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Peace Operations and Humanitarian Space: How Can the Military and Civilians Cooperate in Protecting Civilians? *

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The subject of this paper – peace operations, humanitarian space and the protection of civilians – has been a long standing, and contentious, topic of debate among military and humanitarian actors.

This debate has not been confined to UN peace operations alone. Military forces from NATO, the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have all faced, at one time or another, protection challenges and been criticized for protection shortcomings. The campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, and now again in Somalia and Libya, have kept these issues at the forefront of the humanitarian agenda. The debate continues, and indeed the discussion in the Challenges Forum, this year and last,¹ reflects the sense that this is unfinished business.

This paper, written from the perspective of a former head of a UN peacekeeping mission, focuses on three points of contention that have characterized and conditioned that debate in UN peace operations:

- civil-military relations, and the perceived clash between UN military goals and humanitarian objectives in conflict situations;
- the structural integration of humanitarian coordination in UN peace missions, which has created, in the view of some humanitarian actors, a conflict of interest between political ends and humanitarian principles; and
- the seeming intrusion of UN peacekeepers into humanitarian space in the context of civil-military cooperation activities (CIMIC), blurring the lines between armed peacekeeping and humanitarian action.

The paper looks at how these issues have interacted, influenced and impacted UN peace operations. It will draw some conclusions on non-military ways to protect civilians and how they can be articulated within peacekeeping activities; it will conclude with some recommendations on how to improve civil-military cooperation to better protect civilians.

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¹ See the report of the 2010 meeting of the Challenges Forum held in Canberra, Australia.

Civil-Military Relations: a Marriage of Necessity?

Civil-military relations are sometimes confused with CIMIC – civil-military cooperation. The former relates to the relationship of military authorities to civilian political authority. The latter has come to define cooperation between military and non-military actors in furtherance of military or security objectives.

Civil-military cooperation is a well established principle of UN peace operations. UN multidimensional peacekeeping missions, unlike NATO or EUFOR operations, are usually structured around a civil-military relationship that gives primacy to the political leadership of the mission: the Force Commander reports to the civilian, political head of the mission who, in turn, reports to the Secretary-General and the Security Council.²

When the objectives assigned to UN forces are purely military in character, the relationship between the civilian and military structures is reasonably straightforward. The strategic parameters of UN military operations are defined in the mission mandate handed down by the Security Council and Force Commanders have the primary responsibility for designing and implementing the operational strategy that is required to implement the directives of the Council with oversight exercised by the Secretary-General and the Head of Mission (HoM). However, as peacekeeping missions have been assigned growing responsibilities for civilian protection, the lines between civilian and military responsibility have increasingly overlapped at strategic and tactical levels.

Expanding the reach of protection

Starting with the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 1999, peacekeeping missions have been given mandates with language calling for “the protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence”.³ This language has been used in all of the large multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations deployed over the last ten years. In the case of the two largest missions – UNAMID⁴ in Darfur and MONUC/MONUSCO⁵ in the Congo – the protection of civilians was assigned as the principal priority of those missions, with the demand that they “use all necessary means”⁶ to ensure civilian protection.

The failures of UN peacekeeping operations in protecting civilians have been well documented, notably in the landmark Brahimi report⁷ (although its findings were largely based on a review of missions that were undertaken *before* protection language started to become widely adopted in UN mandates). That report, and others, concluded that these failures were systemic and symptomatic of structural weaknesses in the way the UN mandated, resourced and managed protection operations.

Almost a decade later, the “New Horizons” non-paper drafted by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS), reviewed

² See “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Principles and Guidelines”, DPKO/DFS, United Nations, New York, March 2008, chapter 7, Part III.

³ See Victoria Holt and Glyn Taylor, *Protecting Civilians in the Context of UN Peacekeeping Operations. Successes, Setbacks and Remaining Challenges*, Independent Study, DPKO/OCHA, New York, 2009, chapter 2.

⁴ African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur.

⁵ United Nations Mission in the Congo (MONUC), which was succeeded by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Congo (MONUSCO) in July 2010.

⁶ For a brief review of how protection mandates have evolved in UN peacekeeping mandates, see Alan Doss, “Great Expectations: UN Peacekeeping, Civilian Protection and the Use of Force”, *Geneva Papers – Research Series* n°4, GCSP, Geneva, 2011.

⁷ *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305, United Nations, New York, 2000.

progress in UN peacekeeping, examined the challenges ahead, and pointed to a generic problem, warning that “the mismatch between expectations and capacity to provide comprehensive protection creates a significant credibility challenge for UN peacekeeping”.⁸ Whether generic or mission specific in origin, the challenge of protection has required a step-shift in the civilian-military relationship in UN peace operations. Three areas of innovation stand out: policy development, protection management and operational response.

Adapting the policy framework

Protection of civilians (POC) mandates have obliged mission personnel to work in a more coordinated, joined-up fashion to improve protection. This requirement has been spelt out as UN policy in the following terms: “The protection of civilians requires concerted and coordinated action among the military, police and civilian components of a United Nations peacekeeping operation and must be mainstreamed into the planning and conduct of core activities. United Nations humanitarian and non-governmental actors (NGO) partners also undertake a broad range of activities in support of the protection of civilians. Close coordination with these actors is, therefore, essential”.⁹

How has this directive been applied in practice? The vehicle favoured for enhancing protection coordination is the country protection strategy. To date only a handful of these strategies have been developed largely in response to, rather than in anticipation of, a protection crisis.

Although the UN General Assembly and Security Council have adopted resolutions on various aspects of protection, they have not adopted an overall concept of what protection means and implies in a peacekeeping context.¹⁰ The subject is still a highly contentious one as evidenced by the debates in the UN’s Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (so-called C-34), where any notion of forceful external intervention in the name of civilian protection, including by UN peacekeepers, is treated with great caution by many UN member states. In the view of one commentator, this reticence among states may well be heightened by the conflating of the concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) with the civilian protection provisions in UN peacekeeping mandates, “vindicating the ones who fear that civilian protection in peacekeeping operations could be a guise to further interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states”.¹¹

Fortunately, this policy gap has not prevented the UN Secretariat from developing an operational concept for the protection of civilians by peacekeeping missions. The concept is drawn up around a three tier construct¹²: protection through political processes; providing protection from physical violence; and establishing a protective environment.

This three tier approach is a recognition that protection requires not only the physical interventions of armed peacekeepers, indispensable though they may be, but also collateral measures that tackle the underlying political and institutional failures that have resulted in the protection crisis.

⁸ “A New Partnership Agenda. Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping”, non-paper, DPKO/DFS, United Nations, New York, 2009.

⁹ See “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines”, Chapter 2, Part I.

¹⁰ Holt and Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹¹ See Thierry Tardy, “The Dangerous Liaisons of the Responsibility to Protect and the Protection of Civilians in Peacekeeping Operations”, paper under submission.

¹² See “DPKO/DFS Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations”, April 2010, para. 14.

It is also an acknowledgement that a peacekeeping mission – and in particular its military component – cannot resolve a protection crisis in an isolated manner, bereft of collateral support from national actors and the international community. As the DPKO/DFS operational concept points out, “the three tiers are mutually accommodating and should be taken forward simultaneously, in accordance with mission mandates and in light of the circumstances on the ground. In many instances, there will be strong links between the activities in one tier and those of another – the tiers are mutually reinforcing”.¹³

This guidance, together with an inventory of lessons learnt in protection practice and a drafting framework for protection strategies should certainly help current and future UN peacekeeping operations to develop a comprehensive approach that anticipates rather than responds to protection crises. Nevertheless, one recent review of protection strategies cautioned that they subsume but do not necessarily resolve divergences of views on protection “between missions and local authorities on the one hand, and between security and humanitarian dimensions of the missions on the other”.¹⁴

Managing protection

Protection strategies are only as good as their implementation. Effective implementation requires strong management mechanisms to ensure that they are implemented. Where they exist, and provided they enjoy genuine support from the top leadership – civilian and military – such mechanisms can play a critical role, bringing together mission components to design and implement a comprehensive approach to country-specific protection challenges. However, this is not yet a standard mission requirement and some missions clearly still struggle with the problem of integrating civilian and military dimensions into a coherent, joined up, policy planning process. Such mechanisms should include partners that have protection responsibilities and concerns such as the UNHCR, UNHCHR and OCHA. MONUC, for example, established a senior management group for that purpose.

Bringing the wider humanitarian community into protection planning remains a significant challenge. Many humanitarian actors are very reluctant to join any planning exercise that includes the military out of concern that humanitarian principles may be compromised or their neutrality tarnished by association.

For their part, military actors sometimes reciprocate this reticence, even though UN missions are encouraged to reach out to the humanitarian community. Concern for operational security is sometimes cited as the reason for this reluctance to engage but cultural factors may play a role as well. Traditional military hierarchies are not always at ease with the less formal and unceremonious style of humanitarian actors. Where these relationships seem to work well, they are often informal and based on personal relationships, which do not always survive the vagaries of military or civilian staff turnover.

¹³ *Ibid.*, para. 15.

¹⁴ Cedric de Coning *et al.*, *Mission wide strategies for the Protection of Civilians*, Norwegian Institute for International Affairs, Oslo, 2011, p.16.

Rethinking the protection model

Protection failures have also compelled the UN to rethink and re-tool its operational models of protection, emphasizing a more cohesive operational interface between military, police and civilian components.¹⁵

With varying degrees of success, missions such as UNAMID, UNMISS,¹⁶ ONUCI and MONUC/MONUSCO have developed various tactical innovations aimed at enhancing protection. MONUC/MONUSCO, for example, has pioneered an innovative approach with its joint protection teams (JPT) composed of military and civilian staff, working in remote areas where the threat to civilians is high. JPTs have led to a greater insistence on the forward mobility of UN forces to curb attacks, better training for troops engaged in protection duties, enhanced community liaison, surveillance centres and improved tactical intelligence.

“Smart” protection is still very much a work in progress. DPKO/DFS has developed training modules for the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping.¹⁷ They include a range of scenario-based exercises, as well as a module on conflict-related sexual violence. It remains to be seen how widely this training package, which is available to all troop and police contributors and peacekeeping training centres, will be used and whether, as a result, commanders and troops will be better prepared for protection duties.

The limits of innovation

All of these efforts to strengthen mission protection capacities and coordination, while highly welcome, have not prevented egregious violence against civilians in places like the eastern Congo and Darfur, essentially for three reasons.

First, the nature of the protection challenge – politically inspired violence, cross-border insurgency, uncontrolled criminality, among others – may change over time. Capabilities and tactics need to change accordingly. This is not easy for the UN, which constantly faces an uphill struggle to find the right blend of military and logistical capabilities (and qualified civilians) for the job at hand.

This gap is especially apparent in times of crisis. Military doctrine dictates that reserves should be held available to deal with emergencies. However, protection is a very troop intensive exercise and when crisis strikes, the UN has no recourse to surge capacity. Such capacity may be forthcoming from bilateral sources (as it was in Sierra Leone and at times in the Congo and Côte d’Ivoire) but there is no certainty. Standby arrangements for surge capacity have been discussed in UN circles for many years but there seems to be little progress in turning such ideas into operational reality.

¹⁵ See “Lessons Learned Note on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping Operations”, DPKO/DFS, United Nations, April 2010.

¹⁶ United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the training issue see Ingrid Breidlid *et al.*, *Report of the Conference on Peacekeeping Vision 2015: Capabilities for Future Mandates*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2011; also Alan Doss, “What Capabilities to Bridge the Expectations Gap?”, in Thierry Tardy (ed.), “For a Renewed Consensus on UN Peacekeeping Operations”, *Geneva Papers – Conference Series* n°23, GCSP, Geneva, October 2011.

The second reason lies in the rationale for the deployment of UN peacekeepers. Typically, the international community has sought to address armed conflict through the negotiation of peace agreements, on the assumption that peace brings protection. UN peacekeepers have usually been deployed to support peace agreements not protection. However, peace agreements often fail and attacks against civilians have continued or worsened, leaving the peacekeepers trying to protect civilians under imminent threat without having the means to do so because the missions were initially configured to keep a negotiated peace and not to enforce protection.

In practice, protection has usually worked best when the troop-to-task and area-to-troop ratios were relatively favourable and when the deployment of UN forces on the ground was quick enough to achieve area domination before armed spoilers could re-assert control. In other situations, where the UN build-up has been protracted and the ratios less favourable, UN forces have struggled to assert the primacy of protection.¹⁸

A third element that has to be factored into the protection equation is national responsibility. In all of its resolutions and pronouncements on civilian protection, either at a thematic or mission level, the Security Council has insisted on the duty of national authorities to ensure the protection of their citizens. This is a primary prerogative of sovereignty, a view echoed in the R2P concept. Peacekeepers are usually called in when governments are unable or unwilling to exercise their full powers of sovereignty, including their responsibility to protect their own people. When national security forces are incapable of stopping violence against civilians or, worse, are themselves guilty of inflicting abuse, the responsibility to protect quickly defaults to the peacekeeping missions, even though it may have neither the resources nor the authority to discharge that responsibility.

Given the fact that missions often face the dilemma in which they are deployed to support a host government that in some instances is responsible for harming civilians with physical violence, DPKO has instructed its missions that, "...in cases where the government is unable or unwilling to fulfill its responsibility, Security Council mandates give missions the authority to act independently to protect civilians. Bearing in mind that missions operate within the principles of peacekeeping and in accordance with the mandate, they are authorized to use force against any party, including elements of government forces, where such elements are themselves engaged in physical violence against civilians."¹⁹

Despite this admonition, it is still a big ask – politically and militarily – for UN peacekeepers to launch operations against government forces. Troop contributing countries may well question the use of their contingents for this purpose, arguing that such operations, conducted without consent of the host government, exceed the peacekeeping remit.

So, unfortunately, unless there is a parallel and effective programme of security sector reform (SSR) in place, the UN's ability to protect civilians is likely to be compromised by the abusive behavior of undisciplined national security forces. In Sierra Leone, the national army was effectively cantoned and retrained under British supervision; the United Kingdom made a multi-year commitment to SSR that included not only re-training but also management reforms tied to budgetary support. In Liberia, the army was essentially abolished and the United States has funded and trained a new and smaller professional army. These measures

¹⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of this issue and some comparative analysis see Alan Doss, "Great Expectations", *op.cit.*

¹⁹ "DPKO/DFS Framework for Drafting Comprehensive POC Strategies", United Nations, New York, 2012.

greatly reduced the protection demands on the UN missions, which did not have to worry about protection dangers emanating from the government's own security forces.

In contrast, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and in Côte d'Ivoire, the national security forces remained intact and under the control of the government, compounded, in the case of the Congo, by the attempted integration of thousands of poorly trained and ill-disciplined ex-combatants. A MONUC effort to promote reform at the operational level in the Kivus quickly ran into trouble when Congolese army units were implicated in atrocities.

Overall the conclusion that emerges from the experiences of the last decade is that civilian-military relationships at the mission level – institutional and operational – are gradually being re-shaped to strengthen UN interventions in support of civilian protection. However, this is an incremental process, which needs to be reinforced. There are still profound challenges that remain unresolved. One is how far UN peacekeepers can engage in the preemptive use of force to prevent attacks on civilians. Another one is how UN forces should respond to the protection challenges posed by abusive national security forces.

Squaring the Circle: Integration and the Projection of Humanitarian Space

The notion of a UN mission integrating civilian, military and police components reaches back to the days of ONUC, the original peacekeeping mission in the Congo.²⁰ However, the concept and structure of an integrated mission encompassing a humanitarian dimension was only formally adopted in late 2000 with the appointment of a Deputy Special Representative to the UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), who combined this function with that of UN humanitarian coordinator.²¹

Integration in practice

Over the intervening decade since the adoption of the humanitarian integration model in UNAMSIL, the debate about integration, its implications, merits, drawbacks and impact on the humanitarian system and the concept of humanitarian space has rumbled on, revolving around several, recurring issues:

- Security of UN humanitarian workers may be compromised by association when UN peacekeepers are engaged in robust action;
- Protagonists who are in conflict with peacekeepers may restrict humanitarian access in retaliation;
- Perceptions of humanitarian actors by local communities and non-state armed actors may be negatively affected by the military activities of the mission and any misbehaviour of peacekeepers;
- Humanitarian advocacy may be constrained by the subordination of humanitarian principles to the political aims of a mission (an argument also used against the “double hat” when UN resident coordinators are designated as humanitarian coordinators).

²⁰ The ONUC organisation chart established civilian as well as military structures and relationships, including with UN agencies and programmes. In recent times, the challenges of mission integration and coordination have been well defined in Chapter 7, part III of the so-called “Capstone Doctrine”, “United Nations Peacekeeping: Principles and Guidelines”.

²¹ For a more detailed account of the decision-making, see Thorsten Benner, Stephan Mergenthaler and Philipp Rotmann, *The New World of UN Peace Operations*, OUP, 2011, chapter 7.

These issues were re-visited in a recent study commissioned by the UN Integration Steering Group. That study examined the impact of UN integration arrangements on humanitarian space and concluded (among other findings) that “despite reforms to the policy of integration over the last decade, the debate remains polarized”.²²

In its research, the study team looked at the security of humanitarian workers and stated that the team “found no clear evidence of a direct link between UN integration arrangements and attacks on humanitarian workers in the contexts reviewed.”²³ But the report cautioned that highly visible integration arrangements may blur the distinction between UN political and humanitarian actors and therefore pose an additional risk to the security of humanitarian personnel.

The study also considered the access issue, concluding that in “some cases, UN integration arrangements have supported increased access to UN and non UN humanitarian actors by facilitating the use of mission logistical assets, the provision of area security by UN peacekeeping forces and the use of military escorts”.²⁴ However, the study cautions that this should not become the default option and points to the other impediments to access created by bureaucratic obstacles, insecurity caused by armed groups and poor infrastructure.

On the issue of relations with local stakeholders, the study “did not find evidence of official UN non-contact policies relating to humanitarian engagement... or of a widespread practice of political interference in humanitarian engagement with non-state armed actors”.²⁵ However, it did conclude that integration arrangements should be determined by informed understanding of how integration will be perceived locally.

As regards humanitarian advocacy, the research team found that “in a number of contexts, the UN integration arrangements have facilitated advocacy efforts amongst UN humanitarian and UN peacekeeping and political actors”²⁶, finding also “instances where UN integration arrangements have strengthened the influence of humanitarian considerations in decision making processes within the UN integrated presence”.²⁷

Overall, the study “found evidence that UN integration arrangements have had both positive and negative impact on humanitarian space.”²⁸ A subsequent discussion at the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), acknowledged that “tensions and hostility with regards to integration may stem more from the way in which integration is sometimes being carried out in practice rather than integration *per se*”.²⁹ Indeed, the integration debate has sometimes been driven by institutional positioning within the UN system, as well as personal relationships among actors, rather than an objective assessment of the merits or flaws of integration.

²² Victoria Metcalfe, Alison Giffen and Samir Elhawary, *UN Integration and Humanitarian Space*, The Stimson Centre, Washington, DC, December 2011, p.1.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

²⁷ *Ibid.* In addition, for a personal assessment of this aspect of integration, see also Alan Doss, “Eyewitness: Crisis, Contention and Coherence; Reflections from the Field”, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 15, No.4, August 2008, pp. 574-576.

²⁸ *UN Integration and Humanitarian Space*, *op.cit.*, p.4.

²⁹ *The search for Coherence: UN Integrated Mission and Humanitarian Space*, Humanitarian Policy Group Roundtable Summary, 11 March, 2011, New York, p.9.

Integration, coherence and coordination

The same discussion in the HPG drew a distinction between structural and strategic integration, contending that even if structures are not integrated there should be coherence in UN policies and that “strategic integration, if implemented in an appropriate manner, is in the interest of all”.³⁰ In other words, whatever the degree of structural integration, coherence is a worthwhile objective, difficult though it may be to achieve in practice.

So, can strategic coherence be achieved in the absence of an integrated structure? A call for better coordination is usually the response. However, coordination should not be confused with coherence; coordination can facilitate coherence – it does not replace it.

Personal experience from field operations suggests that coherence (and solution finding) starts with “integrated thinking”,³¹ putting the problems (not mandates) at the centre of the discussion. Ideally, this would find practical expression in some kind of common vision on how partners, inside and outside of an integrated structure, would work together to tackle the inter-related political, security and humanitarian challenges that most conflict situations generate.

This approach is now being attempted within the UN system through integrated mission planning and strategic frameworks. It remains to be seen whether it will work, or if it will go the way of earlier efforts to achieve strategic coherence, which have been dogged by the “shopping list” syndrome of multiple, institutional demands, lacking a clear sense of the priority and cohesion (UN humanitarian appeals have sometimes suffered from the same malaise).

Developing coherence beyond the UN system is of course even more complicated. The reluctance of some humanitarian actors to sit down with military and political actors further complicates the search for coherence in operational situations, which is why, as the HPG suggests, “humanitarians need to find a balance between neutrality and coherence”.³²

Armed Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Action: Blurring the Lines or Expanding the Space?

Humanitarian actors have expressed their concern that armed UN peacekeepers and UN mandated forces are increasingly impinging on humanitarian space, confusing the role of military and humanitarian actors to the detriment of the latter. Much of this concern has centred on CIMIC activities. NATO currently defines CIMIC as “the coordination and cooperation, in support of the mission, between the NATO Commander and civil actors, including national population and local authorities, as well as international, national and non-governmental organizations and agencies”.³³

The UN has not defined CIMIC in a doctrinal sense. Instead, CIMIC is understood as a set of activities that are carried out by peacekeepers, using their own or UN resources, as a means to

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

³¹ Alan Doss, “Eyewitness: Crisis, Contention and Coherence; Reflections from the Field”, *op.cit.*

³² *The search for Coherence, op.cit.*, p.4.

³³ NATO, “Allied Joint Publication 3.4.9: Civil-Military Cooperation”.

reach out to local populations through interaction with communities and civil society, using both dialogue opportunities as well as material assistance (the latter usually funded as quick impact projects – QIPs).

Peacekeeping and protection: trespassing on humanitarian space?

In the case of both UN peacekeeping and UN-mandated operations, the claim has been made that peacekeeping operations are increasingly intruding into and subverting humanitarian space. They are said to do so for two main reasons. First, in providing material assistance, they blur the line between assistance based on humanitarian principles (impartiality, neutrality and independence) and assistance driven by political or military motives. Secondly, they crowd out assistance provided by humanitarian actors, who may be forced to compete on unequal terms with military actors.

The increase in mandated protection responsibilities for UN peacekeeping missions has drawn UN peacekeeping operations ever deeper into this debate on the concept and practice of humanitarian space. Does robust action by UN peacekeepers in defence of civilians restrict humanitarian access? Do UN agencies risk losing their humanitarian access in consequence? And do robust operations enlarge or diminish humanitarian space?

Active protection requires UN peacekeepers to take action to defend civilians. They cannot therefore remain strictly neutral. But neutrality and impartiality should not be confused. The concept of humanitarian space should not be conflated with the notion of neutrality, which would imply that UN peacekeepers (and indeed humanitarian actors) would remain aloof even in the face of attacks on civilians.

It is difficult (and perhaps unwise) to make general assumptions about the impact of robust operations on humanitarian space. In some cases, for example in the Ituri district in eastern Congo, there seems little doubt that robust action, even though it initially caused displacement, did create space for humanitarian agencies to reach vulnerable populations, partly because the action was relatively short lived but also because of the political accommodation with neighbouring Uganda, which helped to constrain the rebel militias. For various reasons, robust action in the Kivus has proved less effective and the level of humanitarian access has waxed and waned in function of the security conditions on the ground.

Protection and proximity: a danger of humanitarian displacement?

There is another important implication for humanitarian space resulting from protection focussed mandates. Protection requires proximity and confidence. Outreach to the local population is therefore essential for peacekeepers charged with providing protection and deterring attacks on civilians. Humanitarian actors, however, have questioned the provision of material assistance by peacekeepers furnished as a part of that outreach, apprehensive about CIMIC displacing and militarizing humanitarian action. This concern has been most loudly expressed in the context of the Afghanistan and Iraq operations but it has also arisen in relation to UN peace operations.

Humanitarian concern about cooperating with the military has occurred even when robust action was not at issue as was the case in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti. As one

review put it, “In order to establish a clear separation from military actors, the humanitarian system created a firewall around itself. This meant missed opportunities”.³⁴

Obviously, UN peacekeepers should not duplicate or replace services that humanitarian actors can provide. But nor should assistance from peacekeepers be ruled out if it is not readily available from humanitarian sources, with the proviso that it is not used to reward or penalize communities or create dependency. There is a risk, of course, that humanitarian action will be used to achieve purely military goals without due respect for humanitarian principle. However, the integrated model favoured by the UN does provide some safeguards by allowing for the articulation of humanitarian concerns at the senior levels of mission leadership.

Conclusions: Getting the Balance Right

This paper concludes with six recommendations on how non-military ways to protect civilians can be better articulated within peacekeeping activities and how civil-military cooperation can be improved for that purpose.

First, protection is about politics. While the credible threat of military force for protection should not be excluded, the overall approach must be political, aimed at ending violent conflict and the denial of basic rights (including access to humanitarian assistance). Integrated protection strategies reflecting this multidimensional approach should be developed up-front, as an urgent and mandatory task for all missions assigned protection duties, not as a post facto add-on. Such strategies should be developed in a consensual, inclusive fashion.

Second, if protection strategies are to have any real prospect of success, they must draw in all armed protagonists (national, and where needed, regional) even those whom the international community would rather keep at bay. That was an important lesson from the Sierra Leone experience where the rebel RUF, despite its horrific record of violence was induced into a peace process and successfully disarmed.

Third, on the ground, a closer rapport between military and civilians is equally vital to protection. Opportunities for creating a civilian-military dialogue and joint planning for protection should be pursued at all levels, central to local. Too often civilians and military are talking past each other. Both need to recognize that they must be part of the solution or they will quickly become part of the problem.

Fourth, joint civilian-military teams should develop operational strategies on the ground in forward areas where the need for protection is most acute. This requires the military to recognize that non-military actors have an important and legitimate stake in the way that military operations are conducted but also for humanitarian stakeholders to accept that the military are vital partners, not to be dogmatically shunned in the name of humanitarian principle.

³⁴ *The Humanitarian System: how does it affect humanitarian space?*, Meeting Summary, ODI (HPG), London, 14 January 2011.

Fifth, joint civil-military consultative mechanisms should be put in place to guide and objectively monitor, on the basis of agreed indicators, the progress of protection and the impact of actions taken in support of protection.

Finally, while the debate on civil-military relations and humanitarian space is certain to continue, it is worth bearing in mind the observation of the HPG that “humanitarian space is not the exclusive domain of humanitarian actors: national and other authorities, which can include both civilian and military institutions, have the right and the obligation to provide for the well-being of the civilian population”.³⁵

Protection is a common challenge which requires a common response.

³⁵ *Humanitarian Space: Concepts, Definitions and Uses*, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 20 October 2010, p.2.