



***Field Support for Peace Operations***  
**Background Paper for the 12 February 2010**  
**Thematic Series “Building More Effective UN Peace Operations”**

UN peacekeeping deployments have changed significantly over the last decade. The diversity of mandates, the operational complexity, and increased risks borne by peacekeepers underscores the both changes in the nature of insecurity and the continued importance of UN operations to the maintenance of international peace.

Field support, to paraphrase an old adage, is the lifeblood of UN peace operations. The Department of Field Support (DFS) backstops over 120,000 military, police, and civilian peacekeepers in 17 field missions led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). This marks a 20 percent increase since DFS was established in June 2007, and a three-fold increase since 2000. Contemporary UN peacekeeping missions are responsible for an array of tasks, from establishing security and protecting of civilians to laying the foundation for rule of law and long-term peacebuilding. Missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Chad, highlight a growing trend in deployment to expeditionary theaters lacking developed infrastructure or local contracting providers. There, and elsewhere, the UN has faced operational challenges warranting faster deployment, enhanced mobility, improved safety and security, and, once mandates are achieved, more flexible transition to peacebuilding. In fact, despite fielding the same number of peacekeeping missions today as in 2003-2004, the cost of these operations has tripled to some USD 7.75 billion.<sup>1</sup>

The demands on DFS have not been limited to UN peacekeeping, either. Since its establishment, DFS has been called upon to provide support to a burgeoning number of Department of Political Affairs (DPA)-led “special political missions” financed from the regular UN budget – from stand-alone peacebuilding offices like the UN Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, to those established upon the withdrawal of peacekeeping mission (e.g., the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone) – and to *ad hoc* partnership arrangements, like those established for the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Research on global conflict trends suggests that the demand for complex UN peacekeeping operations will continue to rise in the near- to medium-term. Yet, without reform, delivering the full range of support requirements demanded by UN field operations poses a challenge for DFS. Its support activities are governed largely by financial and procurement rules and procedures that were not designed for peace operations, let alone for today’s multifaceted mandates. The consequence has often been slow deployment, operational under-performance, and inefficient use of available resources. That the UN’s logistical and financial support structures have been ill-suited to the demands posed by complex peacekeeping operations was the focus of several unimplemented recommendations in the Brahimi Report of 2000 and features centrally in the

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<sup>1</sup> DPKO figures from <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/bnote.htm>;

peacekeeping reform efforts initiated in 2009.<sup>2</sup> The persistence of this issue attests to the importance of updating DFS's support structures and the high degree of sensitivity – due to political and financial concerns both among Member States and within the Secretariat itself – surrounding reform of the means through which DFS deploys, maintains, and draws down UN peace operations.

Moreover, DFS remains better structured to meet the needs of peacekeeping than of non-peacekeeping missions. This is due, in part, to the sheer size and cost of peacekeeping operations relative to other deployments – the 2008-2009 budget for peacekeeping was eight times larger than that for SPMs<sup>3</sup> – and, related, to DFS's origin in DPKO's Office of Mission Support. This suggests a need not only to update DFS support capabilities for improved effectiveness, efficiency, and flexibility in peacekeeping missions with thousands of personnel, while at the same time adapting them to meet the niche requirements of missions with as few as five.

In response to the emerging support challenges faced by contemporary peacekeeping, DFS is developing a new “Global Support Strategy,” which will be presented to Member States in a Report of the Secretary-General in early 2010. The new support strategy builds on prior innovations like the Strategic Deployment Stocks and pre-mandate commitment authority – the rapid financial and logistical facilities made available to start-up peacekeeping missions as part of the Brahimi Report – and proposes new reforms to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of DFS service delivery for DPKO and DPA field missions.

The Global Support Strategy proposes a package of reforms, to be introduced over a five-year window, focused on four broad areas: (i) streamlining budgetary and financial management systems, particularly for mission start-up; (ii) improving human resource management, including conditions of service for staff; (iii) enhancing logistics and communication capabilities, including introduction of pre-defined “service packages” to more rapidly and safely support the activities of military, police, and civilian field personnel; and (iv) establishing global and regional service centers supporting multiple missions. Within in each of these areas, DFS is seeking to better calibrate its support to whether missions are starting up, fully operational, or drawing down.

While the innovation of a new DFS strategy is of necessity, the farther-reaching political, financial, and operational implications of changing the way the UN supports peace operations has yet to be fully explored. Consequently, many Member States – who must approve legislative reforms and commit finances need for implementation of the strategy, as well as utilize its services as troop and police contributing countries – view reform with a combination of support for the broad goals of improved performance, and circumspection over the details. Providing clarity on these issues in advance of the upcoming discussions on DFS's new support strategy in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping (the C-34) in February 2010, and in the Fifth Committee later in 2010, will be essential to ensuring that the UN continues to deliver stability and peace to conflict afflicted areas. Its proposed launch during the 2010-2011 UN budget cycle, in the context of the global financial crisis, only adds to the challenges – and importance – of early efforts to build consensus among Member States.

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<sup>2</sup> See: The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *A New Partnership Agenda: Charting the New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping* July 2009; Bruce Jones, Richard Gowan, and Jake Sherman, “Building on Brahimi: Peacekeeping in an Era of Strategic Uncertainty,” April 2009.

<sup>3</sup> DPKO figures from <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/bnote.htm>; DPA figures from A/64/349.