

Civilian Affairs Officers in UN Peacekeeping : @PKO Now!

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Norimasa Tochibayashi

Program Advisor

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Civil Affairs Officers in UN Peacekeeping

Civil Affairs Officers are civilian officers in UN missions. They are often referred to as "civilian peacekeepers"¹ in contrast to military components. Civil Affairs Officers play a key role in almost all peacekeeping missions and a number of special political missions (SPMs), reporting to the political Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG).²³

The Evolution of the Civil Affairs Officer

The evolution of the Civil Affairs Officer took place in response to a transformation and expansion of UN peacekeeping operations in 1990s. Since the Cold War ended, the number of intra-state conflicts, rather than state-to-state wars, increased. The UN was required not only to keep peace but to facilitate nationwide reconciliation and state building processes.⁴

In these circumstances, civil affairs were mentioned in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, and the local population became the primary stakeholder in the peace process. To implement the civilian mandates, support and strengthen the local population as well as the government for sustainable peace,⁵ Civil Affairs Officers were deployed in peacekeeping operations. Cedric Thornberry, the former DSRSG of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in charge of civil affairs, indicates that the origin of the UN Civil Affairs Officer

is found in the mandate of UNPROFOR in 1992.⁶

The Four Principles of the Civil Affairs Officer

UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS) define the four key principles of Civil Affairs.⁷ The first principle is national and local ownership. As mentioned above, Civil Affairs Officers are required to support the local population. The Officers are to ensure that the population is able to sustain peace by themselves even after the peacekeeping mission has ceased its operations there.

The second is impartiality and sensitivity to demographic diversity. Civil Affairs Officers are, or have to be, familiar with the differences of local groups. Therefore, the Officers are to ensure that all relevant interests and facets are impartially considered in peace processes.

The third is sensitivity to context. Needless to say, there are various factors that should be addressed in each UN mission due to the differences of context, such as constraints of resources, political will, capacity, etc. In order to take the appropriate approach and activities, Civil Affairs Officers are required to maintain sensitivity and understand the differences of the context of each UN mission.

The last principle is credibility. For Civil Affairs Officers, who work as an interface between the mission and the local population, their credibility is crucial to implement their mandates at the local level. DPKO / DFS expects that the credibility is derived from a professional and well-coordinated approach, realistic identification of activities for a given context, and consistent application of the principles above.

Judging from the above, the Civil Affairs Officer is ideally a credible supporter, as well as a civilian peacekeeper, who is familiar with the local population and sensitive and flexible to the context of UN missions.

End Notes

¹ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Service, Civil Affairs Handbook (New York: United Nations, 2012), 22.

(<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/policy/civilhandbook.asp>)

² Given that Civil Affairs Officers often represent the mission in working with UNCT, they can also report to the DSRSG /RC/ HC. See *ibid.*, 92.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴ Norimasa Tochibayashi, "Expansion of UN Peacekeeping" @PKO Now! no. 4 (July 2012).

⁵ UN DPKO / DFS, Policy Directives on Civil Affairs (New York: United Nations, 2008), 2.

⁶ Cedric Thornberry, "Civil Affairs in the Development of UN Peacekeeping" *International Peacekeeping*, 1, no. 4 (1994): 473.

⁷ UN DPKO / DFS, Policy Directives on Civil Affairs (New York: United Nations, 2008), 4.