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Improving United Nations Intelligence: Lessons from the Field

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Key Points

- United Nations (UN) member states have historically been hesitant to provide the UN with an intelligence-collection mandate at either strategic (headquarters) or operational (field) levels. However, the increased size, length and complexity of peacekeeping operations, compounded by severe security threats to UN personnel, make a stronger UN intelligence capability in the field increasingly necessary.

- Over the past decade, UN member states have begun to support a limited UN intelligence capability in peacekeeping missions. As a result, the UN created a new multidisciplinary structure in 2005, the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC), whose mandate is to produce mission-wide integrated analyses for the senior management of peacekeeping missions. The uniqueness of the JMAC model lies in the fact that JMAC teams are composed of military, police and civilian team members who share a same physical office space and report to a common civilian chief.

- Research by the author and others suggests that JMACs succeed in producing valuable intelligence in particular in larger missions whose mandates comprise both military and civilian elements. It also finds that civil-military collaboration within JMACs works better than could be expected considering the very different backgrounds and work cultures of military, police and civilian staff.

- In light of the JMAC experience, UN managers should perhaps consider relying more on multidisciplinary teams which can contribute to the integration of all UN activities and goals. The JMAC model may also be relevant for other structures such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union (EU) when military and civilian goals are intertwined.

- Based on the JMAC experience, UN intelligence should no longer be considered an oxymoron when referring to operational levels. JMACs have proven that the UN is capable of producing high-quality intelligence assessments when provided with the necessary mandate and resources.

The past twenty years have seen an exponential growth of UN peacekeeping in terms of breadth of mandates, scale and duration of operations. Where peacekeepers in the 1960s, 70s and 80s were deployed primarily to monitor ceasefires, they now investigate human rights violations, provide electoral support, and occasionally even support active combat operations. This surge has required a five-fold rise in the UN peacekeeping budget over the past ten years, from USD 1.5 billion in 1999 to almost USD 8 billion in 2011; it has similarly led to a four-fold increase in UN personnel deployed to support peacekeeping activities, from 27,000 military, civilian and police peacekeepers in 1999 to over 120,000 in 2011.[1]

The overall capacity of the UN to plan and implement peacekeeping operations has grown in line with these increased human and financial resources; however, the UN remains weak in the critical area of strategic information assessments, or what is commonly known as intelligence. This may appear surprising considering that the UN deploys tens of thousands of staff – from military observers to child protection officers – who become privy to information through their daily interactions with local communities and political actors. In fact, the problem the UN faces lies less in a failure to collect data than in insufficient human and technical resources for systematic information management and analysis that could transform the streams of data into actionable intelligence.

States have historically been opposed to granting the UN any intelligence-collection powers, fearing that such a role could lead to violations by the UN of national sovereignties, expressly protected by Article 2(7) of the Charter.[2] UN officials adopted a similar stance during most of the UN's history, seeking to shield the UN from any activity that could be perceived as espionage by any of its members.[3] Indeed, to this day, much of the ambivalence surrounding UN intelligence capacities stems from the misconception that intelligence is necessarily the result of a covert process.

But since the end of the Cold War, the positions of both member states and UN officials have evolved considerably in response to the renewed importance of multilateral security policy and diplomacy. Indeed, peacekeeping has taken centre stage as a tool for the containment of conflicts since the early 1990s, while at the same time, states have made greater use of coercive measures, such as arms embargoes, requiring a stronger UN monitoring capability. In addition, the UN has increasingly been tasked with preventive diplomacy, which calls for more predictive capabilities. Finally, global threats such as terrorism have become more prominent in recent years and have revealed some of the limitations of strictly national intelligence strategies. This policy paper will outline some of the tangible policy changes resulting from this new tentative support for UN intelligence capabilities. In particular, it will examine the mandate and implementation of the Joint Mission Analysis Centres (JMAC), a multidisciplinary structure created in peacekeeping missions whose role it is to generate integrated analytical products.

Strategic Intelligence Capabilities at UN Headquarters

At UN headquarters level, the gradual shift in views on UN intelligence gathering has translated mainly into a change in the language and assertiveness of UN officials. For example, in a press conference in 1996, Secretary-General elect Kofi Annan used the word "intelligence", a word previously avoided in UN discourse:

"[w]e have learned, contrary to past hesitation, that intelligence is necessary and that we need to have solid political analysis to be able to, if not determine, then envision how the crisis is likely to develop and how we would act if it went in one direction or the other".[4]

In 2000, the High-level Panel appointed to review UN peacekeeping chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi endorsed the Secretary-General's call for enhanced intelligence capabilities of the UN. The Panel found that:

"[t]he Secretary-General […] need[s] a professional system in the Secretariat for accumulating knowledge about conflict situations, distributing that knowledge efficiently to a wide user base, generating policy analyses and formulating long term strategies. That system does not exist at present".[5]

However, notwithstanding the Panel's strong recommendations, member states chose not to endorse the proposal for a new *Executive Committee on Peace and Security Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat*, and the strategic intelligence capabilities at UN headquarters continue to be very limited.[6] In contrast, UN member states have over the past few years increasingly recognized the need for operational intelligence in the UN peacekeeping missions.

Rationale for Operational UN Intelligence Capabilities in Peacekeeping Missions

Several of the UN's peacekeeping attempts of the 1990s, including those in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda, failed to achieve their goals in part because the missions lacked a mandate and/or a willingness to obtain basic intelligence on the activities and intentions of the warring parties. Since that time, UN mandates have in many cases become still more unwieldy: the UN now contributes to the administration of countries (Kosovo, Timor-Leste) and the protection of civilian populations (Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)), and thus, in effect, shares responsibility with national governments for the security and well-being of millions of individuals. In addition, the UN has increasingly been mandated with peacekeeping in countries that meet few, if any, of the pre-conditions for peace. Against this backdrop, UN member states have started to realize that intelligence is in fact a key element of peacekeeping: only if the UN has accurate situational awareness and good predictive capabilities can it contain threats to peace.
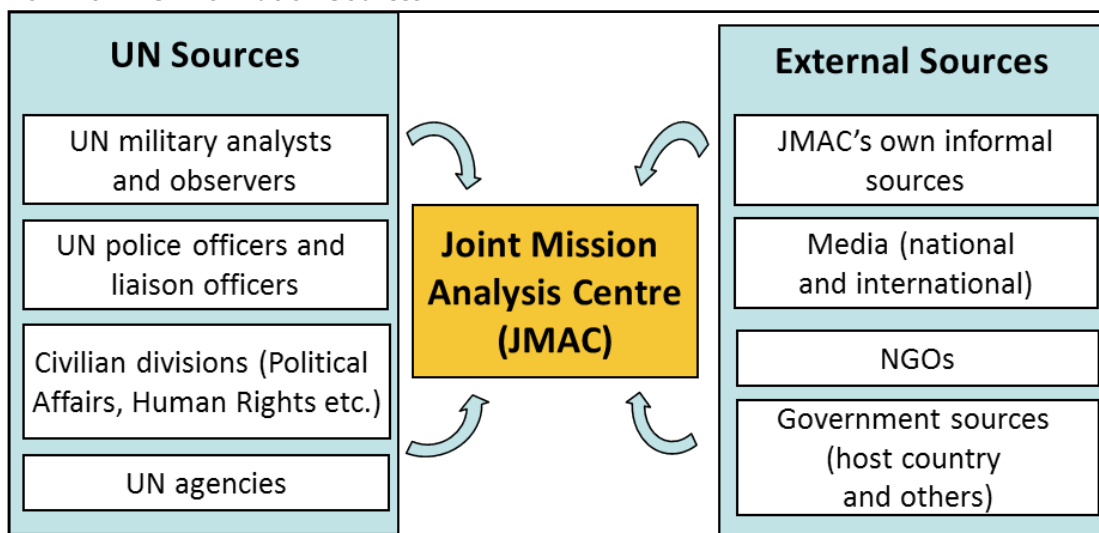
Additionally, there is the imperative of improving troop and staff safety. The UN conducts operations in some of the world's most volatile security environments at great risk to its staff. The robust peacekeeping mandates the UN

2

is tasked with in some countries can lead to the UN being perceived as an actor in the conflict, and thus a target of attacks in its own right. In this context, it has become clear to both UN officials and member states that strengthening the capability of the UN to streamline and assess information is an essential tool both to fulfil peacekeeping mandates and to protect staff from harm. This finding was underlined by the High-level Panel on UN peacekeeping, which found that "UN forces for complex operations should be afforded the field intelligence and other capabilities needed to mount an effective defence against violent challengers."[7]

Box 1: JMAC Information Sources

Source: Author, based on UN DPKO (2010) (see endnote 9).

Considering the complexity of peacekeeping mandates and the considerable level of risk involved, it may appear surprising that the UN currently has no formal intelligence-sharing arrangements with national intelligence agencies. While the UN Secretariat does receive some information from states (in particular the Security Council members), it is shared on an ad hoc basis. For this reason, and in contrast to institutions such as NATO or the EU, the UN must rely to a very large extent on the information generated by its own military and civilian analysts to support its operations. Acknowledging these concerns, member states supported the creation in 2005 of a new operational intelligence structure in peacekeeping missions, the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC).[8]

The UN's Operational Intelligence Structure: the Joint Mission Analysis Centres (JMACs)
In the traditional UN peacekeeping mission structure, most tactical intelligence needs were met by the military analysts who were deployed as part of military contingents while other intelligence needs relating for example to political processes or humanitarian crises were met by civilian analysts in political, human rights or civil affairs divisions. Military, police and civilian teams followed completely separate reporting lines and standard operating procedures, and were often physically housed in different compounds. The obvious drawback of this arrangement was that information-sharing between the various mission components could be a significant challenge, with the result that comprehensive intelligence pictures did not always emerge.

JMACs' Mandate
Recognizing the importance of integrating the various information flows and skills present within the mission structure, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) created the JMACs, first as trial cells in 2005 and then more widely. The formal DPKO policy (first adopted in 2006 and revised in 2010) states that:

"JMAC generates integrated analytical products, providing the [Head of Mission] and [Mission Leadership Team] with an incisive understanding of issues and trends, their implications and potential developments, as well as assessments of cross-cutting issues and threats that may affect the implementation of the mission's mandate".[9]

The particular role assigned to JMAC is that of contributing *integrated* analytical products to the mission, which incorporate multiple perspectives, including political, security and humanitarian concerns, as well as gender and human rights.

In order to achieve this goal of producing mission-wide analytical products, the JMAC is tasked to collect information from a wide variety of sources, both from within the UN and from outside sources. The policy prescribes that "all mission components shall put in place systems to share timely and accurate information to enable the JMAC to produce its integrated analyses",[10] as illustrated in Box 1.

JMACs' Team Composition
In order to meet the goal of generating integrated analytical products, JMACs are formed as multidisciplinary teams composed of military, police and civilian analysts, with all team members sharing a same physical office space. JMAC's most unique feature is that all JMAC staff members, including the military and police analysts, report exclusively to the common civilian JMAC chief (as opposed to military or police superiors) (see Box 2).

Box 2: JMAC's Multidisciplinary Structure
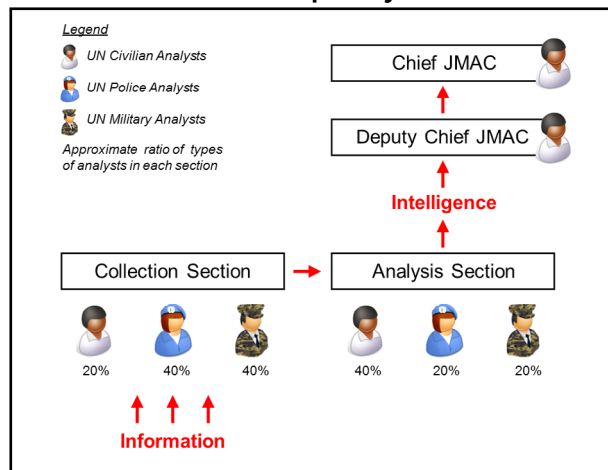
Source: Author, based on UN DPKO (2010) (see endnote 9).

Implementation

First launched as trial cells in 2005, JMACs are now established in 7 of the 14 peacekeeping missions currently administrated by DPKO, including its largest missions in Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Haiti and Sudan (see Table 1). Most of the JMAC teams have grown since they were initially established and now typically comprise between 5 and 30 staff members.

Other JMACs achieved early successes. For example, according to Michael Dziedzic and Roberto Perito who studied the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti in 2008, "a significant contribution to the success of MINUSTAH'S anti-gang campaign was validated, real-time tactical intelligence provided by JMAC".[13] Walter Dorn reached a similar conclusion, explaining that JMAC in Haiti produced "target packages" with the required information for precision operations and quick arrests of gang members.[14]

UN member states have shown continued support for the new JMACs over the past few years, as demonstrated by their adoption of mission budgets including JMAC staff positions, and as explicitly mentioned in several reports of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, for example in 2007: "[t]he Special Committee notes that fully effective […] joint mission analysis centres are one of the key tools to assist mission safety and security efforts including through integration with the Department of Safety and Security, and in this regard supports their further development." Nevertheless, the Special Committee pointed out in the same report that "although clear policy direction has been issued on [the joint operations centres and joint mission analysis centres], significant challenges remain in implementation".[15]

Table 1: JMAC Implementation

JMAC Fully Implemented	Number of Staff (estimate)	JMAC Partially Implemented (Staff have dual functions)	No JMAC
MINUSTAH (Haiti)	30	MINURSO (Western Sahara)	UNTSO (Middle East)
MONUSCO (DRC)	16	UNMIL (Liberia)	UNMOGIP (India and Pakistan)
UNAMID (Darfur, Sudan)	17		UNDOF (Syria)
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	8		UNFICYP (Cyprus)
UNMIS (Sudan)	22		UNMIK (Kosovo)
UNMIT (Timor Leste)	9		
UNOCI (Côte d'Ivoire)	11		

Source: Annual mission budgets (for civilian posts) and author interviews.

Have JMACs Succeeded in Delivering Valuable Intelligence?

Several reviews of JMACs have been undertaken by scholars and DPKO staff. These studies reveal mixed results, with some JMACs registering early successes and thus enjoying high credibility within their mission, while others were deemed to exist mainly on paper.

In its early stages, the JMAC structure often met with resistance from senior managers, who struggled to distinguish the traditional military analyst functions from the new JMAC roles. They also perceived ambiguity in the JMACs' mandate, which seemed to not distinguish clearly between mission security, operational planning and long-term strategic mission planning goals.[11] As a result, several JMACs were appropriated by senior managers to function as a private intelligence team. For example, researcher Mark Malan explained that in the early stages of the JMAC in the mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the JMAC team functioned as part of the force commander's team and operated as a de facto military operations analysis cell.[12]

Based on interviews and surveys conducted by the author in 2010, it appears that the JMAC model has largely proved its value over the course of its five-year existence, even if implementation can still be optimized. JMACs have distinguished themselves especially in larger missions where information-sharing and -management can be a significant challenge. In some of these larger missions, JMACs have succeeded in positioning themselves as "anti-establishment units" within the larger mission, capable of challenging perceived notions or speaking uncomfortable truths. JMACs can also play a key role where self-interest may be affecting the reporting and analysis of other units. The JMACs that are able to take on such a role are typically those that enjoy strong support from senior mission management and that obtain a significant proportion of their information from their own sources (as opposed to exclusively from UN military, police or civilian sources, or from media reports). Conversely, the added value of JMACs is less clear in smaller missions where information flows are easier because there is less information overall and because the smaller number of staff makes personal rapport easier.

Another key determining factor for the success or failure of the JMAC structure is the breadth of the mission mandate and the balance of civilian and military goals. Where the mandate is exclusively military, as for example in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the added value of JMAC is less certain and JMACs consequently have more trouble asserting themselves in the military-dominated mission structure.

Finally, the effectiveness of JMACs also depends on external factors, such as a mission's standing with its host government. For example, the interests of the Government of Haiti were to a large extent aligned with the mandate of MINUSTAH in relation to the dismantling of the gangs, as many of the benefits would accrue to the Haitian Government. As a result, the mission enjoyed strong support for its robust actions in the capital's slums, and JMAC benefited from a strong mandate to collect relevant intelligence. The situation is quite different in countries where the UN is only a minor player in a larger political conflict, as in Lebanon, or where the goals of the government and the mission are not well aligned, as in Sudan.

Conclusion and Recommendations
1. Considering the success that some JMACs have been able to achieve in supporting their mission mandates, member states, DPKO and senior mission management should continue to support these structures and attempt to strengthen them, for example through further professionalizing the staff (including through the use of rosters of qualified analysts and training) and through opportunities to share best practices among the various JMACs.
2. A second noteworthy finding is that based on interviews and surveys of JMAC staff, it appears that civil-military collaboration within JMAC works well. Staff do not report clashes between military and civilian work cultures, nor do they accuse each other of incompetence; on the contrary, they overwhelmingly recognize the value of their teams' multidisciplinary composition. Given this result,

UN managers should perhaps be less hesitant to mix staff members of different backgrounds and task them with a common goal. Indeed, the UN has already moved in this direction with the creation of its Country Teams which include staff from the various UN actors operating in a country (such as peacekeeping missions and UN agencies in the "integrated mission"). It is further conceivable that JMAC could operate at this UN Country Team level, rather than only at the DPKO mission level, to better support the holistic strategy of the UN in post-conflict countries and to better address the concerns of UN agencies. Such a strategy seems particularly appropriate in countries in, or nearing, their draw-down phase.

3. The JMAC model may also be relevant for other organizations such as NATO or the EU when military and civilian goals are intertwined.

4. Finally, a key lesson from the JMAC experience is that UN intelligence should no longer be considered an oxymoron. At the operational level, JMACs have demonstrated that the UN is capable of producing high-quality and relevant intelligence assessments when given the necessary mandate and human resources. Contrary to the criticisms often levelled at the UN, JMACs in the field have proved capable of protecting the confidentiality of such information against leaks to the host government, staff members' national governments, and to the public at large. The JMAC experience could then pave the way for increased support on the part of member states for UN intelligence work overall, both at headquarters and in the field, in order to support the UN's growing role in conflict prevention and mediation.

NB: The views expressed in this paper are entirely and solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the GCSP or the United Nations.

Endnotes

1. UN Documents A/65/715 (for 2004-2011), A/60/693 (for 2001-03) and A/57/723 (for 1999-2001).
2. For background information, see Ben de Jong, Wies Platje and Robert David Steele (eds.), *Peacekeeping Intelligence: Emerging Concepts for the Future*, Oakton, VA, OSS International Press, 2003; A. Walter Dorn, "United Nations Peacekeeping Intelligence", in Loch K. Johnson (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp.275–95.
3. For example, UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld refused to support the establishment in 1960 of a permanent UN intelligence agency, stating that the UN must have "clean hands", cited by Dorn (see n.2 above), p.276. Similarly, UN Secretary-General U. Thant wrote to the Commander of the UN Operation in the Congo (UNOC) in a coded cable on 24 September 1962: "We are fully aware of your long-standing limitations in gathering information. The limitations are inherent in the very nature of the UN and therefore of any operation conducted by it", cited by A. Walter Dorn and David J. H. Bell, "Intelligence and peacekeeping: The UN operation in the Congo, 1960-64", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.2, No.1, 1995, p.11.
4. Press Release GA/9212, United Nations, 18 Dec. 1996, p.13.
5. Report of the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (Brahimi Report), UN doc. A/55/305 – S/2000/809, 2000, para.68.
6. The only existing structure within the DPKO headquarters formally tasked with comprehensive information collection and analysis is the Situation centre created in 1993 which acts as the information "hub" for peacekeeping operations. With only 24 professional staff positions to monitor the activities of all 14 DPKO missions 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the situation centre has only limited scope for analytical work. Indeed, the situation centre's research and information unit, which comes closest to having an analytical mandate, currently has only three professional staff positions.
7. Brahimi Report (see n.5 above), para.51.
8. Two additional new structures are the Joint Operations Centre (JOC) responsible for integrated reporting on current operations and the Joint Logistics Operating Centre (JLOC) responsible for the logistical coordination between military and civilian components. The Joint Operations Centres and the Joint Mission Analysis Centres are designed to work closely together and are usually located in the same office space to facilitate information-sharing.
9. Policy – Joint Mission Analysis Centres (JMAC), DPKO Policy Ref. 2010.3, 1 February 2010, para.7 (unpublished).
10. DPKO (see n.9 above), para.10.
11. Philip Shetler-Jones, "Intelligence in Integrated UN Peacekeeping Missions: The Joint Mission Analysis Centre", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.15, No.4, 2008, p.523.
12. Mark Malan, "Intelligence in African Peace Operations: Addressing the Deficit", paper No.7, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Accra, 2005, p.22.
13. Michael Dziedzic and Roberto M. Perito, "Haiti: Confronting the Gangs of Port-au-Prince", special report 208, US Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, 2008, p.8.
14. A. Walter Dorn, "Intelligence-led Peacekeeping: The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), 2006-07", *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.24, No.6, 2009, p.826.
15. Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, 2007, UN doc. A/61/19/Rev.1, paras.64 and 104. See also the Committee's 2009 report, UN doc. A/63/19, para.47; and 2010 report, UN doc. A/64/19, para.35.

6

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