

# Inside the Engine Room: Enabling the Delivery of UN Mandates in Complex Environments

MARC JACQUAND



**Cover Photo:** Engineers at work at the UNOCI logistics base in Abidjan's suburb of Koumassi, May 7, 2012. UN Photo/Basile Zoma.

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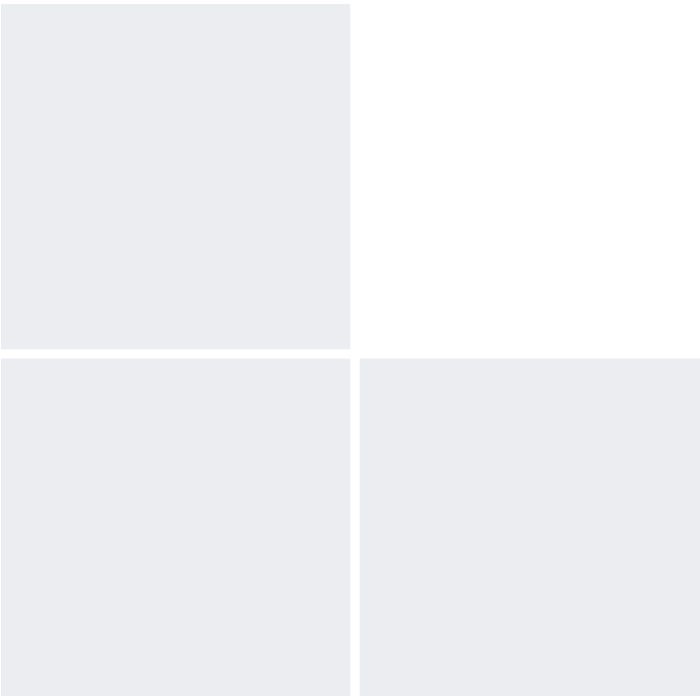
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## Abbreviations

DCO	UN Development Coordination Office
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DOS	UN Department of Operations Support
DSRSG/RC/HC	Deputy special representative of the secretary-general/resident coordinator/ humanitarian coordinator
MERT	Medical emergency response team
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
R&R	Rest and recuperation
UNDSS	UN Department of Safety and Security
UNHAS	UN Humanitarian Air Service
WFP	World Food Programme



## Executive Summary

Particularly in the complex environments where it increasingly deploys, the UN depends on a range of functions to implement its mandate. These include but are not limited to provision of security, facilitation of access, medical support, support to staff welfare, logistics, coordination, and risk management. Compared to substantive tasks implemented as part of mandates, these enabling functions, or enablers, have received less scrutiny. As a result, enablers—and their financial costs—are often unknown or misunderstood by member states, donors, and even UN staff.

While different enablers serve different purposes, require different skills, and have different costs, they have several things in common. First, they are not tied to a specific substantive mandate but benefit all mandates. Second, they are delivered through different business models depending on the location and type of service (e.g., through an integrated office or separate units; by the UN or by external providers). Finally, enablers are all part of an infrastructure of public goods that support not just the UN but also a broader set of actors.

These shared characteristics have implications for the cost of enablers. Because enablers are not tied to specific mandates and lack standard definitions, their costs are often buried, obscuring their true value. With such a wide range of business models for delivering enablers, the UN also has no standard, harmonized, or coherent way to fund them as one set of services. The result is funding arrangements that are unstable and often insufficient. With services that benefit many funded by a few, tensions arise over what is often seen as unfair burden sharing.

To appease these anxieties and put enablers on a path to sustainable funding, the UN needs to tackle several challenges:

- **Reporting and consolidating data:** The most immediate challenge is to understand what enablers are, how they are used, what they enable, and how much they cost. Much of this data is not regularly reported, and the data that is available is

often scattered within organizations and across the UN system. While data is not the end point, it is a necessary starting point for the UN to engage in dialogue with those who use enablers and those who pay for them.

- **Dedicating the necessary capacity:** Enablers require the right skill set and often the right systems and hardware, all of which increase costs. But cutting costs by skimping on enablers is not a viable option. More spending on enablers is required now if lives and resources are to be saved later.
- **Managing trade-offs:** Managing enablers means managing trade-offs between them and the risks they seek to address. For example, reducing costs related to one enabler could require additional investment in a different enabler to address new risks that arise. In a context of finite resources, the UN needs to set and articulate clear priorities to guide these difficult trade-offs.
- **Integrating operations into planning:** Because few understand enablers in their entirety, UN missions and agencies struggle to integrate operational matters into their planning. This lack of operational planning poses an especially acute challenge during mission transitions. Such planning is critical to avoid retroactive, ad hoc arrangements.
- **Communicating the importance of enablers:** As a result of these other challenges, few take an interest in what enablers are and how much they cost. This is exacerbated by the indirect and often invisible link between enablers and results and the difficulty of invoking what would happen in their absence. Effective communication on the need for enablers is necessary to convince member states and donors to fund them.

Ultimately, there must be greater coherence between those who define UN mandates, those who fund them, and those who implement them. To achieve such coherence, the UN's navigation room, where mandates are defined and expectations are set, must speak to the engine room, where budgets are developed and mandate enablers are funded.



## Introduction

From physical threats to staff to diversion of aid, and from fragmentation of political agendas to budgetary constraints, the United Nations faces growing, multifaceted pressures in the high-risk contexts where it deploys. To manage these complex challenges, various initiatives have emerged from within and outside the organization, including the 2018 Action for Peacekeeping initiative and its Declaration of Shared Commitments, the secretary-general's strategic reviews of select peacekeeping missions, investigative reports on specific incidents, and aspects of the UN development system reforms. These initiatives have focused on high-level questions related to mandate definition and strategic positioning, value for money, and the tactical dimensions of mandate delivery.

What has not received the same level of scrutiny is the range of functions required to operate under such complex conditions, how much these functions cost, and how the UN is configured to manage and fund them. To implement any substantive mandate, the organization needs the capacity to undertake a range of less visible functions, including but not limited to provision of security, facilitation of access, medical support, support to staff welfare, logistics, coordination, and risk management. These functions enable the UN to carry out its mandated tasks. Without them, mandates cannot be delivered, or are delivered poorly.

Unfortunately, these functions and their associated financial costs are often unknown or misunderstood by member states and donors, and even by UN staff. This is partly because they are poorly explained or not transparently presented and partly because they are complex, often buried in different budgets, only indirectly linked to mandate delivery and results, and not easily captured.

At times, these enabling functions are also ignored because they reflect uncomfortable trade-

offs that may not align with, or could even go against, the interests of most UN actors, member states, and donors. Investing in or divesting from one function inevitably impacts several others, and the way these trade-offs are handled carries risks. These risks are exacerbated by severe budgetary pressures, with several member states wanting the UN to achieve “more with less.” As a result, enabling functions are often underfunded, causing important trade-offs to be ignored or mismanaged, undermining mandate delivery, and putting people and resources at risk.

This paper explores these enabling functions, or enablers, by explaining what they are, why they are needed, how much they cost, and how they are—or should be—funded.<sup>1</sup> It then investigates the challenges involved, including the trade-offs at play, and how recognition of these trade-offs should inform strategic, policy, and budgetary decision making for UN operations. It then explores potential solutions, including current efforts to rethink UN business models such as cost-sharing arrangements, in order to reconcile, to the extent possible, the competing imperatives that are making it increasingly difficult for the UN to deliver on its mandates.

It is hoped that a better understanding of the need for and cost of these enablers, and the realities they reveal and reflect, will allow for greater unity of purpose among those who define the mandates, those who fund them, and those who implement them. It could also lead to fewer inconsistencies between the UN's “engine room,” which manages operations, and the UN's “navigation room,” where strategic considerations are discussed.

## What Are Enabling Functions?

Enabling functions, or enablers, are a set of tasks required to allow the implementation of mandates. They are not tied to any particular substantive mandate, be it disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), electoral support, delivery of

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<sup>1</sup> The paper does not propose to provide a comprehensive accounting of these functions and their costs in all complex environments across UN missions and country teams. The complexity of these environments and paucity of data, which itself is one of the challenges explored in this paper, render such accounting impossible. Instead, the paper draws on specific data points provided by UN colleagues for specific locations when and where the information is available. This anecdotal approach reflects the broader situation across UN operations in complex environments, highlighting the need for more integration and consolidation of costs related to enablers across the UN system. However, this is an endeavor fraught with methodological difficulties and transaction costs, and this paper can only provide illustrative examples.



**Box 1. Definitions and caveats**

While a reference to mandates and complex environments often implies a focus on operations authorized by the Security Council, this paper's purview is not just peace operations. It covers the costs of delivering all UN mandates, including those related to development, human rights, and humanitarian interventions carried out by the UN Secretariat and UN agencies, funds, and programs.

This broader perspective is justified because all these interventions require enablers, these functions often serve multiple different UN mandates in a specific country or region, and they are increasingly shared among UN entities and other actors. It also allows for an exploration of how the cost of such functions is often subsidized by parts of the UN and how current or new business models could deliver these functions more efficiently.

By "complex environments," the paper refers to situations characterized by a combination of the following features: a fragile political situation, a high degree of insecurity, the potential for or existence of violent conflict, constrained access for the delivery of mandates for logistical or security reasons, high risks of corruption and aid diversion, and the need for or presence of a multidimensional response.

Therefore, while the paper focuses mostly on environments where a UN peace operation is present, its overview of enablers and its analysis also apply to contexts where the UN presence is limited to UN agencies delivering multidimensional mandates in complex environments.

humanitarian aid, capacity building, or any other task the UN typically performs in complex environments. They rarely feature as mandated tasks, but they need to be performed for all mandated tasks to be implemented. Therefore, they require planning, people, financial resources, and systems.

**TYPES OF ENABLING FUNCTIONS**

Enabling functions include provision of security, facilitation of access, medical support, support to staff welfare, logistics, coordination, and risk management.

**Provision of Security**

While host-state responsibility for the safety and security of UN staff remains a principle of the UN's engagement and presence in a country, the reality is different in complex environments. By nature, these are high-threat contexts, and the UN relies on its own resources and capacities to protect its staff and assets.

The UN's role in providing security takes many forms. It ranges from static protection of UN facilities and assets to close protection of senior UN officials, escorts for UN staff and convoys, reconnaissance missions, and security analysis and advice. The provision of these services is a precondition for the UN's presence in and its staff's travel to and within a given country. Over the years, the

UN has developed a wide range of rules under the Security Risk Management framework that specify the required security arrangements, training obligations, systems, and resources required for deployment to and presence in high-risk situations.

Depending on the context and the type of security service, these tasks are undertaken by security officers from the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), agency and mission security personnel (including police and military components of a peace operation), or private external security providers. They also entail extensive training both for these providers and for all UN civilian personnel.

**Facilitation of Access**

The UN's ability to access specific areas or people to deliver its mandates is strongly linked to security. In many environments, the UN puts in place extensive access restrictions for its personnel, mostly for security reasons. In Somalia, for example, significant portions of the country have been off-limits to UN staff or only accessible for staff to perform critical tasks when the security risk is considered acceptable, as determined through a "program criticality" assessment. Such restrictions are often less intense for national and international NGOs, as well as for national UN staff. They tend to be similar, if not higher, for diplomatic staff.

Access is not merely constrained due to security concerns, however; to be present and perform its mandated tasks, the UN needs to be trusted and accepted. It requires people on the ground with the skills and expertise to connect with local leaders, understand communities' perspectives and sensitivities, secure passage of staff and convoys, and resolve disputes related to the UN's access and presence. The strategies used to gain acceptance are often intricate and require plenty of lead time, with people on the ground well before mandate implementation begins. Continual investment and monitoring are also necessary to sustain access throughout mandate implementation. For the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), access is not just an enabler but a mandated task.<sup>2</sup>

### Medical Support

UN personnel and their partners are frequent targets of attacks and are exposed to many other hazards.<sup>3</sup> In response, and to allow mandate delivery, the UN provides medical services, including through facilities operated by peacekeeping operations and agency-specific medical units, as well as dedicated emergency response teams supporting UN personnel and other actors. The presence of medical services in a given location is often a condition both for permanent deployment and for short-term visits and missions.

### Support to Staff Welfare

Support to staff welfare includes the provision of psychosocial support in the aftermath of traumatic events or to address long-term stress. In many high-risk environments, it also includes the management of rest and recuperation (R&R) cycles for staff, which, depending on the location and its security context, vary from four weeks to eight weeks (i.e., four to eight weeks in, one week out). Management of the R&R process requires both providing transportation in and out of the location and ensuring business continuity.

### Logistics

Beyond security, many complex environments impose logistical constraints on the movement of

people, goods, and funds. These are especially severe in landlocked countries, which require long and costly supply lines. Logistical constraints can include perilous physical terrain, inadequate communications infrastructure, administrative barriers or obstructionist behavior from host-country authorities to the import of goods, and legal restrictions on transferring funds in and out of the country.

The logistics needed to overcome these challenges require investment of time and resources to facilitate safe transportation of staff and goods, build and maintain compounds, or ensure timely payment of staff and partners. Because the UN frequently relies on the private sector to provide assets and logistics for daily operations (e.g., electricity, food, sanitation), it also needs to invest in procurement and risk management, especially in terms of due diligence before contracting.

### Coordination

The UN is often mandated to coordinate international assistance in areas related to its mandated tasks, mostly through the resident coordinator and humanitarian coordinator, as well as through peace operations. Coordination is both internal (among UN entities) and external (between the UN and national and international partners). In many complex environments, UN coordination is also needed at the subnational level, which can put pressure on the coordination budget and resources.

Expectations for strong, UN-led coordination have recently been reinforced by the UN development system reform, which strengthens the role of the resident coordinator. Likewise, the recommendation from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus emphasizes the role of the resident and humanitarian coordinator.<sup>4</sup> These developments have built expectations for sustained UN leadership of collective planning and monitoring, partnership development, and joint analysis.

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991) mandates the emergency relief coordinator to facilitate access for emergency assistance, including through negotiation.

<sup>3</sup> See Aid Worker Security Database, available at <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/report/summary>.

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus," February 21, 2019.

## Risk Management

In recent years, the UN has gradually increased its risk-management capacities both at headquarters and in the field. In complex environments, almost every task involved in implementing a mandate carries a political, security, legal, programmatic, fiduciary, or reputational risk for the UN (see Box 2 on fiduciary risks). Risks are present in activities ranging from procuring goods and services to selecting program implementing partners, from designing a recovery strategy to providing relief in remote areas, and from launching a DDR project to conducting an election.

While all UN entities, including peace operations, have internal risk-management policies, systems, and processes, capacities for robust and comprehensive risk management remain limited. In two high-risk environments, Afghanistan and Somalia, the UN has established dedicated units to provide additional risk-management support to all UN actors in the country. The value of these units lies in their mandate to pool risk-related information across UN entities and to design “whole-of-UN” risk assessments (e.g., of the UN’s electoral support or famine response in Somalia).

## KEY FEATURES OF ENABLING FUNCTIONS

While the different types of enablers serve different purposes, require different skills, and have different costs, they share several characteristics. First, they are not tied to any one substantive mandate. Almost all mandates benefit from security, access, staff welfare, logistics, coordination, and risk management. This offers opportunities for pooling and economies of scale but also makes budgeting and cost recovery more challenging.

Second, enablers are delivered through different business models depending on the location and type of service. For example, in some contexts, an integrated office provides coordination and analytical support to the entire UN presence. In others, a peace operation and a UN country team have separate coordination units. Similarly, depending on the circumstances and type of UN presence, security can be provided by UN peacekeepers (including guard units) or by external security companies. How each enabler is provided and funded varies greatly, and the UN still lacks a standard model for consolidating these as one set of services.

### Box 2. Managing fiduciary risks in complex environments

Among the many risks facing the UN, aid diversion is one of the top concerns. The UN is under increasing scrutiny to ensure that it adheres to the highest standards of fiduciary management. Many of the complex environments in which the UN has a multidimensional presence are characterized by high degrees of corruption, requiring enhanced due-diligence procedures.

It is important to stress that aid diversion is not the only risk faced by the UN and that attempts to reduce fiduciary risks also generate other risks—notably the risk of not providing support. The interplay between different types of risks is often misunderstood, and the UN system has limited dedicated risk-management capacities beyond those related to oversight functions such as audits, evaluations, and investigations. But risk management is not just about oversight; it is also about informing decision making and protecting UN personnel.

When managing fiduciary risks in complex environments, it is important to keep in mind that such risks emanate from a wide variety of actors. Emergency contexts provide many opportunities for aid diversion. The phenomenon of “briefcase NGOs,” which pop up to absorb the influx of relief money only to disappear when funding dries up, has been well documented. Aid is also diverted by governments, UN agencies, donors, and private service providers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Transparency International, “Integrity of Somalia’s Humanitarian Sector Must Be Strengthened for Aid to Reach Those Most in Need,” December 13, 2016, available at [www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/integrity\\_of\\_somalias\\_humanitarian\\_sector\\_must\\_be\\_strengthened\\_for\\_aid\\_to\\_r](http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/integrity_of_somalias_humanitarian_sector_must_be_strengthened_for_aid_to_r).

Third, enablers are all part of an infrastructure of public goods that support not just the UN but also a broader set of actors (see Table 1 for an example of enablers used by member states and international NGOs in Somalia). The examples are many:

- Many UN flights (e.g., in Mali, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia), including those provided by the mission and the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) operated by the World Food Programme (WFP), regularly transport government officials, member-state and donor delegations, and civil society partners.
- UNDSS reconnaissance and information are used by other international actors (e.g., member states, donors) to decide if and when to visit certain areas and how to structure their own security details. VIP visits from host governments or other member states are also often supported by UN security capacities on the ground.
- Risk-management services in Somalia and Afghanistan are extended to the entire aid community, with dedicated trainings for local NGOs, due-diligence information sharing with donors, and capacity building for government institutions.
- Research and analytical products developed by OCHA (e.g., analysis of access conditions, needs assessments) are used by many non-UN actors for analysis, funding allocation, and program design.
- The availability of UN medical services is often a requirement for non-UN international actors to

deploy, including for short-term visits. In Somalia, for example, the UN operates a medical emergency response team (MERT) in locations where the AU mission and UN support office do not have medical facilities to allow international staff to be present and to facilitate visits by other actors.

- Through its coordination platforms, the UN helps international actors engage with national partners. The UN also often facilitates contact between its international partners and host governments, organizes their visits, and even advocates on their behalf to authorities at various levels of government.

#### HOW MUCH DO THESE ENABLING FUNCTIONS COST?

Determining the cost of enabling functions is a challenging task. They are often buried in a maze of other costs, with their true value obscured by a complex system of subsidies and spread across different entities' budgets. Enablers are also not subject to standard definitions or classifications, and their costs are not assessed through a standard methodology or centrally consolidated, either in-country or globally.

Data from individual UN field operations does, however, illustrate the cost of enablers and why it matters to broader decision making. This data also shows how different enablers impact each other, including in terms of cost. For example, the shorter R&R cycles needed in highly stressful contexts require greater logistical support (and entail higher costs) as staff are transported in and out of work locations more frequently. In the non-permissive

Table 1. Use of enabling functions in Somalia by non-UN actors

Enabling Functions	Member states use?	International NGOs use?
UN flights	YES	YES
UNDSS information, reconnaissance, and ground support	YES	YES
Emergency medical care	YES	YES
Maps and risk assessments	YES	YES
Coordination and facilitation between authorities and donors/partners	YES	YES
Coordination of planning and programming	NO	YES

environment of Somalia, the UN subscribes to a four-week R&R cycle, which entails costs of approximately \$4.8 million per year to airlift personnel in and out of the country. In Mali, where many staff are entitled to a four-week rotation, the peacekeeping mission spends \$1.84 million a year in aviation costs for civilian R&R and \$9.57 million for uniformed R&R. In Iraq, it is estimated that shortening the R&R cycle for 240 Baghdad-based staff from six to four weeks would increase costs by \$2 million per year, mostly in travel-related outlays.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, while longer R&R cycles entail fewer financial costs, they pose the risk of staff burnout, greater medical needs, and poor performance.

The cost of enablers can fluctuate over time due to the vagaries of complex environments. For example, costs increase when more air transportation is needed if ground movement becomes impossible because of deteriorating security conditions or weather-related hazards. Similarly, costs can go up when commodity prices rise (notably the price of fuel) or when money transfer fees increase due to regulatory changes in third-party countries.

Some of these costs are relatively standard across countries. This is true for many logistics requirements, which are a staple for a UN presence in complex environments. For example, the standard cost of an unarmored heavy-duty 4x4 vehicle (e.g., a Nissan Patrol) is about \$25,000 to \$30,000 whether the UN is operating in Yemen, Niger, or Colombia. However, even these standard costs are higher in many complex environments due to security regulations that demand greater protection; an armored vehicle costs at least \$150,000, or five to six times as much as an unarmored vehicle, and an ambulance costs around \$80,000.<sup>7</sup>

Other costs are more context-specific. The case of Somalia illustrates how almost every aspect of the UN's presence and programming requires dedicated enablers that come at a higher cost. One of the key challenges for mandate delivery in Somalia is the difficulty of providing safe personal

and professional facilities in the face of unabated threats and attacks. As a result, the average cost of security-compliant accommodation in Mogadishu is \$176 a day per staff member, or \$64,240 a year, in addition to staff remuneration and hazard pay. Armed escorts from private security providers in and around the city cost the UN \$700 per trip.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, beyond transportation for military and civilian R&R, the UN mission in Somalia spends about \$23.5 million annually on 48,000 individual flights, including close to 4,000 undertaken by non-UN personnel. This intensive flight operation is also dictated by the large number of UN, NGO, and donor personnel in Nairobi who travel in and out of Somalia on a regular basis. While relocating these staff to Mogadishu or other places in Somalia would reduce the need for air travel, security-related costs would increase, as would those related to staff welfare, remuneration, and accommodation, which on average exceed similar costs in Nairobi by 33 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Another location-specific enabler in Somalia is the medical emergency response teams (MERTs), which consist of one doctor and one or two nurses in each of five locations where mission-provided medical services are not available. The need for the MERTs was tragically confirmed in 2015 when a UNICEF team was attacked in Garowe and four staff were killed. The nearby MERT was able to save the lives of four other team members by providing stabilizing aid until additional support could be flown in from Mogadishu and Nairobi. Many diplomatic delegations have made deployments to remote locations dependent on the availability of a MERT. These teams, all contracted as UN volunteers, cost the UN \$1.6 million per year.<sup>10</sup>

The UN also bears greater risk-management costs in Somalia. Since 2011, following allegations of massive fraud associated with the famine response, the UN operation in Somalia has upgraded its collective and entity-specific risk-management capacities and systems. Greater due diligence and scrutiny are applied to any person or organization doing business with the UN, from

6 Data provided by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and Department of Operations Support (DOS).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.



private security providers to NGOs delivering humanitarian aid to individuals applying to fly on UN planes. These efforts have been supported and coordinated by a dedicated risk-management unit under the authority of the deputy special representative of the secretary-general and resident and humanitarian coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC). This unit is equipped to address all potential risks to the UN in Somalia. For example, with funding from a variety of donors, it supported the 2016 electoral process by vetting all recipients of UN technical and financial support, including over 14,000 delegates. It also provides risk-management services to the UN's flagship multi-partner trust fund, in which donors have invested over \$200 million to support a range of national priorities. The cost of maintaining the risk-management unit, which has eight staff (including four national staff), is \$1.2 million per year.<sup>11</sup>

The risk-management systems of specific UN entities in Somalia carry additional costs. Third-party monitors—often used to provide an additional, independent layer of project monitoring—usually cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000, or 3–5 percent of the project budget. Remote-management approaches such as call centers and verification using satellite imagery—designed to provide oversight while keeping staff out of harm's way—amount on average to 6 percent of the project budget.<sup>12</sup>

Yemen provides another vivid illustration of the cost of the range of enablers required to sustain one of the most complex humanitarian responses in the world. The humanitarian community has appealed

for \$4.2 billion for Yemen in 2019. Out of this total, \$26.2 million is needed for coordination and safety and \$68.5 million for logistics. Hence, the cost of enablers is \$94.7 million, or just 2 percent of the total appeal.<sup>13</sup> Coordination and safety include support for information management (mapping, data management, information products, and information technology equipment), coordination through the humanitarian cluster approach (cluster coordinators, offices, and humanitarian needs analysis and response planning), and humanitarian access and deconfliction (staff to analyze access constraints, engage with key stakeholders, and liaise with the Saudi-led coalition). Logistics is meant to cover costs associated, inter alia, with UNHAS, warehousing, fuel, and land transportation. As of June 2019, coordination and safety needs were 29 percent funded, while the logistics appeal was 65 percent funded.<sup>14</sup>

Globally, the humanitarian logistics cluster highlights both the immense cost of enablers and the funding situation. Humanitarian logistical needs, which provide the foundation for life-saving interventions, are often well-funded, relative to other clusters (see Table 2). However, the 40–60 percent annual gap between appeals and funding remains daunting. Logistics budgets usually correspond to 5–8 percent of total humanitarian appeals and 2 percent of overall funding.

The low proportion of funding appeals dedicated to logistics has an immense impact. Lack of funding often delays the movement of humanitarian cargo facilitated by the logistics cluster, including both food and non-food items.

Table 2. Humanitarian appeals, logistics cluster<sup>15</sup>

	Appeal	Funded	Coverage
2018	\$410.5 million	\$215.6 million	52%
2017	\$299.3 million	\$188.8 million	63%
2016	\$322.5 million	\$123.8 million	38%

11 Data from the risk management unit budget, UNOPS Somalia.

12 Elias Sagmeister and Julia Steets, "The Use of Third-Party Monitoring in Insecure Contexts," SAVE, November 2016.

13 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Yemen 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan," available at <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/675/summary>.

14 Ibid.

15 Data from UN Financial Tracking Service.

**Box 3. The cost of incentives**

Personnel are directly linked to mandate delivery and are therefore not included in this paper's definition of enabling functions. Nonetheless, they require mentioning to understand what it takes to deliver. To attract high-quality international staff and incentivize deployment to high-risk areas, enablers such as security, R&R, and risk management are not enough. Adequate financial compensation, in the form of "danger pay" or "hazard pay" provided in addition to base salaries, is critical.

On average, danger pay is approximately 7 to 10 percent of staff salaries. For 100 international staff paid a total of \$20 million per year, this would entail an increase of \$1.4 to \$2.0 million a year. In Iraq, for example, the mission spends around \$4 million a year on hazard allowances for civilian staff, or an average of \$6,000 per individual each year.<sup>16</sup>

For the UN, the rationale for additional remuneration is at times disputed, with some arguing that other partners could fulfill staffing needs at lower cost without prejudice to staff quality. This debate is fraught with political agendas beyond the purview of this paper. What is harder to challenge, however, is the principle that financial incentives are needed for personnel to face serious threats and put their lives at risk in the pursuit of mandate delivery.

Insufficient resources for UNHAS sometimes impede humanitarian workers' movement and access to people in need in remote places.

Related to the financial costs of enablers—and ultimately more important—are the human costs. The number of fatalities, injuries, and illnesses borne by the UN's military personnel has increased since 2000 (see Table 3). Similar trends can be observed for civilian UN and non-UN staff. What is difficult to capture is the counterfactual: how many lives have been preserved and protected through investments in better security, welfare, risk management, access, and related enablers? And how many more lives would be at risk—or worse, lost—without these investments?

**HOW DOES THE UN COVER THESE COSTS?**

The UN has no standard, harmonized, or coherent way to fund these enabling functions as one set of services. Funding comes from a combination of sources, and the funding model varies from country to country, depending partly on the business models adopted for different functions. These sources include the following:

- Assessed contributions from the UN regular budget and peacekeeping budget;
- Allocations from UN headquarters, including from agencies (e.g., allocations from the UN Development Programme's core resources) or

Table 3: Fatalities, injuries, and illnesses borne by the UN's military personnel<sup>17</sup>

Incident/circumstance	2000	2005	2010	2015	2018
Vehicle (road, weather, collisions)	33	108	116	89	108
Gun or rocket fire	39	27	21	61	79
Explosive ordnance, improved explosive devices, landmines	5	9	4	57	59
Ambush	16	23	15	9	21

<sup>16</sup> Data provided by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and DOS.

<sup>17</sup> Data provided by DOS.



offices (e.g., allocations for coordination from the Development Cooperation Office and for security from UNDSS) that themselves receive funding from the regular budget and from cost-sharing arrangements at the global level;

- Financial contributions from donors, either through bilateral arrangements or through trust funds set up for this purpose;
- Cost sharing among UN agencies using their project budget, reserves, or savings;
- In-kind support from member states, mostly related to staff, such as “gratis personnel” provided to missions, junior professional officers, and secondments; and
- Recovery of the cost of services used by one UN or non-UN entity from another.<sup>18</sup>

In many instances, these funding sources are comingled. For example, UN security is often funded through a mix of funding from UNDSS, pooled resources from UN agency and mission budgets, and direct donor support for specific services (e.g., the MERTs in Somalia).

Altogether, these funding arrangements are unstable and often insufficient for four main reasons. First, many agencies and offices do not receive core funding from UN headquarters. For example, the World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), all of which play significant roles in complex environments, must finance the full cost of their operations through the projects they implement; in fact, it is their headquarters operations that are funded by their country-level project budgets (as a percentage of the project budget or on a direct-cost basis). Their ability to contribute to enablers not tied to specific projects is therefore limited, as such contributions need to come from project budgets. As few project budgets include a line for “enabling functions,” these contributions often come from other project lines to the detriment of programming. The recent trend toward tightly earmarked contributions rather than core funding makes it even harder for these agencies to adequately finance these services.

Second, funding practices do not always match the nature of these services. For some enablers—particularly coordination, risk management, and medical support—costs are more or less fixed and not tied to project budgets. Funding these services based on a proportion of the project budget would therefore be inadequate and risk creating gaps (see Box 4).

Third, allocations from headquarters are often standard across countries, regardless of need or complexity. For example, funding from UNDSS is largely based on the number of UN staff based in the country, which means that the allocation for high-risk and low-risk environments with similar staff levels can be similar. Funding from the Development Coordination Office (DCO) is higher in post-conflict countries, but the twenty-eight peace operations that currently receive top-ups in coordination funding vary in complexity and need.

Finally, the practice of considering UN peace operations as the service provider and funder of last resort is reaching its limits. For security and logistics in particular, peace operations provide infrastructure upon which many other UN and non-UN actors depend. In remote areas such as northern Mali or the eastern Central African Republic, the mission is often the sole provider of transport, logistics, and life support. Yet proper cost-recovery arrangements are seldom in place. As a result, peace operations subsidize these services. At a time when they are under severe budgetary stress, this arrangement is no longer viable. It is also generating tension within the UN, with disputes over cost recovery often pulling the system apart in contexts where it should be coming together.

These complex, hybrid funding arrangements can further polarize the politics of cost at the UN. One issue is free-riding: the fact that many of these services, which benefit many, are funded by a few through extra-budgetary contributions exacerbates tensions over the thorny issue of burden sharing. Moreover, many member-state donors have challenged the costs of these services, feeding the prevalent perception that the UN is costly and inefficient.

<sup>18</sup> However, there is evidence that full cost recovery is rarely achieved. In Somalia, non-UN entities (e.g., embassies, NGOs) are only charged a \$100 administrative fee per airline ticket. Similarly, UNHAS only recovered \$13.7 million from ticket fees in 2014 (out of a total cost of \$18.5 million), with just four donors providing direct support to make up the shortfall. Similar gaps in reimbursement by both UN and non-UN entities have plagued mission budgets in Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other contexts.

## Challenges to Sustainably Funding Enabling Functions

To appease these anxieties and put these services on a path to sustainable funding, the UN needs to tackle several challenges. These include challenges related to data, capacity, trade-offs, planning, and communication.

### REPORTING AND CONSOLIDATING DATA

The most immediate challenge relates to data on enablers: what they are, how they are used, what they enable, how much they cost, and how they are funded. Much of this data is absent because, for several enablers, it is not part of standard reporting requirements. The data that exists is often scattered within organizations and across the UN system, making it difficult to consolidate, and multiple sources of funding make it hard to obtain a comprehensive picture.

In Afghanistan and Somalia, for example, the dedicated risk-management units are funded by cost-sharing arrangements among UN entities, direct donor contributions, and trust funds, including the Peacebuilding Fund. These units complement risk-management tasks undertaken by specific entities, which can be funded from project budgets, reserves, or funds provided by headquarters, all of which are rarely classified specifically as risk-management costs.

Data on security services presents the same hurdles. Most, but not all, security services are provided by UNDSS, which is funded through a combination of allocations from headquarters, contributions from UN entities, direct donor support, and cost-recovery arrangements, with the source and amount often depending on the type of service and its purpose. In Somalia, for example, the MERTs—though critical—are not a core UNDSS service and are therefore not eligible for funding through allocations from headquarters or interagency security budgets. Beyond this maze of funding sources for collective security is funding for entity-specific security, which often comes from a combination of project budgets (for project-specific needs) and support allocations from headquarters (for fixed corporate costs).

The difficulty of identifying and consolidating

funding sources is compounded by the difficulty of attributing use of enablers to specific entities. Air transportation provides a stark example. Aviation budgets are seldom distributed across types of passengers (i.e., UN or non-UN). The true cost of air transportation would require deducting the cost of cargo and splitting the remaining costs among entities using the service on the basis of passenger type and volume, the aviation assets used, and distance traveled. The cost of getting this information would be high, and there is currently little demand for it. However, this data is needed to inform budgetary discussions and clarify the implications of specific decisions. For example, it could clarify the knock-on effects of a reduction in funding for transportation on the operations of actors beyond the peace operation. The data would also help inform discussions on the design of cost-sharing arrangements between the service provider and users, which often turn acrimonious.

There has been progress, however. In recent years, the Department of Operations Support (DOS, formerly the Department of Field Support) has tried to obtain more granular information from peace operations on a range of operational matters, including expenditures on fuel, construction, food, and aviation. Similar information, although not always to the same level of depth, is often available from individual UN agencies, notably through more sophisticated enterprise resource management platforms. However, disaggregation by type of enabler is not standard, and consolidation of data either at the country level or globally to understand the true cost of delivery remains aspirational.

### DEDICATING THE NECESSARY CAPACITY

The increasingly complex environments in which the UN operates mean that enablers require an increasingly sophisticated skillset. Getting the right skillset and, for many functions, the right systems and hardware, increases costs. While efforts to reduce costs often give rise to the temptation to improvise or to task enablers to staff on top of their other responsibilities, this is no longer an option. Functions like facilitation of access, due diligence, and coordination all require dedicated competencies and training.

This is particularly true for security, where the

ever-more sophisticated nature of threats to the UN requires regular upgrades in training content and increased training frequency. Robust risk management also requires dedicated competencies in pattern detection and familiarity with the latest software for trend recognition. Similarly, new techniques and technologies for map design and analysis as well as for logistics are imperative if the UN is to sustain high-quality operations.

### MANAGING TRADE-OFFS

Managing enablers, and their cost, means managing trade-offs between different functions and the risks they seek to address. For example, a small physical presence often reduces requirements and costs related to security and logistics. However, it also increases risk, both fiduciary (the UN has fewer eyes and ears on the ground to monitor programs) and reputational (counterparts could perceive the small presence as a dereliction of duty or withdrawal from responsibilities). As such, a smaller security apparatus may need to be counter-balanced by increased capacities to manage these risks. Likewise, reductions in logistics capacities (e.g., cars, flights) reduce direct engagement with local leaders and populations, which can generate new political and reputational risks. In many countries, for example, the limited number of

armored vehicles restricts opportunities for leaving the compound to visit local interlocutors and develop local knowledge and relationships.

The trade-off between presence, cost, and mandate delivery is brought into sharp focus in Somalia, where the UN has had intense internal debates over whether to relocate staff from Nairobi to Mogadishu and other Somali towns. The heavy presence in Nairobi has generated resentment among Somali authorities, who see it as perpetuating a supply-driven, externally imposed, distant engagement. In response, the UN has gradually moved its presence into Somalia to signal a new era of international support to the country's statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts. As previously mentioned, however, basing staff in Somalia comes at a higher financial cost to cover security requirements, which few member-state donors have been willing to accept, especially for UN agencies. Moreover, some have questioned the value of moving staff to Somalia only for them to spend most, if not all, of their time confined to UN compounds and to rarely engage with the "real" Somalia. Yet the politics of returning staff to Nairobi—a decision often contemplated, especially for functions that are not location-specific, such as administration—have proven toxic.

Table 4. Risk profile of delivery methods in Somalia

Delivery method	Advantages	Drawbacks
Implementation by NGOs or civil society organizations	Lower cost Deeper access Greater safety for UN staff	Increased fiduciary risks Increased costs related to due diligence and capacity building Increased reputational risk due to the transfer of the safety risk to other actors
Call centers and GPS tracking or satellite imagery verification	Greater safety for UN staff Additional fiduciary control	Higher cost (5–6 percent of the project budget, on average)
Spot-verification day trips conducted by UN staff	Additional fiduciary control Lower cost	Staff security risks Limited reliability over time
Third-party monitoring	Additional fiduciary control Greater safety for UN staff	Greater reliability Higher costs (often more than \$10,000 per project) Increased reputational risk due to the transfer of the safety risk to other actors

Another example from Somalia is the trade-offs associated with remote project-management methods (see Table 4). Where access is either limited or restricted, and where it is difficult to have a physical presence, remote-management methods are often used to reduce the need for and cost of security services. These methods demonstrate the potential for a domino effect: while each method avoids some risks and costs associated with a permanent physical presence, it increases risks and costs in other areas.

## INTEGRATING OPERATIONS INTO PLANNING

Few UN personnel understand enablers in their totality, their costs are difficult to assess, and, as with any other public good, it is challenging to determine the right cost-sharing formula and avoid too many free riders. Moreover, the UN's Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning and related guidance are silent on these issues. As a result, UN missions and agencies struggle to integrate operational matters into the plans they submit to legislative and budgetary authorities. Retroactively planning for and funding these functions is only possible through ad hoc, tenuous arrangements.

Lack of operational planning poses an especially acute challenge during mission transitions. When a peacekeeping operation draws down or departs, the rest of the UN presence loses much of its supporting infrastructure, notably for logistics and security, which it struggles to replace. Discussions with donors to secure financial support for these enablers are often difficult. A mission's drawdown or departure inevitably leads member states to expect significant changes to the UN's footprint, including its financial needs. However, in most contexts, the need for these functions remains. In addition, moving the funding of these functions from the predictable peacekeeping budget to more unpredictable voluntary contributions requires a holistic understanding of these functions and reliable data. Both are in short supply.

## COMMUNICATING THE IMPORTANCE OF ENABLERS

Finally, as a result of these other challenges, enablers suffer from a public relations problem.

Few people beyond those tasked with performing or securing resources for these functions take interest in what they are and how much they cost. Except for security, they fail to garner much consideration outside of operational staff and arenas. Communicating about them is hard, for they lack, on the surface, strategic significance.

Two challenges exacerbate this attention deficit. One is the indirect and often invisible link between enablers and results. Demonstrating a causal link between a risk-management task or a financial-management capacity-building program and the successful delivery of a DDR project, for example, is difficult. What one does not see and does not understand, one is reluctant to fund.

A second, and related, challenge is that counterfactuals, which are often a powerful communication method, are almost impossible to argue for enablers. It is difficult to claim the relevance of enablers by invoking what would happen in their absence (save for facilitation of access, perhaps, without which few reasonable people would argue that humanitarian aid could be delivered). Even in the area of security, the counterfactual is mired in debates over lighter or more robust postures. Risk management deals in probabilities, which weaken counterfactual certainties. Coordination is perhaps the function for which the counterfactual is hardest to argue; while support for humanitarian coordination through OCHA and frequent references to coordination in Security Council mandates point to the widespread recognition of its value, the UN continues to struggle to make a strong case for funding it, as shown by recent efforts to set up the new development coordination architecture.<sup>19</sup>

Together, these two challenges feed mistrust on the part of member states and donors when confronted with calls for more funding for these functions. Absent a compelling narrative, and lacking comprehensive, transparent data, mention of these functions can trigger fears of profligacy and poor management of public resources. These sentiments, substantiated or not, call for continuous innovation and improvement in how enablers are delivered, funded, and explained.

<sup>19</sup> The establishment of the new UN development system, and the costs associated with the enhanced capacities in the resident coordinator offices and the DCO was met with some resistance and skepticism by several member states and quite a few UN agencies.



## Business Models for Delivery of Enabling Functions

To overcome these challenges, the UN must continue to improve the way it delivers and funds enablers. In today's political and financial environment, these functions are not exempt from the push for more efficient UN operations.

### A WIDE RANGE OF MODELS

In practice, the UN uses a wide range of models for delivering enablers, with little consistency or standardization from one operating environment to another. This diversity partly reflects the need for tailored solutions, dictated by the specificities of each environment, the configuration of the UN presence, and the resources available.

For example, the UN uses a range of business models for system-wide coordination. Coordination between the UN Support Mission in Libya and the UN country team is done jointly with personnel funded by DCO and the mission's budget, while OCHA coordinates the humanitarian response separately. In the Palestinian territories, the coordination unit is fully embedded in and funded by the UN political mission, with OCHA remaining outside of this coordination structure. In Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, system-wide coordination, including several humanitarian liaison tasks, is managed by an integrated office that also oversees other units in the mission, all under the authority of the DSRSG/RC/HC. In many other places, coordination services are performed separately by the mission, the resident coordinator office, and OCHA.

Local-level coordination is also done in myriad ways. In some locations, the UN entrusts local coordination to an agency or a mission's existing regional political office. In others, the resident coordinator office deploys and funds stand-alone coordination capacities.

However, this plethora of models can make delivery of enablers less effective and efficient. Without standardized models, UN personnel often reinvent the wheel at a high transaction cost. This shortcoming is gradually being recognized. The development system reform has introduced a

standard global model for the structure and funding of core functions in resident coordinator offices. OCHA is also increasingly homogenizing the design and implementation of its access and analysis capacities with due regard for country-specific requirements.

Other enablers lag behind. Some UN operations in complex environments have limited risk-management systems in place. Others have some capacity, but it is restricted to individual entities. Others, as previously mentioned, supplement entity-specific capacities with a unit servicing the entire system. On the security front, while there have been recent efforts at harmonization and several standard features apply across all countries, inconsistencies abound. These notably include differences in the list of security services cost-shared among UN entities in a country and the operational and funding relationship between UNDSS's in-country presence and the security apparatus of UN missions and entities.

The UN's approach to logistics is also diverse and fragmented, especially with regard to shared compounds and facilities. While standardization, reliability, and predictability of logistics services have greatly improved with the global service center model, these gains remain at the macro level of operations, notably in relation to human resources and supply-chain management. There is no such standardization at the country level. While local requirements are important to consider (e.g., who needs to be where, the UN's in-country configuration), they do not warrant the diversity of funding and business models currently used for deployment, housing, and transportation of personnel. Moreover, logistics cost-sharing arrangements are often haphazard, generating internal tension.

Business models can also vary within a country, depending on the security posture and needs and the type of function. From Mali to Afghanistan, UN missions and entities have different configurations in their various locations across the country. Where a mission and country team coexist physically, the mission often provides facilities and compounds for UN agencies to use. In other places, either the mission or the agencies have a stand-alone presence, requiring a different set-up and a different approach to providing enablers.

The choice of business model in different parts of a country is dictated by a range of factors. Cost considerations often drive UN entities to pool resources. Security assessments can require different actors to live and work in the same compound. Perceptions also matter; in places where close proximity to a UN peace operation may be interpreted as compromising independence and impartiality, UN humanitarian actors often choose to operate from separate locations and minimize their dependence on mission assets.

### WHAT OPTIONS ARE THERE FOR MORE EFFICIENT, PREDICTABLE MODELS?

The diversity of business models is to some extent inevitable. However, while adaptation to local needs is essential, there are fairly simple ways to make existing approaches more standardized and predictable.

To begin with, the UN system needs to improve its collection and aggregation of data as a prerequisite for having informed discussions on which model is best suited to which contexts and for deciding how to divide up costs. Gradually, both in-country and at headquarters, the UN should identify, record, and consolidate enablers and their costs based on standard definitions, classifications, and tracking methodologies. In the field, resident coordinator offices, which are responsible for some of these functions, as well as mission planning units, which are often tasked with consolidating mission budgets, could lead this effort. But uncovering and sharing data will require the involvement of many actors, including UNDSS. At headquarters, departments such as DCO, UNDSS, and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General's Strategic Planning and Monitoring Unit could factor this need for data on enablers into their ongoing analysis of UN resources.

Together, these offices could also intensify efforts to list and disseminate interesting field practices on the management of enablers. So far, such practices have been undertaken more on the basis of happenstance, local imperatives, external pressures, or staff ingenuity than through any concerted system-wide strategy. Such practices include integrated offices, which bring together capacities for analysis, risk management, security, and coordination. Pooling such capacities not just lowers costs (through

common premises, for example); it also enhances the value and relevance of each function and the quality of its outputs.

On the administrative side, greater standardization of instruments such as memoranda of understand (MoUs) or letters of agreement always helps—notably by providing logistics and regulating different partners' access to enabling assets—even if they need to be tailored to specific environments. This would improve the predictability of cost-recovery rates (which agencies need in order to better anticipate and budget for the costs of services provided by missions, for example) and reduce transaction costs (since MoUs often need to be renegotiated repeatedly).

New technologies can also make many of these functions more efficient. Already, humanitarian entities and peace operations alike are making increased use of innovations such as block chains, drones, and big data to accelerate or improve mandate delivery. For example, humanitarian entities are using block chains to secure payments for aid beneficiaries and reduce intermediary costs. Big data is helping predict the spread of epidemics. Drones allow for safer—and cheaper—reconnaissance and faster delivery of small aid parcels across difficult terrain.

Yet the application of new technologies to enablers is uneven. They are spreading rapidly for use in analysis, notably for access mapping and forecasting, as well as in the field of logistics. Technological innovation for medical services and security provision is more mixed. There are plenty of unexplored opportunities when it comes to risk management and coordination in particular.

Finally, the search for more effective ways to manage these functions ties into the broader debate on the UN's efficiency. The main debate revolves around the tension between increasing quality and cutting costs. While the two are not always mutually exclusive, in complex environments there is a limit to how much the UN and its partners can afford to save on enablers. The search for more efficient ways to perform these tasks and the various operational, programmatic, and funding models all share one central feature: they require dedicated capacity. Any business model that seeks to dilute such capacity, for example by merging it

#### Box 4. A levy to fund enabling functions?

In several contexts, donors have suggested imposing a levy on project budgets as a way to fund enabling functions. The suggested approach is to include in the budget of every project that benefits from enablers a certain amount to be transferred to the entity or entities providing these function, calculated as a percentage of overall project costs. While simple and elegant in theory, this idea is conceptually and operationally flawed for several reasons:

- Enablers are rarely a function of the volume of programming. Many of them are fixed, no matter how often they are used, or are tied to factors other than project funds.
- Under UN rules and regulations, full budgets need to be secured in order to issue contracts. The budget secured from a levy is variable and unpredictable, however, which would make it difficult for providers of enablers to recruit and retain staff and to manage teams.
- The operational arrangements for imposing, collecting, and transferring the levy would carry high transaction costs. These costs may surpass the actual revenue generated.
- The inclusion of a specific amount in a project budget to sustain the provision of enablers would likely come at the expense of, rather than in addition to, project funds.
- Implementation of this approach would most likely get bogged down in disagreements over allocation and rates, especially as different projects make different use of different enablers.
- Even if this idea would be technically feasible for UN agencies that operate on a project-management basis, it would be more complex for peace operations, which operate on a different programmatic and budgetary basis. This would require designing different arrangements for different recipients, likely increasing complexity and confusion.
- Finally, the levy does not address the problem of free riders; in fact, it may exacerbate it, as enablers are not provided only to those donor countries who support the UN's programmatic activities.

with other tasks, ultimately undermines the broader operation.

For example, in 2011, the small-footprint model used for the special political mission in Libya was hailed as a cost-effective way to support the country's complex transition, but few investments were made in many of the enablers discussed in this paper. The UN operation therefore had limited resources to travel across the country to engage with political leaders, armed groups, and other stakeholders. It likewise had little capacity to analyze and monitor risks. This provides a sobering reminder of the cost of underinvestment in these important functions.

## Conclusion: Linking Expectations to Resources

Operating in complex environments has become—and is likely to remain—the new normal for the UN. It is therefore imperative for the organization, its member states, and its partners to increase their

collective understanding of what it takes to deliver the wide gamut of mandates in such environments.

First, it requires making a choice among imperfect options and difficult trade-offs; each option carries a risk, and investing in or divesting from one enabler almost inevitably impacts several others. This means that member states and the UN need to decide what matters more: Preventing fraud? Mitigating security risks? Reducing transaction costs? Removing obstacles to access? Moving closer to counterparts? In complex environments, the UN cannot have it all unless it is ready to invest in all. In a context of finite resources, difficult trade-offs need to be made, and priorities need to be set and articulated.

Second, delivering mandates in complex environments requires investing in enablers. Considering the complex environments in which the UN often operates and the UN's unique requirements and roles, the funding arrangements for enablers are inadequate and unsustainable. On an almost daily basis, the UN is making trade-offs



that stretch to the limit its ability to implement its mandates in the field. Lack of financial support has real operational implications that are all too often measured in human lives. More spending on these functions is required now if lives and resources are to be saved later.

Yet there is limited recognition of the range of enabling functions required to deliver different mandates; these functions are vital but not readily visible. There is also a lack of awareness of their costs, which are high and multidimensional. Increased awareness requires more detailed information. The data required to provide this information and support meaningful discussions on mandates remains scattered, hard to access, and complex. Ongoing efforts to gather, consolidate, and disseminate information on these functions and their costs must continue and must be supported. Investing in such efforts now will help the organization save down the road. Data is not the end point, but it is a necessary starting point for the UN to engage in a dialogue with its partners: those who use enablers and those who are asked to pay for them.

Such data is also important given the “public good” dimension of many enablers. Because these functions are often provided to a range of non-UN actors, allowing them to operate in complex environments, they are a form of subsidy.

Understanding the true cost of that subsidy can help the UN share the cost more equitably. Data on the cost of enablers can also better inform judgments about how cost-effective the UN is, especially compared to other actors.

Research, information sharing, and dialogue on these functions, what they enable, and what they cost must therefore continue. To be meaningful, senior leadership must engage with this effort. Heads of UN departments and agencies must understand and talk about enablers. Their counterparts in member-state capitals must listen and care.

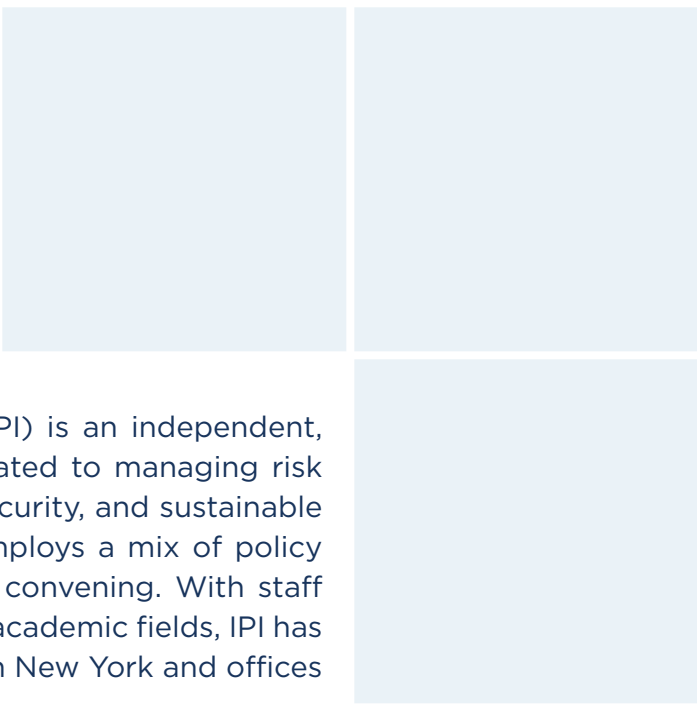
To be impactful, this effort must lead to concrete changes in budgetary decisions in the Fifth Committee, the executive boards of UN agencies, and national governments. Choices on the level of ambition of UN mandates, expectations for what the UN can achieve, and the trade-offs involved must be reflected in budgets and funding allocations. The UN must make the cost of delivery and what it takes to implement mandates more explicit. Ultimately, there must be greater coherence between what is wanted from the UN and what is needed for the UN. To achieve such coherence, the UN’s navigation room, where mandates are defined and expectations are set, must speak to the engine room, where budgets are developed and mandate enablers are funded.











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