**The creation of Greater integration coherence within the UN system**

Following the end of the Cold War, UN Member States began to search for more effective responses to intra-state conflicts. Starting in the late 1980s, the UN Security Council increasingly authorized multi-dimensional peacekeeping missions combining political, military and civilian actions to support transitions to independence or from war to peace. In 1997, the concept of ‘integration’ was introduced by the Secretary-General to reflect evolving practice on the ground. It aspired to ensure a higher degree of coherence among UN entities to help achieve these ambitious peacekeeping and peace building goals. This report provides an overview of the UN’s pursuit of coherence and the evolution of the concept of UN integration.

The main purpose of UN integration is to increase coherence within the UN system, aimed at maximizing the individual and collective impact of the UN system towards peace consolidation. However, beyond this basic familiarity with the concept there was often a limited understanding and awareness of the details of the policy and guidance on implementation.

The benefits and risks of UN integration for humanitarian space have been intensely debated for many years. Some UN humanitarian staff, and many staff in non-UN humanitarian organizations, remains deeply skeptical that UN integration can benefit humanitarian action. Many NGOs are opposed to UN integration on principle, arguing that integration arrangements blur the distinction between humanitarian, military and political action, subordinate humanitarian priorities to political prerogatives and therefore place humanitarian action at significant risk. Conversely, many in the UN political and peacekeeping community stress the need for enhanced coherence and highlight the positive experiences of UN integration and the significant progress made in policy development and practice in recent years.

**Evolution and implementation of UN integration**

The concept of ‘integration’ is not new in the UN system. Various efforts to achieve greater coherence within the UN predate the formal introduction of the term ‘integration’ in 1997. The concept has evolved, however, into a formal policy aimed at ‘maximizing the individual and collective impact of the UN’s response, concentrating on those activities required to consolidate peace’ (UN, 2008). The policy is now applicable to all conflict and post-conflict settings where the UN has a Country Team and a multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation or country-specific political mission/office. Current policy provisions also seek to address concerns about the potential impact of UN integration on humanitarian space, specifying that integrated arrangements ‘should take full account of recognized humanitarian principles, allow for the protection of humanitarian space, and facilitate effective humanitarian coordination with all humanitarian actors’. Recent policy decisions not only seek to prevent or mitigate potential negative impacts of integration arrangements on humanitarian space, but also to offer advantages, stating that ‘an integrated approach and integration arrangements can yield significant benefits for humanitarian operations’ (UN, 2008).

Another change in policy that sought in part to address humanitarian concerns was a greater emphasis on the strategic elements of integration, which include a shared vision of the UN’s strategic objectives; closely aligned or integrated planning; a set of agreed results, timelines and responsibility for the delivery of tasks critical to consolidating peace; and agreed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation among UN actors. As outlined, in current policy and guidance, the country-level arrangements created to support these strategic elements should be determined by the context.

Despite these developments, the research team found that the concept of UN integration remains poorly understood amongst UN and non-UN staff and has been inconsistently applied in practice, including with respect to the provisions on humanitarian space. These deficiencies stem from a general lack of awareness on the part of some UN and non-UN staff of the content of the policy; limited ownership by some UN agency and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) staff of the policy more broadly; limited understanding amongst some Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Political Affairs (DPA) staff of the operational relevance of humanitarian principles; and a lack of transparency in decision-making processes and of accountability for non- compliance with the policy, including as it relates to humanitarian space. These factors have contributed to a climate of mistrust and negativity, and have entrenched the positions of supporters and detractors of UN integration.

**So, what now?**

For more than two decades, the United Nations has developed policies and practices to create greater coherence within the UN system. Today, UN integration is a formal policy aimed at maximizing the individual and collective impact of the UN to consolidate peace and applies to every country context where a UN peacekeeping or political mission, UN country team of development, and humanitarian agencies coincide. Yet, the benefits and risks of UN integration have been intensely debated for a great number of years. Some humanitarians remain deeply skeptical that UN integration can benefit humanitarian action. Other humanitarians are opposed to UN integration on principle, arguing that integration arrangements blur the distinction between humanitarian, military and political action, subordinate humanitarian priorities to political prerogatives and therefore place humanitarian action at significant risk. Conversely, many in the UN political and peacekeeping community stress the need for enhanced coherence and highlight the positive experiences of UN integration and the significant progress made in policy development and practice in recent years.

In 2010, the UN Integration Steering Group commissioned the Humanitarian Policy Group and the Stimson Center to undertake an independent study to explore the impact of UN integration arrangements on humanitarian space and make recommendations towards the improved management of this impact. The study found both positive and negative impacts of UN integration arrangements on humanitarian space and evolving policies and practices over the last decade intended to better protect humanitarian space. Despite these reforms, the debate remains polarized and stakeholders - including UN departments, funds, agencies and programs - should redouble their efforts to promote greater awareness and consistent implementation of policy provisions that seek to ensure that UN integration arrangements protect humanitarian space. They should also do much more to build confidence across the political, peacekeeping and humanitarian communities to help ensure that the potential benefits, of Greater integration coherence within the UN system, are maximized, and the risks minimized.

**Useful links:**

<http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7526.pdf>

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2429TST%20Issues%20Brief_Global%20Governance_FINAL.pdf>

<http://www.un.org/events/panel/resources/pdfs/HLP-SWC-FinalReport.pdf>

<http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/tcpr.htm>

<https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/UNDG-perspectives-on-organizational-arrangements-May-2015.pdf>

<https://www.unjiu.org/en/reports-notes/JIU%20Products/JIU_REP_2009_5_English.pdf>

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