

# THE UN INTERVENTION BRIGADE: EXTINGUISHING CONFLICT OR ADDING FUEL TO THE FLAMES?

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Jay Benson | June 2016

*A One Earth Future Discussion Paper*

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## ABSTRACT

The authorization of the Intervention Brigade (IB) in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has sparked controversy in the international community over the value of such deployments for UN peace operations. Outlined here are several key conditions which can help determine whether this model can be successfully deployed as a tool for civilian protection outside the DRC context. The analysis focuses on four key considerations which need to be examined in order to determine if the success of the IB in the DRC can be replicated—and its failures avoided—in other contexts. These include:

1. *The targeted armed group's method of resource allocation*
2. *The speed of deployment*
3. *The resources and capabilities of the IB force*
4. *Steps taken to reduce post-intervention violence against civilians*

Though far from a universal solution, under the right circumstances the IB model of peace enforcement may have the potential to be effective as a tool for civilian protection.

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*Cover image: A peacekeeper on patrol in Beni, DRC, as a resident gathers wood. UN photo by Sylvain Liechti.*

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## INTRODUCTION

UN missions have too often failed to protect civilians in conflict areas. In 2013, the UN authorized and deployed the Force Intervention Brigade (IB) in the Eastern DRC, a special detachment within the larger United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), in an effort to improve long-term civilian security in one of the world's most dangerous conflicts. The Intervention Brigade is unique because of both its expansive mandate to take offensive action against illegal armed groups and its robust military capabilities. No previous UN deployment has been given the mandate and tools to proactively pursue armed groups. The IB has since sparked controversy over the UN's role in ongoing conflicts and what the future of UN peace operations will look like. Here, it is posited that there are several conditions for successful implementation of the IB model as a tool for civilian protection outside the context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). IB deployments are likely to be successful when a targeted armed group relies on the exploitation of natural resources and civilians rather than on voluntary civilian support. Also key to the success of any IB intervention will be the specific military capabilities provided to the force, the speed with which the force is deployed, and the steps taken to mitigate the potential for government violence against civilians after control over territory and populations is regained. Within this analysis, there is no attempt to characterize the Intervention Brigade as either a panacea or a liability for UN peace operations. Rather, the provided analysis is of the IB as just one of many policy tools available to the international community which may be used to reduce abuse against civilians in armed conflict.



*A schoolboy watching a MONUSCO vehicle. UN photo by Silvain Liechti.*

## THE FAILURE OF CIVILIAN PROTECTION IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

In recent years, civilian protection has been reinforced as a core mission of UN peacekeeping operations. However, despite the wide acceptance of the civilian protection norm in principle, traditional UN peacekeeping forces have often proven ineffective in carrying out this mission. During the 1990s, international peacekeeping repeatedly failed to protect civilians from attacks by armed groups. Many of the UN missions that failed to protect civilians lacked the capability and authority to take effective action. UN peacekeepers have traditionally been only lightly armed and are often outgunned and/or outnumbered by the forces threatening civilians. This was certainly the case in the most frequently cited examples of peacekeeping failure, such as Srebrenica and Rwanda. Additionally, their mandates have often restricted peacekeeping forces to acting only in cases where they or the civilians designated as being under their protection are attacked. The resulting failures not only delegitimized UN peacekeeping operations but also undermined the potential for UN intervention to serve as a deterrent to armed groups targeting civilians. These experiences demonstrated to the international community that if UN peace operations were to effectively protect civilians, alternatives to the traditional peacekeeping model were needed.

## “PEACE ENFORCEMENT” AS A TOOL FOR CIVILIAN PROTECTION

Peace enforcement is defined by the UN as the use of coercive measures, including military force, to restore peace in ongoing conflicts.<sup>1</sup> The goal of military peace enforcement is to end a conflict by achieving a military victory or applying pressure to armed actors in a manner which forces a political settlement. The Intervention Brigade is the UN’s first attempt to utilize the military aspect of peace enforcement for civilian protection.



*MONUSCO Force Commander with a group of children in Pinga. Photo by MONUSCO, Flickr.*

Peace enforcement strategies differ from traditional UN peacekeeping operations in several ways that may be beneficial for protecting vulnerable civilian populations. Most importantly, direct military action against armed groups targeting civilians can lead to their military defeat, definitively eliminating the threat to civilians rather than attempting to reactively defend against individual instances of abuse. Short of defeating a targeted group, an offensive approach may keep an armed group on their heels, more likely to revert to defensible positions away from population centers, and thus less likely to have the mobility to attack large numbers of civilians. Additionally, the deployment of peace enforcement detachments with robust mandates and offensive military capabilities has the potential to change the incentive structures for individual members of targeted armed groups, discouraging involvement by increasing the risks of being a member. Finally, reducing the mobility and territorial control of targeted groups limits their ability to generate income through resource

extraction, illegal taxation, and other forms of illicit economic activity, undermining their long-term ability to sustain their operations. The IB’s unique mandate and capabilities allow it to pursue peace enforcement in a manner that traditional peacekeeping deployments could not. Despite these potential advantages, the concept of peace enforcement, and the UN’s role in such missions, has encountered valid criticism on both political and pragmatic grounds.

The UN’s role in peace enforcement has raised political concerns for two primary reasons. First, specific UN member states and many outside observers have expressed concerns about UN peace enforcement because such missions diminish the UN’s role as an impartial actor in conflict and thus detract from its role as an unbiased mediator.<sup>2</sup> Critics contend that even in cases where the characteristics of the conflict and the targeted armed groups make an effective mediated resolution unlikely, resorting to peace enforcement hampers the UN’s ability to play the role of neutral arbitrator in future conflicts. Many members, particularly those states which contribute large numbers of troops, are also concerned about the increased threat to troops in peace enforcement missions. The offensive military tasks which accompany peace enforcement are inherently more dangerous, and when peacekeeping troops are made party to a conflict, they are more likely to be targeted by armed actors, a risk many states contributing high numbers of troops are uncomfortable with.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to these objections to the specific role of the UN in peace enforcement, there are also a variety of more deep-seated objections to the entire concept of peace enforcement. Many foreign NGOs and humanitarian groups working in conflict zones have expressed concerns that outside intervention into active conflicts may change the perceptions of foreign civilians, increasing the likelihood they will be perceived as being party to the conflict and then targeted by armed actors.<sup>4</sup> Others point out that escalation of the conflict caused by peace enforcement has the potential to result in increased numbers of civilian casualties.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most fundamentally, many fear that attempts to end ongoing conflict via military means will detract attention and resources from efforts to find the political resolutions needed for long-term peace and stability.<sup>6</sup>

Academics have also shed light on the potential pitfalls of peace enforcement strategies. Recent academic research indicates that biased military intervention, meaning intervention which takes offensive action against only certain parties to a conflict, may in fact increase violence against civilians by the actor being targeted. As an armed group perceives that its comparative strength is declining due to outside intervention against it, it may increase violence against civilians in an effort to extract resources from them and assert control.<sup>7</sup> This correlation between biased intervention and the increased targeting of civilians means that when considering intervention, UN policymakers must weigh the long-term benefits of defeating armed actors who constitute a continuous threat to civilians against the potential for increased short-term violence against civilians.

| <b>POTENTIAL POSITIVE<br/>OUTCOMES<br/>OF A UN INTERVENTION<br/>BRIGADE</b>  | <b>POTENTIAL NEGATIVE<br/>OUTCOMES<br/>OF A UN INTERVENTION<br/>BRIGADE</b>   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Leads to military defeat of armed groups targeting civilians</li> <li>● Keeps an armed group on its heels, away from population centers</li> <li>● Limits incentives for individuals belonging to an armed group</li> <li>● Limits an armed group’s ability to generate income</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Diminishes role of UN as an impartial actor</li> <li>● Increases the threat to peacekeeping troops</li> <li>● Escalates the conflict</li> <li>● Detracts attention and resources from efforts to find political resolutions</li> </ul> |

The debates over the normative and pragmatic repercussions of peace enforcement touch deep-seated beliefs on the use of force in the pursuit of peace. These conversations are extremely important and have major implications for the Force Intervention Brigade model. However, the fact that the intervention brigade is already in action means that another, parallel discussion must be had. If UN policymakers choose to use peace enforcement as a tool in certain cases, time must be taken to consider how such operations can be undertaken with the least amount of suffering by civilians and the best prospects for long-term conflict resolution.

## **THE FORCE INTERVENTION BRIGADE IN THE DRC**

### **BACKGROUND AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS**

The eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of Congo has been host to one of the longest, most complex, and brutal conflicts in recent history. Catalyzed by spillover from ethnic conflict in Rwanda and Burundi in the mid-1990s, a plethora of warring rebel groups have emerged in the eastern DRC. In December 2015, there were roughly 70 armed groups operating in the area,<sup>8</sup> intermittently fighting each other and the Congolese armed forces (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, or FARDC), and entangled in a constantly shifting web of alliances and animosities. These groups claim diverse motivations, from protecting the interests of various ethnic groups to establishing an Islamic state in Uganda. This proliferation of armed groups has been made all the more dangerous by the support provided by neighboring states to their rebels of choice. While the overt participation of neighboring militaries and outside support has ended, the array of armed groups has remained. Furthermore, the conflict has been characterized by widespread, systematic, and brutal targeting of the local civilian population. Looting, sexual violence, forced labor, forced recruitment, and civilian massacres have become commonplace. This state of enduring, indiscriminant violence is a tragic reminder of the international community’s failure to protect civilians.

Moreover, while almost all armed groups in the eastern DRC claim to be fighting for the interests of various ethnic groups, political supporters, or local communities, very few seem to rely on these various civilian constituencies for voluntary material support. Instead, these groups have been able to sustain their operations through the exploitation of the region’s natural resources and the violent coercion of civilian populations. According to a recent report by the United Nations Environment Programme, “the protracted conflict cycle and insecurity in eastern DRC appear increasingly dominated by economic interests rather than predominantly political motivations.”<sup>9</sup> This shift has led to an increase in abusive methods for acquiring resources, including but not limited to the exploitation of extractive natural resources, taxation of businesses, market taxes, household taxes, checkpoints, border crossings, and outright looting. Nearly every armed group uses a combination of some or all of these methods to exploit the communities around them.

## TRADITIONAL UN PEACEKEEPING IN THE DRC CONTEXT

The eastern DRC is also the site of one of the UN's longest-running peacekeeping operations. First authorized in 1999, the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC has been one of its largest and most expensive operations. However, despite the time and resources spent on addressing this conflict, several instances highlight the failure of the traditional UN peacekeeping model to protect the long-suffering civilians in the DRC. In May of 2002, the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) rebel group put down a minor mutiny against its control in the city of Kisangani and carried out reprisals against the civilian population with killings, sexual violence, and looting. The UN had roughly 1,000 troops in the city at the time but made no attempt to use its military capabilities to restore order or protect civilians.<sup>10</sup> In April of 2004, RCD rebels entered Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, and again committed widespread looting and sexual violence. Bukavu had a MONUSCO (then-MONUC) garrison of 700 troops who protected a limited number of civilians but made no larger effort to confront the rebel takeover militarily.<sup>11</sup> Four years later in Kiwanja, North Kivu, approximately 150 civilians were killed in a rebel attack while a detachment of 100 peacekeepers less than a mile away did nothing to intervene.<sup>12</sup>

In these and many other such cases, UN forces were outnumbered or outgunned, lacked accurate intelligence, or were torn between competing missions, but these issues only serve to highlight why the traditional model of UN peacekeeping operations has so often proven ineffective as a means of protecting civilian populations from mass violence. Jason Stearns, an eastern DRC expert formerly with the UN, described the problem with peacekeeping forces in the DRC context as being “always too late. They’ve already been massacred or raped once you get there... The UN understands now that you have to be preemptive to protect civilians.”<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in 2013, the rise of the M23 rebel movement spurred the UN into action, catalyzing the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade. At its height, M23, or the March 23 Movement, was the largest rebel faction in the region. Fighting with M23 intensified in November of 2012 as the group advanced on Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. In another glaring failure of traditional UN peacekeeping to protect civilians, MONUSCO troops lacking the capabilities or mandate to confront the group head-on allowed M23 to march into the city. M23 occupied Goma for several days before withdrawing to areas outside the city in late November and early December.<sup>14</sup> It was these several months of intensified fighting that created the humanitarian crisis that convinced the UN Security Council that more robust peacekeeping strategies must be employed if there was to be an end to the violence.



MONUSCO Force helicopter with weapons for the FIB. Photo by MONUSCO, Flickr.

## INTERVENTION BRIGADE AUTHORIZATION

The IB was authorized in March of 2013 under UN Security Council Resolution 2098.<sup>15</sup> The IB is the first “offensive” peacekeeping detachment authorized by the UN. The IB is distinct from previous UN troop deployments because of both its comparatively offensive mandate and its advanced military capabilities. It has a specific mandate to “neutralize” and “disarm” rebel groups in the eastern DRC which pose a threat to civilian populations or challenge the authority of the Congolese state.<sup>16</sup> The mandate to pursue offensive action against armed actors which threaten civilians in an attempt to “neutralize” or disarm them has never previously been given to UN peacekeeping detachments. While nearly all UN peacekeeping missions in recent years have had mandates to protect civilians, none has had such free-ranging authority to proactively confront armed groups.

The Intervention Brigade is also unique in the military capabilities it has been given in order to pursue its mission. The brigade consists of just over 3,000 troops, which include three infantry battalions, one artillery company, and one special forces and reconnaissance company.<sup>17</sup> The force

consists of troops from Tanzania, South Africa, and Malawi, and is led by a high-ranking Tanzanian commander.<sup>18</sup> Whereas traditional UN peacekeepers are armed with light weapons intended for use in self-defense, the Intervention Brigade is equipped with an array of

offensive capabilities. The IB now uses mortars, snipers, heavy artillery and, crucially, attack helicopters to press the offensive against Congolese rebels.<sup>19</sup> It has also been authorized to use drones for reconnaissance.<sup>20</sup> This new array of offensive weapons systems completely changes the operational capabilities of UN forces on the battlefield.

## INTERVENTION BRIGADE ACTION AGAINST ARMED GROUPS

In the few years since its deployment, the Intervention Brigade has worked with the Congolese armed forces to combat the array of non-state armed groups that have been abusing civilians in the region for decades. Its initial focus was neutralizing the threat to civilians posed by the ongoing M23 rebel movement. The first elements were deployed to Goma in May of 2013, and the detachment had reached full force by July.<sup>21</sup> The Intervention Brigade took its first offensive actions in August, shelling M23 positions outside of Goma.<sup>22</sup> They then used a variety of offensive capabilities to expand the security perimeter around Goma and assault various M23 positions. These actions proved to be quite effective, as only a month after the offensive against M23 began, the rebel group was pressing for a ceasefire.<sup>23</sup> By November of the same year, M23 had renounced its insurgency,<sup>24</sup> and the group's new leader, Sultani Makenga, and 1,700 fighters fled to Uganda, where they surrendered and were disarmed.<sup>25</sup> In a matter of months from its initial deployment, the Intervention Brigade, alongside the FARDC, was able to achieve the decisive defeat of the most powerful rebel group seen in the region in years, eliminating a major threat to the security of civilian populations in the area in a manner inconceivable through the use of the UN's traditional peacekeeping model.

Since the defeat of M23, the Intervention Brigade has continued to carry out offensives in tandem with the FARDC against the remaining rebel groups that continue to pose a threat to civilians. The largest of these subsequent IB-backed offensives has been directed against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The ADF is an Islamist group that originated in western Uganda but has been operating in the eastern DRC for decades. They have carried out a string of horrific attacks against civilians<sup>26</sup> and are blamed for the kidnapping of roughly 1,000 civilians over the last five years.<sup>27</sup> The Intervention Brigade and FARDC began offensive operations against the ADF in January of 2014, and by April the rebel group had been dislodged from its main base of operations in Virunga National Park,<sup>28</sup> with the ADF chief of staff having been killed in the fighting.<sup>29</sup> However, remnants of the group have continued to carry out attacks on civilians in the Ituri district, and the UN and FARDC are planning another offensive intended to provide a more decisive defeat of the weakened group.

In addition to this major IB-backed offensive against ADF, the IB has lent its offensive capabilities to a series of other military operations against comparatively minor, but still threatening, rebel groups. These offensives have included operations against the National Forces of Liberation (FNL)<sup>30</sup> and, more recently, the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FPRI).<sup>31</sup> Both operations have used the Intervention Brigade's surveillance drones and attack helicopters to decisive effect,<sup>32</sup> critically weakening and eliminating these groups and thus enhancing civilian security in their former areas of operation.

The campaigns outlined were all undertaken as joint operations between the UN Intervention Brigade and the Congolese armed forces. In each of these cases, the surveillance capabilities provided by IB drones, as well as the increased firepower available via the deployment's artillery and attack helicopters, seem to have played a decisive role in turning the tide against targeted armed groups. In contrast, recent cases in which the FARDC has pursued operations against rebel groups without the support of these vital military capabilities have proven less successful. The clearest indication of this trend is the recent FARDC offensive against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

The FDLR is a Rwandophone (and primarily Hutu) group. The group was founded by Hutu extremists who participated in the Rwandan genocide and fled into the eastern DRC after Tutsi forces retook Rwanda. The FDLR has since operated in the eastern DRC, committing an array of abuses against civilians in the areas they control. The severity of these abuses is attested to by the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Sylvestre Mudacumura, military commander of FDLR forces, for war



People displaced from Katwiguru by FDLR conflicts. Photo by Julien Harneis, Flickr.

crimes including “attacks on civilians, murder, mutilation, cruel treatment, rape, torture, destruction of property, pillage, and outrages against personal dignity.”<sup>33</sup> The FDLR remains one of the most powerful rebel groups in the eastern DRC and is a high-priority target for future offensives of the Intervention Brigade. However, disputes between the FARDC and the UN over the human rights records of the generals chosen to lead Congolese forces in the offensive against the FDLR have hampered cooperation until very recently. As a result, when the FARDC launched this long-anticipated campaign in February 2015,<sup>34</sup> it did so without the crucial support of the Intervention Brigade. In the months since the beginning of this FARDC offensive there have been few credible reports of significant gains, and it seems that the campaign is settling into an indecisive stalemate.<sup>35</sup> This raises questions about the ability of the FARDC to effectively neutralize remaining rebel groups and protect civilians independently, and further reinforces the notion that the support of the Intervention Brigade plays a decisive role in peace enforcement and civilian protection in the eastern DRC. It also highlights the necessity of effective communication and cooperation with host states and militaries if the IB model is to be fully utilized as a tool for civilian protection. In January of 2016, the UN and the Congolese government announced an agreement to resume cooperation in campaigns against the FDLR,<sup>36</sup> but as of this writing, joint operations were yet to resume.

## ASSESSMENT OF IB PERFORMANCE IN THE DRC CONTEXT

The Intervention Brigade experienced initial success in its rapid neutralization of M23 as a major threat to the civilian population of the eastern DRC in 2013. Since that point, its operations have been met with still significant but more modest successes, as well as some troubling failures. Operations against the ADF seem to have significantly weakened the group, but ADF fighters continue to carry out intermittent attacks on civilians, and they remain a major driver of insecurity in the Ituri region. In the IB’s campaigns against smaller rebel groups, their offensive military capabilities have proven effective in neutralizing the groups and eliminating the threat they pose to local civilians. Conversely, the FARDC offensive against the FDLR, carried out without the help of IB drones, artillery, and helicopters, has not been as successful as those carried out with IB backing, leaving the FDLR a continued threat to local civilian populations. These military operations show a record of mixed success, and highlight the need for cooperation between the UN and host governments in order for the IB to be effective.



Member of FIB greets a child in Pinga. UN photo by Sylvain Liechti.

In addition, IB operations seem to have positive spillover effects for the reduction of rebel activity beyond the direct neutralization of the targeted group. For example, in mid-November of 2013, in the wake of the defeat of M23, 1,000 members of armed groups sought to abandon their respective groups and be integrated into the FARDC.<sup>37</sup> In the two weeks directly following the defeat of M23, commanders and fighters from more than 20 armed groups, almost all of which had not yet been directly targeted by IB forces, surrendered to government forces and entered demobilization camps.<sup>38</sup> This demonstrates that the actions of the Intervention Brigade have not only the direct effects of neutralization by military means, but also seem to have a strong deterrent effect which can be extremely beneficial in encouraging the voluntary demobilization and disarmament of groups not yet targeted by IB offensive action. This deterrent effect essentially serves as a force multiplier, potentially resulting in gains in civilian safety which exceed what would be possible through the direct targeting of abusive groups alone.

However, while the participation of the Intervention Brigade and the use of their offensive military tools seem to play an important role in the success of military operations to defeat illegal armed groups, so far this battlefield success has not directly translated into gains in the security of local civilians. Where one major group has been eliminated, others seem to have filled their role perpetrating violence against civilians, and overall levels of such violence in the eastern DRC have not declined since the start of IB operations. This can be interpreted in two ways. It could be seen as a validation of the concerns expressed by those opposed to the concept of coercive peace enforcement. Conversely, it may be that these setbacks are short-term developments, and that the long-term gains in civilian security that may be derived from peace enforcement in the DRC are yet to be realized. Peace enforcement as a tool for civilian

protection is intended to produce long-term benefits by eliminating the worst-offending armed groups and ending conflict via coercive force. It may be that the Intervention Brigade simply has not been operating long enough to have its desired effect on violence against civilians.

It is very difficult to derive any definitive conclusions about the long-term effect of IB operations on civilian protection given this single case and the relatively limited timeframe in which it has been deployed in a conflict that has ebbed and flowed in intensity over decades. However, in cases of the most severe and widespread violence against civilians, international policymakers would be ill-advised to take completely off the table any policy option with the potential to protect civilians. Each case of conflict will have to be examined on its own to determine if and when the IB model may be effective given the specific context. So, if the IB model is to be considered for future use, the question then becomes, under what contexts might the significant successes seen in the eastern DRC be replicated and the troubling failings avoided?

## THE FUTURE OF THE MODEL: CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL CIVILIAN PROTECTION

The success of the IB model as a strategy for civilian protection will be dependent upon the ability of policymakers to determine which conflicts around the globe the IB is the best suited for and the conflicts in which it would be the wrong tool to use. In making this determination, four criteria are important.

### 1. *The Target's Method of Resource Generation*

The IB model of peace enforcement is more likely to be successful when targeting armed groups which obtain resources from the exploitation of an area's natural and human resources than it is if the targeted group is supported voluntarily by a significant portion of the local population. This distinction affects both the characteristics of the armed group and the possibilities for their deterrence in ways that have important ramifications.

One of the most important effects of this distinction between exploitative or voluntary methods of resource acquisition is that armed groups that rely on exploitative strategies for acquiring resources are more likely to commit violence against civilians. The conflict in the eastern DRC is characterized by just such groups.

*Armed groups that rely on exploitative strategies for acquiring resources are more likely to commit violence against civilians.*

While many claim to represent ethnic, religious, or political constituencies, most rely on the violent exploitation of civilians rather than their voluntary support. Violence against civilians is likely to be a more attractive strategy for such groups on two levels. At the individual level, groups which rely on extraction of natural resources, extortion of local trade, and outright looting from civilians are more likely to attract ill-disciplined, "opportunistic" recruits whose primary motivation for participation in the armed group is their own personal economic gain.<sup>39</sup> These less-disciplined fighters are more likely to exploit conflict situations for their own gain and prey on civilians.<sup>40</sup> This same incentive structure is also apparent at the group level. Armed groups which derive their funding through exploitation of natural resources and civilian populations have limited incentive to restrict their use of violence against civilians. Such groups do not view the civilian populations under their control as a base of sustained, long-term support, but as an additional source of exploitable material resources. In such situations, the traditional model of UN peacekeeping (separation of forces and facilitation of political dialogue) is ineffective as a civilian protection technique because civilians left under the control of such a group will be subject to consistent and severe abuse. In fact, this consistent abuse is exactly what has been seen in previous years under MONUSCO's limited mandate. Such conflicts create an urgent need for peace enforcement strategies such as IB deployment.

The reliance of predatory rebel groups on the exploitation of resources may also make them more vulnerable to defeat by outside intervention. Predatory groups by definition rely on physical access to the natural resources, transportation routes, and civilian populations they derive their resources from. Robust interventions such as IB deployments have the potential to deny armed groups safe access to their sources of revenue. By monitoring important natural resource sites, local transportation corridors, and significant population centers and interdicting the targeted armed groups exploiting these resources, an intervening force may be able to effectively deny such groups safe access to the revenue they need in order to maintain their operations. Traditional UN peacekeeping forces have not had the will or capacity to deny armed groups physical access to the resources they depend upon in this manner. IB

deployments, with their more flexible mandate, offensive weapons, and more robust rapid reaction capabilities, are better-suited to actively denying armed groups these resources than any previous UN force has been.

Conversely, conflicts which are characterized by armed groups that rely on the voluntary support of local civilian populations for their material resources may be less suited to the IB model of peace enforcement for two reasons. Since such groups are less likely to commit abuses against civilians,<sup>41</sup> there would be little justification for IB deployment, which should be reserved only for the most extreme cases of endemic violence. Additionally, combating voluntarily supported armed groups would necessitate a more wide-ranging counterinsurgency strategy, requiring more resources than is feasible for UN deployments.

## 2. *Speed of Deployment*

One important policy implication of the academic literature referenced is the need for rapid deployment of any potential intervening IB force. As discussed, a biased intervention against an armed group seems to essentially initiate a window of time during which civilians experience elevated levels of abuse at the hands of the armed group targeted by the intervention.<sup>42</sup> Policymakers must understand that by announcing an IB deployment to a conflict area, they are essentially catalyzing a reaction by the targeted armed group that is likely to create a short-term increase in danger for the very civilians they are seeking to protect. Therefore, if such interventions are to be undertaken with the goal of civilian protection in mind, once the authorization for intervention has been obtained, policymakers have a responsibility to deploy the intervening force to the conflict area and begin operations against the targeted group as quickly as possible. Failure to do so will undermine the intervention's utility as a tool for civilian protection.

*By announcing IB deployment to a conflict area, policymakers are essentially catalyzing a reaction that is likely to create a short-term increase in danger for the very civilians they are seeking to protect.*

The speed of any future IB deployment after its authorization by the Security Council might be increased in two ways. The first would be to reexamine the concept of a permanent UN standby force. Such UN standby forces have been discussed in the past.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the closest the UN has ever gotten to having a standby force was the Standby High-Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG). SHIRBRIG was created in 1996 at the initiative of several countries enthusiastic about the notion

of a UN standby force. Despite high hopes for the force, SHIRBRIG deployed combat troops only once, to monitor an Ethiopian–Eritrean ceasefire agreement in 2000–2001. However, SHIRBRIG failed to raise the expected number of troops from supporting states, with only an under-strength Canadian/Dutch infantry battalion and a Danish headquarters company being deployed. In addition, the SHIRBRIG force took twice as long to deploy as anticipated, reducing its utility as a rapid reaction force. After this deployment, SHIRBRIG lingered on, providing planning and capacity-building support to several UN peace operations, but under-resourcing and poor member state cooperation meant that SHIRBRIG failed to meet the expectation of a reliable and robust standby force, and it was disbanded in 2009.<sup>44</sup>

A more pragmatic short-term solution may be an effort to gain commitments to an intervening force from member states that have the necessary military resources prior to the authorization for intervention. This seems to have been the case in the DRC, as several regional organizations, including the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the South African Development Community, expressed support for an offensive intervention against armed groups in the eastern DRC prior to the Security Council's authorization of the IB, and member states provided the troops for the resulting deployment.<sup>45</sup> Identifying member states with the military capacity and political will to contribute to an IB intervention prior to its authorization should significantly reduce the window of time between the signal to the targeted group that the balance of power has shifted against them and their neutralization.



Uruguayan peacekeepers patrol Pinga. UN photo by Sylvain Liechti.

### 3. *Capabilities and Resources of IB Deployment*

It is also crucially important that once policymakers have made the decision to use a peace enforcement strategy, the force deployed has the resources, in terms of both troop numbers and advanced military capabilities, to rapidly overwhelm the targeted armed group. When measuring the success of an operation from the perspective of civilian protection, simple victory over an armed group is not enough; the target group(s) must be defeated decisively and quickly for two reasons specific to the goal of civilian protection. First, without the resources to quickly overcome a targeted group, military operations against said group have the potential to increase the danger to civilians in the same manner slow deployment does. Unfortunately, this seems to have been the case in the campaign against the ADF, as the failure to decisively defeat the group has allowed it to increase its violence against civilians in the Ituri district. Second, failure to achieve decisive victory over a target may mitigate a crucial secondary effect of IB intervention: the deterrence of other armed groups not directly targeted with military action. In situations where multiple armed groups constitute a threat to civilian populations, an overwhelming victory by an IB deployment could convince armed groups not directly targeted by the intervention to refrain from violence against civilians, seek political progress towards their objectives, or possibly abandon armed conflict altogether. Conversely, a weak peace enforcement operation which must maintain sustained operations against a targeted group, even if such operations end in the eventual defeat of the group, is unlikely to have similarly robust deterrent effects, mitigating one of the major benefits such a strategy may hold for civilian protection.

In order to carry out these rapid, overwhelming operations against the targeted group, any IB deployment will need to be equipped with mobile offensive capabilities such as the attack helicopters which were used to such seemingly significant effect in the DRC. However, equally important will be a deployment's intelligence-gathering, logistic, and transportation resources. One of the valuable lessons learned in the DRC is that no amount of offensive military capabilities can be effective if IB forces are unable to locate targeted groups, travel quickly to their locations, and sustain operations in the field. A lack of these resources will mitigate their unique advantages over the traditional model of UN peacekeeping. Surveillance and intelligence capabilities (both imagery and human) may be particularly vital, as insufficient intelligence will prevent IB forces from reacting rapidly to developments on the ground, and creates the potential for increased danger to civilians via the misapplication of force and resulting collateral damage.

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### 4. *Accounting for Post-Intervention Government Violence Against Civilians*

One of the inherent effects of successful IB intervention is the expansion of the state's territorial control. In order to ensure that IB intervention is effective not only in ending rebel operations but in improving overall civilian safety, policymakers must consider the government's potential for violence against civilians after it regains its authority over civilian populations. Without accounting for the possibility of government violence, IB intervention may simply deliver civilians from the hands of one abuser into those of another. Some have criticized the Intervention Brigade's deployment in the eastern DRC and the UN's military cooperation with the FARDC on the grounds that they are collaborating with government forces which have been gross abusers of civilians themselves.<sup>46</sup> This is largely true. The FARDC has a poor record on human rights, and has committed truly deplorable acts of violence and extortion against civilians. However, government targeting of civilians differs from that of non-state armed actors primarily because the international community has more tools to address it and alleviate the threat it poses to civilians. Particularly in cases such as the DRC, where UN forces are a valuable ally against rebel groups, the international community has the leverage to apply both carrots and sticks to shape the future behavior of a state military and reduce the likelihood of violence against civilians in ways it simply cannot with non-state armed groups.



Community after rebel attacks in Kiwanja. Photo by Julien Harneis, Flickr.

So in what circumstances is government violence against civilians most likely to occur? Studies have shown that government forces are more likely to target civilians with violence when they can easily identify characteristics of the population which indicate possible support for an opponent. As a result, government forces commit more violence against civilians who share ethnic or religious links with an opponent<sup>47</sup> or who live near an opponent's base of operations<sup>48</sup> because these factors lead to the perception, real or imagined, that such civilians may provide material support to their opponents. In the DRC context, the issue of ethnic/religious identity and government targeting of civilians may be quite important. For example, in the FARDC's current campaign against the FDLR, troops may be more likely to carry out acts of violence against Hutu civilians they perceive as being FDLR supporters. The dispersed, mobile nature of armed group activity in the DRC makes the consideration of proximity to a rebel "base" less significant. However, in conflicts where rebel activity is closely associated with a single location, such as the Libyan city of Benghazi's role as the center of anti-Gaddafi resistance, empirical studies show that civilian populations have a higher risk of violence by government forces the closer they live to such a location.

*Without accounting for the possibility of government violence, IB intervention may simply deliver civilians from the hands of one abuser into those of another.*

Policymakers undertaking IB-model intervention need to take steps to try to mitigate such government violence against civilians if intervention is to be effective as a civilian protection strategy. One tactic for mitigating the threat of government violence would be the targeted placement of UN observers in the areas which have the highest threat of government reprisals against civilians. Such a policy would be

a logistical challenge, particularly in a conflict zone as large and with as limited infrastructure as the eastern DRC. However, if properly implemented, the presence of such observers immediately following and for a certain period after the resumption of government control in locations at high risk of government violence against civilians may help mitigate the worst of such violence. Such a strategy may be particularly effective in deterring a military's abuse of civilians in the context of IB-model intervention. In such cases, the UN is an active ally of the government, and military abuse of civilians witnessed by UN observers would risk the loss of the valuable military capabilities the IB provides. However, UN observers are a short-term solution. In the long term, UN operations such as IB interventions which facilitate the expansion of government control must also include extensive security sector reform programs. Ensuring that the security sector is professionalized, responsive to civilian authority and, crucially, adequately paid will help reduce violence against and extortion of civilians by government forces. These steps will help ensure that IB intervention does not simply end rebel activity but leads to net gains in civilian safety.

## CONCLUSION

The UN authorization and deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade is a milestone in UN peace operations, one which may have important ramifications for how the world seeks to protect civilians in conflict areas. It challenges some of the core notions of the traditional model of UN peacekeeping operations, and introduces the possibility of using more robust peace enforcement strategies in the UN's efforts to improve the security of civilian populations. Such strategies have the potential to improve civilian protection by deterring, disarming, or otherwise dismantling the armed groups that are the most prolific abusers of civilians. There is only one case study to examine in an assessment of the Intervention Brigade and their approach to peace enforcement, but their initial success in proactively combating armed groups through a more offensive mandate and military capabilities is reason for cautious optimism. However, this military success has not been effective in reducing overall levels of violence against civilians. Like any tool, the IB model should only be applied in cases it is best suited for. The efficacy of this policy option must be weighed for each individual case based upon the characteristics of the conflict and the armed actors being targeted. Though this new model of UN peace operations certainly has serious drawbacks if misapplied, the need to protect civilians suffering truly horrific abuses in conflict areas means that the international community must continue to consider the use of the IB model as a tool for civilian protection where conditions for its success exist. The IB model will not protect all civilians all of the time, but it may be the best tool available for making long-term net improvements in civilian security.

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