Intelligence in the UN

Intelligence has always been viewed as somewhat at odds with the UN, an international organisation founded on principles of transparency, multilateralism and protection of human rights. Yet as UN operations have turned increasingly complex and robust, the need for comprehensive intelligence support has become more pronounced, both inside the UN Secretariat and among *some* of its member states. Yet other member states, predominantly from the so-called Non-Aligned Movement, remain sceptical towards developing any sort of capability associated with intelligence inside the UN, because they fear it can be used to undermine their own regimes. Such scepticism is likely to be rooted in traditional conceptions about intelligence, linking it primarily to the protection of national interests, murky methods and the military establishment. At the same time, there are indications of a change in attitude towards the use of intelligence in UN peace operations, both inside the Secretariat, in the missions and among a large number of member states. As a result, the organisation is currently developing intelligence-like capabilities both at the UN headquarters in New York and in the field. Some would therefore argue that the UN has reached a *critical juncture* in the area of intelligence, while others remain sceptical about the UN ability to develop true intelligence structures.

In today's presentation, I will first briefly guide you through selected highlights from the history of UN intelligence, looking at some of the earlier attempts to establish intelligence capabilities inside the UN system, some of which succeeded and some of which failed. I then move on to give you an overview of the current intelligence architecture of the UN, and I will also consider to what extent the current UN capabilities match the intelligence requirements of ongoing operations. Finally, in my concluding remarks, and in the spirit if true intelligence work, I will speculate on the *future* of UN intelligence.

To begin with the past, the first well-documented UN intelligence capability was established already in 1961, to support the first UN operation in the Congo: ONUC (Organisation de Nations Unies au Congo), and it was actually established by two Norwegian officers from the Norwegian troop contingent. Although the civilian leadership of that mission initially expressed deep concerns about developing any sort of intelligence capacity to support the operation, they soon came to accept the establishment of a *Military Information Branch* (MIB) when a civil war broke out half a year into the mission. With no historical precedents

and no existing guidelines or policies, the Military Information Branch, which was driven forward by the military components of the mission, developed into being something quite similar to a traditional military intelligence structure. At its peak, it conducted wireless message interpretation, aerial surveillance, and human intelligence (HUMINT), involving interrogations of civilians and use of informants.

In the history of UN intelligence, however, the Military Information Branch represents the odd case out, as did the ONUC operation in terms of complexity and robustness. It was to take the UN more than 50 years to establish any similar capability. Although several attempts were made to develop intelligence capabilities both at the strategic level in New York and at the field level, neither the majority of Member States nor the UN Secretariat approved of the idea that the UN should have its own intelligence service. These sentiments are clearly mirrored in the semi-official *Peacekeepers Handbook* in a version from 1984:

> The UN has resolutely refused to countenance intelligence systems as part of its peacekeeping operations; intelligence having covert connotations is a dirty word. (…) Any form of covert intelligence is liable to create prejudice and suspicion. (…) Trust, confidence and respect form the essential fabric on which a successful peacekeeping operation needs to be based. 'Spying' does not help towards this end.[1]

Notwithstanding the general scepticism towards intelligence in the UN, one particular unit was created at the strategic level in 1993 as a result of a reorganization of the whole peacekeeping department of the UN. When Boutros Boutros-Ghali became Secretary General in 1992, one of his first decisions was to establish the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). The year after, a Situation Centre was created within DPKO with the intention of supporting its decision-making process, and connecting civilian, military and police flows of information. The Situation Centre was to also produce assessments of political, military and security trends, which affected ongoing and potential peacekeeping operations. However, relying solely on information from the field, proved insufficient. DPKO needed a way to tap into the information networks of the Member States, including their embassies and intelligence services.

Consequently, in 1993, the *Information and Research Unit* was created, consisting of intelligence officers seconded from the governments of four of the five permanent members

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[1] In Paul Johnston, "No cloak and dagger required: Intelligence support to UN peacekeeping," *Intelligence & National Security* 12, no. 4 (1997): 103.

of the Security Council. China did not participate allegedly because it was unwilling to share information with the other members. The seconded intelligence officers, who worked as so-called 'gratis personnel' in the UN, provided the organization with intelligence feeds from their national intelligence services. This event marks a shift in the history of UN intelligence, i.e. the Information and Research Unit represents the first dedicated intelligence capability at the strategic headquarters level. It testifies to a change in attitude among key Member States but also within the UN Secretariat. However, the Information and Research Unit received mixed reviews, and has been accused of serving as a manipulation tool for its exclusive club of powerful member states.

This may be why no alternative capacity replaced the Information and Research Unit when it was closed down in 1999. The closure was the result of a General Assembly resolution prohibiting the work of gratis personnel, pushed through by members of the *Non-Aligned Movement* (NAM). The same group of states would later vote against several new proposals for establishing intelligence capabilities at the strategic level in the UN, such as the *ECPS Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat* proposed by the Brahimi-report in 2000, and the *Military Information Analysis Service*, proposed as part of a major restructuring of the Office of Military Affairs as late as in 2008.[2]

Indeed it appears that the alleged north-south divide among UN member states, which is often used by scholars to explain why the UN decision-making machinery tends to downplay any major reform initiatives, appears to have become particularly pronounced when dealing with the intelligence issue. This is confirmed by people inside the UN secretariat who work with intelligence on a daily basis. As one UN official told me:

> The NAM countries have traditionally wanted to keep the UN weak, because they see a militarily strong UN as a potential threat to their current power structures, both in their own nation and in the international system. (…) The primary concern of each nation is the sovereignty of their state and the continuation of the government in power. Due to the perception by some states that the UN has been engaging in interventionist operations, there exists a fear that technology-enabled intelligence capabilities may threaten their national security.[3]

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[2] United Nations, "Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects (The Brahimi Report)," (New York: United Nations, 2000), United Nations, "Report on the comprehensive analysis of the Office of Military Affairs in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations," (New York: United Nations, 2008).

[3] Interview, DPKO, New York, February 2009.

However, if we look at the current intelligence architecture of the UN, the organisation has made some significant progress towards developing its own intelligence capabilities lately. Yet as I return to towards the end of this presentation, there are still obstacles constraining the UN from developing these capabilities further.

Current UN intelligence architecture

Before that, let's have a closer look at the current intelligence architecture of the UN. As I already mentioned, a proposal to establish a so-called *Military Information Analysis Service* in the Office of Military Affairs in New York was turned down by the member state committees in 2008. However, a substitute has been approved, and is currently being established in the Office of Military Affairs under the name 'Assessment Team', or the A-team which I like to call it. According to a UN official, it is essentially the same concept that was voted down in 2008, only the name has changed, because the word 'Service' could not be accepted in the so-called Fifth Committee which controls the budget of DPKO, and is dominated by the Non Aligned Movement. However, there were no objections to the word 'Team'.

The main task of the Assessment Team is to anticipate and respond to critical information requirements of a *military* nature to enhance force protection and senior decision making. The intention is to provide operational and strategic analytical products beyond the capacity of the Situation Center in DPKO and the various analytical capacities in the field. For instance, the Assessment Team is intended to contribute to a broader perspective through strategic assessments of regions and areas of interest. These assessments will primarily be based on data-mining of open sources and gathering of information across missions in the UN, and ideally also external sources such as research institutions, the media, and NGOs. Its products will include threat warnings, mission-specific analyses incorporated into broader regional contexts and wider threat and risk assessments across missions.

The A-team is not the only recently established intelligence-like capability in the UN headquarters. In 2007, the *Research and Liaison Unit* was created as part of the Situation Centre (SitCen). It provides senior managers at the UN headquarters with an analytical capacity to undertake in-depth mid to long-term research studies on current political, security and operational issues affecting UN missions. A second function is to liaise with both internal and external actors. It also gives weekly briefings to the member states. Finally, and most importantly, the Research and Liaison Unit supports and backstops the field based Joint

Mission Analysis Centres, or JMACs.

The JMACs represent the most groundbreaking development of intelligence capabilities in the history of the UN, and they have been a required element of all UN Integrated Missions since 2006. However, the exact role of the JMAC as part of the larger UN integrated framework remains largely unresolved. In other words, there is no prevailing, clear or shared conception about what a JMAC really is. Should it be a 'normal' intelligence structure in the traditional meaning of the word, or, does it represent something different – a novel branch within the field of intelligence so to speak?

Due to the open and multilateral nature of the organisation, the UN could not establish a field based intelligence service in line with the traditional intelligence services of nation-states. Therefore, DPKO had to develop a different type of intelligence structure, something more in line with the spirit of the UN and the Integrated Mission concept. Hence, the JMAC was developed; a concept which incorporates several core features of a traditional intelligence structure, but which also draws heavily on the underlying logic of the Integrated Mission concept, i.e. to create a link between the different dimensions of peacebuilding into a coherent support strategy. As such, there are characteristics of a traditional intelligence structure which the JMAC concept does not include, but there are also characteristics of the JMAC concept which would not be included in a traditional intelligence structure. For instance, the JMAC is not intended to engage in covert intelligence collection methods, deception or spying. On the other hand, a traditional intelligence structure is not intended to integrate the various dimensions of peacebuilding in line with the UN Integrated Mission concept (although it could have been useful in the context of peace and stabilisation operations).

This is what makes the JMAC unique. Both practitioners and scholars have stressed the challenges of not having sufficient intelligence support to operations. But they have also argued that the *type* of intelligence support needed is qualitatively very different from traditional warfare. While traditional warfare aims at defeating an enemy militarily, the aim of peace and stabilisation operations is to facilitate a *transition* from conflict to sustainable peace and stability. Managing such transitions requires effective integration of civilian and military instruments, which, in turn, calls for an integrated information support system. In this regard, traditional national intelligence structures have by some been portrayed as largely irrelevant.

By integrating the various civilian and military components of a UN mission, the JMAC

concept therefore comes across as better equipped to cover the complex information needs of contemporary peace and stabilisation operations. It is also thought to contribute towards mission-wide integration by linking together the various mission components and delivering integrated and balanced analytical products to a wider range of clients, including the UN Country Team, thereby streamlining their understanding of the conflict situation. It is one of very few UN structures in which civilian, military and police personnel are actually intended to be *physically* integrated in the same multidisciplinary analytical unit. This unit is in turn intended to reflect the expertise found along the various dimensions of UN peace operations, such as political affairs, civil affairs, military, police, security, rule of law, DDR, electoral affairs, gender, child protection, humanitarian issues, development, human rights etc.

The JMAC is therefore in a unique position to inform decisions on a range of topics. Given its integrated staff structure, JMAC analysts should also be well placed to expose flawed reasoning and compartmentalised views stemming from otherwise stovepiped UN structures. By combining insights and expertise from different mission components, it can look at each mandated task in relation to the others, and acknowledge how these may affect each other. As such, an integrated intelligence structure like the JMAC can offer products that cannot easily be generated from within a one-dimensional military structure, or any other branch of a multidimensional mission.

It almost sounds too good to be true, and the implementation of the JMAC concept in the various UN missions has shown that creating this type of intelligence structure is easier said than done. One particular problem has been that the JMACs have been criticized for favouring the security or military elements of mission mandates, thereby failing to create the necessary links between short term security needs on the one hand, and longer term development and governance needs on the other. This pattern could be rooted in traditional and stereotyped conceptions about the intelligence concept, linking it primarily to the police and the military. Secondly, the JMACs experience problems in information collection partially because other mission components do not necessarily recognise their mandate and purpose, but also because they must refrain from a number of traditional intelligence collection methods such as signals intelligence (SIGINT). Thirdly, there are problems of recruitment and staffing, as in any other UN component. Fourthly, there are problems of rotation routines with the military staff officers. Finally, the senior mission management does not always appreciate or understand the potential contribution of the JMAC for improved and more coherent decision making. An additional and somewhat exceptional challenge is found in a couple of cases where the JMAC

has reached a level of information that is so advanced that its products cannot be distributed freely within the mission because they are too sensitive.

Because the JMAC is a rather novel construction, with clear associations to the intelligence realm, it is not surprising that its implementation in various UN missions has lead to quite different outcomes. This can also be related to a lack of detailed and clear JMAC policies, lack of relevant training programmes and the differing character of each mission, of course.

Matching the intelligence requirements of current operations

Moving on to whether or not existing UN intelligence capabilities match the requirements of current operations, and especially so within the more robust operations such as the one in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the one in Haiti. Over the past year I have visited both these missions to study the organisation and daily activities of their JMACs. What I have found are two impressive and substantial intelligence structures which are quire different both in structure and daily routines as well as in how they are used my the mission leadership.

First of all, although both of these missions are known to be robust, they are in my mind no longer so. In the past, both missions conducted offensive military operations, but this is no longer the case as I understand it. In Haiti the criminal gangs of its capital city, Port-au-Prince, were largely removed by robust military and police operations in 2006-07 in which the JMAC played a significant role in the operational planning. The UN mission in the DRC has a mandate which allows for quite robust operations, depending on how you interpret it of course, but current military contingent commanders do not seem to favour robust operations to the same extent as did some of the former military contingent commanders.

However, in terms of intelligence capabilities the JMACs of MINUSTAH and MONUC have reached impressively sophisticated levels of information. Some would even argue that they have access to such advanced information that handling it with the proper care internally has become somewhat of a problem. Consequently, information that may be of crucial importance for the security of various mission components is sometimes not disseminated widely, but rather directed exclusively to the mission management. As a result, the battalions in the field do not have access to the same information as other element of the very same UN mission. Rather they depend on their own G2 units to provide intelligence. These units, however, consist of traditional military intelligence personnel, or sometimes of military officers with no
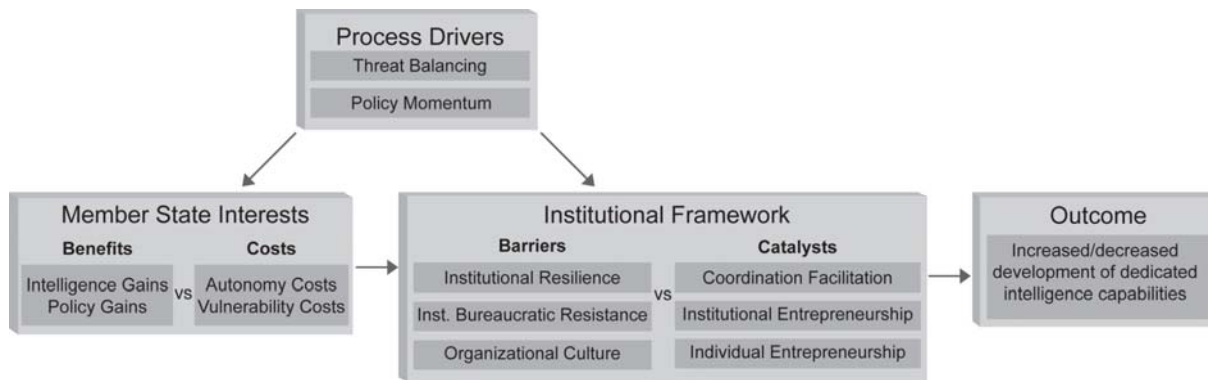
previous experiences in intelligence work. Therefore, they are not necessarily geared towards the information requirements of peace and stabilisation operations which are qualitatively very different from traditional warfare. What is more, they do not have direct access to information from other components of the UN system as does the JMAC. This type of information is absolutely necessary to ensure situational awareness and to protect civilians from both imminent and longer terms threats to security.

On the other hand, there are JMACs in other missions who are not nearly as sophisticated mainly because the operational environment does not allow for anything that even resembles intelligence activities. This is for instance the case in both UN missions in Sudan. Yet compared to how things were 10 or even only 5 years ago, there have been significant improvements in the level of information due to the implementation of the JMAC concept.

At the strategic level in New York there is still a long way to go before the UN has managed to develop the appropriate intelligence capabilities. At this level, member states remain sceptical towards developing any sort of intelligence-like capability. While the Research and Liaison Unit and the A-Team come across as relevant, they have yet to become truly significant for ongoing missions. For instance, the Research and Liaison Unit only consist of four employees. There is little evidence that the missions benefit from analytical products from the strategic level. Rather, the information seems to flow in the opposite direction, from the field to New York. In order to provide missions with relevant analytical products from the strategic level one would have to create an integrated structure in line with the JMAC with the ability to collect information from all the different UN departments, agencies and programmes. At the same time, they would constantly have to make sure they are not perceived as a spying unit that makes intrusions into the affairs of member states. This is evidently a challenge if a regional perspective is to be developed. In other words, real intelligence capabilities at the strategic level in the UN headquarters seem very unlikely at the moment.

Concluding remarks – the future of UN intelligence
I promised to end my presentation with some speculations on the future of UN intelligence. To that end I have developed a theoretical model which illustrates some of the key mechanisms affecting the development of intelligence within the UN.

Process Drivers
- Threat Balancing
- Policy Momentum

Member State Interests

Benefits vs Costs

Benefits	Costs
Intelligence Gains Policy Gains	Autonomy Costs Vulnerability Costs

Institutional Framework

Barriers vs Catalysts

Barriers	Catalysts
Institutional Resilience	Coordination Facilitation
Inst. Bureaucratic Resistance	Institutional Entrepreneurship
Organizational Culture	Individual Entrepreneurship

Outcome
- Increased/decreased development of dedicated intelligence capabilities

Now, I am not going to go all theoretical on you, and I'll only comment briefly on this. It is fair to assume that in intelligence matters, states tend to act more or less rationally and will primarily be driven by national interests, whatever these may be. Accordingly, one could say that states will perform a cost-benefit calculation when deciding on whether or not to support the development of intelligence capabilities in the UN. Once these interests are introduced to the UN institutional framework, they can be either facilitated or restrained by what I have termed institutional barriers and institutional catalysts. Finally, process drivers can be both external and internal forces that may cause a change in the circumstances within which the other two factors are determined. For the UN case it seems that particularly two mechanisms have driven the process forward. Threat balancing refers to the increasingly hostile and unpredictable conflict environments that the UN operates in. Policy momentum refers to the process itself and how the self-reinforcing mechanism known as positive feedback intensifies the process once it has started.

To sum up, then, as long as the UN continues to engage in complex and volatile conflict environments, the need for intelligence support will be present at all levels of operation. Understanding the conflict dynamics, identifying and understanding the intentions of the key players involved and being able to foresee threats to the mission mandate are all tasks that rely on a comprehensive or integrated intelligence support structure. This is now being recognized both internally in the UN system and externally among the majority of its member states after years of skepticism and 'blocking the process'. Nevertheless, there are still several institutional and political obstacles constraining the organisation from developing the appropriate intelligence structures at the various levels of command, and especially so at the strategic level. In addition, the exact *type* of intelligence structure needed remains largely unresolved. As I have already mentioned, a certain level of integration between various UN departments, programs and agencies will be needed at all levels in order to cover the vast

information needs of the peacebuilding community at large. Therefore, two main obstacles to developing the required intelligence support structures appear to be prominent, both of which relates to traditional and stereotyped conceptions of the intelligence concept. Firstly, there is the general scepticism expressed by the member states, and especially among the Non-Aligned Movement, towards developing any type of capability related to intelligence within the UN system. Secondly, once the development of intelligence structures is approved, there is the challenge of developing a structure properly designed to cover the complex information needs of contemporary operations. Again, stereotyped conceptions about the intelligence concept seem to constrain the UN from developing intelligence structures whose scope of analysis go beyond the traditional military and police dimensions by integrating the various civilian and military actors inside the UN system. A secondary problem will be the challenge of not duplicating already existing analytical capacities in the various UN departments and agencies. Accordingly, it is the physical integration of various UN departments and agencies into one multidisciplinary analytical unit which would make an integrated intelligence structure unique and better equipped to cover the intelligence requirements of complex and robust UN operations. And that will be my final word for today. Thank you!

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