Control of armament, ammunition, and stockpiles in peace support operations

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Introduction

In all scenarios or 'areas of operation' where PSOs are deployed it is possible to classify weapons and ammunition according to who owns them. Such owners include peacekeepers; the UN; host governments; third countries; and, in the case of illegal weapons and ammunition, gangs and criminal organizations.

A COE Manual has regulated the control of equipment and weapons belonging to TCCs/PCCs since 1996 (see UNGA, 2017). However, the manual regulates the reimbursements that the UN makes to TCCs/PCCs and not the control of weapons losses, or the prevention of the diversion of weapons and ammunition to third parties. Neither does it establish the levels of ammunition holdings that contingents require.

Such issues are largely left to the internal guidance of the contingents themselves, based on their national rules and regulations. TCCs/PCCs have some flexibility when determining the ammunition-holding levels for their contingents. Holdings are based on the *Guidelines on Ammunition Levels for Peacekeeping Operations* issued by UNDPKO in 2002 (UNDPKO, 2002), and in the case of MONUSCO (which operates in the DRC) this is complemented by SOPs on 'Force Ammunition Levels and Stockpile Management', which the mission issued in December 2012 (MONUSCO, 2012).

In recent years UN peacekeeping headquarters have been increasing internal controls governing the armed forces operating in PSOs, based on emerging needs, existing international guidelines, and national regulations. Missions themselves have also been generating new procedures, recommending the creation of new control bodies, and assigning new tasks and responsibilities to existing offices and personnel in both their own forces and mission support organizations.

A key element in the area of arms control is, without a doubt, the organizational culture within TCCs/PCCs, which is normally reflected in national legislation. When a military unit comes from a country without this type of organizational culture and legislation, it is very difficult for members to acquire the necessary mentality in the short period of a PSO, and the probability that unjustified (and unreported) losses of arms or diversion of ammunition may occur increases.

Many challenges still have to be overcome in order to prevent such losses. This paper seeks to provide an overview of some of the most pressing issues.

Binding agreement with the UN

A troop or police contributor to a PSO must sign a binding agreement with the UN prior to deployment called an MoU, which stipulates the obligations of each party with regard to personnel, major equipment, and self-sustainment. It is important to note that no limits or minimum ammunition-holding levels are mentioned in this document.

As discussed above, the COE Manual determines arms and ammunition verification and control procedures (UNGA, 2017). These controls basically consist of an 'arrival inspection' when the contingent arrives in the mission area, 'operational inspections' to be carried out at least every six months during the deployment of the unit in the mission area, and a 'repatriation inspection' before the return of the unit to its country of origin. These inspections are intended to ensure that both parties meet the terms of the MoU between the UN and the various TTCs/PCCs throughout the entire deployment period. They also generate baseline data for calculating the UN's reimbursements to the respective TCCs/PCCs.

In recent years UNDPKO-OMA has ordered all missions to undertake operational readiness inspections. Military staff officers conduct these inspections, which are designed to complement the COE inspections (which focus only on equipment) and provide an operational readiness assessment of all military units in the peacekeeping contingent.

Types of weapons and ammunition

For the UN there are two types of weapons: crew-served and personal weapons. Crew-served weapons are defined as any weapon operated by more than one designated soldier, and are considered to be major equipment. They are included in the MoU. On the other hand, personal weapons are assumed to be part of the individual equipment of each soldier, which includes the helmet, clothing, and vest. These are not mentioned in the MoU specifically, and the relevant reimbursement falls under reimbursements for 'personnel'.

The UN also recognizes two types of ammunition in the COE Manual:

- *training ammunition* (for sighting, calibration, test-firing, and training), which is considered to be consumable, is included in the wet lease maintenance rate, and is therefore considered a national responsibility (UNGA, 2017, ch. 3, para. 28); and
- *operational ammunition*, which 'the United Nations and TCCs/PCCs agree to deploy to the mission area so that it is readily available for use in the event of need' (UNGA, 2017, ch. 2, para. 28).

Control of ammunition

Ammunition holdings

The only UNDPKO document dealing with quantities and types of ammunition and later mentioned in subsequent manuals is the *Guidelines on Levels of Ammunition for Peacekeeping Operations* from 2002 (UNDPKO, 2002). These guidelines are only indicative and their purpose is to advise with a view to proper planning prior to deployments. They do *not* determine the amount of operational ammunition that military or police units must deploy for a PSO, nor do they try to influence related TCC/PCC doctrines or tactics.

In 2012 MONUSCO issued SOPs on 'Force Ammunition Levels and Stockpile Management' in order to have a better view of and control a contingent's ammunition holdings, in addition to the security and safety of its ammunition storage facilities (MONUSCO, 2012). Currently the UN is also working on a WAM policy that will provide a much-needed framework for, and clear guidance on, WAM in PSOs.

Ammunition storage

Ammunition storage facilities in PSOs should be in line with the guidance contained within the IATG. This does not always happen, however, either due to budgetary constraints or the continuous movement of military units, particularly to temporary operational bases. The construction, maintenance, and improvement of ammunition storage facilities are normally the contingents' responsibility, but are coordinated with the relevant administration and the force's engineers to reinforce safety and ensure the performance of any other major engineering tasks.

The force's ammunition technical officers (ATOs) should be responsible for inspecting storage facilities and making recommendations to correct possibly dangerous situations.

Ammunition resupply

The resupply of ammunition is a responsibility of TCCs/PCCs, even when the UN will reimburse the costs of some of this ammunition when a claim is made through the appropriate channels for 'operational ammunition'.

This decentralized system was based on the assumption that TCCs/PCCs have a major interest in keeping and taking care of ammunition holdings for their own contingents. It has two main disadvantages: it creates several supply lines that increase the possibility of undesired losses or diversion; and it ensures increased ammunition holdings (as compared to a centralized stockpile system).

Uruguay's experience

Importance of national-level controls

When Uruguay began sending military units to UN PSOs (such as those in Cambodia, Mozambique, and Angola in the 1990s), an earlier system governed inspections and there was neither a COE manual nor an infantry battalion manual as a guide.[1] The IATG did not even exist at that time.

Resupplies for these contingents were not problematic, mainly because the missions lasted less than two years. But they provided good learning scenarios for the more prolonged later missions such as MONUSCO (operating in the DRC) and the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which required a completely new approach to logistics, training, and troop rotations.

In the absence of guidance from the UN system, relevant Uruguayan contingents controlled their weapons and ammunition by applying national Uruguayan laws, decrees, and regulations. This continues to be the case where guidance is not available.

In Uruguay, all military units carry out weekly controls of their weapons, and then inform their superiors on a monthly basis or when they have been ordered to do so. Weapons are checked every time somebody removes a weapon from the armoury and when they return it. Specific controls are also carried out on weapons and ammunition stockpiles every time there is a handover of officers in charge, and also during the handover of unit commanders. Weapons warehouses also have physical and electronic security measures, in addition to strict entry control procedures.

When a weapon is damaged, disabled, or lost, 'summary information' is compiled and an officer designated for each case conducts a full investigation, part of which involves exploring the circumstances of the incident and determining whether those involved were responsible for any action or omission that led to the loss, or whether it was an accident for which no one was responsible. In cases where responsibility is attributed, disciplinary measures are implemented, and if a crime is suspected, the case is transferred to the military justice system.

The same procedure is used in units deployed in PSOs, which has allowed Uruguay to maintain very strict control of its peacekeepers' weapons. If a weapon is lost or stolen, this is also communicated to the National Registry of Arms, which is in charge of directing and coordinating activities related to the control and registration of weapons, ammunition, explosives, gunpowder, and pyrotechnic material, and the reception, depositing, delivery, and disposal of arms and ammunition remitted by the civil justice system—and to the authorities of the relevant mission.

In 2014 the Uruguayan government also approved Law No. 19.247 on the possession, carrying, commercialization, and trafficking of firearms, ammunition, explosives, and other related materials, which updated relevant civil and criminal legislation.

As the above clearly illustrates, there is an 'organizational culture' within the Uruguayan Armed Forces that governs the control and possession of arms, and when troops deploy in PSOs they carry this culture or mentality with them. On many occasions they have incorporated relevant internal controls and procedures into PSOs (see Box 1) in the same manner as other contingents and staff officers who come from countries with a similar organizational culture.

One of the major barriers to PSOs' operational effectiveness is the widespread tendency of:

- field support personnel to make decisions based exclusively on the mission's budget; and
- their counterparts at the contingent level to make decisions based on reimbursement considerations.

Both tendencies are problematic, adversely affecting not only the effectiveness of military operations, but also the establishment of effective and responsible arms and ammunition controls.

Conclusion

The main responsibility for arms and ammunition in PSOs rests with TCCs. This is as it should be, because they are the owners of the materiel and the main people with an interest in having their weapons used in an appropriate manner and for the intended purpose.

However, PSOs must have control procedures in place that function as a security system so that they may warn the force commander in a timely manner when a contingent is not performing optimally, thus allowing them to take the necessary corrective measures.

The possibility of having shared UN–TCC responsibility for ammunition in some PSOs should be considered (the COE Manual does not reject this option). The TCCs could deploy with their own ammunition for training and to ensure a pre-determined minimum operational stockpile, and the UN could take care of the bulk stockpile of operational ammunition. This system would minimize ammunition supply lines, reduce the number of ammunition storage facilities, increase security, and reduce costs. UN missions could manage the procurement, storage, and transportation of operational ammunition, supplying contingents based on their requirements and in accordance with the security situation in their respective operational areas.

It is important to include estimates of the construction costs of ammunition and weapons storage facilities in PSO budgets, especially when they exceed the capabilities of the military units deployed in the field.

When selecting armed contingents to participate in PSOs, it is necessary, among other things, to take into account what their national legislation prescribes in terms of arms and ammunition control. This is because contingents naturally tend to replicate their national 'organizational culture' when they are in the field.

A complete list of weapons, including their serial numbers, could be attached to the relevant MoU as an annexe to facilitate controls. In the same way, an annexe with the ammunition levels agreed by both parties could also be attached.

Box 1 Case study: MONUSCO SOPs on force ammunition levels and stockpile management

In 2012 a military uprising led by the M23 non-state group took place in eastern DRC, which took over the city of Goma, making MONUSCO operations more difficult. In particular, operations to supply MONUSCO bases in the province of North Kivu were adversely affected.

At the beginning of this uprising there was a need to implement a daily reporting system on these bases' supply status. Previously this had been done on a weekly basis. The only item that needed special attention was ammunition, which—because it was a national responsibility—had not been clearly established as forming part of a periodic report.

To resolve this deficiency in the short term immediate orders were issued that each base should report on the status of its ammunition supplies and in some cases its resupply needs. Also, in order to resolve the administrative gap in the medium and long term, a document was drafted containing SOPs on the level of ammunition and the type of stockpile management required (MONUSCO, 2012). This document, based on the recently published IATG,[2] provided a regulatory framework that allowed better control of weapons and ammunition. In a single document it provided a series of guidelines on the management of armaments based on input from various mission offices, together with guidance on the transport, storage, and destruction of ammunition. It also established a reporting channel, and determined responsibilities for inspections and the construction of ammunition storage facilities. UNDPKO-OMA subsequently sent it to other missions, and it came to serve as a guide for other similar SOPs.

This is just one case among thousands of how the initiatives of staff officers can gradually build up regulatory frameworks in the field by drawing on their own experiences at the national level (and from peacekeeping arenas) to improve the efficiency of their missions.

Endnotes

1 The COE Manual replaced the previous methodology 'whereby troop/police contributors were reimbursed based on in and out surveys and the depreciation of equipment' (UNGA, 2017, ch. 1, para. 1).

2 See UNODA (2015). The IATG were first published in 2012, but were updated in 2015, and the first edition is no longer available, hence the dating of this reference.

References

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