

Chapter 14

Combat Air Power in the Congo, 2003–

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After the United Nations had its first experience of robust peacekeeping in the Congo in the early 1960s (a baptism by fire – see Part I of this volume) the Security Council did not launch another peacekeeping operation in that region or anywhere else in Africa until the end of the Cold War (Namibia mission in 1989). A decade later, peacekeeping returned to the Congo. In 1999, the Security Council created a new mission in the country that by then had been renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the 1990s, that country had experienced the direct effects of genocide in neighbouring Rwanda and two ravaging civil wars, the second of which could be called a “continental” war, since many African countries sent troops to fight on opposing sides. To help end the second civil war, at the end of November 1999 the Council created the Mission de l’Organisation des Nations unies en République démocratique du Congo (MONUC). At its founding MONUC was designed as a small, non-kinetic mission tasked with assisting the implementation of a peace agreement and the liaising between conflict parties, as well as some basic planning and reporting functions; it was authorized to deploy 500 military observers.² However, within three months it was expanded by a factor of more than 10 and given a robust mandate to “take the necessary action” under a Chapter VII³ mandate to engage in protection operations not only for UN personnel but also for “civilians under imminent threat of physical violence”.⁴

In 2010, MONUC was renamed the Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO). It commanded a budget of US\$1.35 billion and employed some 25,000 personnel, including nearly 21,000 in uniform (military and police).⁵ As in the earlier 1960s

1 This chapter borrows material from the author’s book *Keeping Watch: Monitoring, Technology and Innovation in UN Peace Operations* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2011), Chapter 7. Several sections reproduced with permission.

2 United Nations Security Council, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1279 (1999), 1999, 3.

3 Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, a chapter that deals with enforcement.

4 United Nations Security Council, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1291 (2000), 2000.

5 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, “MONUC Facts and Figures”, United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/monuc/facts.shtml> [accessed 7 May 2014].

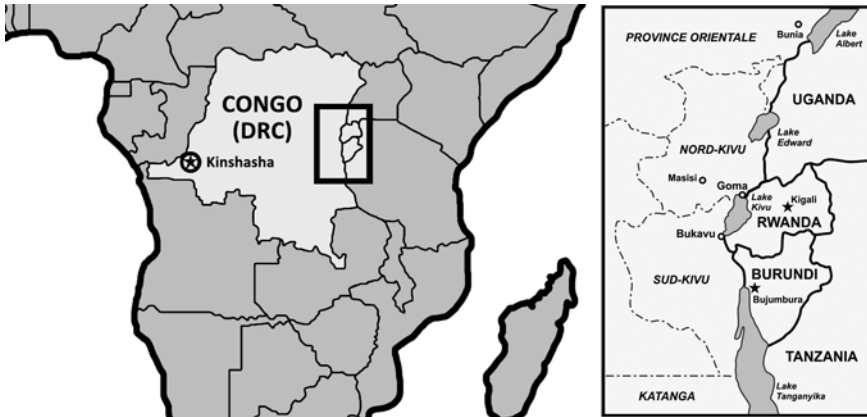


Figure 14.1 Maps showing the position in Africa of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Kivu provinces and neighbouring countries of eastern DRC

Source: Author, with graphic design by R. Lang and H. Chilas.

mission the United Nations began small and became more robust as the situation increasingly demanded. One lesson it relearned from the 1960s was the need for substantial armed forces and combat air power.

Any military operation in the DRC is challenged by the vastness of the land, the conditions in the deep jungle and the minimal infrastructure. The lack of a responsible and able national military and government compounds the problem. Operations must cover a forbidding terrain in a country with few paved roads – for example, there are less than 500 km of paved roads in a country the size of western Europe, and most of those paved roads are concentrated in the capital, Kinshasa (Figure 14.1). Most of the UN's effort in the DRC has been in its eastern provinces: the Kivus and Province Orientale. These areas are virtually ungovernable, with various tribes and foreign powers vying for power, revenge, and the precious mineral wealth. It was dangerous for peacekeepers and potentially explosive, especially in 2003.

Experiences of a European Force⁶

As the United Nations sought stability in Province Orientale in 2003, it sought help from the European Union (EU), which sent in a French-led force under the codename “Operation Artemis”. The Security Council authorized this new Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF) in Resolution 1484 (2003) of 30 May. The IEMF, under separate command from MONUC, was designed to be

⁶ The section was first drafted by Ryan Cross. Its contribution is gratefully acknowledged.

a short-term deployment: only three months. But the Security Council gave it strong authorization “to take all necessary measures to fulfil its mandate ... to contribute to the safety of the civilian population, United Nations personnel and the humanitarian presence” in the town of Bunia in the Ituri district.⁷ The IEMF benefitted from robust air power.

The leading echelon of the IEMF deployment occurred on 6 June 2003 as tactical transport aircraft deployed Special Forces into Bunia’s airport.⁸ Mirage F-1s flew above to make sure that the forces were inserted safely. The day after the initial arrival of forces, air power was utilized repeatedly, including laser-guided bombs fired from Mirage 2000D jets.⁹ Air strikes required that the ground forces include highly trained Joint Tactical Air Controllers to help designate the targets for precision munitions. In close air support (CAS) operations, friendly and opposing ground forces need to be clearly distinguished.¹⁰

The air component was tasked to provide a day and night deterrent presence over Ituri, gather intelligence, and ultimately provide CAS to threatened ground troops if needed.¹¹ This required that the expensive planes and helicopters operate out of French military bases in Chad and Gabon, as well as out of Entebbe Airport (Uganda), which functioned as the logistics hub for the operation. With such large distances, “a typical mission would involve multiple air refuelings (sic) and last up to seven hours, with two hours on station over Ituri”.¹² As flight paths to Ituri also took the fighter aircraft over large swathes of the DRC, any downed aircraft would involve complex and time-intensive search and rescue operations (although none occurred). The French Air Force:

came up with a plan that used French Army Cougar helicopters based in Gabon and Cameroon and several pre-positioned stocks of fuel in DRC ... providing an adequate response to any flight emergency remained an important issue.¹³

The operational aviation elements also provided CAS, tactical and strategic airlift, military helicopter operations – including attack, logistics, and surveillance – and presence and overflight missions. Satellite imagery was also available. In addition, ground forces conducted “cordon-and-search operations and vehicle patrols

7 United Nations Security Council, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1484 (2003), of 30 May 2003.

8 Laborie, G.J. *The Diplomacy of the Jaguar: French Airpower in Postcolonial African Conflicts*. The Wright Flyer Papers (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air Command and Staff College, Air University, March 2009), 22.

9 Laborie, G.J. “The Diplomacy of the Jaguar: French Airpower in Post-Colonial African Conflicts”. Research Report. (Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, 2008), 26.

10 Laborie, *The Diplomacy of the Jaguar*, 2009, 26.

11 Laborie, “The Diplomacy of the Jaguar”, 2008, 24.

12 Ibid., 25.

13 Ibid.

through the region”, applying strong rules of engagement to engage when fired on.¹⁴ These actions bought the United Nations time and space to bring in more resources to augment MONUC.¹⁵

The air power was not only French. The mission was not strictly formed from the current EU member states; future EU member states contributed, as did nations from Africa, Asia, and the Americas.¹⁶ A transport aircraft group comprised aircraft from Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the United Kingdom,¹⁷ in addition to France.¹⁸ For example, the Canadian Forces provided logistics support in the form of two Hercules transport planes and some 50 personnel in what was codenamed “Operation Caravan”.¹⁹

As there existed a complete security vacuum on the ground, IEMF’s task was to halt open warfare between the tribes (Hema and Lendu mostly) and to protect the population at risk; all reports indicate that this protection was provided in

14 Marks, J. “The Pitfalls of Action and Inaction: Civilian Protection in MONUC’s Peacekeeping Operations”, *African Security Review* 16(3) (2007), 73.

15 Sow, A. “Achievements of the Interim Emergency Multinational Force and Future Scenarios”, in *Challenges of Peace Implementation: The UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, ed. Mark Malan and João Gomes Porto (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2004), 211; Hendrickson, R.C., Strand, J.R. and Raney, K.L. “Operation Artemis and Javier Solana: EU Prospects for a Stronger Common Foreign and Security Policy”, 39; Homan, Kees, “Operation Artemis in the DRC”, in Ricci, Andrea and Kytömaa, Eero. *Faster and More United? The Debate about Europe’s Crisis Response Capacity*. European Communities Commission, Directorate General for External Relations, 2007, 153; International Crisis Group, *Maintaining Momentum in the Congo*. Africa Report No. 4, 26 August 2004; Laborie, “The Diplomacy of the Jaguar”, 2008, 24–6; Laborie, *The Diplomacy of the Jaguar*, March 2009, 21–3.

16 Spokesperson of the Secretary General, High Representative for CFSP, “Summary of the Address by Mr Javier Solana, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy to the European Parliament”, Statement to the European Parliament (Brussels, 18 June 2003). Available at: http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_2441_en.htm [accessed 7 May 2014].

17 Wodka-Galien, P. “The Tricolor Aloft”, *Journal of Electronic Defense* 27(3) (March 2004), 57.

18 Interestingly France was forced to lease strategic lift planes in the form of AN-124s to complete the mission, given American reluctance to provide strategic lift, which would echo similar strategic lift issues for France following 2013 Mali operations. See: Laborie, “The Diplomacy of the Jaguar”, 2008, 24. On Mali, see, for example Barrie, D. Hackett, J. and Boyd, H. “Behind the Mali Headlines, an Issue of Airlift”, International Institute for Strategic Studies, *IISS Voices*, 30 January 2013. Available at: <http://iissvoices.blog.wordpress.com/2013/01/30/behind-the-mali-headlines-an-issue-of-airlift/> [accessed 7 May 2014]. Jennings, G. “Analysis: Mali Intervention Highlights France’s Strategic Airlift Gap”, *Defense and Security Intelligence and Analysis: IHS Jane’s*, January 21, 2013. Available at: <http://www.janes.com/products/janes/defence-security-report.aspx?id=1065975360>

19 Canadian Joint Operations Command Public Affairs, “Operation CARAVAN”, Summary of Past CJOC Operations (Ottawa, July 2003). Available at: <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-past/op-caravan.page> [accessed 7 May 2014].

limited areas using the robust force. Likewise, obsessive force did not seem to occur – although it was certainly a concern.²⁰ For example, it was known at the time that man-portable air-defence systems were in the region where Artemis was operating. Therefore, extensive defence and self-protection equipment was carried by most aircraft, plus a combat-search-and-rescue helicopter and a commando group were deployed into the region to prepare for the loss of aircraft and the necessity to extract downed crews. Ultimately, though, the most predominant threat reported was small-calibre weapons fire.²¹

Air assets were able to monitor improvised airstrips being used for the infiltration of weapons to militias in the region by air. Artemis was able to “disrupt the flow of arms into Ituri through the use of helicopter, fixed wing and other surveillance assets”.²²

Artemis provided critical support to MONUC and the broader region by providing the force necessary to insure a diplomatic breakthrough “against the forces of chaos and violence”.²³ The International Crisis Group, a reputable international non-governmental organization (NGO), likewise found that Operation Artemis “largely achieved its stated mandate” through its willingness to use force against “those who interfered with the operation”.²⁴ The French force commander declared that the area of operations, the city of Bunia, would be “‘sans [without] armes’ and his troops acted quickly – sometimes with deadly force – against those who refused to comply” although this was more likely “a case of Bunia without visible arms”.²⁵

Artemis created an excellent demonstration of air power and the options it brings for the progressive use of force.

What could start as a dedicated ISR [Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance] sortie could evolve into a show of force using non-kinetic means such as a high speed pass and possibly culminate in a strike ranging from gun strafing to the use of LGBs [laser-guided bombs].²⁶

With Artemis, an after-action assessment of the French Air Force role argued that air power could provide “effects at the cost of a very small footprint on the ground and little collateral damage”.²⁷

20 Laborie, “The Diplomacy of the Jaguar”, 2008, 25.

21 Galien, “The Tricolor Aloft”, 57.

22 Homan, “Operation Artemis in the DRC”, 153; Sow, “Achievements of the Interim Emergency Multinational Force and Future Scenarios”, 211; International Crisis Group, *Maintaining Momentum in the Congo*, 3.

23 Ibid., 220.

24 International Crisis Group, *Maintaining Momentum in the Congo*, 3.

25 Ibid., n. 14.

26 Laborie, “The Diplomacy of the Jaguar”, 2008, 26.

27 Ibid.

A UN “lessons learned” study of Operation Artemis concluded with recommendations, including the importance of “the use of air surveillance assets to monitor movements of troops, vehicles or aircraft by MONUC”.

After IEMF handed over to MONUC, the United Nations equipped the mission with a powerful asset: armed helicopters. These came in especially useful in the Kivu region of the DRC.

MONUC’s Eastern Division

As MONUC took over responsibility from the European force in September 2003, it managed to acquire observation and attack helicopter units from India that immediately proved their worth, though they were initially not permitted to fly at night for safety reasons and were too few in number to cover the vast territory of the eastern DRC effectively. The infiltration routes for arms and fighters from neighbouring countries were still not monitored, although this reconnaissance and surveillance had been mandated. While some rebel leaders were apprehended and sent to the International Criminal Court after 2005, many others were still roving the land with their bands.²⁸ The United Nations was unable to keep track of their movements or prevent them from pillaging and committing human rights abuses against the general population. MONUC itself was subjected to attacks, kidnappings, and fatalities. Many cordon and search operations proved fruitless. Over time and under necessity, the mission began increasingly robust operations within its Chapter VII mandate.

MONUC created its Eastern Division with Security Council support in 2005 to bring more law and order to the Congo’s “wild East”, especially in the Kivu provinces (Figure 14.2). It was the first time a peacekeeping operation had included a division-sized component, though in the 1960s the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) had two brigades in Katanga. The plan was to bring illegal armed groups, both local and foreign, under control through “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration” programmes and if all else failed to confront them forcefully. MONUC’s new robust rules of engagement permitted combat action to prevent militia attacks on civilians. But a number of hard-line militia leaders, supported by breakaway factions of the DRC army, continued their abuses and illegal mining activities. They intimidated the local population, attacked villages, and clashed among themselves and with the troops of the country’s armed forces (the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, the FARDC). These government troops were themselves frequent perpetrators of human rights violations. Despite having 13,000 UN troops in the East, MONUC’s monitoring and reaction capacity was far from satisfactory in the vast and volatile territory. The leaders began to call for more sophisticated technical means, beginning in 2005.

28 BBC News, “DR Congo Militia Chief Arrested”, World Service, 22 March 2005. Web edition, sec. Africa. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4370843.stm>

Neither the Congolese government nor MONUC had resources to track aircraft, let alone control them, in the country's airspace. Commercial aircraft travel in the east depended on the limited air traffic control provided mostly from neighbouring countries. To complicate matters, hundreds of landing strips, built in the era of Congo's dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, were available for arms smuggling with little chance of detection – the United Nations could not afford to place UN military observers at such a large number of landing strips. A Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) was sent by UN Headquarters to the DRC to identify "the exact nature of the surveillance assets". The JAM recommended the acquisition of three mobile surveillance radars, with an effective range of 150–250 km each, "to provide timely warning to enable airborne operations against smugglers".²⁹

For aerial surveillance, the JAM noted that:

With the exception of one flight of Indian Alouette III helicopters, MONUC has no dedicated aerial surveillance capability. It has no airborne imaging capability at all, and no night surveillance capability.³⁰

It observed that "the provision of day and night aerial surveillance assets would have an early and positive impact", and specifically recommended unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for local surveillance and overwatch of operations. UAVs had been deployed temporarily in 2006 in western DRC by the European Union Force (EUFOR) during the elections. A UAV contractor bidding process was aborted in 2010 but a new one was launched in 2013. For airspace surveillance, the JAM also noted: "MONUC needs a capability to monitor/control the airspace in eastern DRC". It recommended that MONUC "deploy three mobile air surveillance radars on wheels for temporary surveillance of selected airspace". To accentuate the problem, MONUC suffered numerous fatalities. For instance, in February 2005, a Nepalese officer engaged in providing protection to human rights investigators was fatally shot as he tried to board a departing helicopter. A subsequent investigation showed that MONUC lacked even a basic awareness of the militia's position, strength, equipment, mobility, logistical resources, commanders, organization, and intent.

Engaged in a robust peace operation without the full complement of tools, MONUC's Eastern Division commander strongly supported the conclusions of the JAM. In June 2005, Major General Patrick Cammaert, a senior MONUC military commander, declared a "critical shortfall in dedicated surveillance and intelligence-gathering assets with sufficient reach to provide commanders with accurate, timely and comprehensive intelligence". He identified an urgent requirement for "an aerial surveillance platform with the ability of near real-time

29 DPKO, "Report of the Joint Assessment Mission on Intelligence Assets Requirements of MONUC (11 to 19 April 2005)" (JAM Report), DPKO internal document, 2005.

30 Ibid.

enhanced video, geo-coordinated reference data, thermal imagers, and compatible downlink for communications down to the tactical level”.³¹ In response, UN Headquarters approved a US\$5.8 million budget item for aerial surveillance and initiated a bidding process.³² But to the frustration of the mission leaders, UN Headquarters could identify no compliant or suitable bids from industry.³³ The story became worse after several attempts failed (until finally succeeding in 2013) to contract UAVs for the mission, as noted above.

Despite the setbacks, MONUC has enjoyed more capacity and some remarkable success. It has engaged in extensive cordon and search operations and has employed mobile operating bases and surgical operations using Special Forces equipped with night-vision goggles. With enhanced capabilities for night flying, its attack helicopters were able to support many ground initiatives to prevent militia atrocities. In November 2006, it was able to halt an attack on the town of Goma. Also in 2006, MONUC supervised the largest and most complex elections ever overseen by the United Nations, allowing millions of voters to go to the ballot boxes in relative peace. The EUFOR provided UAVs (Belgian B-Hunters) to assist the UN mission during the tense time. In the DRC, monitoring technology was making a difference and field commanders continued to call for more.

The Mission's Mi-35 Attack Helicopters

The Mi-35 attack helicopter has become a symbol of robust UN peace operations (Figure 14.2). A powerful surveillance, troop transport, and weapons platform, this helicopter was originally designated the “Hind” by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the Cold War.³⁴ Designed to fight NATO armoured forces on the central plains of Europe, it was deployed by the Soviet military

31 Major-General Patrick Cammaert, “Headquarters Eastern Division Requirement”, message from Eastern Division Commander Cammaert to MONUC Force Commander, 24 June 2005, MONUC files.

32 The United Nations budgeted US\$5.83 million for an “airborne surveillance system” for MONUC for 2006–2007. The request was advertised by the UN Procurement Service United Nations. Source: MONUC, “2006–7 Acquisition Plan – UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, 2006. Available at: http://www.un.org/Depts/ptd/2007_monuc.htm

33 MONUC leaders felt the firm Airscan, which had earlier approached them to provide such a service, would have been satisfactory, but the firm was deemed non-compliant in New York because some of its services had been used by governments in South America and Africa to commit human rights abuses. See: International Labor Rights Forum. “Lawsuit Filed Against Occidental Petroleum for Involvement in Colombian Massacre”, 24 April 2003. Available at: <http://www.laborrights.org/end-violence-against-trade-unions/colombia/news/11403> [accessed 7 May 2014]. Also see O’Brien, K.A. (1998), “Military–Advisory Groups and African Security: Privatised Peacekeeping?”, *International Peacekeeping* 5(3), 78–105.

34 Center for Army Lessons Learned, “Hind”, *Center for Army Lessons Learned Thesaurus* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Combined Arms Center,



Figure 14.2 The Mi-35 helicopter gunship used in robust peacekeeping

Source: UN Photo #200146, 17 September 2008, C. Herwig.

in Afghanistan and by several African dictators, including Mobutu, President of the Congo (then called Zaire), to suppress their populations. So it was ironic that this instrument of oppression became an instrument for peace when deployed by Indian forces assigned to MONUC and flown under the UN flag.

Used by MONUC since 2004, the four attack helicopters of the Indian Aviation Contingent, based in Goma, are equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance systems. Though the sensors are designed for target identification and engagement, they are also used extensively for area reconnaissance in support of ground troops in the eastern Congo.

The helicopter's value in the Congo has been demonstrated many times, especially when the rebel group known as the CNDP (Congrès national pour la défense du peuple, or National Congress for the Defence of the People) attempted to attack Goma in 2006 and in 2008. In both cases, the Mi-35 helicopters aided the ground troops of MONUC and the Congolese army (the FARDC) by determining the exact locations of the rebels and, when necessary, aiming rockets or machine-gun fire directly at them.

The CNDP's first major advance on Goma in November 2006 brought the rebels to a town called Sake, some 20 km west of Goma. At this critical juncture,

17 September 2008). Available at: <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/thesaurus/toc.asp?id=36442>

the small fleet of UN attack helicopters was used to maintain an overwatch and continuously update MONUC forces on the positions of friendly forces and militia in the area. In one prominent case, the CNDP established a camp near the cell phone tower (Celtel) on a ridge west of Sake. The attack helicopter's onboard sensors were used to scan the Celtel Tower Ridge and 60–100 renegade troops were found at the upper camp, while the FARDC were at the lower camp. It was observed that the forces were exchanging fire with the FARDC troops using machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.³⁵ The onboard sensors enabled the crew to relay information about “tubular” and “tripod-mounted” structures that appeared to be rocket launchers and mortars respectively in the CNDP-held area.³⁶

On other flights the helicopter crews observed rebel militia clearing areas of growth and engaging in construction. They also reported on deserted villages and civilians fleeing violence.³⁷ The crews could inform MONUC about the presence or absence of rebel movements along important roads, especially those used in the rebel advance towards Goma.³⁸ The helicopters were usually not on offensive missions, so the militia were not much deterred from their activities and even ignored the presence of helicopters.³⁹ But during the intense periods, when the United Nations had warned the CNDP not to advance, the militia would often disperse after spotting or hearing the approaching attack helicopters. During ground battles, on-scene UN commanders observed that rebel firing would usually stop after the arrival of an Mi-35, though not always.

In addition to a colour television camera, the helicopters had fourth-generation, forward-looking infrared (FLIR) cameras and the crew were equipped with special goggles for night flying, which was permitted in special circumstances. The night flights detected hidden militia camps operating with the intent of overwhelming and threatening Goma. Since the militia often moved forward at night to prepare for dawn attacks, the FLIR provided crucial intelligence on developing threats. For instance, on 26 November 2006 an attack helicopter detected a vehicle plying the Sake–Goma road with its headlights off. Closer tracking revealed that this vehicle was shuttling between two towns, stopping on the road as large numbers of armed personnel emerged from their jungle cover at the roadside to meet the occupants. The helicopter concluded that renegade militia were hiding off the Sake–Goma road in order to group for an assault towards Goma. The Indian battalion patrols in the vicinity were advised accordingly and they were able to confirm the deduction by making contact. This vital information could then be passed to the brigade headquarters located in Goma in order to mount joint operations to repel the

35 MONUC After Mission Reports (“AMRs”) were provided to the author by the mission with permission of the Chief of Staff Forward. See: MONUC, “After Mission Report” (AMR), UNO–888, 26 November 2006 (0612–0748 hrs).

36 MONUC, “After Mission Report”, UNO–887, 26 November 2006 (0910–1041 hrs).

37 MONUC, “After Mission Report”, UNO–886, 26 November 2006 (0945–1116 hrs).

38 MONUC, “After Mission Report”, UNO–888, 26 November 2006 (1410–1530 hrs).

39 MONUC, “After Mission Report”, UNO–886, 26 November 2006 (1256–1438 hrs).

threat.⁴⁰ The Mi-35 helicopters provided “area domination and surveillance” on the Sake–Goma road and helped to halt militia advances towards Goma in Fall 2006.

The CNDP once again threatened Goma in the period September to November 2008 and, once again, the Mi-35 provided early warning and a potent means to repel the rebel advance. Local UN ground commanders sometimes called for helicopter backup after being attacked. Such was the case on 19 September 2008 when both FARDC and MONUC positions were assaulted near the town of Masisi, some 70 km northwest of Goma. The attack helicopter quickly made radio contact with the local MONUC commander of the Contingency Operating Base (COB), who relayed the supposed position of the rebels on the Kahungole ridge. The nearby FARDC identified their own positions using smoke and white flags. The rebel positions were confirmed by the helicopter crew using visual observation and Mi-35 sensors. The helicopter carried out dummy dives to warn and deter the CNDP elements. After the COB commander reported that CNDP cadres were continuing to threaten UN forces, the helicopter fired a warning shot. When rebel firing continued, salvos of rockets were launched on the CNDP position. This finally caused the CNDP to pull back and stop shooting. The mission was accomplished without any collateral damage and fratricide thanks to the accurate firing from the attack helicopters.

Despite UN warnings and defensive actions, several thousand rebel troops attempted for over two months to seize Goma in 2008. On 28 October 2008, as the rebel offensive continued, an Mi-35 crew was briefed by senior MONUC officers, including the Indian Brigade commander and the Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS) Forward, Colonel James Cunliffe. The officials shared intelligence on CNDP cadres concentrating in the jungles near the Nyiragongo volcano for an attack on Goma in the night. The attack helicopter arrived in the general area and established radio contact with a MONUC Forward Air Controller (FAC). The DCOS was the on-scene commander. The FAC directed the helicopter towards the location of the “negative elements”, as they were called. The helicopter also received information from FARDC troops on the CNDP positions, though the communications with FARDC troops proved technically problematic due to incompatible radio sets.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the attack helicopter identified the ground target and carried out a dummy dive as a warning. The FAC delineated the Forward Line of Own Troops and gave explicit details on the disposition of UN ground troops. He also confirmed the absence of friendly troops and civilians in the vicinity of the target area. The attack helicopters assessed the appropriate attack direction, having to keep clear of the line of fire of a FARDC tank and two army vehicles fitted with heavy-

40 MONUC, “After Mission Report”, UNO–887, 26 November 2006 (1705–1831 hrs).

41 The Mi-35 crew later suggested that the ground troops be provided with sets for direct communication with the helicopter since this is a mandatory requirement for the use of attack helicopters when providing fire support to ground forces. In another sortie, the attack helicopters had to communicate with ground forces via an UN Lama helicopter that was also in the area.

calibre automatic weapons that were sporadically engaging the rebel target. After receiving confirmation from the FAC, the attack helicopter fired warning shots at the rebel positions. The FAC confirmed that the target was correctly identified. The helicopter then engaged the target during two more passes. The accuracy of the fire was confirmed by the FAC after each pass and the helicopter orbited the target area to carry out a damage assessment.

The helicopter fired again as the government ground troops commenced their assault on the target. This fire had to be accurate because of the forward movement of the FARDC troops. The helicopter carried out a final live pass, engaging the target with four rockets. Henceforth, the proximity of FARDC troops to the target meant no more helicopter attacks could be mounted. Approaching the end of its 1.5-hr flight endurance, the helicopter was replaced on station by another Mi-35. The helicopter crew remarked in their After Mission Report:

The operation was successful in stopping CNDP advance and stopping their concentration, preparatory to attack on Goma. The attack helicopter support was decisive in stopping the FARDC from falling back, boosting their morale and thus encouraging them to advance and attack the CNDP positions and reclaim lost ground. This was possible due to the co-location of the ground FAC and FARDC officers [so] the operation and the attack helicopter support could be coordinated.⁴²

The helicopter and ground actions achieved this tactical success, but the CNDP continued its advance from other directions. The next day, an Mi-35 was dispatched along the Goma–Rutshuru road. About 10 km north of Goma, the attack helicopter observed Congolese troops and army vehicles, including tanks and BMPs,⁴³ moving in retreat towards Goma. The on-scene commander, again DCOS Cunliffe, informed the Mi-35 crew by radio that the army was withdrawing after a battle with the rebels. Furthermore, the CNDP rebels were advancing in company strength along the road towards Goma. Both UN and FARDC troops were being fired upon with small arms and mortars from about 2–3 km north of Cunliffe’s position, which also marked the Forward Line of Own Troops. Colonel Cunliffe approved a helicopter engagement with the CNDP rebel cadre north of his position. The attack helicopter pilots identified the positions from which the rebels were firing. After ascertaining that there were no civilians in the area, the attack helicopters engaged them with four 57 mm rockets. The mission report did not give a damage or casualty assessment. The attack helicopter then reconnoitred the area north using the on-board scanners, but could not spot any movement. The

42 MONUC, “After Mission Report”, UNO–889, 28 October 2008.

43 The BMP (“Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty”) is a Russian-designed infantry fighting vehicle, combining the features of an armoured personnel carrier (APC) and a light tank.

DCOS asked for a scan of the Rwandan border for possible military elements. No such elements were located.⁴⁴

The limits of joint and combined jungle warfare were shown when an Mi-35 sought to engage CNDP elements near Kibumba at the base of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano on 29 October 2008. After hearing reports of fire on FARDC troops, the crew spent 30 minutes scanning the target area with its TV camera, seeking to spot any movement or arms fire. Finally it found 7 or 8 men approximately 3 km west of the FARDC location moving towards the forest at the base of the volcano. Before engaging, the attack helicopter needed to obtain reassurance that there were no FARDC soldiers in the area. Since the FARDC commander took 7–8 minutes to confirm that these were of the CNDP rebel cadre, the men were able to disappear in the jungle and the attack helicopter lost its ability to track and target them.⁴⁵

The attack helicopter had other limitations as a sensor and weapons platform. Helicopters could typically remain on site for only 1.5 hrs before returning to refuel. They were also limited by poor weather conditions, which sometimes forced them to return early. Nevertheless, in the crucial test of September–November 2008 they proved to be a key enabler to repel aggression. The rebel attack on Goma was thwarted. The United Nations had protected a major population centre, something it had failed to do in other missions. This success served as a lesson on the utility of robust peacekeeping. When India decided to withdraw the Mi-35 aircraft in 2011, citing needs back home, the United Nations made it a priority to find a replacement and Ukraine stepped in to provide the Mi-35 service.

The Mi-35 attack helicopter (or its variants) has been used successfully not only in the DRC but also in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and (much earlier) in Croatia. It is a highly mobile and powerful platform for peace enforcement. The United Nations has made progress in the twenty-first century to incorporate such forceful means into some of its operations. There are many more cases to be studied and lessons to be learned about how to use attack helicopters. The use of force for peacekeeping is an irony and a dilemma with tremendous importance for the peace of the world.

44 MONUC, "After Mission Report", UNO-888, 29 October 2008 (0855h–1027hrs.).

45 Even though it had lost sight of the confirmed CNDP fighters, it fired in their general area repeatedly with 28 rockets. The success of these shots could not be ascertained due to thick vegetation in the area. The crew remarked in the after mission report: "A golden opportunity to engage CNDP cadre in the open and thus helping stem their advance was lost due to the long channel of communication between on-scene Cdr [commander] and Attack Helicopter". It also recommended that as far as possible, the commander should be on-scene "to provide accurate and timely intelligence and guidance to Attack Helicopter" (MONUC, "After Mission Report", UNO-888, 29 October 2008 (0855h–1027hrs)).

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