URBAN CONFLICT & TARGETING

A SPECIAL PROBLEM FOR PROTECTION

A reflection from experiences and lessons in East Africa

4❂ | UNIDIR UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE
FOR DISARMAMENT RESEARCH

ABOUT UNIDIR

UNIDIR is a voluntarily funded, autonomous institute within the United Nations. One of the few policy institutes worldwide focusing on disarmament, UNIDIR generates knowledge and promotes dialogue and action on disarmament and security. Based in Geneva, UNIDIR assists the international community to develop the practical, innovative ideas needed to find solutions to critical security problems.

NOTES

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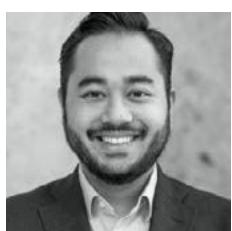
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
CCTARC	Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell
COE	contingent-owned equipment
FIB	Force Intervention Brigade
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IEDs	improvised explosive devices
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ISTAR	intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NSAGs	non-State armed groups
POC	protection of civilians
TCC	troop contributing countries
UAV	Unmanned Aeriel Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA/UN PHOTO/STUART PRICE

CONTEXT

Recent years have seen the application by some militaries of sophisticated weapons and powerful technologies to armed conflict, such as precision weapons, surveillance capabilities that can identify and localize threats more accurately than ever before, and unmanned platforms combining these capabilities to add greater persistence to the search and engagement of valid military targets. But these developments have not solved a fundamental challenge in warfare: the avoidance of civilian casualties. The number of civilians harmed resulting from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas remain high globally, accounting for at least 17,000 civilians casualties in 2019.[1]

A key reason for the continuing civilian toll in modern warfare is conflict in urbanized environments. The density of the civilian population makes it more vulnerable to direct harm, while its dependence on a web of critical and interconnected services create special vulnerabilities to the damaging wide-area effects of explosive weapons. Conflict in urban settings is often a result of non-State armed groups (NSAGs) choosing to locate in populated areas, both to draw from civilian resources and to exploit proximity to civilians and critical infrastructure in order to complicate attacks by States seeking to apply international humanitarian law (IHL) and rules regulating the conduct of hostilities. These rules include, but are not limited to, the prohibition on indiscriminate attacks, the prohibition on disproportionate attacks and the obligation to take feasible precautions in attack.

The increased risk of civilian harm from explosive weapons when operating in urban and other civilian-concentrated areas raises important questions about how parties to conflict can review and

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1 Such concerns have led to calls by the United Nations Secretary-General and the International Committee of the Red Cross for States to develop appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies in conformity with IHL relating to the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, and have appealed to parties to conflict to adopt policies and practices to enhance protection of civilians, including by avoiding the use of such weapons. See paras 33-35, Report of the Secretary-General, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, S/2020/366.

adapt their military policies and practices to address risks, understand impacts, and mitigate civilian harm. A number of States have touted their mix of technological capabilities and robust targeting practices to help address the risks to civilians and civilian objects of warfare in populated areas. While States continue to assess, develop and adapt a range of policies, capabilities and practices to reduce civilian harm from operations, including from explosive weapons, in urban environments, it also raises a series of questions for reflection:

How accessible, applicable and effective are existing policies and practices—including advanced technological capabilities and robust targeting practices—in reducing civilian harm in contexts where capacities and resources may be limited or constrained, and are they sufficient to protect civilians? Are there other policies and practices—new or evolving—that have been applied

in low-capacity contexts to reduce civilian harm, which may not have been previously documented and analyzed in-depth? What lessons can be learned from efforts to reduce civilian harm in such contexts, and how might it help inform shared understanding on foundational steps that all States can take to better protect civilians in urban conflict? This brief sets out to help examine these questions.

Building on research in 2019 on opportunities to reduce civilian harm in multilateral operations[2], in 2020 UNIDIR sought to identify lessons learned and good practices to reduce civilian harm in operations, with particular focus on the use of explosive weapons, in various regions in Africa. East Africa was chosen as the first sub-region for examination because of a number of factors, including:

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2 For more information about UNIDIR's research approach, see Annex I of this report. Also see the UNIDIR food-for-thought paper at https://unidir.org/publication/opportunities-strengthen-military-policies-and-practices-reduce-civilian-harm-explosive; and See the UNIDIR Options paper at https://www.unidir.org/publication/opportunities-improve-military-policies-and-practices-reduce-civilian-harm-explosive.

- » **A number of conflicts involving adversaries operating in urban environments**
- » **Non-state armed group tactics of hiding and attacking from within the population;**
- » **A spectrum of differing partnering relationships;**
- » **Challenging mandates involving multiple sources; and**
- » **Forces experiencing significant resource challenges, such as shortfalls in intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) systems and means for precision engagement.**

Operations in East Africa are particularly challenging because of the complexity and expectations of their mandates, and the interplay and respective roles of the United Nations (UN) and regional organizations, such as the African Union. Moreover, the reliance on troop contributing countries (TCC) to provide resources in non-UN operations, including contingent-owned equipment (COE), means that choices available to commanders may be at times limited or inappropriate for the needs of the mission. Further, donors supplying weapons and ammunition to host States might not always pay adequate attention to quality and compatibility issues, for example, which can also contribute to increased risk to civilians.

Operations in East Africa are also complicated by the scope of "partnering" arrangements. Under IHL, a "partnering force" has obligations for the proper conduct of the "partnered force". These partnerships may range from long-term capacity-building arrangements with embedded trainers in a "train-advise-assist" type model, to situations whereby a contingent is requested by the host State to deploy units, such as a government battalion or local armed militia. States in East Africa could also participate in a larger coalition, such as AMISOM, where State forces may generally operate independently but under the auspices and guidance of the leadership of a regional organization, which impacts how individual States approach the use of force and civilian protection. A State may also have a partnering arrangement with a State willing to provide support,

such as the provision of intelligence or fire support with Unmanned Aeriel Vehicle (UAV) armed strikes, where neither the State nor the host State have established command relationships with the provider of the assets.

Operations in East Africa can be further challenged by the actions of adversary armed actors that may show limited respect for IHL norms. These actions have included using civilians as human shields; using protected objects as defensive strongpoints; and choosing to fight in urbanized environments to secure assets, as part of their tactics to offset technological disadvantages and feed grievances among the civilian population.

Lessons from East Africa operations also reveal challenges for military planners and commanders to design and implement safe and secure management of materiel, which affect both the performance of explosive weapons and efforts to secure them. These challenges include:

» **STRATEGIC**: suppliers of arms and ammunition circumventing or violating national and multilateral transfer controls, including arms embargoes, resulting in transfer of material to unauthorized recipients who may ignore IHL norms;

» **OPERATIONAL**: loss of materiel to adversaries, due to a high operational tempo where materiel movements are rapid and frequent, and/or where logistic supply route and temporary forward operating bases may be vulnerable to attacks; and

» **TACTICAL**: inadequate capacity within a mission to operationalize the necessary weapon and ammunition management systems; varied military institutional cultures and approach to weapon control discipline; as well as lack of personnel and specialized expertise available for the safe and secure management of explosive ammunition.

All these factors have contributed to increased safety and security risk to civilians associated with explosive weapons in East Africa operations.

This brief is designed to assist policymakers and members of armed forces to appreciate likely gaps, challenges and deficiencies observed in the conduct of multilateral operations in East Africa when they take place in urban environments, and offer observations to improve ways to reduce civilian harm in lower-capacity, and often asymmetrical, contexts. This brief supplements a more detailed analysis of policies and practices to reduce civilian harm from explosive weapons in East Africa, which will be released later in 2020.

For the purpose of this paper, the term 'urbanized environment' includes populated areas and other concentrations of civilians and civilian objects for brevity. Detailed elaboration of concerns over developments of urbanization of warfare and the normative framework applicable to the use of explosive weapons in urban environments are covered in the 2019 UNIDIR food-for-thought paper.[3] UNIDIR's research approach to this topic is elaborated in Annex I of this paper.

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3 UNIDIR food-for-thought paper at https://unidir.org/publication/opportunities-strengthen-military-policies-and-practices-reduce-civilian-harm-explosive.

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DISCONNECT BETWEEN MANDATES & ABILITIES
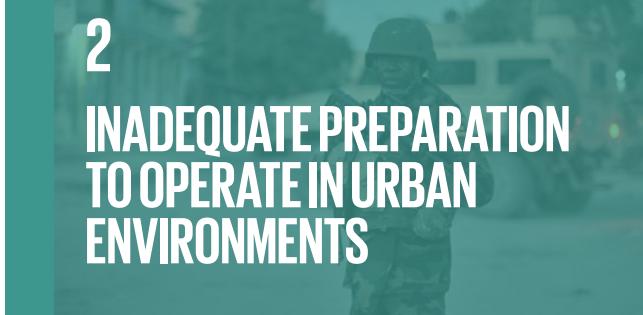
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SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS & OBSERVATIONS

This brief is the result of informal sub-regional dialogue and consultations, based on the facilitated discussions at a workshop held in the Humanitarian Peace Support School in Nairobi, Kenya on 10-11 March 2020. The workshop drew lessons from various operations, primarily focusing on the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The workshop was an opportunity to gather military and other subject matter experts with experience of these operations and discuss their respective experiences and perspectives. This in-depth exchange on reducing civilian harm from targeting operations in urban environments was a first for many participants, giving an opportunity to hear other perspectives and identifying some shared understandings of civilian protection challenges.

Lessons and experiences shared by military experts from East Africa operations highlight the challenges associated with intelligence management, resource shortcomings, and both political and operational choices on the effectiveness of their operations, as well as the complexity of their missions. In reflecting on their experiences, and in an effort to identify ways to reduce civilian harm from operations in urbanized environments, participants examined a number of different scenarios in which they conducted operations. This ranged from house-to-house clearance in Mogadishu, Somalia, around the civilian-concentrated Bakara Market in 2010-11; the restoration of Kismayo under Somali government control, drawing adversaries out of populated areas in 2018; lessons to avoid collateral damage from targeted offensive operations by the FIB in 2013; to reducing the risk to civilians from weapons and explosive hazards in

POC sites that hosted IDPs in South Sudan in 2013-14.

Further, lessons pointed to the challenges to mitigate civilian harm in light of tactics endangering civilians used by non-state armed groups, such as Al-Shabaab, including using civilian populations and objects as shields. The use of explosive weapons by various actors in a range of contexts was central to the dialogue and reflection among the participating military experts on lessons learned to reduce civilian harm.

While the participants had varied roles and experiences from several different operations and theatres, they developed 10 areas of shared understandings presented below. These ten areas are supplemented in each case with observations by UNIDIR.

1 DISCONNECT BETWEEN MANDATES AND ABILITIES

The risks to civilians from warfare in urbanized environments are increased by a disconnect between mandates that are crafted through politically-driven processes that may be built around a traditional peacekeeping construct, and the asymmetric characteristics of the operational environment, including gaps in the means and availability of capabilities and means to operate in such theatre.

OBSERVATION:

The contemporary approach to UN and regional peacekeeping operations does not adequately reflect the complexity of the challenges faced by military forces in East Africa, including the significant demands on forces operating in asymmetrical environments and conducting dynamic targeting in urban settings while also promoting host-nation capabilities and maintaining stability. Participating military and other subject matter experts reflected that, while improvements have been seen in guidance[4], protection of civilians has not been adequately factored into the mandating processes of some of the multilateral operations in East Africa. Where they do exist, protection of civilian mandates have often been inconsistent, unclear, or insufficiently resourced.[5] This left operating forces unprepared to manage and reduce the risks to civilians from explosive weapons—which remain one of the primary categories of weapons used by military forces in East Africa for operations—in particular in urban areas. Regardless of whether a mission had a protection of civilian mandate, participants agreed that the general obligation for civilian harm mitigation must be taken into account.

2 INADEQUATE PREPARATION TO OPERATE IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Reducing risk to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in an urban environment is particularly challenging when the operating force is inadequately prepared for the mission in terms of authorities, force capabilities, and command structure.

OBSERVATION:

Lessons identified from East Africa operations indicate that there is a foundational mismatch between the current politically- and donor-driven approach to developing mandate, force structure, and accompanying resources and the need to create a force capable of comprehensively reducing risks to civilians in complex, challenging missions. On the one hand, a complex mixture of materiel are deployed and used in theatre to achieve mission objectives, but the effects of those weapons and the impact on civilians and civilian objectives are not always well understood by deployed forces. On the other hand, participants emphasized the lack of availability of alternative means to the use of indirect fire weapons in urbanized environments. This is not limited to choices of weapon systems, but also tactical alternatives, such as delaying an attack until collateral damage concerns are minimized or policy choices such as not engaging in counter-battery fire.

With regards targeting practices, participants demonstrated an appreciation of various practical measures to reduce civilian harm, but their experience in application varied. For example, many were familiar with fire support coordination measures, such as command and control requirements of fire missions to specify who has the authority to fire, and to keep records of each fire mission—however, experiences among commanders varied in whether approval considerations took into account different calibre weapons in differing situations, including the restriction on the employment of specific weapons. In another example, while many participants were familiar with targeting decision-making tools such as no strike lists, restricted target lists and no fire areas, experience in its application varied among military planners and commanders. More broadly, lessons reveal varied understanding as well as challenges to develop collateral damage estimates that accurately identified potential risks, hazards and effects of explosive weapons before authorizing fire missions in order to avert civilian harm, including indirect effects.

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4 For example, the 2019 United Nations Department of Peace Operations Policy on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping, as well as its 2020 Handbook. See https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpo_poc_handbook_final_ as_printed.pdf.

5 African Union, Peace Security Council document, PSC/PR/2 (CCLXXIX) dated 18 May 2011.

3   NEED FOR IMPROVED AND DEDICATED TRAINING

IHL training needs to be embedded in national military doctrine and pre-deployment training programmes, both in terms of the challenges provided by urbanized environments and the use of explosive weapons therein. IHL theory needs to be transformed into actionable standard operating procedures, while training should be locally contextualized.

OBSERVATION:

IHL training for military forces conducting multifaceted missions in urban settings should reflect the complexities of the challenges they face and include practical considerations for meeting IHL requirements that help protect civilians. As an example, lessons identified reveals that the IHL requirement for precautionary warnings of attacks are not well understood, and military commanders in East Africa operations have faced challenges in its application, in particular in the context of dynamic targeting.

4   UNDERSTANDING PARTNERING

There are a variety of "partnering" models, ranging from long-term security sector capacity-building relationships, to short-term assignment of local forces or militias for a specific, limited-duration operations. However, the responsibilities of partnering forces for IHL compliance[6] by partnered forces are not always well-understood by deployed forces, which demand attention. These responsibilities need to be considered during mandate formulation and mission analysis phases of planning, since there will be implications for organization, training and materiel support.

OBSERVATION:

Missions are often comprised of several contingents who are also reliant upon their own doctrine, operational experiences, equipment capabilities and professional military education to determine how they will conduct operations. Military forces may also partner with host-nation forces with different levels of capabilities and skills. This has implications on how military forces utilize targeting processes and deploy and use explosive weapons in urbanized environments. For example, partnering can create some opportunities for reducing risks to civilians, in greater language proficiency or cultural understanding by local forces, while also resulting in some areas of increased risk, such as lack of discipline, weak command and control arrangements or materiel management. Participants emphasized that decisions regarding organization, training, and needed authorities and capabilities for the mission should include these considerations.

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6   C. Droege and D. Tuck, "Fighting together: Obligations and opportunities in partnered warfare", Humanitarian Law & Policy, 28 March 2017, https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2017/03/28/fighting-together-obligations-opportunities-partnered-warfare/

5   TACTICS OF ADVERSARIES

Adversaries have often demonstrated little respect for IHL, including use of tactics such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to conduct indiscriminate attacks, which cause large numbers of casualties. These adversaries can also exploit the information environment and may fight from protected sites, such as religious and cultural sites, in order to inflict reputational damage on military forces, as risks are attached to both inaction and actions by military forces.

OBSERVATION:

The behaviors and tactics of adversaries in urbanized environments compounds the challenges to reduce civilian harm. Key challenges faced by forces in East Africa include distinction, misidentification, tracking and maintaining a mobile target, as well as use of human shields and attacks from protected sites by the adversary. While the use of such tactics by adversaries can violate IHL, the military force still retains both the requirement to comply with IHL and the need to complete its mission, while also considering self-defence measures. Solving this commander's dilemma requires a sophisticated approach to planning and operations, and participants reflected that these elements should be sufficiently considered in the preparation and equipping of the force.

6   GAPS IN INTELLIGENCE CAPACITIES

Many East Africa operations suffer from a lack of actionable intelligence, capability and capacity. Multinational operations often lack the institutional mechanisms and habitual behaviours of intelligence sharing. Moreover, lack of capacity and capability in ISTAR to find, fix, track and engage targets reduce opportunities to strike adversaries in more advantageous, less populated terrain more swiftly, and can increase the risk of misidentification of civilians as combatants. The lack of intelligence capacity also has significant impact on the forces' ability to understand the operational environment as part of planning, as well as to estimate the potential collateral damage of operations and assess any civilian harm that may be caused.

OBSERVATION:

Taking into account the complexity of understanding the operational environment, acquiring adequate intelligence to find, fix, track and engage targets in urbanized environments is challenging. This may be particularly challenging because of the potential for obscuration in the urban environment, the inherent errors and potential wide-area effects of indirect fire, the vulnerability of the civilian population and infrastructure to the effects of explosive weapons, and the unpredictable movement and behaviour of populations. This is further compounded in a conflict with non-State armed groups where the adversary does not wear uniforms and has close relationships with segments of the local civilian population, both of which may increase the risk of target mis-identification.

Lessons identified suggests that multilateral missions in East Africa rarely have organizations that are trained to track, analyze and report civilian casualties, with AMISOM Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell (CCTARC) being an exception, rather than the norm. This has hampered efforts to conduct effective assessment of tactical actions that may result in civilian harm, including to learn lessons that can be used to inform future operations. Such assessments are critical as they demonstrate a commitment to protecting civilians, enable learning and improvement, demonstrate transparency, and are an integral part of ensuring compliance with IHL.

7   NEED FOR APPROPRIATE, COMPTABILE, AND SUFFICIENT SUPPORT

While TCCs provide their own COE, host States are frequently reliant upon donors for providing weapons and ammunition for operations. Two issues were identified: COE of different TCCs may be inappropriate or incompatible with the needs of the mission; and secondly, donors have a responsibility to ensure that the provision of materiel support to the host State meets mission requirements, technical performance standards and that the users understand the weapon system and ammunition effects, so that they can reliably assess potential collateral damage and civilian harm.

OBSERVATION:

Participants reflected that the lack of guidance on the deployment and use of weapons and ammunition in relation to mission mandate—such as permitted types and quantities of explosive weapons, as well as potential technical standards on deployment of weapons with specific characteristics (calibre, explosive-effect etc.)—can result in the inappropriate use of weapons, contributing to potential civilian harm. Lessons identified suggests the benefits of a series of arms control practices to reduce civilian harm from explosive weapons prior to operations at the mandate formulation and planning stages. These include:

» An assessment of suitability of deployed forces' weapons and ammunition for the nature of the mission, including materiel baseline of the host State;
» Defining, and in some cases imposing technical standards, for importation of certain heavy weapon systems and explosive ammunition into theatre, including provisions applicable to gifts and grants to host State to reduce ammunition-related performance variations;
» Establishing guidance for the safe and secure management of materiel, in particular on ammunition and propellants management, including through risk assessment, recordkeeping and physical security and stockpile management, by the host State as well as deployed multilateral forces; and
» Undertaking practical risk reduction and education activities associated with clearance and disposal of UXOs and abandoned explosives and ammunition.

8   DEVELOPING MILITARY-CIVILIAN MECHANISMS

Militaries and civilians do not institutionally know how to "connect" with each other. Foreign forces, even those from the region, may not know the cultural mechanisms and local dynamics appropriate for reaching out to local communities in order to understand their security and protection coping mechanisms. Conversely, civilians may find it difficult to differentiate between varied elements of the security forces, especially where non-State armed groups gain unauthorized access to government uniforms and equipment. The absence of engagement mechanisms impairs building trust and the support of the population.

OBSERVATION:

Lessons from East Africa operations reveal the need for understanding of local traditions, practices and behaviours in order to reduce the risk to civilians and the exercise of culturally-aware responses to civilian harm. This requires time and appropriate investment in engagement with the local population. In this regard, an effective communications strategy is an essential component of reducing and responding to civilian harm. Lessons from East Africa suggests a need for communications that help inform mission planning and tactics, as well as a clear mission policy to respond to civilian harm resulting from operations. Participants emphasized that such a response policy should include roles and responsibilities for communication, and appropriate resource allocation to undertake strategic communication, on the one hand to pay dedicated attention to the needs of the affected individuals and communities, and on the other hand to counteract and address information warfare and propaganda of adversaries.

9 OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE LEARNING PROCESS

There are opportunities to improve the sharing of lessons learned and good practices across contingents from operations, refreshing pre-deployment training as well as for institutional learning and practice in the future, including on ways to reduce civilian harm from explosive weapons.

OBSERVATION:

Experience in East Africa reveals that lessons identified flow more easily along national lines than across contingents TCCs, which at times creates a barrier for mission-wide learning and adaption of policies and practices in reducing civilian harm, including from explosive weapons use. For example, while the AMISOM indirect fire policy serves as a good practice from East Africa to avoid civilian harm from explosive weapons in urban operations, there has yet to be a dedicated in-depth mission-wide lessons learned exercise to assess its implementation across deployed TCCs and the impact to operations as well as civilian harm.

Further, where operational tempo is high and there are few reserves, as observed in several East African operations, there may be challenges in withdrawing troops from the front-line to reconstitute and refresh tactics, techniques and procedures based on lessons identified, yet these are crucial to operational success.

10 COMMANDER'S DILEMMA: PROTECT CIVILIANS AND MISSION

Even when choices in strategy and capabilities may be restricted or limited, practical measures can be undertaken to minimize and mitigate civilian harm, to include tactical alternatives to the use of explosive weapons.[7] However, such alternative choices may evoke the dilemma commanders face: protecting civilians while simultaneously protecting both the mission and the force.

OBSERVATION:

Experience in East Africa illustrate the real dilemma of trying to protect civilians in a complex and dynamic environment when self-defence is a real concern. Some participants spoke of cases where their own forces were killed because of showing restraint. While previous operations have shown how it is possible to both protect civilians and military forces, with civilian casualty numbers and troop fatality numbers both decreasing (and mission effectiveness increasing) as new tactics and guidance were employed, this is a delicate balance, and the East Africa experiences show that civilian protection approaches must be nuanced in order to successfully address that dilemma.

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7 An example being how AMISOM adapted its tactics in Mogadishu. Initially using artillery, mortars and recoilless launchers (RCL) to respond to Al-Shabaab's use of indirect fire weapons, AMISOM shifted more towards the use of small arms fire during its offensive to clear the former from Mogadishu. In so doing, it took heavy casualties.

FOUNDATIONAL GOOD PRACTICES

The workshop and research explored various good practices over the different elements of the civilian protection lifecycle, drawn from a wealth of backgrounds and experiences in East Africa, and focused on the challenge of reducing civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in urbanized environments.

A reasonable question given this wealth of good practices is, where should States operating in East Africa start? To answer this, drawing on shared understanding developed from the workshop, UNIDIR offers a set of suggestive foundational good practices that States can initially prioritize, practices that are in addition to the universal obligation to comply with IHL. While the suggested good practices are identified from the East Africa context, they may have wider applicability to other low-capacity, and asymmetrical contexts.

To strengthen civilian protection in the planning and conduct of operations in urbanized environments, States can:

Develop a national policy that takes a comprehensive approach to civilian protection, deliberately addressing risks to civilians in each of the elements of the civilian protection lifecycle (see Annex I)

Design the mission mandate, authorities, and requisite force requirements in a manner that addresses risks to civilians and civilian objects, including from explosive weapons

Develop and rehearse approaches to address the commander's dilemma of protecting civilians while protecting both the mission and force, including the development of commander's guidance, the use of tactical patience, the development of tactical alternatives in planning, and community engagement practices

Develop processes and battle-drills for effective response to civilian harm, including communication and compensation as appropriate

Develop the necessary capacity to track and assess civilian harm, including consideration of both internal reporting and external allegations, to support reporting, understanding of relevant trends, and informed learning that can help mitigate such harm in future operations

Put processes in place to monitor trends and respond to risks to civilians, including from explosive weapons, as they are identified during the course of an operation

Identify ways to improve the institutional force given identified lessons and challenges, including training, capabilities, doctrine, and organization

Tailor partnering arrangements to address potential risks and leverage benefits of partnering for civilian protection, including planning, training, command and control arrangements, and equipping

ANNEX: UNIDIR'S RESEARCH APPROACH

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

In 2019 UNIDIR initiated research to enhance knowledge and facilitate dialogue among States and their military forces on policies and practices to reduce risks to civilians and civilian objects resulting from military operations using explosive weapons in urbanized environments. This foundation research encompassed different multilateral operations, from those conducted by militaries with advanced capabilities, such as NATO, to peace support operations conducted by the UN or regional organizations, such as the African Union. The outcome of this research and consultations with military subject matter experts and civilian organizations with specialized knowledge of this issue was the 2019 Options Paper[8], which recommended the continuation of the extraction of lessons identified from other theatres, including at sub-regional level.[9] The 2019 Options Paper was necessarily broad in its findings and recognized that consideration of local contexts was extremely important to identify actionable options that can be implemented in a wide range of conflicts by a diversity of States having different levels of experience and different kinds of capabilities. The current research on East Africa is the first step in this consideration of local contexts.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

As with the previous related papers, this one frames the issue of explosive weapons in the broader context of civilian harm mitigation. The research differentiates between the term "protection of civilians[10]" for which some missions have explicit mandates and broader responsibilities and "civilian harm mitigation[11]" which are all actions taken by an armed actor to prevent, mitigate and respond to civilian harm as a result of its presence, activities and operations.

The paper takes a comprehensive approach to civilian harm mitigation from a 'risk reduction' perspective—that is, seeking to understand where the risks and uncertainties lie in the entire 'civilian protection life cycle' from the use of explosive weapons in urbanized

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8 See the UNIDIR Options paper Options Paper at https://www.unidir.org/publication/opportunities-improve-military-policies-and-practices-reduce-civilian-harm-explosive.

9 Ibid.

10 Protection of Civilians is a broad concept encompassing IHL and International Human Rights Law (IHRL); ensuring that civilians are safe from physical harm; and is the inherent end result of peacekeeping.

11 The CHM definition is drawn from CIVIC.
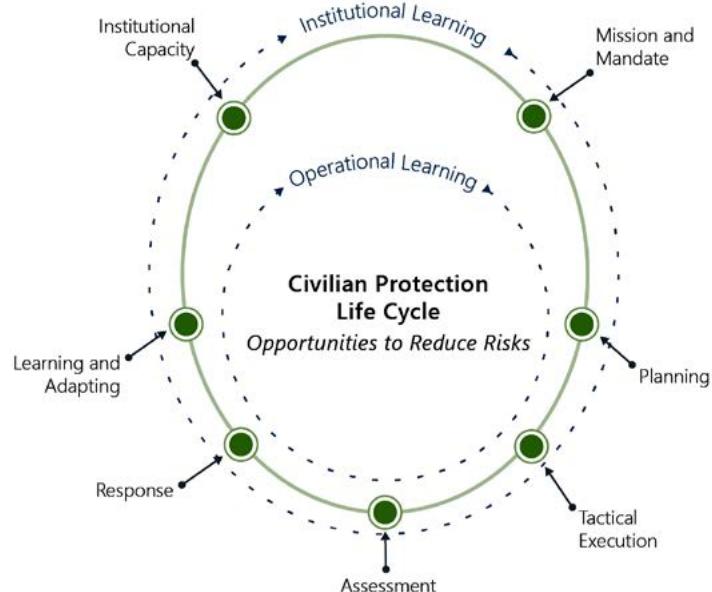
FIGURE 1: Civilian Protection Lifecycle [14]

environments. This comprehensive protection lifecycle approach, as developed by CNA[12], reflects care in civilian harm mitigation being taken at all points in the planning and use of military force and includes learning loops so that militaries can adapt and improve to overcome risks and challenges (see fig. 1).

This approach permits a broader number of options for potential implementation to be considered, while making it more relevant to different operational contexts and types of multilateral operations that may take place. UNIDIR accepts that urbanized environments are varied, as are the mandates under which multilateral organizations operate—no one option will be appropriate for all cases.

WORKING ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The working assumptions of this brief are unchanged from the 2019 UNIDIR food-for-thought Paper[13].

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12 CNA is a USA-based non-profit research and analysis organisation.

13 UNIDIR food-for-thought paper at https://unidir.org/publication/opportunities-strengthen-military-policies-and-practices-reduce-civilian-harm-explosive.

14 Designed by CNA.