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INTELLIGENCE IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS:
A KEY ENABLER

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Peacekeeping missions are one of the most significant aspects of the efforts made by the United Nations (UN) to help countries manage armed conflicts. Since its inception, there have been 59 peacekeeping operations across the globe, while currently, 12 peacekeeping operations are in effect. Approximately 97,000 UN uniformed personnel from over 120 countries are involved in these operations.[1]

Impartiality, consent of the parties, and non-use of force except in 'self-defence and defence of the mandate' are the three basic principles that guide the

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conduct of peacekeeping operations (PKO).Since the operational environment in most of the PKOs has become increasingly complex and dangerous, "Blue Berets" no longer have the luxury of immunity from armed attacks. The high casualty rate in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the attack on a UN base in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2017 are apt testimony to these emerging threats. Intelligence in peacekeeping operations has, therefore, become essential to the smooth and successful execution of the missions.

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, in a recent interview expressed his concern over the threats against peacekeepers and particularly the threats resulting from malicious acts, and acknowledged that the UN needs to do more in terms of "training, awareness of the threats and ability to better collect information together".[2]

Need for Intelligence

Like all military operations, intelligence is vital for the conduct of peacekeeping operations. The primary requirements of intelligence in such an environment are to enhance situational awareness and ensure the protection of civilians and UN personnel.

For peacekeeping operations to effectively function as per their mandate, they need comprehensive and robust intelligence capabilities. It is imperative that commanders should be able to identify threats, monitor events and analyse the behaviour and objectives of various stake holders. Peacekeeping-intelligence is thus a critical enabler to "support a common operational picture, to provide early warning of imminent threats, and to identify risks and opportunities."[3]

However due to the fact that intelligence is a sensitive issue and is traditionally considered a tool to be used against adversaries, nations have been divided in their opinion about the need for intelligence in PKOs. The political sensitivities of member states and their concerns over intelligence gathering as a threat to national sovereignty have therefore led to inadequate intelligence capabilities within the UN mission scope.

A Reluctant Evolution

Over the years, owing to the growing complexity of missions, the United Nations had to change its tentative outlook towards intelligence. In most of the conflicts that the UN has been involved in, such as the invasion of South Korea in 1950 and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, there was no prior warning of impending actions, despite the presence of peacekeeping missions

The term "intelligence" was first used in the UN Peacekeeping environment during the 1960 UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC), wherein the military information branch was created for collecting information, conducting aerial surveillance, and interrogating detainees. However, the political considerations of countries and their suspicions due to intelligence "being a clandestine activity" ensured that intelligence was relegated to the back burner and even the use of the term "intelligence" was replaced by the more benign "information".

In 1987, the Office for Research and Collection of Information (ORCI) was established with a mandate to assess global trends and conflicts, provide early warning of emerging situations, and prepare profiles of various countries and regions. The experiment, however, turned out to be ineffective due to a lack of resources and apprehensions of intrusion of the UN by many governments.

The geopolitical considerations also prevented effective intelligence sharing as demonstrated in Bosnia where the Canadian deputy theatre commander with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) had access to the exclusive imagery intelligence provided by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) but the existing

NATO regulations prevented him from sharing it with Lt Gen Satish Nambiar, his Force Commander who was from India, a non NATO nation.[4] The colossal human tragedies in Rwanda and Bosnia further demonstrated the requirement for creating agile institutional mechanisms to enhance situational awareness and provide early warning of imminent threats.

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ORCI was disbanded in 1992 after the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) was created and a Situation Centre was established within DPKO. An Information and Research (I&R) Unit was created within the Situation Centre to conduct in depth analysis and provide early warning. The unit was manned 24x7 by officers who were on a gratis basis from various countries. However, this system favoured rich, developed countries as they could afford to send their representatives to the DPKO. In February 1999, some developing countries moved a resolution which required the UN to discontinue the services of all officers who were deployed "on a gratis" basis. Consequently, I&R unit was dissolved, which adversely affected the UN's efforts to create an institutional framework for intelligence analysis.

The need for comprehensive information gathering and analysis was reiterated by the Brahimi Report in 2000, along with the recommendation for the creation of the Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat at UN headquarters. The concept of intelligence in peacekeeping received a further boost in 2006 when DPKO took the important policy decision of establishing Joint Mission Analysis Cell (JMAC) and Joint Operations Centre (JOC) in all the PKOs.

The UN benefitted from the advantages of intelligence-led peacekeeping when the UN Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH) in 2006–07 made proactive use of the JMAC and information staff (J2/U2) of force headquarters and units in the field. The mission also used local informants effectively and engaged in deliberate Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) before commencing operations against illegal armed gangs that controlled large parts of some Haitian cities, including the capital Port-au-Prince.

In 2009, encouraged by the success of previous measures and the growing importance of intelligence, the UN created an Assessment Unit within the Office of Military Affairs of DPKO. The unit was mandated for undertaking analysis and ensuring situational awareness of the mission as well as at UN headquarters.[5]

The need for "more effective information management and significant enhancement of analytical capacities" was further emphasised by the High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO)[6]. In 2016, the General Assembly's Special Committee

on Peacekeeping Operations also highlighted the requirement for effective intelligence and called for "a more cohesive and integrated UN system for situational awareness that stretches from the field to the headquarters."7

Current Peacekeeping Intelligence framework

In view of the complex and dangerous environment in which PKOs are being conducted, the UN has now increased its efforts of enhancing the intelligence setup. These efforts manifested in the formal approval of the UN's Peacekeeping-Intelligence Policy, which was initially developed in 2017 and revised in 2019. Although the document issued by the "Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training" does not define the term "peacekeeping-intelligence", it amply lays down the purpose, rationale and scope of peacekeeping-intelligence. The policy defines seven overarching principles of peacekeeping intelligence which must be strictly complied with. These include respect for state sovereignty, no clandestine activities, independence from any national intelligence system, execution by accountable authorities and ensuring security.8

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The UN has also prepared four more policy instructions based on the Peacekeeping-Intelligence Policy. These include the Military Peacekeeping-Intelligence Handbook (UN MPKI HB), JMAC Handbook, Police Peacekeeping-Intelligence Handbook, Peacekeeping-Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Staff Handbook and Units Manual. In addition to the above, UN has also issued guidelines on "Acquisition of Information from Human Sources" which specify who can be used as a source and what are the acceptable practices to obtain information from these sources.9 These comprehensive policy documents provide guidance, instructions, and advice to personnel deployed in PKOs. They also help in overcoming the challenge of different concepts of intelligence prevalent in each troop contributing country (TCC) by standardizing the peacekeeping-intelligence methods to be used in the UN environment. By placing these policy documents in the public domain, the UN has not only ensured transparency and easy accessibility, but also made a clear distinction between military peacekeeping intelligence (MPKI) and other domains.

Peacekeeping-intelligence coordination mechanisms have now been created to facilitate intelligence analysis and sharing. A Peacekeeping Intelligence Coordination Team (PICT) functions directly under the Department of Peace Operations (DPO). An assessment team has also been established under the Office of Military Affairs for analysing the emerging situations and providing intelligence assessment reports.

The JMACs, which undertake mission-wide integrated analysis to support strategic

planning and operational decision making, are at the core of the intelligence structure in every PKO. A Mission Intelligence Coordination Mechanism (MICM) under the Chief of JMAC is also established in every mission. Representatives from JMAC, JOC, the Department for Safety and Security (DSS) and the United Nations Police (UNPOL) are other significant constituents of this peacekeeping-intelligence group in the mission area. The military entities responsible for peacekeeping-intelligence activities include the U2

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staff at the force headquarters, the G2 staff at the sector level, and the S2 staff at the battalion level.

In terms of intelligence gathering activities, PKOs have to mostly rely on overt human intelligence (HUMINT). Troops deployed in mission areas use traditional methods like patrolling and the establishment of checkpoints or observation posts to gather information about the activities of conflicting parties. With the advent of modern technology, PKOs are also gradually incorporating other means of intelligence, including imagery intelligence (IMINT), Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT). Peace keepers are also now extensively using geographic information systems (GIS) to facilitate a broad range of tasks, such as logistics planning and climate monitoring.

MINUSMA, established in 2013, can be considered a pioneer in an enhanced intelligence capacity. It was the first mission to have dedicated intelligence assets including many high-tech sensors. The All Sources Information Fusion Unit (ASIFU) is a unique concept in PKO that aims to provide enhanced situational awareness and facilitate decision making by senior leadership. Although there are challenges of timely sharing and control of assets, many experts feel that a specialised intelligence setup such as ASIFU should be an essential component of PKOs.

Since many of the deployed military personnel do not have any formal experience or training in intelligence, the UN is also investing heavily in providing training support to the missions including through the conduct of dedicated ISR courses. Advice on the implementation of PKI policies through regular visits of PICT to mission areas is also being undertaken.

Implications for India

In April 2013, five Indian peacekeepers were killed in South Sudan when the WFP convoy they were escorting was ambushed by unidentified attackers.[10] The incident amply demonstrated the complex uncertainties of operating in the UN environment and the need to anticipate threats through prior intelligence assessments

Since India is one of the largest contributors to PKOs, it must recognise the growing

importance of intelligence in peacekeeping missions. Pre-deployment training of personnel must focus on aspects of intelligence and UN policies on the subject. This training should be suitably configured according to the specific requirement s of the missions. The Centre for UN Peace Keeping (CUNPK), which conducts training for Indian and foreign nationals should also place a greater emphasis on peace keeping intelligence and position itself as an centre of excellence conducting this training.

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The units selected for deployment in the UN should also create in- house structures for tactical intelligence such as information teams/ cells. It is also imperative that the contingents must include professional intelligence personnel who have the necessary skill sets such as human intelligence gathering, networking skills, linguistic knowledge, and the ability to communicate with the local population.

Apart from the pre-deployment training, Indian peacekeepers must be encouraged to refine their skills through systematic on-the-job training. The use of technology for exploiting imagery and OSINT will enhance their situational awareness and mitigate threats to a large extent.

Peacekeeping-intelligence activities rely on a population-centric approach. Previous experiences show that our peacekeepers find it difficult to interact with locals especially women. A greater proportion of women in UN peacekeeping contingents can obviate this limitation as they can more effectively engage with women and children and gather valuable information for the mission.

Conclusion

Despite the concerns that it may lose its impartial image by gathering intelligence, the UN has realised that peacekeeping intelligence is essential to ensure the safety and security of its staff and of civilians under its protection. It has therefore evolved a framework that ensures a strict adherence to the principles of transparency, impartiality, and efficiency.

Currently, peacekeeping-intelligence primarily deals with human intelligence and open-source monitoring, with reliance on a harmonious relationship with the local population. Although the formal promulgation of UN policies has resulted in developing standard practices and methodologies for intelligence, shortcomings in their implementation and coordination still exist. It is, however an evolutionary phase, and owing to the growing complexity of threats, the importance of peacekeeping in PKOs will continue to increase.

Notes:

[1] Report on Past peace operations | United Nations Peacekeeping at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/department-of-peace-operations. Accessed on February 14 ,2022 .

[2] "Threats against peacekeepers major concern: UN Peacekeeping chief", *The Hindu* November 23, 2021, https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/threats-against-peacekeepers-major-concern-un-peacekeeping-chief/article37639581.ece, Accessed on February 10,2022.

[3] Martin-brule, Sarah-myriam,"The Need for UN Peacekeeping-Intelligence.", *Finding the UN Way on Peacekeeping-Intelligence.* International Peace Institute, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25342.6. Accessed on February 10 ,2022.

[4] A. Walter Dorn, *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence*, Loch K. Johnson (Editor), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, pp.275–295.

[5] Military Peacekeeping-Intelligence Handbook ,http://dag.un.org/handle/11176/324835. Accessed February 15, 2022.

[6] UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People, June 17, 2015, para 221.

[7] UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, March 15, 2016, para 52.

[8] ibid.

[9] Acquisition of Information from Human Sources for Peacekeeping-Intelligence (HPKI) (Guideline) , http://dag.un.org/handle/11176/401065. Accessed on 15 February 2022.

[10] Andrew Green , "Indian peacekeepers killed in ambush in S.Sudan: U.N." , *Reuters*, April 9, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/south-sudan-indian-peacekeepers/indian-peacekeepers-killed-in-ambush-in-s-sudan-u-n-idINDEE9380AI20130409. Accessed onFebruary 10, 2022.