

Peace Enforcement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Reflections on the Force Intervention Brigade

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<https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v45i1.4016>

Abstract

In the past two decades, the world has witnessed a speedy evolution of peacekeeping mandates. In Africa, the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has become the biggest testing ground where United Nations missions have transformed from traditional peacekeeping to a novel complex of peacekeeping and peace enforcement. The crescendo of this evolution is exemplified by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2098 that authorized, within MONUSCO, a Force Intervention Brigade to neutralize all armed groups working contrary to the objectives of peace and stability in the eastern part of the country. This paper assesses the Force Intervention Brigade in order to determine whether its operations have matched the expectations set by its proponents. It argues that contrary to the promise, FIB operations have been impeded by political and strategic factors which have far-reaching implications on the form and structure of future peace operations on the African continent.

Keywords: peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peace operations, MONUSCO, force intervention brigade, UN Security Council, Democratic Republic of the Congo



1. Introduction

State formation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been circumscribed by peace operations of one form or another right from independence in 1960. Indeed, the country's journey to statehood has been stymied by state inadequacies and the persistence of conflict especially in its eastern parts comprising North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri regions. The DRC has played host to three UN peacekeeping missions at different stages of the country's state building trajectory. The first mission, the United Nations Operations in Congo (ONUC), was in response to the first Congolese war in 1960 and the mission lasted five years. The second mission was the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) which was deployed in 1999 to monitor the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement following the second Congolese war of the 1990s. MONUC operated for a decade and was in turn transformed into the United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in 2010. A common thread in the experiences of the missions has been the inability of the UN to act decisively to protect civilians and its own personnel.

In March 2013, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment, within MONUSCO, of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to neutralise all negative forces in eastern DRC (UN Security Council 2013a). The authorization of FIB activities as part of the MONUSCO mission has been met with mixed reactions from scholars and analysts who consider the development as a path-breaking dynamic in contemporary UN peace operations. The concerns about the brigade have been both legal and strategic. From the legal dimension, concerns revolving around the blurring of the distinction between peacekeeping and peace enforcement have created the basis for reflections on the meaning of traditional peacekeeping principles of neutrality and impartiality. While the legal implications of the FIB operations have been widely discussed by some scholars (Muller 2015; Whittle 2015), others have challenged the conventional analysis of the FIB that focuses more on strategic challenges of the mission, in favour of more novel frameworks of analysis. This is evident in the work of Piiparinen (2016) who argues that the FIB can be understood as a sovereignty-building entity that improves the image of the DRC government both domestically and among its regional peers. Yet others have hailed the FIB as an entrenchment of rapid reaction capacity in peace operations that can provide a template for the consolidation of efforts to institutionalize the logic of proactive crisis management on the African continent (Murithi 2016; Mutisi 2015; Saunders 2013).

This paper aims at assessing the FIB in order to determine whether its operations have matched the expectations set by its protagonists. The point of departure in this paper is that earlier attempts to assess the FIB have underestimated the political context in which the mission subsists. Despite having a broader mandate which provides for both unilateral and joint operations with the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) in the fight against rebels, the FIB can only go as far as the DRC government permits. Consequently, the experiences of the FIB clearly indicate a path towards frustration and resignation as the DRC government seems lukewarm to the idea of stepping up joint operations against rebels. Hence, we argue that the ambition of robust operations inherent in Resolution 2098 that authorized the FIB operations has not matched reality as the operational context reveals complex political hurdles facing the MONUSCO in its engagement with the DRC government. The challenges revealed in the operationalization of the mission have serious ramifications on the logic of hybrid peace enforcement operations which is currently gaining ground within the African Union.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section sets the context and the rationale of the study. The next section discusses the evolution of Chapter VII mandates for UN missions in the eastern DRC in order to understand how ‘enforcement actions’ have gradually paved way for an ‘enforcement mission’ in the shape of the FIB. This is followed by a discussion on the institutionalization of peace enforcement in MONUSCO with particular focus on the context and process that birthed the FIB. Thereafter, we offer an assessment of the FIB by highlighting its promise and limitations. In the final section, we reflect on the implications of the FIB on future peace operations on the African continent.

2. Evolution of chapter VII mandates for UN missions in the eastern DRC

A closer look at the peacekeeping landscape in the eastern DRC reveals a gravitation of mandates over time from traditional peacekeeping towards more robust peacekeeping which includes active use of force. From ONUC through MONUC to MONUSCO, one can notice that the UN has been treating certain cases in the missions as meriting a Chapter VII response albeit with cautious phrasing such as *using all necessary means*. Nevertheless, to understand the ‘robust turn’ in UN peace operations in depth, the groundbreaking recommendations from the Report of the Panel on United Nations

Peace Operations (also referred to as the Brahimi Report) serve as a critical benchmark. The report emphasised that the need to enhance “political support, rapid deployment with a robust force posture and a sound peace strategy” in a bid to avoid mistakes that led to Somalia, Rwanda, and Srebrenica in the 1990s (UN General Assembly 2000, 4). In fact, it argued that this recommendation was made with the DRC mission (then MONUC) in mind (UN General Assembly 2000, para 4). Consequently, this paved way for the UN to begin authorizing ‘enforcement actions’ in successive Security Council resolutions.

To appreciate the progression of robust peacekeeping mandates in the DRC, one has to begin by noting the limitations inherent in MONUC, a mission that was tasked with monitoring the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (an observer mission). However, the escalation of violent conflict in the Kivus and Ituri regions in 2000 prompted the UN, through Security Council Resolution 1291, to qualify the situation in the DRC as a threat to peace and security, consequently authorizing MONUC to use force to protect UN officials. Again, in May 2003, the Security Council passed Resolution 1484 that authorized a robust international response, a French-led Interim Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF), to stop massacres in Bunia in the northeastern Ituri district (UN Security Council 2003a). Similarly, Security Council Resolution 1493 was aimed at the protection of civilians, humanitarian, and UN personnel “if the circumstances warrant it” (UN Security Council 2003b). This paved the way for the deployment of a larger and more robust, fully equipped brigade in Ituri. In fact, Resolution 1493 was the UN’s first attempt (albeit with less clarity) to authorize actions aimed at protecting civilians in the DRC.

Another significant change in posture by the UN came with the adoption of recommendations from the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in 2004 which, *inter alia*, attempted to clarify peacekeeping and peace enforcement. The report emphasized the need to distinguish between “operations in which the robust use of force is integral to the mission from the outset” from “operations in which there is a reasonable expectation that force may not be needed at all” (UN General Assembly 2004, 211 and 214). And while acknowledging the need to adopt robust approaches that accord UN missions a Chapter VII mandate to use force not only in self-defence but also for the protection of civilians (PoC), the report further stressed the need for mandates that would take into consideration changing circumstances on the ground (UN General Assembly 2004).

The impact of the High-level Panel’s report was immediately felt when in October

2004 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1565 that expanded MONUC's mandate to include the monitoring of the 2006 elections and dealing with threats posed by particular groups, but this time without applying the conditional clause 'if the circumstances warrant it' (UN Security Council 2004, para 6). It can be argued that starting from the Security Council Resolution 1565 onwards, the posture of peacekeeping began to gravitate towards a more systematic and multi-dimensional peace enforcement and, at times, including both peace enforcement and peacebuilding.

However, despite these reforms, MONUC's capacity to protect civilians was seriously limited due to the restrictive definition of the mission's overall mandate which leaned more towards politico-military reforms. This was evidenced by the eruption of more crises in June 2004 when rebels loyal to Laurent Nkunda overran Bukavu in South Kivu in full view of 1,000 MONUC troops who were fully armed. The troops only protected their premises and about 4,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) that sought refuge in their compound (Boutellis 2013). In response, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1649 which mandated MONUC to "use all necessary means within its capabilities" particularly in "areas where its armed units were deployed, to deter any foreign or Congolese armed group from attempting to use force to threaten the political process and to ensure protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence" (UN Security Council 2005, para 11). This would eventually pave the way for MONUC to decisively use its attack helicopters in 2007 against Nkunda's advances on Goma, while allowing the government armed forces to gain ground.

Notwithstanding this, it should be noted that the operationalization of the expanded mandate created some challenges between MONUC and the Congolese government as the latter felt that the new mandate was quickly evolving into an excuse for external interference in domestic political affairs. This was reflected in 2008 when, following a renewal of hostilities between the FARDC and the Rwandan Hutu militias and supporters of dissident general Laurent Nkunda, the DR Congo government remonstrated the overreaching nature of MONUC's actions. Specifically, the concern was triggered by MONUC operations under UN Security Council Resolution 1856 which authorized the mission to "deter any attempt at the use of force from any armed group", urging the mission to take "all necessary operations to prevent attacks on civilians and disrupt military capability of illegal armed groups" (UN Security Council 2008, para 3f). Hence, the arrest of Nkunda in the government's backyard and the subsequent arrest warrant for Bosco Ntaganda, who had replaced Nkunda in the FARDC, were met with indignation by Kinshasa.

Despite this impasse, the UN effectively reconfigured MONUC into the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) Security Resolution 1925 under Chapter VII of the UN charter with primary focus on the protection of civilians, security sector reforms, and oversight of the electoral process (UN Security Council 2010). As a Chapter VII mandated mission, MONUSCO was capable of exercising a latitude of enforcement operations in the eastern DRC. The transformation of MONUC into MONUSCO occurred at a time of increased consensus about robust peacekeeping evident in the adoption of the Capstone Doctrine in 2008, and the New Horizon Document in 2009, both of which emphasised the need for multidimensionality and enhanced capabilities for UN peacekeeping operations (UNDPKO 2008; UNDPKO 2009). However, the stabilization approach adopted by MONUSCO, which aimed at building the capacity of state institutions—especially security forces of the DRC—so that they could assert control over the so-called ‘islands of stability’ or liberated areas, was criticized heavily following the fall of Goma in 2012.

3. Institutionalizing peace enforcement in MONUSCO: The FIB

While peacekeeping decision making has traditionally been top-down, the context and process behind the passing of Security Council Resolution 2098 reveals a bottom-up decision-making process. In fact, the proposal for a neutral force to intervene in the eastern DRC conflict was mooted by African regional and sub-regional organizations long before the United Nations entered these discussions (Koko 2013; Lamont & Skeppstrom 2013). The continued deterioration of the security situation in the eastern DRC following the carnage by the M23 in 2012, motivated a search for a more lasting solution to the notoriety inflicted by the rebel group. The M23 went on a rampage in the Kivus between May and November 2012 defeating the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a group under UN sanctions whose leaders and members included perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. This assault culminated in the capture of Goma, the capital of north Kivu where 1,500 MONUSCO troops and 7,000 FARDC soldiers were stationed (Dehez 2013). The M23 only withdrew later after international condemnation and prospects of peace talks.

While political solutions were a necessity, there was a deep conviction that a military intervention would be crucial in establishing an environment where appropriate political reforms would thrive. This view was consistently emphasized by both the

International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In fact, the first reference to the need to have a neutral force in eastern DRC came from the ICGLR through a declaration of the heads of state and government regarding the security situation in eastern DRC dated 15 July 2012. The declaration directed the “appropriate structures of the ICGLR to work with the AU and the UN for an immediate establishment of a Neutral International Force to eradicate the M23, FDLR and all other negative forces in the eastern DRC and patrol and secure the border zones” (ICGLR 2012a, para 4). Four other declarations followed in quick succession between August 2012 and November 2012 where the ICGLR kept laying the ground for the Neutral International Force (NIF). For instance, on 8 August 2012, the ICGLR established a sub-committee comprising ministers of defence of Angola, Burundi, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania with the mandate to work out modalities for operationalizing the NIF (ICGLR 2012b). A month later, on 8 September 2012, the ICGLR emphasized the need for the NIF to function within the mandate of the AU and the UN (ICGLR 2012c). At this point Tanzania had already pledged troops to the new initiative, and this motivated the ICGLR to encourage other member states to follow this gesture.

When the city of Goma fell to rebels in November 2012, the idea of the NIF became irresistible to both the ICGLR and the SADC. In a declaration issued on 24 November 2012, the ICGLR noted that there was growing support for the NIF as South Africa was also ready to provide logistical support to the arrangement. The ICGLR further requested Tanzania to provide a force commander for the NIF (ICGLR 2012d). At an extraordinary summit of the SADC on 8 December 2012 which the chairperson of the ICGLR also attended, the SADC acknowledged the groundwork that ICGLR had made with regard to the NIF and further committed to deploying its standby force under the arrangement of the NIF (SADC 2012, para 7, iv-v). The force would comprise troops from South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi operating under the leadership of a Tanzanian force commander. It is argued that the SADC did this at the invitation of the DRC which was uncomfortable with the initial proposal in the ICGLR where Uganda and Rwanda were likely to have influence over such a force (Stearns 2013a).

Significant efforts were made in December 2012 to iron out the operational quagmire that the NIF would face in the absence of an enabling peace enforcement mandate. Hence, following some consultations in December 2012 and a harmonization meeting involving the UN, AU, ICGLR, and SADC in January 2013, there were indications that

the NIF would be absorbed into MONUSCO. In fact, as early as 19 October 2012 the UN had already taken note of the intention by the ICGLR and the AU to deploy the NIF in eastern DRC and was also aware of the need to harmonize modalities within MONUSCO to accommodate peace enforcement operations (UN Security Council 2012). This prospect was strengthened by the signing of the Peace and Security Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (hereafter referred to as PSC framework) on 24 February 2013 by all ICGLR member states, South Africa, the UN Secretary General, the AU Chairperson, and the SADC Chairperson (African Union 2013). The framework emphasized the need for security sector reforms in the DRC and urged stronger regional and international oversight mechanisms, and further called for a strategic review of MONUSCO operations to make the mission better able to support the Congolese government in addressing security challenges.

Drawing on the momentum of the PSC framework, the UN Secretary General's special report of 27 February 2013 alerted the Security Council on the threat that the situation in the DRC posed to international peace and security in the region, further stressing the need for a new strategy to address the situation. The report built its recommendations on the earlier consultations with the AU, ICGLR, and SADC and proposed the establishment of a "dedicated intervention brigade" within MONUSCO to undertake "peace-enforcement tasks of preventing the expansion of, neutralizing and disarming armed groups, to be carried out together with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement efforts" (UN Security Council 2013b, Para 60).

The UN Security Council responded by adopting Resolution 2098 on 28 March 2013 which, *inter alia*, established the Intervention Brigade "on exceptional basis" within MONUSCO to operate for an initial period of one year with three infantry battalions, one artillery, one special forces, and a reconnaissance company with headquarters in Goma, under direct command of the MONUSCO Force Commander (UN Security Council 2013b). The resolution further mandated the brigade, operating either with the FARDC or unilaterally, "to prevent the expansion of all armed groups, neutralize these groups, and to disarm them in order to contribute to the objective of reducing the threat posed by armed groups on state authority and civilian security in eastern DRC and to make space for stabilization activities" (UN Security Council 2013a, para 12b).

The resolution further defined the Brigade's operations as "robust, highly mobile and versatile" while being "in strict compliance with international law, including

international humanitarian law and with the human rights due diligence policy on UN-support to non-UN forces (HRDDP)” (UN Security Council 2013a, para 12). The resolution also recognized the need for the intervention brigade to ensure protection of civilians and mitigate risk before, during, and after any military operation, especially its targeted offensive operations. It is important to note that this mandate has been unaltered in subsequent resolutions that have been renewing the mandate of MONUSCO and the FIB as evidenced in UN Security Council Resolutions 2147, 2211, 2277, 2348, 2409, 2463, 2502, 2556, 2612 and 2066 (UN Security Council 2014a; 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2020; 2021; 2022) .

The adoption of Security Council Resolution 2098 was met with caution and unease among traditional troop-contributing countries such as Argentina, Guatemala, and Pakistan as the countries pondered the increased risk that the whole peacekeeping mission would be exposed to, given the combat posture that the intervention brigade would adopt (Dehez 2013). There is also evidence that the United States, France, and the United Kingdom were initially cautious about the idea of having an intervention brigade that would only multiply the violence in circumstances when the numbers of the brigade (3,069) were insufficient to “change the balance and solve the issues” (Hogg & Charbonneau 2013).

However, across the African continent, Resolution 2098 was generally welcomed by an aura of optimism as it had a grain of an ‘African solution’ to the internationalized conflict in the eastern DRC. Even before the arrangement was tested on the ground, there seemed to have been a plan to fast track the notion of rapid crisis management within the African Peace and Security Architecture. In this regard, in May 2013, South Africa asked the AU at its 50th anniversary to consider creating a new force under the AU Peace and Security Council that would be called the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC) and would comprise 1,500 elite troops drawn from a pool of 5,000 highly trained soldiers who could mobilise within 14 days (Saunders 2013). The idea was to institutionalize the principle of an intervention brigade within the African Union’s Standby Force in order to make it precedential in future responses to conflict situations, thereby giving the countries contributing troops greater latitude with regard to deployment of forces on the continent (Roux 2013; Saunders 2013). But questions would remain, especially regarding the sustainability of such a force since the AU Peace and Security Council was already struggling to operationalize the African Standby Force (ASF). Another challenge would be how to link with the broader multinational UN missions on the continent given that the ACIRC was being proposed to be a permanent

arrangement. The lack of traction of the idea at continental level became even more apparent in the failed deployment to Burundi of the 5,000 strong African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi (MAPROBU) in January 2016 which was premised on the notion of a rapid reaction force. While the African Union gave Burundi 96 hours to accept the mission or face a forceful deployment of MAPROBU under Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act, the plan collapsed after Burundi rejected the call and threatened to treat the AU mission as an invasion force (ICG 2016). This reflected deep divisions among AU members regarding the legitimacy of a mission capable of circumventing a host country's consent, hence, raising further doubt about the feasibility and utility of such an 'interventionist' arrangement.

4. An assessment of the intervention brigade

4.1 The early phase: Initial exploits

The FIB began operations in earnest in July 2013 with its first mission being the neutralising of the M23 rebels. The brigade provided direct combat service support to the FARDC through use of rocket and air support, and heavy artillery (Namangale 2015). Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) were also used to acquire intelligence owing to the expansive terrain that the brigade had to navigate. The use of drones proved to be an important political deterrent because it raised the potential costs for any foreign group bent on supporting the M23 (Dehez 2013).

By October 2013 the brigade had dislodged the M23 from Goma, Kiwanja, Kibumba, Rumangabo, and Rutshuru. On 7 November 2013, the M23 surrendered and agreed to peace talks that led to an agreement with the DRC government on 12 December 2013 in Nairobi. The defeat of the M23 significantly improved the image of MONUSCO, especially in Goma, where its reputation was initially dented by the perceived lack of teeth to enforce its mandate of protecting civilians (Stearns 2013b).

Following the neutralization of the M23, the DR Congo government embarked on a new demobilization program called the National Program for Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (PNDDR III) whereby most ex-M23 combatants were sent to camps that reportedly lacked appropriate community support structures such as food, water, shelter, and basic services. This move was condemned by the international community as forcible displacement. Consequently, PNDDR III received a cold shoulder from the donor community leading to starvation in the camps, and

this discouraged other ex-M23 combatants from participating in the demobilization program (Human Rights Watch 2015; UN Security Council 2014b).

In March 2014, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2147, which extended the mandate of the MONUSCO mission. The Security Council acknowledged the initial success of the intervention brigade and further authorized the brigade to neutralize the FDLR and other negative forces (UN Security Council 2014b). In April 2014, the intervention brigade joined the FARDC in another operation (codenamed Sukola 1) to neutralize the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Muslim fundamentalist rebel group fighting against the Ugandan government but using eastern DRC as its launchpad. The group had been famous for inflicting terror on civilians in North Kivu. The joint operation was largely successful. However, the situation quickly mutated such that a number of small armed groups claiming to be the ADF continued to wreak havoc at community level by settling scores and advancing political motives. According to the Secretary General's report to the Security Council dated June 2015, these attacks continued in the Beni territory of North Kivu where about 347 civilians were killed between October 2014 and June 2015 (UN Security Council 2015b).

4.2 The ambivalent phase: The politics of joint operations

When the attention of the joint operations shifted to the FDLR rebels in early 2014, Kinshasa was not keen to take this route since there had been a history between the government of Joseph Kabila and the rebel group, whereby the DRC used it mostly as a proxy against Rwandan influence in the eastern province. Thus, as the FIB was preparing for the operations against the FDLR, the rebel group suddenly announced that it would surrender and disarm, causing MONUSCO to get suspicious about the timeliness of this decision to lay down arms. The UN Security Council Resolution 2147 (2014) noted with deep concern reports that the FARDC was collaborating with the FDLR at local level. This might possibly explain why the FDLR was able to get timely information on the impending joint operations of the FIB and FARDC.

On strategic level, the DRC government began dragging its feet on the operation against the FDLR, hailing the surrender as a step in the right direction. In a joint communique of 2 July 2014, the ICGLR and SADC gave the FDLR six months to voluntarily disarm and surrender (ICGLR-SADC 2014, para 12, ii). But there was pessimism from Rwanda since similar offers for demobilization of the FDLR had fallen through on multiple occasions in the past (Fabricius 2014). Indeed, at the expiration of

the deadline, the demobilisation was not successful because the FDLR only used it as an opportunity to reorganize and assume a posture that would make the ex-Rwandan *genocidaires* more capable of negotiating with Kigali, thereby throwing Rwanda's commitment to the PSC framework off balance.

Consequent to the failed demobilisation, MONUSCO began preparations for joint military operations with FARDC against the FDLR. But despite calls by the UN Security Council for Kabila to sign a military plan authorizing a joint operation against the FDLR, Kinshasa seemed lukewarm to the idea, instead opting to launch unilateral operations against the rebels. In this regard, the DRC government embarked on a broad reorganization of the FARDC in the eastern DRC. In a deliberate move to frustrate MONUSCO, the DRC government appointed two generals (Sikabwe Fall and Bruno Mandevu) who were blacklisted by the UN for alleged human rights abuses to lead the anti-FDLR operations (Vogel 2014). The DRC government did this knowing fully well that MONUSCO would disengage from the campaign on account of its adherence to the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy.

By early 2015, the government had publicly taken a defiant stance arguing that it would no longer tolerate any interference in the sovereignty of the DRC by MONUSCO and the broader international community (AFP 2015). This followed the breakdown of talks between President Kabila, former MONUSCO chief Martin Kobler, and several diplomats. Consequently, FARDC launched unilateral operations (codenamed Sukola II) against the FDLR in February 2015 after the government rejected a call by the UN to sack the two generals, arguing that it was DRC's sovereign decision to maintain them (Nsabimana 2015). In May 2015, the DRC government spokesperson, Lambert Mende, insisted that the ball was in MONUSCO's court to address its own concerns; otherwise, the DRC was making progress in its unilateral action against the FDLR to the extent that half of the rebels had allegedly been neutralized. He further challenged that since the MONUSCO and the FIB had a mandate to act unilaterally, they were at liberty to launch their own operations against the FDLR (Clottey 2015).

For MONUSCO and the international community, this was a missed opportunity to sustain the momentum and consolidate the gains that the FIB had made in pushing out rebel groups. Consequently, the period between February 2015 and January 2016 witnessed some significant reversals in the security situation especially in North Kivu where the ADF and other rebel groups intensified raids on communities as they capitalised on the security vacuum (Maloo 2016). And in one controversial instance which revealed the impact of the fallout between FARDC and MONUSCO, 21,000

people were displaced from Miriki village in South Lubero (North Kivu) following the killing of 16 members of their community by FDLR rebels in night raids. This happened within a kilometre of both FARDC and FIB positions in North Kivu (UN News 2016a). Although this FIB contingent consisting of South African troops claimed to have known about the attack and fired several flares in the hope that their FARDC counterparts would take action, their failure to respond decisively raised concerns about their commitment to protection of civilians. Under intense pressure, the UN deputy force commander admitted that the mission's response was slow, inadequate, a failure of duty, and promised to investigate the incident (AFP 2016).

The assessment of the situation by the UN Secretary General's report to the Security Council in June 2015 revealed that despite some progress in the unilateral operations of the FARDC against the FDLR, the Congolese army had yet to focus on the epicentre of the group's operations in North Kivu where its leadership was based, and gross human rights violations were still being committed. The report further observed that in most of the areas where initial gains were made, the FDLR elements were returning especially in the mining zones and were setting up illegal taxation systems (UN Security Council 2015b); and as noted by the UN Group of Experts, most of the period between 2014 and 2015 saw the FIB confined to logistical support and intelligence sharing (UN Security Council 2016b).

It is important to note that on 28 January 2016 the UN signed a technical agreement with the DRC government to resume joint military operations, thus paving way for two major operations (Usalama 1 & 2) under the broader Sukola 1 operation primarily targeting ADF positions. While these operations were initially successful, it was observed that FARDC had the tendency to withdraw from its positions prematurely, thereby leaving a security vacuum which would eventually be filled by the returning ADF rebels (UN Security Council 2016b). However, during this period of renewed joint operations, the FARDC simultaneously undertook unilateral operations mainly targeting the ADF positions south-east of Beni. Meanwhile, Sukola II operations against the FDLR which were launched unilaterally in February 2015 by FARDC continued without FIB involvement until September 2017 when operation 'Phoenix Rising' was jointly undertaken by FARDC and FIB against the FDLR south of Nyazale in Rutshuru territory (UN Security Council 2017b, 7).

4.3 Fatigue in the forgotten war

While the FIB operations have been largely affected by high-level politics, allegations of sexual abuse by the troops have also emerged during the brigade's operations. Specifically, in March 2016 the United Nations Response Team uncovered initial evidence of transactional sex, sex with minors, and paternity claims involving members of the Tanzanian contingent of the FIB stationed at Mavivi village near Beni in North Kivu (UN News 2016b). These revelations came on the heels of UN Security Council Resolution 2272 on sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers which, inter alia, calls for the repatriation of a military unit "when there is credible evidence of widespread or systematic sexual exploitation and abuse by that unit", and replacement of such personnel where the troop-contributing country has not taken appropriate steps to investigate the allegations (UN Security Council 2016c). While the UN promised to thoroughly investigate the cases, the outcome has not been made public. These allegations not only compromised the integrity and professionalism of the FIB, but also compromised the credibility of the FIB as a mentoring force to a DRC army famed for human rights abuses and unprofessional military conduct.

At regional level, it is important to assess expectations from role players (the member states) regarding the FIB's continual presence in the DRC. What has been taken for granted thus far is the initial expectation that both ICGLR and SADC had in conceiving such a force and whether their position(s) have remained static. For instance, it is not clear whether any thought was given to the implications of an enduring military campaign without a clear exit strategy. Combat fatigue and public opinion in the troop-contributing countries points to a general concern regarding the longevity of the operations especially where the whole concept of the 'FIB as a force multiplier' for the Congolese army begins to lose utility in the wake of rising cases of casualties in the brigade. For instance, the rebel attack on Tanzanian FIB troops at their Semuliki base in Beni on 7 December 2017, which killed 14 peacekeepers and injured another 53, has been labelled as the worst ever attack by an armed group on a UN mission (UN News 2017).

5. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that the FIB represents a strategic shift in UN missions on the continent as exemplified by a commitment to the development of

rapid response capacity for early and decisive action during conflict. Most importantly, however, it demonstrates the UN's readiness to operationalize the subsidiarity principle in more nuanced and innovative ways than has been the case in the past. Similarly, the PSC framework, which has become the aorta of UNSC resolution 2098, presents the African Union and its sub-regional organizations with a crucial political space for leveraging peacekeeping decision making in the DRC. It shows that regional players have the capacity to affect the shape and function of peace operations on the continent. Nevertheless, designing solutions and affecting the content of UN resolutions is not an end in itself; implementing them to their logical conclusion remains a key challenge for most missions, and the DRC experience is no exception. While it is easier to decide to intervene, it is more complex to sustain the intervention, remain focused on the goal, justify tangible progress, and to exit the scene when clear outcomes have been achieved.

Whether the FIB represents a maturation of peace operations on the continent remains a subject of debate given the political and strategic hurdles that MONUSCO is experiencing in garnering cooperation from the DRC government. Although the FIB registered important successes against M23, political challenges that have circumscribed its subsequent operations depict the bluntness of the context within which the initial exploits have to be interpreted. While the mandate of the FIB will continue to reflect an option for unilateral action against rebels, it remains unlikely that the troop-contributing countries to the FIB and the DRC government would be willing to see the operations engaging this higher gear. Hence, the only realistic option available for MONUSCO is to continue cooperating with the DRC government as uneasy bedfellows if FIB's joint operations with FARDC are to continue. This already moderates the kind of impact that could be expected from such a robust brigade, thereby leaving the United Nations, African Union, and sub-regional organizations with serious issues to ponder in relation to the future of peacekeeping on the continent.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by the Social Science Research Council (USA) through the African Peacebuilding Network collaborative grant.

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