

CHAPTER 10: THE UN'S DRONES AND CONGO'S WAR

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The eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been at war, of varying but incessant intensity, for nearly 20 years. The outbreak of war was catalyzed by a Rwandan invasion in 1996, in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The invasion provoked a war that spanned the Congo* and ended when Mobutu Sese Seko was overthrown in May 1997. Laurent Kabila, who replaced Mobutu, and his son Joseph, who took power after Laurent's assassination in 2001, fought with their former Rwandan patrons and a slew of other combatants in a second round of fighting from August 1998 to June 2003. After the 2003 ceasefire, fighting has continued in the east until the present.†

United Nations peacekeeping forces arrived in the DRC in 1999 and have remained there ever since.¹ The UN

* We will use Congo and DRC interchangeably in this essay, which does not discuss the neighboring Republic of Congo.

† This chapter does not treat the history of these wars in any detail. As Jason Stearns writes, "The conflict is complex and knotted, with dozens of different protagonists. The long history of state decay in the Congo—or, more accurately, the failure ever to build strong institutions—has meant that actors have proliferated, competing for power and resources in the absence of a strong government. At the height of the war, there were upwards of forty Congolese armed groups in the eastern Congo alone, while nine different African states deployed troops." Stearns's book, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012), along with Gérard Prunier's *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), are the best overviews of these complex, sad stories. Howard French, "Kagame's Hidden War in the Congo," *New York Review of Books*, September 24, 2009, is a good, shorter summary.

contingent is called MONUSCO, the French acronym for "United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." Its present mandate, most recently renewed in March 2015, says that MONUSCO's top priority is the protection of civilians.² It is authorized, on paper, to take "all necessary measures" to protect "civilians under threat of physical violence, including by deterring, preventing and stopping armed groups from inflicting violence." Lieutenant-General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, from Brazil, is MONUSCO's military commander and is in charge of nearly 20,000 UN soldiers and five drones. The drones were first deployed in December 2013, in Goma, a city in eastern Congo where MONUSCO has its headquarters. What role have the drones played in protecting civilians over the last year and a half, and what can they accomplish in the future?

The first problem with drones, Santos Cruz says, is lowering expectations. One goal of drones was to help contain cross-border arms smuggling, he notes. But, he asks, "if there are three or four rifles in a boat hidden in the middle of fish, how can you see them?"³ Drones, he says, need human sources to give context. This is not something the UN has historically been good at. "Intelligence used to be kind of a dirty word in the UN," says Chris Johnson, a U.S. Army officer who is Santos Cruz's deputy head of intelligence.

A Selex Falco drone flown by American contractors in support of UN peacekeeping troops in the Congo lands at the Bunia airport.



“I think that’s slowly changing.” Nevertheless, at present, Johnson acknowledges, “There’s no human intelligence network like you’d find in other places.”⁴

The UN’s involvement in the Congo goes back to when the country achieved independence from Belgium. As Walter Dorn has written, “the peacekeeping operation in the Congo, from 1960 to 1964, was the UN’s baptism by fire in nasty internal (intrastate) conflicts.”⁵ In 1961, the UN’s second secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld, died when his airplane crashed (over the border in what is now Zambia) en route to cease-fire negotiations for a ceasefire between the secessionist province of Katanga and the central government of the Congo.* “Aerial reconnaissance, provided by Swedish jets, was essential to predict and preempt Katangan attacks on UN forces,” Dorn writes of the 1960–64 conflict. The Congo has been bound up for half a century not only with questions of how the UN pursues peacekeeping, but also of how it uses aerial reconnaissance.

Unmanned aircraft operated by foreign peacekeepers have flown on and off in the Congo since at least 2006, when Belgian armed forces brought drones to the capital, Kinshasa.⁶ However, their systematic use by the United Nations dates to December 2013.⁷ This has been the first time that the UN has used drones as a “mission asset” (i.e. integrated them into overall operations).[†] The UN’s drones, called Falcos, were built by, and are operated by, Selex, an Italian aerospace company that is a subsidiary of Finmeccanica, a conglomerate.⁸ The Falco is a twin-boomed fixed-wing drone, the size of a compact car, which is pushed through the air by a rear-facing propeller.⁹ The Falco is roughly half the size of a Predator. This makes it much bigger, and thus more expensive to build and operate, than the new generation of drones built by consumer

[†] Though this is often presented as a crucial step forward for the UN, as opposed to in the past when troop-contributing countries brought drones with them, the development is, to an extent, accidental. The UN asked troop-contributing countries to bring UAVs to the Congo, but no member nation was willing to contribute drones. The UN thus put the process out to commercial vendors and received eight bids. The UN sought a UAV that could identify a two-meter target from a distance of five kilometers and that would be able to relocate via C-130 aircraft within 48 hours. It considered a number of options, including the Elbit Skylark, Elbit Hermes 450, MMist SnowGoose, Aeronautics Aerostar, and IAI Searcher. For more, see A. Walter Dorn, *Air Power in UN Operations: Wings for Peace* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 292.

* That crash remains a source of controversy, with Ban Ki-moon, the current secretary-general, calling for a new investigation in July 2015 as discussed in: Somini Sengupta, “U.N. Chief Calls for New Inquiry Into 1961 Plane Crash That Killed Dag Hammarskjöld,” *New York Times*, July 6, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/07/world/americas/un-chief-calls-for-new-inquiry-into-1961-plane-crash-that-killed-dag-hammarskjold.html?_r=0.

companies. Its cost and size are necessary if it is to have the range, endurance and capability that the UN requires. In many ways, this sets it off in character from something like a DJI Phantom. However, both small and large drones gather visual information from above. The questions raised about how they do so, and how that information is used, are similar regardless of the size of the drone.

The UN pays Selex \$13 million annually to run the UAVs (which was the cheapest of the bids it received).¹⁰ The Falco, says Lieutenant Colonel Matt White, a British artillery officer who is currently the head of UAS operations for MONUSCO, is “absolutely outstanding value for money. It brings situational awareness to the mission that you previously didn’t have. I wouldn’t like to guess at the magnitude improvement, but I would suggest it’s large.”¹¹ The Falcos typically fly two missions a day, White explains, from Monday to Thursday. They fly once a day on Fridays and Saturdays, and on Sundays they rest. Each mission is about five hours—the Falco’s endurance is longer, but the missions are planned to allow for contingencies. “Sometimes you have to spend a long time circling an area to get the pattern of life established. Other times it’s dynamic—‘I need to have a look at that now’—and we find stuff that could be actionable straight away,” he says. Selex maintains ten staff members in the DRC to operate the UAVs—pilots, sensor operators, engineers, and mechanics, most of them Americans with experience operating drones in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

For the first 11 months of their operation, the Falcos were based at the airport in Goma, a few miles from White’s office at MONUSCO’s headquarters on the shore of Lake Kivu. In November 2014, Steven France, White’s predecessor, moved them to Bunia, the principal city of Ituri, a region about 200 miles north.¹² “The reason we did that was not because they weren’t needed in Goma, but because there was some pretty atrocious activity going on outside Beni in November,” France says. Beni is a smaller city about halfway between Goma and Bunia, but its airport’s runway had too much gravel for the Falco to take off from and land on without being damaged.

“In October and November 2014, a series of attacks took place in the Beni area that killed more than 200 people and displaced several thousand people,” a January 2015 UN report recounts.¹³ Those attacks are thought to have been made by an armed group called the ADF (Allied

Democratic Forces). The report discusses the leaders of the ADF, who “oversee a system that imposes punishment such as crucifixion; death by stoning; severe beatings even just for speech considered subversive; imprisonment in pits, underground cells and an ‘iron maiden’ ... starvation during imprisonment; and summary execution.” It also explains that between January and September 2014, one center alone dedicated to helping “children associated with armed groups” received 1,125 children between eleven and seventeen years old in the first nine months of 2014.* The ADF is an Islamic group. However, the UN report says that there is no “credible evidence suggesting that ADF has, or recently has had, links to foreign terrorist groups.”¹⁴ Outside experts dispute the role that ideology plays in motivating the ADF; some argue that it ought to be thought of as a criminal gang, while others see it as an ideologically-driven insurgency.

Though the redeployment of the drones took place quickly, they were unable to be of much use against the ADF, says a UN official.¹⁵ The ADF is operating in the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains, in triple-canopy jungle. The Falco uses a Wescam MX-10 sensor to see.† The MX-10 carries both visual and infrared cameras, which can see heat, whether from human bodies or cooking fires.¹⁶ However, the sensors cannot effectively penetrate the canopy. The Falcos were better at aerial reconnaissance than helicopters, which were already being used; they found a whole village that couldn’t be seen from helicopters. However, this UN official notes, you have to give the drones “something to look for.

* These children were recruited by the ADF as well as other armed groups.

† One of the drones also carries a synthetic-aperture radar, but this has seen only limited use, according to White, who says, “It’s quite limited in terms of what it can provide you here. It’s useful in big, open spaces looking for vehicles. We don’t do a great deal of that here in the Congo.”



People demonstrate against MONUSCO in Mavivi, north of Beni, on October 22, 2014 after a series of massacres attributed to the ADF in which 80 civilians were killed.



One of two Falco drones that Selex is operating for the UN out of Bunia, the principal city of Ituri, near the border with Uganda.

The ADF don't walk around with weapons. They cache them." This makes it difficult to tell whether a group of people the infrared sensors glimpse walking around the forest is composed of villagers or rebels.

On January 15, 2015, MONUSCO and the FARDC (the Congolese army) launched an operation against another group* called the FRPI (Forces de résistance patriotique d'Ituri) that had attacked a Congolese army position in Aveba, a town about thirty miles southwest of Bunia.¹⁷ Since that attack, France says, the focus of the drone surveillance has been "almost completely FRPI." In Kagaba, a village about ten miles from Aveba, Aidivodu Gerard, the headmaster at the primary school, recounted an attack that had taken place in April. Apolina Malikizungu, a fifty-two-year-old woman, was killed. The FARDC came late, he says. It took the army half an hour. But MONUSCO came not at all. "During the daytime," he says, "things seem OK, but during the nighttime bandits come."¹⁸ Paka Fabien Alezo, a traditional chief in Nombe, just to the north, says two young men were killed around 9 p.m. on April 14, 2015, when a militia broke down the door to the small house they were sleeping in.¹⁹ At the hospital in Geti, a town about five miles from Aveba, Dr. Joseph Djoki Bahati says, "We have no contact with MONUSCO. We are not safe with MONUSCO. They patrol for their own security."²⁰ Bahati's hospital is about half a mile from a MONUSCO base, where a garrison of seventy-two Bangladeshi soldiers was commanded, in May 2015, by Major Tahsin Salehin. "We try to dominate

the place by showing our presence so the FRPI cannot freely move," Salehin explains. "We send two to three patrols every day, and at night, also, with staggered timing."²¹

"There's a lot happening in every area around here because of the proliferation of the armed groups. ... It's fascinating but it's also frustrating. You know you could do more," says White. "After every mission we provide a post-mission report [that] says what they found, what location, what they analyze it to be. ... That's the point where someone is supposed to say dynamically, if it's an emergency, give it to the operations branch so they can do something about it. But then that demands someone to do something out

on the ground. At the moment, from my limited exposure out here, people are, from the framework brigade perspective, quite fixed with all of their framework patrolling." White explains that he gives the post-mission reports that the Selex contractors create to G2, or intelligence personnel, with whom he shares an office.

"Intelligence has been underfunded for decades in the UN," says Johnson, MONUSCO's deputy intelligence officer. "Fifteen people in a division-size G2 shop is just insane." By contrast, he says, in a U.S. military deployment of comparable size, the headquarters intelligence contingent would number about 500 people. He needs many more people, he says, to analyze open-source intelligence like Twitter and Facebook, as well as to "go through with a fine-tooth comb all the post-mission reports that the UAV does." There is a strange irony at work here. The UN does not have enough personnel to effectively analyze the images it gathers with the current system; it also does not have enough UAVs to cover the enormous expanse of eastern Congo.

For instance, when three UN contractors were kidnapped in late April 2015, thirty miles north of Goma,²² White was frustrated that the Falcos could not help in the search. "We couldn't actually find them because we didn't have an unmanned air system down here. I sat on my hands, thinking if only we had two operation sites, the one down here could be concentrating on that whilst we continue with the armed-group search in the north," he says.† It is an unenviable challenge. Although there are five Falcos in the

* Christoph Vogel, an analyst, maintains the best openly available maps of armed groups in the eastern Congo, at: <http://christophvogel.net/congo/mapping/>

† The three contractors were later released unharmed; it is unclear whether a ransom was paid for their release.

Congo, the Selex team can only fly one at a time. Two of the five are deployed in Bunia, where the team of contractors is, along with one ground control station (GCS). The other GCS and three drones lie fallow in Goma, where they cannot be operated for lack of funds. Only one drone can fly at a time in Bunia because the GCS can only control one drone at a time. It takes three people to operate the drone—a pilot, a sensor operator, and an engineer—who sit in the GCS, a small shipping container by the side of the runway at the Bunia airport. The DRC is the size of Western Europe; even just the eastern provinces where the war is active are large. There are always more places where the drone is not than where it is. This is, of course, true of MONUSCO's 20,000 soldiers as well.

This is a paradox that M'Hand Ladjouzi, MONUSCO's head of office in Bunia, captures well: "The main challenge of peacekeepers in DRC is that the population sees well-trained armies, well-equipped armies with all the resources they can imagine, and they can't see why the problem is still there. Then you go to side of the peacekeepers and see that the zone to be covered by one Bangladeshi battalion is larger than the whole of Bangladesh.* So you can imagine the number of miracles you have to perform in order to be present everywhere."²³

In the case of the UAVs, this difficulty is compounded by another one: the weather. In any number of instances where the Falco's were potentially close enough to be useful, they could not fly because of the weather. "We are affected quite badly because of weather down here. Great Lakes† and non-weatherproofed aircraft don't mix very well," says White. The Falco's weather capability, says Gianfranco Fragasso, a Selex engineer who helped design the drone, is comparable to a small Cessna or other general aviation aircraft.²⁴

In May 2015, as Santos Cruz traveled from Goma to Bunia, his helicopter was shot three times, puncturing the gas tank. Though fuel was leaking quickly, the helicopter landed safely. MONUSCO and Congolese army troops were sent to search for whoever fired on the helicopter, but could not find the perpetrators.²⁵

It is difficult to call MONUSCO a success. The ongoing violence—and severe poverty—in the DRC are heartbreaking. The Congolese government wants the UN to leave, seeing its presence as an infringement of sovereignty.²⁶ The UN's failure stems in part from a lack of resources and a lack of political will from the UN as a whole to take more assertive action, but also in part from

a disconnect between peacekeepers and the Congolese population. "Even when they escort humanitarian convoys, Pakistani, Indian battalions, they don't want to roll up their sleeves. They just watch. They say, 'We are not here to fight,'" says one aid worker with years of experience in the Congo.²⁷ "An abundance of examples illustrate how the interveners' inability to understand their local counterparts fuels miscommunication and misunderstanding and, at times, leads to disastrous consequences," writes Séverine Autesserre in *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*.²⁸ She goes on to describe a 2010 incident in which militiamen raped 387 civilians over the course of three days in Luvungi: "a patrol of Indian peacekeepers actually passed through the village while the atrocity was ongoing."

It is also impossible to call MONUSCO a failure. "MONUSCO is not the police force of the DRC and is far too small, ill-equipped and ill-suited to stop gang, group or individual crimes," says Dorn.²⁹ But, he says, it has a positive effect on the strategic level. Things would inarguably be worse in eastern Congo if not for the UN's presence. Many members of the UN's staff—military, police, and civilian—work long hours at difficult jobs and navigate difficult interactions with the Congolese government. "It's not exactly a collapsed state," the aid worker says. There is, for instance, a parliament. However, "the government is no longer in control."³⁰ The Congo's road network is a shambles; many roads are impassable for much of the year. To drive fifty kilometers (thirty-one miles) from Goma may take four hours, if it hasn't rained for several days, allowing the mud to dry. Santos Cruz suggests that 20 percent of international actors' budgets should go to infrastructure. "The most important thing I've seen is roads and water," he says. "If you can open roads, farmers can export; the army, police, and UN can move." Even if what MONUSCO does is far short of what's necessary to accomplish its goal of "effective



A burial ceremony for victims of an attack by suspected ADF rebels near Beni on April 16, 2015. At least 5 civilians were killed and decapitated in a machete attack.

* This is an exaggeration, but is true in spirit.

† Africa's Great Lakes are a series of large lakes in the Great Rift Valley. Goma is at the northern edge of Lake Kivu, a long skinny lake that constitutes the border with Rwanda. Bunia is near Lake Albert, which Uganda and the DRC share.

protection of civilians under threat of physical violence,” it is a far sight better than nothing. The same can be said for the drones.

If you’re outside in the city of Bunia when the Falco comes and goes from the airport a few miles away, you hear it clearly. This leads many locals to the mistaken conclusion that “when it is flying everyone can notice there is a drone, because of the loud noise. It’s different from what we heard about American drones. ... Here it is very disappointing.”³¹ However, as Brendan Clugston, one of the Falco’s pilots, explains: “We try to stay above the ground as high as possible. We have two aircraft—one without a muffler, one with a muffler—so we have to adjust those altitudes. [We] then also adjust our position because of the reflection of sound off mountains. You try to get in a spot—I was trained on that—where you have less of that reflection.”³² Clugston has flown for SkyWest Airlines out of Houston, has taught at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and has flown Predators in Afghanistan. Unless you happen to be near the airport, if Clugston is flying the Falco above you and you hear it, it is likely because he wanted you to. Many of the armed groups he sees from the air are in fact FARDC soldiers—the Congolese army, MONUSCO’s complicated allies—so he sometimes gets orders to descend and deliberately make the drone heard in order to “see how they react. And we did, about 1,000 feet above the ground. They knew we were there, were running for red flags* and everything because they were FARDC.”

Clugston explains that he’ll use the Falco at times to check road conditions—both the physical condition of the road and the state of impromptu checkpoints that may be present. He has flown over riots and has worked with local police (via UN liaisons). Much of his time is spent, as White notes, looking at “patterns of life.” Clugston explains, “If we are over a jungle area and we start to see a camp within that jungle off the main road, we are really going to pay attention to that and keep going back to that site and see how they are moving.” But if any UN troops engage such groups, Clugston hasn’t seen it. Any interdiction that might take place “happens after we’ve been pulled off station,” he says. Ladjouzi, MONUSCO’s top official in Ituri, where the drones are deployed, when asked what tangible effect the drones have on the situation on the ground, says, “For me, being nonmilitary, it’s not that visible.”

In November 2012, Goma fell to M23, a rebel group supported by Rwanda, despite the presence of UN peacekeepers in Goma.³³ M23’s takeover was the most traumatic event in the recent history of the eastern Congo, setting off an epidemic of rape and summary executions.³⁴ In response to M23’s brutality,[†] the UN created a new unit, called the “Force Intervention Brigade” (FIB). The FIB is comprised of about 3,000 soldiers from South Africa, Tanzania, and

Malawi. The UN announced the creation of the FIB in March 2013, but the brigade did not become operational until that summer.³⁵ When the FIB eventually arrived in Goma, it routed M23 in a joint offensive with the Congolese Army. As James Verini writes in an account of the FIB in *National Geographic*, “The offensive against the M23 was arguably the most aggressive military action the UN had undertaken in more than 50 years.”³⁶

The FIB was controversial within the UN and among international NGOs, who saw it as compromising the UN’s neutrality.[‡] The FIB’s actions against M23—though belated—were a clear victory for the UN. The FIB is currently headquartered in Beni, in the area where the ADF operates. One might reason that the UN’s drones would work closely with the FIB. However, Fragasso explains, “we [the drone operators] don’t have contact with the military organizations who could be interested in the mission. We have limited point of contact. We don’t know who is committing the mission.”³⁷ Johnson, the UN intelligence officer, says that the FIB patrols in similar number and fashion to the “framework” or regular peacekeeping brigades. They have, “relatively the same manpower, same type of equipment,” he says. “Every single one of these battalions and brigades out here have the exact same rules of engagement. There is no difference ... to me the FIB is not special,” says Johnson.

The FIB, Johnson explains, was successful against M23 because M23 acted like a conventional army: “they liked to prepare positions on hilltops ... that’s not the case with the FRPI.”³⁸ Johnson enunciates the UN’s limits: “no foreign force can take down an insurgency. It’s got to be a host nation to do it. But we have a lack of governance. No foreign force can establish governance. It’s got to be the host national forces that do it. The role of the UN here is to help mitigate the instability, insecurity in the area.” At times, as in the FIB’s joint offensive against M23, the UN’s intervention has been strategically decisive. Even before the creation of the FIB, Indian UN peacekeepers flying Russian-made Mi-35 attack helicopters used them to attack armed groups. The CNDP (the predecessor to M23) tried to take Goma in November 2006 and again several times in the fall of 2008. In both cases, “helicopters aided the ground troops of MONUC and the Congolese army (the FARDC) by determining the exact locations of the rebels and, when necessary, aiming rockets or machine-gun fire directly at them.”³⁹ Walter Dorn writes: “in the crucial test of September–November 2008, [the Mi-35 attack helicopters] proved to be a key enabler to repel aggression. The rebel attack on Goma was thwarted, and the United Nations protected a major population centre, something it had failed to do in other missions. This success served as a lesson of robust peacekeeping.”⁴⁰

But such successes are difficult to weigh against failures; thwarting one attack is of little consolation to the victims of a subsequent attack. Frederick Maisha Bifuku, a lawyer and

* The red flags were meant to be waved as an indication that they were allies.

† M23’s history is, like that of most Congolese armed group, complicated. The interested reader should consult “From CNDP to M23” (2012), a Rift Valley Institute paper by Jason Stearns, an accessible, authoritative history of M23.

‡ Timo Mueller, a researcher with Human Rights Watch, has compiled a comprehensive and useful reading list on the FIB, available here: <http://muel-tertimo.com/2014/12/18/the-force-intervention-brigade-a-reading-list/>



A village in Masisi, North Kivu, a region in the Congo which has seen a great deal of fighting in recent years.

political commentator in Goma, says the idea of surveillance drones is a useful one. However, he asks, “Did these drones become blind when they reached the Congo?”⁴¹ Clugston and his colleagues are far from blind; they are competent and they are well-meaning. However, the disconnect between MONUSCO’s good intentions and its actual effectiveness is one reason why the Congolese population perceives it so negatively. According to a poll taken in late 2013 in a joint Harvard-UN Development Programme study, “77 percent of the respondents judge the contribution of MONUSCO to security as being weak to non-existent.”⁴²

An optimistic take is that the drones, by virtue of the information they create, can goad the UN into more dynamic and effective action. As political scientist Langdon Winner has put it, “If one has access to tools and materials of woodworking, a person can develop the human qualities found in the activities of carpentry.”⁴³ The same holds for institutions. However, as Winner notes, it is rarely clear how strong a particular technology’s capacity to shape society is; it is certainly not clear in the case of drones. If drones are to be used effectively by the UN, the information drones gather must be used in conjunction with other sources of information. Whether these other sources are labeled “human intelligence” or “community relations” is in part a matter of attitude; the UN as an institution does a poor job of speaking to local people, however one wants to label such interactions. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule on an individual level. However, as Autesserre writes, “Interveners rarely hold in-depth discussions with ordinary citizens.”⁴⁴

Brigadier General Saif Ur Rahman, a Bangladeshi general who is in charge of MONUSCO’s Ituri Brigade, says that though the UN is still learning how to use drones, he hopes they will allow the UN to do the same job with fewer soldiers.⁴⁵ This is the wrong ambition for the UN’s drones. They can make peacekeepers more effective; they can help keep peacekeepers safer. Drones can in principle act as a force multiplier. But MONUSCO—like other peacekeeping missions—has far fewer personnel than are needed to accomplish its stated goals.*

The role of UN peacekeepers has been an evolving one; it is not only in the DRC that the UN has come to play a more proactive role, but also in Mali, the Central African

Republic, and Sierra Leone. This is an evolution of which drones are a part, though changes in peacekeeping doctrine are an active area of debate and disagreement within the UN. A 2015 report from a “High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations” notes, “In the absence of a peace to keep, peacekeepers are increasingly asked to manage conflict. A rethink of capabilities and concepts is needed, to support these conflict management missions.”⁴⁶ The panel’s recommendations call for “extreme caution” if peacekeepers are to undertake “enforcement tasks,” but also say “peacekeeping principles ... must be interpreted flexibly in light of changed circumstances, and not be used as a shield for inaction.”

If the UN continues to use drones without effectively analyzing and acting on the information they gather, the drones risk becoming a sort of technological apotheosis of the UN observer—capable of seeing great horrors more systematically than ever before, but unable to do anything about them. Another alternative is that the UN, unable or unwilling to expand its mandate in response to the capabilities drones provide, decides simply to stop using them. Asking “how effective are drones?” is not a terribly useful question. Their utility is a function of the UN’s willingness to reconcile what its mandate says on paper—to use all means necessary to protect civilians—with the realities of a recalcitrant Congolese government and the complicated political dynamics among troop-contributing member states. Drones go to the heart of the dilemmas facing the UN as it wrestles with its role as a global arbiter.

* It is not simple, or likely even possible, for the UN to increase the number of peacekeepers somewhere like the DRC. The Congolese government is pressuring the UN to leave entirely; force numbers are a matter of acrimonious political negotiation.

The road south from Bunia goes up over bumpy green hills, climbing an escarpment that, on its far side, drops off to the Albertine Rift, the western branch of the Great Rift Valley. After passing a few small waterfalls, it gets high enough to allow one to see Lake Albert sparkle below. In the distance, Uganda comes in and out of view, barely visible through the mist. Villagers push heavily laden bicycles up the hills. The road divides at Bogoro. One branch leads down to the lake and another south to Aveba, where, in January, MONUSCO announced a joint operation with the Congolese army against the FRPI. The road goes first through the Lagabo refugee camp and then through a series of villages that give way to one another without clear boundaries between them: Lagabo, Nombe, Kagaba. Every few miles, Congolese soldiers, posted in ones and twos, watch the road; some are in uniform, and some are not.

A health clinic in Geti, the first major town, treats one to two rape victims a week.⁴⁷ The clinic doesn't give information about rapes to the authorities, says Manasse Avuta, a nurse there, because it is confidential. Nurses say fighting has gotten worse lately. They've seen malaria incidence rise, Avuta says, because people sleep in the forest to avoid militia members who come in the night. Munuro Console, another nurse, remembers an attack in early April.⁴⁸ Child soldiers, she says, came early in the morning and knocked down the door of a house, cutting a middle-aged woman badly with machetes and injuring a man as well, though he ran away. The soldiers fired their guns, though they did not kill anybody that night. Villagers gathered and shouted, and MONUSCO troops arrived, keeping a distance, she says, of about a hundred meters. "We are dying," she says, "and they are taking pictures." §

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Monusco Background,” United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/monusco/background.shtml>.
- 2 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2211, “Intervention Brigade in Democratic Republic of Congo,” March 26, 2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11834.doc.htm>.
- 3 Carlos dos Santos Cruz, MONUSCO force commander, interview with the author, Goma, DRC, April 28, 2015.
- 4 Chris Johnson, U.S. Army and MONUSCO intelligence officer, interview with the author, Goma, DRC, May 13, 2015.
- 5 A. Walter Dorn, *Air Power in UN Operations: Wings for Peace* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 1.
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