



# INTELLIGENCE AND PEACEKEEPING – ARE WE WINNING?

WRITTEN BY **ANDRÉ ROUX**<sup>1</sup>

For many, the word ‘intelligence’ immediately conjures up images of spies, espionage and spy-masters. Intelligence is a sensitive topic in all multinational operations – particularly so in United Nations (UN) peace support operations (PSOs). The lack of an intelligence-gathering capability within the UN organisation is, however, astounding – this despite the UN’s intelligence failures of the past: from the failed missions in Somalia

and the Balkans to Rwanda. The 1994 Rwandan genocide saw up to a million people die in a hundred days while the

**Above: Officers serving with the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) at the funeral ceremony for seven slain peacekeepers who were killed in an ambush by militiamen in Darfur.**



**The 1994 Rwandan genocide, represented by the mass grave, is an example of past United Nations intelligence failures.**

world watched. The four battalions of troops in the UN Mission in Rwanda, crippled by an ‘observe and report’ mandate, watched helplessly as the genocide unfolded around them, knowing that they had foreknowledge of the impending catastrophe that engulfed the region.<sup>2</sup>

Further intelligence failures that touched closer to home for UN personnel include:

- The 19 August 2003 suicide attack on UN offices in Baghdad, in which 22 people, including UN Special Envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello, were killed.
- The 11 December 2007 suicide blasts in Algiers, which killed at least 41 people, including 18 UN staff members. Responsibility for the blasts was claimed by the Maghreb branch of Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network, which targeted the Algerian headquarters of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), as well as the National Constitutional Council.
- The 9 July 2008 ambush attack on peacekeepers of the African Union (AU)-UN Hybrid Mission known

as UNAMID in Darfur, Sudan. Seven members were killed and 22 injured in a well-coordinated attack in northern Darfur by unidentified gunmen.

The UN’s position, however, is that it does not gather intelligence on member states, and does not have direct access to intelligence sources. The UN acquires information largely through its information offices, official contacts and presence abroad (agencies). The UN Situation Centre (SitCen) in New York is the main organ that continuously gathers and processes information from the field. The SitCen in New York is part of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and also has a small analysis unit, called the Information and Research Unit.<sup>3</sup> This is, however, limited in size, and a major concern is its dependence on intelligence from national intelligence agencies. This makes the information very one-sided and susceptible to manipulation, in what is often called ‘perception management’. The problems created by this dependency on nations supplying intelligence



**The United Nations Situation Centre (SitCen) in New York is the main organ that continuously gathers and processes information from the field.**

to the UN is epitomised in the debacle over Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. When the United States (US) Secretary of State, Colin Powell, presented what he said was US evidence that Iraq had such weapons, no-one in the room had the capacity to evaluate his claims.<sup>4</sup>

UN field missions are reliant largely on the information they can gather themselves, through overt means. The complication, however, is that modern integrated peace missions need a wide spectrum of information. The military and police forces deployed as peacekeepers in these missions are responsible for an increasingly wider range of security-related tasks. A peacekeeping mission Force Commander must assist with stabilisation operations and humanitarian tasks, which could include assisting with food delivery; crisis

situations involving population displacement; security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes; safeguarding election processes and reconstruction projects. The list goes on. What is critical, however, is to utilise the limited forces and resources most effectively. This is especially critical in the new era of robust peacekeeping operations, which was emphasised recently by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, before stepping down as Under-Secretary-General of Peacekeeping Operations. He told reporters in New York that hard lessons had been learned in recent times, and that:

“I, for one, am convinced that force does matter – that we are a long way past the time when peacekeeping started 60 years ago and we would have only unarmed observers: force does matter. To be able to be respected is essential, especially in civil conflicts. I have pushed for robust peacekeeping in the forests of Congo as well as a deterrent instrument in Sierra Leone, or in the slums of Port-au-Prince [the Haitian capital].”<sup>5</sup>

What is clear is that the principals of war remain the basic tenets of military planning and action – whether in a peace support or peace enforcement operation. First, you must have the right force, with the right equipment and training, at the right place and time in order to conduct operations. Then you have to apply those principles, within a doctrinal framework and specific rules of engagement (ROE), to execute those operations.

In order to accomplish all of this in a peacekeeping environment, you need to plan correctly, based on the realities of the situation and allowing for possible escalation in the expected levels of conflict and destabilisation that may be encountered. This planning needs an accurate information base and specific intelligence products. It has, however, been the experience of many Force Commanders that the successful execution of operations and remaining within the decision cycle of belligerent, spoiler forces in a complex multidimensional peacekeeping environment is inevitably problematic, as there is rarely adequate operational- and tactical-level intelligence available.

The UN will also have to develop some forms of secret intelligence. This aspect is even more important in multidimensional peacekeeping operations (PKOs), with their embedded responsibilities: election monitoring, where individual votes must be kept secret; arms control verification, including possible surprise inspections at secret locations; law enforcement agency supervision (to ‘watch the watchmen’); mediation, where confidential bargaining

## DIFFERENT MANDATES, SPECIAL RULES OF ENGAGEMENT, BELLIGERENT 'RULES OF THE GAME' – ALMOST EVERYTHING IS UNIQUE, AND THIS REQUIRES THAT THE OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT REORIENTS AND ADJUSTS ITSELF ACCORDINGLY

positions that are shared by one party with the UN should not be revealed to the other; and sanctions and border monitoring, where clandestine activities (e.g. arms shipments) must be uncovered or intercepted without allowing smugglers to take evasive action. In very high-risk areas characterised by clandestine arms shipments, secret plans for aggression or genocide, and threats to assassinate indigenous leaders or to assault UN forces, some forms of secret intelligence are inevitably going to be required, and the UN must become reliably competent in this area. Eriksson argues that, in the most dangerous situations, “the

peacekeeping organizations should assume the right to carry out intelligence operations by almost any suitable method”, in the interest of guaranteeing the security of the forces it has placed at risk.<sup>6</sup>

The lessons of Rwanda have been clear – the failures there go back to the absence of a strong mandate. However, we can take this one step back. Had there been a more detailed intelligence assessment considering historical tendencies, intelligence indicators, the political will and military capability of the belligerents, and looking at all escalation scenarios, we could have seen a stronger mandate. This, together

REUTERS / THE BIGGER PICTURE



**The peacekeepers deployed with the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) are in a situation where their situational awareness is often negligible, dramatically increasing their vulnerability.**

with a broader, multi-source and credible intelligence capability on the ground, could have prevented the genocide and atrocities that followed.

The challenge of intelligence in peacekeeping – or, more specifically, PSOs – is that these operations differ considerably from traditional military combat or ‘kinetic’ operations. Different mandates, special rules of engagement, belligerent ‘rules of the game’ – almost everything is unique, and this requires that the operational intelligence unit reorients and adjusts itself accordingly. It is important, in conducting peacekeeping intelligence analyses, to understand very clearly that traditional military indicators are not the primary signals that must be perceived and integrated. Unconventional combatants do not drive tanks, they drive ‘technicals’ – 4x4 pick-up trucks with machine guns crudely mounted in the back. The complex operational environment is unpredictable and asymmetric, and it is precisely in these situations that operations must be ‘intelligence-driven’ from the perspective of being initiated, guided by and based on

What, then, is peacekeeping intelligence? It is perhaps easier to describe what it is rather than to have a universal definition. Accordingly, peacekeeping intelligence:

- is information that has been systematically collected, processed and disseminated to the right people at the right time;
- enables more effective decision-making;
- supports a better understanding of the mission dynamics;
- answers questions: who, what, why, where, when and how; and
- is a series of activities defined by source and discipline. In other words, it is a process, commonly defined as the intelligence cycle.

The intelligence cycle is relevant at all levels of the mission, and can be used by all organisations – from military and police structures to humanitarian aid workers. It consists of five steps, namely planning, collecting, processing, analysing and distributing

## IN VERY HIGH-RISK AREAS CHARACTERISED BY CLANDESTINE ARMS SHIPMENTS, SECRET PLANS FOR AGGRESSION OR GENOCIDE, AND THREATS TO ASSASSINATE INDIGENOUS LEADERS OR TO ASSAULT UN FORCES, SOME FORMS OF SECRET INTELLIGENCE ARE INEVITABLY GOING TO BE REQUIRED, AND THE UN MUST BECOME RELIABLY COMPETENT IN THIS AREA

accurate, relevant, real-time intelligence products.

From force generation down to the utilisation of a section of infantry on the ground in a UN PSO, information is needed – accurate, current information, and specifically the analysed information product that we call ‘intelligence’. This is becoming more critical, due to the change from traditional PKOs to increasingly complex multidimensional PKOs in much more volatile circumstances. Today, the UN deploys 20 peacekeeping operations around the globe, with some 110 000 personnel in the field. This does not include the joint Darfur Mission with the AU (UNAMID), which is slated to have 26 000 peacekeepers at full deployment.

While the need for accurate, current intelligence is apparent, there is even now a reluctance to classify and define intelligence in the UN structures clearly. The term ‘military information’ is still being used in many quarters, despite the fact that a mission needs political, humanitarian, socio-economic, security and other forms of intelligence, rather than the mere dispositions, capabilities and actions of militarised forces.

information. Planning can be considered as the management phase of the whole process – from determining information requirements, to the distribution of the finished intelligence product. Collection consists of the gathering of ‘raw’ information from all available resources. This can include open or closed source information. Open source information is that which is legally available to the general public, and generally accounts for up to 90% of available information.

Peacekeeping missions are largely reliant on what is known as ‘human information’ (HUMINT). This comes down to the observations, investigations and assessments of the UN personnel deployed in the mission area. Previously, it was extremely problematic to try and coordinate this information, most of which was open source and neither sensitive nor ‘secret’. Great strides have been made by the UN with the introduction of the Joint Mission Analysis Cell (JMAC) in UN DPKO field missions. A similar intelligence analysis structure now also exists in many UNDP field



**Integrated intelligence-sharing is critical for the successful operationalisation of the African Standby Force and its regional brigades.**

missions. To an extent, this addresses the challenge of ‘stovepiping’, where information is moved up organisational-specific channels to the highest level. This has traditionally affected the humanitarian, police, military and political affairs, and other organisations, within a field mission. In the process, the information was summarised, condensed and lost relevance due to time lags, often emerging as ‘one liners’ at the highest level of the mission. The new JMAC structure, under the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) in the peacekeeping mission, has representatives from nearly all of the organisations within the structure, and is headed by a professional recruitment-level post to ensure continuity through at least part of the life cycle of a peace mission.

The AU, though, has yet to adopt this integrated intelligence-sharing philosophy by means of a dedicated and mandated structure of intelligence ‘professionals’ and seconded specialists. This is, perhaps, largely due

to funding restrictions, yet it is critical to the successful operationalisation of the African Standby Force and its regional brigades, should they be deployed in peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions on the continent.

As valuable as the JMAC intelligence mission structures are in developing strategic forecasts and operational-level situational awareness, as well as providing support to operational planning processes, the real weakness still lies in the tactical-level intelligence collection and analysis capability. Battalions of troops are deployed as 850-man formed units to peacekeeping missions. They are often from different countries, rarely speak a language understood by the majority of the population and belligerents in a peace mission environment, and invariably do not have enough understanding and sensitivity towards the culture and local customs. They also tend to be fixated on ‘military’-type information, and have

generally failed to adopt the UN's new Integrated Mission Planning Process (IMPP) as a planning tool. The IMPP introduces new planning factors in an integrated approach, combining humanitarian and political realities with the traditional threat and neutral factor assessments. This process is, once again, dependent on information flow, including from the humanitarian and political affairs environments. To this end, what the UN should do is ensure that there are at least two dedicated Civil Military Coordination (CIMIC) posts in the generic battalion structure. This will enable the operationalisation of a Civil Military Operations Centre (CMOC) type of structure at the Sector and Battalion levels. This will lead to better coordination, liaison and cooperation between the military and police peacekeepers, the international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the local population and civil structures they are assisting.

The critical lack of 'intelligence orientation' – in other words, the effective utilisation of every police and military peacekeeper as an informed, tasked and directed collector of information during the execution of their routine tasks – means that peacekeepers often have very poor situational awareness. This will become

suicide bombings – like those the US and allied forces in Iraq, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces in Afghanistan, are experiencing. The AU-mandated forces in Somalia are also already affected by such attacks from militant radical extremists, and the shadow of transnational terrorism is not far off. The change in status of the UN – from protection afforded by respect for its neutrality to the perception of actor and role player in conflict zones, making it a legitimate target – was recently echoed by Lakhdar Brahimi in a press statement, after being appointed to a panel to investigate the UN security measures in Algeria at the time of the two 2007 suicide attacks:

"Many people believed the world body has become their enemy and is therefore a legitimate target for attacks because of its perceived double standards and lack of impartiality in handling world crises. I think the UN has been on notice that its flag is not anymore a guarantee for protection."<sup>7</sup>

However, the groups that are the most exposed in the conflict environments of many of the UN's mission areas are the humanitarian aid workers from UN agencies and NGOs. The rising death toll of aid

## WHILE THE UN HAS IDENTIFIED THE NEED FOR BETTER INTELLIGENCE PROCESSES, AND HAS MADE GREAT STRIDES IN DEVELOPING AND CAPACITATING STRUCTURES SUCH AS THE JMAC ON THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF FIELD MISSIONS, THE FAILURES OF SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND LACK OF ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE LIE MAINLY AT THE TACTICAL LEVEL

more critical as the scope of information needed widens in the era of the complex, multidimensional and integrated peace missions of today, and as the irregular, asymmetrical nature of threats to peacekeepers increase. The peacekeepers deployed with UNAMID are already in this situation, where their situational awareness is often negligible, dramatically increasing their vulnerability. This increased vulnerability means they will have to focus more on force protection aspects. Invariably, less attention and effort will go towards executing the 'peacekeeping' mission, which seeks to prevent the conflict, thereby alleviating the incredible human suffering presently being endured by over two million people in Darfur.

It can also be regarded as merely a matter of time before UN peacekeeping missions in Africa become affected by deliberate and directed attacks using car bombs, roadside irregular explosive devices (IEDs) and

workers in Darfur, Somalia and other conflict zones is a clear indicator of their vulnerability and the threats they face. Often, these threats vary so rapidly on the tactical level that the collective organisation structures of the peacekeeping mission cannot provide accurate or relevant threat assessments, even if the information was adequately networked. Yet this tendency will continue, as these conflicts become more protracted and the disparate rebel factions splinter further – many becoming 'spoilers', with no political direction other than localised 'warlordism'. This is a danger in many of the extended conflicts. The UN Department of Safety and Security's (DSS) new field security guidelines, as well as its Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS)<sup>8</sup>, attempt to provide a certain basic level of security structure and awareness to all UN personnel and affiliated humanitarian organisations, aid workers and contracted personnel, as well as to

other humanitarian organisations working in UN peace mission areas.

It is critical that the UN continues with efforts in its field missions to establish both a Force Intelligence Plan as well as a Mission Intelligence Plan, and that it simultaneously sets up the operational-level staff able to manage force and mission-wide intelligence collection, processing and analysis. The UN should also provide for the coherent management of tactical intelligence collection, processing and analysis. This process provides situational awareness, which is of paramount importance for the Force Commander, the Police Commander and other members of the senior management team of a UN peacekeeping mission. In particular, a Force Commander must include non-military as well as military factors in the appreciation, collection and analysis plans, and should also include the monitoring and understanding of factors external to the immediate mission area.

The Police Commander and Military Commanders have a critical role in transitioning a mission towards conclusion, and must maintain an intelligence interest in refugees and displaced persons; politics; economic development; social, cultural and religious development; and last but not least, crime and corruption. To do this, there must be systems, structures, specialists, technical means, doctrines and the right attitude, where every peacekeeper is regarded as – and acts as – an effective, informed, managed and directed information collector, while still focusing on their core line function activities within the mission.

One area that the UN has hopelessly failed to exploit adequately in the quest for operational and force security (safety) intelligence, as well as situational awareness and tactical actionable intelligence, is technical intelligence collection. This is an area that the UN has assessed with a policy document in 2007, but has failed to operationalise, by not including the structures for such technical collection in field mission structures. The value of assets such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) with high loiter time – providing real-time video feeds with day-visual and night-infrared and thermal imaging capability – have been recognised as force multipliers, due to the situational awareness they could provide to peacekeepers. This is precisely what is needed in PSO conflict areas, such as the eastern area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Darfur area of Sudan. Unfortunately, despite a request from the UN to member states to provide UAVs for the MONUC Mission in the DRC, there has been little enthusiasm for this initiative.

While the UN has identified the need for better intelligence processes, and has made great strides in developing and capacitating structures such as the

JMAC on the operational level of field missions, the failures of situational awareness and lack of actionable intelligence lie mainly at the tactical level. It is here where the member states – and particularly the troop and police contributing countries – need to invest more in capacitating their deploying members to change their attitudes, skills and approaches to the concept of intelligence and peacekeeping. Are we getting it right? The answer is a qualified yes – slowly and incrementally, but there are large gaps. It is often the absence of significant threat in certain situations, rather than the proactive planned and intelligence-driven operations of peacekeepers, that lead to successful peacekeeping. ▲

**André Roux is a Peace Mission Planning Officer in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) with experience in several peace missions in Africa, including two years with the UN Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) as a Military Observer and Intelligence Specialist. He is also a Masters student in Security Management at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa.**

#### Endnotes

- 1 The views expressed in this document are those of the author, and do not in any way reflect those of the South African National Defence Force. Some ideas are retained from a 2003 conference paper on Peacekeeping Intelligence, prepared by the author.
- 2 Dallaire, Romeo A. and Beardsley, Brent (2004) *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Canada: Da Capo Press, Random House.
- 3 Jacobs, I. (1999) *UNSCOM, A United Nations Intelligence Organisation*, Canada: Canadian Forces College.
- 4 Chesterman, S. (2006) 'This time too the UN has no Intelligence' in *International Herald Tribune*, Available at: <<http://www.ihrt.com/articles/2006/04/21/opinion/edchest.php>> Accessed on 27 July 2008.
- 5 UN News Center (2008) 'Robust Peacekeeping Here to Stay, Outgoing Chief of UN Missions Says', Available at: <<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27513&Cr=&Cr1=>> Accessed on 29 July 2008.
- 6 Eriksson, Pär (1997) 'Intelligence in Peacekeeping Operations' in *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 10 No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 1-18.
- 7 (2008) 'UN Now Seen as the Enemy' in *Herald Sun* (Article from Agence France-Presse), Available at: <<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,23295953-5005961,00.html>> Accessed on 29 July 2008.
- 8 United Nations (2008) 'Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS)', Available at: <[www.uniraq.org/documents/Guidelines%20-%20New%20MOSS%20Instruction%20Paper%20-%202012%20Nov%2002.doc](http://www.uniraq.org/documents/Guidelines%20-%20New%20MOSS%20Instruction%20Paper%20-%202012%20Nov%2002.doc)> Accessed on 30 July 2008.