

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 24 December 2015 from the Chair of the
Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations
addressed to the President of the Security Council**

I have the honour to transmit herewith the concept note of the seventh thematic discussion of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, held on 19 October 2015, on the theme “The Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: lessons learned” (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council and issued as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Mahamat Zene **Cherif**
Chair
Security Council Working Group on
Peacekeeping Operations



Annex to the letter dated 24 December 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Concept note

Meeting of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations held on 19 October 2015

Thematic discussion on “The Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: lessons learned”

On 19 October 2015, Chad, as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations held a thematic discussion on “The Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: lessons learned”. This discussion brought together Security Council members and a broad range of Member States, including troop- and police-contributing countries. Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Ignace Gata Mavita wa Lufuta, Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations, and Lot Dzonzi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations, were invited to provide briefings.

Context

In December 2012, following the fall of Goma into the hands of the rebel group Mouvement du 23 mars (M23), the international community decided to act decisively to end the cycle of violence that has been destabilizing the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A peace, security and cooperation framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region was negotiated and signed in Addis Ababa in February 2013 by 11 countries, including Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

In March 2013, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2098 (2013), which further strengthened the political mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and allowed for the creation of an Intervention Brigade within the Mission. The creation of this Intervention Brigade was the result of a process that originated in July 2012 with the proposition of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to deploy a neutral intervention force. This proposition was then adopted in October 2012 by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), but the lack of funds impeded its deployment by the regional organization, which prompted the Security Council to step in. The Intervention Brigade, which is part and parcel of MONUSCO, was envisioned as a military complement to the political process, with the peace, security and cooperation framework as the road map. In the wording of the resolution, the Intervention Brigade is “to conduct offensive operations” — within the overall efforts of MONUSCO to protect

civilians and to address the root causes of conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo — in order to “neutralize” and “disarm” groups that pose a threat to “State authority and civilian security” in the region. Formed by contingents from Malawi, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania, the Intervention Brigade is composed of three infantry battalions, one Artillery Company and one Special Forces and Reconnaissance Company.

The Brigade is hailed by some as a paradigmatic shift in the way the United Nations conducts peace operations, while others are quick to point out that resolution 2098 (2013) set up the Brigade “on an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent or any prejudice to the agreed principles of peacekeeping”.

The objective of the Brigade is not entirely dissimilar to those of the already robust mandates of MONUSCO and its predecessor, the United Nations Observer Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). However, three main differences can be brought forward in comparison with other/former explicitly robust peacekeeping mandates of the United Nations: (a) the mandate of MONUSCO clearly states that the objective of the Brigade is to neutralize and disarm rebel groups committing human rights abuses and goes as far as naming those armed groups; (b) the proactivity and the assertiveness of the tasks of the Brigade in terms of the protection of civilians is unprecedented; and (c) the Brigade is deployed under the command of the United Nations, unlike past experiences, such as in the former Yugoslavia or in Côte d’Ivoire.

Deployed during the summer of 2013, the Brigade’s first success came in November of that year when a joint offensive with the Forces Armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) brought M23 to its knees. In the first half of 2014, the Brigade then provided support to FARDC in their overall successful operations against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel group. In June 2015, FARDC and the Brigade jointly initiated an offensive of the Forces de résistance patriotiques en Ituri (FRPI). In spite of these operational successes, the cooperation between the Brigade and FARDC was partly jeopardized by the tension that arose in the first half of 2015 between MONUSCO and Kinshasha regarding the planning of military operations against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR).

Both good and bad points have been anticipated since the announcement of the creation of the Brigade in 2013; some have materialized while others have not. Well over two years after its creation, it is time to take a step back and to think about the lessons that can be drawn from this experiment at the tactical, operational and strategic levels. This exercise is all the more important now that the highly anticipated report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations has been published. Indeed, that report notes that United Nations peace operations are increasingly likely to be deployed in places where spoilers and/or various violent armed groups jeopardize the execution of their mandates, including the protection of civilians aspect that is in context similar to the one that MONUSCO is facing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, the report contains reflections and recommendations that will very likely inform the discussions regarding the possible future deployment of security arrangements similar to the Brigade.

Tactical level

On the up side, the deployment of the Brigade allowed MONUSCO to adopt a more proactive stance towards human rights violations perpetrated by armed groups, as opposed to the more reactive stance that had harmed the credibility of the Mission up until then. Moreover, the experience of the Brigade has not resulted, as feared, in a sharp increase in casualties for Blue Helmets, which may prove that a more robust posture does not necessarily go together with higher fatalities. Indeed, it can even be argued that such a posture may very well — to a certain extent and in some contexts — decrease the risks of attacks and therefore of casualties among United Nations troops.

On the down side, the addition of a new armed actor (the Brigade), even if deployed within MONUSCO, beside rebel groups, militias and FARDC, changes perceptions towards the unity of mission, further increases the density of the “fog of peace”, and thus adds to the tactical complexities on the ground. Furthermore, serious doubts remain regarding the efficiency of the Brigade when confronted by rebel groups using guerrilla tactics. Those doubts extend to the capacity of the Brigade to adequately implement the guidelines for military components in peacekeeping missions for the Protection of Civilians, newly released by the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, while at the same time neutralizing and disarming rebel groups embedded within civilian populations.

Operational level

At an operational level, the main positive aspect of the Brigade is that its formation has encouraged some troop-contributing countries to provide robust capabilities and to accept significant operational risks by reducing ambiguities and divergent interpretations in the field thanks to the crystal-clear objectives set out in resolution 2098 (2013). Moreover, as evidenced by the military victory over M23, the Brigade has demonstrated a good unity of effort with the MONUSCO Force Commander and the Operation Commander of FARDC. The use by the Brigade of United Nations air assets, artillery and mortars as force multipliers supporting FARDC was notably efficient.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the adoption of resolution 2098 (2013) and the subsequent deployment of the Brigade had a negative impact on the engagement level of the other brigades of MONUSCO, some of which refrained from using force, including force to protect civilians, having developed the perception that that was, as of that moment, the sole responsibility of the Intervention Brigade.

Strategic level

The Intervention Brigade experiment clearly shows that, when properly designed and within a favourable political context, the deployment of an offensive brigade can be a powerful incentive for spoilers to lay down arms and join the political and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. As a result, it can be seen as a useful tool of leverage for the other components of the Mission and for the advancement of its overall political mandate. Moreover, the Brigade can play an interesting role — in the early stages — in helping the authorities attain their objective of strengthening their control over remote and unstable areas.

Nonetheless, the hesitation of some contingents of the Brigade about whether or not to participate in military operations against some rebel groups shows how the current structure of the Brigade leaves it vulnerable to the political will of the countries contributing troops to it. Another problem comes with the fact that a peace operation can be seen by important stakeholders as biased in favour of the host Government because the Brigade is at times so closely associated with some military operations that are led by Governmental troops. This bias — be it real or perceived — can harm the credibility of the United Nations as an impartial stakeholder and can undermine its crucial role in political processes.

Recommendations for potential deployment of future force intervention brigades in other peace operations

Looking back at the short experiment of the Intervention Brigade of MONUSCO, and keeping in mind the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, it is possible to put forward the following recommendations:

1. Troops comprising Intervention Brigades should be better prepared and better equipped for responding to guerrilla type attacks;
2. Specific and highly mobile units should be dedicated to more assertive operations for the protection of civilians;
3. In parallel with the proper implementation of the newly released guidelines for the protection of civilians for military components in peacekeeping missions, best practices of tactics used for the protection of civilians should be collected in a field manual and units should be trained accordingly by troop-contributing countries;
4. The autonomy of the Intervention Brigade and the support it receives and cooperation it enjoys with the armed forces of the host country should be finely tuned in accordance with a specific political and strategic context;
5. The increase of a mission's capabilities and the increased robustness of the mandate that accompanies the deployment of an Intervention Brigade can lead to higher risks of the infliction of collateral damage. Early warning mechanisms should therefore be strengthened and expanded accordingly;
6. The Intervention Brigade should never replace or upstage a proper political process and a thoroughly thought-out exit strategy. They should be firmly harnessed to such processes in order to avoid the radicalization of rebel groups against the Government and the United Nations and in order to prevent excessive intransigence by the Government towards rebel groups;
7. It is crucial to favour consultations with all countries that contribute troops to a peace operation — not just those providing troops to an Intervention Brigade — before the adoption of robust and offensive mandates. Such discussions on the mandate, threat assessment and specific unit requirements may help to avoid a drop in the level of engagement of the troop-contributing countries that are not involved in the Intervention Brigade and may consequently further strengthen the unity of command of the entire mission;

8. Peace operations that deploy Intervention Brigades should consult with both the host country authorities and United Nations bodies and regional stakeholders to better prepare — with reference to the strategy “Clear-Hold-Build” — the transition from “Hold” to “Build”;
 9. Intervention Brigades that are not efficient should be given the means to be efficient or should be decisively withdrawn in order to try and preserve the credibility of the mission under which they are deployed;
 10. A thorough assessment should be undertaken on whether and when an Intervention Brigade should be deployed within or alongside a peacekeeping operation.
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