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COMMENT

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Sizeable cuts ahead > Finland needs to define its objectives in the area of military crisis management more clearly

Finland is planning significant cuts to the military crisis management budget. The government wants the country to participate in fewer operations and limit the number of troops sent abroad. This challenges Finland to define more clearly what it wants to achieve through its participation in military crisis management.

Finland has long sought to maintain a high profile in international crisis management. Even though the number of Finns participating in crisis management operations has declined considerably since peaking in the early 2000s, a total of 625 Finns are currently carrying out international crisis management duties: 502 in military operations and 123 in civilian operations.

Finland's active role in crisis management has been rooted in a widely shared view of the related benefits. The previous government's 2012 report on security and defence policy, for example, states that Finland participates in crisis management in order to support security, stability and conflict resolution, "and to strengthen Finland's security, international standing and defence capability".

On the surface, Juha Sipilä's government seems to be steering the same course. According to the government programme, "Finland will continue active participation in international crisis management".

In practice, however, there are big changes ahead as the government is planning to significantly reduce its spending in this specific area, with the expenditure set to drop from 101.3 million euros in 2014 to 85.6 million in 2016 and then progres-

sively further from 2016 onwards. In the future, Finland's spending on military crisis management is likely to amount to approximately 60 million euros per year.

In order to implement the cuts, the government wants Finland to participate in fewer operations and to reduce the total number of troops deployed. The government programme states that in 2017 Finland should participate in nine military crisis management operations instead of the 12 it currently contributes to. In addition, readiness to participate in 1-2 additional operations should be maintained. The medium-term goal of the government is participation in 5-7 operations and the readiness to contribute to one additional operation.

The most radical figures put forward in the government programme concern the number of personnel serving in crisis management operations: instead of the 500 soldiers serving abroad today, the government programme talks of a contribution in the region of 90-120 soldiers from 2017 onwards. Defence Minister Jussi Niinistö has, however, emphasised that the numbers mentioned in the government programme are not carved in stone and can be adjusted to the situation at hand. The same goes for the

budget: if necessary, participation in additional operations can be funded from supplementary allocations.

Despite the existing room for manoeuvre, it is clear that the spending cuts will force Finland to carefully consider which operations – new or old – it will contribute to and how. Against this backdrop, Finland should more clearly define its objectives and priorities in the area of military crisis management and consider how it can best meet these objectives. Similar demands have been expressed by various experts in recent years. However, the planned cutbacks make them all the more pressing.

So far, the Finnish government has not laid out its views on the future direction of Finland's participation in military crisis management. The government programme merely notes that Finland should focus on crisis management operations that have the greatest impact and significance from the national point of view. However, this ostensibly clear statement raises more questions than it answers, as the impact and significance of the operations from the point of view of Finland depend entirely on what it is that Finland seeks to achieve.

Various reasons can be given to justify Finland's participation in

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military crisis management also in the future. For example, the idea that the European Union should play a greater role in tackling the root causes of the ongoing refugee crisis has received broad support in Finland and other member states. One of the EU's potential strengths in responding to the conflicts in its neighbourhood is its ability to deal with crises in a comprehensive manner, that is, to combine instruments like civilian and military crisis management, humanitarian aid and development policy.

Successive Finnish governments have strongly advocated the idea of comprehensive crisis management – both nationally and at the EU level. Could strengthening the comprehensive approach – with a particular focus on the EU's neighbourhood – thus be one of the key priorities of Finnish military crisis management?

Or should Finland react to the tensions in the Baltic Sea Region by approaching international crisis management more from the point of view of national defence? In that case, Finland's participation in international crisis management should be contingent upon the needs of the Finnish Defence Forces.

And what about the potential indirect benefits of crisis management? To what extent does Finland

see crisis management as a way to support the UN, strengthen the EU's foreign, security and defence policies, enhance its partnership with NATO or simply raise its own international profile?

Ideally, individual operations help Finland achieve several goals at once. In practice, however, Finland will have to make tough choices. Defining the objectives of the country's participation in military crisis management should thus be a key question when the government starts to prepare its upcoming reports on foreign and security policy, as well as defence policy.