



## Open Briefing

The civil society intelligence agency

Open Briefing is the world's first civil society intelligence agency. Founded in 2011, our mission is to keep those striving to make the world a better place **safe and informed**. We provide **groundbreaking intelligence and security services** to aid agencies, human rights groups, peacebuilding organisations and concerned citizens. We do this so that a stronger civil society can **promote alternatives to armed conflict, protect human rights and safeguard the environment**. Key services we provide include:

- Responding to **requests for intelligence, security or training** from NGOs and journalists.
- Issuing regular **intelligence briefings and risk assessments** for the general public.
- Developing **innovative policy solutions** and promoting them to government.
- Providing **expert consultancy services** to the third sector.

Open Briefing is a bold and ambitious non-profit social enterprise. We are a **unique international collaboration of intelligence, military, law enforcement and government professionals** working tirelessly behind the scenes to make a difference.

Open Briefing's activity is divided across five interlinked departments, three of which are well established (the intelligence unit, think tank and community office) and two of which are new for 2016-19 and are under development (the security unit and training unit).

Intelligence  
unit

Security unit

Training unit

Think tank

Community  
office

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## Intelligence unit

The manipulation of intelligence on Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction in 2003. The US embassy cables and other material leaked by Chelsea Manning to Wikileaks in 2011. The true nature and scope of NSA surveillance revealed by Edward Snowden from 2013 onwards. Such events have made it clear that only an aware and knowledgeable citizenry can ensure the proper meshing of intelligence and political or military action by governments.

“ Issues of security and defence are often the least transparent to the public. Open Briefing is an important contribution to ensuring democratic oversight of governments and armies.” **John Feffer, Co-director, Foreign Policy in Focus**

Open Briefing exists in order to ensure that it is not only those with power and money that have access to credible information on global security and foreign policy issues – every citizen should have that information. As such, we produce numerous accessible publications to keep the public informed, including four different monthly intelligence briefings on various aspects of global security:

**Developments in remote-control warfare:** The United States has led the way in developing a new way of conceptualising and executing war. The emphasis now is on special operations forces; private military and security companies; unmanned vehicles and autonomous weapons systems; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; and cyber conflict – known collectively as remote-control warfare. However, the limits of this approach are being reached and the unintended consequences are now being felt. Since April 2014, Open Briefing has produced a series of monthly intelligence briefings on these issues commissioned and funded by the Remote Control project.

**Transnational organised crime:** The trafficking of people, weapons, wildlife and drugs destroys lives and communities and is a crucial human security issue. The activities of organised gangs can also weaken and corrupt a state to the extent that it risks collapse. Yet, peace and security NGOs often overlook transnational organised crime (TOC), focussing instead on terrorism and geopolitics. To address this, Open Briefing has produced monthly intelligence briefings on transnational organised crime since December 2014. These are written by our TOC expert, Dr Mary Young, and focus on the human rights and human security consequences of organised crime.

**Lifting the lid on Britain's war in Iraq and Syria:** A coalition of countries has come together to combat the threat from Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. There has been much debate over the limit and extent of UK military actions in this conflict, given its central role in the invasion and occupation of Iraq during 2003-08. However, proper debate has been stifled by the lack of information publically available about what the United Kingdom is actually doing in Iraq and Syria. The British government is not being open enough to ensure parliament and the public are properly able to assess and oversee government policy and military actions. To address this, Open Briefing will shortly begin produce a series of monthly briefings identifying and analysing UK actions against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. These are funded by the Network for Social Change.

**Political and security risk updates:** Since October 2013, Open Briefing has produced monthly briefings in collaboration with our intelligence partner, Bradburys Global Risk. These briefings provide political and security risk updates from across the world. Over time, these briefings have tracked and explained the outbreak of the Syrian civil war; the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; the resurgence of Russia and its invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine; the Houthi rebellion in Yemen; the negotiations between Iran and the United States; terrorist attacks and insurgencies across Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa; the opening up of the Arctic to resource exploitation; and political developments around the world.

“With its rational, thorough and transparent approach, Open Briefing has the potential to become an important corrective to often speculative media coverage.”

**Magnus Nome, Commissioning Editor, openDemocracy**

Development agencies, think tanks, human rights groups and other NGOs also need to access credible information in order to ensure their aid programmes, advocacy strategies and policy recommendations are built on sound evidence. Therefore, we have developed partnerships with leading NGOs and civil society networks. The first of these is with **Crisis Action**, a behind-the-scenes network of 100 well-known aid agencies, humanitarian organisations and human rights groups, including Oxfam, Save the Children and Amnesty International. When developing advocacy strategies around protecting civilians from armed conflict, Crisis Action’s international network has occasional intelligence needs, which Open Briefing responds to using analytical methods borrowed from the intelligence community.

Work we have completed for members of the Crisis Action network and other NGOs includes:

- Identifying the **armed drones in use and in development by China, India, Iran, Israel, Russia and Turkey**, together with assessing their likely use given each country’s unique security concerns.
- Assessing **why the Syrian government has been using improvised ‘barrel bombs’** and identifying the countries of origin of the helicopters used to drop them.
- An assessment of the risks of **corruption within the pharmaceutical supply chain to the developing world.**

Our approach allows us to meet the specific needs and priorities of a diverse section of civil society. It makes Open Briefing unique in the peace and security sector: a true civil society intelligence agency.

“Open Briefing has proved hugely useful to Crisis Action and our partners time and again. Their analysis helps us focus our energies on where we can have the greatest impact for the protection of civilians in conflict. The value of that contribution cannot be over-estimated.” **Nick Martlew, UK Director, Crisis Action**

#### **Our mission**

“To keep those striving to make the world a better place **safe and informed.**”

## Security unit

Open Briefing uniquely bridges the humanitarian and security sectors. We are a member of the **Humanitarian Practice Network** and an observer member of the **Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action** (ALNAP), and will shortly be joining **Bond** (the UK body for organisations working in international development). But we also supply intelligence and security services and are a member of the association for professional operators in the security industry, the **British Security Association**. Our particular position has allowed us to identify an issue of grave concern: the use of private military and security companies (PMSCs) by NGOs.

Aid agencies, humanitarian organisations and other NGOs often operate in conflict areas, disaster zones, under repressive regimes or in other high-risk environments. This can require heightened levels of security – from risk briefings, specialist training, logistical support and building security to convoy security and armed security teams if the risk is significant. Industry representatives estimate that approximately 25% of the major companies that provide armed services have worked for humanitarian clients. Leaked documents suggest that CARE, Save the Children, CARITAS, World Vision, UNICEF and the Red Cross have all used PMSCs. In fact, one survey found that every major international humanitarian organisation has paid for armed security in at least one operational context.

PMSCs are highly controversial outfits. Civil society groups have accused employees of such companies of serious human rights abuses, including the torture of detainees, killings of innocent civilians, rape and participation in renditions. It is questionable whether charitable funds should be used to pay for services from these providers. It is also debatable whether it is right for NGOs to 'fight fire with fire' and employ PMSCs in conflict zones – thereby adding yet another armed actor into an already violent situation. It adds to the further securitisation of aid and risks the local population viewing the humanitarian organisation as another belligerent or as part of an occupying force. Furthermore, it is inconsistent for NGOs to use private military and security companies while decrying their use by Western governments in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

At the same time, NGOs do need a safe space within which to deliver aid, disaster response and other services. These organisations also have a duty of care to their employees. There are many professional and ethical companies operating in the sector, and private security specialists do have a lot to offer NGOs. Such professionals can sometimes be the only people enabling NGOs to operate safely on the ground.

To address the serious lack of suitable security provision for NGOs, Open Briefing is developing a security unit that can provide an ethical and more appropriate alternative to PMSCs. Working with trusted partners, including our security consultant and intelligence sponsor, Open Briefing is developing a range of **preventative and defensive non-violent security services** appropriate for the protection of aid workers, human rights defenders, activists, journalists and other civil society actors operating in high-risk environments or under repressive regimes. This might include GPS locators with 24/7 monitoring and SOS functionality; unarmed stand-by security, close protection and counter-surveillance teams made up of former law enforcement officers (rather than soldiers); protective intelligence; risk assessments and threat briefings; evacuation and crisis management plans; and medical, legal and insurance advice. We will also offer free guides to security issues and other informative resources.

Such services will also be of great assistance to civil liberties campaigners, journalists and political activists who face persecution and state violence and are consistently targeted by security services. They cannot afford commercial security advice and obviously cannot turn to the police for protection. By developing networks of skills-based volunteers and building relationships with trusted partners, Open Briefing will be able to meet those needs at a greatly reduced cost and provide services better suited to NGOs.

Our security unit is still in the early stages. It is a natural progression of Open Briefing's intelligence work, and has grown out of two developments. The first was a contract from a major international funder to provide a risk assessment and security package for a senior member of staff considering travelling to Russia to meet local grantees. The second is a nascent project examining the NGO use of PMSCs and developing guidelines for best practice and a code of conduct. Our security unit is an ambitious and truly unique idea, which could change the way NGOs provide security for their staff and help keep activists living under repressive regimes safe from state persecution.

“Open Briefing has the potential to add very considerable value for hard-pressed progressive organisations and individuals at very modest cost.”  
**John Sloboda, Co-founder, Every Casualty and Iraq Body Count**

## Training unit

Drawing on the expertise and experience of the members of our intelligence and security units, particularly our security consultant and humanitarian security consultant, and working closely with trusted partners, our new training unit will deliver courses and bespoke training packages tailored to the needs of civil society clients. In the first instance, this is likely to include a range of **Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT)** modules, including:

- First aid
- Kidnap and hostage awareness
- Self-defence
- Camp craft, navigation and survival skills
- Counter- and anti-surveillance

These courses will be designed to give clients the skills and confidence necessary to operate safely and effectively on the ground in complex, hostile or remote areas, such as war zones or disaster areas. They will also be useful to those operating in or visiting countries with repressive or authoritarian regimes, where they are likely to experience government harassment or surveillance.

Working with our OSINT consultant, we will also provide capacity-building courses designed to help NGO researchers use intelligence effectively, including training in **collecting and analysing open source intelligence (OSINT)** and **imagery analysis**, or designed to help human rights defenders and other activists operate and communicate securely, including training in **cyber and information security**.

An additional important aim of the training unit will be to move larger organisations away from a due diligence/risk reduction approach to training (which is largely tick box) and towards providing their staff with the skills they will need to operate safely and confidently on the ground so that they can deliver programmes more effectively. This change of culture would do much to improve the delivery of aid, development and other programmes by international NGOs and intergovernmental organisations among others.



## Think tank

Open Briefing exists in order to ensure that it is not only those with power and money who have access to reliable, credible information on defence, security and foreign policy issues; every citizen should have that information. This is the core mandate of our intelligence unit. While undertaking this role, we occasionally identify issues that are not receiving adequate attention or policies that are not working. Our role then becomes to explain these failings, propose evidence-based alternative strategies, and leverage our networks of influence to promote those alternatives to opinion-formers, policymakers and the general public. This is the core mandate of our think tank. In this way, our intelligence unit directly informs the work of our think tank but advocacy is deliberately kept separate from analysis.

As part of this, Open Briefing publishes a number of policy-orientated publications, which are informed by rigorous research and subject to peer review. These publications aim to be comprehensive, contextual and condensed. In other words, they cover the different elements of and perspectives on an issue and provide the background to and circumstances of an event, while at the same time remaining concise and succinct. They are guided by the long-standing and near-universal concerns of progressive civil society: promoting human rights, maintaining human security and protecting the environment.

Recent issues covered by our publications include:

- The hostile use of civilian drones by non-state actors
- National security decision making in Iran
- Policy recommendations for the British government regarding remote-control warfare
- Russia's airborne forces (as used in Crimea and eastern Ukraine)
- The resource conflict risk in Burma/Myanmar
- Improving the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty
- India's role in Afghanistan
- Forecasting conflict in West, Central and Southern Africa
- Egypt's political and economic challenges

“Open Briefing potentially will be a great force for good in helping to make transparent areas of activity that are often shrouded in secrecy and where misinformation is common place. In the long term, it could have an important impact on policy.”  
**Bevis Gillett, Trustee, Marmot Charitable Trust**

The Open Briefing think tank acts as a research centre for our analysts, through which they can seek funding to undertake research and projects in response to a need to drive policy change in a particular area or raise awareness of a crucial emerging issue. These cutting edge projects are defined by research, collaboration and advocacy, and go to the very heart of the way we think about and attempt to ensure our security. These activities are organised around several **research themes**, which currently include:

- Remote-control warfare
- The NGO use of private military and security companies
- Transnational organised crime
- Forecasting insecurity and conflict
- Sustainable security

There is a particular focus within our think tank on the contrasting paradigms of sustainable security and remote-control warfare. Sustainable security is a framework for thinking about security based on understanding integrated security trends and developing preventative responses. The central premise of sustainable security is that you cannot successfully control all the consequences of insecurity, but must work to resolve the causes. Remote-control warfare, on the other hand, is a paradigm that has emerged from the war on terror that enables warfare to be actioned at a distance by relying on smart technologies and light-footprint deployments, such as armed drones and special forces. The problem is that it allows actions to be approved that would never be considered using conventional military means; yet the consequences and risks of those actions are not being adequately considered.

All our work is made freely available through our website (over 2,000 unique visitors a month), social networks, podcast and weekly bulletin (3,500 subscribers).

“Open Briefing provides clear analysis and intelligence that can add real value to the work of civil society networks. Their political analysis has been particularly useful.”  
**Mariam Kemple, Head of Humanitarian Campaigning, Oxfam**

## Our team

Open Briefing is the brainchild of our founder and executive director, **Chris Abbott**. Chris is joined by an international team of volunteers, including senior **intelligence, military, law enforcement and government professionals**, who all offer their services to Open Briefing pro bono. A board of advisers made up of leading security and civil society experts supports the team. Key members of our 17-member team include:

**Chris Abbott** is the founder and **executive director** of Open Briefing. He is also an honorary visiting research fellow in the School of Social and International Studies at the University of Bradford. He was the deputy director of the Oxford Research Group until 2009. Chris is the author of two popular books on security and politics, as well as numerous influential reports and articles. He is best known for his groundbreaking work on sustainable security, the security implications of climate change, and remote-control warfare.

**Chris Cushing** is Open Briefing's **humanitarian security consultant**. Chris has 25 years' experience in leading humanitarian action, human security strategies and high-level diplomatic initiatives for international aid organisations, the Red Cross, the United Nations, governments, academia and the private sector in over 60 countries. He has directed emergency humanitarian operations in 17 wars and two disasters. Chris is a former officer in the Canadian Armed Forces and has experience with foreign intelligence agencies.

**Steve Hathorn** is a **senior analyst** at Open Briefing. He is an intelligence analyst with nearly 30 years' experience encompassing the British Army, Defence Intelligence Staff, National Criminal Intelligence Service, United Nations, International Criminal Court and the National Crime Agency. He has worked on projects covering terrorism, human rights abuses, international organised crime and threats to humanitarian operations. Steve has recently completed a master's degree in international politics and security.

**Kevjn Lim** is a **senior analyst** at Open Briefing. He is a humanitarian professional and independent writer and analyst. From 2007 to 2011, he served as delegate for the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Palestinian territories, Sudan, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan, specialising in civilian protection and political and security needs analysis. He is also a former intelligence officer in the Singapore Armed Forces. Kevjn is fluent in a number of languages including Arabic, Hebrew and Persian.

**Roger Marshall** is Open Briefing's **security consultant**. Roger has worked in the private security and risk sector since leaving government service in 2004. He has advised a wide range of individual, corporate and public sector clients on security measures, intelligence gathering, due diligence, fraud analysis and global travel risk. He is the managing partner at Bradburys Global Risk, where he also coordinates security and intelligence field operations and advises personnel on the ground.

**Rob O’Gorman** is a **senior analyst** at Open Briefing. He is a former Canadian Forces intelligence operator and officer with over 20 years’ experience providing tactical, operational and strategic assessments. As a mission support officer, he was also involved in arms control verification operations in select regions of the world. More recently, Rob has supported Canada’s counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan, together with the government’s Canada First strategy in the high Arctic.

**Professor Paul Rogers** is an **adviser** to Open Briefing. He is professor of peace studies at the University of Bradford and global security consultant to the Oxford Research Group. He has worked in the field of international security, arms control and political violence for over 30 years. He is the international security editor of openDemocracy, and has written or edited 26 books. Paul is also a regular commentator on global security issues in the national and international media.

**Dr John Sloboda** is an **adviser** to Open Briefing. He is the co-director of Every Casualty and co-founder of Iraq Body Count. From 2004 to 2009, he was the executive director of the Oxford Research Group, and from 2009 to 2014 he was co-director of the organisation’s Every Casualty programme. John is also emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Keele and an honorary professor in the School of Politics and International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London.

**Neil Smith** is Open Briefing's **OSINT consultant**. Neil served as a police officer for 13 years, during which time he was attached to the on-call firearms unit, the plain clothes vehicle crime squad, the burglary squad and the drug squad. Since leaving the police in 1996, he has worked as a full-time investigative researcher for a range of clients, including government departments, law enforcement agencies and journalists. Neil also trains investigators and journalists in the art of using the internet as an investigative tool.

**Dr Mary Young** is a **contributing analyst** at Open Briefing. She is a lecturer in law and a researcher of transnational organised crime and financial crime at the Bristol Law School at UWE. After completing her PhD, she was made a research fellow at Aberystwyth University, and carried out research into organised crime in Jamaica. She subsequently taught international finance in Aberystwyth’s School of Management and Business. Mary also has a fellowship at the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law at Cambridge University.



“Open Briefing provides an invaluable service to us, conducting high-quality research in extremely tight timeframes and with limited budgets. The unique and wide-ranging pool of expertise available ensures that our very specific requests are met with the utmost precision.” **Caroline Donnellan, Manager, Remote Control project**

## Budget and funding

Open Briefing is a registered **non-profit company limited by guarantee** (No. 07649656) and run as a social enterprise. During 2012-15, 6.3% of our income came from trading (predominantly consultancy). In line with the generally accepted criteria for social enterprise, we are working towards raising 50% of our income from trading activities. This ensures financial sustainability and places less strain on the already oversubscribed human rights and peace and security funding pools.

Open Briefing uses a radically different organisational model: we are a **virtual think tank**, and rely predominantly on **skills-based volunteering** and **pro bono consultancy** for our staffing needs. Having a virtual office and a volunteer network allows for far lower overheads (projected at only 10% over 2016-19), and frees the organisation from a specific locality. It means Open Briefing can start small and develop organically, while being able to adapt rapidly to future opportunities and challenges.

The articles of association of Open Briefing include a charitable purpose, an asset lock and a non-profit clause, meaning foundations that are registered charities can legally make grants to us, as our work is treated as charitable in nature. The majority of our income to date has been grants from a select group of trusts and foundations that appreciate the value of our work and wish to support our ongoing development. Our current funders are the **Polden-Puckham Charitable Foundation, Network for Social Change, Marmot Charitable Trust, Philamonic Trust** and **Remote Control project**. We are currently seeking additional grantmakers to join these trusts in order to raise the **£285,000** required for our planned work over 2016-19. A summary budget is below, and a full budget can be provided on request.

Department	2016		2017		2018		Total
	£	%	£	%	£	%	
Intelligence unit	£37,500	40%	£37,500	40%	£48,000	51%	£123,000
Security unit	£9,000	9%	£28,000	30%	£15,000	16%	£52,000
Training unit	£2,500	2.5%	£3,000	3%	£3,500	3.5%	£9,000
Think tank	£22,000	24%	£6,500	7%	£6,500	7%	£35,000
Community office	£4,000	4.5%	£4,000	4.5%	£4,000	4.5%	£12,000
Core costs	£19,000	20%	£17,000	18%	£18,000	18%	£54,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£94,000</b>		<b>£96,000</b>		<b>£95,000</b>		<b>£285,000</b>

“Open Briefing has established itself as singularly well-informed source of information on a wide range of international security issues. It has done so with a tiny budget compared with just about every NGO. Its entry on to the scene really is a breath of fresh air.” **Paul Rogers, Professor of Peace Studies, University of Bradford**