

# Force Intervention Brigade: A Sea Change for UN Peace Operations?

In March 2013 the UN Security Council, through resolution 2098, authorized the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to protect civilians from ongoing violence perpetrated by armed rebel groups. The brigade was deployed within the existing mandate of the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and its authorized strength. The resolution mandated the intervention brigade to ‘neutralize armed groups’ and to reduce ‘the threat posed by armed groups to state authority and civilian security’ through ‘targeted offensive operations’ in a ‘robust, highly mobile and versatile manner’. The intervention was in response to the large-scale November 2012 attacks by the Mouvement du 23-Mars (M23) group on Goma.

The resolution stated that the intervention brigade should not ‘create a precedent or any prejudice to the agreed principles of peacekeeping’. However, at the time of its deployment, there were various concerns about the appropriateness and viability of the FIB and the consequent implications of such a development on current and future UN peace operations.<sup>1</sup> The humanitarian community raised concerns that the FIB makes the UN a party to the conflict, thereby hampering the humanitarian community’s access to vulnerable communities. Equally, several troop-contributing countries (TCCs) were wary of the scope of the operation.<sup>2</sup> The FIB’s subsequent success in defeating the M23 militarily in November 2013 has been met with cautious optimism by observers.

Against this background, the Challenges Forum convened a panel discussion on the FIB in January 2014 to unpack the lessons and explored the following guiding questions:

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on the potential risks and challenges of the FIB, see ‘The Art of the Possible: Peace Operations Under New Conditions’, Challenges Forum Policy Brief 2013:1, April 2013; and Cammaert, Patrick, and Blyth, Fiona, ‘The UN Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’, *IPI Issue Brief*, July 2013.

<sup>2</sup> ‘United Nations peacekeeping operations’, Security Council meeting on 26 June 2013, S/PV.6987.

## The workshop

The Challenges Forum held a panel discussion on the implications of the Force Intervention Brigade for future UN peace operations in New York on 17 January 2014. The meeting was co-hosted with the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations. It brought together senior UN policymakers, national government representatives, and leading peacekeeping experts.

The panel consisted of H.E. Mr Martin Kobler, Special Representative for MONUSCO, Mr Jack Christofides, Director of Africa II Division, DPKO, Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Patrick Cammaert, former Military Advisor, DPKO and former Commander for Eastern Division, MONUC, and Mr David Hutchinson, Principal Legal Officer, Office of Legal Affairs. It was moderated by Mr Colum Lynch, Senior Fellow, *Foreign Policy* magazine.

This policy brief reflects the rapporteur’s interpretation of the meeting and not necessarily the views of the Challenges Forum, the co-host nor of all of the participants.



The Permanent Mission of  
Germany to the United  
Nations  
New York

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- What were the conditions for success?
- What are the implications for UN peacekeeping's core principles relating to the use of force, consent of the host country, and impartiality?
- What are the doctrinal implications from the deployment of the intervention brigade? What impact will it have on the principles of 'the use of force' in future UN peace operations?
- Is the intervention brigade *sui generis* or are we witnessing a shift in the types of peace operation mandated? And what are the potential implications for future UN missions in non-permissive environments, such as South Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR)?

## Conditions for success

The willingness of the UN to initiate a plan like the FIB is in large part due to the strong political commitment of the neighbouring countries in the Great Lakes region. The *Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the DRC and the Region*, agreed to by 11 countries in February 2013, paved the way for the UN to seriously consider the FIB (originally conceived by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region) as a strategy to break the pattern of violence in eastern DRC. Countries in the region recognize that instability in the region can adversely impact their own political and economic stability. Significantly, the substantially reduced regional patronage of the M23 was critical to the success of the FIB experiment.

The willingness of all the relevant (international and regional) actors, particularly among the five Special Envoys to work in unison to ensure that the military strategy that is the FIB concretely supported the ongoing political frameworks and strategy for the DRC is particularly important as it ensured a high level of political cohesion that did not necessarily exist previously.<sup>3</sup>

That the Security Council was willing to take the political risk to explicitly authorize a high-tempo offensive operation by the UN (what some peacekeeping experts would term 'peace enforcement') was seen by many as a contributing factor for the eventual success of the FIB. The particularly forceful language of the resolution also provided a cloak of assurance to the countries contributing to the FIB—Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi—that their unequivocal readiness to use force to carry out the mandate in its fullest sense was sanctioned.

A critical condition for the FIB's success was the role of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC). The FARDC, compared to 2006, was in a far better position (in terms of training,

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<sup>3</sup> The current five special envoys/representatives are: Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Head of MONUSCO; Mary Robinson, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region; Boubacar Diarra, AU Special Representative for the Great Lakes; Russell Feingold, U.S. Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and the DRC, and Koen Vervaeke, EU Senior Coordinator to the Great Lakes.

capabilities and political will) to carry out combat operations and to secure and consolidate gains made on the ground. The success of the FIB was also conditioned on the fact that MONUSCO is an extremely well-resourced mission and had the means to provide enabling assets to support the FIB. This allowed the FIB and the FARDC to wage intensive operations—on average 15 a day—against the M23. Strong mission leadership was also credited with contributing to the success of the FIB.

## Lessons identified and implications

Although the FIB created a much-needed space to move the political process forward in DRC, it remains to be seen if the momentum it created will be sustained. The defeat of the M23 led to the resumption of the Kampala talks and resulted in both sides signing a declaration in Nairobi in December. This rests considerably on how swiftly the DDR process moves forward so as to avoid the likelihood of a resurgence. As one panellist pointed out, the long-term success of the FIB effort is ensuring that the ‘M24 syndrome’ is avoided.

MONUSCO’s exhibit of its willingness to leverage the capabilities it had at its disposal made a strong impact on other rebel groups. It indicated that the mission would no longer ‘cohabitate’ with armed groups. MONUSCO is no longer perceived as reactive and is more positively received by the local population in eastern DRC.

An unintended impact of the FIB was that it created an artificial dichotomy between the brigade and the rest of mission. The ‘1 UN, 1 mandate and 1 force’ mantra is at risk. If the brigade is to be extended beyond its current period of authorization, there is a need for FIB to be more mainstreamed.

Following the success of the FIB, there were calls for the intervention brigade model to be exported to other crisis situations such as South Sudan, CAR and Mali, not least by the very same contributing countries that made up the FIB.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the experience of the intervention brigade model will inform the discussions on the recently proposed IGAD-led stabilization and protection force for South Sudan.

There was general agreement at the workshop that the FIB was designed to be fit-for-purpose for the DRC, it was therefore ill-advised to ‘lift and insert’ it into the context of South Sudan or anywhere else. Drawing, however, on some of the conditions for success in DRC, there were several aspects of the FIB model that were applicable to other contexts:

- robust political posturing is necessary for robust military interventions to be effective;
- strong mission leadership is necessary; and
- the use of force should always be in aid of, not in lieu of, achieving a political strategy.

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<sup>4</sup>‘Long road to an African rapid reaction force’, IRINnews, 21 February 2014.

In particular,

- the existing mandates of UN peace operations are sufficient for robust peacekeeping,
- there is no need for new or 'threatening' language in Security Council resolutions; and
- the political will of troop-contributing countries to use force when necessary to implement the mandate to its fullest extent is vital.

Many participants stressed that an important step forward from the FIB initiative and for the future of UN peace operations is a consensus on the robustness of peacekeeping. Discussions between the UN and member states on robust peacekeeping, including its limits, should take place, particularly in the capitals of troop- and police- contributing countries. Some participants noted that the discussion on robust peacekeeping is linked to a potential trend of a regionalization of peacekeeping where more and more TCCs have vested interests in certain conflicts and their resolution, thereby potentially eroding the principle of impartiality and neutrality.<sup>5</sup>

The questions of whether the limits of peacekeeping have been overstepped, whether this implies that the long-standing peacekeeping principles are obsolete, and whether new doctrine is needed, were raised. There was a mixed sentiment within the group. Some reflected that the FIB has clearly pushed the boundaries of peacekeeping, that the peacekeeping principles have been prejudiced, and that it was a peace-enforcement operation. There were others, however, who considered peacekeeping to be an elastic enough term to include highly kinetic operations, and that the peacekeeping principles remain valid for these new operations. Strikingly, there was hesitation and reluctance to say that new doctrine was needed.

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<sup>5</sup> See 'Death of Doctrine? Are 'Fit-for-Purpose' Peace Operations the Way Forward?', Challenges Forum Policy Brief 2013:2, October 2013.



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