

# A New Paradigm for International Peacekeeping: Examining the EU Security and Defence Initiative in the Gulf of Guinea as a Reference for the Future UN Peacekeeping<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

This article argues that the European Union's Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries of the Gulf of Guinea (EUSDI) offers valuable insights for the future evolution of Peacekeeping operations deployed by both the United Nations (UN) and regional organisations. While UN peacekeeping has a strong record in reducing casualties and facilitating peace, it has faced significant challenges due to rising confrontations within the UN Security Council as well as the increasingly challenging mission environments. In this context, the EUSDI, established in December 2023 in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin, provides a unique operational model characterised by a small team, agility, targeted support, and cost-effectiveness, leveraging existing EU delegations for a short-term, scalable presence. The EU's strategic focus on targeted technical support in the region, underscored by the EUSDI, exemplifies the efficacy of a modest yet competent operational presence in addressing pressing security challenges. This article presents that the EUSDI's nimble, agile mission model, with tailor-made approaches, could offer compelling lessons for the UN's ongoing efforts to redefine its peacekeeping approach in an increasingly complex global security landscape.

## Keywords:

United Nations;  
European Union;  
Peacekeeping  
Operations; the Gulf of  
Guinea.

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## Introduction

This article argues that the agility, targeted support, and cost-effectiveness demonstrated by the European Union (EU)'s Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African Countries of the Gulf of Guinea (EUSDI) provide compelling reference points for discussion for adaptation and evolution of future United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping operations, particularly in response to contemporary security challenges.

A literature review on UN peacekeeping operations reveals that the UN peacekeeping operations has an extraordinary track record of reducing civilian and non-combatant casualties in civil wars; preventing the spread of violence; facilitating and assisting in the implementation of peace agreements; and maintaining peace in the aftermath of war (Walter, Howard & Fortna, 2021). Concurrently, the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations remains a subject of ongoing debate within academic literature, as other studies also point out the challenges of UN peacekeeping operations (Khonde, Katayanagi & Mikami, 2025; Rosas Duarte & Souza, 2024; Blair, Di Salvatore & Smidt, 2022). Scholarly analysis reveals a mixed record, with some operations successfully achieving their mandates and contributing to peace and stability, while others have fallen short of this or even exacerbated conflict dynamics.

Turning to key documents presented at the UN, the so-called the "Brahimi Report" was a seminal document acknowledging the need for more robust, better resourced, and more strategically deployed UN missions (United Nations, 2000). Recent UN discussions, including independent research *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities* released by the UN in October 2024, are built on top of these discussions, acknowledging the limitations of traditional peacekeeping operation models in contemporary conflicts and seeking new paradigms. As evidenced by the 2024 independent study, there is an institutional recognition that the traditional multidimensional peacekeeping, with its extensive mandates and large footprints, needs to be updated.

"Peacekeeping faces formidable challenges, as does the multilateral system writ large," the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for peace operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, told the UN Security Council in September 2024. "As geopolitical tensions have mounted . . . operations are increasingly unable to rely on member states to act in a strong, unified manner to support peacekeeping efforts," he said (Lacroix, 2024). Notwithstanding the geopolitical tensions and other operational challenges that peacekeepers face, UN peacekeeping remains a symbol of multilateral cooperation. USG Lacroix noted, "We need to continue to invest in strengthening peacekeeping tools in order to make them more effective and adaptable to today's and tomorrow's challenges" (Lacroix, 2024).

With regards to the rowing sense of urgency over the current situation surrounding the UN peacekeeping operations, USG Lacroix noted in his op-ed issued on the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers on 29 May 2025 that "Today, the United Nations Peacekeeping stands at a critical juncture. The global landscape is dangerous and complex. Crises erupt quickly and spread faster, magnified by

international political polarisation, transnational crime, terrorism, a rising sense of impunity, and the weakening of international law.” (Lacroix, 2025).

Against the backdrop of expanding multidimensional crises, a working group issued a study report on the future of the UN Peacekeeping titled, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*, which was commissioned by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) of the UN Secretariat at the request of Germany and the other co-chairs of the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Process. It was intended to inform the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, which was convened in Berlin in May 2025, by providing insights on new peacekeeping models and capabilities (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024, p. 1). The report outlined a series of thirty models that describe what UN peacekeeping has accomplished in the past and could achieve in the future. Each model delineates the strategic objective it seeks to fulfil, the tasks that peacekeepers would perform to meet that objective and the assets an eventual mission would need to be successful.

In this context, this article argues that the EU’s new Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) initiative, namely, the EU Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries of the Gulf of Guinea (EUSDI), established in December 2023 in partnership with Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin, could provide a potential model for multinational peacekeeping missions and operations from which the UN could learn in particular from the perspective of its nimbleness and flexibility. Whilst it is evident that the viability and success UN peacekeeping hinge on the political will among UN member states to find consensus on solutions to conflicts, this article analyses on the operational model of multinational peacekeeping operations, with a particular focus on the EUSDI.

Firstly, this article provides a concise overview of the recent discussions surrounding the UN peacekeeping operations. Then, it reviews the 2024 DPO’s study on the future of peacekeeping. This article moves to overviews of the EU’s engagement in the Gulf of Guinea and its CSDP as well as an analysis of the EUSDI activities. Lastly, the concluding part discusses how the EUSDI model could be useful for future peacekeeping operations.

### *Literature Review: Success and Limitations of the UN Peacekeeping Operations*

A number of studies have positively evaluated the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping operations. Previous studies focusing on UN peacekeeping operations’ roles in peace and security indicated that UN peacekeeping: is clearly a cost-effective way of increasing global security (Hegre, Hultman & Nygård, 2019); deployed into an active civil war reduces battle-related fatalities (Hultman, Kathman & Shannon, 2019); improves protection of civilians (Kjeksrud, 2024); reduces conflict-related sexual abuses (Reeder & Dicke, 2023); and improves women’s political participation (Blanton, Peksen & Blanton, 2023) as well as women’s well-being (Gizelis & Cao, 2020). Other studies focusing on UN peacekeeping’ roles in socioeconomics demonstrated that UN peacekeeping: increases economic growth in host countries in post-conflict settings (Jensen, 2020); mitigates the negative effect of conflict on household’s economic well-



being (Bove, Di Salvatore & Elia, 2022); and promotes democracy in host countries (Campbell & Di Salvatore, 2024). It is evident that the key determination for the success of UN peacekeeping operations in civil war settings is cooperation from the host state (Pushkina, Siewert & Wolff, 2022). A rapid deployment of blue helmets in civil war settings is also the key to success in terms of reducing violence, displacement, and contagion (Kathman, Benson & Diehl, 2023). Whilst it is evident that these positive assessments were derived from specific circumstances and may require certain conditions to be met, the extant scholarly literature largely supports the argument that the UN peacekeeping operation is an effective tool for addressing the aforementioned topics and others besides.

Peacekeeping operations are often associated with large-scale operations but the 2024 DPO report shows that peacekeeping missions can be tailored flexibly. As the study presents: “The models could be used to establish narrowly focused missions based on a single model, or operations with a broader set of objectives that encompass multiple models” (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024, p. 21). Both scholarly research and policy reports predict that the future of UN peacekeeping is likely to lie in smaller, tailor-made missions with relatively narrow mandates (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024; van Emmerik & Albrecht, 2025).

### *Key Discussions on the Future of the UN Peacekeeping Operations*

Recent years have seen a noticeable trend in UN peacekeeping operations whereby new missions have not been established for more than a decade. According to the DPO, there are seventy-one UN peacekeeping missions established, with eleven currently deployed. The most recently established mission is MINUSCA, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic established in 2014, except for the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), which succeeded the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). This fact indicates that there have been no new UN peacekeeping operations for more than ten years.<sup>3</sup> Hikaru Yamashita argues that three principal factors are identifiable as the primary factors contributing to the stagnation of the deployment of new UN peacekeeping operations (Yamashita, 2024).

Firstly, there has been a shift in the dynamics of the Security Council due to a resurgence in the competition between major global powers (Yamashita, 2024, p. 3). Secondly, the stagnation of decision-making momentum in the Security Council, in conjunction with the deterioration of relations between major powers, exerts a substantial influence on both UN peacekeeping operations and multilateral cooperation in general (Yamashita, 2024, p. 7–10). Thirdly, there has been an expansion of the mandates of PKOs as well as a mismatch between the actual priorities and mandates.

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Past Peace Operations*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/past-peacekeeping-operations>. (accessed on 7 March 2026).

This is due to the nature of conflicts having changed, which has exacerbated the gap between mandates and implementation (Yamashita, 2024, p. 10–11).

At the level of the UN, several key studies have been conducted as initiatives by the past Secretary-Generals and the relevant departments related to peacekeeping operations since the publication of the “Brahimi Report.” Fifteen years later, the report of then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s *High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (HIPPO Report) (United Nations, 2015a) was released in 2015 (United Nations, 2015b). Subsequently, the strategy of the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) (United Nations, 2018) and the Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) (United Nations, 2021) were released in 2018 and 2021 respectively, under the initiative of Secretary-General António Guterres. Furthermore, the DPO-led study, *Future of Peacekeeping Operations* (FOPO), has also been conducted from 2020 as part of A4P. Subsequently, in July 2023, the Secretary-General unveiled *The New Agenda for Peace* (United Nations, 2023), providing material for deliberation in the lead-up to the adaptation of *The Pact for the Future* at the Summit for the Future in September 2024 (United Nations, 2024). In this context, the DPO released *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities* in October 2024.

### *UN 2024 Study Report on the Future of Peacekeeping*

The report, entitled *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*, provided insights into the future of UN peacekeeping, including new models and modalities. It highlighted the key capabilities for the future of UN peacekeeping operations, including planning, personnel, leadership, support capabilities, data and information management, strategic communications, information integrity, standby and rapid deployment capabilities, and peacekeepers’ security and welfare (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024). The report also identified several factors that contribute to the success of UN peacekeeping operations, including the Security Council’s leadership and unity, cooperation and support from the host government, delivery of tangible benefits, regional support, achievable goals, sufficient resources, realistic expectations, commitment and local knowledge, adaptability, performance, conduct and accountability, and effective transition.

At the same time, the report outlined several challenges facing UN peacekeeping, including intensifying geopolitical competition, perceptions of partiality and a trust deficit among some actors, increasing financial pressures, and a range of problems and limitations within UN headquarters and peacekeeping missions, particularly pertaining to planning, human resources, and the level of agility of various processes. The report identifies the following five challenges facing contemporary peacekeeping operations.

First, geopolitical competition is intensifying and international divisions are deepening. Differences in perspectives on international issues have polarised the Security Council and among Member States, making political support and funding for peacekeeping operations unstable and eroding trust in the UN (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024, p. 10).

Second, the gap between capabilities and expectations is widening. While local and international communities hold high expectations, the resources available for deploying peacekeeping missions and operations are limited, creating a significant gap. Particularly when resources are insufficient or expectations are unrealistically high, the UN's achievements are often underestimated, potentially making alternative security actors appear more attractive (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024, p. 10).

Third, the financial crisis is worsening, and UN peacekeeping operations are no exception, as they have also faced serious financial pressure due to member states' budget cuts (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024, p. 10).

Fourth, the fundamental principles of peacekeeping face intense pressure. Traditionally, peacekeeping operations were clearly distinguished from peace enforcement, based on the consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. Instances are, however, increasing, where host governments request support closer to enforcement activities, such as countering insurgents, rather than support for peace processes, making this principal distinction difficult (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024, p. 10).

Fifth, responding to complex new threats is required. Armed conflicts have become urbanised and internationalised, while non-state actors have diversified and expanded. Concurrently, the weaponisation of artificial intelligence and drones, the spread of mis- and disinformation, and the infiltration of organised crime are advancing simultaneously, overlapping and influencing each other (Wane & Kihara-Hunt, 2024, p. 15–17).

One of the key contributions of this report is the summary of 30 peacekeeping models that the UN could utilise in the context of peacekeeping (Yamashita, 2024, p. 19–35). Each model represents a package of a desired strategic goal, a cluster of potential mandated tasks, and a brief list of related capabilities to enable its successful deployment (Yamashita, 2024, p. 19). These models can be used to establish short-term missions based on a single model or operations with a broader set of objectives that encompass multiple models as well as those with long-term mandates (Yamashita, 2024, p. 21). A modular approach has the potential to engender flexibility by facilitating the design of different phases of a peacekeeping operation across its operation cycle. Similarly, these models could be used to plan the transition of large missions with broad mandates into smaller, more focused operations as part of an exit strategy (Yamashita, 2024, p. 22).

## *The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Activity in the Gulf of Guinea*

### *The EU's CSDP Missions and Operations*

The CSDP is an integral part of the EU's foreign and security policy, providing the union with the capacity to act in situations of crisis and conflict. It has evolved significantly since its inception in the early 2000s, with roots in the earlier European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The CSDP is the EU's primary mechanism for the deployment of

military and civilian missions and operations abroad, with a core focus on key tasks in peace and security. These include peacekeeping, conflict prevention, capacity building and the strengthening of international security (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022; Doyle, 2022). The scope of CSDP missions and operations is wide-ranging, encompassing military operations, such as counter-piracy missions (e.g., Operation Atalanta), and civilian missions focusing on the rule of law, security sector reform (SSR), and border management.

Since the first CSDP missions and operations were launched back in 2003, the EU has undertaken more than 40 operations outside of the union, deploying both civilian and military missions and operations in several countries across Europe, Africa and Asia. As of today, there are twenty-one ongoing CSDP missions and operations, including twelve civilian, eight military and one civilian and military initiative (EEAS, 2025a).

### *The EUSDI in the Gulf of Guinea*

The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) is an important shipping zone for maritime transport between central and southern Africa and Europe. However, the states of the region have been confronted with considerable challenges, namely the increased threats emanating from the lack of control over the coastal waters and the weak control over access and security along the coast. The consequences included a growth in criminal and terrorist activity, which also posed a growing threat to the EU (EEAS, 2021). In this particular context, in 2014, the EU adopted an “EU Strategy for the Gulf of Guinea” (Council of the European Union, 2014) to lend support to the objectives of the so-called “Yaoundé Architecture” (CCAS, ECOWAS, and GGC, 2013). Subsequently, the EU launched “the Gulf of Guinea Action Plan” in 2015 to support the implementation of the EU’s Strategy for the Gulf of Guinea (Council of the European Union, 2015).

While piracy and armed robbery incidents reached a peak in 2020 and then dropped by about 90% in 2024 compared to that peak, the weak rule of law and justice systems continue to undermine security efforts (Marangio, 2025). Turning to the northern region of the GoG countries, the region still faces challenges such as activities of terrorist armed groups, illegal migration, organised crimes, and hybrid threats. These threats not only disrupt the internal security of countries in the region but also regional trade and economic development.

The EU has recognised the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address these challenges, leading to the establishment of the EUSDI. The Council of the EU adopted a decision to establish the EUSDI in Benin and Ghana on 3 August 2023 (Council of the EU, 2023a), which was followed by an adaptation of another decision to establish the Initiative in Côte d’Ivoire and Togo on 25 September 2023 (Council of the EU, 2023b). The Initiative has officially been launched with the adoption of the decision by the Council on 11 December 2023 in partnership with Ghana, Togo, Benin and Côte d’Ivoire. (Council of the EU, 2023c).

The EUSDI is modest in size, with a limited number of technical specialists deployed to the EU delegations in the four countries to provide the government with technical

support. The Initiative is comprised of a civilian pillar and a military pillar. A small number of specialists are based in EU Delegations across the region to establish a network of contacts and collaborate with national authorities to identify specific needs and develop advisory or training projects. The deployment of supplementary EU experts and/or short-term training teams can be requested on a temporary basis to address specific requests (Council of the EU, 2023a). It complements the European Peace Facility (EPF) assistance measures (EEAS, 2025k), including the provision of support for the Beninese Armed Forces<sup>4</sup> and the Ghanaian Armed Forces.<sup>5</sup>

The Initiative implements civilian and military projects aimed at enhancing resilience in vulnerable areas of the northern regions of these countries, such as capacity-building of the national security and defence forces; pre-deployment operational training of their security and defence forces; enhancement of security and defence forces in technical areas; promotion of the rule of law and good governance in the security sector; and support trust building between civil society and security and defence forces. The initiative has several key components as follows:

- (a) **Civilian Component:** This focuses on strengthening the capacities of local law enforcement agencies, coast guards, and judicial systems. It includes training, advisory support, and equipment provision to enhance the rule of law and civilian-military trust.
- (b) **Military Component:** This entails the deployment of naval assets and personnel to conduct joint exercises, patrols, and capacity-building activities with regional navies. It also aims to enhance the awareness of the participants in their programmes.
- (c) **Coordination and Cooperation:** The EUSDI emphasises coordination with regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), as well as with individual coastal states. This ensures a collaborative and effective approach to security.

The EUSDI is designed to be a flexible and adaptable instrument as well as to complement other EU initiatives and programmes in the Gulf of Guinea, such as development aid and humanitarian assistance. Its targeted and small-scale engagements also promote local ownership while ensuring its operational sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

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<sup>4</sup> Council of the EU adopted assistance measures under the EPF to provide the **Beninese Armed Forces** (*Forces Armées Béninoises*) with military equipment to meet their operational requirements and pre-deployment training needs on 21 May 2024 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1455), 13 June 2024 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1415), and 15 July 2024 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1980), respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Council of the EU adopted assistance measures under the EPF to provide the Ghana Armed Forces with non-lethal equipment to enhance their capabilities on 10 July 2023 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1440), on 27 November 2023 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/2682), and on 4 April 2024 (Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1063).

### *Activities of the EUSDI in the Gulf of Guinea*

This section overviews the primary activities of the EUSDI in Benin, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire, respectively. Regarding Togo, no public reports of EUSDI activities have been released by the EEAS at the time of the writing this article.

#### *The Case of Benin*

In Benin, the EU team trained ninety officers of five units of the Republican Police to deal with Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) in Kandi, Parakou, Dassa and Cotonou in May 2024. In Cotonou, Dassa and Parakou, twenty-two members of the operational command of Mobile Intervention Companies (CMI) took part in scenario-based training exercises organised by the EU team (EEAS, 2024a). A mobile training team (Mobile Training Team/MTT), made up of five military trainers from the Engineer Battalion of the Spanish Army's XVI "Canarias" Brigade, also gave a course on Countering Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IEDs) in Porto Novo in January and February 2025 (EEAS, 2025h). Additionally, a specialised team of five EU drone experts from the European Gendarmerie Force arrived in Benin in March 2025 to train the Republican Police on the use of drones to support police work (EEAS, 2025b). In December 2025, four-week training programme, which was the 25th course provided by the military pillar of the initiative, took place in Cotonou, marked at every step by close cooperation between instructors, trainees, and visiting leadership (EEAS, 2025i).

#### *The Case of Ghana*

In Ghana, a team of three EU experts visited Ghanaian border posts near Burkina Faso in May 2024 to develop support measures for the Ghana Immigration Service, the Ghana Police Service, and the Ministry of National Security. They prepared initial proposals for forensic training for the Immigration Service (EEAS, 2024a). The Initiative conducted a pilot course on "Counter Terrorism and Intervention Training" in January 2025 in Ghana, where twenty instructors from the Immigration Tactical Training School (ITTS) were trained in advanced counterterrorism and intervention tactics (EEAS, 2025g). The ITTS trained members of the Ghana Immigration Service for their deployment in northern Ghana in the fight against terrorism. A team from the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) also made a pivotal visit to Ghana in April 2025 as part of the EU's commitment to advancing security and defence partnerships in West Africa (EEAS, 2025j). The Netherlands has contributed with planning expertise in the Brussels based headquarters and provided StratCom training, followed by training on integrating gender perspectives into military operation in September 2025 (EEAS, 2025d). In December, the EU announced that they delivered the first edition of the *Ammunition and Depot Management* Module Training Team through the EUSDI in close cooperation with Ghanaian authorities, with the focus on safety, accountability, and sustainability (EEAS, 2025c).

### *The Case of Côte d'Ivoire*

In Côte d'Ivoire, hundreds of police officers, including nine women, participated in security and first aid courses provided by the EU at the Police School in Korhogo in 2024. The training focused on two topics: (1) Sensitization for Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and (2) First aid in a hostile environment. By the end of the training cycle, over 300 police officers will have taken part in the training, with later sessions planned for the Ivorian Gendarmerie (EEAS, 2024b). In addition, an educational initiative unfolded at Camp Militaire de Zambakro, near Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, where the EU Delegation and the EU Military Advisor delivered a specialized lecture, which aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of EU Defence and the CSDP, with a particular focus on the EU's Strategic Compass and its implications for the Government of Côte d'Ivoire (EEAS, 2025e). In September 2025, a high-level training took place in Abidjan with the focus on strategic communication and national stability for the Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FACI) (EEAS, 2025f).

### *Implications*

A core tenet of the EUSDI is to enhance the security situation of the region by supporting capacity building and training for national security and defence forces as well as by fostering the rule of law and governance in the security sector. The examples demonstrated in the previous section exemplify the targeted intervention model, which enables a swift and precise response to a specific threat or request. The following three key implications for the future UN peacekeeping operations can be drawn out from the preceding section.

- (a) **Agility and adaptability:** The EUSDI leverages pre-existing EU delegations in the countries. This allows for rapid tasking, deployment, and scaling of presence based on a request from the local authorities as well as real-time intelligence.
- (b) **Targeted and specialised interventions:** The EUSDI's relatively limited yet highly specialised areas of focus demonstrate how a small but highly capable footprint can address acute security challenges within a defined operational domain.
- (c) **Flexibility and cost-effectiveness:** The EUSDI operates through a flexible coordination, with local authorities based on their requests, with the support from the EEAS HQ and EU member states, depending on their demands in terms of human resources and logistics. This allows the EUSDI to implement programmes effectively despite its relatively limited human and financial resources.

Considering the expansion of the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations and the resulting potential mismatch between the actual priorities on the ground and the mandates that UN missions may face, the EUSDI presents a compelling exemplar through its targeted and specialised engagements. The C-IED training in Benin and the Counter Terrorism and Intervention Training in Ghana, for example, exemplified these

limited yet highly specialised support. The EUSDI's capacity to dispatch mobile training teams or specialised drone experts, as evidenced in Benin and Ghana, underscores a modest yet effective blueprint for faster international security assistance.

There is criticism of the EU's inability to design a clear strategy for its CSDP missions in Africa and to effectively counter the growing anti-Western sentiment on the continent, which is often fuelled by competing foreign actors (Vogel & Horváth, 2025). The EUSDI model can offer a critical view on the possibility of overcoming the failures of the withdrawals of several EU CSDP missions in the Sahel region, as the model respects the ownership of African countries while carefully managing the mission's visibility in order not to be seen as a foreign 'colonial' actor intervening in their countries/regions (Pye, 2024, pp. 488–489). The EUSDI model shows the possibility of the EU remaining a competent security actor without the political friction of large-scale military substitution in Africa, although its application could be limited to countries that already have well-established democratic and rule-of-law systems and relatively high-level security environments.

The discussion on the EUSDI can also be incorporated into the discussion of ad hoc coalitions (ADCs), in which there is growing recognition that flexibility is a key asset, as it could help avoid deadlock in highly institutionalized settings of traditional international organizations (Reykens et al., 2023, p. 738).

## *Conclusion*

As this article discussed, the EUSDI represents a significant development in its approach to regional security. Whilst the scales and political contexts differ, the Initiative offers concrete lessons in operational flexibility and targeted capacity building that, if strategically adapted, could significantly inform the UN's ongoing efforts to redefine its peacekeeping footprint in an increasingly complex global security landscape. The EUSDI model, primarily focused on training and capacity building at the request of host nations, could also navigate a lower political threshold for the establishment of a mission and operation at the Security Council.

However, the EUSDI is so small that it cannot be directly compared to UN peacekeeping operations, which typically deploy larger numbers of personnel in more politically complex and charged environments. Therefore, it would be more productive to focus on the key implications this article highlights for discussions of future UN peacekeeping models rather than treating the EUSDI as a potential alternative to UN peacekeeping operations.

As UN Peacekeeping missions and operations, including large-scale, multidimensional missions, face increasing legitimacy crises and host-state resistance (Norberg, Amstutz, Bardalai, Mood and Phillips, 2025; Street, Watson and Hartmann, 2025), the EUSDI model offers a compelling alternative characterised by hybridity, modularity, and regional ownership. Although the EUSDI does not aim to replace larger peacekeeping missions and operations, its unique model could serve as a potential reference point for the strategy in the post-peacekeeping operations setting.



This operational shift aligns with the transition toward modular and more flexible CSDP missions envisioned in the EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence to allow for tailored support to regional partners as well as in the further refined in the 2023 Civilian CSDP Compact (Council of the EU, 2022; EU, 2023). By deploying small teams of civilian and military advisors rather than medium- to large-sized battalions, the EU minimises the mission's interventionist aspect while providing cost-effective technical assistance. This shift is also able to address the capability-expectation gap by focusing on the specific training and equipment needs of the four coastal states.

One of the most significant contributions of the EUSDI model to the post-UN peacekeeping operation debate is its emphasis on reciprocal partnership. The EUSDI is built upon tailored support based on the needs identified and formulated by the four countries themselves (Council of the EU, 2023d). By prioritising regional ownership and focusing on the capacity building of local authorities through a modular framework, the EUSDI operationalises a sustainable, state-led security model suited to the evolving challenges of the post-UN peacekeeping era.

Another pivotal element in the EUSDI is its integration with the European Peace Facility (EPF). Established in 2021 as an off-budget instrument, the EPF allows the EU to bypass previous legal restrictions under Article 41(2) TEU, which prohibited the use of the EU budget for operations having military or defence implications (European Union, 2016). By funding the provision of defence-related equipment, including non-lethal equipment, as well as training, alongside the EUSDI's personnel deployment, the EU can both train local forces and equip them to secure their own territory materially.

The EUSDI Gulf of Guinea demonstrates that the future of international security assistance may not lie in the perpetuation of large- to medium-scale missions and operations, but in the deployment of flexible, nimble, and material-intensive initiatives. By prioritising modularity and bridging the gap between training and equipment, the EUSDI stands as a critical case study in how the EU is operationalising a sustainable security model that respects sovereign agency while effectively addressing transnational threats. This model offers a viable path forward for the international community as it seeks to redefine peace operations in an increasingly fragmented global security landscape.

As the literature shows, UN troops can reduce battlefield violence more effectively alongside a non-UN partner, and non-UN multinational missions also need UN peacekeeping operations to curb violence successfully (Schumann & Bara, 2023). UN peace operations have increasingly partnered with regional multinational organisations. In this context, the EUSDI model, as analysed in this article, also provides practical insights for multinational peacekeeping operations led by other regional or international organisations.

### *Disclaimers*

The views, opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not reflect the views of the organisation I belong to.

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### *Notes on Contributor*

Yusaku is a Second Secretary at the Embassy of Japan in Ukraine. In his previous posts, Yusaku served at the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security (UNLOPS), where he worked extensively on peace and security-related files, including the EU CSDP/CSFP and UN PKO/SPM. Prior to that, he worked at the Mission of Japan to the EU in Brussels. Yusaku holds a PhD from the University of Tokyo (Japan).

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