

## Forceful Peacekeeping: Shared Risk, Sustainable Engagement

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UN peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) recently knocked down a nasty militia called M23 with a political-military punch that may become a model for dealing with rights-abusing armed groups elsewhere in Africa.

The political punch combined regional and international support for region-wide peace with pressure by donors on aid-dependent Rwanda to cut its support to M23.

The military part of the punch was a new Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). Originally conceived as a neutral, regional force to enforce the regional peace process, it was eventually integrated within the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). The brigade's troops from South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi deployed with a mandate to "neutralize" groups like the Rwanda-backed M23.

In early November, Congolese troops backed by the Force Intervention Brigade routed M23 forces that were, by then, both short on supplies and shorn of regional political support.

Some have stressed the new mandate in accounting for the Force Intervention Brigade's successes to date, but for the United Nations, "neutralize" can mean many things - such as isolation and cutting of supplies or reducing popular support - up to and including deadly force. Like other UN missions launched or reinforced in the past decade, MONUSCO and its FIB have the right to use "all necessary means" to protect civilians under imminent threat of violence and to carry out other key elements of their mandates.

So what is different here? It is the intent to force, as it were, the use of force - highlighting some Security Council members' growing impatience with peacekeeping mission leaders' failure to effectively use the tools, from political to military, that they were given to do their jobs.

Thus, along with a new mandate, MONUSCO received, in quick succession, both a new force commander and new civilian head of mission. Once the Force Intervention Brigade had a relatively brief interval to form and train, the mission and its new leaders launched military operations in support of the Congolese army.

Other crises in the past 10 years have also prompted changes of mandates and leadership favoring the use of force. In May 2003, an aggressive new head of mission organized a UN response to interethnic violence in the DRC's far northeast district of Ituri. The UN deployed well-armed, brigade-strength, mechanized infantry forces to Ituri and immediately set out to pacify the district.

Three years later in Haiti a change in head of mission led within months to the UN's winter 2006-07 campaign against the powerful and heavily armed gangs of Port au Prince and other Haitian cities. UN forces undertook

coordinated assaults on gang-ridden slums, handing over some 800 leaders to Haitian authorities despite fierce armed resistance.

In late 2010 in Côte d'Ivoire, UN peacekeepers protected the winning presidential candidate from the forces of the incumbent, who used street gangs and uniformed services alike to harass not just opposition politicians but the UN mission itself.

As tensions peaked in early spring, the mission received a new force commander, then reinforcements from the UN operation next door in Liberia, and finally a more forceful mandate. UN forces executed this mandate in collaboration with a small French force, targeting the old regime's heavy weapon sites and ultimately resolving the crisis.

The DRC thus matches a pattern of reactive UN crisis reinforcement but does entail two departures that suggest how crisis prevention and response may be structured in the future.

The first one is bringing the Force Intervention Brigade into the structure of the UN operation, to support a regional peace initiative. The Force Intervention Brigade's troop contributors are members of the Southern African Development Community, one of Africa's Regional Economic Communities that pledged several years ago to raise brigade-sized contributions to an African Standby Force.

The Standby Force was intended to stabilize dangerous situations under the aegis of the African Union. Neither the African Union nor the Regional Economic Communities can afford to support such forces on their own, but with globally raised UN peacekeeping money, planning and logistical support, they can. The UN has used this model to support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for nearly five years, with reasonable success - due in no small part to greater risk tolerance by troop contributors than is common in the UN's own operations.

In Mali, the UN has opted to replace a West African-led mission with its own operation, in a politically unresolved and terrorist-fringed situation that is more complex and dangerous than the previous missions it has taken over in that region, in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. It remains to be seen how effective it will be.

It is, however, the Central African Republic that may truly test the liberal impulse to rescue the decent masses from the corrupt and violent few. Incipient nihilism there invites an operation aimed not just at stability but at temporary regional or international trusteeship. The largest effort of its kind yet attempted, such an operation would preferably be led by the African Union, with the scope of UN support given AMISOM and forces from AU members for whom the meltdown in CAR may pose a clear and present danger. The UN and the AU, in combination, match regional interests with global resources; properly managed, a clear and present win.

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