

# **Civil-Military Cooperation in Humanitarian Assistance: Integrated Missions as a “Best Practice” in UN Response**

**Maureen Mersmann  
Issue-Specific Briefing Paper  
Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies  
University of Denver  
2011**

## **Abstract**

*Humanitarianism increasingly is viewed as one part of a broader strategy to manage the transition from a conflict to post-conflict environment and build a lasting peace. Military and civilian actors in the humanitarian sphere are not only peering at a common reality, but becoming increasingly intertwined in their dealings with it. Project- and program-specific “best practices” are specified; the United Nations’ integrative role is featured.*

**(Keywords: civil-military cooperation, integration, coherence)**

## **Introduction:**

In recent history, war and humanitarianism have always been connected. As Peter Hoffman and Thomas Weiss so aptly state, warriors and humanitarians peer through different lenses at a common reality<sup>1</sup>. Humanitarianism has historically been characterized primarily by the articulated principles of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, but has begun to evolve from a strictly palliative measure to a more interventionist model. Rather than neutrally working to save lives and alleviate immediate suffering, humanitarianism is viewed as one part of a broader strategy to manage the transition from a conflict to post-conflict environment and build a lasting peace. In this context, military and civilian actors in the humanitarian sphere are not only peering at a common reality, but becoming increasingly intertwined in their dealings with it.

Military organizations have historically been involved in a variety of foreign assistance activities. The belief that a military can make a significant contribution to the development of a country while increasing popular support for itself and its government is not new – it dates back even to Roman empire-building. Civil-military cooperation can take many forms: projects in which a military works with a host-nation military, projects in which a military works with civilians from its home country, projects in which a military works with host-nation civilians, and projects which incorporate multiple varieties of the previous relationships<sup>2</sup>. The predominant

---

<sup>1</sup> Hoffman, Peter J., and Thomas G. Weiss. 2006. *Sword & Salve: Confronting New Wars and Humanitarian Crises*. Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. p11.

<sup>2</sup> De Pauw, John W., and George A. Luz. 1992. *Winning the Peace: The Strategic Implications of Military Civic Action*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

model for United Nations responses to complex emergencies – Integrated Missions – reflects most closely the fourth variety.

A UN Integrated Mission is ‘an instrument with which the UN seeks to help countries in the transition from war to lasting peace, or address a similarly complex situation that requires a system-wide UN response, through subsuming various actors and approaches within an overall political-strategic crisis management framework.’<sup>3</sup> The origins of integrated missions, sometimes also referred to as the ‘coherence agenda,’ can be found in the transition from “first generation” peacekeeping to the complex operations that have characterized UN responses since the 1990s<sup>4</sup>. A series of responses to complex emergencies during that time, and critical reactions to those responses, prompted the UN to undergo several reviews of its operations. This work will attempt to articulate best practices in UN response to complex emergencies, as articulated through its own policies and publications.

### **Policy Framework:**

In Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Haiti, Mozambique and Somalia, the UN found itself embedded in a series of complex emergencies, requiring a multifunctional response from the political, military, development, and humanitarian arms of the organization. Several widely criticized missions (Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia among them) prompted the then Secretary General to undertake a broad review of the work of the UN. Prominent among the resulting publications in the late 1990s and early 2000s are several documents promoting greater coherence between political, military, and humanitarian action. These documents identify the

---

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN Document A/55/305S/2000/809, New York: United Nations, August 2000. (Brahimi Report.)

<sup>4</sup> Eide, Espen, Anja Kaspersen, Randolph Kent, and Karen von Hippel. *Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations*. Independent study for the Expanded UN ECHA Core Group, May 2005.

strengths and weaknesses of response operations and recommend greater coherence as a strategy for moving forward.

The Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, in 1996, published *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from Rwanda*. It identifies as a major problem the fact that, while humanitarian agencies on the ground acted admirably (though their actions were quite limited), there was a lack of political will on the part of UN member states to intervene. Thus, the report concludes, had appropriate political decisions been taken early on, it is apparent that much of the humanitarian operation subsequently required would have been unnecessary. In effect, humanitarian action substituted for political action<sup>5</sup>. This report also goes on to recommend increased coherence between political, military and humanitarian arms of the UN.

In a 1997 report on *Renewing the United Nations*, the Secretary General called for a more united and integrated UN both at headquarters and in the field<sup>6</sup>. He instituted a system of integrated missions and declared that system-wide integration in the field would be one of his key objectives, the purpose of which was to ensure that “humanitarian strategies as well as longer-term development aims are fully integrated into the overall peacekeeping effort.”<sup>7</sup> This call from the SG and resulting alterations in mission structure clearly articulated that the UN had recognized coherence as a primary driver in mission success.

The Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, was commissioned by the Secretary General in 1999 to assess the shortcomings of the system at that

---

<sup>5</sup> Erickson, John. *International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from Rwanda*. Synthesis report for the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. March 1996.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, *Renewing the United Nations – A Programme for Reform*, UN Document A/51/950. July 1997.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, *Annual Report of the Secretary General on the Work of the Organization*. UN Document A/52/1. September 1997.

time and to make frank, specific, and realistic recommendations for change<sup>8</sup>. The full report (commonly referred to as the Brahimi Report) was issued in August of 2000 and included in the recommendations of the panel was the move towards an integrated mission structure. While no mention is made specifically of ‘integrated missions’ as such in the body of the report, it does call for Integrated Mission Task Forces becoming the standard vehicle for planning and supporting UN missions<sup>9</sup>.

Integration was further solidified as the guiding principle for UN operations in post-conflict situations in the Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions issued in 2006. This note clearly positions integration as the framework for ‘linking the different dimensions of peacebuilding (political, development, humanitarian, human rights, rule of law, social and security aspects) into a coherent support strategy’<sup>10</sup>.

Integrated missions have continually evolved and have been, or are currently being, carried out in Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, Haiti, Iraq, Kosovo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)<sup>11</sup>. These missions increasingly seek to promote coherent approaches to crisis situations, and a series of parallel efforts to promote such coherence have been identified. First, an overarching strategic vision of the main goal of UN efforts; second, mission planning which reflects the strategic vision; and third, mission design which brings all relevant UN and non-UN actors together in a way that reflects and maintains the overarching vision<sup>12</sup>.

### **Humanitarian Challenge:**

---

<sup>8</sup> Brahimi Report.

<sup>9</sup> Brahimi Report.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, *Guidance on Integrated Mission*, Note from the Secretary-General. February 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Harmer, Adele. ‘Integrated Missions: a Threat to Humanitarian Security?’ *International Peacekeeping* (2008) 15:4, 528 – 539.

<sup>12</sup> Eide et al 2005.

The integration of all forms of UN action with a common purpose in a complex emergency does offer a compelling promise of providing long-term peace and stability to affected populations<sup>13</sup>. These efforts have raised some concerns, however; principally among them the incorporation of humanitarian assistance into this common strategic framework.

A fundamental operational principle – that, in the context of their work, the humanitarian imperative comes first<sup>14</sup> – some claim has been threatened. Critics suggest that the humanitarian imperative is necessarily impartial, independent, and neutral and the humanitarian mandate is limited in scope: to provide direct assistance to people in immediate need, wherever and whoever they may be<sup>15</sup>. However, the purpose and goals of integrated UN missions are far less limited: they aim to manage transitions from a state of conflict to a sustainable peace<sup>16</sup>. The incorporation of humanitarian action into a broader political-military framework may, as some have suggested, give politics and diplomacy a humanitarian dimension, but some claim it will result in the politicization of humanitarian aid<sup>17</sup>.

The goal of providing immediate life-saving assistance, while at the same time supporting long-term development and policy goals, is a complicated one. Humanitarian assistance, by its traditional definition, has been limited. However, meeting immediate needs and saving lives in the here and now may not be incompatible with ‘managing transitions,’ as broader UN mandates often require. Humanitarian aid is increasingly becoming seen as a way to address root causes of conflict as well as treating the immediate effects of the same.

---

<sup>13</sup> Charny, Joel. ‘Upholding Humanitarian Principles in an Effective Integrated Response.’ *Ethics & International Affairs* (2004) 18:2, 13-20.

<sup>14</sup> International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross. ‘Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.’ *International Review of the Red Cross* (1996) 310, 55-130.

<sup>15</sup> De Torrenté, Nicolas. ‘Humanitarianism Sacrificed: Integration’s False Promise.’ *Ethics & International Affairs* (2004) 18.

<sup>16</sup> Eide et al 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Charny 2004.

Proponents of integration, or the coherence agenda, suggest that humanitarian relief, when properly carried out, provides a basis for future development and that, in turn, good development reduces future need for humanitarian aid<sup>18</sup>. This placement of humanitarian efforts in a continuum of long-term development puts humanitarian action in a broader context of peacebuilding and development. Mission integration is underpinned by the concept that only by addressing the root causes of conflict can societies heal<sup>19</sup>. Addressing the root cause of a conflict is a complex, political, and seemingly endless task, often requiring reform of political and justice systems, creating or training armed forces, and managing development.

**Summary:**

There is broad recognition of the fact that conflict and humanitarianism have always been and will always be interconnected. The controversy surrounds issues of if, when, and to what extent actors who can participate in conflict – either as combatants or providers of security – ought to be involved in the provision of humanitarian aid. The structure of UN integrated missions supports the conclusion that humanitarian action is only one part of the set of necessary actions to be taken in a complex emergency – especially one requiring an intervention. Greater coherence and integration among and between various strategic arms of a UN mission has been articulated by the organization itself to be the best way to move forward in response to complex emergencies. As the nature of war evolves, so too does humanitarian response. Integrated missions are one attempt to address the increasingly complex nature of conflict.

---

<sup>18</sup> Macrae, Joanna. 'Understanding Integration from Rwanda to Iraq.' *Ethics & International Affairs* (2004) 18.

<sup>19</sup> Charny 2004.

## **Bibliography:**

Charny, Joel. "Upholding Humanitarian Principles in an Effective Integrated Response." *Ethics & International Affairs* (2004) 18:2, 13-20.

De Pauw, John W., and George A. Luz. 1992. *Winning the Peace: The Strategic Implications of Military Civic Action*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

De Torrenté, Nicolas. "Humanitarianism Sacrificed: Integration's False Promise." *Ethics & International Affairs* (2004) 18.

Eide, Espen, Anja Kaspersen, Randolph Kent, and Karen von Hippel. *Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations*. Independent study for the Expanded UN ECHA Core Group, May 2005.

Erickson, John. *International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from Rwanda*. Synthesis report for the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. March 1996.

Harmer, Adele. "Integrated Missions: a Threat to Humanitarian Security?" *International Peacekeeping* (2008) 15:4, 528 – 539.

Hoffman, Peter J., and Thomas G. Weiss. 2006. *Sword & Salve: Confronting New Wars and Humanitarian Crises*. Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. p11.

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross. "Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief." *International Review of the Red Cross* (1996) 310, 55-130.

United Nations, *Guidance on Integrated Mission*, Note from the Secretary-General. February 2006.

United Nations, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN Document A/55/305S/2000/809, New York: United Nations, August 2000. (Brahimi Report.)

United Nations, *Annual Report of the Secretary General on the Work of the Organization*. UN Document A/52/1. September 1997.

United Nations, *Renewing the United Nations – A Programme for Reform*, UN Document A/51/950. July 1997.