

Ghana's experiences in peace operations and contingent weapons management

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Ghana, as a major troop- and police-contributing country (TCC/PCC), has been involved in peace operations for nearly 60 years since it first deployed troops in the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in 1960. Since then, Ghana has been involved in more than 30 UN missions and several regional and sub-regional peace missions under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the African Union (AU). Even though Ghana has not been involved in any major incidents of weapons losses during peace operations apart from, perhaps, during the Port Franqui massacre of April 1961, it is still worth sharing some of the country's experiences in peace missions over the last nearly six decades.

This background paper is an attempt to share Ghana's experiences, practices, and lessons learned in peace operations with the aim of helping to better understand and reduce the loss of arms and ammunitions from peace operations while improving security for peacekeepers and their beneficiaries. It will examine how weapons get lost or diverted in the operational area and suggest ways of improving weapons and ammunition safety and personal security for peacekeepers.

Personal and Ghanaian experiences in the field

Ghana has been contributing troops and police to UN peace operations since the early 1960s. Since their first participation in ONUC, over 80,000 Ghanaian military, police, and civilian personnel have served in various capacities in more than 30 UN missions. I have personally participated in eight of them. In most of these operations there have been instances where weapons have been lost either through attacks by hostile armed elements or through careless mishandling of weapons by peacekeepers. A few examples will suffice, including of losses experienced by UN troops from countries other than Ghana.

By far the highest number of weapons and ammunition lost by Ghanaian troops during peace operations occurred in the UN operations in the Congo. This was during the Port Franqui shooting incident, which culminated in the unfortunate massacre of 43 Ghanaian military personnel and two of their British officers in April 1961. Some of the Ghanaian troops were alleged to have drowned while attempting to escape the shooting. The incident is reported to have happened when the Congolese interior minister, who was visiting Port Franqui on 27 April, publicly criticized the local *Armée nationale congolaise* (Congolese National Army, or ANC) forces of being anti-Lulua and a source of unrest in the ethnic conflict rocking northern Kasai. He threatened to have them disarmed by the UN forces if this did not change. The following day, the ONUC garrison at Port

Franqui was attacked by ANC troops, who thought it shared the pro-Lulua bias of the interior minister. Forty-seven UN troops (Ghanaian, Swedish, and British) were killed, some of them after they had been disarmed (Cremer, 2003, pp. 52–59; Dorn and Bell, 2003, p. 272; Hoskyns, 1965, p. 49; Packham, 2004, p. 185).

It has not been possible to ascertain the quantities of weapons and ammunition that were lost as a result of this unfortunate incident. It is still not clear whether the lost weapons corresponded to the number of persons killed or that some weapons belonging to dead personnel were later retrieved. No official records are available on this subject.

With regard to the various Ghanaian contingents, there is another case of ammunition loss through forced abandonment during operations with the UN Mission in Rwanda. A Ghanaian battalion was initially based at Byumba, but was forced to vacate its position at short notice due to an incursion by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1994. On 6 April 1994 President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, killing him and several of his close advisers. It is believed that the attack was carried out by Hutu extremists who believed the president was about to sign the Arusha peace accords, not by the RPF, a Tutsi military organization stationed outside the country at the time, whom the Hutus blamed. In any event, Hutu extremists in the military, led by Colonel Bagosora, immediately went into action, murdering Tutsis and moderate Hutus within hours of the plane crash.

In response to these attacks the RPF decided to intervene to save its kith and kin. Ghanaian troops in their line of march—about 225 in number—were given short notice to move out of their base in Byumba and relocate to Kigali. In beating a hasty withdrawal under harassing fire from RPF forces, some ammunition was left behind. The quantities and type(s) are yet to be determined. An attempt to obtain information from the Directorate of Army Peacekeeping Operations proved futile, apparently because records have been destroyed in the course of time.

Other UN troops suffered similar losses for one reason or another. In Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group seized Freetown in January 1999 and in the process killed several Nigerian troops serving with the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Nothing was said about what happened to their weapons, but it is obvious that some weapons and other equipment might have fallen into the hands of the RUF rebels. The RUF were notorious for their attacks on peacekeepers and for seizing their weapons and equipment.

These attacks did not cease after ECOMOG was rehatted as the UN Mission in Sierra Leone. In May 2000 the RUF occupied and looted disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration facilities in Makeni and Magburaka in Sierra Leone. This was not the first time the RUF had seized weapons from the UN. There were reported incidents in the Kambia and Port Loko axis where weapons had also been seized.

In Guiglo in the west of Côte d'Ivoire, militant Young Patriots loyal to ex-President Gbagbo stormed the Bangladeshi contingent's camp on 18 January 2006 and overran it, forcing the peacekeepers to flee and leave their weapons and equipment behind. This led to the repatriation of the whole battalion. To date, no information on weapons, ammunition, and other equipment lost or destroyed has been made available.

Also in Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladeshi troops found themselves in a number of other unfortunate situations. In one such incident, a convoy of troops on its way to Abidjan from their base in Daloa in the west lost their way and found themselves in Yopougon, a pro-Gbagbo suburb of Abidjan. They were attacked by the Young Patriots, who seized their weapons and burned one of their vehicles.

In another incident, a Bangladeshi patrol escorting food supplies to the Golf Hotel for President-elect Alassane Ouattara and some members of his blockaded and marooned government was set upon by Young Patriots and their equipment was seized from them. These two incidents were widely reported on local media and even appeared on YouTube.

Peacekeepers have been attacked on and off duty in the operational area with the aim of stealing or seizing their weapons. I had a personal experience in Côte d'Ivoire when as deputy force commander I was invited by Blé Goude, then minister for youth and leader of the Young Patriots, to a meeting at the Hotel Tiama in the Plateau district of Abidjan. While waiting inside the hotel for the arrival of the minister, I heard a commotion outside and went out to see what was happening. Outside the hotel lobby I saw my bodyguards—mostly Senegalese soldiers—struggling with a Young Patriot group called La Sorbonne. One of the soldiers was trying to hold onto his rifle, which the Young Patriots were trying to snatch from him. I quickly went to his aid and managed to retrieve the weapon for him, but unfortunately they were able to steal his self-loading pistol while he was struggling to retrieve the rifle. All attempts to retrieve the pistol proved futile until the crisis came to a head.

Often, peacekeepers have been accessories to the loss or diversion of weapons and ammunition because of carelessness or poor security measures. Once in Lebanon a machine gun was stolen from one of the Ghanaian positions at night. Apparently, the guards had all fallen asleep and Lebanese armed elements sneaked in to steal that valuable weapon. All initial efforts to retrieve the weapon proved futile. However, on a happier note, persistent enquiries through local leaders led to the discovery of the people who took the weapon. The battalion literally had to buy back the weapon.

There was another incident in which a Lebanese national took undue advantage of his friendship with a Ghanaian soldier and over-fraternization by the soldiers in the camp to steal the soldier's personal rifle. In this case too the weapon had to be bought back.

Such cases are too many to recount across missions, but mostly as a result of national sensitivities they are treated as an internal issue and are hardly reported officially.

Another incident involving Ghanaian troops that led to a temporary seizure of weapons in South Sudan is worth mentioning. Following a request to Ghana to send additional troops to South Sudan, it was decided to withdraw the 300 requested troops from the Ghanaian contingent serving with the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, which was about to be down-sized as a result of the draw down of the mission. In packing up their stores and equipment to be shipped to South Sudan, one container was filled with a mix of weapons and logistics stores, but was mislabeled as 'construction materials'. On arrival in South Sudan in February 2014, a scan of the container revealed the presence of some arms and ammunition among the stores. This raised suspicion among the South Sudanese authorities, especially since the containers were to be shipped overland through rebel-held territory to their final destination, instead of being airfreighted, as was preferred by the South Sudanese authorities. The authorities thought that it was a ploy to supply the rebels with arms and ammunition, so they seized the container. It took a high-powered Ghanaian delegation led by the then deputy defence minister to have the weapons released in June 2014 after nearly five months of back-and-forth negotiations.

Ways of preventing weapons and ammunition loss

Given the fact that weapons that are stolen or diverted become a double-edged sword capable of hurting their original owners, how can we ensure that weapons and ammunition are safeguarded to ensure the better protection and personal security of peacekeepers and the civilian population they are required to protect?

Weapons and ammunition fall under the general umbrella of contingent-owned equipment (COE). The whole prevention framework therefore should be subsumed under COE management.

In the Ghanaian military context, specific COE maintenance training is carried out for key appointment holders during pre-deployment training. The training focuses on the sustaining and management of all deployed COE. The logistics officer normally oversees a unit's COE and executes this role in conjunction with the company quartermaster sergeant and company sergeant majors at the company level. It must be noted that the ultimate responsibility for COE management lies with the unit commander and the company commanders. The commanding officer needs to keep abreast of the COE role because he countersigns the UN verification report.

Under the wet-lease system, TCCs/PCCs are reimbursed for various equipment and services provided in the mission area. There are strict inspection criteria that must be adhered to before a TCC/PCC can be fully reimbursed for equipment fielded in the operational theatre.

In the past there had been serious problems with the COE profile of the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) mainly because of disregard for the existing memorandum of understanding

requirements and the poor maintenance of COE. Ghana had not been deriving maximum returns from the wet-lease reimbursement as a result of lapses in record keeping, and poor maintenance and reporting procedures, among other things. To address this problem, GAF has in the past year created the position of unit COE officer with lieutenant colonel rank to oversee a battalion's COE matters during peace operations.

Topmost among the preventive measures should be training. Training must be continuous and must cover personal security, camp security, field security, and stockpile management. Much focus must be placed on pre-deployment training. Training in stockpile management for relevant personnel covering record keeping, storage, control, and maintenance of weapons and ammunition in the field will go a long way in preventing or minimizing losses.

Peacekeepers should be more concerned with their personal security and the security of their personal weapons. It is their first line of defence. They have to stay alert at all times, whether on or off duty. They have to be able to defend themselves and stay alive before they can protect others. While on patrols, peacekeepers must be on the alert and adopt appropriate anti-ambush skills to counter possible ambushes.

The next important preventive measure should be a good reporting system based on daily and periodic inspection routines. Periodic inspections of weapons and ammunition, as well as security measures covering their safety, will go a long way in preventing or minimizing losses. Losses, no matter how they occur, must be reported through the normal chain of command within the battalion. Routine weapons and ammunition checks and inspections must be carried out at various levels of command. When a loss is detected it must be reported through the normal chain of command at the unit level. If a loss occurs as a result of an incident, an incident report should be filed. In all cases, a board of inquiry should be convened to investigate the loss and the report forwarded to force headquarters for appropriate action to be taken. The convening authority at the unit level is the commanding officer, who has the sole responsibility, but delegates responsibility for the inquiry to a subordinate officer who submits a comprehensive report covering the terms of reference in the convening order. The terms of reference may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. the circumstances leading to the loss of the weapon or ammunition;
- b. the date and time of the loss;
- c. who is responsible for the loss; and
- d. whether the loss could have been avoided.

Another important preventive measure is good camp security. There should be all-round camp security with perimeter fencing and adequate lighting. Armouries, magazines, and ammunition dumps must be well sited and protected with perimeter fencing and appropriate security and safety measures.

Good communications within the operational area could also help to prevent or minimize losses. A good communications network that links all positions to a central source will ensure the quick and efficient passage of information. Suspicious movements and possible attacks on any position can easily be relayed to other positions to raise the alarm for all positions to be on the alert and take the necessary precautions to avoid being overrun.

Commitment to robust peacekeeping techniques and the elimination of national prejudices would also in no small measure contribute to the prevention or minimization of weapons and ammunition losses in peace operations. The selection of personnel by TCCs/PCCs is very important in this regard. Often TCCs/PCCs treat peace operations as a welfare issue and therefore select personnel who are in the terminal stages of their career, the aim being to help them acquire some money before finally leaving the service. Such personnel are often too old to endure the physical hardships of peacekeeping and are often incapable of engaging in combat or reluctant to do so when required and therefore prone to compromise on the strict application of correct procedures.

Another effective way of preventing or minimizing losses is the adoption of best practices. Many countries have long-standing histories of participation in peace operations and have acquired invaluable experiences in the process. The sharing of such experiences among TCCs/PCCs could go a long way to plug loopholes through which weapons/ammunition losses occur.

Conclusion

Ghana has been a regular contributor of troops and police personnel to UN peacekeeping operations and regional arrangements under the auspices of the AU and ECOWAS for nearly six decades.

Because of the wet-lease system operated by the UN, training in COE management is one of the priority areas for Ghanaian contingents in order to qualify them for reimbursement at the appropriate rates. This training also ensures that equipment is properly maintained so as to attain a reasonable life span in the field.

During these operations weapons and ammunition have been lost either through hostile action or through carelessness or lax security by individual peacekeepers. To ensure accountability, mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that weapons/ammunition losses are reported within the chain of command and appropriate investigations conducted through the convening of boards of inquiry.

Through training and strict maintenance procedures, weapons/ammunition losses experienced by Ghanaian peacekeepers during peace operations have been kept to a negligible minimum.

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