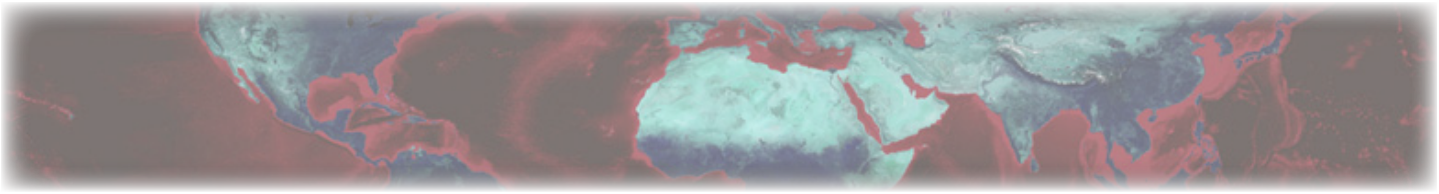
GCSP
Geneva Centre for Security Policy
Centre de Politique de Sécurité, Genève
Genfer Zentrum für Sicherheitspolitik

Impartial, Inclusive, Influential

GCSP Policy Paper 2013/8
9 December



Diversion of Weapons within Peace Operations: Understanding the Phenomenon

By Eric G. Berman and Mihaela Racovita

Key Points

- *The circulation of military equipment in areas where security is failing creates conditions for some of this materiel to be diverted to non-state armed groups. This risk becomes more pronounced when counter-measures such as strict record-keeping, stockpile management, discipline and robust incident reporting are not taken seriously.*
- *Though the breadth and scope of diversion of weapons from peacekeeping operations is hard to quantify, a review of incidents from 1990-2013 indicates that they are neither rare nor isolated; they affect many missions and troop-contributing countries (TCCs).*
- *Diversion, be it from mission stockpiles, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and cordon and search efforts, or occurring during patrols, can be minimised and perhaps prevented through targeted reactive and preventive measures.*
- *There is a chronic lack of data on diversion, due to the sensitivity of the subject, lack of transparency on stocks or procedures, and a culture of minimising or dismissing such incidents altogether.*

Driven by the new security challenges of the post-Cold War period, peacekeeping[1] has increased in tempo, scope and complexity. Missions have taken on broader mandates, with greater responsibilities, such as the protection of civilians, disarmament, demobilisation, and the reintegration of former combatants, and security sector reform. In this context, peacekeeping operations must overcome political, financial and operational challenges before they are even deployed. Once on the ground, peacekeepers become increasingly the targets of violence and crime. A former U.S. Senior Adviser on Darfur commented in October 2013: "It's kind of open season on UNAMID."[2] This situation is not limited to Darfur. Rather, 'protecting the protectors' and their assets across missions and contexts has turned into a challenge in its own right.

Incidents of diversion are neither rare nor isolated, plaguing multiple missions in a variety of settings, from Afghanistan to former Yugoslavia, and from Burundi to Sudan.

Diversion of peacekeepers' weapons and ammunition to unauthorized users is an under-studied problem that requires greater attention. The seizure of weapons and ammunition from peacekeepers raises humanitarian, safety and security as well as financial concerns. Weapons that are acquired unlawfully from peacekeepers enter into use or circulation. They are used to threaten civilians and perpetuate cycles of violence. The proliferation of arms and ammunition in fragile environments also affect the safety and security of peacekeepers. (In some cases, the capture of UN vehicles and uniforms by insurgents also gives a strategic advantage to armed groups. This was the case in 2000 in Sierra Leone, when the rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) took hostage a UN peacekeeping team, and used its equipment as camouflage, in their attack of government controlled territory.) Diversion produces financial losses for missions and contributors, in a climate where budgetary constraints are ever-present considerations. All told, the failure to secure peacekeepers' material undermines the success of their mission.

1 Throughout this paper, the term 'peacekeeping' is understood to include a variety of multilateral military engagements, such as "peace operations", "stabilization operations", and "multinational forces".

2 Reuters, 'In Darfur: the limits of peacekeeping", 13 October 2013 http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/08/us-sudan-darfur-peacekeeping-idUSBRE99707W20131008

Diversion: the knowledge gap

As the breadth and scope of peace missions continue to expand, the number of peacekeepers has reached near-record highs. Deployment figures registered an eight-fold increase in the past twelve years, despite setbacks experienced in the early 1990s that saw the UN Security Council scale back its commitments to pre-Cold War levels. While around 97,000 peacekeepers currently operate in fifteen UN missions, tens of thousands more serve with regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) in Somalia, and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in Central African Republic.

The exponential increase in uniformed personnel translates into larger and more complex logistical and material needs for peacekeeping missions. For instance, in 2011, for 120,000 personnel (including around 20,000 civilian staff), the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) supplied 253 aircraft, 19,600 vehicles, and 1,750 tons of food per day.[3] TCCs provide a variety of weaponry, from personal or crew-operated weapons and ammunition to armoured vehicles fitted with numerous light weapons (and heavier armaments). The Small Arms Survey estimated back in 2009 that in Sudan alone international peacekeepers possessed more than 30,000 small arms.

Little is known about the scale and scope of diversion, about what happens to recovered material or about the measures that exist to tackle and prevent diversion.

The increased circulation of military equipment destined for areas where security is weak, presents risks, and some of these weapons destined to support peacekeepers end up in the hands of non-state armed groups. This phenomenon, known as diversion, includes incidents of unlawful capture of military equipment, through seizure, forced abandonment or corrupt practices. Some examples of loss through seizure or abandonment are well known: Guinean and Zambian contingents serving in Sierra Leone and Nigerian troops in Sudan. Others are less well known: Bangladeshi troops in Côte d'Ivoire, or Burundian troops in Somalia.

Diversion is difficult to gauge. Due to the sensitivity of the subject and the classified status of information on stocks, information on diversion is particularly scarce and difficult to obtain. Little is known about the scale and scope of diversion, about what happens to recovered material or about the measures that exist to tackle and prevent diversion. Scarce knowledge is compounded by a culture of non-disclosure and a reporting bias against documenting small level incidents. While large-scale incidents (such as the RUF attacks noted above) inevitably make the papers, other smaller-scale events are seldom made public.

Though diversion is often associated with malfunctioning system or procedures, not all incidents spell negligence. In some instances weapons or ammunition are captured from the bodies of peacekeepers killed in the line of duty. This was the case in Somalia, in October 2011, when Al Shabaab militants displayed equipment and uniforms allegedly captured from peacekeepers slain in combat. Elsewhere, peacekeepers surrender empty weapons after running out of ammunition, as was reportedly the case in the overrunning of the Haskanita base in 2007 (see below). These cases underline the difficulties of attributing responsibility and emphasize the variety of diversion scenarios.

Many labels, same phenomenon

In the absence of an official definition of diversion, labels abound, each reflecting a particular attitude towards these incidents. UN agencies generically describe the diversion of small arms from licit to illicit holders: as "leakage," "evaporation" or "trickling."[4] These labels minimise the seriousness of diversion and devoid it of agency. In UN-speak, diversion is also described through the method of capture of material, such as: "seizure", "capture," or "forced abandonment." This terminology underlines an institutional preoccupation with the method rather than the impact of diversion. As another example, French military who manage the RECAMP (the program for the Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capacities) depots speak of a "coefficient of evaporation" to describe situations in which ammunition or even firearms are not recovered from field exercises or loans to African peacekeeping missions. This description suggests that diversion is often understood as a normal cost of doing business, which does not require clear and transparent reporting procedures.

Small amounts of diversion of materials from peacekeeping operations are often factored into calculations of reimbursement for materials provided by TCCs. According to the UN Logistical Contingent Owned Equipment Training Manual some losses are unavoidable in high-risk environments which have: extreme environmental factors (mountainous, desert conditions, swampy conditions, climatic and road conditions), hostile action/forced abandonment factors (calculation conditions include the estimation of the frequency of criminal activities in the area, likelihood of hostile military engagement, distribution of minefields) intensified operational condition factor (size of area of responsibility, length of logistic chains and infrastructure). This factoring-in of small-level diversion is useful, yet it also contributes to the overall reluctance to engage the larger issue, and to improve transparency and tracing of military equipment on the ground.

Recording and reporting diversion is not an established practice across peacekeeping missions, which leads to a reporting bias towards actors who do report. The UN for instance, provides several sources of information on diversion, which, though incomplete, shed light on some aspects of diversion. UN Secretary General reports include information on instances of diversion, in their sections on the security challenges faced by peacekeepers, but these are indicative rather than exhaustive. Other sources such as reports by UN Security Council Expert Panels on Embargos, UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) investigative reports and Board of Inquiry reports also include information on diversion incidents. By contrast, other bodies, such as the AU, ECCAS and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are less transparent on this topic. In their case, data collection on diversion is reliant on official statement and press releases, as well as secondary sources: news articles, academic articles, and key informant interviews. The absence of

3 Sean Purcell, "Procurement for Peacekeeping and Engineering", presentation, New York, 3 November 2011.

4 Markovski et al, "Channels of small arms proliferation: policy implications for Asia-Pacific", *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, 3, 1, 2008; also author interview, 14 March 2013.

universal reporting standards for peacekeeping leads to underreporting for some missions compared to others.

Multiplicity of sources does not equal availability of data. Information on incidents of diversion is often scarce, with information on contingents' arms and ammunition holdings and losses difficult to obtain. The reluctance to embarrass countries contributing troops (and risk having to replace them) by pointing out their shortcomings or acknowledging casualties they have suffered is still strong and unhelpful (even if understandable). For instance, the amount and types of weapons and ammunition lost through diversion is seldom reported in-full by peacekeepers. Descriptions are often indicative rather than precise, stipulating for example that a container of ammunition was stolen, without specifying the type, mark or quantity (as occured in the Raiba Trans incident in Sudan in 2008 – see below). In other cases, information is lacking altogether, and the media will report of a patrol being ambushed and vehicles captured without specifying if the vehicles were fitted with weapons. The UN and the media often will focus on the fate of peacekeepers detained, without any discussion of the fate of their equipment. A story's arc often ends with 'detained peacekeepers released unharmed' with one left to guess if they were armed and, if so, if they were released with their arms.

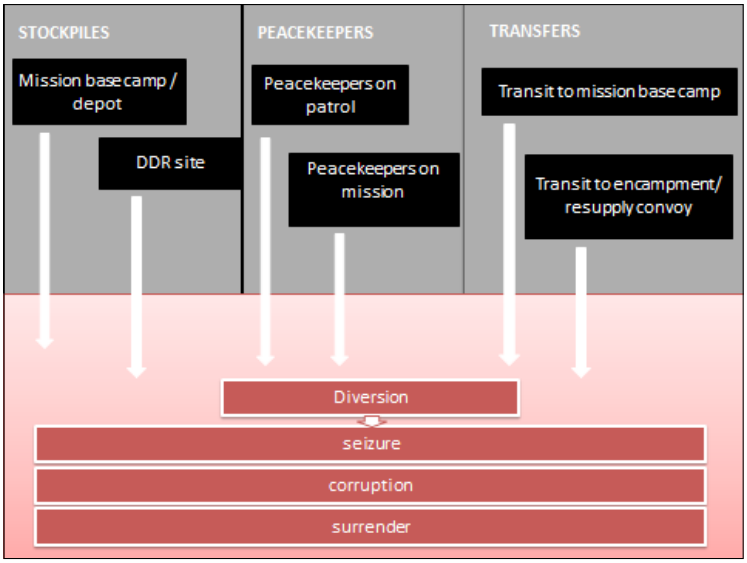
Mapping diversion from peacekeeping missions: an ongoing exercise

Though the breadth and scope of diversion of weapons from peacekeeping operations is not easily quantifiable, the emerging Small Arms Survey dataset addresses this research gap. It maps incidents of diversion in UN, ECOWAS and AU missions from 1990 to 2013. It records only events and information on quantities of weapons and ammunition that were publicly reported and verifiable (in media outlets or by the UN agencies or missions). Given the limitations of available data, these events are severely undercounted. We record data on incidents that refer both to large numbers of weapons or substantial quantities of ammunition, as well as smaller incidents involving diversion from patrols. Diversion is an ongoing rather than a historical problem.

We define diversion as: 'the action by which warring factions or criminal groups unlawfully acquire small arms and light weapons from transfers or stocks held by national governments, civilians, private security companies or international organizations.' In the context of peacekeeping operations, diversion refers to the illegal acquiring of UN weapons or military equipment (such as ammunition) by warring factions, through "seizure", "corruption" or "surrender" (see figure 1).

Diverted weapons and ammunition can originate from: stockpiles (base camp depots, DDR depots), peacekeepers (on patrol, or on mission), or transfers (to mission camp, or during resupply efforts). Stockpile diversion features incidents of weapons and ammunition seized directly from mission depots (which contain materials supplied by TCCs) or through the raiding of DDR depots (that contain weapons collected from combatants through DDR programmes). A notable example of a base camp depot diversion incident took place in 2007, with the overrunning of the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) Haskanita Group site. Over 300 rebels attacked the site, and captured seventeen vehicles, computers, mobile phones, cash and "large amounts of weapons and ammunition on site".[5] Militants and non-state armed groups have also targeted DDR depots, as sources of weapons. In May 2000, the RUF occupied and looted DDR facilities in Makeni and Magburaka.

Figure 1 – Avenues of diversion from peacekeeping operations: stockpiles, peacekeepers and transfers



Source: Small Arms Survey, unpublished background paper.

Alternatively, diversion occurs in transit, through hijacking of convoys of military equipment destined to peacekeepers, or from attacks on peacekeepers on patrol. Most notably, in 2008, a shipment of ammunition by Raiba Trans Sudan private company was attacked on its way from El Obeid to Nyala. On this occasion, some 12 tons of ammunition were stolen. Similarly, in 2011, an AU-UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) patrol was detained, and relieved of its weapons, rocket launchers and ammunition.

Incidents of diversion are neither rare nor isolated, plaguing multiple missions, in a variety of settings, from Afghanistan to former Yugoslavia, and from Burundi to Sudan. Though multiple incidents have been reported in Sudan (with AMIS and UNAMID), Somalia (AMISOM troops) or Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), diversion is not isolated to missions operating in Africa. From 1992-94, Khmer Rouge forces attacked and captured UNTAC peacekeepers in Cambodia, occasionally relieving them of their weapons. In another instance, in 1994, Serbian forces seized a tank, two armoured personnel carriers and an antiaircraft gun from a depot under protection of UNPROFOR peacekeepers. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, in various missions throughout West Africa, both UN and ECOWAS peacekeepers experienced large-scale losses, including by formed units at battalion strength.

Measures to limit or prevent diversion

To address diversion from peacekeeping operations effectively, policymakers must first recognise that there is a problem that needs to be clearly defined

5 United Nations Security Council, "Letter dated 7 November 2008 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) addressed to the President of the Security Council", November 2008, S/2008/647, para 312.

and accounted. To do so, one must overcome the basic challenges to data collection: the reluctance to speak about diversion in peacekeeping, for fear of endangering already fragile troop or financial contributions. Agencies must also improve data gathering on diversion, addressing especially the low level of specificity (the difficulty of obtaining exact figures of material lost, types of weapons, and ammunition markings). Increased transparency, regular reporting and investigation of mismanagement and diversion incidents can improve the knowledge base on diversion. Accurate data on incidents of seizure, surrender or corruption involving weapons or ammunition destined for peacekeepers also provides clues on creating best practices in the field.

Conclusions

Diversion of materials from peacekeeping operations can be held in check and prevented through reactive and preventive measures, applied to both stockpiles and transfers of military equipment. Reactive measures are, by definition, ex post facto, and come as solutions to identifiable problems or practices on the ground. DDR programs which are in many cases part of the peacekeeping mission mandates collect large amounts of civilian-held small arms. However, regulations do not necessarily stipulate that all weapons collected have to be destroyed in situ, and some of these weapons recirculate (either as a result of hostile action; attacks on DDR bases or as a result of inadvertent transfer to pro-government militias). Thus, funding stockpile management and surplus destruction, and establishing clear guidelines on when captured weapons are transferred to national military can limit stockpile diversion. Preventive measures aim for improving the tracking of material deployed, by marking firearms destined for peacekeeping missions before they are sent to the field and by accurate record-keeping of all materials in stock or that are captured from non-state groups. Programmes, such as the U.S. Blue lantern end-use monitoring tool, create watchlists with basic warning flags for possible seizure in transit.

Ultimately, diversion is a long-standing problem that has yet to be awarded the attention it deserves. Though more notable cases (such as capture of several patrols from UNAMSIL) occurred in early 1990s and 2000s, multiple seizures of weapons and ammunition continue to be reported after 2010. Until universal and transparent reporting standards are introduced across peacekeeping missions, the exact breadth and scope of this occurence will remain hard to compute. This lack of information will continue to prevent the adoption of durable and targeted measures to prevent the seizure or surrender of weapons and ammunition.

December 2013

NB: This paper is solely the opinion of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the official view of the GCSP.

About the authors

Eric G. Berman is the Managing Director of the Small Arms Survey. He has published widely on UN peace operations and African security issues.

Mihaela Racovita is an Associate Researcher at the Small Arms Survey. She works on armed violence (with a focus on Nepal) and on arms proliferation.

The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. It provides authoritative evidence-based information and analysis on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. For more information, see www.smallarmssurvey.org.

GCSP Policy Papers are available at www.gcsp.ch