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Review of the implementation of the peace and security reform

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the implementation of the peace and security reform ([A/75/202](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met online with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 27 October 2020.

2. The Advisory Committee also had before it the report of the Board of Auditors on the financial statements of the United Nations for the year ended 31 December 2019 ([A/75/5 \(Vol. I\)](#), chap. II, sect. G) and the concise summary of its principal findings and conclusions ([A/75/177](#), paras. 215–222). The Board indicates that, as part of its audit of United Nations operations under financial regulation 7.5, it reviewed the peace and security reform, including the operations of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in the context of the reform ([A/75/5 \(Vol. I\)](#), chap. II, paras. 7 and 542).

3. In addition, the Secretary-General indicates in his report that the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (IED-20-001) (see paras. 16–18 and 21–23 below).



Background

4. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in October 2017, the Secretary-General submitted his report to the General Assembly on restructuring of the United Nations peace and security pillar ([A/72/525](#)), in which he outlined four main goals¹ of the proposed reform to restructure the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Peacebuilding Support Office (see [A/72/525](#), sects. III and IV). In its resolution [72/199](#), the Assembly supported the vision of the Secretary-General for reforming the peace and security pillar and requested him to submit a comprehensive report on his reform proposal.

5. Subsequently, in March 2018, the Secretary-General submitted his report on the revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 under section 3, Political affairs, and section 5, Peacekeeping operations, and the proposed budget for the support account for peacekeeping operations for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019 related to the peace and security reform ([A/72/772](#)). The General Assembly, in its resolution [72/262](#) C, welcomed the whole-of-pillar approach to integrating political and operational responsibilities and endorsed the establishment of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations (resolution [72/262](#) C, sect. III, paras. 3 and 4).

6. The Advisory Committee further recalls that the proposal of the Secretary-General on the peace and security reform was centred on the creation of the two new departments, with a single regional political-operational structure (shared by the two departments for the day-to-day management of all political and operational peace and security activities) and supported by an Office of the Director for Coordination and Shared Services (to ensure coherence and consistency with regard to management, administration, budgetary and similar processes across the pillar) (see [A/72/859](#), para. 4).

II. General observations

7. The Advisory Committee acknowledges the progress made to date in implementing the peace and security reform. The Committee notes that some tools have been put into place for reporting on benefits of the reforms initiated by the Secretary-General, including the first online benefits tracker (see para. 13 below and [A/75/538](#), para. 4).

8. The Advisory Committee further notes that, in its report on the financial statements of the United Nations for the year ended 31 December 2019, the Board of Auditors identified areas for improvement in the implementation of the peace and security reform: planning and implementation of the reform; change management; revitalization of the Peacebuilding Support Office; and financing of the Peacebuilding Fund. In its most recent report on the Board of Auditors ([A/75/539](#), paras. 49–52), the Committee concurs with all the recommendations of the Board, in particular those relating to the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund in the context of the peace and security reform. The

¹ The goals of the proposal are to: (a) prioritize prevention and sustaining peace; (b) enhance the effectiveness and coherence of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, ensuring the primacy of politics and flexibility of approach; (c) make the peace and security pillar more coherent, nimble and effective through a “whole-of-pillar” approach to address fragmentation; and (d) align the peace and security pillar more closely with the development and human rights pillars ([A/72/525](#), para. 14).

Committee stresses the importance of the full and expeditious implementation of the recommendations of the Board.

9. Upon enquiry as to the implications of the Secretary-General's request that the General Assembly take note of his report (A/75/202, para. 56), the Advisory Committee was informed that the report had been issued in response to the request of the Assembly, in its resolution 72/262 C, that the Secretary-General undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of the resolution and that the report did not contain any proposals for action by the Assembly. The Committee was further informed that, in accordance with its long-standing practice, when the Assembly "takes note" of a report of the Secretary-General, it neither agrees nor disagrees with the report (see A/75/538, para. 7).

10. Upon further enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as the report of the Secretary-General did not contain any proposals for approval, the recommendation to take note of the report had no financial implications (see A/75/538, para. 8; see also A/72/772, para. 6; and A/72/525, para. 63).

III. Implementation of the peace and security reform

A. Overall progress

11. The report of the Secretary-General provides an overview of the implementation of the reform, reflecting information in the following areas: (a) implementing the reform: managing change and establishing the new structures (A/75/202, sect. II); (b) monitoring progress: evidence of the benefits of the reform (ibid., sect. III); and (c) managing reform benefits, addressing challenges and changing work culture (ibid., sect. IV). The Secretary-General indicates that, while many of the reforms are still being consolidated, his report presents some early evidence of its benefits and identifies measures taken to address challenges and achieve the objectives of the reform (ibid., para. 3). Information on early evidence of the impact of the reform is provided through nine case studies detailed in paragraphs 16 to 41 of his report. He indicates that the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations identified nine specific reform benefits under three objectives,² which are listed in the annex to his report (ibid., para. 16).

12. Furthermore, the Secretary-General indicates that the Secretariat has developed the first Secretariat-wide approach to managing and overseeing change in an accountable and transparent way. A tracker is publicly available online (see <https://reform.un.org/content/benefits-tracker>) and includes a dashboard that displays indicators and targets. The Committee was informed that the peace and security pillar was regularly updating the data against the indicators in the benefits tracker and continued to monitor progress against the objectives of the reform, with a view towards continuous improvement (see also A/75/202, para. 45). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the reform benefits tracker was designed to measure how the Secretariat was making progress on realizing the intended benefits of the reforms, as established in the commitments of the Secretary-General in his reports to the General Assembly.

² Objective 1: integrated, politically driven approach to mission and non-mission settings; objective 2: closer alignment with development actors; and objective 3: organizational coherence, nimbleness and effectiveness.

B. Monitoring benefits

13. The Board of Auditors indicates that it had asked which indicators the United Nations had established to monitor and verify that the reform process was achieving the four main goals of the reform outlined by the Secretary-General in his reform proposal (see para. 4 above), especially with regard to the second goal: to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. The Board was informed that, in preparation for the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the reform ([A/75/202](#)), the two departments were tracking results through an online benefits management tracker for all three reform streams (see para. 12 above). The Board is of the view that the two new departments must define ways to achieve the four main goals outlined by the Secretary-General and that the implementation of the reform needs to be closely monitored using measurable criteria, indicators and milestones (a mere benefits management tracker is insufficient) ([A/75/177](#), paras. 215–218).

14. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, to provide the General Assembly with a more tangible illustration of the impact of the reform, a case study was selected for each of the nine expected benefits of the peace and security reform (see para. 11 above). It was indicated to the Committee that the report of the Secretary-General was not a summary of the indicators, which, as moving targets, were best appreciated through the tracker, but rather a way of showing what the indicators could mean in practice. **The Advisory Committee notes that there appears to be a lack of clarity with respect to the correlation between the four main goals outlined by the Secretary-General in his initial reform proposal and the nine benefits under the three objectives newly presented in his report on the implementation of the reform. The Committee trusts that more clarification will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the present report and an update will be provided in the context of the next progress report (see para. 29 below).**

15. The Board of Auditors recommends that the Administration establish indicators to monitor and verify that the reform of the peace and security pillar is implemented to ensure the achievement of the four goals laid out in the report of the Secretary-General ([A/72/772](#)), especially with regard to the goal of enhancing the effectiveness and coherence of peacekeeping operations and special political missions ([A/75/177](#), para. 219). **The Advisory Committee concurs with the recommendation of the Board of Auditors.**

C. Enhancing effectiveness, efficiencies and coherence

16. The Secretary-General indicates that the restructuring of the peace and security pillar is anchored in the establishment of the two new Secretariat departments (the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations) on 1 January 2019 ([A/75/202](#), para. 10). He further indicates in his report that, as the OIOS evaluation found inconsistent operating procedures and duplicative processes between the two departments (see also IED-20-001, paras. 48–64), he has requested the two departments to review the processes concerned. Furthermore, he indicates that measures to improve coordination in the policy structures of the peace and security pillar and to avoid overlap and duplication are being pursued. In order to enhance coherence and set joint priorities, the two departments established a steering committee on guidance development and learning, which has requested several products, including a joint study to assess cooperation between special political missions and peacekeeping operations ([A/75/202](#), paras. 48–50).

17. The Advisory Committee notes that OIOS, in its report on the evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs dated 16 March 2020, indicated that shortcomings in regional division integration, work processes and knowledge management had created challenges to efficient achievement of conflict prevention goals, including some work processes that had created inefficiencies (IED-20-001, paras. 48–59). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the OIOS evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs covered the period from 2017 to 2019, and therefore examined the work processes and levels of integration that had existed under the previous Department of Political Affairs, as well as the newly created Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

18. Concerning effective and efficient integration into the single regional political-operational structure³ (see also para. 6 above), the OIOS evaluation found that views on the extent to which reform had achieved the integration of those divisions were mixed. It was noted that a majority of the staff of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs interviewed indicated a low or mixed degree of integration and that some staff also noted the challenges in having two Under-Secretaries-General (dual reporting lines for the single regional structure) and merging different approaches of the two departments (IED-20-001, paras. 48–49). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that structural integration had been implemented for Lebanon, Cyprus and Western Sahara, where teams of the former two departments (the Department of Political Affairs and Department of Peacekeeping Operations) covered the same country or region. For other issues, the integrity of teams covering peacekeeping operations and subregions had been maintained. Furthermore, co-location of staff had been facilitated to provide a conducive environment for enhanced informal exchanges. Moreover, the Committee was informed that efforts had been made towards the functional integration of the former teams through a variety of activities, such as ensuring systematic incorporation of prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding aspects into document preparation and clearance processes across the pillar.

19. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was also informed that no formal cost-benefit analysis had been presented because the need to reform the pillar was widely accepted and no such analysis was required by the General Assembly in its resolutions 72/199 and 72/262 C. The ultimate objective of the peace and security reform was not to reduce costs, but to improve the ability of the Organization to implement its mandates. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that a cost-benefit analysis and efficiency gains should be part of any reform initiatives as a norm, along with improved effectiveness and coherence. The Committee reiterates its view that it would have expected some efficiencies to be derived from a peace and security pillar restructuring initiative of this magnitude and recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide an update on potential efficiencies in the context of the next progress report (see also A/72/859, para. 8; see para. 29 below).**

20. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its resolution 72/262 C, the General Assembly noted that dual reporting lines would exist between the Assistant Secretaries-General heading the single political-operational structure and the Under-Secretaries-General for Peace Operations and for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and requested the Secretary-General to keep the implementation of dual reporting lines arrangements under close review and to take concrete actions to ensure that line management within the single political-

³ The single structure combined the previous regional divisions of the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of Operations of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations into one regional structure that is shared by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations.

operational structure was clear, coherent and accountable (resolution 72/262 C, sect. III, para. 6). The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will continue to ensure effective and efficient integration into the single regional political-operational structure with a view to maximizing the full potential of his restructuring of the peace and security pillar.

D. Changing organizational culture

21. The Secretary-General indicates that, from the beginning, he identified culture change as an essential ingredient of the reform. The peace and security pillar concerns not only a new architecture and new structures, but also a new way of working. He also indicates that, as an example, as noted in the recent evaluation by OIOS, integration in the regional divisions is still in progress but, where it has occurred, divisions have been able to produce higher-quality analysis in terms of breadth, coherence and depth. The Secretary-General states that culture change is not an area in which one-off measures can have an impact (A/75/202, paras. 51–53).

22. The OIOS evaluation also found that the organizational culture of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs had elements that both facilitated and hindered the efficient and effective achievement of its goals (see IED-20-001, paras. 56–59). The highest and lowest rated elements of the Department's culture, as reported by staff surveyed, are presented in figure 10 of the report of OIOS. Furthermore, the evaluation showed that morale in the Department was mixed: of all staff surveyed, 43 per cent rated morale as excellent or good, while 49 per cent considered it had decreased since the reform. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that several initiatives had been launched to drive culture change in the pillar since January 2019, such as a staff engagement action plan, Building Our Pillar, by the two departments, focusing on five key areas: professional development; innovation and new ways of working; a culture defined by trust; accountability and ethical behaviour; and an enabling environment for gender equality and inclusion. Key activities also included a partnership with the United Nations System Staff College focusing on foundational change management skills to empower staff to drive change from below. The Under Secretaries-General for the two departments had also committed themselves to holding regular meetings with their staff to discuss management issues and challenges in the new structures and to continuously promote a change in culture and approach to the work of the United Nations.

23. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that, as requested in the recommendations of OIOS, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs had developed an action plan for follow-up actions. The Department had accepted all the concrete steps identified by OIOS in relation to strengthening the management culture and communications, with corresponding lead entities and target dates for completion. The Committee was also informed that some activities had already been completed, such as issuance of practices, procedures and templates for staff, while implementation of others was ongoing. In a separate but related development, in response to a Secretariat-wide staff engagement survey, the Office of the Director for Coordination and Shared Services had convened a working group of staff from across the peace and security pillar to address the concerns expressed by staff of both departments and to develop a comprehensive action plan.

24. The Advisory Committee acknowledges the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General to promote culture change with the implementation of the peace and security pillar reform. The Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in its resolution 72/262 C, recognized the complementary roles of cultural change, leadership and accountability in the success of structural changes (resolution 72/262 C, para. 5). The Committee trusts that the Secretary-

General will make further efforts to facilitate culture change and provide an update in the next progress report (see para. 29 below). The Committee has discussed further the accountability framework of the Organization in its report on the review of progress in the implementation of management reform ([A/75/538](#), paras. 15–19).

E. Aligning with the development pillar

25. The Advisory Committee recalls that one of the four main goals outlined by the Secretary-General in his reform proposal was to align the peace and security pillar more closely with the development pillar (see para. 4 above). In his report on the implementation of the peace and security reform ([A/75/202](#), paras. 12, 19, 27, 28, 33, 37, 40, 41 and 44), information on strengthened cooperation with the resident coordinators is provided in the case studies showing evidence of the impact of the reform (see para. 11 above). OIOS observed in its evaluation that, while development system reform has repositioned the role of the resident coordinators to represent the Secretary-General at the country level and act on behalf of the entire Organization, there is no formal framework for engagement between the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the resident coordinators, and the involvement of resident coordinators in conflict prevention has been somewhat unclear. Most resident coordinators surveyed were uncertain how much prevention engagement to undertake with Governments and how to utilize the Department's support most effectively in this engagement. Similarly, some Department staff interviewed indicated uncertainty about how much information to share, when and with whom (IED-20-001, para. 43).

26. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, since the establishment of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Development Coordination Office in 2019, the two entities had worked closely to strengthen coordination and collaboration between Headquarters and resident coordinators. It was indicated to the Committee that, in relation to governance and seniority in the field, there was a clear division of labour in view of the distinct roles played by the head of mission, who was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the mission's mandate, and the resident coordinator, who coordinated the United Nations country team. In structurally integrated settings, the resident coordinator function was typically integrated into the mission in the form of a multi-hatted deputy special representative of the Secretary-General serving concurrently as the resident coordinator (and, in many cases, also as the humanitarian coordinator). In non-integrated settings, the resident coordinator was separate from the mission, but still had close interaction and mechanisms for coordination, even while pursuing different functions. The Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that the structurally integrated peacekeeping operations were the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that the structurally integrated special political missions included the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that the coordination and collaboration between the**

two departments and the resident coordinator system are a critical element in realizing the reform goal of aligning the peace and security pillar more closely with the development pillar and trusts that detailed information will be provided in the context of the next progress report (see para. 29 below).

F. Continuous improvement mechanism

27. In the conclusion of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the most immediately visible elements of the reform are structural. More important than the structural changes is the impact that they are having in the places where the peace and security pillar is engaged. While the reform has already yielded some early benefits, it has only just started. Changes in practices, culture and processes will take time and will constitute an ongoing learning effort. To ensure a regular review of how better results can be achieved, he will introduce a mechanism for continuous improvement ([A/75/202](#), paras. 54 and 55). He also states that, while benefits management pertains to the reform and will specifically measure reform-related improvements, his goal is to transition benefits management into a continuous improvement effort by the end of 2020. In that way, ongoing reform activities can be completed and new improvements can be implemented on a continuous basis (*ibid.*, para. 16).

28. Upon enquiry on the stated goal of transitioning benefits management into a continuous improvement effort by the end of 2020, the Advisory Committee was informed that the benefits would be tracked until they were realized to ensure full transparency and accountability and that the online benefits tracker would continue to be a foundation to track progress and achievements relating to reform until most reform elements had been implemented. Furthermore, continuous improvement would be gradually introduced as a mechanism to reflect on issues and opportunities for improvement. It would inform necessary course corrections and highlight the need to take additional actions to truly realize the Secretary-General's vision of a more nimble, effective, efficient and accountable United Nations Secretariat.

29. While noting that the Secretary-General's goal is to transition reform benefits management into a continuous improvement effort by the end of 2020, the Advisory Committee is of the view that it is not clear when the peace and security reform activities are to be completed and what type of a mechanism for continuous improvement is to be introduced. The Committee further notes the lack of information on how the peace and security reform activities will be reported in the future. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide a progress report on the implementation of the peace and security pillar during the main part of the seventy-sixth session of the Assembly.

G. Other matters

Responses to the coronavirus disease pandemic

30. The Secretary-General indicates that, through the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, further benefits of the reform became apparent. Despite implementation challenges, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations worked to amplify his call for a global ceasefire to facilitate the response to the pandemic. The pillar, together with the Department of Operational Support, formed a COVID-19 field support group, a joint field and Headquarters coordination forum working to find tangible solutions to challenges in addressing the pandemic ([A/75/202](#), paras. 42–44).

31. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with additional information on the work of the COVID-19 field support group, which had been established in mid-March 2020 to identify and address internal priorities and support-related challenges in order to protect personnel and continue operations in the field. It was indicated to the Committee that the feedback from the field through multiple surveys had shown that there was much appreciation for the work of the group, especially in the guidance and support on cross-mission problems. **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the efforts of the Secretary-General, through the COVID-19 field support group, to protect personnel and continue operations in the field. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide more updated information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, lessons learned, best practices and measures taken to ensure the safety and well-being of personnel in the next progress report (see para. 29 above).**

Equitable geographical representation and gender balance

32. The Advisory Committee requested additional information on the geographical distribution of posts and positions in the two departments. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that the composition of the two departments should be further improved to reflect more equitable geographical representation. The Committee recalls that the General Assembly, in its resolution 72/262 C, requested the Secretary-General to address the issue of equitable geographical representation of Member States, in conformity with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, at all levels of the two departments and to intensify his efforts to ensure proper representation of troop-contributing countries in the relevant new departments, taking into account their contributions to United Nations peacekeeping, and to report thereon in the context of future overview reports.**

33. The Advisory Committee was also provided with additional information on gender balance in the two departments. The Committee notes that, for staff in the Professional and higher categories, female staff accounted for 52 per cent in both the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the single regional structure, while the percentage was 36 per cent in the Department of Peace Operations. **The Advisory Committee trusts that greater efforts will be made to improve gender balance in the Department of Peace Operations.**

34. The Advisory Committee will further discuss matters relating to equitable geographical representation and gender balance in the context of its review of the forthcoming annual report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics, as well as the biennial report on the overview of human resources management of the Organization.

35. In addition, the Advisory Committee requested, but had not received upon finalization of the present report, information on challenges experienced during the recruitment process by the two new departments. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the related information will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the present report.**

IV. Conclusion

36. The action requested of the General Assembly is set out in paragraph 56 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/75/202). **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General, subject to its observations and recommendations above.**