



Interview with Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye

United Nations Military Adviser
for Peacekeeping Operations*

The spectrum of peacekeeping operations has grown increasingly broad and has come to include various – and sometimes simultaneous – dimensions, such as conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacemaking, peace enforcement and peacebuilding. With the ascendancy of more robust peacekeeping mandates, such as the one assigned by United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2098 to the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), there is a need to analyse thoroughly the complexity of the contexts in which peacekeepers are deployed today, the rules applicable to their engagement, and the modalities they can introduce to adapt to new realities. In this interview, the Review sought the opinion of a distinguished military commander and strategist on the future evolution of peacekeeping missions.

Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye has been the serving UN Military Adviser for Peacekeeping Operations and Head of the Office of Military Affairs for the past three years. He has exercised command responsibilities at all levels of the military hierarchy and has been among the privileged officers to lead the Senegalese military. Besides his participation in Operation Fode Kaba II in Gambia and the conduct of several campaigns in Casamance, Senegal, General Gaye has taken part in UN operations in Sinai, Lebanon, and Kuwait, where he commanded the Senegalese battalion during Operation Desert Storm. His experience also includes a tour of duty of more than five years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as MONUC/MONUSCO Force Commander. Prior to that, he served as Ambassador of

* This interview was conducted in New York on 9 April 2013 by Vincent Bernard, Editor-in-Chief of the *International Review of the Red Cross*, and Mariya Nikolova, Editorial Assistant.

the Republic of Senegal to Germany, Austria, and the organs of the UN in Vienna. General Officer of the Armoured Cavalry branch, General Gaye is a graduate of the prestigious Saint-Cyr military academy and the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre of France.

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How do you see the evolution of peacekeeping missions over time, in particular those having a protection mandate? What do you see as the major challenges today for this type of mission in general?

Peacekeeping has evolved around certain landmark events. In the years following 1994 and the Rwanda crisis, there was a certain disaffection with peacekeeping and an increase in the importance of regional organisations, in particular in dealing with crises such as that in Liberia. A second landmark was the publication of the Brahimi Report.¹ This document formed the framework for the development of peacekeeping, resulting in the deployment of a total of 120,000 peacekeeping soldiers around the world by the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. So during that period peacekeeping had considerable appeal. Meanwhile, the majority of conflicts were becoming internal, resulting in the development of concepts such as ‘robust’ peacekeeping and the ‘integrated approach’. These tools have the advantage of being applicable to today’s conflicts.

Yet, as it often happens, one has the impression that ways of adapting to changes in conflict situations are always reactive in nature. This is more or less the situation in which we find ourselves today. We have peace missions around the world, but on the one hand most such missions are in Africa – these are by far the most complex ones – and on the other hand, the large majority of them are deployed in French-speaking countries. At the same time, we see that there are two areas in which we have failed to achieve our objectives, namely the number of peacekeeping soldiers who speak the languages of the countries in which they are deployed, and the number of women involved in peacekeeping activities.

Now, what are the challenges ahead? The first is obviously the problem of resources, as we are going through a difficult period in that regard. Wherever they operate, our peace missions must strive to be as effective as possible. However, the resources available to them are close to being seen as minimal. We also face challenges in terms of capacity. There are areas in which we suffer from a lack of capacity: intelligence, aerial mobility, and mastery of local languages. Then there are obviously the challenges specific to each mission: usually political processes, the problem of reforming the armies of the countries where we are deployed, and of course the fact that peacekeeping has to be accompanied by peace consolidation – one being financed by obligatory resources and the other by voluntary resources. This is how I see the situation and the challenges from my perspective as military adviser.

1 Editor’s note: see the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (commonly referred to as the ‘Brahimi Report’), UN Doc. A/55/305–S/2000/809, 21 August 2000.

How can peacekeeping missions adapt to the challenges you have just identified?

Every mission takes place in a specific context and reacts in a different way to these challenges, which are a major source of concern for the UN, where practice most often evolves more rapidly than concepts. With respect to resources, although the UN is learning to do more with less, the effort to offset capability deficits is currently centred on the pooling, at regional level, of the resources essential for our missions. Although the details are still being worked out, we have had to bring this inter-mission cooperation into play on several occasions – for example, to respond to security problems on the border between Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire by a transfer of attack helicopters, and to the emergency in Syria by deploying military observers from other missions. As for capabilities arising from new technologies, we continue to appeal to Member States while at the same time exploring possibilities for outsourcing, which will shortly be the object of an experiment in one of our missions.

Turning to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), what, in your view, will be the main challenges in implementing Security Council Resolution 2098 providing for deployment of an ‘intervention brigade’ under the command of MONUSCO as a means of adapting to developments in the conflict?²

First of all, I think the merit of Resolution 2098 is that it is extremely proactive. Secondly, it is a resolution resulting partially from the initiative of the countries in the region. It is because those countries wanted to set up a neutral international force (deployed on the border between the DRC and Rwanda) on the basis of contributions from countries in the region, and because they applied to the UN for funds to finance that force, that we favoured this solution. Moreover, it is essentially the countries in the region that will contribute to manning this intervention brigade. Thirdly and finally, it is a realistic resolution because it takes into account the fact that unfortunately the DRC’s armed forces have been unable to gain the upper hand over the armed groups in the region. It remains to be seen whether it will represent a significant development once it is implemented.

What are the opportunities and costs of other UN-mandated missions deployed in support of peacekeeping missions, such as Operation Unicorn in Côte d’Ivoire?

I believe that such an arrangement is first of all imposed on us by the nature of the crises we face today. We are usually deployed in post-conflict situations. When a post-conflict situation is facing a fresh outbreak of hostilities – as was the case in Côte d’Ivoire – the peacekeeping force is no longer entirely adapted to

2 Editor’s note: see UNSC Res. S/RES/2098 (2013), 28 March 2013, para. 9 and ff.

the circumstances. Our force generation process is very lengthy because it is highly political. So to manage the crisis, we have one possibility: to call upon neighbouring missions, or in other words, to pool certain resources at the regional level. However, we also have another possibility: to ask for volunteers to help us in stabilising the situation. This a concept that is gradually gaining ground.

Furthermore, a peacekeeping force is not a standby arrangements system.³ It does not possess an intelligence-seeking capability, nor does it dispose of any specialised means of freeing hostages. It does not dispose of capacities which are generally found in expeditionary forces. In this context, there is a definite advantage in having a parallel force providing us with such support on a permanent basis. So to sum up, such configurations are imposed on us by the realities on the ground. It may be that they are conceptualised after the event, but with hindsight, it is clear that having Operation Unicorn in Côte d'Ivoire was an advantage; the operation undoubtedly helped to deal with the post-electoral problem.

What are the main challenges, in your view, for peacekeeping in Mali at present?

The situation in Mali is obviously a major challenge. Indeed, I believe it is illustrative of various challenges currently facing us. First of all, it is an internal situation which has deteriorated because political decisions were not taken at the right time or in an appropriate manner. This created the breeding ground on which armed groups operating in vast zones have been able to gain the ascendancy that we see today. It is a further reminder that every time a peacekeeping operation is set up, an effort must be made to bolster a political process; otherwise, we are not building on firm ground. Secondly, we are still in a situation in which the means for establishing the authority of the state – in particular the capabilities of the army – have not lived up to expectations. The third factor is that the regional and continental organisations did play their roles but very quickly reached their limits, which were essentially financial in nature.

You will note that a similar situation can be observed in the Central African Republic. The UN is going to find itself faced with high expectations of its peacekeeping soldiers; we are waiting to see how the Security Council is going to draw up the mandate of this future force. We are also waiting to see with what political processes the mission is going to be associated, and finally, how high-intensity operations can be entrusted to UN peacekeeping forces.

I discussed earlier the association between a UN peacekeeping force and a UN-mandated force in support of a peacekeeping force. We have seen this with Operation Unicorn in Côte d'Ivoire as well as with Operation Artemis in the DRC; we have also seen something similar with the operation EUFOR RD Congo.

3 Editor's note: a standby arrangements system combines homogenous groups of military means or capabilities working together towards the same operational objective, thus providing a more effective response to the inter-army nature of military operations.

We have tried to find a remedy for the lack of reserves constantly suffered by the UN in crisis situations by establishing cooperation between missions: for example, the mission in Côte d'Ivoire was able to use attack helicopters belonging to the mission in Liberia. However, this is not always sufficient. What is needed is a force capable of stepping in and providing support to deal with crises. This is likely what will be set up in the mission in Mali.

What is your view of the 'integrated mission' approach, as exemplified by the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (MISMA)?

A mission is described as multidimensional and integrated because it encompasses all the sectors of activity which have to be sorted out before a crisis requiring the deployment of UN troops can be stabilised. These missions encompass sectors as diverse as child protection, civil affairs, electoral assistance, human rights, security, the rule of law, and so on. They are, in my view, an appropriate response to the new patterns of conflict whose complexity is intimately bound up, particularly in Africa, with issues of good governance. However, putting this type of mission in place is only a preliminary to a solution which depends even more on the smooth functioning of this complex array, on the determination of the host country to resolve the crisis, and on the commitment of the international community to seeking a political solution. In other words, a complex problem requires a complex solution.

Could you explain how your office approaches the force generation process? What challenges are involved, and have you defined certain 'good practices' in this process?

The force generation process is usually set in motion by the adoption of a Security Council resolution, the development of a plan of operation and the drafting of various operational documents defining the organisation and capacities of the units concerned and the tasks they will be required to perform. On the administrative and financial level, continuous exchanges of views between the contributing countries and the departments concerned with peacekeeping and with mission support result in agreements on matters such as reconnaissance of the area of deployment, reimbursement, visits prior to deployment, and the deployment itself. Thus, it is a long process which unfortunately has to cope with the challenges of urgency, of generating sufficient resources, and of their coherent deployment.

Here good practice means forward planning and the pooling of available UN resources so as to respond in an appropriate manner to the challenges mentioned. My services establish informal contacts with potential contributing countries long before the adoption of a resolution, on the basis of proposed levels of personnel and the needs in terms of units outlined in the initial planning process. This approach also relies on the UN Stand-by Arrangements System.

How do you view integration of the law in peacekeeping missions, from the stage of force generation to that of accountability in the event of violations? How is training and dissemination of international humanitarian law and other pertinent norms done among peacekeeping forces?

This is a matter that has become vital. For as long as peacekeeping forces were forces of interposition between two conventional armies, there was practically no problem of that sort. But ever since peacekeeping forces have become involved in internal conflicts within states, they have faced new threats. What posture should a peacekeeping force adopt when it is targeted by children? What should be its attitude with respect to violence against women? What should be the attitude of peacekeepers responsible for protecting populations in relation to the rights of displaced persons? These are all relevant questions we ask ourselves today. It is no longer possible to engage in peacekeeping operations without having a clear idea of the body of rules contained in the law of war. Furthermore, the forces concerned must have a sound understanding of those rules. This is provided for in their instruction and training before deployment. Our colleagues in peacekeeping missions who have to deal with all these issues also receive continuous in-service training. It is their duty to ensure that their forces respect the law. Lastly, it is a fact that today, with the use of force, and being mandated to perform tasks implying the use of force, the very status of peacekeeping forces is being called into question. When we are asked to provide the Congolese army with support in disarming armed groups, some consider that we become parties to the conflict. But at some stage, it becomes necessary to be a party to the conflict in order to resolve it. So there is no obstacle to becoming involved in a conflict as long as that involvement is in conformity with the law.

That is why we have put in place a Human Rights Due Diligence Policy in the context of the support provided by the UN to non-UN security forces. This mandatory policy ensures that the non-UN security forces that we support abide by the same principles as the UN, and clearly demonstrates that respect for international law occupies a very important place in peacekeeping activities. Here the very spirit of the UN is at stake. That is why the Secretary-General put in place a ‘Code of Conduct for UN peacekeepers’,⁴ to ensure that the behaviour of civilian, police, and military peacekeeping personnel remains exemplary. Their legitimacy stems from this.

Do you have any means of involving countries that contribute troops in these reflections, and of engaging in discussions with them on the issues you just mentioned?

Absolutely. We launched the debate, and these principles are indeed a condition for accepting a contribution to a peacekeeping mission. Some proposals for contributions have had to be turned down – diplomatically – because they gave rise

4 Editor’s note: for more information, see the United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit’s website: <http://cdu.unlb.org/UNStandardsofConduct/CodeofConduct.aspx>.

to problems in terms of compliance with the law. The states concerned were involved in legal issues on matters requiring progress on their part. This conditionality therefore serves as an initial filter, attesting to the mentality within the UN which is really conducive to respect for the law.

How do you see the interaction between humanitarian actors and peacekeepers today, especially in contexts where ‘integrated missions’ are deployed?

First of all, I believe that humanitarian agencies are included in most UN peacekeeping resolutions. Several resolutions stipulate that peacekeeping forces have a responsibility to protect UN personnel, but also to provide support for humanitarian actors. In certain resolutions, this support is particularly explicit. Humanitarian workers are therefore taken into account in the context of a peacekeeping mission. And that is the case under formal mechanisms – the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator coordinates all UN agencies, funds, and programmes, and serves as a link with the humanitarian organisations. Thirdly, the heads of missions are in contact with humanitarian agencies.

As for myself, when I was a force commander and travelling in the field, I always held meetings with humanitarian actors. I used to insist: ‘Don’t tell me what’s working well, tell me what isn’t working.’ Similarly, when I would meet with the territorial commander, I would tell him: ‘Don’t tell me what the Blue Helmets have succeeded in doing, tell me what is not going well and what you expect from them.’

Finally, humanitarian workers are extremely familiar with the situation on the ground. Commanders of peacekeeping forces – while maintaining their decision-making autonomy – and local military commanders find a win-win equilibrium whereby each knows what they can expect from the other. This is the ideal situation. Obviously there may be times when this balance is not achieved. I had this experience in the DRC during an operation carried out in the Ruwenzori area in December 2005 against the armed group ADF-NALU,⁵ which resulted in the destruction and burning of all the ADF-NALU camps and the recovery of a large number of weapons. At the same time, the population was displaced without prior warning, and apparently in a period approaching harvest. Humanitarian agencies saw that as a disaster, so we decided that we would meet them to talk about how to proceed in the future, and about the need to consult them before mounting certain operations, while still respecting confidentiality and time frames.

For those responsible for a peacekeeping mission – and more particularly for the military – it is necessary to be familiar with and open to all actors involved, including humanitarian actors. Such sensitivity is all the more necessary as

5 Editor’s note: ADF-NALU is an acronym for the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (*Forces Démocratiques Alliées–Armée Nationale de Libération de l’Ouganda*), an armed group operating in the east of the DRC.

humanitarian agencies also have their own way of doing things. This is particularly apparent when a new Security Council resolution is being drawn up and when the mandate of some peacekeeping mission is being renewed: humanitarian actors try to influence the content of resolutions by means of reports, and often succeed in doing so.

What is your reading of the future evolution of peacekeeping missions? Does the recent Security Council Resolution 2098 reflect a tendency towards a more 'offensive' concept of peacekeeping missions?

I can reply to this question only by sharing with you my personal viewpoint, which does not necessarily reflect the position of the UN. I think we are moving towards situations in which we shall increasingly need forces capable of carrying out robust operations. I believe that we should proceed in two directions. First, as was already done in the DRC, we should rely more heavily on regional forces, even if that means giving them a UN mandate and having them wear blue helmets. Their motivation and their interest in stabilising the crises affecting their countries will probably be greater than those of troops coming from other continents. We must take this into account, while at the same time striving to maintain the universal nature of peacekeeping. Second, there is a need to encourage Northern countries to become involved again, in particular helping peacekeeping missions to be 'systems of force', by supplying them with the capabilities that they lack, such as aerial mobility and intelligence. It is these two aspects that will allow peacekeeping forces, wherever they operate, to maintain moral ascendancy over the various actors present.

A peacekeeping force is not a war machine. From the semantic viewpoint, the expression 'peacekeeping' can give rise to no misunderstanding. Whatever the adjective attached to it – 'friendly', 'robust', etc. – it is still keeping the peace! So if we want to continue to do peacekeeping, in view of the changes in the nature of conflicts, we have to maintain an advantage over the various other actors. This is what avoids slippage towards a war situation. What was done in Somalia was not peacekeeping: Uganda and Burundi – countries which contribute troops – are in a state of war.⁶ What they accepted in terms of human losses cannot be accepted by a peacekeeping force; this is just not possible and the Security Council would never have countenanced it. So the Northern countries will have to return to peacekeeping one way or another. That is my own personal view.

But I also regret that we are moving towards an environment in which the forces are increasingly having to face situations of war. Sadly, we are going through a period in which hotbeds of tension are flaring up. This is the case in West Africa, which has thus far been a rather stable region: I am thinking of Guinea,

6 Editor's note: in 2011, the African Union Mission in Somalia's peacekeeping troops (composed of Ugandan and Burundian forces, among others) reportedly sustained heavy losses in a deadly confrontation against armed militants in Somalia. See Josh Kron and Mohamed Ibrahim, 'African Union peacekeepers killed in Somalia battle', in *New York Times*, 21 October 2011, available at: www.nytimes.com/2011/10/22/world/africa/african-union-takes-casualties-in-somalia-but-numbers-vary.html.

the Central African Republic, Mali. The difficulty of foreseeing the future and of developing appropriate tools is one of the UN's peculiarities. We do not assemble forces, we do not produce equipment; we only take what is there and those who are willing to come forward, whereas states can analyse situations, make projections, develop materiel, form units, and prepare themselves in accordance with their interests. We are merely the users of what is available. That is why we are always rather tardy.