

Multidimensional and Integrated Peace Operations: trends and Challenges Welcom
Address by Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen

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Distinguished participants, dear friends,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this timely and important seminar.

It is my hope that it will provide an opportunity for us all to share experiences and take stock of the progress made in implementing the integrated mission concept. As the setting is Geneva, we will have a particular emphasis on the humanitarian aspect of such operations.

This seminar is part of a project that my government launched to follow up on the UN-initiated Integrated Missions process. It is the third in a series of seminars that are being held worldwide to draw on regional expertise, experience and views. The first meeting, focusing on Asia, was held in Beijing a few weeks ago, and was followed by a meeting in Addis Ababa focusing on experiences from the Great Lakes. We will follow up in New York and West Africa, before a concluding seminar in Oslo in October.

The process will culminate in a final document that summarizes the findings of the regional seminars and sets out recommendations for the planning and implementation of future integrated missions. This document will be presented to the senior management of the UN and other stakeholders.

I also hope that this process will complement other ongoing processes in the United Nations, regional organizations, and member states. In addition, I hope that this process will enable us to build the competence and the knowledge necessary for UN staff to coherently design and implement the UN's activities on the ground as well as at Headquarters.

Our ultimate aim is to strengthen the capacity of the UN and its member states to make optimal use of limited resources in an increasing number of complex field operations. To achieve this, further development of policy, doctrine and planning at headquarters level is necessary. At the same time, we must maintain a practical field-oriented perspective, focusing on improving outcomes on the ground. In this respect, we are very pleased that several practitioners from current field operations will be making an active contribution throughout the series of seminars.

The development of integrated missions is closely related to the broader UN reform agenda, including the humanitarian reform process. These processes share the goals of increasing the effectiveness of the UN and making it more operational. In promoting both of these processes, my government is keenly aware of the need to accommodate the many different mandates that the UN is tasked with. A key objective of our discussions here should be to find practical ways of reconciling these different operational goals and mandates within a common framework based on the desired outcome.

The ultimate aim of our endeavor is to strengthen the capacity of the UN and its member states to make optimal use of limited resources in an area of utmost importance. I would like to underline, however, that we firmly believe that the aim of further integration should be reconciled with respect for humanitarian imperatives. Progress in the field of integration requires greater awareness of the need for long-term thinking and planning. In addition, a demographically and gender-sensitive approach should be applied at all levels.

Dear participants,

Peace operations have undergone major changes over the last two decades. Over the past few years, we have seen an unprecedented growth in blue-helmet operations. This surge in the number of different operations and the internal complexity of most UN peace operations places a massive work burden on the UN system. This burden makes it increasingly difficult for the UN to plan and execute its operations efficiently. Reforms of the UN system which is charged with the full range of tasks from strategic guidance and oversight to day-to-day support of as well as the intergovernmental processes, have not kept pace with the rapid expansion both in volume and complexity, in field operations.

There is also a growing recognition of the complex and non-linear nature of conflict. Greater coherence is necessary to fulfill peace operation mandates. A coherent multilateral response relies on the simultaneous implementation of programmes and activities of a multitude of actors – military, political, development and humanitarian – from both the UN and other organizations. Organizational structures must reflect this reality. While normative changes in UN policies have expanded the reach of peace operations, institutional reforms have not kept pace.

There is also another aspect that merits more focus – how to better integrate to mutually support and reconfigure and adapt our responses efficiently and on a regular basis to meet the actual demands and changing conflict environments on the ground. Too often we – and the UN and various smaller actors and donors – are too busy focusing on the “green flags” in a mission – the elements of success. And thus we don’t pay enough attention to the critical areas where serious involvement is still needed or the impact of our involvement. The tendency is to focus only on the successes, and not on the unfulfilled objectives and the possible consequences of failing to meet them.

In spite of the best of intentions, we have a tendency to remain too static in our approach. It is important to think strategy, not exit. In general, a quick exit is unlikely to be a good strategy, and we repeatedly declare victory too soon. In so doing, we run the risk of punishing success.

We must also overcome the tendency to see elections as an exit strategy for international engagement, and to equate elections with a formal definition of democracy. It is also important to recognize that although elections represent an important milestone, they tend to shift the risks rather than overcome them. That said, integration is increasingly seen as a means of achieving a sustainable exit and ease the interface between peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and restoring national capacities.

Any form of integration should recognize the need for unity of purpose coupled with mutual respect for each other's roles. This is closely related to the argument that we need a more unified UN presence in the field, which, in turn, cannot be achieved without a more integrated approach at headquarters. Integration and common understanding at the strategic level will lay the foundation for integration in the field.

In spite of the fact that the UN continues to operate at the limits of its capacity, there is little doubt that the collective ability of the United Nations to plan and lead complex peace operations has significantly improved over the last few years. While there is still substantial room for improvement, we believe that the glass is half full, not half empty.

Furthermore, we believe that we, as member states, have a responsibility to contribute resources to peace operations and take part in the global debate about the improvement of this essential instrument. Increasing the UN's capacity to implement effective and efficient peace operations should not be left to the Secretariat alone.

Our rationale is based on the conviction that the challenges presented in post-conflict environments can only be met through a multi-pronged approach. This requires mutually reinforcing contributions from a wide range of sectors and actors.

On the basis of our extensive research and investigation into integrated missions, we see a clear need to revisit the definition of integration. We must define *what* to integrate and *when* it should be integrated in order to achieve the desired impact. We also need to focus on *what objectives we should integrate around, what outcomes we should expect to achieve through integration, how to measure our impact and how to create incentives to integrate.*

Now I would like to say a few more words about integrated missions and humanitarian affairs – which I am certain, will be elaborated upon in today's discussions.

UN humanitarian agencies and external organizations have frequently expressed concern that integration processes – both within and outside the UN – threaten the integrity of humanitarian space.

Moreover, the need to maintain impartial humanitarian space in times of conflict has been a major challenge to the integration process. Though it may seem contradictory, those of us engaged in peacekeeping know well that the political and military pursuit of long-term peace and stability can often conflict with the immediate lifesaving action guaranteed to all civilians under international humanitarian law.

This is both an incentive for, and an impediment against the integration effort. Peacekeeping carried out without reference to humanitarian programs can have a devastating impact on civilians, whereas humanitarian action without reference to stabilization objectives can help perpetuate the conflict. This is a challenge that demands creativity and compromise for the sake of those people we seek to help, and here in Geneva, we hope to strike a new balance the need for coordination, with the need for credible humanitarian distance.

Another trend – is the growing acceptance of the protection of civilians as an organic part of any peace operation mandates. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines protection broadly as ‘all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of individuals in accordance with international human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law’. What is less clear is who is responsible for which aspect of this definition. A closer examination of protection and its implications is necessary.

Integration should not be seen as just an administrative measure or as a goal in itself. Integration is a tool for improving impact on the ground through more efficient delivery, less bureaucracy and less duplication of effort. Ultimately, integration is only relevant to the extent that it enhances the ability of the UN to effectively engage with its partners in building the foundation for sustainable peace. Humanitarian action is an essential component of this effort, even though it may be most effective when not fully integrated.

One example: the Norwegian approach to health cooperation in Afghanistan.

Please allow me to illustrate this with a small, but illuminating example:

When military forces deploy in peacekeeping operations in larger numbers, they typically bring embedded military medical facilities, including field hospitals with capacities for advanced surgery. By definition, these facilities tend to have much more capacity than they will need for their everyday tasks, simply because they need to have the ability to treat large number of patients on the day that heavy fighting takes place.

In many peacekeeping operations, we have seen that military medical staff more or less on their own initiative choose to fill their spare time by “searching for patients” in the local community. This could be a part of a so-called “hearts and minds” programme or simply an expression of a desire to do good in the world. At times, “pet patients” have been adopted,

with little understanding of the trickle-effect such a choice has in a typically impoverished and illiterate population.

Needless to say here in Geneva, these initiatives very frequently collide with the long-term efforts of humanitarian agencies, NGOs or local administrations to build new, sustainable health services. They bring no structural change whatsoever, they create false expectations, and they may even undermine future, locally generated services which may not be able to maintain the same level. Quite understandably, several organizations that are professionally involved in the development of the health sector have been highly critical of such self-styled activities.

We've heard the message, and we've learned the lesson. I have made it clear to my troops that as a general rule, our military health personnel should abstain from such "self-styled" activities, however paradoxical it may seem on first glance.

However, on its own, such a measure still leaves us with the morally difficult problem of having advanced health capacity in an idle mode in the midst of a place where adequate health services are extremely scarce.

Hence, what we've done in stead over the last year, is that we have agreed with the Afghan Ministry of Health, the regional authorities, the World Health Organization and UNAMA that our military surgeons should use their spare time to train and develop the local hospitals in the towns in which they are serving (Mazar-e-Sharif and Meymaneh). Based on local needs, a particular focus has been placed on capacity-building in anesthetics and treatment of severe burns. The focus is on further developing local expertise, equipment and capacity, so that the effort can be sustainable.

I am mentioning this small example simply because I think it illustrates that we as a military organization are aware of the pitfalls of walking blind-folded into the humanitarian field. It also illustrates that pragmatic solutions can be found when "vetted" by the professional agents in the health field and the national government. The model recognizes the need for sustainability and structural change and of abstaining from competing with local or international civilian health services.]

Finally, an integrated approach must be given the resources and training necessary for its implementation. No two operations are the same. But common among them is the need for better knowledge of the different organizational mandates, better integrated planning, more robust guidelines, and, most importantly, the demonstration of mutual respect. This will improve interoperability both between contributing states, within the mission and between partners on the ground.

I hope that this seminar will provide a more in-depth understanding of these and the many other trends, challenges and dilemmas that face UN peacekeeping today. I believe it is vital that member states engage in this crucially important debate.

Distinguished participants, I am confident that you will all contribute to the deliberations today and tomorrow. I look forward to taking part in the seminar this morning.

Thank you.