

The UN Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Maj. Gen. Patrick Cammaert and Fiona Blyth, International Peace Institute (IPI)

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This new policy brief by Major General Patrick Cammaert (Ret.) and Fiona Blyth was published by the International Peace Institute in July 2013. The brief examines the origins of the regional Intervention Brigade authorized by the UN Security Council to be deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the context of its deployment, and its issues. Maj. Gen. Cammaert is a former military advisor in the United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operations and former Eastern Division commander of the UN Mission in the DRC. Blyth is a research assistant at IPI.

After nearly fourteen years of peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations established a new, more aggressive kind of force for the conflict-stricken nation in March 2013: the Intervention Brigade. Situated within the existing United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), this offensive combat force is designed to break the persistent cycles of violence in DRC and protect civilians by carrying out targeted operations to neutralize rebel forces. While this new initiative could improve the UN's efforts to protect civilians, particularly by deterring rebel attacks through a show of force, it also raises a number of risks and challenges for MONUSCO, the DRC, and the region as a whole.

MONUSCO's peacekeepers are already authorized to use military force to restore peace and security under their Chapter VII mandate, with rules of engagement that allow them to conduct offensive operations in the protection of civilians. The extent of these operations is, however, contested among troop contributors, and the formation of the Intervention Brigade highlights the reluctance of some to implement the mandate to its fullest extent. The brigade's deployment makes the UN a party in the conflict, which many member states fear taints the UN's neutrality with future consequences for peacekeeping operations worldwide.

Making the UN a party in the fight increases the risks to the civilian components of MONUSCO, who may become targets of rebel reprisals to Intervention Brigade operations. MONUSCO's core troops must be perceived as effective in order to deter such attacks and display a willingness to counter rebel incursions with decisive action and the use of force beyond self-defense. This may also increase the risks to the population in the DRC, which may experience casualties from the fighting.

The Intervention Brigade may succeed in clearing rebel groups and deterring violence for the duration of its one-year deployment. But the current weakness of the Congolese armed forces when it comes to supporting MONUSCO and any gains made by the brigade must be addressed, as they are an unreliable ally yet critical to sustainable solutions to the conflict.

In addition, the brigade must form a part of a wider strategy for bringing peace to the DRC, creating political space for the new Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Military intervention unsupported by a political process could, in fact, discourage parties from engaging in negotiations.

Finally, this broader strategy must be driven by national actors with the support of regional powers.

The conflict in the DRC cannot be addressed solely within its borders. The pervasive backing of rebel groups by Congo's neighbors requires that solutions to the conflict have regional support.

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Intervention Brigade was conceived and agreed to in the subregion by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and endorsed at the regional level by the African Union (AU), but the political process must have a similar consensus.

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