

Review of UN Special Political Mission Funding and Backstopping

At the end of its regular 2010 session, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution asking the Secretary-General to conduct a thorough review of special political mission (SPM) funding and backstopping, and to make proposals for alternatives.¹ This represented a potentially significant step towards strengthening the contribution of the UN's political missions to peace and security.

As outlined in the Secretary-General's 2009 report on SPMs, "SPM" is only a budgetary category.² It now comprises by default most peace and security activities *not* included in the rest of the UN programme budget (the regular budget), as well as anything that is *not* a blue-helmet peacekeeping operation. With no clear definition of an SPM other than a budgetary one, this category has come to include a wide range of entities, ranging from the missions and envoys described in this volume to sanctions panels (experts dealing with specific sanctions regimes).

While SPMs keep growing into more numerous and complex formats – especially in the cases of larger UN special political missions such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan – there have not been any major improvements to their funding and backstopping arrangements. This means there are gaps in the support provided at headquarters to staff deployed in some of the world's most dangerous environments including Somalia, Afghanistan and the Palestinian Territories.

The challenges that the Secretary-General's forthcoming SPM funding and backstopping review is likely to highlight include:

- The UN financial rules and arrangements have effectively two separate and misaligned systems. The peacekeeping budget is set annually in the middle of each year, while the regular budget – including SPMs – is biannual and agreed at the end of every other year. This means that budgeting for SPMs requires a good deal of guesswork about future needs. Unsurprisingly, the UN Secretariat often has to request supplemental funds for SPMs that expand or face new challenges.
- Exacerbating this problem, political missions receive less individual attention from member states than peacekeeping operations, as their financial requirements are wrapped up with other elements of the regular budget debate. That limits the oversight by Member States. Similarly, there is no inter-governmental entity equivalent to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (the "C34") that reviews the state of peace operations every year.
- Also, SPMs lack a "support account" to budget headquarters substantive and support backstopping, and lack any proper access to start-up and expansion resources. This means that SPMs are backstopped by fewer staff than peacekeeping operations, directly impacting support and reporting processes.

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The different budgetary systems for peacekeeping operations and special political missions complicates resource sharing and service provision from one side to the other, as well as transitions to and from peacekeeping operations and SPMs. For example:

- The Department of Field Support (DFS) covers the logistical needs of both peacekeeping operations and SPMs. However, under current rules it should not use resources paid through the peacekeeping support account to support SPMs, and SPMs should not have access to the strategic deployment stocks of equipment and supplies housed in the UN's Brindisi Logistics Base.
- While the General Assembly has passed a resolution endorsing a new Global Field Support Strategy designed by DFS,³ it only provides specific improvements for peacekeeping operations but not to SPMs.
- There are similar problems associated with SPMs drawing on experts based within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) such as the staff in its Office of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI). Paradoxically, OROLSI cannot budget for providing support to SPMs, even in cases of SPMs with mandates that include police reform or security sector reform.
- Conversely, under the current arrangement the Department of Political Affairs' Electoral Assistance Division has difficulties budgeting for expert backstopping to leaders of peacekeeping operations involved in organizing elections, although EAD staff have long been supporting elections where there are peacekeeping operations.
- Where countries hosting peacekeeping operations face decreasing imminent threats of armed conflict or crisis (e.g., Liberia, Timor Leste), transition to smaller political missions is complicated by the lack of interoperability across the two budgetary systems.

If the UN is to run political missions more rationally, and ensure that they receive the best available support from New York, Brindisi or a neighboring mission, new arrangements need to be found to remove these artificial boundaries. In a multi-year legislative reform, the Secretary-General's review is likely to propose changes to the funding rules that will have a direct impact on operational effectiveness.

1 A/RES/65/259 (2011)

2 A/64/349 (2009)

3 A/RES/64/269 (2010)