

Finland and the United Nations: In Defense of the National Interest

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Introduction: What can the UN do for Finland?

Finland's membership of the United Nations has always involved hard choices about how to defend the country's national interests. In November 1956, less than a year after Finland joined the world organization, the UN General Assembly held an emergency session to discuss the Soviet invasion of Hungary. It passed four resolutions condemning the USSR's actions and calling for a large-scale relief effort to aid the suffering Hungarians. Finland, all too conscious of its vulnerability to Russia, abstained on those resolutions that explicitly criticized the Russian intervention. "The abstentions were widely and indignantly criticized in Finland," as the diplomat and scholar Max Jakobson later noted.¹ "On the Hungarian issue the Finnish Government had put good relations with the country's powerful neighbor before the luxury of making an emotionally satisfying gesture at the United Nations."

There were echoes of the Hungarian crisis in March 2014, when the General Assembly debated Russia's interference in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. Russia had already blocked Security Council over the crisis. By contrast, the Assembly voted in favor of a resolution dismissing the widely derided "plebiscite" on Crimea's joining the Russian Federation. Finland was one of the 100 countries backing the resolution, but Helsinki would have liked something bolder. Addressing the General Assembly in September 2014, President Sauli Niinistö told other leaders that "the voice of this important body should have been even stronger, condemning Russia's actions and charting a way towards ending violence and restoring peace."²

¹ Max Jakobson, *Finnish Neutrality: A Study of Finnish Foreign Policy Since the Second World War* (Praeger, 1969), p103.

² President Sauli Niinistö, Statement to the UN General Assembly, 24/9/2014.

The contrast between Finland's caution towards the USSR in 1956 and Niinistö's direct criticisms of Moscow in 2014 is indicative of how fundamentally its international position has altered since the end of the Cold War. During the decades of East-West tension, Finland prioritized the UN as a mechanism to mitigate conflicts between the great powers. Outside NATO and the Warsaw Pact, it was a pioneer of UN peacekeeping in the Middle East. Finnish officials ranging from Sakari Tuomioja to Martti Ahtisaari played an important part in UN mediation and peacemaking at different stages, and Ahtisaari had an instrumental role in the organization's efforts to assist the end of the Cold War in Namibia and the Balkans.³

Yet the post-Cold War world also opened up a new range of international options for Helsinki. The decision to join the EU in 1995 and development of institutional ties with NATO changed Finland's foreign policy DNA. "Anchored to Europe and the Nordic countries both politically and in terms of values," in the words of a recent futures report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Finland is undeniably part of the West."⁴ This emphasis on the country's European and (partial) transatlantic vocations has reduced the importance of the UN as a source of influence and security. In a recent address to the country's ambassadors, Foreign Minister Timo Soini declared: "Finland's proven standard recipe for solving international challenges is cooperation."⁵ In this context he emphasized the importance of EU membership, partnership with NATO and bilateral relations with countries ranging from Sweden to the United States. But he did not refer to the United Nations at all.

Finland has not given up on the UN. It still has widespread popular support: 76% of Finns say they "tend to trust" the organization, compared to a EU-wide average of just

³ Sakari Tuomioja (1911-1964), prime minister in 1953-1954, was a close ally of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, and represented the U.N. in Laos and Cyprus. President Ahtisaari acted for the UN on Namibia and Kosovo.

⁴ *Finland's Position, Security and Welfare in an Increasingly Complex World* (Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014), p10.

⁵ Foreign Minister Timo Soini, Speech at the Annual Meeting of Heads of Mission, 24/8/2015.

51%.⁶ Helsinki is the leading funder of UN Women, a staunch supporter of the organization's mediators and a small but loyal contributor to blue helmet missions. Finnish officials take on thankless tasks on behalf of the organization: Helsinki has led efforts to convene a conference on a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, and a former member of the foreign ministry is the Special Representative of the Secretary-General dealing with the frozen conflict in Georgia. Diplomats and governments do not take on such tasks because they offer quick or easy wins. The fact that Finland lobbies for such roles indicates its residual belief in the UN's values.

Nonetheless, there are solid reasons for Finland to question how the UN serves its national interests. Its contributions to the organization do not always receive the respect they deserve: in 2012, it unexpectedly lost a race for a temporary seat on the Security Council to Australia and Luxembourg. Yet the primary reasons for Helsinki to reassess its relations with the UN are more immediate and more serious. Like the EU and West as a whole, Finland now faces a deteriorating security environment. Challenges include Russia's increasing aggression and the proliferation of disorder in the Middle East and North Africa, which has driven a flood of refugees into Europe and may incubate a new generation of international terrorism. "Europe is living through its own Years of Danger," as President Niinistö has warned. "It is framed by a ring of violence from Ukraine to North Africa."⁷ As the president has argued this demands "precise, honest and even self-critical thinking." This should include a frank reckoning of how effectively multilateral organizations serve the country's immediate political and security concerns. That has to include the UN.

Discussions of the UN often shy away from tough-minded analyses of its utility. There is a tendency among experts on multilateral affairs to assume that all forms of international cooperation are good and should be reinforced. This is evident in some recent studies of Finland's role at the UN. A study of the 2012 Security Council race

⁶ See the Annex to Standard Eurobarometer 83 (July 2015), p38.

⁷ President Sauli Niinistö, Speech at the Annual Meeting of Heads of Mission, 25/8/2015.

by the International Peace Institute reassuringly concludes: “Finland should certainly continue what it currently does” at the UN and “Finland could do even more.”⁸ This is sound advice if one works on the assumption that Helsinki’s main goal in global affairs is to burnish its status at the UN and win elections there.

But it does not necessarily make sense if one assumes that Finland’s overarching goals to provide for its own national security, reducing disorder in its neighborhood and protecting the global environment for Finnish investment and trade. Reflecting this, this paper does not focus on what Finland is doing in and through the UN already, valuable as much of this is. Instead it assesses the UN’s current and potential utility in addressing four areas recent official statements and documents identify as core factors in serving Finland’s national interest. These are *(i)* managing the new threat from Russia; *(ii)* handling the chaos in the Middle East; *(iii)* strengthening European security cooperation; and *(iv)* addressing global threats such as pandemic disease, cyber-warfare and challenges to liberal values and norms.

The paper concludes that the UN has an important role to play in advancing each of these interests. Even if it is no longer the primary vehicle for Finnish foreign and security policy, it still offers mechanisms to reduce tensions with Russia; manage the political and humanitarian dimensions of the wars in the Arab world; support the development of the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and address aspects of globalization ranging from the threat pandemic disease to the women’s security issues. The UN’s performance across this range of issues is far from perfect, and it is struggling notably badly in the Middle East and North Africa.

The paper concludes with some ideas on steps that Finland could take to buttress the UN’s role on these fronts, although it is worth highlighting that current Finnish initiatives – such as its support for mediation and the UN’s civilian crisis management

⁸ *Taking Stock, Moving Forward: Report to the Foreign Ministry of Finland on the 2012 Elections to the United Nations Security Council* (International Peace Institute, 2013), pp23-24.

operations (Special Political Missions) and engagement on global health security – *already* substantively serve the country's interests in these areas.

National Interest #1: Managing the Russian Challenge

For Finland, it is obvious all national security assessments must begin with Russia. It is less obvious that the UN provides a useful framework for dealing with the challenges posed by Moscow. Just as the Soviet Union ignored the UN General Assembly's protestations over its behavior in Hungary in 1956, Russia has treated the Assembly's condemnation of its behavior in Ukraine with contempt. Its veto power ensures that the Security Council cannot take effective action to respond to its aggression in the eastern Ukraine. The U.S. and European members of the Council have repeatedly used it as a platform to highlight Moscow's interference in Ukraine, but Russian diplomats have shrugged off these accusations with impunity.

Russia's veto has also set limits to the role that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN officials can play on the ground. Early in the crisis, American officials considered requesting a senior UN official to oversee a political transition in Kiev, and a UN official (Robert Serry) briefly investigated the situation in Crimea before being detained and evicted by armed men. The secretariat's engagement in the crisis was also hampered by a lack of specialists on Russia and its neighbors in the office of the Secretary-General and Department of Political Affairs (DPA). Reflecting this mix of political and practical obstacles, the UN has played a very limited role in the crisis, and the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has taken the lead.

It thus seems hard to argue that the UN can or will play a major role in containing Russian aggression in Ukraine or elsewhere in future. Yet it is worth noting that past experience shows that the UN can play a significant role in addressing three dimensions of the Russian challenge: *(i)* producing objective reporting on the situations in flash-points such as Crimea to counter Moscow's information warfare;

(ii) offering a neutral framework for crisis de-escalation with Russia; and (iii) providing practical support to the OSCE in preparing and mounting field missions.

Objective reporting: The UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has played the first of these roles effectively during the Ukraine crisis. As the Finnish Institute for International Affairs has noted, Russia's new style of "hybrid" warfare involves heavy use of "intensive information measures – more commonly referred to as propaganda" to obscure the facts of a conflict.⁹ OHCHR officials have, however, been able to challenge Russia's narrative on certain key points. While Moscow has, for example, presented the absorption of Crimea (which is off-limits to OSCE monitors) into the Russian Federation as a success, OHCHR reports have emphasized "systematic human rights violations" against pro-Ukrainian individuals and Crimean Tatars.¹⁰ Lithuania, currently a temporary member of the Security Council, has convened regular meetings to discuss these findings. Russia has refused to participate in these, arguing that the situation in Crimea is an internal matter, but the evidence of its abuses has caused it discomfort.

De-escalation: While the UN has not been able to play a role in de-escalating the Ukrainian conflict, it has provided a useful "off-ramp" for Russia in previous crises. Precedents for this date back to the Cold War, when UN officials helped the USSR find ways out of conflicts including the Afghan war. The most obvious post-Cold War example is Kosovo, where the deployment of the UN Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) acted as a mechanism for rapprochement and the West after the NATO campaign against Yugoslavia. The UN secretariat played a quiet facilitating role during the crisis over Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, as UNMIK offered a framework for the deployment of an EU mission to help guide a nascent state forward. (Finland has particular expertise in managing these de-

⁹ András Rácz, *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Willingness to Resist* (The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015), p13.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2014 to 15 February 2015* (OHCHR, 2015), p6.

escalatory processes through the UN, given President Ahtisaari's involvement in both 1999 and 2008). Moscow also turned to the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) to help defuse tensions in Kyrgyzstan after a flare-up of anti-Uzbek violence that claimed 2,000 lives in 2010.

Although Russia's overall foreign policy position has hardened a great deal since these crises during President Putin's third term, Russia has nonetheless continued to utilize the UN as a framework for limited cooperation with the West over crises in the Middle East, including Iran, Syria and Yemen (see next section), even after Moscow's military intervention in Syria. It remains possible that, suffering from sanctions and at risk of getting bogged down in the Middle East, Russia could eventually turn to the UN as a mechanism to de-escalate the Ukrainian conflict and other confrontations with the West. Even if the chances of such rapprochement remain low, the UN needs to retain the ability to play this de-escalatory role.

Collaboration with the OSCE: If the UN's role over Ukraine has been limited, the crisis has given a new lease of life to the OSCE, which has mounted a widely-praised Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in the east of the country. This has been a significant test, as the OSCE has had little experience of launching new operations since the 1990s. The UN secretariat provided quiet support to the start-up of the operation, for example sharing rosters of potentially relevant staff, and OSCE officials and UN humanitarian agencies have collaborated closely on the ground. The OSCE is now reviewing its operational performance and the UN, with much greater operational experience in recent years, could offer further guidance and advice to this process in future – a process Finland is well placed to support.¹¹

Summary: It is clear that these UN activities – truth telling, de-escalation and inter-organizational assistance to the OSCE – are neither individually or collectively

¹¹ On 5 November 2015, for example, the International Peace Institute hosted a meeting in Vienna comparing UN and OSCE positions on civilian operations in warzones.

sufficient responses to the scale of the challenge from Russia today. The UN cannot play a security role comparable to NATO or the EU in facing down Moscow. But it still has an important potential role as an institutional framework for diplomatic engagement with Russia, in parallel to efforts to boost the West's security posture.

National interest #2: Managing threats from the Middle East and North Africa

In contrast to the Ukrainian situation, the UN's role in managing the current crises in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is obvious. The UN has had a constant presence in the Arab world since the 1940s, when it sent its first mediators and observers to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Finland has been a long-standing contributor to the organization's efforts in the region, deploying military observers and peacekeepers to the Middle East for decades.) Since the outbreak of the Arab revolutions in 2011, however, the UN's position across the MENA region has grown markedly in both scale and complexity. The organization is presently trying to mediate resolutions to the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen. Peacekeepers on the Golan Heights have been kidnapped by Al-Qaeda affiliates, while the blue helmet peace operation in Mali (MINUSMA) has frequently been attacked by Islamist groups. The UN's humanitarian agencies have had shoulder the huge burden of aiding refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Mauritania to Iraq. These linked crises add up to a generational test for the UN.

They are also creating huge problems for Finland and all other members of the EU. In the early days of the Arab revolutions, many European governments were wary of becoming entangled in events south of the Mediterranean. They are now paying the price for their lack of earlier engagement, as hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants enter the EU and growing numbers of European citizens, including dozens of Finns, go to fight with the so-called Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq. As President Niinistö has underlined, the migration crisis could threaten the freedom of movement inside the EU and is already fuelling rising nationalism across the Union.

Finland and its European partners thus have an acute interest in assessing whether the UN has the capacities it needs to address the current threats emanating from the Middle East “at source” across three categories of activity: (i) mediation and civilian crisis management; (ii) peacekeeping operations; (iii) humanitarian assistance.

Mediation and civilian crisis management: Finland has a particular interest in the UN’s political work in MENA because it is a vocal champion of conflict prevention and civilian crisis management at the UN.¹² It co-chairs the Friends of Mediation with Turkey and has collaborated with Mexico to promote reforms to the UN’s Special Political Missions (SPMs), which provide a civilian alternative to peacekeeping operations. Finland had settled on these priorities before the Arab revolutions, but both have gained increasing importance due to the chaos in MENA.

UN envoys and mediators have played leading roles in Syria, Yemen and Libya. This has placed a significant strain on the UN’s mediation capacity. The results have been mixed: The UN has struggled in Syria and made only halting advances in Libya. It initially enjoyed considerable successes in managing a political transition in Yemen, but this has fallen apart over the last year as the Houthi rebel movement seized territory and a Saudi-led coalition intervened in response. Despite these setbacks the Security Council has repeatedly pushed the UN to continue its mediating role in these cases, suggesting that the demand for the UN’s political service will stay high.

If this puts the UN system under strain, SPMs across the MENA region have also faced major challenges. While the UN set up a support mission in Libya immediately after the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, this was evacuated in 2014 due to deteriorating security situation. The UN’s existing SPMs in Lebanon and Iraq have been heavily involved in efforts to manage the spillover from the Syrian war and rise of IS. They have managed to offer useful behind-the-scenes political assistance to the governments of the two

¹² See *The UN Strategy of the Finnish Foreign Service* (Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013), especially pp17-20.

countries. Yet the level of violence across the region still threatens to overwhelm the UN's civilian crisis management efforts. The recent High-Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) has recommended that the UN set up a regional office for MENA to support these multiple political interventions.¹³ While this faces some local opposition, it is clear that the UN needs to overhaul its political presence across the MENA region to handle an open-ended period of acute disorder.

Peacekeeping operations: The violence challenging UN mediators and SPMs in the MENA region also poses a challenge to the UN peacekeeping forces there. The UN Disengagement Force on the Golan Heights (UNDOF) has been rendered almost inoperative by a series of kidnappings of its personnel by the Al-Nusra Front. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has not suffered comparable harassment, but still face serious risks of violence resulting from an expansion of the Syrian war and/or renewed hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel. This is of particular concern to Finland, which currently jointly deploys a unit with Ireland in UNIFIL.

The danger of terrorism to UN forces has also come to the fore in Mali, where Islamist extremists have killed nearly fifty peacekeepers in 2015. This is forcing a reassessment of the division between peacekeeping, peace enforcement and counterterrorism (CT) operations in areas affected by radical Islamism. UN officials fear that blue helmet missions will be forced into CT missions they cannot sustain, inviting new losses. Finland shares these concerns. Yet as violence continues to roil the MENA region, EU governments may increasingly turn to the UN to mount stabilization operations across their southern flank. The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway have already deployed a mix of attack helicopters, special forces and intelligence experts to Mali. There has also been talk of new UN military operations in Libya, Syria and Yemen, all of which would present major risks to the blue helmets. Just as it may be necessary to overhaul the UN's civilian presence in the

¹³ The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People* (UN doc. A/70/95 – S/2015/446), p36.

MENA region to handle prolonged violence there, it may also be necessary to make peace operations across the Arab world more robust to cope with this threat.

Humanitarian operations: Despite the challenges to UN civilian and military crisis management across the MENA region, the proliferation of crises has hit UN humanitarian agencies hardest. The financial and operational burden of the Syrian crisis alone has been immense: The UN appealed for over \$8 billion to assist 18 million Syrians in 2015. This comes at a time when pressures on the humanitarian system in other regions are exceedingly high, with 60 million refugees and IDPs worldwide.¹⁴ Meanwhile, many Western aid donors have had to cut back their funding for economic reasons. As a result, the provision of assistance to Iraqis, Syrians and other suffering communities has been uneven: The World Food Program (WFP) has, for example, had to make major cuts to its handouts, reducing the number of Syrian refugees receiving food vouchers by one third in 2015.¹⁵ In recent months European governments have responded to the flow of refugees into Europe by offering the UN extra funds, but this sadly looks like too little, too late.

These desperate circumstances have helped fuel the flow of refugees and migrants to Europe. If the UN is unable to assist the displaced in their region of origin, they will inevitably go further afield for help (this, of course, simplifies the complex causes of migration but it is not a coincidence that Syrians are traveling to Europe in large numbers). The pressure is such that senior UN officials talk about the risk that the humanitarian system soon reaching a point where it cannot handle new crises.

Efforts to address this problem will come into focus around a World Humanitarian Summit scheduled for 2016. This opportunity may go to waste, however: Initial UN

¹⁴ Rahul Chandran points out that the UN's Global Humanitarian Appeal grew by 446% between 2004 and 2013, from \$3 billion to \$16.4 billion. See Rahul Chandran, "It's Broke, So Fix It: Humanitarian Response in Crisis," UNU Center for Policy Research blog, 9/3/2015.

¹⁵ For current details of WFP's efforts, see <http://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria>.

proposals for systemic reforms appear unfocused and uninspiring.¹⁶ In the meantime, non-UN humanitarian organizations claim that the UN is not disbursing aid efficiently or coherently.¹⁷ Finland, one of the top twenty donors of humanitarian aid, may not only have to find more money for the UN in future, but also push UN agencies to fix their procedures and systems to deliver aid better.

Summary: Overall, the UN has been asked to play a central role in stabilizing the MENA region through political, security and humanitarian means. This is squarely in the national interest of Finland and other EU members challenged by the human spillover effects of the crisis. But it is becoming clear that the UN's civilian, military and humanitarian mechanisms for handling this range of problems is inadequate: The EU's members will either have to bolster the UN or look for an alternative strategy for managing the MENA challenge – as of now the UN seems to be the best there is.

National Interest #3: Strengthening European security cooperation

While the UN struggles with the crises in the Arab world and Ukraine, Finnish officials have naturally looked to strengthen EU security cooperation and their partnership with NATO as insurance against the new generation of threats. As the recent Ministry of Foreign Affairs futures paper notes, “Finland can increase its influence within the EU both in the union's external relations and in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).”¹⁸ It is probable that, facing budget cuts, Helsinki will mainly focus its security efforts on EU and NATO-based operations.

This looks like a further reason for Finland to limit its contributions to the UN. Helsinki has significantly cut back its blue helmet peacekeeping contributions since

¹⁶ Rahul Chandran, “Saving the World Humanitarian Summit From Itself,” UNU Center for Policy Research blog, 26/10/2015.

¹⁷ See, for example, Marie O'Reilly, “UN at ‘Heart of Dysfunction’ in Humanitarian Aid, New Report Finds,” IPI Global Observatory blog, 22 July 2014.

¹⁸ *Finland's Position* (n.4), p8.

the 1990s as it has refocused on European missions. Yet counter-intuitively, partnerships with the UN may provide some pathways for strengthening European security cooperation, even if these are less direct than first-order priorities such as Baltic defense coordination. Options include *(i)* deepening EU-UN operational cooperation and, in parallel, supporting UN-NATO collaboration; and *(ii)* triangulating with the United States and EU partners on direct assistance to the UN.

EU-UN cooperation: UN peace operations have been important partners for EU-flagged missions since the inception of the European Security and Defence Policy (precursor to the CSDP). Over two-thirds of all ESDP/CSDP have been deployed alongside a UN mission or been deployed as a pathfinder for a larger blue helmet force. The recent CSDP deployments in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) have followed this pattern. EU-UN coordination has certainly not always been straightforward, as Finnish troops experienced in Chad in 2008 and 2009, where tensions between the two organizations were high. Yet inter-organizational contacts have improved significantly since then, and headquarters-to-headquarters links are now good. Countries such as Finland that wish to see CSDP develop further thus also have an interest in building up EU-UN cooperation as a regular framework for CSDP deployments, especially given the urgent security challenges on Europe's southern flank outlined above.¹⁹ A 2014 study led by the Center for International Peace Operations (Berlin) highlighted three areas for improvements: *(i)* common planning protocols; *(ii)* common approaches to Security Sector Reform (SSR); and *(iii)* closer coordination on training.²⁰ There is also a need for soldiers and officials with EU experience to serve with the UN, and *vice versa*, to smooth day-to-day ties.

Finland has the status to advance cooperation of this type, given its experiences in both EU and UN missions. For obvious reasons it is less well placed to champion UN-

¹⁹ For more details on this argument see Richard Gowan and Nick Witney, *Why Europe Must Stop Outsourcing its Security* (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015).

²⁰ Wanda Hummel and Tobias Pietz, *Partnering for Peace: Lessons and Next Steps for EU-UN Cooperation on Peace Operations* (Center for International Peace Operations, 2015).

NATO cooperation, which is less institutionalized than EU-UN coordination. Nonetheless, the NATO secretariat is keen to deepen its ties with the UN, and has important advice to offer on dealing with the sorts of extremist threats the UN is dealing with in cases such as the Golan and Mali (see above). As an element of its partnership with NATO, Finland should look for ways to facilitate these linkages.

Triangulation with the US and EU partners on UN deployments: While Finland may still focus on EU and NATO-led deployments, however, it should note that there are also opportunities to strengthen European security cooperation and security cooperation with the U.S. *inside* UN operations too. As observed above, Finland's Nordic partners have recently made significant specialized contributions to the UN mission in Mali, along with the Netherlands. While this deployment is driven by concerns over Mali as seedbed of Islamist terrorist groups and route for people trafficking, it is also calibrated to strengthen the participants' ties with Washington.

The Obama administration, concerned by the poor state of UN forces in cases such as Mali and South Sudan, has pushed for European countries to deploy more blue helmets. In a speech in Brussels earlier this year, U.S. ambassador to the UN Samantha Power emphasized that the administration did not view such deployments as “soft”, and argued that UN deployments rank alongside NATO and EU missions as “means by which a European country can advance our collective security.”²¹ On this logic, UN operations can be seen as part of the broader framework for transatlantic burden sharing in an age of multiplying threats. President Obama hosted a summit in New York in late September at which over fifty countries, including Finland, pledge new forces for UN operations. On paper at least, these added up to 50,000 new personnel. Ambassador Power singled out Finland's pledge of “multiple military units, including special forces” for particular praise at a recent speech in New Delhi.²² As a historical pioneer of UN operations with a focus on European security concerns, Finland is well

²¹ Ambassador Samantha Power, Remarks in Brussels, 9 March 2015.

²² Ambassador Samantha Power, Remarks in New Delhi, 20 November 2015.

placed to triangulate with the US and its EU partners on reinforcing future UN deployments.

Summary: Finland should not see UN deployments as a distraction from – or obstacle to – its European security ambitions. Instead it should see strengthening UN operations as an important adjunct to steps to strengthen CSDP and the partnership with NATO, and an opportunity to build more cohesive global security cooperation.

National interest #4: Global challenges

While it is fairly easy to see the links between Finland's interests and the UN's role in Ukraine or Syria, it is also important to recognize the country's broader stake in fighting global challenges. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' futures paper notes, Finland is now too well integrated into the global economy to insulate itself from challenges such as pandemic disease: "Finland's international position is highly dependent on the smooth operation of the multilateral system."²³ This expansive definition of the national interest covers dimensions of the UN's work ranging from the struggle against climate change to the battle against extreme poverty. It also encompasses questions of values: Finland is deeply committed to women's rights and UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Even if events in Syria, Libya and Ukraine are uppermost in policymakers' minds, the UN's role in tackling global threats and advancing liberal values are also key to its importance to Finland.

These issues are inevitably too varied to be covered comprehensively here. What is most important is that Helsinki *(i)* maintains its status on issues such as Women, Peace and Security on which it is already a leader and *(ii)* continues to search for developing issues where it can drive concrete actions through the UN system.

²³ *Finland's Position* (n.4), p8.

Women, Peace and Security: An international group of experts recently completed a broad-ranging study of UNSCR 1325, which was passed in 2000. As the director of UN Women noted, this found significant evidence of progress – such as women’s participation in peace processes – but a “crippling gap” remains between the international community’s ambitions and performance.²⁴ This October, the Security Council passed a new resolution (UNSCR 2242) on measures to overcome this gap. For Finland, continuing to champion the Women, Peace and Security Agenda at the UN is both a useful source of good publicity and, above all, just the right thing to do.

Global Health Security: Helsinki also has an opportunity to address gaps in the global health system in the wake of the Ebola outbreak. This is an especially sensitive area, as the panic over Ebola raised public awareness about how pandemic diseases could spread quickly and cause widespread mortality. Stopping such epidemics is a probably the clearest example of why “international cooperation in the national interest” is necessary. Even before Ebola hit the headlines, Helsinki had focused on this issue, working with the U.S. on the Global Health Security Agenda, an effort to reduce the threat of infectious diseases. This puts it in a strong position to follow up the Ebola outbreak, which demonstrated major gaps in the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN’s capacities to fight health threats. As Laurie Garrett of the Council on Foreign Relations warns, “the WHO performed so poorly during the crisis that there is a question of whether the world actually needs it.”²⁵

Garrett suggests that a top-level effort is required to address what went wrong. She suggests that Ban Ki-moon “should convene private meetings with the World Bank, the WHO, and several other relevant agencies and institutions to develop plans for a more coherent and efficient response to future epidemics.”²⁶ This makes sense in

²⁴ Phumzile Mlambo-Ngucka, “Foreword”, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, p5.

²⁵ Laurie Garrett, “Ebola’s Lessons,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 5 (2015), p102.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

theory, but Ban is already overloaded with priorities such as development, climate change and peacekeeping crises. He is also approaching his final year in office, losing leverage as he does so. At the very least, a concerned UN member state such as Finland could help the Secretary-General manage such a consultation process and ensure that his successor build upon it. Finland's track record on global health puts it in a good position to play such a role, in its own interest and to boost its profile.

New challenges: This may also be true of other global challenges. As Ban Ki-moon's time in office winds up, many UN experts are assessing areas that his successor could prioritize. A recent survey by the Center on International Cooperation highlighted a range of potential priorities in addition to long-running concerns such as human rights and nuclear proliferation including *(i)* the regulation of new security technologies such as drones and cyberweapons; *(ii)* illicit flows and international drug policy; and *(iii)* growing economic inequality.²⁷ Whoever becomes Secretary-General will have to use considerable political judgment in choosing which of these issues to grasp. But a friendly power such as Finland could again play a role in building political support behind initiatives on these issues.

Summary: Finland is hardly the only friend of the UN that will want to carve out political space to address these global problems. It is most likely to succeed in doing so if it build coalition with other countries to pursue its global priorities – just as it has based its work on mediation on cooperation with Turkey and worked with Mexico on SPMs. Nonetheless, Finland has the intellectual capital and diplomatic experience to take a leading role on issues such as global health security at the UN.

Conclusion: Protecting Finland's national interests through the UN

²⁷ Sarah Hearn, Jeffrey Strew and Alison Burt, "Meeting Summary: Updating the Rules and Infrastructure for Globalization", Center on International Cooperation, 6/7/2015.

This paper has argued that the UN can and does play a significant role in advancing Finland's national interests through multiple channels, even if it does so imperfectly. More specifically, it has argued that the UN offers *(i)* diplomatic mechanisms for countering mitigating the threat from Russia; *(ii)* a range of political, military and humanitarian tools for limiting the crises in the MENA region and their spillover into Europe; *(iii)* a framework for developing European security cooperation, including cooperation with the US; and *(iv)* a platform for handling a wide variety global problems that impinge on Finland's security and place on the world stage.

Yet the paper has also been blunt about the obstacles to the UN in playing these roles. These include Russia's ability to block Security Council initiatives over crises such as that in Ukraine, the massive strain on UN systems in the MENA region, and organizational failures such as the WHO's poor response to the Ebola outbreak. The UN serves Finland's interests in numerous ways, but it does not always do so well.

Helsinki cannot resolve these problems on its own. But it does have opportunities to contribute to the UN's effectiveness across the areas discussed. These include:

1. Increasing the UN's ability to handle threats from Russia by:
 - Devoting extra resources to UN efforts to monitor human rights in the former Soviet space as an objective counter Russian information campaigns.
 - Increasing the UN's ability to support de-escalation of current and future crises with Russia by (i) providing additional resources to the Secretary-General for Russia-related expertise; and (ii) commissioning lessons learned studies of previous de-escalatory processes, such as those over Kosovo.
 - Supporting UN cooperation with the OSCE, especially in sharing UN guidance and lessons learned for the OSCE's efforts to reboot its operational capacity.
2. Providing emergency assistance to the UN's efforts in MENA by:

- Continuing to expand political and financial support to UN mediation efforts across the region;
 - Cooperating with partners such as the other Nordic nations and Ireland on (i) broad strategic planning and (ii) case-specific contingency work on making UN operations fit-for-purpose in the face of rising Islamist threats;
 - Acting as policy-leader on efforts to reinforce the UN humanitarian system after its failures in MENA before the World Humanitarian Summit.
3. Developing the UN as a framework for closer European security cooperation by:
- Initiating efforts (again with natural partner such as Ireland, and in coordination with the UN secretariat and EU External Action Service) to bridge EU-UN gaps on issues including planning, SSR and training;
 - Where possible, working with the NATO secretariat on parallel processes to strengthen the UN-NATO relationship;
 - Conducting triangular discussions with the US and EU/NATO partners on how to reinforce UN missions in the context of transatlantic burden sharing.
4. Addressing global challenges by:
- Leading the international response to the high-level study of UNSCR 1325;
 - Acting as a catalyst for UN-led efforts to review the WHO and broader multilateral architecture for epidemic response in the wake of Ebola;
 - Studying options for future work on global challenges, such as new technologies, with the next Secretary-General to help set the UN's future agenda.

Some of these proposals are narrow – others very broad. Many could only make sense if closely coordinated with the actions of like-minded UN members. Yet if Finland is

willing to experiment with some of these options, it has opportunities to buttress its national security through the UN in parallel with its activities in the EU and in partnership with NATO. At a time when Finland and its European partners face serious and worsening threats, they must pursue these concrete goals rather than “the luxury of making an emotionally satisfying gesture at the United Nations.”