes monitoring and evaluation, and, where relevant, the calibration of efforts, including to deal with controversial issues such as human rights violations. [...] The missions’ training and advice on human rights might reduce the likelihood of armed forces abusing local populations, but the attention given to this aspect was generally considered too

limited by the stakeholders interviewed for this study.' It added: 'strengthening armed forces could also increase the risk of coups d'état [...].'¹¹¹

While Security Sector Reform/Defence Sector Reform (SSR/DSR) processes were drafted, they were often imposed on the countries without local participation and consequently not implemented: 'In both CAR and Mali, trainees and government officials complained that EUTMs impose a European reform model on a foreign-owned process, with too little openness to listening to recipients' perspectives. There is a perception, particularly among trainees, that the missions have a paternalistic or even condescending attitude and lack sufficient understanding of historical and cultural contexts.'¹¹² Furthermore, the missions suffer from '[t]he high turnover of personnel and language problems', which 'reduce the ability of EUTMs to build institutional memory, improve situational awareness and build strong relations with counterparts'.¹¹³

The EU's apparent focus on combating non-state armed groups further escalates the situation. Providing public services, establishing a democratic and accountable government, and ensuring the security of the general population does not seem to be a priority. Despite these long-standing issues it took the emergence of the Russian Wagner Group for the EU to suspend part of its missions in the CAR and Mali in 2020/2021. Reputational concerns were explicitly cited in the decision:

'In this context, EU Member States decided [...] to temporarily suspend the provision of operational training to formed units of the Malian armed forces and National Guard, as a reversible measure in order to prevent any reputational risk due to Malian defence and security forces trained by the EU falling under the control or engaging along [sic] of Russia-affiliated forces, as it had been observed in the Centre of the country.'¹¹⁴

The Sahel has become a battle ground for global power struggles and politics that bring nothing but destruction to the local population. But since the region is so far from the global powers involved, this destruction goes almost entirely undocumented and unchecked. Unsurprisingly, there is growing resentment of France and the EU in the region. 'People can't understand why the jihadists are gaining ground when one of the world's most powerful armies has spent so many years fighting terrorism. It's inconceivable to them. They've reached the conclusion that Barkhane wasn't here to help us', said Ali Idrissa, a civil society activist in Niger, about the former French military mission.¹¹⁵ After the coups, Mali and Niger essentially expelled French troops, sparking anti-French demonstrations and social media messages.¹¹⁶ Rather than taking responsibility for their actions, France and the EU attribute these reactions to Russian propaganda and aim to counter them by further increasing French social media outreach in the region.

EUTM Mali

European Union Training Mission, Mali (EUTM-Mali)

LAUNCHED ON: 18 February 2013

**NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022:
429**

**RELEVANT RESOURCES: Gold, diamonds,
uranium, bauxite, phosphate, oil**



The European Union Training Mission to Mali (EUTM-Mali) was established in 2013 following the 2012 coup. Its current mandate, which aims mainly to train the Malian Armed Forces ‘with a view to enabling them to conduct military operations aiming at restoring Malian territorial integrity and reducing the threat posed by terrorist groups’, runs until May 2024, with a decision on its future currently pending.¹¹⁷ While it is unclear exactly how many soldiers have been trained, as there is no comprehensive database, the mission claims to have contributed to the training of more than 5,000,¹¹⁸ much less than the original aim of 15,000 to 16,000. In April 2022, the EU suspended all operational training in Mali following the involvement of the Wagner Group in support of the government.

History

The unrest in Mali in 2012 began with an uprising by the Tuareg living in the north of the country as well as non-state armed groups. The reasons for this uprising are historical: the territory of the nomadic Tuareg, disenfranchised and with limited access to basic public services, was divided across five countries by European imposed colonial border structures that failed to reflect local dynamics. The increasing desertification of the Sahel, which has led to a reduction of arable land, has meant even more hardship and also ignited conflicts between various groups. These conditions not only fuelled previous uprisings in 1962, 1990, and 2007, but also increased the severity of the recent unrest, which was worsened by arms flowing in from Libya after the overthrow of Gaddafi and arms stolen from deserted Malian soldiers. While the EU took this as reason to support the Malian Armed Forces, non-state armed groups reportedly exploit the situation to swell recruitment.¹¹⁹

Mali experienced military coups in 2020 and 2021. In mid-2021, the new government turned towards Russia for armed support to fight against the rebels, which angered the Europeans. This shift towards Russia was motivated by the unmet demand for more arms supplies from Europe, and a perception that European involvement only exacerbated the situation. In an interview with a Russian news agency in October 2021, the Malian Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga accused France of training the very “terrorists” it claims to be fighting.¹²⁰ Following escalating conflicts with its military supporters and rising anti-French sentiment, Mali expelled France’s military Barkhane mission in May 2022 and withdrew from Sahel G5. The country’s security and humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate, with 2023 being the most violent year since 2012.

Detrimental Effects

European engagement in Mali, as in the wider Sahel region, has arguably served to exacerbate the delicate situation. Although some reporting blames an alleged increase in human rights abuses and massacres on the Wagner Group takeover, the reality is that the Malian Armed Forces have long been associated with committing a similar level of violence as the non-state armed groups. The EU's strategic review of the EUTM and EUCAP Sahel paints a bleak picture, summed up by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs: 'It points to human rights violations and impunity, structural deficiencies, weak logistics, a lack of resources, poor leadership, an almost absent operational cycle, weak control-and-command, as well as overall limited military and organisational improvements'.¹²¹ SIPRI reports that '[i]nitiatives that aim to enhance governance and the fight against corruption meet with particular resistance'.¹²² In its strategic review the EU concedes, '[t]he situation of human rights remains dire in Mali. Widespread impunity prevails, with a general lack of accountability'.¹²³

Despite this sombre assessment, the EU did not suspend its operational training until reports surfaced of EU-trained soldiers fighting alongside the Wagner militia. In fact, the EU had extended its mandate in March 2020 despite evidence of severe human rights violations by the very soldiers it had trained. It also continued support after the coup that disabled democratic voting rights, even providing the government with a military aid package of €24 million.¹²⁴

Even now, the EU is considering future cooperation with the regime provided that certain conditions are met '[...] to avoid any reputational risk and preserve the credibility of the EU: free and entire functioning of the CSDP Missions according to their SOMAs [Status of Mission Agreements], absence of any interference of Russia-affiliated forces with the trained units and the existence of mechanisms to prevent Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law violations'.¹²⁵ It also decided to maintain its soldiers stationed in the country '[i]n order not to create a vacuum which could be exploited to the detriment of EU's interests'. These considerations suggest that strategic interests and reputational concerns are prioritised over the welfare of the Malian population, the supposed beneficiaries of the mission.

The EU's own strategic review of its mission bizarrely recognises the futility of using military power to resolve underlying public policy problems when it comes to Russian military engagement, though seems blind to observing the same issues in relation to its own military presence: 'Their [Russian] combat actions might only reduce the number of terrorist attacks in the short term enabling the Malian government to claim success. However, they will significantly increase instability, ethnic violence and divides within the society in the medium term, undermine the Peace Agreement, and fuel the terrorist armed groups' rhetoric'.

the EU had extended its mandate in March 2020 despite evidence of severe human rights violations by the very soldiers it had trained.

EUTM RCA

European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic

LAUNCHED ON: 16 July 2016

**NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022:
105**

**RELEVANT RESOURCES: Gold, oil, diamonds,
iron ore, copper, manganese**



The European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA) has been in the Central African Republic (CAR) since 2016, with the current mandate scheduled to end in September 2024.¹²⁶ It is the fourth military mission in the country, following EUFOR Chad/RCA (2008-09), a bridging mission preparing for a UN takeover, and EUFOR RCA (2014-15), a nine-month mission that secured Bangui's airport before handing it over to the UN and CAR military.¹²⁷ This was followed by the military advisory mission EUMAM RCA (2015-2016). The current military mission has been accompanied by another civilian advisory mission, EUAM RCA, since 2019. The UN also has a significant presence in the country through MINUSCA, which includes nearly 15,000 troops. However, according to the US Council on Foreign Relations, MINUSCA 'faces significant challenges in fulfilling its mandate to protect civilians and dismantle armed groups'.¹²⁸ The EUTM RCA focused on strategic advice, operational training and education, having trained about 3,400 soldiers since its inception.¹²⁹ However, similar to EUTM-Mali, most of the training was suspended and personnel reduced in December 2021 because of the CAR's cooperation with the Wagner Group.

History

The CAR has been mired in political crisis for over a decade. A rebel alliance overthrew the former president in 2013, triggering a wave of violence by various militias that forced more than 1.3 million people to flee their homes.¹³⁰ The UNSC subsequently imposed an arms embargo on the country. While a 2019 peace deal succeeded in reducing the violence, it did not eliminate it. In 2020, an alliance of armed groups launched an offensive against the government. Disappointed with what it considered to be ineffective support by the European mission, the government sought armed assistance from Rwanda and Russia, which had previously supplied them with arms and training under an exemption to the UN arms embargo. By the end of 2021, there were hundreds of Russian mercenaries in the country,¹³¹ with most of CAR's armed forces (FACA) under the direct command or supervision of the Wagner Group.^{132,133} This prompted the EU to significantly reduce its mission, while France and the US, which had special forces and logistical support in the country, also suspended much of their support.¹³⁴

According to Tim Glawion, Research Fellow at the GIGA Institute of African Studies, 'The army and Russian Wagner Group mercenaries recaptured practically all important towns and cities within a year. These rapid victories reinforced a narrative that the peace mission – which hadn't managed this in seven years – is not a reliable partner against the rebels'.¹³⁵ Current plans call for both EUTM RCA and EUAM RCA to conclude in 2024 unless relations with the government improve.

Issues

The human rights situation in the CAR remains catastrophic. A SIPRI report states that '[...] the FACA remains a potential threat to stability through the instrumentalization of soldiers for internal political or ethnicized purposes, human rights violations, defections to armed groups, and even the risk of a military coup d'état'.¹³⁶ The UN has documented evidence of abuses and violations by government forces and mercenaries that may amount to war crimes in the context of an increasingly authoritarian president.^{137,138}

While the EU has been quick to blame the dismal human rights situation in the country on the Russian Wagner Group, the armed forces committing these atrocities had been trained by the EU for five years. There seems to be a consensus that the mission failed to meet its stated goals, with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) noting that it failed to stabilise the country. The former Polish Foreign Minister Anna Fotyga pointed out that 'the reality is that the training strategy used by the European Union in the Central African Republic, is neither adequate nor sufficient, as it does not attack the real security problems of the country, and is content to train soldiers in basic techniques and strategies, not adapted to the reality of their country'.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, the country ranks extremely low on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a current life expectancy of less than 50 years at birth.¹⁴⁰

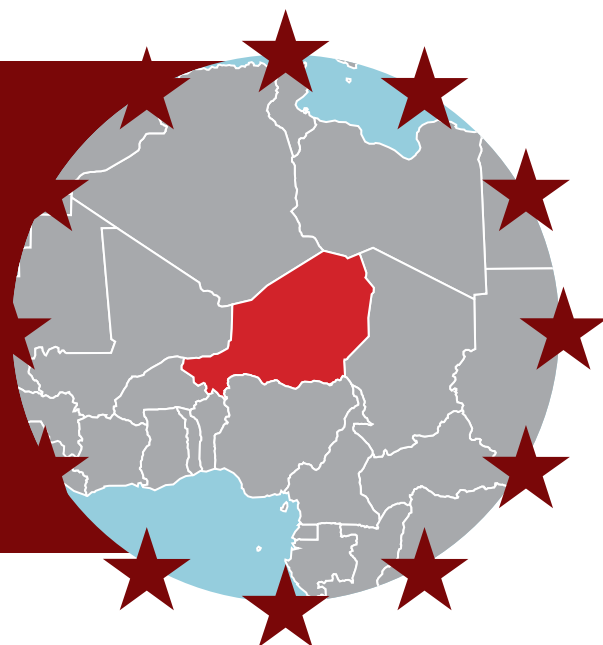
EUMPM Niger

European Union Military Partnership Mission in Niger

LAUNCHED ON: 20 February 2023

NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2023: 50–100

RELEVANT RESOURCES: Uranium, oil, gold



Despite its disastrous record in Mali and the CAR, in December 2022 the EU launched another military mission in the Sahel region, the EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM) Niger. This started in February 2023 with an initial mandate of three years. Its stated goal was to ‘contribute to enhancing the military capacity of the Nigerien Armed Forces in order to support Niger in its fight against terrorist armed groups in compliance with Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law’.¹⁴¹ The mission was suspended following the July 2023 military coup in which President Mohamed Bazoum was deposed.¹⁴² It is not clear whether soldiers trained under the mission participated in the coup, but according to an American official, at least five leaders of the coup had received U.S. assistance.¹⁴³ In December 2023, the new regime cancelled EUMPM Niger as well as the civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger.¹⁴⁴ At the end of January 2024, less than a year after the start of the mission, the EU High Representative Josep Borrell said that all EU forces had left the country.¹⁴⁵

Issues

The EU’s interest in Niger is almost certainly based in part on the country’s wealth in natural resources. It is the world’s fifth-largest uranium producer and supplied 25% of the EU’s uranium in 2021, a critical commodity especially for France, which dominates the Nigerien uranium industry.¹⁴⁶ In a 2013 press release Oxfam International cited Ali Idrissa, a civil society activist in Niger: **‘In France, one out of every three light bulbs is lit thanks to Nigerien uranium. In Niger, nearly 90% the population has no access to electricity. This situation cannot continue’.**¹⁴⁷ While the extraction of uranium had already diminished before the coup, French companies have an interest in ensuring that no other companies have access to the critical raw material.¹⁴⁸ Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in Niger, such as the French Orano, treat the environment and population with the usual lack of respect that comes along with extractivism. This has resulted in pollution of water resources and severe health problems due to radioactive waste among the population in the northern region of Niger, who do not benefit from these economic activities.¹⁴⁹

In an increasingly militarised environment amid US and EU military missions, the Nigerien government has prioritised spending its limited budget on arms imports rather than on

services to benefit its population. Military expenditure before the coup far outweighed social investments, with 'explosive ammunitions being the country's second largest import after rice'¹⁵⁰ and security spending accounting for 13.4% of its gross domestic product (GDP), a significant proportion of which benefits the US arms industry.^{151,152} The country's defence budget has almost doubled since 2021 and the army has grown from 5,000 in 2013 to 30,000 in 2022, with the aim of reaching 100,000 by 2030.¹⁵³ High levels of corruption further complicate the situation; a 2020 audit found that 'at least \$137 million of public money had been lost over the past eight years – roughly ten per cent of the total defence budget over that period – due to corrupt contracts for military equipment'.¹⁵⁴ The EU appears to be untroubled by this corruption, having provided an additional €112 million to the G5 Sahel defence sector the following month, a move that indirectly supported the country's armed forces and government.

In June 2023 the European Council decided to support Niger with two assistance measures worth €5 million for lethal weapons, the first time that such weapons have been delivered to an African country under the EPF.¹⁵⁵ The military coup occurred shortly thereafter, and the armed forces have since presented themselves as anti-Western and specifically anti-French, ordering France to remove its 1,500 troops within a month and unilaterally ending their military cooperation with the US shortly after.^{156,157} The EU together with ECOWAS – notably only months after channelling millions of Euros into Niger for lethal weapons – applied sanctions that have reportedly hurt civilians more than the leaders of military coup.¹⁵⁸

US interference

The US maintains a heavy presence in the country, with more than 1,000 personnel stationed there and operating three drone bases. *The Intercept* described one of these bases in Agadez as 'a surveillance hub and the lynchpin of an archipelago of U.S. outposts in West Africa'.¹⁵⁹ The US had invested an estimated \$500 million in the country's militarisation since 2012, but in March 2024, the new military government ordered it to leave, saying that the 12-year-old security pact violated Niger's constitution. At the time of writing, the US had yet to act on that order, with Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh saying that there was no timeframe for the withdrawal of forces.¹⁶⁰

The militarisation was clearly to Niger's detriment. In 2002, before the increased foreign interference, the US food monitoring agency described the situation in Niger as 'satisfactory' and achieving 'progressive improvement'.¹⁶¹ The UN currently classifies Niger as one of the world's least developed countries (LDCs) with high poverty rates and substantial humanitarian needs. The nation is heavily reliant on foreign aid, with 4.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and 4.4 million suffering from food insecurity – up by 90% since 2011.¹⁶²

Security issues have also worsened over this period, with human rights abuses committed by security forces and economic deprivation driving people into the arms of non-state armed groups. This is acknowledged by Colonel-Major Hassane Boubacar, now in the Nigerien government: 'The jihadists do what the state fails to do and provides services that the government fails to provide'.¹⁶³

The deadly crackdown on migration

The EUMPM was meant to complement the EU's civilian border security mission in the country, EUCAP Sahel Niger. This mission was initially aimed at tackling organised crime but its priorities had increasingly shifted along with the EU trend to preventing migration. Through political pressure and bilateral funding,¹⁶⁴ the EU and its member states pressured the Nigerien government to implement the infamous Law 2015-036 that forbids the transport of migrants in the north of the country, effectively outlawing migration to Libya and onward to the EU and contradicting the freedom of movement in the ECOWAS area. This had disastrous impacts on migrants and the estimated 6,000 Nigeriens involved in the migration transport economy. They were abruptly outlawed and labelled as people smugglers and traffickers, increasing local economic deprivation and pushing migrants into the hands of less experienced transporters and more dangerous routes.¹⁶⁵

Since 2015, when the government made migration illegal, more than 5,000 people are estimated to have died in the desert.¹⁶⁶ According to a media sources,¹⁶⁷ the EU's repressive migration policies that were in part implemented through EUCAP Sahel were one of the alleged reasons for the 2023 coup. In November 2023, the military government repealed the law,¹⁶⁸ and military convoys can be rented to accompany migrants in the government's effort to restart the lucrative migration economy in the border region.¹⁶⁹ However, both Spain and Germany have hinted at wanting to resume migration-control projects in Niger.^{170,171}

Future missions in the Sahel

It appears that the EU has not learned, or perhaps does not wish to learn, from its past failures in the Sahel region. Following the curtailment of its missions in Mali and the CAR in response to resistance to the Wagner Group presence, the EU shifted its focus to other countries in the region. The same strategic review that acknowledged the very sobering outcomes of the previous two missions recommended expansion into Niger, a plan put into practice with the 2023 launch of the failed EUMPM Niger, and into Burkina Faso and the Gulf of Guinea.¹⁷²

The recommendation for Burkina Faso was for a 'train, equip and accompany' package as part of a mission similar to the one in Niger to help the Burkina Faso Armed Forces fight against the 'terrorist threat' that allegedly controls 40% of the territory.¹⁷³ Burkina Faso also stands very low on the HDI and its economy heavily relies on its mining industry, which accounts for 71% of its exports, predominantly in gold and zinc.¹⁷⁴ Irrespective of its gross human rights abuses and two coups in 2022, fuelled by anti-colonialist (French) sentiment,¹⁷⁵ the EU already supports Burkina Faso's military. The army's mass execution of 180 members of the Fulani minority in June 2020 resulted in no apparent response or consequences on the part of the EU.¹⁷⁶ Further, the government passed a law permitting the army to arm civilian volunteers to combat non-state armed groups, although it appears that the Fulani are the main victims of these volunteer armies' attacks.¹⁷⁷

In December 2023 the EU launched a 'security and defence initiative' in the Gulf of Guinea with the stated aim of supporting Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo by 'strengthening the capabilities' of their respective security and defence forces in order to 'contain and respond to the pressure exerted by terrorist armed groups in their northern regions'. This came together

with EPF support packages for the Beninese Armed Forces (€11.75 million) and the Ghana Armed Forces (€8.25 million).¹⁷⁸ The region provides crucial shipping lanes for European companies and has seen instances of piracy, which is likely to be one of the reasons for the EU's interest.^{179,180} And so the cycle begins again where the EU expands its military presence further in Africa without taking stock of whether it is achieving its own stated aims or further exacerbating an already extremely volatile security situation.

Operation IRINI

European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI)

LOCATION: off the coast of Libya

LAUNCHED ON: 31 March 2020

NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022:
610



The EU launched operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI in 2020, a successor to Operation Sophia, with the principal aim of implementing 'the UN arms embargo on Libya through the use of aerial, satellite and maritime assets. In particular the mission is mandated to carry out inspections of vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya suspected to be carrying arms or related material to and from Libya'.¹⁸¹ It boarded and inspected at least 25 vessels between 2020 and February 2024.¹⁸² Its secondary task involves disrupting the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks and supporting the capacity building and training of the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and Navy, which has not yet started at the time of writing, but was part of Operation Sophia (LCG training) and by equipment donations (for example several batches of patrol ships from Italy).¹⁸³

Arms embargo on Libya

Many have questioned the effectiveness of the UN arms embargo on Libya that has been in place since 2011. Since the western-backed ouster and assassination of the Libyan ruler Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011, the country has descended into conflict. The main factions include the UN-backed Government of National Accord based in Tripoli that controls the west of the country and is also supported by Italy, Türkiye and Qatar. The east and south of the country are largely controlled by former general Khalifa Haftar, supported by Egypt, France, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Russia.¹⁸⁴ In a 2023 review of the mission the EU Military Committee found that the arms embargo 'is constantly broken, especially by air and land, [...], undermining the efforts made by the Operation on the high seas'.¹⁸⁵ A detailed assessment by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (Foundation for Science and Politics) Berlin concluded

that an arms embargo monitored by sea is one-sided: it hinders the Tripoli government from receiving weapons from Türkiye while allowing weapons to flow freely via the 4,300 km land borders with six states, disproportionately favouring the faction around Haftar that controls the area around these borders.¹⁸⁶ Türkiye has made similar accusations and has hence refused to let Irini personnel inspect its Libya-bound vessels.^{187,188}

Migration

Notably, Operation Irini does not have a ‘search and rescue’ mandate, despite operating in an area where thousands of people drown every year. This decision aligns with the EU’s failed strategy of ‘detering’ migrants from attempting to reach the EU by making their journey more difficult. Irini’s predecessor, Operation Sophia, is said to have rescued more than 45,000 people in its five-year operation, and the earlier one-year Italian mission Mare Nostrum is said to have rescued 150,000,¹⁸⁹ while Irini has only been involved in four rescue operations during the entire period of its operation, saving a few thousand lives at most.¹⁹⁰ This comparison is not to glorify the previous missions, however, since it is not always clear to what extent those who were rescued were able to exercise their right to seek asylum, or whether they may have been detained and deported.

It is clear that the strategy of deterrence through patrolling has led to migrants choosing more difficult routes and to more fatalities: since 2014, more than 29,000 people have drowned or disappeared in Mediterranean waters which, as documented here, are under constant surveillance by EU mission Irini.¹⁹¹ The EU is now considering extending the mission to monitor waters around Tunisia, making the journey for migrants departing from Tunisia more difficult.¹⁹²

The mission’s secondary task of supporting the LCG – which, in reality, is a network of criminal militias funded by the EU since 2015 – has already led to significant human rights violations.¹⁹³ While Irini has yet to begin training the LCG, it is already communicating the position of migrant boats, and the EU and its member states have been financing the entity for years with at least €450 million and supported it by donating vessels.¹⁹⁴ Despite knowing that the LCG abducts migrants heading to the EU and places them in detention centres under atrocious conditions, a Search and Rescue Zone for Libya was established in 2017, allowing EU states to gradually shift their responsibility of saving lives to Libya. Since 2017, it is estimated that the LCG has kidnapped about 120,000 people and brought them back to Libya against their will.¹⁹⁵ A UN fact-finding mission stated that **‘a wide array of war crimes and crimes against humanity’ – including arbitrary detention, murder, rape, enslavement, extrajudicial killing, and enforced disappearance – ‘have been committed by state security forces and armed militia groups’**. Migrants are being ‘systematically tortured’ and subjected to sexual slavery.¹⁹⁶ The UN investigator, Chaloka Beyani, made a clear connection between the EU support and the human rights violations: ‘The support given by the EU to the Libyan coastguard in terms of pull-backs, pushbacks, (and) interceptions led to violations of certain human rights.’¹⁹⁷

In 2020, EUNAVFOR IRINI signed a cooperation agreement with another EU mission active in Libya, the (civilian) Border Advisory Mission EUBAM Libya. In June 2023, EUBAM Libya announced the inauguration of a training centre for the LCG.¹⁹⁸ In March 2023 EU officials

stated that Irini was ready to resume training the LCG whenever the Libyan side was ready. Operation Irini also cooperates with the EU Border and Coast Guard Frontex that has been accused of aiding in numerous illegal deportations and human rights violations.¹⁹⁹ According to Giuseppe Cannata, an academic evaluating Operation Sophia, which did train the LCG, '[...] EU security policy partially resulted in worsening humanitarian condition for the victims of the very criminal networks it was trying to disrupt and, in a broader sense, for the human rights situation in Libya'.²⁰⁰

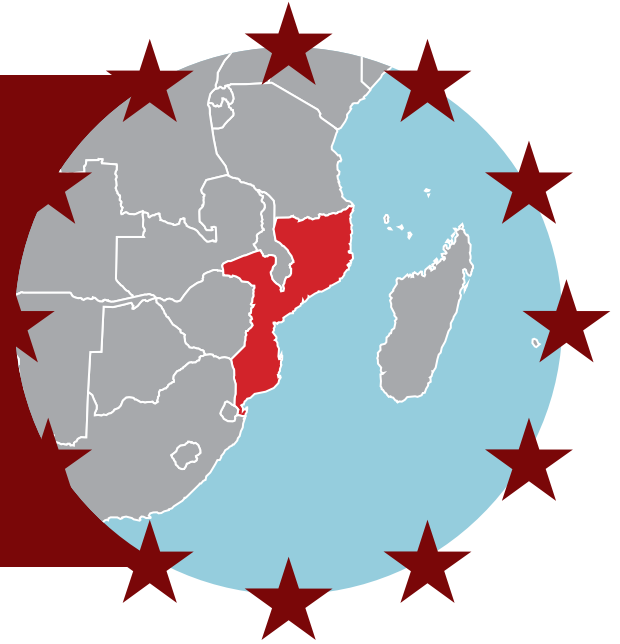
EUTM Mozambique

European Union Training Mission in Mozambique

LAUNCHED ON: 3 November 2021

**NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022:
104**

RELEVANT RESOURCES: Gas, coal, oil



EUTM Mozambique started in late 2021 with a team of 140 personnel. Its aim is to 'support the capacity building of the units of the Mozambican armed forces selected to compose a future Quick Reaction Force, in order for them to develop the necessary and sustainable capacities to restore safety and security in Cabo Delgado'.²⁰¹

Origin of the crisis

Cabo Delgado, the northernmost province of Mozambique, is rich in natural resources, particularly gas. It possesses an estimated 100 trillion cubic feet in natural gas reserves, making it the third largest in Africa.²⁰² Furthermore, it is believed to hold some of the world's largest untapped coal deposits. The discovery of gas resources in 2011/12 can be traced as the true origin of the security crisis, as it has led to immense exploitation and suffering of the local population by major companies as well as non-state armed groups. Multinational corporations – including French Total, US ExxonMobil, China's CNPC, and Italy's Eni – were quick to divide up the area and extract gas for immense profits, backed by the export credit agencies of their respective countries.²⁰³ Cabo Delgado now houses Africa's three largest liquid natural gas (LNG) projects: the Mozambique LNG Project (Total, formerly Anadarko) worth \$20bn, Coral FLNG Project (ENI and ExxonMobil) worth \$4.7bn, and Rovuma LNG Project (ExxonMobil, ENI and CNPC) worth \$30bn.²⁰⁴

The local population has seen no benefit from either the product or the profits: most of the oil and gas is exported to Europe, while two-thirds of Mozambicans are still without electricity.²⁰⁵ Citizens had no say in the opaque agreements between their government and MNCs, and the jobs they were promised never materialised. Moreover, many communities were displaced from

their lands to make space for the corporations. Traditional fishing communities were forcibly 'resettled' up to 10km inland, depriving them of access to waters for fishing and inhibiting them from exercising their traditional and cultural rights and earning a livelihood.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, there are virtually no public services in Capo Delgado, and the MNCs avoid paying taxes, depriving Mozambique of an estimated \$5.3bn in tax revenues for the LNG projects alone.²⁰⁷

Armed insurgency

The dire economic situation – 46% of the population live below the poverty line, even more in the north – lack of government support, and public anger in the wake of a massive corruption scandal that surfaced in 2016 created the perfect conditions for an insurgency.^{208,209} Non-state armed groups began carrying out attacks in the northern province, including against the corporations. However, villagers pointed out that while the gas companies' facilities have rarely been attacked, communities who refused to move have been repeatedly raided by armed groups, with some people blaming the corporations for this.²¹⁰ Government forces and private security contractors, such as the state-backed Russian Wagner Group and South African Dyck Advisory Group, were deployed to protect the MNCs rather than the local communities.²¹¹ While the non-state armed groups were brutal and their attacks have claimed an estimated 4,000 lives since 2017 and displaced a million people, so was the EUTM-trained army: they have terrorised the local population through arbitrary and unlawful killings, forced disappearances, extortion, hostage taking, rape, and other abuses.²¹²

Rarely does the armed conflict in Mozambique make the international news, although in March 2021 the situation reached an international audience when insurgents targeted the city of Palma, where hundreds of Total's foreign employees are based. The government dispatched 800 security forces to protect Total's Afungi LNG Park, leaving the city's inhabitants largely unprotected.²¹³ Reports emerged of government forces preventing people from escaping, assaulting those who attempted to flee, and allegedly accepting bribes for places on rescue flights.²¹⁴ This attack prompted Total and ExxonMobil to temporarily withdraw from the country and halt any compensation payments to people displaced by their projects. Meanwhile a plan to restart an LNG development project by TotalEnergies has been repeatedly delayed.^{215,216}

The need for a non-military solution

The situation in Mozambique clearly illustrates that military engagement is not going to resolve the security crisis but is rather driving an increasing number of people to join non-state armed groups, who are trying to win over locals by distributing looted items.²¹⁷ Even experts close to the US political establishment agree with this assessment.²¹⁸ Nolan Quinn, a research associate for the Council on Foreign Relations' Africa Program, writes:

'Concerted efforts to improve governance and economic opportunity in Cabo Delgado have been largely absent from any existing counterinsurgency strategy. Instead, in a peripheral region blighted by persistent poverty and inequality, government officials have prioritized the interests of multinational energy companies, large-scale ruby miners, and heroin smugglers at the expense of local workers—all while enriching themselves through corrupt practices.'²¹⁹

Despite this, the EU launched its military training mission to support the Mozambican government's brute-force approach, closely followed by Portugal, the former colonial power, which signed a five-year military cooperation agreement in 2022.²²⁰ Instead of imposing a military response, Friends of the Earth Europe recommended a plan for this purpose:

'All companies, financiers and government actors should work together to initiate sustainable development and just transition interventions and address the (effects of) violence, trauma, food insecurity, displacement, by ensuring:

- The development and implementation of sustainable energy policies, prioritizing energy needs of Mozambican citizens and renewable energy and energy efficiency;
- The withdrawal of military troops and private security companies and addressing the serious human and women's rights violations and suppression by military forces, holding responsible parties accountable.²²¹

EUMAM Ukraine

European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine

LOCATIONS: Germany and Poland

LAUNCHED ON: 15 November 2022

NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2022: 365

RELEVANT RESOURCES: Oil, gas, iron ore, titanium, lithium



Launched in November 2022 for an initial period of two years, the European Union Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) Ukraine is one of the more recent EU military missions. It aims to train up to 60,000 Ukrainian soldiers in EU member states by the end of summer 2024 'to enhance the military capability of the UAF [Ukrainian Armed Forces] to conduct military operations effectively, to enable Ukraine to defend its territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, effectively exercise its sovereignty, and protect civilians'.²²² By February 2024, the EU had trained almost 40,000 soldiers²²³ for an average of 30-40 days.²²⁴ There are two coordination centres: Special Training Command (ST-C) in Strausberg, coordinating training in Germany, and Combined Arms Training Command (CAT-C) in Poland's Zagan, in charge of pan-European coordination.²²⁵

The mission is funded by the EPF, which has already provided €11.1 billion for various military assistance to Ukraine,²²⁶ including for 'equipment for lethal and non-lethal purposes'. It follows a pre-war civilian CSDP mission that has been active in Ukraine since 2014, aiming to reform the Ukrainian security sector while also strengthening border security and control. Predictably, the mission has faced criticism from Russia, whose Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria

Zakharova declared on 6 October 2022 that the mission would make the EU 'a party to the conflict'.²²⁷ Croatia echoed similar criticisms and refused to host Ukrainian soldiers training in its country. President Milanović asserted that Croatia should not be involved in the war and that the proposal would violate the constitution because it failed to clarify the basis for declaring Ukraine an ally, given that it is not a member of the EU or of NATO.²²⁸

An article on *Verfassungsblog*, an outlet concerned with legal issues, highlighted that, since the training is taking place in Germany and Poland, this is the first EU military mission located on EU soil, which contradicts the EU treaty's provision that the Union may use its military assets on missions *outside* the Union.²²⁹ While the decision has been justified '[i]n view of the exceptional circumstances arising from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine', judicial experts on *Verfassungsblog* question whether this suffices to make it legal: '[i]t is questionable whether such exceptional circumstances resulting from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, to which the Council refers, constitute a valid legal argument for altering the purpose of the Treaty provisions on Common Security and Foreign Policy'.

The EU actively training the armed forces of a country involved in a war on EU soil sets a very dangerous precedent about EU engagement and lowers the threshold for when or not the EU decides to flex its military muscle and become involved in wars.

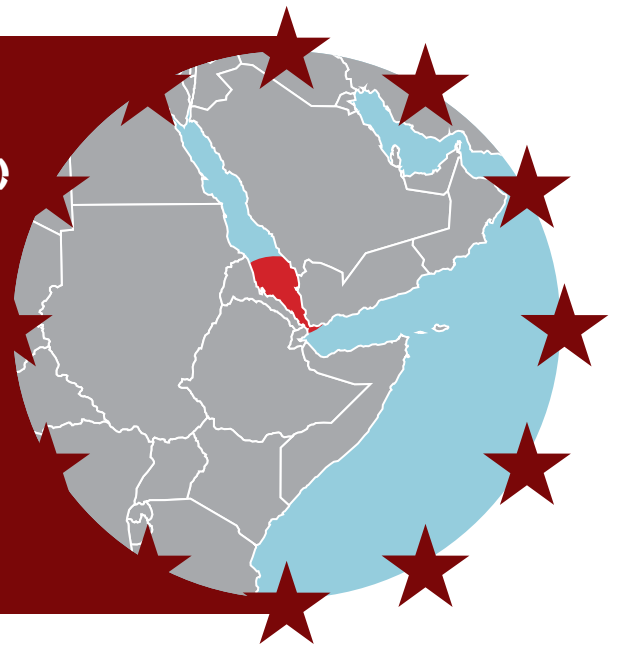
EUNAVFOR Aspides

European Union's Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) OPERATION ASPIDES

LOCATIONS: Area between the Gulf of Aden, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the south of the Red Sea

LAUNCHED ON: 19 February 2024

NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN 2024: 160



The newest EU mission, EUNAVFOR Aspides, comes in response to several months of blockading Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea area by the Yemen-based Ansar Allah (also known as the Houthis). The blockade began after Israel launched its genocidal war on Gaza²³⁰ and has significantly reduced marine traffic in a crucial area for world trade. While usually 12% of global trade goes through the Suez Canal before traversing the Red Sea area, the Houthis' blockade has reduced the number of ships by half.²³¹

The mission was agreed on in record time and launched on 19 February 2024 with the official aim 'to ensure a Union naval presence in the area where attacks occur, with the aim of ensuring freedom of navigation for vessels, in close cooperation with like-minded maritime security providers. For that purpose, the operation should accompany vessels, provide maritime

situational awareness and protect vessels against multi-domain attacks at sea. It should remain defensive in nature'.²³² It is currently mandated to run for 12 months in the area between the Gulf of Aden, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the south of the Red Sea, and started with four ships (French, Italian, Greek, German). In the first seven weeks after the launch the EU frigates escorted 68 merchant vessels through the blockade.²³³ While EU leaders emphasise its 'defensive' character that supposedly distinguishes it clearly from the more aggressive US-led operation Prosperity Guardian and made it clear that there will be no attacks on Yemeni territory, the vessels are allowed to use force to respond to attacks on them or the merchant ships they accompany.^{234,235}

The launch of mission Aspides is the only concrete action that the EU has taken in relation to the events in Gaza and it serves not to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people but to protect Western trade interests. It speaks volumes of where the EU's priorities lie and where and when it is willing to act and when it decides to simply do nothing, or worse, actively greenlight a genocide.

Conclusion

The EU has been conducting military missions overseas for over 20 years. These missions have been deployed with scant oversight from the European institutions, operate within a legal grey area where, as part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it is unclear how they would be held to account before the European courts, and are funded predominantly through an EU funding mechanism, the European Peace Facility (EPF), that is off-budget and therefore not subject to parliamentary scrutiny. For the most part these missions have been ‘under the radar’ and far from view of the vast majority of EU citizens, with the exception of the EU’s training mission of Ukrainian soldiers, which has received some public attention. The model applied by the EU in its bid to present itself as a reliable ‘hard power’ actor, among global power players, raises serious questions about its democratic processes and institutional structures.

The missions are mandated under the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy to ‘promote peace, prosperity, security and the interests of Europeans’ around the world. Yet this research found that they were almost entirely concerned with European interests, while doing little to address the peace, prosperity and security concerns of the local populations in host nations. The missions operate in countries and regions with extensive natural resources or importance to trade, from the gas fields of Mozambique, to the mineral-rich Sahel, to the vital shipping lanes of the Red Sea. Rather than increasing the stability and security in their host nations, they permit the EU to secure and maintain a foothold in these regions.

The missions examined in this report revealed a worrying trend whereby the EU has invested hundreds of millions of euros in armaments and training to military forces in countries that were accused of severe human rights violations. Moreover, the EU collaborated with governments embroiled in corruption scandals, involved in violently curbing dissent, and with extremely poor human rights records. In the Sahel, military forces that received training and equipment were involved in military coups that overthrew elected governments.

The problems that the EU claims to be addressing – instability, insecurity and violence – are often deeply rooted in the consequences that stem from European countries’ colonisation of Africa. It is often unresolved territorial questions related to borders drawn up by the colonial powers, or power structures that prevailed following the liberation struggles of the 1960s, land and ocean grabs to control natural resources, as well as local economic consequences – such as extreme poverty – of a deeply unequal global trade system that drive insecurity. The EU will never be able to resolve problems on the African continent by deploying military missions. Claiming that it can do so is a further example of the colonialist mindset which often dominates the corridors of power in Brussels. Were the EU to be genuinely concerned about the situation in many African countries and eager to deploy peacekeeping troops, it could

use its leverage and do so within the UN system rather than acting outside, or on the margins of multilateralism. Moreover, it could address the deeply uneven power dynamics between the EU and its African counterparts that serve to protect European interests and lead to the impoverishment of many African countries.

The profiteers who reap the financial benefits of these missions include the arms companies, which benefit from the contracts for the purchase of weapons, as well as the border and military-industrial complex more broadly that stand to gain much from insecurity and war. Moreover, oil and gas companies, as well as mineral investors and large-scale fishing companies, also saw the opportunity to secure and increase their profits.

The logical conclusion after 20 years of such missions is that the EU should finally bring these to a close, and focus its efforts on diplomacy, strengthening democracy, and working within the existing multilateral structures.

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