



For two decades the United Nations has had a peace keeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Straight from the beginning we've heard criticism on how expensive and how large the mission is.

At its peak it held close to 20 000 UN soldiers, the largest UN mission in the world. Naturally it has cost a lot of money and it still does. Demands for having fewer soldiers in the mission have been frequent, both from those who never wanted the soldiers to be there at all, and from those who pay for it.

But things should be put in perspective. 20 000 soldiers *is* a reasonably large figure. But remember that they were deployed to a country which is as large as western Europe.

In comparison, a few years earlier, in the mid 90's, NATO sent 60 000 soldiers to safeguard the peace treaty in Bosnia. 60 000 soldiers in a country as large as Småland, a province in Southern Sweden.

In 2017 Sweden held a seat at the UN Security Council. The United Nations Associations of DR Congo and Sweden held a joint seminar in the UNHQ at the time. During the seminar we urged the EU to uphold targeted sanctions against members of the DRC regime who are responsible for human rights violations and repression against people. We also demanded that president Kabila should step down and not seek a third mandate period as president. A third point of ours was to argue against the Security Council decision to withdraw 3 500 UN-soldiers from MONUSCO simply because the US, under the Trump regime, decided to demand so.

Two years later we are happy to see that the former president backed down and that elections were finally held. But we also see the result of the withdrawal of UN-troops. The international civil society organisation CIVIC, Center for Civilians in Conflict as well as other CSOs, have issued fresh reports with examples of how civilians have been killed in areas close to where there used to be a UN MONUSCO base.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the pressure for further reductions has continued. In order not to receive these as surprises depending on Trump's temper in the future, there have been some analyses and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CIVIC\\_PKReport\\_Final2\\_Web-2.pdf](https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CIVIC_PKReport_Final2_Web-2.pdf)

decisions already taken in order to have a strategy for the MONUSCO to exit the DRC and before Christmas the Council must decide on the mission's mandate for the next year.

In the field, November turned in to be one of the worst months in a long time for MONUSCO as over 100 civilians were massacred by the ADF in perimeter close to areas where MONUSCO contingents are deployed.<sup>2</sup> The violence is ongoing, and we have little hope that the death toll in December will be lower. With the mission failing to protect civilians from attacks from the ADF-militia, large parts of the population in Beni and other cities in eastern DRC have reacted with anger and have demanded the withdrawal of the UN troops since they were deemed worthless.

The situation is complex and there are explanations for the UN inaction this month. The raise of violence from the ADF was a response to the Congolese army's offensive against the group, an offensive that wasn't carried out in coordination with the UN. But such explanations are not enough to avert us from demanding that the UN need to do better in their protection of civilians in accordance to its UN Security Council's mandate.

UNA-Sweden and UNA-DRC share the opinion that it would indeed be normal to have a point in the future when security was guaranteed simply by the Congolese themselves, with a good and decent Congolese police force and a well-behaved Congolese army where such means are necessary.

But we can't see that this point is close in time. It is years, maybe decades, ahead of us.

According to a recent report from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights nearly 70 per cent of the violations related to restrictions on democratic space throughout the country are committed by members of the Congolese national police and army with the remaining 30 being committed by armed groups.<sup>3</sup>

This brings us to the concept of Responsibility to Protect, which was unanimously adopted by the UN in 2005. It is intended to bridge the gap between respect for sovereignty and the need to intervene when atrocity crimes are committed.

The primary responsibility to protect its populations lies with the national states but if they fail by lacking the will or the capacity to stop large scale crimes, the world community must take responsibility to act. In between these extremes are situations where a weak state can co-operate with the UN to deal with these crimes. The UN and DRC finds itself in such a middle way situation. Such situations are problematic in many ways, but they are the lesser of all evil alternatives.

So, what does the DR Congo really need?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/drc-hacked-death-suspected-rebel-attack-beni-191207065804108.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/human-rights-situation-and-activities-united-nations-joint-human-1>

Well, our wish list is long:

- Economic development and a wise and controlled use of the vast natural resources in the country.
- A political life based on true democracy and good governance.
- Women's and youth empowerment and participation in all sections of society.
- Increased development aid from richer countries.
- Humanitarian assistance.
- Peacebuilding support.
- Mediation and conflict resolution between various community groups in the society.
- A continuation, and improvement, of reforms within the Congolese police and armed forces.
- A competent UN presence through MONUSCO, with civilian elements but also police and military means.

In the long run the civilian tools are the most important to achieve sustainable peace, but with the current security situation in mind enhancement of police and military means are deeply needed, which is why it is sad that MONUSCO's presence is endangered.

If anything, we would have preferred open and inclusive discussions on how to strengthen MONUSCO rather than how to plan its exit. There has been very fair criticism and expectations from not least the Congolese public themselves that MONUSCO has not been tough enough against armed rebel groups. Rather than trying to protect civilians at risk there have been occasions when UN troops have been used only to protect their own bases and humanitarian convoys in an old-fashioned peace keeping way.

Over the years there has been different drivers pushing for MONUC/MONUSCO to leave. Former president Joseph Kabila forced a decimation of the force prior to the elections in 2011. He also pushed for downsizing it further prior to the elections last winter and since at least 2017 he has had the US and Trump as co-drivers on this mission. After the election we have seen the new president, Felix Tshisekedi, with a cabinet with a large portion of Kabila's people, hint at the possibility to invite Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi to send their troops to the DRC to help combat armed groups.

Anybody who is following the current raising tension between Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi resulting from having their proxy armed groups picked against each other in the DRC realizes that there would be great dangers to such a "solution".

It would be better to strengthen and motivate the UN mission with well-trained and equipped soldiers from countries who understand and upon altruistic motives are willing to combat these armed groups in order to stop them from committing further massacres. Only then can we hope for true protection of the Congolese civilian population.

It is no secret that the current main troop contributors often argue for less dangerous interpretations of their mandate and aim for a more traditional form of peace keeping. Other

countries, not least western, often argue for more robust peacekeeping, including confrontations with illegal armed groups.

The main troop contributors answer to this often is heard as “easy for you to wish, you are not here yourselves”. This is genuinely true. Of MONUSCOs soldiers 51% come from South Asia and only 2% from Europe.

So, of 15 500 soldiers in MONUSCO only 308 are European soldiers and of these 292 are from the Ukraine. Couldn't other European states do better, really?

We often hear that European soldiers are needed back home in fear of future Russian possible aggressiveness. Meanwhile the Congolese population, being under aggression right now, is deprived of security.

If MONUSCO itself cannot be enhanced alternative solutions must be searched for. Maybe the situation calls for an ad hoc-solution such as the one Sweden, France and other countries did in eastern DRC in the Artemis-mission of 2003? Although not without imperfections, the mission was generally deemed a success in the way it took some temporary burden off from the UN-mission. Another alternative would be to form an EU-AU-UN-hybrid force to back-up MONUSCO's own intervention brigade, but with finances from outside of the UN.

It is important that the local conflicts in DRC are addressed by all UN-bodies and other agencies and organisations and that much more resources are directed to this. Above all it is vital that the Congolese people feels that there is a real hope for a better future. This mandate period needs to be remembered as a positive one. Otherwise, the political future looks bleak and the risk of another setback in Congolese history increases.

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