

## **The Promise of Peace: UNSC 2098 and 2147 and the Protection of Congolese Civilians**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (hereafter, the DRC, DR Congo, or “Congo”) remains home to one of the largest humanitarian crises since the Second World War. As the largest and longest-running UN peacekeeping force in the organization’s history, the UN Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO) boasts a civilian protection record characterized by limited success. During the late 1990s, a series of peacekeeping failures inspired a series of scholarly critiques and UN reforms. International political will coalesced around the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). MONUSCO represents a test case for the operationalization of R2P. This paper analyzes UN Security Council Resolutions 2098 and 2147 and their impact on MONUSCO’s capacity to protect civilians in eastern DRC. Drawing on interviews with UN personnel and Congolese civilians, the paper constructs a case for the limited operational success of UNSC 2098 on measures of civilian protection.

Keywords: peacekeeping, United Nations, conflict resolution, central Africa, interventionism

### **Introduction**

With an estimated 5 to 6 million fatalities since 1994, the conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains the world’s deadliest since the conclusion of the Second World War. MONUSCO, the mission in place in the DRC since 2010, remains the UN’s largest, most expensive, and longest-running peacekeeping force (MONUSCO 2014). MONUSCO’s ability to protect civilians – and thus prevent fatalities – is the subject of this paper.

The geography of eastern Congo is complex and often unforgiving. At 2,344,858 square kilometers, the DRC is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa and the eleventh largest country in the world. Nearly two-thirds of Congolese civilians live in remote rural areas, and dense vegetation in the DRC’s eastern provinces often provides shelter for armed groups (CIA World Factbook 2014). Given these realities, it comes as no surprise that MONUSCO demands a large share of UN peacekeeping resources. As MONUSCO possesses adequate numbers of personnel and the financial resources needed for meeting the demands of this challenging peacekeeping environment, the explanation for the mission’s shortcomings must be found elsewhere.

While MONUSCO’s current mandate, which dates to UNSC Resolution 2098 (March 2013), lists four distinct objectives, this paper focuses on the first mission objective: the protection of Congolese civilians. The mandate aims to quell simmering violence in the DRC’s eastern provinces, conceptualized as North and South Kivu and Orientale. The UNSC reaffirmed

MONUSCO's expanded authority under the 2013 mandate by issuing UNSC Resolution 2147 (2014). This paper examines the extent to which greater peacekeeping latitude for MONUSCO translates into peace dividends for Congolese civilians. In doing so, I rely on a series of semi-structured interviews with Congolese community members and UN staff (both foreign and Congolese).<sup>1</sup> The interview excerpts offer insight into assessments of MONUSCO's prior and current performance, and address the tangible impact of the 2013 resolution.

To begin, I present the following question: to what extent has an increase in MONUSCO's peacekeeping authority, as contained in UNSC Resolution 2098 (2013), translated into an increased capacity to protect civilians? In response, I argue that while assessments of MONUSCO do in fact reflect observable progress in the mission's capacity to protect civilians, these capacity developments fall short of both the initial enthusiasm accompanying Resolution 2098 and the "peace dividends" – measurable increases in civilian security – that might be reasonably expected in the nearly one and a half years between March 2013 and the time of data collection (June and July 2014). To explain the gap between the expected and observed progress, I contest that the mission possesses three key internal shortcomings that limit its ability to adequately fulfill its primary objective of protecting Congolese civilians. These limitations include lack of uniformity in the internalization of human rights norms among Congolese troops, a geographic mismatch between the concentration of violence and the concentration of MONUSCO resources, and lack of troop commitment at the individual level. A second argument addresses problems with the ways in which MONUSCO collaborates with the Congolese state. The mission's collaborative efforts ultimately fail because UN staff prioritizes collaboration with Congolese political elites and government institutions at the expense of inclusive consultation with Congolese communities.

### **Internal Limitations: MONUSCO's Structural Failures**

The evolution of MONUSCO's peacekeeping mandates parallels an evolution in the international peacekeeping conversation, reflecting a transition away from preventing violence between states and toward an imperative to protect individual civilians from human rights abuses committed by states and non-state actors (Goldstein 2011; ICISS 2001; Mansson 2005). MONUSCO's current mandate, in placing unprecedented emphasis on the protection of civilians, represents the current manifestation of these evolving norms.

In the 1990s, a series of large-scale peacekeeping failures sparked scholarly debate over the efficacy of the UN's approach to conflict resolution. In 2001, the International Commission Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) contested that the problem with international peacekeeping lay not with a substandard organizational capacity, but with the UN's failure to adapt to the changing dynamics of international violence in the twenty-first century (Goldstein 2011; ICISS 2001). The Commission found that each state bore the primary responsibility for the protection of its citizens. If a state proved unable or unwilling to carry out this duty, however, it became the duty of the international community to provide the state in question with the support necessary to protect the rights of individuals within its borders (ICISS 2001).

This new doctrine, referred to in international relations as the "Responsibility to Protect," or R2P, evolved logically from the UN's disappointing performance as a global protector of civilians (Bratt 1996; ICISS 2001). In a world in which an increasing percentage of civilians

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<sup>1</sup> All interviews were conducted by the author in the North and South Kivu provinces, from June to July 2014.

suffers atrocities at the hands of their own government and/or non-state actors, ICISS advocates for a paradigm shift in peacekeeping (Goldstein 2011). Though R2P has never attained *de jure* status, it is increasingly employed as a *de facto* standard used to advocate for the authorization of new missions and to evaluate existing operations (Oatley 2013).

Despite growing agreement on the importance of civilian protection, gaps in understanding still exist among UN peacekeepers concerning how such norms might be implemented in eastern DRC. During my research, interview respondents – both UN staff and Congolese community members – expressed frustration at the lack of uniform standards for UN interventions in the name of civilian protection. Respondents added that no accountability mechanism requires peacekeepers to intervene.

The absence of uniform understandings of intervention standards and the absence of a standard definition of “civilian protection” limit the ability of MONUSCO troops to intervene on behalf of civilians. One UN staff member commented on the consequences of a lack of clear guidelines by which to measure “civilian protection”:

When we went out to the field, we would always get updates from peacekeepers on the security situation. We would ask what they were doing to protect the civilian population. A common answer was, “We do patrols on market days.” They would go in the car and patrol the market on specific days. To my understanding, this was not civilian protection. There is more to civilian protection than that. (UN Civilian Observer, interview, July 2014)

Given a mandate to protect civilians, UN soldiers were not accountable for steps they did or did not take to do so. My interviews with Congolese community members and UN staff evidenced a lack of visible action steps taken to protect Congolese communities from latent violence. Whether inaction is attributable to a lack of uniform understanding of what “civilian protection” requires, as in the observation above, or to a lack of uniform will, the UN’s failure to articulate the parameters of “civilian protection” does Congolese civilians a disservice. A lack of evaluative benchmarks also undermines accountability: “Often we see situations in which people are fighting near UN troops and the troops do not intervene” (Congolese Community Member, interview, June 2014).

At the organizational level, the mission’s geographic distribution of resources has limited MONUSCO’s capacity to effectively protect civilians. Today, many armed groups in the DRC operate in rural, sparsely populated areas in the country’s eastern provinces. In contrast, MONUSCO places a disproportionately large share of its resources in Kinshasa, the nation’s capital, located in the far west of the DRC. Additionally, mission resources and troops remain concentrated in urban provincial capitals such as Goma and Bukavu (MONUSCO 2014). Conversations with Congolese community members highlight the UN’s failure to prioritize areas in the greatest need of support. In the statements below, respondents observed a trend among peacekeepers to choose personal comfort over effective civilian protection.

MONUSCO should go to places where atrocities are actually occurring, rather than remaining in town centers. They remain in the center of town because it is easier to access water there. (UN Interpreter, interview, July 2014)

The UN lives in the best places. Compared to where civilians are living, they live much more comfortably. They do not seem to care about development or protecting civilians. When they

leave, we wonder what we will have to remember them by, because up to this time they have done nothing. (Congoese Community Member, interview, June 2014)

They do not go to the places where people are fighting. They do not go into the bush. (Congoese Community Member, interview, June 2014)

MONUSCO needs a stronger presence in the field, not just in Bukavu or Goma. In order to truly protect civilians there definitely needs to be a stronger presence in the field to gather information. We can't simply have the peacekeepers remain at their bases without communicating with the civilian population. (UN Civilian Observer, interview, July 2014)

MONUSCO plays a crucial role in contributing to the discrepancy between the overwhelmingly rural location of militia activity and the concentration of troops, which is disproportionately urban. Appendix A displays the geographic distribution of armed militias currently operating in the DRC. It must be noted that armed group activity remains limited to the Congoese provinces of Orientale, North Kivu, and South Kivu, and, to a lesser extent, Katanga. Each of these provinces lines the eastern edge of the DRC. Additionally, apart from the Kata-Katanga armed group in Lubumbashi, in the Katanga province, no armed groups operate in provincial capitals and most armed groups reside outside major cities. Even in Katanga, armed groups remain concentrated in rural areas and launch only sporadic attacks on major cities like Lubumbashi (MONUSCO 2014).

At the time of this writing, MONUSCO's DRC headquarters are in Kinshasa, the country's capital city, located about 1,500 miles from the capitals of North Kivu and South Kivu in eastern Congo. This is significant given that the country's eastern provinces have experienced greater levels of instability. During the two Congo wars, from 1998 to 2003, Kinshasa itself underwent periods of conflict and occupation by foreign militants (Nzongola 2002; Stearns 2011). In the years since the war's formal conclusion, relative peace has returned to Kinshasa. Conflict during the 2003–2014 period erupted not only in the nation's capital, but also in its mineral-rich eastern provinces. The inherent shortcomings of MONUSCO's "home base" location concern more than the 1,500 mile distance alone. The country's east is accessible by way of Kinshasa only through air travel, and only on a singular national airline. Travel by road involves many delays due to the difficult terrain and unreliable roads, and cross-country automobile excursions may take months (Foster and Benitez 2011). In late spring 2014, the mission began a large-scale shift of resources from Kinshasa to Congo's eastern provinces (UN Political Affairs Officer, interview, July 2014). This shift represents an overdue development, the tangible consequences of which remain to be seen.

In addition to shortcomings around lack of uniformity in intervention standards and geographic organization of resources, assessments by UN staff and Congoese community representatives revealed a lack of uniformity in troop skill level and readiness, a systemic lack of commitment on the part of UN troops, and a lack of trust between UN troops and Congoese civilians:

I do not think that it is realistic to expect troops to stay for longer than one year. While civilian MONUSCO staff may elect to devote their life's work to Congo, for most military peacekeepers the Congo is simply a posting. (UN Civilian Observer, interview, July 2014)

How can we expect troops to die for a country that is not their own? (UN Language Consultant 2014)

Regardless of the quality of high-level leadership, the degree of international political will, or the financial resources of the mission, the success of MONUSCO depends at least in part on the quality of peacekeeping troops. As one interviewee proposed, “The entire purpose of the UN is that it is a multinational organization, but this also makes it very difficult to manage” (UN Civilian Observer, interview, June 2014). Perceived lack of commitment on the part of individual UN troops undermines civilian trust in peacekeeping forces, making it difficult for the UN to operate collaboratively and thus more effectively. Additionally, as outlined below, structural injustices endemic in UN troop contribution and deployment also taint local perceptions of UN credibility.

### **Country-Level Troop Contributions: Structural Racism in Peacekeeping?**

In considering country-level disparities among peacekeeping troops, concerns also arise regarding the potential for structural racism being embedded in the way in which the UN deploys peacekeeping forces. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the nations with the highest military expenditures include, in order of descending expenditure size: the United States (US), China, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK), and Japan. Together, these five nations accounted for 1,059 billion USD in military spending (of which the US accounted for over 50 percent, at 682 billion), or 60 percent of global military expenditures in 2012. The US alone bore responsibility for nearly 40 percent of all military expenditures for that same year (SIPRI 2013). Of SIPRI’s top 5 military spenders, only China appeared among the UN peacekeeping’s top 15 troop contributing countries as of February 2015 (UN Peacekeeping 2015a). Also in 2015, the US, while first in military spending, ranked 66 in troop contributions, with just 119 total military and police personnel serving in peacekeeping operations globally (UN Peacekeeping 2015a). As per the UN’s February 2015 report, the top 5 troop contributing nations include, in descending order: Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Ethiopia, and Rwanda (UN Peacekeeping 2015a). Of these 5 nations, only India was listed in SIPRI’s top 15 military spenders in 2012 (SIPRI 2013). In observing military expenditure data from SIPRI and troop contribution data from the UN, a key pattern emerges: overall, the countries spending the most to train and equip their own troops do not proportionately contribute military personnel to peacekeeping operations. Using military spending as a crude proxy for troop quality, the statistics cited above further corroborate interview responses from MONUSCO personnel, suggesting that overall discrepancies in troop quality have proven to be a hindrance to optimal mission functioning (UN Civilian Observer, interview, July 2014). Under-resourced and poorly trained troops struggle to meet the UN’s more demanding mandate.

In addition, the numerical differences between country military spending and country troop contributions suggest a darker conclusion regarding the structural racism in UN peacekeeping. Countries with greater military capacity, on the whole, do not contribute in a meaningful way to peacekeeping operations, the vast majority of which are on the African continent. Of the UN’s sixteen active peacekeeping operations, just over half – nine out of sixteen – remain geographically situated on the African continent. This is twice the number situated in the Middle East, the second densest region in the world in terms of peacekeeping, which currently hosts four active missions. The European continent hosts only one active UN mission, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). There are no active missions on the North

American continent (UN Peacekeeping 2015b). Taking these figures together with SIPRI data, it appears that the UN receives a disproportionately higher share of troop contributions from countries with relatively low levels of military spending. The UN then deploys these troops to its peacekeeping missions, over 50 percent of which operate on the African continent. In summary, a phenomenon arises whereby relatively poorly equipped troops bear the primary responsibility for international peacekeeping on the African continent. Examining military expenditures within the world's wealthier, more militarized nations and the corresponding failure of these nations to leverage military capacity in service of peacekeeping, the structure of troop contributions and deployments is perhaps suggestive of a lack of will rooted in the comparative devaluation of African lives.

### **Collaboration on the Ground: Poorly Placed Priorities**

MONUSCO does in fact expend effort to engage with the host government in the DRC. Thus, rather than there being an issue with an absolute lack of collaboration, problems arise with the ways in which MONUSCO chooses to prioritize its relationships with stakeholders. The mission's preference for elite-level political consultations reflects the legacy of past UN operations in terms of their deference to host governments (Boutros-Ghali 1992; ICISS 2001). However, in the DRC, such consultations often serve to systemically exclude Congolese communities. While community members do in fact report efforts by MONUSCO to promote dialogue, these reports reveal that such consultations categorically lack substance. Community members do not witness their recommendations being put into practice by MONUSCO personnel. This has led some community members to conclude that the UN's efforts to collaborate with Congolese communities amount to a shallow attempt to feign inclusion. As one community member said: "I meet them often at ceremonies. They hold different ceremonies where they serve food to people who attend" (Interview, June 2014). The respondent went on to state that the meetings referenced lacked any attempt at substantive consultation.

Relative to political authorities, Congolese community members possess a much more comprehensive knowledge of the needs of Congolese civilians and the challenges that they face. Thus, to effectively protect civilians in eastern Congo, the UN must shift focus from high-level consultations with government officials to more frequent, transparent, and substantive collaborations with Congolese communities. Many interviewees expressed frustration with MONUSCO's lack of community consultation:

When they arrived, they did not consult us or ask our opinion. They simply came and starting working without asking what the population here needed. That is why they did not succeed. (Congolese Community Member, interview, June 2014)

When MONUSCO came, they signed a contract with the government...the government does not know what the Congolese population needs. If they made the contract with us, we could better advise them on what needs to be done. (Congolese Community Member, interview, June 2014)

If MONUSCO came to us civilians, we could more accurately advise them on what they need to succeed and on what needs to be done. The problem is that they go to the government and the government does not know what we need. We recognize that they are not accomplishing

their mission but we do not necessarily know why. The government may have an answer to this question. (Congoese Community Member, interview, June 2014)

In the context of a lack of trust between the Congoese electorate and those elected to represent their interests, the preference on the part of the UN for high-level political negotiations becomes difficult to understand. Collegial relationships between UN personnel and local political officials are critical, but such relationships must not come at the expense of an equally collegial relationship with Congoese communities. Theoretically, one can argue that, in a society sufficiently democratic to presume that elected officials, on average, reliably represent the will of that society's citizens, consistent consultation with those elected officials will go far in identifying and responding to the needs of the people. Where the democratic link is weaker, however, the relationship between elected officials and the electorate and their needs remains far less clear. One UN Team Leader of Interpreters insisted that: "Civil society must not stop until their voices are heard. Congoese citizens must continue denouncing atrocities in the presence of MONUSCO and must continue to push the Congoese government to fulfill its role in providing security. They must push for the new mandate to be implemented in practice; they must push for MONUSCO to respect its mandate" (Interview, July 2014). Effective peacekeeping is a collaborative effort; for MONUSCO to achieve its mandate, it must meet Congoese civil society halfway.

### **Tourists in Blue Helmets: Shortchanging Congoese Civilians**

Despite minor improvements in mission capacity following the release of UNSC Resolution 2098, MONUSCO displays a perpetual failure to meet its primary objective: the protection of Congoese civilians. This failure arises both from the internal limitations of MONUSCO as well as from complexities within the dynamics of collaboration between MONUSCO and the Congoese state. While perpetual shortfalls do cast doubt on the credibility of MONUSCO, UN peacekeeping, and perhaps even the UN as an organization, Congoese civilians stand to suffer the greatest losses if MONUSCO's capacity to fulfill its objectives continues to fall short of its mandate. One Congoese national and former UN employee described the UN's longstanding presence in his country as an "unfulfilled promise":

MONUSCO pretends to come and bring peace. What people expect them to do is to come and bring peace, but sometimes they have their own agenda. We are really in need of peace. In the east of Congo, we have a lot of problems and a lot of challenges. When we were told that there would be a mission devoted to all of these problems, we thought that maybe things would change. What we see in the field and what people are expecting are two very different things. (UN Language Consultant, interview, June 2014)

This language consultant's statement reflects a pervasive opinion among Congoese civilians that the UN fails to deliver on its promises. More alarmingly, the consultant suggests a discrepancy between MONUSCO's explicit objectives and the mission's underlying agenda.

The consultant's claims do not lack historical precedent, particularly in the Congoese case. In *Toward an African Revolution*, Frantz Fanon writes, "It is not true to say that the UN fails because the cases are difficult. In reality the UN is a legal card used by the imperialist interests when the card of brute force has failed" (1969, 195). Fanon here references the complicity of ONUC in Belgium's neo-colonial occupation of Katanga province and other parts of the Congo

in the 1960s. In *Lumumba Speaks* (1961) and *The Assassination of Lumumba* (2001), Patrice Lumumba and Ludo De Witte, respectively, additionally implicate the UN as a key player in the US–Belgian plot to eliminate Congo’s first prime minister and inspire the rise of General Mobutu. The ONUC mission ostensibly operated in an effort to restore law and order following a succession of post-independence crises in July 1960: the Congolese National Army (*Armée Nationale Congolaise*, or ANC) mutiny, the secession of Katanga province under Moïse Tshombe, and the subsequent occupation of the region by Belgian troops. In his capacity as Prime Minister, Lumumba initially requested UN intervention in response to Belgium’s violation of Congolese sovereignty (Lumumba 1961). The mission quickly deviated from its ostensibly neutral role, prolonging Belgian occupation and undermining Lumumba’s political authority (De Witte 2001; Lumumba 1961).

While it is perhaps unfair to superimpose the sins of ONUC on its twenty-first century successor, MONUSCO, the criticisms of Fanon, De Witte, and Lumumba remain worthy of careful consideration, particularly given contemporary doubts regarding the UN’s motives in the Congo (Congolese community members, interview, June 2014; Nzongola 2012). The fact remains that the interests of powerful, wealthy countries prevail at the United Nations. For its part, the United States funds nearly 30 percent of the total UN peacekeeping budget (Power 2015), while three out of the five permanent seats on the UNSC belong to Western governments (UNSC 2015). In this climate of disproportionate influence, scrutiny must be applied to the motives behind UN peacekeeping decisions.

Whether due to a Western-dominated sub-agenda or, more benignly, to practical mission shortcomings, the fact remains that MONUSCO represents a perpetual unfulfilled promise to many Congolese civilians. At best, the mission’s well-meaning initiatives fall short of tangibly benefitting the Congolese people. At worst, MONUSCO represents a fifteen-year, billion-dollar façade, a mockery of peace where Congolese civilians remain the butt of a cruel joke. As one Congolese community member reported: “We can tell you about their mandate because we hear what they tell us in the different meetings we attend. But if you ask other civilians who do not attend these meetings, they will tell you that MONUSCO troops are like tourists. They just come to visit and to steal riches from Congo. They are ‘working’ but they are not doing anything” (Interview, June 2014).

While the comparison of UN peacekeepers to tourists might exaggerate the nature of MONUSCO’s inadequacy, the reflection by this community member channels years of frustration on the part of Congolese civilians in response to the unfulfilled promise of peace. Since the nearly one and a half years since MONUSCO’s 2013 mandate granted the mission increased power and authority to protect civilians in eastern DRC, the slow rate of progress suggests that the mission is on track to yet another failed promise. If the international community is to make good on its promise to work with the DRC toward sustainable peace, MONUSCO cannot afford to neglect its internal shortcomings, nor can it fail to reform its strategy for working collaboratively with Congolese institutions.

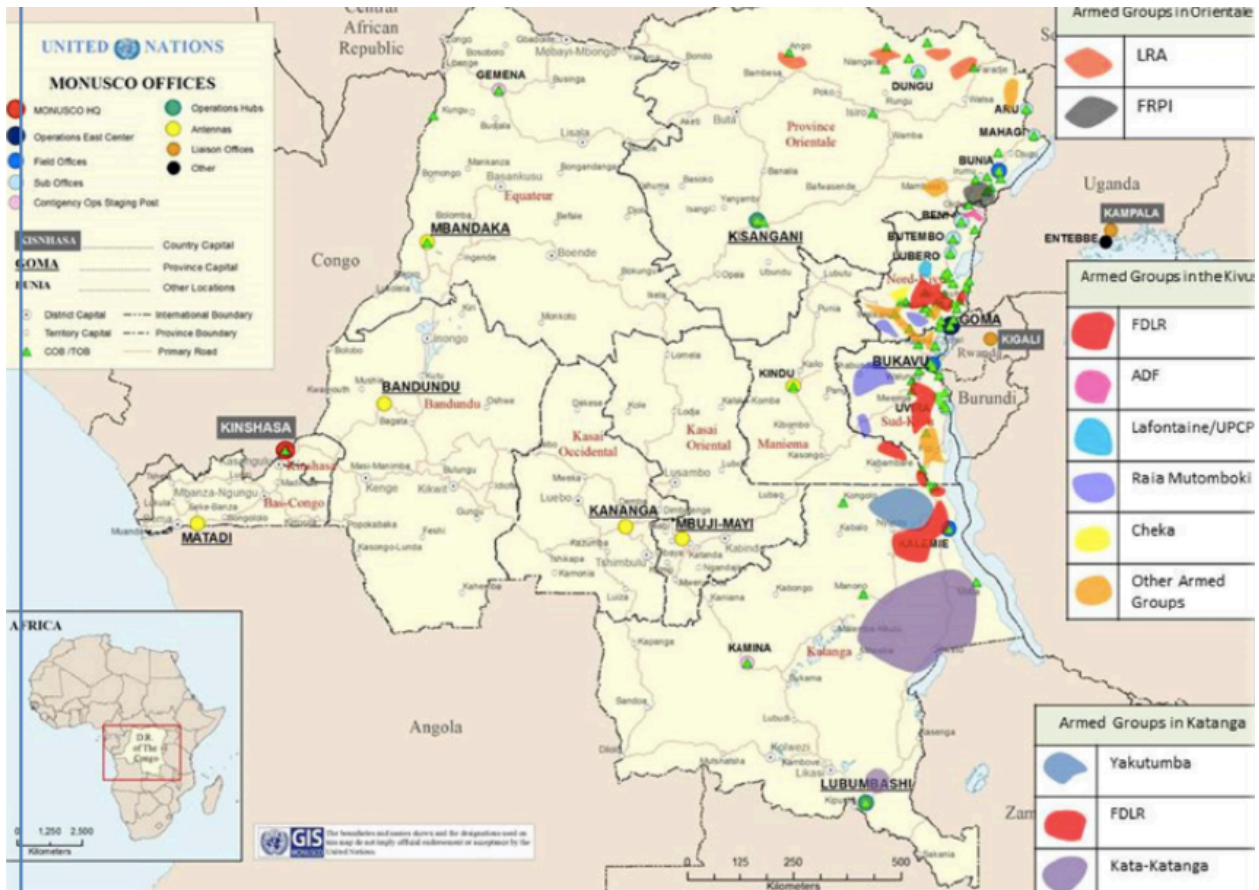
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Appendix A. Map Showing Armed Group Presence in the DRC



Source: MONUSCO. 2015. La MONUSCO en un Clin d’œil. [MONUSCO at a Glance]. (April). [https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2015-04-16\\_global\\_factsheet\\_fre.pdf](https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2015-04-16_global_factsheet_fre.pdf).