

Briefing Paper

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MONITORING ILLICIT ARMS FLOWS

The Role of UN Peacekeeping Operations

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Front cover photo

Ammunition seized by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. Source: UN Photo, 2015

Overview

UN Peacekeeping operations are in a unique position to monitor flows of illicit arms and ammunition in their areas of operation. Systematic collection and analysis of data regarding matériel encountered by peacekeeping operations can enhance their situational awareness. It can provide important information about sources and supply chains of armed actors illicitly procuring arms and ammunition, as well as help in assessing capacities, intent, and geographical expansion of those actors. It can also make important contributions to the work of UN Panels of Experts monitoring arms embargoes.

This Briefing Paper reviews relevant aspects of UN peacekeeping operations— their mandates, relations with UN Panels of Experts, as well as different approaches towards monitoring illicit arms flows. The Paper presents case studies on the UN peacekeeping operations in Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. The Paper considers the scope for improving management of arms and ammunition by peacekeeping missions to prevent matériel from being lost or otherwise diverted.

This Briefing Paper concludes that UN peacekeeping missions could become substantially more involved in monitoring illicit arms and ammunition flows. This requires greater awareness and support for such work within the UN system and in its operations. This Paper's findings are also relevant to efforts to monitor progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 16 and Target 16.4, which calls on states to significantly reduce illicit arms flows.

Key findings

- United Nations peacekeeping operations often remain unaware of their potential contribution to identifying and combatting illicit arms flows.
- A key factor in this regard may be a lack of awareness of the requirements of UN Security Council resolutions and other relevant obligations.
- Limited engagement in the monitoring of illicit arms flows can result in opportunities to identify and combat such flows going unused.
- Technical staff, either recruited by UN peacekeeping missions or if they are given access to matériel recovered by these missions, may greatly enhance capacities for the monitoring of illicit arms flows.

Introduction

The illicit flow of arms and ammunition contributes to destabilizing countries in which UN PKOs operate. Understanding such flows is a prerequisite for effective countermeasures. UN PKOs¹ are uniquely placed to assist in the identification and monitoring of these flows; in some cases, PKOs also have legal obligations to take certain actions to counter diversion. At the same time, few PKOs take advantage of their potential capacity to monitor illicit arms flows. This appears to be mainly due to a lack of awareness and understanding of the requirements of PKOs. In turn, this leaves unused an important tool that is available for identifying and eventually countering illicit arms flows.

This Briefing Paper first looks at the mandates of UN PKOs and at why missions and the troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs and PCCs) that take part in them can make a significant contribution to the monitoring of illicit arms flows. The paper then highlights the relevant experiences of two UN PKOs with extensive experience in this field: Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. It concludes with a discussion of lessons learned and challenges faced.

Mandates of peacekeeping operations

The potential capacity of UN PKOs to monitor UN arms embargoes was raised in international negotiations on tracing illicit small arms and light weapons in 2005.² The UN Security Council followed up on these discussions with generic resolutions in 2013 and 2015, outlining a framework for embargo monitoring by PKOs (UNSC, 2013; 2015a). In addition, Security Council resolutions providing mission-specific mandates sometimes contain language relating to the monitoring of illicit arms flows.³ Further, PKOs may engage in monitoring activities as part of operational needs to maintain situational awareness in conflict zones.⁴

PKOs are typically also explicitly requested to provide logistical and other assistance to UN Panels or Groups of Experts on embargo monitoring that operate in mission areas (see below). Indeed, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to direct relevant PKOs and other entities to 'provide the utmost assistance to the work of Panels of Experts in the 'implementation and compliance monitoring' of arms embargoes (UNSC, 2015a, para. 28). Further, the Security Council has raised the potential role of UN PKOs in directly contributing to

combatting illicit arms flows. This includes providing assistance to host countries in tracing illicit arms (UNSC, 2015a, para. 4). The Security Council has also raised the possibility of assigning dedicated staff to UN missions to effectively monitor arms embargoes (UNSC, 2015a, para. 9).

Relations with UN Panels of Experts on embargo monitoring

There is continued interest in the issue of monitoring Security Council embargoes with a view to identifying how best such monitoring can be undertaken.⁵ In the UN system the primary tool for this is Groups of Experts or Panels of Experts (Panels). The Security Council mandates Panels to investigate and report on possible breaches of embargoes. As noted above, PKOs are requested to assist these Panels. Typically, this is done using an internal focal point nominated by the mission to support the Panel in terms of logistics for visits and in-country movements.

Assistance provided by PKOs to Panels can vary, however.⁶ In at least a few cases PKOs may also seek to distance themselves from the findings of Panels that accuse either host governments or neighbouring countries of potential embargo violations.⁷ Indeed, interviews with personnel of several PKOs suggest that missions may perceive embargo monitoring as an essentially political tool that will result in accusations (against the PKO) of potential wrong-doing—by either host governments or UN member states. PKOs may thus choose to curtail their further engagement in monitoring activities.⁸

The converse of this reluctance is heightened engagement: PKOs may go much further in their support of Panels and, more broadly, the identification and monitoring of illicit arms flows. Specifically, PKOs may choose to monitor such flows to identify whether new materiel is arriving in conflict areas. This is separate from possible subsequent efforts to establish which actor or actors may be responsible for producing and transferring the materiel. PKOs may thus engage in monitoring without having to trace and establish responsibility for illicit flows.

Unique position of peacekeeping operations

The continuing presence of PKOs in relevant conflict zones can allow them to

make strong contributions to the essential first step of collecting data on illicit arms and ammunition flows. For example, Panels typically have only limited time available during their one-year appointments to travel in conflict zones and acquire information on materiel used by embargoed actors. In contrast, PKOs often have a full-time presence in conflict zones. This can allow PKO teams to quickly mobilize after an armed clash to inspect battlefields and, if it is safe and secure to do so, document evidence left behind at these sites, such as fired casings of ammunition cartridges. Likewise, peacekeepers can document relevant evidence in cases in which they are the targets of attacks.

PKOs may also have opportunities to document and centralize information on illicit arms and ammunition in a variety of other situations. These can include the discovery of arms caches and the disarmament programmes of former combatants as part of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes. Further, depending on the context, peacekeeping missions may access illicit arms and ammunition seized by national defence and security forces in armed conflicts or at crime sites.⁹

It is important to note that, where PKOs document and centralize information on illicit materiel, they are not replacing Panel activities on embargo monitoring. Rather, PKOs can use their



Members of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan conducting a weapons sweep. Source: UN Photo, 2016

Box 1 Foreign-sourced materiel used by Malian terrorist groups

Much of the arms and ammunition used by armed groups in Mali was looted from stockpiles of national defence and security forces in 2012, as well as in previous rebellions in northern Mali. Armed groups who arrived from Libya around 2011–12 brought other materiel to Mali, especially heavy machine guns mounted on 4 × 4 vehicles. While armed groups continue to use such materiel, they also add to their stocks with ongoing procurement from nearby countries.

In this context, Libya was and remains an important source of arms and ammunition for armed groups in Mali. This is especially true with respect to anti-vehicle mines and mortar shells (including both 81 mm and 60 mm). Until 2016 investigators regularly documented small arms ammunition coming from Libya that appeared in ‘waves’: similar ammunition would be found for a couple of months, and would then be replaced by other ammunition that was not previously present. These waves reflected the arrival of new shipments for the various armed groups.

New sources

More recently, MINUSMA investigators can increasingly trace small arms ammunition used by armed groups in Mali to states in the sub-region other than Libya. Investigators have also documented various supplies from the territories of West African coastal states. This materiel includes explosives for use in commercial mining operations that terrorist groups use in the construction of improvised explosive devices in Mali.

It is interesting to note that much of the more recently encountered materiel was produced in recent years: MINUSMA investigators frequently encounter ammunition used by armed groups in Mali that was produced in 2014 and 2015. Such ammunition was clearly diverted after the crisis in northern Mali in 2012. Similarly, investigators traced commercial explosives recovered in an arms cache in May 2017 to an export to a state in the sub-region in November 2016, which means that the materiel was diverted within months of its arrival at its original destination.

Collaboration with outside investigators

PKOs face constraints in the information they can share with non-UN actors. It is important to note that MINUSMA is only one of several

Map 1 Geographical distribution of Al Murabitun attacks



Photo inset: AK-pattern rifle recovered from the site of one of the attacks

Source: Holger Anders (2017)

actors in Mali involved in the collection and analysis of arms and ammunition used by armed groups. Other actors include national authorities, international armed forces, and the staff of specialized non-governmental organizations.

In practice, collaboration between MINUSMA and outside investigators is indirect. MINUSMA alerts national authorities to the identification of possibly embargo-violating materiel as part of its mandate to assist them in combatting illicit small arms flows. National authorities have subsequently used this information as the basis for their own requests to outside investigators to conduct tracing operations designed to identify the last known point of the materiel in legal possession. The findings of these tracing operations are then shared with both national authorities and MINUSMA to assist in their monitoring activities.

Significance

Tracing diverted materiel is reactive: it typically deals with materiel that has already been diverted. But monitoring illicit weapons flows and identifying sources allow MINUSMA to complement its understanding of the intent and capabilities of armed groups. In addition, they enhance MINUSMA’s understanding of the scope of the activities of armed groups in the sub-region. Importantly, these activities also allow national and international actors to better target trafficking routes in efforts to disrupt armed groups’ supply lines.

Case study: rifles used by terrorist group Al Murabitun in attacks on hotels and other locations

MINUSMA’s role in monitoring illicit arms flows is illustrated by investigations into materiel used by the Al Murabitun brigade, an armed group affiliated to al-Qaeda and operating in West Africa. On 7 August 2015 assailants attacked a guesthouse in which UN contractors were residing in Sévaré, Mali, killing eight people. One assailant also died in a firefight with Malian soldiers who arrived on the scene after the start of the attack. Al Murabitun subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack.

Following the attack, MINUSMA documented an AKMS-pattern assault rifle used by the assailant who was killed. The rifle was 7.62 × 39 mm in calibre and produced in 2011 (see photo inset in Map 1). In collaboration with Malian authorities, MINUSMA investigators established that assault rifles of the model, producer, and year of production in question were not part of the stockpiles of the Malian Defence and Security Forces. In other words, there was a clear indication that the rifle had been illegally trafficked into Mali.

This finding became even more pertinent after the recovery of further assault rifles of the same model, producer, and year of production following subsequent attacks in Bamako, Mali;¹⁰ Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso;¹¹ Grand Bassam, Côte d’Ivoire;¹² and in Gao, Gao region, Mali.¹³ In all of the attacks the assailants used assault rifles from the same initial illegal transfer to Al Murabitun. MINUSMA and associated investigators could thus link the various attacks and confirm that they had likely been centrally planned and facilitated. These findings clearly demonstrated the capacity of Al Murabitun to stage attacks not only in central and northern Mali, but in neighbouring countries as well. This allowed security actors to better comprehend Al Murabitun’s capacities (see Map 1).

Box 2 Tracking domestic distribution

If monitoring illicit supplies from abroad is one focus of MINUSMA activities, another is the tracking of the domestic distribution of the materiel investigators encounter. Such tracking allows MINUSMA to confirm the areas of operations of specific armed groups, as well as commonalities and differences in procurement between and among the groups. In the Malian context, which is marked by a multitude of armed groups, such tracking has proven highly beneficial in terms of improving MINUSMA's situational awareness.

For example, based on the recovery of specific ammunition following assassinations in central Mali in 2016, investigators confirmed that the assailants were connected to a particular armed group: at the time of the attack the armed group in question was the only one to use this ammunition. Investigators were also able to demonstrate that armed groups operating in northern Mali provided material support to groups in central Mali. This finding contributed to a revision of MINUSMA's terrorist threat predictions for central Mali.

Developing investigative leads

As noted above, MINUSMA and collaborating investigators assisted national authorities in establishing links among several terrorist attacks in the period 2015–16 (see Box 1). MINUSMA and collaborating investigators also assisted authorities in Mali and Burkina Faso in establishing linkages between several attacks in 2017.¹⁴ As with the earlier attacks, investigators were able to link assault rifles used in the attacks to a specific armed group. Notably, the rifles were linked to arms recovered in a prior seizure in Mali in early 2016. This demonstrated that the arms seized in early 2016 came from the same armed group stockpile as the arms used by assailants in the 2017 attacks, providing new investigative leads that were unlikely to have been otherwise explored.

Significance

Tracking the domestic distribution of arms and ammunition used by armed groups contributes to situational awareness regarding both the areas of operation and the identity of the armed groups responsible for attacks in Mali. MINUSMA's work in this regard also assists national authorities in their own investigations. It directly contributes to building their nascent capacities for the identification and monitoring of illicit arms flows.

Case study: distribution of 2015-produced small arms ammunition in terrorist attacks

Since 2016 MINUSMA and collaborating investigators have repeatedly documented certain ammunition used in various attacks and associated incidents in central Mali. The collection of this ammunition—calibre 7.62 × 39 mm, produced in 2015—at specific attack sites allowed MINUSMA to tie it directly to Katibat Massina, an al-Qaeda-affiliated armed group. After determining that this ammunition was not used by any other armed group in Mali and was not in broader circulation in central Mali (it was not used in crimes or bandit attacks, for example), MINUSMA was able to gain greater insights into Katibat Massina's procurement lines. MINUSMA's discovery also provided investigative leads for national authorities linked to a range of assassinations of local authorities and religious leaders in central Mali that, prior to the finding, could not be linked to Katibat Massina.



presence and proximity to collect information on a much broader and systematic level than what is typically possible by Panels. The collected information can, in turn, greatly assist Panels in the identification of possible embargo violations.

This, at least, is suggested by the experience of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), where the technical staff generated new files whenever they encountered materiel considered of possible interest from an embargo-monitoring perspective.¹⁵ The files were offered to the relevant Panel, which followed up on many of them by initiating tracing requests to the countries of production of the materiel. The Panel then presented its findings in its reports to the Security Council Sanctions Committee covering Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁶

Approaches to monitoring

PKOs approach the monitoring of illicit flows differently. While Security Council resolutions provide a framework for monitoring illicit arms flows, it is PKOs themselves that often decide on the specific structures and procedures they will use to accomplish this task. These decisions are based on identified needs and available resources, also taking into account the differing contexts in which PKOs operate.

For example, several PKOs—including the missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR)—created ad hoc working groups that bring together different mission components to coordinate their efforts in relation to embargo monitoring.

Missions may also adopt ad hoc structures for specific tasks. In November 2013 the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)¹⁷ convened an assessment team to document materiel left behind by the M23 armed group in eastern DRC after the group withdrew from the area.¹⁸ One of the tasks of the MONUSCO team was to assess whether the materiel contained any evidence of states in the sub-region illicitly supplying M23.¹⁹

Monitoring by UNOCI

UNOCI,²⁰ which closed in June 2017, had an extensive mandate on embargo monitoring, including carrying out inspections



of the stockpiles of embargoed state actors in Côte d'Ivoire.²¹ Notably, UNOCI's activities in this regard were strongly encouraged by the Panel of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire (CDI Panel): as early as 2005 the Panel urged the creation of stronger monitoring capacities within UNOCI, including recommending the recruitment of a consultant on embargo monitoring.²²

Under this strong mandate UNOCI established the Integrated Embargo Monitoring Unit at its headquarters. This unit collated information collected by inspection teams throughout the country. The mission further strengthened its capabilities in 2011, appointing a technical specialist in identifying and monitoring illicit arms flows. This meant that UNOCI was not limited to collecting and sharing

data only with the CDI Panel. Rather, the mission was able to proceed independently with preliminary analyses of whether the materiel it encountered suggested possible violations of the arms embargo.²³

For example, UNOCI monitoring staff regularly screened materiel collected in disarmament programmes, noting models, producers, and years of production, among other characteristics. This screening allowed for the identification of various types of arms and ammunition whose presence suggested possible embargo violations. Thus, where materiel produced after the embargo of 2004 was encountered,²⁴ it could be flagged as of possible interest from an embargo perspective. As noted above, these case

files were then shared with the CDI Panel, which decided on possible follow-up. Without the monitoring unit's work, the CDI Panel would arguably not have been aware of the presence of various materiel in the country.²⁵

Monitoring by MINUSMA

Security Council Resolution 2253 and related resolutions established an arms embargo on certain terrorist groups (UNSC, 2015b). Some of these groups operate in Mali. In its resolutions mandating the operations of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)²⁶ the Security Council requested the mission

to assist the sanctions-monitoring team in the verification of the implementation of this embargo.²⁷

MINUSMA, unlike UNOCI (see above), does not have a formal structure to monitor the arms embargo on terrorist groups operating in the centre and north of Mali. Despite the lack of a formal structure, staff with experience in embargo monitoring are supporting mission-wide efforts to document and centralize information on arms and ammunition used in terrorist attacks against MINUSMA or other targets. Collected data on materiel is systematically entered into a database, together with contextual information on the location and date of use, documentation of the materiel, and information on the presumed users of the materiel.²⁸

In four years MINUSMA documented more than 600 military small arms and light weapons and more than 12,000 rounds of associated ammunition. The materiel was documented after its recovery in some 430 terrorist attacks, caches, and other incidents, including acts of banditry.²⁹ The collected information was then compared against known stock of Malian defence and security forces. In collaboration with national authorities, MINUSMA staff have identified various materiel that was likely trafficked illegally into Mali from abroad (see Box 1). MINUSMA staff also track the in-country internal distribution of relevant materiel to identify the domestic supply chains of terrorist groups (see Box 2). As mandated, MINUSMA shares the information with the relevant Panel, as well as national investigative and judicial authorities.³⁰

Beyond monitoring: improving mission management of arms and ammunition

While PKOs may make significant contributions to monitoring illicit arms flows, they themselves may also *feed* illicit markets if seized and recovered arms and ammunition are not managed adequately. Policies, procedures, and best practices around the management of recovered weapons by PKOs can vary considerably, and anecdotal information suggests that, in some instances, seized materiel may actually have re-entered illicit circulation. Furthermore, arms and ammunition that peacekeeping troops bring with them into mission areas—known as contingent-owned equipment (COE)—can be diverted if captured during attacks or lost due to poor management and lack of

accountability. As research by the Small Arms Survey has shown, the problem of lost and diverted COE is much wider than previously understood, representing millions of rounds of ammunition and thousands of weapons.³¹

In January 2018 the UN published a handbook for DDR practitioners entitled *Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context*.³² The Small Arms Survey, as part of its Making Peace Operations More Effective project, is assisting regional organizations that authorize peace operations to improve on current practices to prevent such losses.

Member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) are among the most active TCCs involved in UN PKOs.³³ They are subject to obligations placed on them by their governments as a result of the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, which entered into force in 2009 (ECOWAS, 2006), and the 2010 Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components that Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly,



which entered into force in 2017 (Kinshasa Convention, 2010).

Article 11 of the ECOWAS Convention and Article 22 of the Kinshasa Convention both require troops from the member states of these two regions to document in centralized sub-regional databases the small arms and ammunition they bring into and take out of mission areas (including their parts and components). The ECOWAS Convention contains a requirement that TCCs from member states:

(D)ecare to the ECOWAS Executive Secretary all the small arms and light weapons seized, col-

lected and/or destroyed during peace operations on their territory and in the ECOWAS region (ECOWAS, 2006, art. 11.1.c).

Similarly, the Kinshasa Convention stipulates that:

(D)ata relating to weapons and ammunition collected during disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operations, shall be kept in the subregional database of weapons used in peacekeeping operations for a minimum of 30 years (Kinshasa Convention, 2010, art. 22.2).

At present these measures are largely aspirational. The Small Arms Survey is working with ECOWAS to establish and implement a reporting tool that would help start to make these provisions a reality.

Best practices and lessons learned

Experience demonstrates the feasibility of monitoring illicit arms flows by PKOs. Lessons learned include the need for systematic data collection and centralization. In practical terms, this may entail the collection of cartridge cases and other



Members of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali work with the local community. Source: UN Photo, 2017

evidence from sites of attacks against PKO personnel (where this is not done by national authorities). It may also require consistent efforts to adequately document arms and ammunition seized by PKOs or national authorities, or otherwise recovered from illicit circulation and use. Any such information that is gathered should be centralized to allow for the analysis and identification of trafficking flows and changes to them.

Collection and documentation efforts will greatly benefit if the trained personnel conducting them know how to record the information about arms and ammunition that is useful for the purposes of monitoring illicit flows. (This type of information is necessarily more detailed than, for example, the usual documentation required by DDR programmes.) The development of identification guides and baseline studies on materiel present in a country can be considered best practice in this regard. Maintaining a database on encountered materiel over a longer-term period (as MINUSMA does in Mali, for example)³⁴ facilitates the identification of previously undocumented materiel and can assist in the identification of materiel that has only recently arrived in a conflict area.

A more comprehensive approach to monitoring can be provided in cases in which PKOs have staff who have the technical knowledge required for the identification of illicit materiel and the experience to determine whether this materiel may reflect recent trafficking flows. If no such trained, experienced staff are available, PKOs may also consider (within the framework of their mandates) providing access to collected data to technical specialists from elsewhere in the UN system, or to specialized non-governmental organizations.

In the longer term it may also be useful to better link different PKOs active in the monitoring of illicit arms flows in their areas of operation with a view to sharing knowledge and experience, and harmonizing data collection tools. This may assist in providing a broader picture of the illicit circulation of arms. It may also help inform sub-regional efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition.

Challenges

There are a number of challenges to PKOs' collection of data on illicit arms and ammunition flows. Practically, access to arms and ammunition of embargoed actors can be difficult. Even the recovery of materiel following armed attacks can pose safety and security risks or require travel to remote and insecure locations. PKOs also

face conceptual constraints. The lack of awareness within PKOs about the capacities required for identifying and monitoring illicit arms flows is one such constraint. The belief that—in the absence of explicit language authorizing such activities—PKOs lack the mandate for such work and that it should be left exclusively to Panels of Experts appointed by the Security Council can curtail collection efforts. As a result of these challenges, the general rule is that PKOs only rarely engage in the systematic documentation of arms and ammunition of embargoed actors, leaving unexploited their unique opportunities to identify and monitor illicit flows of arms, ammunition, and related materiel.

At the same time, some argue that PKOs may encounter difficulties if they do more than monitor illicit arms flows. PKOs may be comfortable monitoring any illicit materiel newly arrived in conflict zones—when it arrives, who is using it, and what might be learned from its distribution—but using this information as the basis of further investigation may raise other issues. Thus, if a PKO sought to initiate international tracing requests in an attempt to comprehensively document the transfer chains of materiel from its legal producer up to its point of diversion, it could face further challenges. For example, if producer states were unwilling to cooperate in such tracing operations the PKO leadership could become concerned about political backlash from states accusing the mission of 'overstepping' its mandate.

Even acknowledging the potential challenges posed by doing more, monitoring illicit flows—even without establishing exact points of diversion—can greatly assist PKOs in fulfilling their missions. Monitoring can improve situational awareness for PKOs, as well as assist national authorities in carrying out investigations and taking appropriate measures to disrupt illicit arms flows. Further, the case of MINUSMA suggests that PKOs can also benefit from information provided by outside investigators supporting national authorities through the conduct of tracing operations in relation to materiel identified as potentially representing embargo violations.

At present, the primary reasons that PKOs are not systematically including the monitoring of illicit flows in their activities are twofold. Firstly, there appears to be limited awareness within PKOs on how to identify and monitor illicit arms flows. Secondly, limited resources within PKOs may prevent the data collection and analysis activities that would be required for such work. Thus, the absence of technical staff that could assist PKOs to

develop means and mechanisms that would allow them to better make use of their opportunities is the general norm for PKOs.

Conclusion: looking ahead

UN PKOs are uniquely placed to assist in the identification and monitoring of illicit arms flows. How they approach such monitoring may differ according to their specific mandates and circumstances. Experience suggests, however, that PKOs can make significant contributions in this area. A critical element in this regard is the availability of staff with adequate technical knowledge. Such staff can support mission-wide efforts at systematic data collection, centralization, and follow-up, whether by doing the PKO's own analysis, forwarding the data to relevant UN Panels of Experts, or forwarding it to national authorities. Raising awareness of these possibilities within both the UN and its PKOs may help to build support and capacities for such work.

PKOs may also consider enhancing their monitoring capacities in areas related to arms trafficking that are pertinent to their mandates and contexts. For example, in Mali, it is not only illicit arms and ammunition that fuel armed violence, but also commercial components. For example, the vehicles armed groups use, whether to move around in conflict-affected areas or in attacks, improvised explosive devices, or suicide bombings, constitute a relevant area for monitoring.³⁵ More broadly, monitoring illicit flows of arms and associated materiel can benefit from parallel investigations into the financing of embargoed actors and, as relevant, trafficking in natural resources or related issues.

In a longer-term view, if more PKOs strengthen their relevant capacities, information sharing among such missions could generate greater understanding of illicit cross-border trafficking affecting the countries in which the PKOs operate. Dedicated staff in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (which manages PKOs at UN Headquarters level) could further support PKOs in strengthening their monitoring capacities, as well as centralize the data collected by missions to inform discussions at the headquarters level, and even among national stakeholders.

Further efforts within the UN system to strengthen the capacity of PKOs to monitor illicit flows of arms and associated materiel may require resources that are difficult to obtain. That said, even basic processes and a minimum of expertise in PKOs to improve the collection and analysis of information required for the

monitoring of illicit arms flows may go a long way towards better utilizing the unique position of PKOs to identify and assist in the design of measures to disrupt such flows and the violence they fuel. ●

List of abbreviations and acronyms

- CAR** Central African Republic
CDI Panel Panel of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire
COE Contingent-owned equipment
DDR Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DRC Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECCAS Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States
MINUSMA UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MONUSCO UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Panel (UN) Panel of Experts
PCC Police-contributing country
PKO Peacekeeping operation
TCC Troop-contributing country
UN United Nations
UNOCI UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire

Notes

- 1 This Briefing Paper uses the term 'UN peacekeeping operations' to refer to a variety of UN-mandated missions, including stabilization missions, peacekeeping missions, and others.
- 2 For example, see UNGA (2005, para. 28), which included the recommendation that the UN further consider the role of UN PKOs in tracing illicit small arms.
- 3 Language may give a mandate to support national authorities in addressing illicit small arms and light weapons, for example. For other examples, see UNSC (2015a, para. 23; 2017a, para. 46; 2017b, para. 56).
- 4 Author interviews with senior legal advisors of UN missions in the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, 2013–17.
- 5 See, for example, LeBrun and Rigual (2016); UNGA (2015); Boucher (2010). Also see UNSC (2017c, Annex II).
- 6 See, for example, LeBrun and Rigual (2016); Boucher (2010).
- 7 Author interviews with former members of UN embargo monitoring Panels, various locations, 2017.
- 8 Author interviews with UN mission personnel in the CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Sudan, South Sudan, and other locations, 2010–17.
- 9 This is frequently done by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization

- Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), for example (author interviews with confidential sources, Bamako, Mali, October 2017).
- 10 Radisson Blu Hotel, 20 November 2015; Azalai Hotel Nord-Sud, 21 March 2016.
 - 11 Cappuccino restaurant and Splendid Hotel, 15 January 2016.
 - 12 Beach-side resorts, 13 March 2016.
 - 13 At the airport, 29 November 2016.
 - 14 Attacks in 2017 where MINUSMA provided investigatory assistance included Campement Kangaba (near Bamako), 18 June; Istanbul restaurant, Ouagadougou, 13 August; MINUSMA camps in Douentza, Mopti region and Timbuktu (all Timbuktu region), 14 August.
 - 15 Author interviews with members of the UNOCI Integrated Embargo Monitoring Unit, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, September 2013.
 - 16 Author interviews with member of the Panel of Experts concerning Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, September 2013.
 - 17 MONUSCO was the PKO in the DRC. The acronym is derived from the French version of the mission's name: *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo*.
 - 18 Author interview with members of the assessment team, Goma, DRC, December 2013.
 - 19 MONUSCO sought this information to adequately frame its relations with states in the sub-region (author interview with members of the assessment team, Goma, DRC, December 2013).
 - 20 Also commonly referred to as ONUCI (*Opération des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire*).
 - 21 See, for example, UNSC (2015c, para. 19(f)).
 - 22 See, for example UNSC (2005).
 - 23 Author interviews with members of the UNOCI Integrated Embargo Monitoring Unit, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, September 2013.
 - 24 Practically, this meant that items were produced in 2005 and later were flagged by the UNOCI monitoring staff.
 - 25 Author interview with member of the CDI Panel, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, September 2013.
 - 26 The acronym is derived from the French version of the mission's name: *Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali*.
 - 27 See, for example, UNSC (2016, para. 20(d)).
 - 28 For arms, data collected includes type, model, producer, year of production, and serial number. For ammunition, data collected includes the calibre, producer, year of production, and lot number.
 - 29 Author interviews with knowledgeable sources in Bamako, Mali, October 2017.
 - 30 The specific mandate can be found in UNSC (2017a, paras. 22(d) and 46).
 - 31 See Berman, Racovita, and Schroeder (2017).
 - 32 See de Tésières (2018).
 - 33 The 26 member states of ECOWAS and ECCAS include 9 of the top 25 TCCs/PCCs to UN PKOs, not including their contributions to regional and sub-regional peace operations on the African continent (Berman and Maze, 2016; UN Peacekeeping, 2018).
 - 34 Author interviews with knowledgeable sources in Bamako, Mali, October 2017.
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The Security Assessment in North Africa receives core funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. In addition, the project receives ongoing support from Global Affairs Canada and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. It has previously received grants from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Foreign Office, the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the US State Department.

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