Summary

The Secretary-General has put forward his initial ideas for UN peace and security architecture reform, based on the reviews of peace operations, peacebuilding and women, peace and security. The proposals include two key dimensions: (i) restructuring peace and security departments and offices at headquarters to avoid competition, duplication or lack of functional linkages; and (ii) management reform measures to increase delegation to leadership in the field and speed up processes.

The purpose of this note is to input experiences and views from the host nations of peace operations, in particular but not only members of the g7+ group of countries. The points raised fall in two main areas:

- Support for the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General, and examples of country experiences that illustrate why these changes are important both from a host nation perspective and in support of national ownership;
- Additional ideas on changes to the way the UN operates that could increase the impact and effectiveness of peace operations.

Experiences that illustrate the need for the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General:

1. Merging the regional desks of DPA and DPKO, with PBSO moving to the new D(P)PA.

Practical problems encountered which this reform could help resolve centered around mission transitions. Examples included: (i) the problematic transition from UNAMET to UNTAET in Timor-Leste; (ii) despite good forward planning by the missions, lack of continuity in peacebuilding initiatives started by the peacekeeping contingents in Sierra Leone; (iii) lack of articulation with external economic shocks (Ebola/commodity prices and aid patterns) in Liberia; and (iv) lack of adequate engagement and support from the UN’s counterterrorism entities, in particular in field coordination in Afghanistan.

2. Delegating authority to the field and speed of response.

Practical examples included the inability: (i) of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Timor-Leste to provide for the basic needs of Timorese resistance fighters in cantonment areas, and to retain high-performing staff who were assisting the local authorities; (ii) of the SRSG in Liberia to assist government in transporting payments to civil servants in outlying areas; (iii) of the mission in Guinea Bissau to use locally warehoused street lighting poles for the benefit of safety in the capital city; and (iv) to provide for the transport of delegations from Sierra Leone and Liberia to assist in mediation processes.

Issues raised that are not in the Secretary-General’s current proposal included the need for:

- More robust and more neutral processes of recruitment of SRSGs. On that note, Guatemala noted that the selection process for SRSGs needs to be revisited as should also be the provision of guidance from HQ departments, as well as ensuring that Chapter VI missions stay within their mandate of assisting governments rather than imposing solutions.
- Two-step mandating processes, where an initial mission mandate in a crisis situation is understood by the Security Council and the Fifth Committee to be truly initial, and to be not only refined but possibly significantly adjusted in subsequent mandating processes where the views of national authorities can be taken into account. An exit strategy should be considered from the beginning of this second mandate stage.
- More attention to collaboration across the pillars of development, peace and security and human rights; as well as focus on thematic issues like gender and reconciliation.

Experiences that illustrate the need for the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General:
Background

The purpose of this note is to input experiences and views from the host nations of peace operations, in particular but not only members of the g7+ group of countries. Meetings were held during the UNGA High-Level Week with Ministers from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste; with ministers or senior officials from Guinea-Bissau, South Sudan, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste at a meeting in Lisbon; and with Permanent Representatives of Afghanistan and Guatemala in New York. This note is a brief summary of ideas arising in those discussions.

Findings

1. Support for the Secretary-General’s proposals

All countries interviewed noted the crucial positive role that peace operations had played in their transitions from conflict, but also gave examples of how reform is needed to strengthen effectiveness and national ownership.

2. Restructuring of departments

There was general support from the countries interviewed for the restructuring of the departments to make them more streamlined. In particular, Ministers and senior officials interviewed noted that this change should facilitate transition periods. Examples included those given below.

The transfer from a special political mission to a peacekeeping operation in Timor in late 1999–early 2000 was hampered by lack of communication between the Department of Political Affairs and Department of Peacekeeping Operations (Former President and Prime Minister Gusmão and Former President, Foreign Minister and Minister Ramos-Horta). The UNTAET deployment did not make the best use of the knowledge gained under UNAMET of Timor’s particular conditions: UNAMET staff were little involved in UNTAET planning and UNTAET did not participate in a joint assessment mission with Timorese counterparts and donors, which UNAMET had helped establish. The relationships that UNAMET had developed with the Timorese counterparts were not continued in a smooth way during the transition to UNTAET. This disconnect could have been avoided had UNAMET and UNTAET been managed by the same department.

In Sierra Leone, the transition to an Integrated Peacebuilding Office was particularly crucial to give confidence to the people as the peacekeeping operation drew down. Minister Kamara noted that this was essentially a political task and that bringing the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) into DPA therefore made sense. Areas that the Minister felt were under-emphasized, however, included:

- The analysis of the mission drawdown plan with macroeconomic conditions and government capacity.
- The confidence-building value of small programmes carried out by the contingents (including Quick Impact Projects, or QIPS, described by Minister Kamara of Sierra Leone as “tipping point projects”); noted as valuable but with a need also to establish systems for community maintenance—e.g., water wells and mosques built by contingents in Sierra Leone not maintained.
- The need for the missions to have staff who understand economic issues and can help in explaining links between economic, political and security issues to other partners such as the IFIs.

In Liberia, the mission transition was also communicated well in advance and was generally well planned—crucially, it has included good coordination with national stakeholders—but the government noted that it was not articulated well with economic and fiscal issues (worsening a commodity shock and post-Ebola economic contraction and transferring functions onto the government budget in a deteriorating fiscal environment). The government therefore urged stronger linkages with
good economic analysis in the restructuring. The government noted that this did not necessarily mean drawing down more slowly—in fact it could have meant drawing down some elements faster; but finding mechanisms to compensate national institutions that need to take over these functions during the transitional period, through either the mission budget or the Peacebuilding Fund. This could not be done through regular donor programmes since these also contracted during the period of mission drawdown.

A more general observation is that the proposals would address some of the problems seen recently in the “rushing” of transitions, as in Haiti. Adequate planning and cooperation around transitions are crucial to ensuring that transitions do not undermine gains already made.

Looking beyond transitions, host nations see other advantages to merging the regional desks. One is facilitating a longer-term engagement in capacity building and strengthening national institutions—a priority for host countries. Additionally, in Afghanistan, the government noted that a large number of the threats facing the country are regional and external. The previous peace and security architecture did not facilitate addressing these, in particular when DPKO managed UNAMA, since it was not possible to look at regional issues. The merged regional desks should facilitate a better approach. The government also noted that it is extremely supportive of the Secretary-General’s reforms related to counterterrorism, but observes that this has yet to be articulated in terms of activities coordinated with UNAMA on the ground.

3. Speed of human resource processes and delegation to leaders in the field

Minister Ramos-Horta noted that UNTAET was very slow to deploy although it was desperately needed to help revive core state functions such as public finances, justice and police (having a transitional administration mandate): “Sergio Vieira De Mello was very frustrated at the beginning that he could not hire anyone directly. Sergio was a powerful figure, but he did not control the administration.” Practical examples of the difficulties this caused included the urgent need in early 2000 to improve physical conditions (shelter, mattresses, food) for the FALANTIL troops who had very responsibly not engaged in any fighting after the referendum. While the SRSG wanted to do something to help, UNTAET was told by New York that it could not provide any assistance to FALANTIL, despite the positive role they had played. The delays in so doing contributed to tensions in FALANTIL’s command and ranks over their treatment, and eventually to one of the factors (weak security sector governance too rapidly established at independence after a decision to have no national army was reversed) that enabled renewed violence in 2006. While engagement with groups that retain arms is always an issue needing careful judgement, the SRSG on the ground would have been better placed to make this judgment, with appropriate advice and remaining within all UN and DAC rules.

A similar issue arose in Liberia, where in the early period after the peace agreement the government found it impossible to carry salary payments to civil servants outside Monrovia. The mission was told that UN helicopters could not be used for this purpose. This is another issue where good judgment is needed: there are real fiduciary risks in such an agreement (what happens if some of the money disappears while on UN transport?), but there were also huge risks to attaining the mandate objectives in not doing so. The SRSG on the ground, with appropriate specialized advice on mitigating financial risk, would again have been best placed to make this judgment. A further example arose when the mission was unable to participate in purchasing generators from neighboring countries to return street lighting to central parts of Monrovia, although this was of huge importance for security in the capital and a small cost.
Sierra Leone noted that field missions in the region were unable to make a similar judgment call when the assistance of Sierra Leone and Liberia was requested for a mediation process in Guinea-Bissau: they were told that mission transport could not facilitate this. Minister Ramos-Horta, who was Special Representative in Guinea-Bissau, highlighted an analogous example where he could not for many months get approval to use street lighting poles for local street lighting that were actually physically present in one of the local mission warehouses.

Former President and Prime Minister Gusmão also noted that the SRSG had little authority over hiring to meet local conditions. In particular, mission staff who the national authorities and the SRSG had found to be skilled and helpful to the local authorities did not have their contracts continued, while other very inexperienced staff were hired.

Guatemala emphasized the need to focus on the mandate, noting how the mandate of CICIG was intended, inter alia, to strengthen national institutions, although it is not clear the extent it has been able to do so. It was further pointed out that the staff selected were not the right people to undertake institution-building.

A consistent theme across countries was that improved delegation to the field would facilitate more involvement and leadership of national actors, as it would provide the SRSG with even greater scope for meaningfully engaging with them.

Other issues raised

Four main ideas were raised in the discussions, which are not currently explicitly addressed in the Secretary-General’s proposals: (i) two-step Security Council mandating; (ii) leadership appointments; (iii) links with development and human rights; and (iv) thematic issues like gender and reconciliation.

On two-step Security Council mandating, all the countries interviewed noted there was little sense of dual work with the host nation on the eventual exit strategy. They recommended:

- Initial Security Council mandates in a crisis be considered formally as interim in terms of the tasks and composition of the mission; and that this be followed up by a second phase allowing for more comprehensive consultation with national leadership and other national stakeholders. This may result in a second mandate, composition and budget, which is quite unlike the first, which should be considered normal by both the Security Council and the Fifth Committee.

- The Lisbon meeting and subsequent interviews recommended that an exit strategy be considered from the beginning of this second mandate stage, focused on building national institutional capabilities. Guatemala supported this while stating that transitions need to be better managed and that there could have been a more systematic discussion of the eventual exit strategy for UN peace operations. Afghanistan underlined that the Law and Order Trust Fund, which was supposed to build capacity in Afghan institutions, still lacked progress after more than a decade. Countries also recognized that conditions change in terms of national leadership and the openness to partnership to exit peace operations: while a two-stage process is desirable, it is also desirable that the Security Council, the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies take account of evolving conditions and adjust the mission tasks and composition (significantly, if needed) on a regular basis.

Regarding leadership appointments, it was suggested that effective SRSGs are crucial to the success of missions and that the Secretary-General’s reform proposals might include more specific measures to:

- Ensure the neutrality of appointments: for example, while it may be important that neighboring countries do not have very strong objections to the selection, neighboring countries should not be encouraged to dominate the selection.
Ensure the best skillset and practical experience, including by drawing on experience of post-conflict transitions and countries that have hosted peace operations.

Ensure that appropriate guidance is provided from HQ, such that SRSGs act as low profile, neutral brokers who uphold the values and standards of the UN, and do not become themselves viewed as taking partisan positions in domestic politics.

On links with development and human rights, the host nations interviewed felt that stronger links needed to be created between the peace and security, development and human rights pillars of the UN. Afghanistan noted that UNAMA had now led the formation of a “One UN” approach to support the Afghan National Peace and Development Framework: this was very welcome but should have taken place much earlier. Guatemala underlined the importance of putting human rights at the center of all mission mandates and ensuring that there was a consistent relationship between SRSGs and Resident Coordinators. The Liberian government also found that, although this was later rectified, in some periods different parts of the UN were “operating in silos—UNDP says one thing, the mission another, FAO another” (Minister Kamara, Liberia). Much stronger coherence between the mission and all other UN entities would be helpful. On a note related to development, it was stressed that missions should contribute to the national economy through maximum local procurement of goods and services.

On thematic issues, host nations noted that the proposals now appear to mainstream gender rather than create a dedicated capacity in the peace and security pillar. Timor-Leste and some other countries felt that their experience both with UN missions and in government was that, without a dedicated capacity, the ability both to advocate and to push for accountability on gender issues could be diluted and become too weak to ensure any progress. In relation to reconciliation, host nations mentioned that this important issue should be more explicitly addressed and indeed prioritized. In particular, it was suggested that the SRSG should be supported in efforts to mobilize political support for and facilitate communication on issues relating to reconciliation and dialogue for sustaining peace with national actors.
“Goodbye Conflict, Welcome Development”

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