



# Peacekeepers in Combat: Protecting Civilians in the D.R. Congo

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## Abstract

Largely uncredited in public media and academic literature, the United Nations has used armed force frequently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), probably more than in any other UN peacekeeping operation. Though unheralded, this saved lives and protected cities and towns. However, attacks on civilians in DRC are so frequent and widespread that many times the mission has been unable to respond in a timely fashion. To save more lives and gain trust in the local population, a much greater UN effort is needed to support robust measures, with more resources, determination and accountability (for inaction as well as action), even as “donor fatigue” sets in for a mission that has been operating since 1999. Still, it is important for peacekeeping as a whole to recognize and learn from cases of use of force against Congolese illegal armed groups (IAGs), like the ADF, CNDP, FDLR, FRPI, and M23. These cases show some remarkable successes, including removing some major POC threats, fracturing rebel groups, increasing UN deterrence, and enhancing the rule of law in the still untamed “Wild East” of the immense African country.

## Keywords

combat – Congo – peace operation – protection – United Nations – use of force

## 1 Introduction

Peacekeepers are not known to be fighters. For many observers, it is hard to even cite a single instance where the blue helmets engaged in combat to fulfil

a mandate, especially the protection of civilians (POC). But it has happened frequently in the twenty-first century, after the hard lessons of the 1990s when peacekeepers more often than not failed to act robustly to prevent the slaughter of civilians. In 1999, the Security Council endorsed the idea that UN peace operations should be authorized, and indeed mandated, to use force for POC. Accordingly, in over a half-dozen newly created missions, the Security Council mandated peacekeepers to use “all necessary means”, within their capabilities and areas of operation, to protect civilians “under imminent threat”. Thus began a twenty-first-century norm of robust Security Council mandates for multidimensional peace operations.<sup>1</sup>

However, in practice, peacekeepers still failed often to react robustly when atrocities were being committed, leaving civilians to die unnecessarily, sometimes near UN bases. But in a growing number of cases, the UN soldiers did act robustly, if not at the time of the first attack, then later to neutralize armed groups that were a continuing threat. Unfortunately for the United Nations, instances of peacekeepers acting with force are seldom described and are mostly unknown. The foundational reference book, *The Use of Force in Peace Operations*<sup>2</sup> only describes operations up to 2001, a 50-plus year period where force was hardly used for POC. Naturally, the work cannot describe or analyze the use of force applications in the new century. And the United Nations itself is hesitant to broadcast to the world the cases when its peacekeepers have used force.<sup>3</sup> Even the oversight office within the United Nations was unaware of how frequently force has been used.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, the literature on peacekeepers

1 Adamczyk, Sarah. ‘Twenty Years of Protection of Civilians at the UN Security Council’, *HPG Policy Brief*, no. 74, 2019, pp. 1–13, available at <https://www.odi.org/publications/11348-twenty-years-protection-civilians-un-security-council>.

2 Trevor Findlay, *The Use of Force in Peacekeeping*. SIPRI and Oxford University Press, 2002.

3 The United Nations itself has been rather shy in making studies of its use of force in the field, perhaps because the organization does not want to showcase the violence committed as it works to enhance peace. For instance, the UN mission in the DRC wanted UN headquarters to conduct a best practices study after the M23 neutralization, particularly the Kiwanja major heliborne operations of October 2013. This would have provided valuable lessons on how to avoid massacres, like the one the CNDP committed in Kiwanja in 2008 not far from a UN base. But the mission received no answer from UN headquarters, even as the mission’s plans, reports, analysis were shared with UNHQ. Major-General Jean Baillaud, e-mail to the author, 16 November 2020.

4 A 2014 UN review concluded that ‘force is almost never used to protect civilians under attack’ (United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services. ‘Evaluation of the implementation and results of protection of civilians mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations’, 7 March 2014, UN Doc. A/68/787.) It ‘noted a persistent pattern of peacekeeping operations not intervening with force when civilians are under attack’. The cases in the current paper show otherwise.

in combat is starting to grow.<sup>5</sup> More instances of peacekeepers in combat are being publicized and new insights are being gained. But important questions remain: How have the UN soldiers used force to protect civilians and what was the outcome? Has the United Nations found the right balance in applying both destructive and constructive means to protect people?

The regular (quarterly or semi-annual) reports of the UN Secretary-General (SG) on each peace operation describe the main events within the missions. They ought to and often at least mention cases when the field mission engaged in the use of force. A review of the relevant passages in the SG reports on peace operations, using the United Nations Protection of Civilians Operations (UNPOCO) dataset of Stian Kjeksrud, shows 41 cases of use of force for POC by “destruction” (i.e., combat).<sup>6</sup>

The country where the world organization most frequently engaged in combat for POC is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). According to UNPOCO, 34 of the 41 cases of combat for POC were recorded in SG reports for the missions in the DRC—and these are only a small fraction of the combat cases in the DRC. The other missions and conducting combat for POC in UNPOCO were: Central Africa Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Sierra Leone. These underestimates suggest that the mission reports of UN Secretary-General reports do not highlight combat actions. But they do provide important pointers.

In the case of the UN’s Congo mission reports, there are enough cases to analyze and categorize them. This paper reviews these cases, drawing mostly from the SG reports to elaborate on these events. The paper first briefly overviews the early and significant use of force in the UN’s mission in the Congo in the 1960s—the most robust peacekeeping operation of the Cold War. The

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5 See, for instance: Paul D. Williams, ‘How Peacekeepers Fight: Assessing Combat Effectiveness in United Nations Peace Operations’, *Security Studies*, vol. 32, issue 1, pp. 32–65. Also: Mats Berdal, ‘What Are the Limits to the Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping?’ in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, edited by Cedric de Coning and Mateja Peter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2019. Williams estimates the peacekeepers engaged in over 170 battles between 2000 and 2020. He describes several cases of combat in DRC against various forces: Mai-Mai Mazembe (Buleusa, June 2016); ADF (Semuliki, December 2017); and Mai-Mai Yakutumba (Uvira, September 2017).

6 The UNPOCO (United Nations Protection of Civilians Operations) dataset captures the cases of use of force for POC in African conflicts from 2000 to 2017 that are reported in SG Reports. It categorizes the 200 identified UN military operations to protect civilians. Stian Kjeksrud, ‘Using Force to Protect Civilians: A Comparative Analysis of United Nations Military Protection Operations’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Oslo, 2019), available at <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/68457>.

paper then reviews the combat operations of other missions in the Congo. The operations in the Congo were (with acronyms arising from the French names<sup>7</sup>):

- ONUC (United Nations Operation in the Congo), 1960–64
- MONUC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), 1999–2010
- MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), 2010–present.

The paper concludes with insights and lessons from the robust actions of the UN's missions in that war-torn country.

## 2 Prelude: Combat in Katanga (1961–63)

The United Nations first fought in the Congo in the period 1961–63 against mercenary-led forces of Moïse Tshombé, who had declared the secession of his Katanga province only 11 days after the Congo had achieved its independence in 1960. The Security Council authorized the UN mission to use force to prevent civil war. The Council expanded the mandate to the capture of mercenaries in Katanga after Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld died in September 1961 in a plane crash while on a mission to bring about reconciliation with Tshombé. On several occasions, the UN operation in the Congo (ONUC) deployed peacekeepers to protect civilians, including 30,000 Baluba in a threatened displaced persons camp. After mixed results from earlier robust actions (Operations Rum Punch and Morthor), the United Nations waited until the opportune moment to respond to provocations.<sup>8</sup> After Katangan forces shot down a helicopter in December 1962, the mission responded with force. ONUC used the fighter aircraft contributed by Sweden,<sup>9</sup> and ground forces from India,

7 The acronyms come from the French names of the UN missions: ONUC (*Opération des Nations Unies au Congo*); MONUC (*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo*); MONUSCO (*Mission de l'organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en RD Congo*).

8 The UN mission in the Congo launched operations Morthor and Rumpunch in August–September 1961, but the results were mixed. At the same time, the mission struggled to protect remotely stationed peacekeepers, including near Jadotville, where Irish peacekeepers had to fend off multiple attacks. This was brought to the public awareness in the Netflix movie 'The Siege of Jadotville' (Smythe, 2016), based on a book by Declan Power, *Siege at Jadotville: The Irish Army's Forgotten Battle*, Blackstone Publishing, 2005.

9 Dorn, Walter. 'The UN's First 'Air Force': Peacekeepers in Combat, Congo 1960–64', *Journal of Military History* 77, no. 4 (October 2013), pp. 1399–1425. Dorn, Walter. 'Peacekeepers in Combat: Fighter Jets and Bombers in the Congo, 1961–63' in *Air Power in UN Operations: Wings for Peace* edited by W. Dorn (Ashgate, 2014), pp. 17–39, available at <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315566313>.

Ireland, and other nations to seize major installations, capture mercenaries, and repel other attacks. The mission successfully ended the rebellion and kept the country together. But this extremely taxing ONUC mission brought the United Nations to the brink of bankruptcy and caused much division among UN member states, especially when collateral damage from UN combat was reported. UN peacekeepers did not return to the Congo (or Africa for that matter) until the end of the Cold War. And it was only in the new century that the United Nations again used armed force in the Congo, first in self-defence,<sup>10</sup> and later for POC.

### 3 Battle of Bunia (2003)

MONUC was deployed to the fractious Congo in 1999 even though the second of two nearly consecutive civil wars had not yet ended. And after the 2003 peace agreement, MONUC had to deal with foreign militaries who had stayed in the country. Both Uganda and Rwanda claimed their forces in the province in the northeastern province of Ituri—near their borders (see Figure 1)—were essential to prevent tribal fighting, especially between the Hema and Lendu tribes in Ituri. At the same time, these foreign forces were exploiting the precious mineral resources of the region. Under strong international pressure, the two countries officially withdrew their forces in May 2003. The government could not afford local security, so to fill the security vacuum the European Union deployed a robust stop-gap mission (*Opération Artémis*, June–Sept), while the United Nations gained time to boost its own mission.<sup>11</sup> This short EU mission used substantial force, including fighter jets that would break the sound barrier to create sonic booms as a show of force. The mission suppressed rebel groups in small but important areas, notably in Bunia, allowing the United Nations time to build up its own forces, though these UN forces were not nearly as robust as the EU forces.

In September, the situation became dire, as tribes were engaged in attacks and counterattacks against each other and occasionally targeted the United Nations. Over 400 civilians died in the regional capital, Bunia, over the span of half-a-year. Even as the UN's Ituri Brigade was being established, UN

10 Reuters, 'Congo: Peacekeepers Fire at Protesters', *New York Times*, 10 October 2002; and *New York Times*, 'Congo: Renegade Commanders Capture City', 3 June 2004.

11 To allow UN forces time to build up, the European Union deployed to Ituri a 6-month mission called Operation Artemis. The aerial component of the operation is described in Dorn, 'Combat Air Power in the Congo, 2003–'.

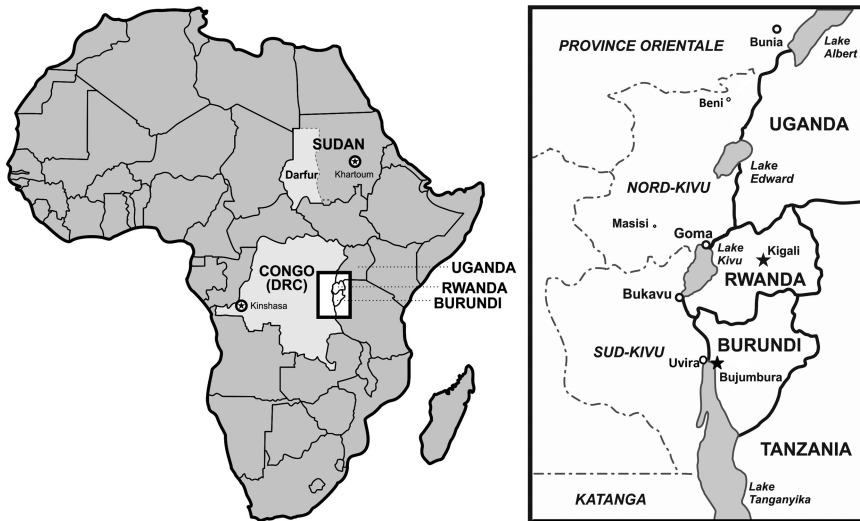


FIGURE 1 Map of Africa and the Eastern DRC Congo.

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headquarters was hesitant to authorize force because of frictions that might arise with rebels. The SG's report on MONUC's first major use of force downplays the action, stating only: "there were still some hostile incidents, but there was no significant deterioration in the overall security situation in Bunia". In reality, much UN combat was involved.

The main Hema political party and militia was the *Union des patriotes Congolais* (UPC), founded by Thomas Lubanga Dyilo. On 15 September 2003, the UPC sought to take over Bunia by "promoting riots and orchestrating attacks on UN military units".<sup>12</sup> In response, MONUC surrounded the UPC political-military headquarters in the southern part of the town, arresting some 50 militiamen and seizing weapons and ammunition. As militiamen shot at UN troops and vehicles, the mission found itself forced to "clear the town" from south to north, fighting "block by block", causing many militia fatalities.<sup>13</sup> The next day a mass of uniformed UPC militiamen, using civilians as a shield, approached the town. MONUC was serious about protecting the town and flew its newly acquired attack helicopters (Mi-35 from India). Helicopter's crew open fire on the advance truck carrying 10 militiamen moving towards

12 Isberg, Jan-Gunnar, Lotta Victor Tillberg, and Samuel Svärd, *By All Necessary Means: Brigadier General Jan-Gunnar Isberg's experiences from service in the Congo 2003–2005*: Trans. Stephen Henly. Stockholm: Svenskt Militärhistoriskt Biblioteks Förlag, 2012.

13 *Ibid.* 'In the evening we found quite a lot of dead and wounded militiamen. We had also arrested another 20 militiamen, identified as riot leaders'.

the town after the UN aircrew realised weapons from the truck were aiming at aircraft.<sup>14</sup> This caused the UPC militia to reverse course and return to the bush. It was an early case of using force to prevent an impending attack.

Bunia was saved but the UPC (UPC/L) continued to fight in other locations in Ituri, particularly against the Lendu's *Front nationaliste intégrationiste* (FNI), which itself was predatory on civilians. After many house burnings by both sides, MONUC "dismantled" (destroyed) several militia camps to reduce their fighting capacity. Typically, the UN would allow the militia inhabitants to scatter before destroying a camp. At one FNI headquarters in Loga, MONUC troops came under fire from FNI. "During the ensuing exchange of fire, between 50 and 60 FNI militia members were killed and two MONUC soldiers from Pakistan were injured".<sup>15</sup> UN and government actions against UPC and FNI continued for years, including the arrest of their leaders.<sup>16</sup> The UPC's Deputy Chief, Bosco Ntaganda left for North Kivu to join the newly formed National Congress for the Defence of the People (French: *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* or CNDP).

#### 4 Saving Goma (2006–08)

After the largely successful DRC election of 2005, the main threat to the civilian population centres in eastern Congo came from the CNDP. It was made up mostly of Congolese Tutsi (Banyamulenge) and was supported by elements of the Rwandan political elite, which wanted to keep a foothold in eastern DRC to pursue many economic interests, especially natural resource mining. The Rwandan government also sought to counter and ultimately defeat combatants from the former Rwandan (Hutu) regime which had taken refuge in DRC. The Rwanda-supported CNDP was the largest, best organised and resourced of the many armed groups.

In 2004, rebel (future CNDP) forces attacked and temporarily occupied Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province. The United Nations was much criticized for not protecting that city. When the CNDP moved to seize Goma, the

14 UN News 'UN Helicopter in DR of Congo Fires at Militias in Self-defence', 16 September 2003.

15 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUC*, 15 March 2005, UN Doc. S/2005/167.

16 Mamiya, Ralph. 'Engaging with Nonstate Armed Groups to Protect Civilians: A Pragmatic Approach for UN Peace Operations', *International Peace Institute*. 25 October 2018, available at <https://www.ipinst.org/2018/10/engaging-with-non-state-armed-groups-to-protect-civilians>. The UPC founder Thomas Lubanga was arrested by Congolese authorities in 2005 and later sentenced by the International Criminal Court to 14 years in prison.



capital of North Kivu province, in 2006 and again 2008, MONUC was determined to help the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) defend the town and its million inhabitants.

When the FARDC brigade was unable to stop the advance of CNDP forces, the government called for UN support. On 19 September 2008, when both FARDC and MONUC positions were assaulted near the town of Masisi, the UN's Mi-35 attack helicopters from India carried out a series of operations, using presence, show of force, simulated attack runs, and warning shots to deter the CNDP elements. As rebel firing continued, salvos of rockets were launched on the CNDP position. This use of force 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 and the targeting information provided by the MONUC troops on the ground.

Similarly, on 28 October 2008, rebels concentrated at night in the jungles near the Nyiragongo volcano for an attack on Goma. Air reconnaissance closely monitored their movements. The UN forward air controller directed Mi-35 helicopters to engage the targets during several passes using the onboard night-vision equipment. The landing positions of the 57 mm rocket fire were confirmed after each pass. FARDC troops then moved to new blocking positions around the city. On this and subsequent attempts in 2008, the CNDP was unable to take Goma. It also made the attackers and their patrons (Rwanda especially) realize that the cost of seizing Goma was higher than if there was no UN presence. The United Nations had protected a major population centre, something it had failed to do in Bukavu (2004) and in other instances and missions. This success served as a lesson in the utility of robust peacekeeping.

Eventually, the CNDP agreed to give up its rebellion, signed a peace treaty on 23 March 2009, and partly integrated into the FARDC. However, in April 2012, a splinter-group of former CNDP members broke away from the FARDC to start a new rebel group called the *Mouvement du 23 mars* (M23), named to “protect” the 2009 agreement, which the M23 claimed that DRC President Joseph Kabila had violated. The M23 was much better prepared than its predecessor, the CNDP.

## 5 Losing Goma (Temporarily)

In November 2012, the M23 achieved what the CNDP could not: the occupation of Goma, albeit only for two weeks. At first, the UN mission attempted in July to stop the gradual M23 advance towards Goma by sending attack helicopters



to fire on M23 positions.<sup>17</sup> But the M23 regrouped, and its numbers swelled, as many members of the FARDC defected. It also had direct and indirect support from Rwanda, including night vision equipment, modern weapons and intelligence.<sup>18</sup> On 15 November, the M23 were at the periphery of Goma. The UN mission (now called MONUSCO) used attack helicopters (Mi-24 from Ukraine) in 18 sorties, firing a record 620 rockets and 4 missiles.<sup>19</sup> All combined, UN air and ground forces also fired some 5,300 rounds of ammunition. But the M23 “bypassed” MONUSCO positions, engaged in night-time fighting and sent “considerable neutralizing fire”. The M23 took control over most of Goma but did not seize UN positions, like the regional headquarters on Lake Kivu. When the M23 attempted to take the airport, MONUSCO provided a “robust” and successful defence.<sup>20</sup>

Substantial international pressure on Rwanda, as well as the M23, led to the M23’s withdrawal from Goma, which it did on 1 December. The M23, now flush with many guns and much loot, remained as a serious menace to the security of the eastern Congo. To “neutralize” it and other armed groups in eastern Congo, the Security Council<sup>21</sup> created the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in March 2013, with a mandate to conduct “targeted offensive operations” against rebel groups, the first time a peacekeeping operation was explicitly given an offensive mandate.<sup>22</sup> The first main target was the M23.

17 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 14 December 2012, UN Doc. S/2012/838.

18 The UN’s Group of Experts on the DRC had concluded that the government of Rwanda was providing arms and ammunition, in violation of the SC embargo (UNSC, ‘Letter dated 12 October 2012 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo’ 15 November 2012). MONUSCO provided further evidence of the Experts Group report of ‘external support’, when it saw M23 entering Goma with ‘equipment and ammunition that were not part of FARDC stocks, such as M60-type rifle grenades’ (UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 15 February 2013, UN Doc. S/2013/96). Probably Rwandan support went even further: advisers on the ground, communication interception (including MONUSCO comms), logistics, medical support and possibly even direct fire support from Rwanda itself.

19 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 14 December 2012.

20 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 15 February 2013.

21 UNSC Resolution 2098 (2013).

22 Charles T. Hunt, and Lisa Sharland, ‘Implementing R2P through United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Opportunities and Challenges’, Chapter 11 in *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect: A Future Agenda*. United Kingdom, Taylor and Francis, 2019. and Dennis M. Tull, ‘The Limits and Unintended Consequences of UN Peace Enforcement: The Force Intervention Brigade in the DR Congo’, *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 25, issue 2, 2019, pp. 167–190.

## 6 Neutralizing the M23

MONUSCO, with its new FIB, achieved one of the most robust and successful applications of force in UN history when it worked alongside the Congolese armed forces to neutralize the M23.

The UN mission (MONUSCO) worked closely with the FARDC in military operations in late August 2013. Extensive aerial intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) was conducted with UN helicopters (using high powered paparazzi-styled cameras). Also, ground observers using binoculars and night vision devices mapped out the positions of M23 forces at the Kibati Heights, north of Goma. The rebel forces fired occasional mortars and howitzer shells into Goma, causing not only civilian deaths but threatening the airport where UN aviation assets were based. Even after MONUSCO fired warning artillery rounds, the M23 continued shelling Goma.<sup>23</sup>

Any operation against the M23 required that it be pushed away from the Heights, especially the area called “Triple Towers”, so that the M23 could not retaliate against Goma by shelling it. On 30 August 2013, MONUSCO targeted the M23 positions with both artillery fire and attack helicopter strikes. The FARDC’s ground forces then launched an assault on the M23 strongholds with MONUSCO providing support with its artillery, mortars, ground troops and attack helicopters, including Rooivalk helicopters from South Africa. Over 12 days, the M23 managed to inflict fatalities on the FIB and FARDC troops, but the rebel group was forced to move north from Goma to Kibumba. The UN mission kept a close watch on the M23, especially as the rebel group engaged in several skirmishes with the FARDC over the next two months. At the same time, negotiations were being conducted between the M23 and the DRC government in Kampala, Uganda.

Heavy fighting broke out again on 25 October. The FIB and FARDC forced the M23 into retreat. Based on joint planning and with a view to avoid human rights violations (as seen in the 2008 operations), MONUSCO deployed a FIB task force in Kiwanja UN base, near Rutshuru, even though it was occupied by M23. The United Nations included helicopter support (Mi-8, Oryxes and one Mi-26). When the FARDC offensive reached near the town, the Mi-26 (on temporary assignment from Sudan) was dispatched and the FIB task force was separated into three different elements to support the FARDC. The united effort blocked the M23 from entering the town.<sup>24</sup> On 27–30 October, the

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23 Baillaud, e-mail to the author.

24 Olivier, Darren. ‘How M23 Was Rolled Back’, *African Defence Review*, 30 October 2013, available at <https://www.africandefence.net/analysis-how-m23-was-rolled-back>.

Congolese armed forces regained control over several towns, reaching as far as the Ugandan border. The M23 was forced to retreat to a small triangle of territory around Mbuzi, Tchanzu and Runyoni. But it carried out sporadic shelling of Bunagana on 4 November, killing civilians, until the FARDC gained control over the remaining M23 strongholds on 4 and 5 November, with the support of the UN's Rooivalk attack helicopters. All the remaining M23 elements fled across the border overnight into Uganda and especially Rwanda, which had been supporting the rebels.<sup>25</sup>

The M23 finally agreed to end its rebellion, at least temporarily. The cost to the United Nations was three peacekeepers killed in action in the counter-M23 operation of 11 days.<sup>26</sup> The FARDC suffered many more casualties. But the combat operations led to the full military neutralization of the M23. And the M23's main supporter (Rwanda) received a strong message not to interfere with pseudo-military forces in its mineral-resource-rich neighbour. After the M23 defeat, with greater confidence, MONUSCO shifted its attention to other armed rebel groups, especially the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

## 7 Fighting the ADF: Attrition Warfare?

The ADF originated in Uganda, where it claimed to champion Muslim rights. In the late 1990s, it was forced out of Uganda into the DRC border region, particularly in the North Kivu province. It dispatched armed parties to attack towns and citizens in both countries. For more than two decades, FARDC and UN forces conducted many operations against the ADF.

From as early as 2005, MONUC was helping the FARDC destroy camps of the ADF and an allied rebel group, NALU (National Army for the Liberation of Uganda). About 600 MONUC members provided logistical and air cover support for over 3,500 FARDC troops, who overran 14 rebel camps in 2005. One MONUC soldier and 6 FARDC soldiers lost their lives, while ADF/NALU suffered an estimated 86 fatalities.<sup>27</sup> With this ADF setback, civilian lives were likely saved but the rebel group persisted and over time became an increasingly problematic POC threat for the Congolese inhabitants, particularly in the Beni area in the 2010s.

25 *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*. 'Rwanda protecting M23 Rebels Within Their Own Borders?', 2014, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27714346>.

26 Baillaud, e-mail to the author. The three fatalities included Lt Mlima (Tanzanian Special Forces) who operated within South African-led Task Force in Kiwanja. He was killed during a M23 counterattack bringing the total to three killed in action against the M23.

27 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUC*, 28 December 2005, UN Doc. S/2005/832.

Major-General Jean Baillaud, the Deputy Force commander recalls the UN's actions against the ADF:

On 25 December 2013, MONUSCO provided AH [attack helicopter] fire support to FARDC: ADF positions were overrun in Kamango, forcing ADF combatants to return to their camps in the Virunga National Park. The same day, the decision was made to initiate the deployment of FIB elements in Mavivi (near Beni airport), in anticipation of the launch of FARDC operations. In January 2014, when shots were fired at a UN Mi-24, the attack helicopter responded by firing rockets. This led to no more shooting on helicopters for several months. But the attacks resumed in 2015.<sup>28</sup>

MONUSCO provided not only logistical support, but also air reconnaissance and day-and-night air fire support, which facilitated the FARDC's capture of the ADF's main camps, in particular the one named Medina, which allowed the seizure of documents as well as weapons. UN artillery support was considered but did not initially materialize due to the difficulties of observing the targets. FIB elements, mainly the Tanzanians Battalion deployed in Beni, held key positions while anti-ADF ops were ongoing, in particular in Kamango and Similiki bridge (a major crossing point to Virunga National Park). Nepalese Eng Coy started to fix the infrastructure on the main axis Mbau-Kamango and repaired the Similiki bridge which the ADF tried to destroy before leaving this key position. In April [2014], most of the ADF camps were under FARDC control but the key ADF leaders not yet been captured or killed. Operations slowed down and MONUSCO kept increasing its support, deploying more FIB troops in camps in the Beni region.

In Operation Sukola I, the joint forces cleared the main ADF camps in March 2014. Despite the progress (and perhaps in reaction to it?), the ADF sponsored dozens of attacks against civilians, killing hundreds (including some with decapitations), looting property and burning structures, including many houses, a police station and a hospital. It ambushed UN patrols and attacked the UN base at Semiliki (sometimes written Semuliki) on at least two occasions. The October 2014 massacres started a new phase while ADF had regrouped and reorganized in the "triangle" close to populated areas along RN 2 axis from Beni to Eringeti, close to Ituri. Joint UN-DRC Operation Umoja II, were launched to prevent more attacks. The operations were conducted by foot with Malawian

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28 Baillaud, e-mail to the author.

or Tanzanian units alongside FARDC from December 2014 to early 2015. The ADF shot at UN helicopters on many occasions but, fortunately, no injuries were sustained. At one point, ADF gunfire forced down a helicopter with the Force Commander on board.<sup>29</sup>

After identifying ADF targets using UAVs, including at night, the United Nations and FARDC again targeted ADF positions using attack helicopters and artillery. They destroyed more ADF camps and neutralized at least one senior leader. These actions undoubtedly weakened the group, but the ADF was able to sustain its numbers “by absorbing splinter militia groups into its ranks”.<sup>30</sup>

Another attack on a UN base in Semiliki occurred on 24 March 2016. The ADF launched an even more lethal attack on the poorly protected Tanzanian base in Semiliki on 7 December 2017, resulting in the deaths of fifteen Tanzanian peacekeepers, and 53 wounded, making it the deadliest armed attack on the United Nations since the Somalia operation in 1993.<sup>31</sup>

In Beni territory in May 2016, FARDC and MONUSCO (including FIB and the mission's special forces, still under Operation Sukola I) engaged in seven days of combat against the ADF. MONUSCO provided artillery fire support, and logistical/medical support. The joint operation destroyed five ADF camps and severely reduced ADF freedom of movement. The United Nations reported 24 ADF elements killed and four captured, including one child. However, many ADF personnel escaped northward individually or in small groups.<sup>32</sup>

In July 2016, in response to ADF attacks on civilians, FARDC/MONUSCO sought to find the assailants. In the firefight, they reportedly killing eight rebels. On 8 August, FARDC/MONUSCO attacked the ADF in Abyalose. One main camp was captured and occupied by FARDC.

In the Beni area, the mission sought to find better intelligence for POC so it created the Joint Intelligence Operations Centre (JIOC) to improve its civil-military-police analytical capacity—the UN's first such intelligence centre outside of a mission headquarters. According to the SG Report: “This allowed for more rapid MONUSCO reaction in support of FARDC to repel attempted attacks by suspected [ADF] elements”. In the Eringeti area, MONUSCO supported Operation Usalama to clear the ADF from key areas, including the

29 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 10 March 2015, UN Doc. S/2015/172; UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 26 June 2015; UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 28 September 2015, UN Doc. S/2015/741; and UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 24 December 2015, UN Doc. S/2015/1031.

30 *Ibid.*; and UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 10 March 2015.

31 An analysis of the Semuliki attack is provide in Williams, ‘How Peacekeepers Fight’, pp. 54–57.

32 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 28 June 2016, UN Doc. S/2016/579.

group's camp, humorously called "Garlic", and "replacing them with an enduring FARDC protective presence".<sup>33</sup>

In various areas, as they were able, MONUSCO helped Congolese military justice authorities expedite criminal judicial proceedings for those who committed atrocities, including members of the Congolese security forces.<sup>34</sup> But the ADF continues to be a pernicious presence in the Wild East of the DRC.

Another major human rights violator, the *Force de résistance patriotique d'Ituri* (FRPI), operated in nearby Ituri, but it finally agreed to disarm in 2020, after two decades of fighting. MONUSCO found it had to use force to achieve peace.

## 8 Fighting the FRPI and Cobra Matata

The FRPI conducted regular attacks on civilians, especially looting raids and abductions. In the Ituri province, FRPI forces often operated around mining sites and markets, where they could seize more goods. The FRPI was responsible for many human rights abuses, including major instances of rape and gang rape.<sup>35</sup> One of its main leaders, Cobra Matata, led the massacre at Nyakunde hospital in 2002, and the attack at Bogoro in 2003, where an estimated two hundred were killed.<sup>36</sup> The United Nations sought to deal with the FRPI in much the same way as the ADF, using force, but it also sought and eventually gained a peace agreement in 2020.

Negotiations in 2014 were not so fruitful and the FRPI refused a government ultimatum to surrender by the end of the year. The group, with about 800 to 1,000 militiamen, continued to be major threat, even after Cobra Matata was arrested on 2 January 2015. In mid-January, MONUSCO supported the FARDC in several anti-FRPI actions. UAVs helped track FRPI elements, which allowed more precise canon fire from the UN's attack helicopters on

33 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 3 October 2016, UN Doc. S/2016/833.

34 Leila Zerrougui. 'Strengthening the rule of law and protection of civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *UN Chronicle*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2018, pp. 8–11.

35 'FRPI reportedly committed 50 separate human rights abuses against more than 200 victims, including 26 cases of rape, 19 murders and more than 20 instances of looting and destruction of property. On 10 May, FRPI elements attacked two villages, looting goods and allegedly raping 15 women'. UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 26 June 2015, UN Doc. S/2015/486.

36 International Criminal Court. '*Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Case of the Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga, Judgment Pursuant to Article 74 of the Statute*', 7 March 2014. ICC Doc. ICC-01/04-01/07. paras. 566, 1280. [www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2015\\_04025.PDF](http://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2015_04025.PDF).

the main FRPI camps. Additional fire support was delivered by the UN's Ituri Brigade (Bangladesh) and the FARDC. Despite a joint UN/FARDC cordon, many FRPI escaped. Some were later intercepted by the FARDC but the presence of these forces in the field made it harder for the United Nations to use its attack helicopters.

The FIB was not used for these operations as its priority was the ADF and the FDLR (see below). Instead, the Guatemalan Special Forces were deployed and played an important role in the success.<sup>37</sup> Operation "Clean Sweep" had dismantled FRPI camps in areas northwest of Aveba in January 2015. Some FRPI elements, exhausted from the fighting, surrendered as a result of the operations.<sup>38</sup> But in other cases, even after FRPI commanders offered to surrender their forces (approximately 300 combatants in one case), they failed to follow through. It seemed that the rebel group was using negotiations as a tactic to buy time, not an uncommon strategy in that region.

The FRPI soon regrouped and their attacks picked up. By June 2015, some 500 FRPI militiamen occupied Aveba causing the population to leave entirely. On the June 3, after extensive UAS night surveillance, the UN's attack helicopters took action with canon fire on main FRPI camps, with fire support provided by the Bangladeshi Battalion and the FARDC. FRPI were allowed to escape but were later ambushed by FARDC. The attack helicopters conducted more sorties during the day and engaged FRPI firing at them.<sup>39</sup>

Still, the FRPI continued to menace the population, with 41 recorded attacks against civilians and FARDC in April 2016 and 47 in July. Again, MONUSCO cooperated closely with FARDC operations, including Operation Torche, that dismantled over a dozen FRPI camps.<sup>40</sup> However, the rebels quickly moved and built new camps in the jungle. In effect, it became a game of "Whack-a-Mole" as FARDC and MONUSCO efforts continued, with new camps and new atrocities popping up in different areas.

In 2017–18, the UN mission declared that FRPI posed "the single greatest security threat to civilians" in Ituri. In joint operations, the FARDC and MONUSCO destroyed FRPI camps, killing some of the officers and fighters, and causing a rise in FRPI surrenders.<sup>41</sup> The UN actions over the years "played a useful part

37 Baillaud, e-mail to the author.

38 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 26 June 2015.

39 Baillaud, e-mail to the author.

40 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 28 June 2016; and UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 3/4 October 2016, UN Doc. S/2016/840.

41 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 30 June 2017, UN Doc. S/2017/565; UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 2 October 2017, UN Doc. S/2017/824.



in defeating the FRPI mainly because it forced them to the negotiating table. It facilitated greater political leverage rather than military dominance”.<sup>42</sup> The FRPI finally agreed to a peace agreement with the government, ending two decades of fighting in 2020, promising to integrate into the FARDC.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, even with these occasional “peace victories”, there were plenty of other groups to deal with.

## 9 Fighting the FDLR: Rwandan Hangover

The *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) was a resistance movement formed by the *Forces armée rwandaise* (FAR), the military forces of the defeated Hutu-led Rwandan government that had committed genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994. Many ex-FAR withdrew to the Congo, where they found some safe haven from attacks by Rwandan forces and their proxies. The inability of the UN mission in Rwanda to stop the genocide in 2004 had been a major motivator for the United Nations to gradually improve the robustness of its mandates and deployed forces. Now the United Nations was facing the former *genocidaires* and their progeny in the FDLR.

In 2005, MONUC and FARDC sought to reduce the freedom of movement of FDLR in South Kivu. In Operations Falcon Sweep and Iron Fist the joint UN/FARDC warned the FDLR before destroying six empty camps. The idea was to encourage these Rwandans to “repatriate or move to more remote areas where they do not pose a threat to the local population”. But FDLR attacks on villages continued, with killings including women and children, though the FDLR denied it was the perpetrator.<sup>44</sup>

In 2011, in Operation Hatua Yamana (“Formidable Reach”), the FARDC and MONUSCO sought to eliminate an FDLR stronghold in the Kimua-Ngeenge area and (re)assert government authority. However, some locals accused the FARDC of punitive expeditions against civilian populations suspected of supporting “enemy” forces. But, as Stian Kjeksrud wrote, “it is not uncommon that armed

42 Adrian Foster (served as MONUSCO Deputy Force Commander 2009–2013 and Deputy Military Adviser at UN Headquarters 2013–2017), e-mail to the author, 6 November 2020.

43 United Nations Peacekeeping, ‘DRC: Congolese Government and FRPI Armed Group Have Signed a Peace Agreement’; and MONUSCO, ‘North Kivu: FARDC and MONUSCO repel ADF attack in Mbau’, 12 February 2020, available at <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/north-kivu-fardc-and-monusco-repel-adf-attack-mbau>.

44 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUC*, 2 August 2005, UN Doc. S/2005/506.

groups also dress up in [FARDC] army uniforms” so the allegations may be false.<sup>45</sup>

While MONUSCO mostly worked to support FARDC military operations, it also undertook its own operations “to maintain military pressure on the armed group by targeting its leadership and its key sources of income, including the charcoal trade”. In 2016–2017, the mission dismantled a number of FDLR camps and charcoal taxation checkpoints. It also seized FDLR communications equipment and internal documents near Virunga National Park.<sup>46</sup> In 2017, MONUSCO unsuccessfully sought to capture the top leader of FDLR FOCA [combat wing] near the Nyiragongo volcano. As a follow up, Guatemalan Special Forces (GUASFOR) and helicopters from Ukraine, South Africa and Pakistan, caused casualties among the FDLR and captured weapons and significant documents. GUASFOR captured or wounded FDLR without causing civilian casualties.

The UN actions once again showed that it was possible to conduct robust joint operations with the FARDC, even against the FDLR. Earlier such joint initiatives were stifled by the DRC Government, which had provided tacit support and safe haven for the FDLR, the enemy of the Rwandan government. It was frustrating for the UN mission to work with Government, which seemed to be abiding by the motto “The enemy of my enemy is my friend”, no matter the human rights record of these friendly groups. The rule of law had not come the jungles of the Congo. And the Congolese government also had many discontented areas willing to challenge the government.

## 10 Mayi-Mayi: the “Wild East”

Mayi-Mayi is a loose name for many of the local tribal groups. They sometimes live in peace but often attack other towns and groups, including government forces and other illegal armed groups (IAGs). Ironically, after Mayi-Mayi elements attacked M23 elements on 6 July 2013 and caused a threat to the civilian population, MONUSCO engaged with and killed Mayi-Mayi elements.<sup>47</sup> MONUSCO reported that it killed one Mayi-Mayi member, injured two and arrested another. Since the Mayi-Mayi were also fighting the M23, the UN's

45 MONUSCO and OHCHR, ‘Final Report of the Fact-Finding Missions of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office’; and Kjeksrud, United Nations Protection of Civilians Operations (UNPOCO) dataset.

46 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 10 March 2017, UN Doc. S/2017/206.

47 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 30 September 2013, UN Doc. S/2013/581.

actions did provide relief to the M23. This shows some of the complexities of operations in the untamed eastern Congo.

Because the Mayi-Mayi are so numerous and exist all over the eastern Congo, their “defeat” is not a possibility. The most that the United Nations can do is manage the threat, engage in POC efforts, neutralize the worst groups, and try to reduce the civilian impact of violent Mayi-Mayi activities.

The descriptions in the SG Reports on the DRC give a sense of the variety of approaches taken, from forced disarmament to using armed force:

On 25 October 2005, FARDC declared the Virunga National Park a weapons-free zone and launched operations, supported by MONUC, against renegade Mayi-Mayi in the area. As a result, 359 Mayi-Mayi elements were disarmed, five camps were destroyed and 167 weapons recovered; 14 FDLR elements were also captured. 5,000 displaced as a result of the operations.<sup>48</sup>

On 6 January [2013], a MONUSCO armoured personnel carrier based at the mobile operating base in Mambasa supported FARDC with heavy machine gun fire and jointly pushed back the several hundred Mayi-Mayi Simba combatants who had entered Mambasa town the previous day and caused FARDC to temporarily withdraw from the town. A MONUSCO helicopter from Bunia replenished FARDC small arms ammunition and rockets and evacuated 14 injured FARDC soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

In North Kivu, during 2016 various Mayi-Mayi groups, e.g., *Union des patriotes pour la défense des innocents* (ironically) known as Mayi-Mayi Mazembe, attacked many civilians. Reportedly some killings were carried out because they perceived the Hutu civilians to be supporting the FDLR. In Buleusa, MONUSCO troops had to engage (fire upon) Mayi-Mayi elements who were impeding the distribution of food to internally displaced persons (IDPs), “resulting in the death of nine Mayi-Mayi elements”.<sup>50</sup>

In one horrific instance, some 50 Mayi-Mayi Mazembe (named after its leader) attacked an IDP camp, killing 30 and injuring 21 (27 November 2016). MONUSCO exchanged fire with attackers, killing one and injuring two. After

48 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 28 December 2005, UN Doc. S/2005/832.

49 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 15 February 2013, UN Doc. S/2013/96.

50 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 28 June 2016, UN Doc. S/2016/579.

the attack, FARDC and MONUSCO reinforced their positions as a preventive measure.<sup>51</sup>

One of the major mission successes in forceful POC was the defence of Uvira, a large town in South Kivu that was under attack by Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba in September 2017. MONUSCO blocked entry points to the town, and the Pakistani brigade on the outskirts of Uvira repelled the group with direct fire. When the rebel group mounted an attack on FARDC and MONUSCO positions using speed boats, mortars, and heavy machine guns, MONUSCO's attack helicopters destroyed the Mayi-Mayi boat fleet. The United Nations also spoke directly with Yakutumba, the group leader, "to dissuade him from attacking the town and made it clear that MONUSCO would act to protect civilians". After the attacking force withdrew, MONUSCO continued monitoring rebel movements and any expansion into mining areas that "could provide an important source of funding to the armed group".<sup>52</sup> The decisive intervention of MONUSCO to engage the Mayi-Mayi helped prevent the fall of Uvira and limit civilian casualties and displacement. As in so many cases, the UN actions have gone unheralded, except for the gratitude of locals for a short period of time.

## 11 Analysis: the Use of Armed Force

As the incidents described in this paper show, the United Nations has frequently engaged in combat with IAGs in eastern DRC, mostly as part of its mandate to protect local populations. Despite these successes, the mission is more associated with the times when it did not respond to mass atrocities, sometimes making headlines for these failures.<sup>53</sup> This paper helps correct the mistaken perspective and balance the record.

51 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 29 December 2016, UN Doc. S/2016/1130.

52 UN, *Report of the Secretary-General on the MONUSCO*, 5 January 2018, UN Doc. S/2018/16; and *Reuters*. 'Congo naval boats battle rebels on Lake Tanganyika', *New York Times*, 28 September 2017, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/congo-violence/congo-naval-boats-battle-rebels-on-lake-tanganyika-idUSL8N1M926L>.

53 For instance, the *New York Times* and other media outlets provide headlines about atrocities that the UN mission did not prevent, include: Kisangani in 2002 (*Reuters*, 'Congo: Peacekeepers Fire at Protesters'), Bunia in 2003 ('Terror Persists as Congolese Await U.N. Force', 4 June 2003), Bukavu in 2004 ('Congo: Renegade Commanders Capture City'), other locations in 2005 ('Africa: Congo: U.N. Investigates Reports of New Massacre', 12 July 2005), Kiwanja in 2008 ('A Massacre in Congo, Despite Nearby Support', 11 December 2008), Niangara and Walikale territory in 2010 ('U.N. Says Congo Rebels Killed Scores in Village', 2 May 2010; and 'Rape Victims in Congo Raid Now More Than 240', 2 September 2010), South Kivu in 2014 ('Dozens Killed in Massacre in Eastern Congo', 7 June 2014),

Though the UN missions in the Congo pioneered the use of force in peace-keeping, most of the progress was made in response to past failures. Only after tragedies, did the UN Security Council authorize more robust mandates. Rather than being proactive, the Council has been primarily reactive. It ignored many requests from the Secretary-General for larger and better equipped forces in DR Congo. But when disaster struck in the field, with massacres, the Council would respond by authorizing the use force. For instance, it was only after the Kisangani massacre of May 2002 that the Security Council passed Resolution 1417 (2002) in June, the first to explicitly call for protection of civilians (POC) in DRC, despite the earlier resolution 1265 (1999), where the SC expressed its “willingness” to consider robust POC for UN missions more generally.

Similarly, it took the shock of the takeover of Bunia by Thomas Lubanga's UPC in 2003 to cause the UN's Ituri Brigade to be equipped with attack helicopters (provided by India, see Dorn, 2014). In South Kivu, the embarrassing seizure of Bukavu by a rebel group led to an increase in the force size and authorizations in Resolution 1565 (2004). Perhaps most significantly, after the break-away group M23 seized the capital of North Kivu, Goma, in November 2012, Security Council resolution 2098 (2013) finally gave the mission a mandate for “offensive targeted operations”. The resolution created the Force Intervention Brigade to carry out such operations, including against the M23 and other groups identified in the resolution.

While the Congo mission may not be the best equipped mission of the United Nations (MINUSMA in Mali probably holds that privilege), MONUSCO has used armed force the most. It usually does so in conjunction with the national forces (FARDC) to combat IAGs. By contrast, the mission's actions to protect civilians from FARDC attacks is much spottier. The UN operation has an inherent strategic dilemma when it comes to using force against government forces with which it is mandated to cooperate. It seeks to implement its Human Rights Due Diligence Policy to refuse cooperation with FARDC commanders who are known human rights violators. But at times, the government has forced MONUSCO to cooperate with such individuals.

Despite the many strategic, operational and tactical challenges, the UN's use of force has been significant. This is a natural evolution of the POC norm,

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Mutarule in 2014 (*Al Jazeera*, ‘UN mission admits failure to stop DRC murders’), Kalongo in 2015 (Moloo, ‘UN peacekeepers in the DRC no longer trusted to protect’), Beni in 2017 (‘7 Congo Army Officers Charged With War Crimes in Massacre’, 18 March 2017), and Kasai-Central province in 2017 (‘Ugandan Rebel Group Massacres 22 in Congo’, 8 October 2017). MONUSCO and OHCHR issued a report about mass rape in 2010 in Walikale territory (MONUSCO and OHCHR, ‘Final Report of the Fact-Finding Missions of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office’, para. 16–17).

bringing a greater sense of security for the population to the Wild East of the DRC, where lawlessness has caused so much death and suffering. The UN actions have kept that difficult region of the Congo under some level of control and stability, not allowing armed groups to seize and hold major population centres or overthrow the DRC government (as happened previously when Laurent Kabila worked with rebels in the East to seize power in Kinshasa in 1997), while offering physical protection to civilians and deterring attacks against them.

Over the past decade, the UN mission helped the government gain significant victories over some notorious armed groups. However, the government in Kinshasa, 1,570 km away from Goma, showed little interest in truly overcoming the problems of the East and in helping the local population. Indeed, some posited that the Kabila government used the IAG threat to booster its own political position in the DRC. As long as the threat was not against the government itself in Kinshasa, the argument goes, it aided Kabila by pointing to a threat to rally support. With the end of the Kabila presidency in 2019, there was hope that the central government could gradually provide increased support for the local population in the East and for MONUSCO. But the response did not meet expectations and local populations held demonstrations against MONUSCO while demanding it to do more for POC. The UN mission could be much more effective, even as it plans a transition out of the country.

The UN Security Council has endorsed a joint UN-DRC Government strategy to progressively draw down MONUSCO, though the timeline for withdrawal from eastern DRC will depend on any progress in reducing the threat of armed groups and addressing the root causes of conflict. The Security Council is likely to continue expecting MONUSCO to use force, and to do so according to high performance standards. The Council continued to demand the reconfiguration of MONUSCO to enhance its effectiveness, signalling key Council members' continued expectation that MONUSCO will live up to the robust mandate handed to it.

## 12 Conclusion

Overall, the UN's use of armed force in DRC has been significant and salutary, especially since 2008, when it prevented an attack on Goma. Its support of FARDC operations against IAGs had beneficial POC effects. Though many groups still terrorize local populations in the vast territory, MONUSCO and the FARDC were able to neutralize imminent threats at key times, including attacks on Bunia and Uvira. The actions not only provided immediate protection but also

helped bring several groups to the negotiating table, including the FRPI in 2020. Having used armed force impartially, the United Nations also had greater credibility in its mediation function and in its deterrence capability, e.g., while on patrols and with its show of force.

Still, local populations view UN forces as relatively passive since many IAGs continue to roam freely and harm their families and livelihoods. After high initial expectations, disappointment easily set in: locals accuse the United Nations of being ineffective.<sup>54</sup> Though the UN mission may appear prepared to fight IAGs with Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) and attack helicopters, the reality is that the UN mission is understaffed and under-resourced to deal with the many armed groups in this region. A force of 15,000 uniformed personnel is simply not enough to secure hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of rough terrain and often vicious conflicts.

Furthermore, MONUSCO is obliged to operate in coordination with the FARDC, which lacks capacity and strategic direction. Congolese forces also have a tendency to avoid sharing intelligence, especially when some members participate in the war economy and collaborate with IAGs. The FARDC itself has frequently also posed a serious threat to local populations, despite MONUSCO's protestations. MONUSCO finds it has to work with forces that sometimes aid and abet the very armed groups that need to be stopped.

The FIB action in 2013 to neutralize the M23 threat was the height of MONUSCO's robust activity.<sup>55</sup> By contrast, the three framework brigades in eastern DRC—Bangladeshi in Ituri, Indian in North Kivu and Pakistani in South Kivu (coincidentally resembling the geographical order of the three nations in South Asia)—have been quite settled and passive in their approach to ongoing Congolese conflicts.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes they have excused their lack of robust measures by declaring (incorrectly) that it is the FIB alone that had the robust mandate. When the FIB reduced its ambitions and could no longer be counted on to apply force, the Force Commanders were obliged to assemble smaller units, including special forces units, to carry out robust operations. So the UN's robust action are still far from sufficient.

While some criticize the United Nations for not being robust enough, others criticize it for the over-use of force.<sup>57</sup> Some complain about damage done

54 Zahra Moloo, 'UN peacekeepers in the DRC no longer trusted to protect', *Al Jazeera*, 18 January 2016.

55 Tull, 'The Limits and Unintended Consequences of UN Peace Enforcement', pp. 167–190.

56 Fernando Rodrigues Goulart, 'Blue Helmets, Armed Groups, and Peace at Stake: Does Combat Motivation Matter for Robust Peacekeeping to Succeed?', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 28, issue 1, 2021, 36.

57 For example, Thierry Tardy, 'A Critique of Robust Peacekeeping in Contemporary Peace Operations', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 18, issue 2, 2011, pp. 152–167.



when the United Nations engages in combat with IAGs, especially when civilians are killed, which is rare. Still others argue that a more assertive and robust peacekeeping response endangers “humanitarian space”, including vulnerable humanitarian workers, despite the UN mission’s huge investment in humanitarian action. Still others have argued from the purely pacifist point of view that force only begets more force.

One academic<sup>58</sup> claims the UN “can’t end wars”, despite the UN’s role in ending civil wars in the Congo in the 1960s and early 2000s, as well as more than a dozen cases worldwide. Some other academics feel the use of force is against peacekeeping principles and that MONUSCO is blurring the line between peacekeeping and enforcement, thus losing impartiality.<sup>59</sup> Still, others complained that by helping the government to fight the rebels, the UN mission was only propping up the corrupt and undemocratic government of Joseph Kabila. Fortunately, he finally succumbed to national and international pressures, including from the UN mission, and allowed national elections to proceed in 2018. When his preferred candidate lost, the less challenging of the two main opposition candidates was given the presidency. Still, new forms of progress are being made to work with government forces, even as the mission plans to draw down after about a quarter century in the country.

In the Congo and more generally, the UN mission in the DRC has strengthened the use of force norm in peacekeeping, just as it did for the use of intelligence in peacekeeping.<sup>60</sup> Ralph Mimiya—former head of the POC team at the UN Department of Peace Operations—argued that the military operations and others like it “can be used to weaken armed groups, reduce threats to civilians, and lay the groundwork for political dialogue”.<sup>61</sup>

The Wild East of the Congo take many decades to tame, even after the central government finally commits to establish a just order. Solutions do not come easy, but in cases like the DRC, the use of force is certainly part of the mix. For POC especially, the use of force has proven to be an important component of a UN mission’s toolkit.

58 Séverine Autesserre, ‘The Crisis of Peacekeeping: Why the UN Can’t End Wars’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 98, issue 1, January/February 2019.

59 Fabricius, ‘Is the Force Intervention Brigade neutral’; and Müller, ‘The Force Intervention Brigade’, pp. 359–380.

60 Kuele and Cepik, ‘Intelligence Support to MONUSCO’, pp. 44–68.

61 Mamiya, ‘Engaging with Nonstate Armed Groups to Protect Civilians’.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### **Biographical Note**

Walter Dorn teaches officers of rank major to brigadier-general from Canada and about 20 other countries. As an “operational professor” he also assists international organizations and participates in field missions. For instance, he served as a UN Electoral Officer for the 1999 referendum in East Timor and a Visiting Professional with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2010. He has frequently been a consultant with the UN's Department of Peace Operations, including service in 2014 on the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in UN Peacekeeping. He is also doing consulting work for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).