

Comprehensive Security in a Conflict Environment

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Abstract

For the past five years, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has been implementing its mandate, partially in an environment of ongoing violence. This article describes ways in which the conflict continues to impact the lives of civilians and describes the humanitarian-security nexus in the Ukrainian conflict. As well, the article draws conclusions, which contributions an international monitoring mission can make to mitigate the human cost of the conflict and pursue a comprehensive concept of security and to prevention, even while operating under the conditions of an ongoing conflict.

Keywords

comprehensive security – conflict prevention – Ukraine – OSCE SMM – Human Dimension – humanitarian-security nexus – Donbas conflict

In March 2017, the authors published an article focusing on the role of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine as an instrument of comprehensive security, including conflict prevention.¹ In its conclusion, a number of lessons learned were identified. Amongst those was the recommendation that *“a careful consideration of the expectations and needs of the people on the ground are vital for both conflict management and prevention efforts.”*

1 Apakan, E. and Sporrer, W. *The Ukrainian Crisis: The OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission*, Turkish Policy Quarterly, March 2017.

It continued: “A decisive humanitarian response by the international community to any conflict is not only required by international standards and commitments, but it also has a de-escalating impact at every stage of the conflict cycle.”

The current article will reflect on this observation, also in light of new literature.² It will attempt to describe in more detail how a monitoring Mission such as the SMM, with a mandate focused on “gather(ing) information and report(ing) on the security situation in the area of operation”³ can play its part in a comprehensive crisis response, where careful consideration of the needs of people will reduce the potential for further conflict.

The purpose of the SMM is to work towards the security and stability of Ukraine and to support and facilitate the implementation of the Minsk agreements in a volatile and unpredictable environment. In this context, the need for a comprehensive view of security, which includes the protection of civilians, has already been enshrined in the Helsinki Decalogue,⁴ where it has been recognized that humanitarian improvements, respect for human rights and the rule of law on the one side, and increased security in the military sphere on the other are mutually reinforcing concepts.

This humanitarian-security nexus is not only crucial in the context of conflict management and resolution; it also plays an important role for prevention. The current OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Foreign Minister of Slovakia, Miroslav Lajčák, has in this context said that “if we don’t put our ears to the ground, we will not hear the tremors which tell us that trouble is ahead.”⁵

“Putting our ears to the ground” in the context of the work of the SMM means maintaining a focus on the people, recognising their basic needs and reporting about how the conflict affects their daily lives. It means projecting stability and a culture of peace in the context of the comprehensive security framework of the OSCE.

This article answers several questions: what are the main humanitarian consequences of the crisis in and around Ukraine and who are the most

2 Such as: Autesserre, S. (2019). *The Crisis of Peacekeeping*. [online] Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-12-11/crisis-peacekeeping> [Accessed 11 Mar. 2019].

3 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Decision no. 117 Deployment of an OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine*, PC.DEC/1117, 21 March 2014, available at: <https://www.osce.org/pc/116747?download=true>. [accessed 11 March 2019].

4 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) : Final Act of Helsinki*, 1 August 1975, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3dde4f9b4.html> [accessed 11 March 2019].

5 Statement by the Chairperson in Office H.E. Miroslav Lajčák Presentation of Priorities, OSCE Vienna, 10 January 2019, [online]. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/408602?download=true>. [Accessed 11 Mar. 2019].

vulnerable groups? In which areas, related to human rights, the humanitarian sphere and the rule of law, can a large international stabilization mission like the SMM be most useful in the context of the conflict?

1 How the Conflict Affects the Civilian Population

In an armed conflict that takes place in a volatile and complex environment, civilians continue to get injured and lose their lives. The Mission thoroughly corroborates civilian casualties and establishes the facts of these circumstances.⁶ The fact that the Mission corroborates cases directly on the ground takes these numbers out of political dispute, which facilitates communication and transparency in the field and at the negotiating table, with a perspective to eventual reconciliation.

Furthermore, in the vicinity of the contact line, the damage or destruction of critical infrastructure has a profound impact on the lives of civilians. Water or gas infrastructure is often affected, and the workers keeping such infrastructure functioning are at times injured by the fighting.⁷ To give some examples, the Donetsk water filtration station, located between positions, supplies water to 378,000 people on both sides of the contact line. If the 1st Lift Water Pumping Station near Vasylivka were to cease operating, 1.2 million people would immediately lose access to water. Power lines, when damaged, deprive entire areas of electricity.

In this context, the SMM is active on the ground in facilitating local solutions to protect infrastructure or to facilitate repairs through its presence. This contributes to the assurance that locally agreed ceasefires for repair works will be respected. In more than 1,200 occasions only during the last year, the Mission performed such facilitation of local ceasefires, allowing for 94 critical repairs to be carried out and deploying more than 3,200 patrols in the process. In this way, the Mission's monitoring helps alleviate the hardship of civilians living in or close to the conflict area, on both sides of the line of contact.

The line of contact also cuts across families and historically grown communities. Every month, it is crossed by civilians more than one million times.⁸ From 2017 to 2018, the crossings of the contact line have increased by more

6 During 2018, the SMM has reported 238 civilian casualties (134 men; 74 women; 21 boys; 9 girls) 106 casualties were due to shelling, 87 due to mines and unexploded ordinance, 42 due to small arms fire, and 3 due to other conflict related causes.

7 SMM to Ukraine, Daily Report No. 89/2018, 18 April 2018; SMM to Ukraine, Daily Report 7/2019, 11 January 2019.

8 According to official figures provided by the State Border Guard Services of Ukraine.

than 15 per cent. In 2018, 3.25 million crossings occurred at the only crossing point in Luhansk region, Stanytsia Luhanska, passable only by foot, where people crossing have to climb a wooden ramp, connecting two parts of a broken bridge.⁹

Civilians also need special crossing permits, but face inconsistencies in the application of rules. They stand in long queues at checkpoints close to ongoing fighting, often for many hours in extreme heat or freezing temperatures, and often without access to water, sanitation and medical facilities. Between 21 December 2018 and 25 February 2019 alone, 16 civilians died while waiting in line, often having endured harsh conditions.

The Mission performs monitoring functions at each of these crossing routes and also facilitates the situation wherever possible: the SMM brings particular hardship cases to the attention of the people in control, and they liaise with the Mission's international partners, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations (UN), who can provide concrete help. There have also been efforts to improve the conditions, at least on the government-controlled side.

Notably, the conflict also affects civilians outside of the direct conflict area: 1.3 million people in Ukraine are registered as internally displaced persons (IDP),¹⁰ and have often lost their entire livelihoods as a result of the conflict. Many of them have not found adequate housing or employment. The SMM maintains focus on this vulnerable group by reporting on their situation and by engaging with them directly. IDPs will play a key role in any future efforts towards reconciliation and they often maintain close contacts with people in areas not under government control.

The Mission also attempts to direct international focus on certain demographics particularly affected by the conflict: while the elderly make up 60 per cent of all IDPs, they are still most likely to be left in remote villages and cut-off settlements along the contact line, and therefore more likely to fall victim to shelling. According to a recent study,¹¹ 89 per cent of the elderly near the contact line rely on their pension, often constituting the only source of

9 UN Security Council (2019). *8461st Meeting: Situation in Ukraine (Provisional) S/PV.8461*, 12 February 2019, New York, Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_8461.pdf. [Accessed 11 Mar. 2019].

10 Government figures.

11 Help Age, *Emergency protection-based support to conflict affected older women and men in the GCAs locations of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts*, July 2018 https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/helpage_baseline_report_usaid_echo_july_2018.pdf (accessed 11 March 2019).

income in a household. However, since 2014 pensions are no longer provided in non-government-controlled areas. As a result, thousands of elderly people, including those with disabilities and mobility challenges, cross the contact line to receive payments. In fact, most crossings of the contact line – with all the hardships described above – are attributable to the elderly’s need to receive their pensions from government-controlled areas.¹²

As for children, 220,000 are at risk of losing their lives or being injured by landmines.¹³ Out of 30 child civilian casualties, 21 were caused by the landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) or unexploded ordinances (UXOs). Schools and educational institutions have also sustained damages in the conflict; on at least three occasions children were inside these institutions during the incidents. Furthermore, children born in areas not controlled by the Government since the beginning of the conflict, are at risk of statelessness. SMM observations in this regard also inform other international actors for humanitarian relief.

2 Making an Impact for Comprehensive Security

There are a number of ways in which a mission that is mandated to monitor and to facilitate dialogue can implement its mandate to contribute to comprehensive security the ground, and therefore become a more effective agent for conflict management and for the prevention of further escalation. The experience of the SMM has pointed to the following areas, where “*embracing bottom-up strategies that draw on local knowledge*,”¹⁴ in the form of local arrangements can be found in the Ukrainian context.

12 UNHCR report “Crossing the Line of Contact”, January 2019 http://vpl.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ENG_EECP_Monitoring_Jan_2019.pdf.

13 Ranoev, V. (2019). *2 million Ukrainians are affected by landmines in Ukraine’s eastern conflict regions – United Nations in Ukraine*. [online] Un.org.ua. Available at: <http://www.un.org.ua/en/information-centre/news/4317-2-million-ukrainians-are-affected-by-landmines-in-ukraine-s-eastern-conflict-regions> [Accessed 11 March 2019]. 2019.

14 Autesserre, S. (2019). *The Crisis of Peacekeeping*. [online] Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-12-11/crisis-peacekeeping> [Accessed 11 Mar. 2019].

2.1 *Impartial Monitoring and Reporting*

Sustained, thorough and impartial monitoring and reporting in itself can have a preventative effect,¹⁵ and can contribute to conditions that reduce the potential for conflict. It contributes to an atmosphere, where dedicated humanitarian actors can operate in an environment with more reliable information and it can insulate certain facts from a politicized debate. For example, reporting on ceasefire violations have, from time to time, led to recommitments to the ceasefire, resulting in an overall reduction of civilian casualties.

2.2 *A Focus on Local Arrangements and Facilitation*

Issues such as the arrangement of ceasefires in order to conduct repair works, or for the removal of human remains require local facilitation. Such local solutions can consist of windows of silence, the establishment of protection zones around critical infrastructure, or locally targeted humanitarian de-mining, for example in the vicinity of schools and kindergartens. Eventually, this should lead to an established mechanism that will address the lack of trust on the ground, paving the way for further steps towards de-escalation.

2.3 *Co-Operation with Humanitarian Partners through Referrals*

A monitoring mission is a generator of detailed information collected on the ground. This includes information about human rights, fundamental freedoms and the humanitarian situation. Such information is of key importance for actors that provide actual aid, to target their efforts and limited resources where aid is most needed. The SMM has set up a number of humanitarian referral mechanisms in the field, where the Mission informs agencies such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the ICRC, in addition to national and international NGOs and bilateral donors about the findings in the humanitarian field, including information on concrete cases. This information is then followed up by these agencies, thus providing help as a direct consequence of the SMM's referral.

2.4 *Keeping People at the Centre of the Mission*

A factor of key importance is direct, frequent and broad contact with people on the ground, whose daily lives are shaped by ongoing violence. Such direct exchanges, notably including gender aspects in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, contribute to the Mission's acceptance and security and can

15 Kemp, W. (2016) OSCE Peace Operations: Soft Security in Hard Environments, New York: International Peace Institute. [online]. Available at: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1606_OSCE-and-Peace-Operations.pdf. [Accessed 11 Mar. 2019].

be an important factor for early warning and an enabler for preventive action. They also ensure that the needs of the people remain the guiding principle throughout all activities. Only if the people in the Mission area remain at the centre of all planning, all monitoring, all operations and all reporting, will the SMM make the best possible contribution to the protection of civilian populations and comprehensive security in Ukraine.

In conclusion, the SMM and the Mission's humanitarian and development partners on the ground share an aspiration towards humanitarian recovery, and towards helping people stay safe from violence, coercion and abuse, and the restoration of their wellbeing. In his recent statements, the Secretary General of the UN has again emphasised the importance of building resilience and a comprehensive view on security, which "*helps ease tensions, deliver sustainable development and sustain peace.*"¹⁶ By acting with this in mind, with common sense and caution, and in line with its mandate, the SMM seeks to make the best possible contribution to normalisation and stabilisation in Ukraine.

16 "Secretary-General's remarks to the Human Rights Council", 25 February 2019.