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Prioritization and Sequencing of Peacekeeping Mandates: The Case of MONUSCO

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STIMSON

On November 21, 2019, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop to discuss the mandate and political strategy of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). This event was the fourteenth in a series of workshops examining how the activities included in peace operations' mandates can be better prioritized, sequenced, and grounded in political strategies. This meeting note was drafted collaboratively by IPI, the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report. It summarizes the main points raised in the discussion under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants. This project is funded with the support of the government of Germany.

Introduction

The UN Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in December 2019. In this context, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Stimson Center, and Security Council Report organized a workshop on November 21, 2019, to discuss MONUSCO's mandate and political strategy.

This workshop offered a platform for member states, UN staff, and outside experts to develop a shared understanding and common strategic assessment of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The discussion was intended to help the Security Council make informed decisions with respect to the strategic orientation, prioritization, and sequencing of MONUSCO's mandate and actions on the ground.

Discussions during the workshop's first session focused on the current political and security dynamics in the DRC, including conflict drivers at the local, provincial, national, and regional levels, the implications of the country's ongoing political transition, and recent diplomatic initiatives at the regional and international level. In the second session, participants examined how to adapt MONUSCO's mandate to strengthen the mission and help the UN achieve its objectives over the coming year.

Conflict Analysis

The past year has seen a reduction in insecurity in some areas of the DRC, and notable progress in the governance space and regional relations under the new Congolese government. However, many root causes of violence remain unaddressed, and the potential to address them depends on the continuation of a fragile political transition.

SECURITY SITUATION

While violence throughout the country has decreased in scope and intensity in recent years, high levels of insecurity and criminality persist in different regions of the DRC. In the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, there are open clashes between government forces and a diverse array of non-state armed groups. Some of the estimated 130 armed groups operating in the country are deeply connected to local communities through economic, sociocultural, and political ties; others are perceived as illegitimate actors,

motivated predominantly by their own political or economic interests.¹ Continued fighting between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and armed groups poses serious threats to the physical safety and rights of civilians, sustainable peace, and national and regional political cohesion.

While the FARDC carries out direct operations against certain armed groups with support from MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), the national government and the mission continue to face challenges creating and maintaining a protective environment throughout these provinces. In particular, logistical challenges, a limited ability to counter asymmetric threats, predatory behavior by some state security services, and political and economic linkages between state officials and armed groups prevent them from realizing these objectives.

The provinces of Kasai, Kasai-Central, Kasai-Oriental, and Tanganyika confront different conflict dynamics. While direct conflict with armed groups has largely subsided, militias and criminal organizations continue to employ extractive practices toward local communities, including through their exploitation of natural resource economies. Intercommunal violence remains prevalent in these provinces and has contributed to widespread displacement and violence against civilians. Humanitarian challenges remain acute, and much of the population lives in poverty without access to public services.

STATUS OF THE ROOT CAUSES AND DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE

Unresolved conflict drivers continue to fuel insecurity across a number of provinces. Weak or absent government institutions, particularly at the provincial and communal levels, perpetuate conditions where citizens' basic needs are not met and civil rights are not respected. This challenge fuels cycles of criminality, and populations in some cases reluctantly embrace non-state armed groups as de facto providers of security and administrative support.

Disputes within and between communities over access to and use of land also contribute to increasing violence at the local level, especially in areas where displaced civilians or refugees are returning after many years. In addition, non-state armed groups and state security services alike illicitly extract natural resource wealth as part of a political economy that fuels human rights abuses and persistent criminality.

National and regional actors often have complex political and economic linkages to this community-based violence. For example, transnational armed groups operating within the DRC often include local militias in their patronage networks. Additionally, some political elites throughout the country continue to rely on identity-based discourse to incite localized violence for personal gain. These issues are compounded by conflicts between neighboring countries that have spilled over into the eastern DRC, where national and regional elites channel these political tensions into support for competing armed groups.

Nonetheless, these dynamics also give space to recent efforts to foster intercommunal cohesion. Successful peacemaking efforts have often involved close cooperation between local communities and subnational or national government officials who strive to build relationships with the communities they represent. Locally driven reconciliation efforts, including peacebuilding workshops and trust-building exercises, have proved partially effective at creating pockets of peace at the local level, notably in remote areas of the Kasai region and in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu.

POLITICAL DYNAMICS AND THE GOVERNANCE TRANSITION

The DRC has seen significant shifts in its political landscape following a peaceful governance transition and the handover of executive power to an opposition candidate. Félix Tshisekedi was inaugurated as president in January 2019, and a new coalition government was instituted in September 2019.² Encouragingly, there appear to be early

¹ UN Security Council, *Transitioning from Stabilization to Peace: An Independent Strategic Review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, UN Doc. S/2019/842, October 16, 2019, para. 21.

² The coalition is a partnership between the party of President Tshisekedi, the Cap pour le changement (CACH), and that of former President Joseph Kabila, the Front commun pour le Congo (FCC).

efforts within the governing coalition to pursue proposed political reforms to restructure security agencies, combat corruption, and improve the transparency and efficiency of existing accountability mechanisms.

Some participants also highlighted newfound political space for opposition parties and civil society organizations to operate through democratic channels. For example, senior opposition leaders have recently returned from exile, and some parties are focusing their political capital on building broad electoral constituencies ahead of elections scheduled for 2023.

In this context, public expectations are high for the new government to deliver on its promises, particularly those relating to subnational governance reforms. One participant recommended measuring progress on key challenges facing the government using the following indicators: a defined strategy for security sector reform (SSR) and defeating armed groups, an accountable budget to build state capacity, and the implementation of political reforms at the national and state levels.

However, significant challenges remain. The governing coalition is based on a fragile alliance that took nine months to build. Widespread public perceptions that former President Joseph Kabila continues to exert significant influence throughout the coalition, in addition to his party's control over the national legislature, could restrict President Tshisekedi's ability to implement his policy agenda. Some participants also speculated that levels of political violence could rise if governance reforms stall or if the coalition collapses. Rising political tensions would similarly restrict national authorities and the UN from systematically addressing the country's structural drivers of violence.

REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND MULTILATERAL INITIATIVES

Regional and international dynamics are also important for the DRC's political and security trajectory and, by extension, for MONUSCO's future. Neighborhood dynamics have long been

critical for understanding security developments in the country, particularly in the DRC's eastern provinces. President Tshisekedi has sought to improve diplomatic relations in recent months, including at the head-of-state level, which is exemplified by concerted outreach to Angola, Rwanda, and Uganda. Relations between Rwanda and Uganda have shown signs of improvement, although relations between Rwanda and Burundi remain tense, and the risk of domestic unrest in Burundi ahead of the 2020 elections is growing.³

At the multilateral level, the DRC is a member of many subregional organizations, including the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the South African Development Community (SADC), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). These organizations are necessary for promoting stronger regional integration and for helping the countries address persistent transnational threats. The 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework (PSC Framework), supported by the UN special envoy for the Great Lakes region, remains a useful tool for coordinating political initiatives aimed at addressing structural drivers of conflict in the region. Continued room for improvement exists, especially given the PSC Framework's limited focus on the protection of civilians, growing concerns by Congolese citizens over the potential presence of foreign troops within the country's borders, and continued transnational linkages between regional governments and armed groups operating in the DRC.

President Tshisekedi has also prioritized diplomatic initiatives with international partners in an attempt to generate political goodwill and mobilize donor support. For example, the International Monetary Fund's decision to reopen its loan program with the DRC is expected to help fund stabilization initiatives and increase service delivery.⁴ However, broader diplomatic engagement is also intertwined with the country's political transition. For example, this financial assistance was delayed by several months over the ruling coalition's inability to agree on a budget.

³ UN Security Council, *Transitioning from Stabilization to Peace: An Independent Strategic Review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, UN Doc. S/2019/842, October 16, 2019, paras. 29–30.

⁴ Michael Kavanagh, "IMF Eyeing \$370 Million Rapid Credit Facility for Congo," Bloomberg, November 9, 2019, available from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-09/imf-eyeing-370-million-rapid-credit-facility-for-congo>.

Prioritization and Sequencing of MONUSCO's Mandate

Participants agreed that MONUSCO's strategic priorities, detailed in UN Security Council Resolution 2463 (2019), remain relevant for guiding the mission's upcoming mandate. Gradual openings in the country's political space and a small but noticeable reduction in violence provide new opportunities for the council to consider how to reconfigure the mission to undertake stabilization tasks and begin preparations for its eventual drawdown and transition. However, participants discouraged significant changes to the mission's mandate at this time, noting that any changes should not restrict the mission's ongoing efforts to support national actors in addressing political, security, and humanitarian challenges.

Instead, they highlighted opportunities for the Security Council to update the mandate so that MONUSCO can more actively support the country's ongoing political transition and regional engagements, continue with stabilization efforts that are founded on a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians, and begin working with an array of national actors and international partners to lay the groundwork for the mission's eventual transition.

RECONFIGURING STABILIZATION-ORIENTED TASKS

In light of changing conflict dynamics and the country's new political dispensation, participants encouraged the UN Security Council to maintain a focus on the protection of civilians while adjusting the mission's mandate to ensure that MONUSCO's footprint and activities reflect conflict dynamics on the ground.

Participants reflected on the potential for reconfiguring MONUSCO's force posture, in light of the increasing sub-regionalization of conflict dynamics within the DRC. This could entail consolidating military operations in specific regions and relying more on nonmilitary tools to consolidate gains elsewhere. Some participants recognized the need to maintain MONUSCO's force posture in areas of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri where active fighting persists. Ongoing

operations, they suggested, should primarily be used to pressure non-state armed groups to engage in political dialogue. They also recognized that active operations and political dialogue alone are insufficient for promoting sustainable peace and encouraged the mission to expand complementary stabilization programming related to justice, corrections, arms registration, and community violence reduction.

In areas of low-intensity conflict, such as the provinces of Kasai, Kasai-Central, Kasai-Oriental, and Tanganyika, participants agreed upon the need for MONUSCO to increase its engagement on rule-of-law activities. This approach could also entail a continued focus on resettling displaced populations and demobilizing communal militias. Doing so would also require a surge in police presence and increased civilian capacity to maintain a focus on the rule of law and the humanitarian-development nexus. However, some participants disagreed with the approach of completely demilitarizing MONUSCO's presence in these areas, citing the need for a military response to counter threats posed by criminal organizations or community-based militias.

In addition to this geographic reconfiguration, participants suggested greater emphasis on political engagement and programming that complements MONUSCO's military operations. First, they argued that the mission should continue its long-term focus on strengthening and professionalizing national security forces in order to prepare national authorities to reassume full responsibility for providing security throughout the country. As part of this, the mission should also sustain its efforts on SSR, an already significant task, in order to reduce the security sector's incentives for predatory behavior against civilians. Second, the mission should continue its stabilization efforts through both political engagement and programming, including demobilizing armed groups and supporting community-based mediation efforts. To achieve greater progress in these areas, Congolese authorities, with support from MONUSCO, will have to foster community support and promote intercommunal reconciliation and transitional justice.

Participants also reflected on the future of the FIB. While it was successful in neutralizing the M23 group in eastern DRC in 2013, it has recently

confronted challenges achieving its mandate. Some participants called for a greater emphasis on nonmilitary tools and questioned the FIB's relevance moving forward; others called for increasing the FIB's funding and logistical support so it can more effectively neutralize armed groups. Participants encouraged the Security Council to use the upcoming mandate to better align the FIB with the mission's overall approaches to political engagement and stabilization.

SUPPORTING THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Participants welcomed the mandate's continued focus on supporting national political processes. Given MONUSCO's comparative advantage in helping create space for political dialogue, participants also urged it to continue engaging in this area at the subnational, national, and regional levels.

Some recommended that the mission continue to use its good offices to help sustain political space for dialogue among the parties within the governing coalition, as well as between the governing coalition and opposition parties. Additional efforts by the mission to continue promoting an open national political space, especially for opposition forces, civil society organizations, and underrepresented communities, were framed as necessary to help the country consolidate the gains achieved through the political transition. Some participants encouraged the mission to continue supporting subnational government authorities by conducting sensitization campaigns and implementing local conciliation committees to provide mediation and arbitration services. To mitigate challenges from weak state capacity at the local level, participants called for MONUSCO to continue supporting and advising subnational political institutions.

Participants also urged MONUSCO's leadership to continue incorporating a regional lens into its political and security engagements throughout the country. They encouraged frequent collaboration with the UN special envoy for the Great Lakes region, along with regional and subregional organizations, to develop a political strategy to address the linkages between local militias and transnational armed groups. One participant highlighted emerging coordination between the DRC and its neighbors on regional security threats and asked whether the mission could help the government

incorporate the protection of civilians into these efforts.

PREPARING FOR AN EVENTUAL TRANSITION

Participants agreed that the UN should begin preparing for MONUSCO's eventual drawdown and transition. The findings of the independent strategic review of the mission, submitted to the UN Security Council in October 2019, helped frame discussions on the concepts of national ownership, sustainability, and the primacy of politics.

Participants agreed that an immediate drawdown and exit would be premature. They instead advocated for an approach that recognizes transitions as primarily political exercises, links to a stable and cohesive national political environment, and provides the space for national actors and the UN to develop a long-term roadmap for the UN's reconfiguration. They similarly recognized the importance of the Congolese government's active input into discussions on these issues; in this light, they acknowledged the government's commitment to deliver a formal response to the Security Council regarding the independent strategic review.

Participants discussed mechanisms that could help the Security Council guide the mission's transition. For example, some suggested the adoption of clear and realistic benchmarks for the mission, which would help the council better understand whether MONUSCO and the Congolese government are achieving progress on a range of priorities. While some argued that benchmarks could clarify engagement with stakeholders and help measure policy gains (particularly in regards to SSR and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration activities), others warned that it was too early to determine benchmarks. They called for continued informal consultations between the Congolese government and the UN to account for the fluid political environment.

Participants identified several ways for the Security Council to help MONUSCO strengthen the partners that will assume its responsibilities post-transition, including the national government and UN agencies, funds, and programs operating in the DRC. They also identified several ways the council should encourage the mission to work

more closely with partners, such as the national government, UN agencies, and civil society, to transfer its remaining responsibilities. Participants urged the council, following inputs from the mission, to explore ways to increase the Congolese government's ownership of tasks currently mandated to the mission, particularly on the protection of civilians and SSR.

Additionally, participants encouraged the Security Council to mandate a clearer division of labor between the mission, the UN country team in the DRC, national authorities, and international partners. Some encouraged the country team to assume more of a leading role on stabilization-related activities so that MONUSCO can streamline its priorities over the coming years. For example, one participant identified the mission's current work on natural resource management: although this has a tangible impact on conflict dynamics, one participant made the point that UN agencies would be better placed than the mission to focus on this issue.

Finally, some participants suggested that the Security Council reevaluate MONUSCO's role in providing logistical support to humanitarian actors. The mission is regularly called upon to deploy its air assets in support of providers of humanitarian assistance in remote areas of the country. However, one participant described this practice as costly, unsustainable, and outside of MONUSCO's mandate. Participants called for greater engagement with UN agencies and other actors to ensure a sustainable approach to humanitarian assistance and clear expectations about what kind of support is feasible from the mission. Absent

such clarity, the mission risks unintentionally creating a vacuum in the humanitarian space and facing public backlash.

Conclusion

The DRC's political and security dynamics continued to improve over the past year, with the ongoing political transition, regional rapprochement, and a conflict that has decreased in scope and intensity. However, the underlying fragility of the political process, as well as persistent low- and high-intensity conflicts in certain regions, pose continued challenges. Effective state governance is absent in much of the country, insecurity and poor infrastructure hamper humanitarian access, and civilians face pervasive threats from armed groups and the FARDC.

In this context, MONUSCO's current mandate remains highly relevant. Workshop participants encouraged the Security Council to maintain the mission's mandate to engage on political developments and the protection of civilians. However, they also highlighted opportunities to refine existing tasks, including contextualizing stabilization efforts, bolstering the police presence, and promoting an expanded state presence without undermining protections for civilians' safety and rights. Finally, they called for the Security Council to take a cautious approach to planning for the transition by mandating a clear division of labor between MONUSCO, the government, and other actors and considering tools to track progress on gains made so far.

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