

ISSUE BRIEF

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U.S. Should Oppose Return to U.N. Peace Enforcement

Brett D. Schaefer

The U.N. Security Council recently adopted resolutions to create an “intervention brigade” to supplement the U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and to establish the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The Security Council’s approval of the Mali mission where there is no peace to keep and authorization of offensive action by peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) violate the basic U.N. principle that peacekeepers are not war fighters. The U.N. has eschewed peace enforcement for well-founded reasons based on past experience. The U.S. should oppose U.N. peace enforcement and instead support ad hoc coalitions and interventions.

Past Tragedy. A primary U.N. responsibility is to help maintain international peace and security, the most visible aspect of which is U.N. peacekeeping. Between 1945 and 1989, Cold War rivalries permitted approval of only 18 operations. By contrast, 35 operations were approved in the 1990s, including some that sent peacekeepers to situations lacking an agreed cease-fire or peace. These more forceful missions led to some of the most disastrous events in the

history of U.N. peacekeeping: the failure to restore peace and governance in Somalia; U.N. peacekeepers’ failure to stop the 1995 massacre in Srebrenica, Bosnia; and unwillingness to act in the face of genocide in Rwanda.

With Srebrenica and Rwanda in mind, the U.N. since 1999 has instructed its peacekeepers to protect civilians from the imminent threat of violence. These debacles also led to a reexamination of U.N. peace enforcement culminating in the *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (Brahimi report), which acknowledged the need for robust peacekeeping operations at times but also unequivocally stated: “[T]he United Nations does not wage war. Where enforcement action is required, it has consistently been entrusted to coalitions of willing States, with the authorization of the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter.”¹

This report has guided peacekeeping policy for over a decade. Even as U.N. peacekeeping has been assigned broader responsibilities and expanded to historic highs in personnel and expense in the 2000s,² the U.N. has observed the principle that it should not engage in peace enforcement operations. Indeed, the U.N. reiterated the conclusions of the Brahimi report in the 2009 *A New Partnership Agenda Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping*:

The single most important finding of the Brahimi report was that UN peacekeeping can only succeed as part of a wider political strategy to end a conflict and with the will of the parties to implement that strategy.... Peacekeeping is not always the right answer. In situations of high political tension, or in contexts where regional or national

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The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

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support is lacking, prevention, mediation, peace-building and conflict-sensitive development activities may be more effective. In active conflict, multinational coalitions of forces or regional actors operating under UN Security Council mandates may be more suitable. Successful crisis management rests on choosing the right tools and bringing them together in ways that maximize their respective strengths.³

Subsequent updates to *New Horizon Initiative* have not overturned this conclusion. Indeed, the Security Council has preferred to support ad hoc coalitions when use of force was required, such as the African Union force in Somalia and the current French and Economic Community of West African States intervention in Mali.

Stepping into Peace Enforcement. Traditional peacekeeping, as acknowledged in Resolution 2098, involves several basic principles, “including consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force, except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.”⁴ However, recent Security Council action evidences enthusiasm for more aggressive missions that harken back to the 1990s, authorizing missions in the gray area between traditional missions and peace enforcement.

■ **MONUSCO.** Resolution 2098 established an offensive U.N. combat force within the authorized troop ceiling of 19,815 to neutralize and disarm armed groups in the eastern DRC. The

“intervention brigade” was deemed necessary after current MONUSCO peacekeepers—already possessed of the most aggressive mandate among U.N. missions—failed to fulfill their charge to prioritize “protection of civilians” and instead retreated in the face of attacks by a rebel group late last year. The DRC government has little authority over eastern Congo, which is infested with armed groups with political and economic motives. This mandate removes entirely the fig leaf of U.N. neutrality by establishing MONUSCO as an armed participant in the conflict required to confront armed adversaries directly and forcefully.

■ **MINUSMA.** Resolution 2100 instructs 12,600 peacekeepers to use “all necessary means” to stabilize “key population centres and support for the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country” and to protect “civilians and United Nations personnel” in Mali.⁵ The Malian government has minimal authority in northern Mali, and there is no peace agreement between the provisional government and rebel groups in northern Mali. Radical Islamists continue to conduct terrorist attacks periodically. The U.N. has acknowledged the volatile environment in Mali. The “use all necessary means” phrase in U.N. parlance encompasses the use of force and, combined with instructions to reestablish state authority and protect civilians in northern Mali, virtually assures that peacekeepers will need to

1. U.N. General Assembly and U.N. Security Council, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305-S/ 2000/809, August 21, 2000, p. 10, http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/ (accessed April 30, 2013). This report is called the “Brahimi Report” after the panel’s chairman, former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi.
2. U.N. peacekeeping in recent years has been conducted with unprecedented scope and expense. At the end of February 2013, the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) oversaw 113,766 total personnel (92,936 uniformed personnel) involved in 14 U.N. peacekeeping operations plus the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. The U.N. peacekeeping budget is \$7.33 billion for July 2012 to June 2013. Both the number of personnel and the budget will increase when MINUSMA, with an authorized size of 12,600 and projected budget of \$800 million, becomes operational. U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” Fact Sheet, February 28, 2013, <https://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/bnote0213.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2013).
3. U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations and U.N. Department of Field Support, *A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping*, July 2009, p. 9, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/newhorizon.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2013).
4. U.N. Security Council, “Resolution 2098 (2013),” S/RES/2098 (2013), March 28, 2013, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2098\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2098(2013)) (accessed April 30, 2013), and press release, “‘Intervention Brigade’ Authorized as Security Council Grants Mandate Renewal for United Nations Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo,” SC/10964, U.N. Department of Public Information, March 28, 2013, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc10964.doc.htm> (accessed April 30, 2013).
5. U.N. Security Council, “Resolution 2100 (2013),” S/RES/2100 (2013), April 25, 2013, in press release, “Security Council Establishes Peacekeeping Force for Mali Effective 1 July, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2100 (2013),” SC/10987, U.N. Department of Public Information, April 25, 2013, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc10987.doc.htm> (accessed April 30, 2013).

act aggressively to meet their mandate and will be a target. Thankfully, the Security Council did not repeat the DRC error by authorizing an offensive peacekeeping force as part of MINUSMA. Instead, the resolution prudently authorizes the continued presence of an independent French force to “use all necessary means...to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat.”

The UNSC has authorized missions in the gray area between traditional missions and peace enforcement, including the MONUSCO operation before creation of the intervention brigade, but Resolutions 2098 and 2100 go further toward peace enforcement than the U.N. has ventured since the 1990s. The U.N. is aware of the significance of this shift and has taken pains to disguise it. Resolution 2098 explicitly establishes the intervention brigade on “an exceptional basis and without creating a precedent or any prejudice to the agreed principles of peacekeeping.” The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations told journalists that MINUSMA “is not an enforcement mission.”⁶

Yet the very act of creating the intervention brigade establishes a precedent for future action, and asserting that MINUSMA is not an enforcement operation cannot overcome the facts that there is no peace to keep and that peacekeepers are mandated to impose authority on behalf of the Malian government where it is either weak or absent.

The U.N. feels compelled to obfuscate this issue for a number of reasons, including disastrous past experiences, the potential to undermine the U.N.’s image as a neutral force, the likelihood of increased troop demands and costs associated with peace enforcement, and the potential reluctance of countries to provide troops due to higher risks. Yet the

reality is that these missions are on the edge of peace enforcement or beyond.

What Should Be Done. Neither the DRC nor Mali is ripe for U.N. peacekeeping. The positive environment from a decade ago has been squandered by DRC President Joseph Kabila with ample help from spoilers inside and outside the country.⁷ There is little prospect for peace in Mali until a new government is elected that incorporates adequate representation from long-ostracized groups.⁸ While elections are scheduled for July, significant challenges persist that could derail them.

The Obama Administration has a responsibility not to support the most convenient options but rather to support efforts that are most likely to result in international peace and security. Instead of peace enforcement through U.N. operations, the U.S. should explore and advocate alternatives that address these situations and support a U.N. mission only when the basic principles of peacekeeping are in place.

Specifically, the U.S. should shift gears and demand that the MONUSCO intervention brigade be independently commanded in a manner similar to the French force in Mali or the African Union force in Somalia. International efforts should concentrate on addressing lack of governance in the DRC, and MONUSCO should be downsized and focused on less ambitious goals of protecting and providing security for humanitarian efforts until conditions are again ripe for a more traditional U.N. peacekeeping operation. In Mali, the U.S. should delay standing up MINUSMA until conditions improve while supporting the current French and African interventions.

Although the Administration makes decisions in the Security Council, those decisions have financial implications. The U.N. charges the U.S. 28.38 percent of the U.N. peacekeeping budget, including

6. UN News Centre, “Security Council Unanimously Approves New UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali,” April 25, 2013, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44751> (accessed April 30, 2013).

7. Morgan Lorraine Roach and Brett D. Schaefer, “The U.S. Must Rethink Its Approach to the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 3806, December 18, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/12/democratic-republic-of-congo-crisis-and-the-us-response>.

8. Morgan Lorraine Roach and Brett D. Schaefer, “United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Mali: Only After Stability Is Restored,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 3850, February 12, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/02/united-nations-un-peacekeeping-mission-in-mali>.

the \$1.4 billion annual budget for MONUSCO (now with an additional \$140 million for the intervention brigade).⁹ MINUSMA is projected to cost \$800 million annually which is not currently factored into fiscal year 2014 budget proposals.¹⁰ Congress should challenge the Administration over whether the U.N. should be entrusted with these situations and ask which alternatives were explored.

Conclusion. U.N. peacekeeping operations can be useful and successful, but they are limited, specialized tools that can misfire badly when employed in the wrong circumstances. It is too early to say whether MONUSCO and MINUSMA will succeed or fail, but past overreaches have led to tragedy for U.N. peacekeepers and those under their protection.

The U.S. should not let the pressure to act override prudence. Supporting the intervention brigade and MINUSMA were likely the least difficult options, but history indicates that U.N. peace enforcement is fraught with problems. Failing to learn from past lessons on peace enforcement will only make tragedies more likely in the future.

—*Brett D. Schaefer is Jay Kingham Fellow in International Regulatory Affairs in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation and editor of ConUNdrum: The Limits of the United Nations and the Search for Alternatives (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).*

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9. U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "MONUSCO Facts and Figures," <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/monusco/facts.shtml> (accessed April 30, 2013). In December, the U.N. increased the amount that the U.S. is expected to pay for these missions to 28.3835 percent. See Brett D. Schaefer, "U.S. Must Enforce Peacekeeping Cap to Lower America's U.N. Assessment," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No. 2762, January 25, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/01/us-must-enforce-peacekeeping-cap-to-lower-americas-un-assessment>.
10. BBC News, "Mali: UN Approves New UN Peacekeeping Force, Minusma," April 25, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22296705> (accessed April 30, 2013).
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