PROTECTION WITH LESS PRESENCE:
How the Peacekeeping Operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo is Attempting to Deliver Protection with Fewer Resources
A schoolboy watches as a vehicle of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) negotiates a muddy road in the town of Pinga, North Kivu. The MONUSCO base in Pinga was closed in May 2017.

UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti
ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) works with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to prevent, mitigate and respond to civilian harm.

CIVIC’s vision is for a world where parties to armed conflict recognize the dignity and rights of civilians, prevent civilian harm, protect civilians caught in conflict, and amend harm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Above all, CIVIC would like to thank all of the Congolese civilians who agreed to speak with us about their experiences of conflict, insecurity, and survival.
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The Security Council unanimously adopts resolution 2348 (2017), extending the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) until March 31, 2018 but reducing the authorized number of troops by 3,600.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year, United Nations Member States increased pressure on peacekeeping operations by enacting budget reductions and requesting peacekeeping operations to develop clear exit strategies. These objectives may seem innocuous to some and overdue to others. However, cuts to mission resources could have serious implications in countries that host peacekeeping operations, including negative consequences for civilians exposed to violence and violations in armed conflict. Reducing peacekeeping resources could be particularly detrimental if decisions on whether, when, and how to reduce budgets and personnel are not clearly linked to conditions on the ground and to assessments of how downsizing is likely to affect the safety and security of civilians.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) was the first peacekeeping operation in 2017 to have its troop ceiling reduced during the UN Security Council’s annual renewal of its mandate. The Mission’s budget was also subsequently cut during United Nations (UN) budget negotiations in June 2017. The decisions made by UN Member States and the Security Council to downsize MONUSCO were not, however, sufficiently linked to security conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or negative potential consequences of reductions. The cuts come at a time when political tensions in the DRC are rising in the wake of President Kabila’s failure to hold elections as expected in 2016, and as the security situation is deteriorating in many parts of the country—including in some previously stable areas. Moreover, the reductions were made ahead of a strategic review of the Mission that should have guided Member States on whether budget cuts were appropriate and could have helped MONUSCO determine where to trim resources. The inverted order of the process may have curtailed any possible efficiencies or reform that Member States hoped to achieve through the cuts.

In the DRC, troop reductions and a decreased budget are driving real changes in how the peacekeeping Mission operates. While MONUSCO still maintains over 75 bases throughout the country, it no longer expects to be able to offer adequate protection to civilians by maintaining a presence in all priority areas that are insecure. Instead, the Mission will rely on a strategy of “protection through projection.” This approach requires both military and civilian staff to be highly mobile and able to deploy temporarily, without establishing bases, to areas where security appears to be deteriorating or where the Mission needs to implement activities to fulfill its mandate. While temporary bases are often opened in response to new conflict hotspots only to be shuttered when stability returns, the new method of protection will require MONUSCO to operate from fewer permanent bases around the country and develop capabilities that allow it to shift personnel quickly to different theaters of operation.

UN Member States and peacekeeping experts from inside and outside the UN have long advocated for peacekeeping missions to be more flexible, mobile, and responsive to changing threats and conflict dynamics in their areas of operation. Peacekeeping missions rarely have the number of personnel needed to establish bases in all conflict-affected areas within the countries where they are deployed. Faced with such constraints, MONUSCO has relied on establishing temporary operating bases (TOBs) to shift troops to areas with emerging protection threats. However, TOBs can be resource intensive to set up, and MONUSCO has struggled to withdraw them once they are established because communities and humanitarians become reliant on them for security. Protection through projection is intended to allow MONUSCO to respond more quickly and to prevent, mitigate, or interrupt deteriorating security situations, particularly when escalating violence threatens civilians. Developing a more mobile and responsive posture could allow MONUSCO to better protect civilians and reach areas of the country where it was unable to patrol before.

Before troop and budget cuts were enacted in 2017, MONUSCO was already building its rapid deployment capability and planning to progressively close bases in order to free up troops for mobile operations. As early as 2015, for example, MONUSCO began planning for a “Force transformation” that would lead to increased mobility; in 2016, it began investing in rapidly deployable battalions (RDBs) with the equipment and capability to deploy on short notice. However, the newly imposed resource constraints drove the closure of a number of bases ahead of schedule in the DRC’s North Kivu Province between July and August 2017. The speed with which troop and budget cuts have forced MONUSCO to close bases and implement the protection through projection model raise some protection concerns. While military and civilian components of the Mission have made important

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progress adjusting their strategies to the protection through projection model since it was launched, closures occurred before the Mission could enact necessary reforms for the effective implementation of this more mobile operations model. As a result, the Mission’s equipment and administrative processes will, unless adjusted, likely prevent quick deployment. Moreover, reduced travel budgets and aviation assets linked to the 2017 budget cuts will make it difficult for MONUSCO to be more mobile. Joint civilian-military planning will also need to be improved to enable the new protection strategies to succeed.

Expedited base closures may also have undermined MONUSCO’s ability to incorporate protection concerns of humanitarians and curtailed important work to support the development of community protection strategies that could be implemented after base closures. In interviews conducted for this report, MONUSCO personnel, humanitarian actors operating in the DRC, and Congolese civilians widely recognized that decision-making around recent base closures has not been as consultative as MONUSCO’s own policies recommend it should be. Communication with communities ahead of withdrawal has, at times, been limited. Furthermore, many mitigating protection measures that peacekeeping and humanitarian officials identified as important are being implemented retroactively because they could not be implemented before closure. If MONUSCO is going to continue closing bases and deliver protection with a smaller footprint in the DRC, it will need to address these issues. Otherwise, civilians will be left increasingly vulnerable as tensions and violence rise in the DRC.

It remains to be seen whether MONUSCO’s new model for protection can achieve positive outcomes in the DRC or any other peacekeeping context. Because reductions have already raised protection concerns for civilians, Member States and the Mission will need to closely monitor the impact of their decisions, capture good practices from the DRC, and learn from any negative consequences. MONUSCO’s shift to protection through projection and its expedited base closures are not linked to a pre-existing exit strategy. However, the Mission is now being requested to develop one. Any future exit strategy developed by the Mission will require MONUSCO to increase mobility and will involve gradual withdrawal from large areas of the country that will raise many of the same concerns surfacing now with the protection through protection model. MONUSCO should therefore capture lessons learned as it closes bases in North Kivu Province and apply these lessons to any future downsizing of its presence.

Ultimately, the only actors who can replace the Mission as security providers for Congolese civilians are the Congolese government and its armed forces. MONUSCO’s base closures raise protection concerns because they leave a security vacuum that the Congolese government has not demonstrated the will or ability to fill. Congolese army and police officers frequently lack adequate training and equipment. Some have been incorporated into the army from militia groups with little or no reform intervention. Rather than protect civilians, they often commit high levels of abuses against them. For MONUSCO to progressively withdraw from the DRC, the Congolese government and international stakeholders must commit to serious efforts at security sector reform.
RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo

• Engage in constructive dialogue and planning with MONUSCO to identify the benchmarks and conditions that will allow MONUSCO to progressively withdraw from specific areas in the DRC and the country as a whole.

• In partnership with international and regional actors, deepen commitment to and implementation of comprehensive security sector reform (SSR) as outlined in the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework.²

• Invest additional resources in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of armed group combatants.

To MONUSCO

• Promote clear and timely decision-making based on early warning analysis so that, under the protection through projection model, uniformed personnel deploy at the first signs of a deteriorating security situation to prevent violence.

• Ensure adequate consultation between MONUSCO’s military and civilian personnel and externally with humanitarians ahead of base closures. Further, ensure that consultations take place at an early stage to feed into the decision-making process on closures.

• Continue reviewing information-sharing and coordination structures between MONUSCO and humanitarians to determine whether and how collaboration can be strengthened to reduce protection gaps from MONUSCO’s reduced field presence. In particular, engage with humanitarian actors to revive the use of protection matrices in a format that respects humanitarian principles and civil-military guidelines.

• Work with humanitarian actors and Congolese authorities to integrate and strengthen existing community alert networks so that they continue to function after MONUSCO’s withdrawal from towns and territories.

• Improve joint planning across Mission sections and ensure that consultation begins at the earliest stages of operational planning; establish a standard operating procedure to guide joint planning.

• Review current administrative and security procedures for MONUSCO civilian personnel, UN Country Team officials, and NGO partners to ensure that they allow for rapid deployment.

• Provide additional guidance internally and externally on how rapidly deployable battalions (RDBs) and standing combat deployments (SCDs) will function.

• Prioritize full implementation of a communications strategy for base closures; devote resources to informing civilians and effectively receiving their input through community-level structures prior to base closures.

• Within current resource constraints, continue conducting post-closure assessments and monitoring how base closures are affecting humanitarian access and civilian security.

• As MONUSCO sector boundaries shift, ensure that all troops have a strong contextual understanding of their area of operations and that there are clear lines of communication and command among battalions and between field offices.

• In preparation for future budget cuts, make serious efforts to identify and reduce operational and financial inefficiencies that will not undercut the ability of the Mission to function; work with the UN Secretariat to target these inefficiencies.

• Invest in longer-term planning to develop and implement measures that could mitigate the negative consequences of base closures across different locations. These measures could include the improvement of road and telecommunications networks as well as capacity building for local protection actors.

To the United Nations Security Council and Member States

• Ensure that MONUSCO receives adequate funding to carry out the tasks outlined in its mandate and that any reduction in MONUSCO’s troop or funding levels is based on improvements in the security situation and a reduction of threats to civilians while also taking into consideration the negative consequences that downsizing could have for civilians.

² The Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework is an agreement signed by 11 African countries on February 24, 2013. It outlines a plan for addressing the root causes that have led to recurring cycles of violence in the DRC. The agreement outlines priority activities that should be taken at the national, regional, and international levels and creates an oversight mechanism to review progress on them.
• Allocate and approve appropriate funding for travel by MONUSCO civilian personnel and for aviation assets to support the success of the protection through projection strategy.

• Pledge and deploy additional aviation assets to the Mission that will support MONUSCO’s mobility requirements under the protection through projection model.

• If further reductions in troops or funding are determined to be appropriate, engage MONUSCO in early dialogue on these reductions to allow adequate planning on where reductions will be made in-Mission.

• Support comprehensive SSR and DDR, in particular through diplomatic engagement with the Congolese government.

• Request reporting on efforts to improve joint planning between MONUSCO’s military and civilian sections.

• Contribute troops, police, and enablers that can and are willing to deploy rapidly and temporarily to respond to protection threats more flexibly and with fewer resources.

To the United Nations Secretariat

• Prioritize the generation of troops, police, and enablers that can and are willing to deploy rapidly to respond more flexibly to protection threats.

• Intensify efforts to generate the right balance of civilian and military aviation assets to support mobility requirements within the protection through projection model, including by generating appropriate capacity to quickly move peacekeepers and equipment throughout the country.

• Ensure that contingent-owned equipment is up to the standards agreed to by troop and police contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs) and that pledged equipment allows for rapid deployment.

• Support MONUSCO in the development of indicators to measure mandate implementation progress and benchmarks for an exit strategy.

• Support MONUSCO in identifying and reducing systemic inefficiencies in peacekeeping operations so that budget reductions are a source of improved efficiency rather than reducing critical Mission resources.
METHODOLOGY

This report is primarily based on field research conducted by one Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) staff member and one consultant. Interviews were carried out in the Goma and Pinga regions of the DRC over four weeks in July and August 2017. Several additional interviews were conducted via telephone and Skype with civil society leaders, humanitarians, and subject matter experts in Goma and Walikale, DRC between July and October 2017. Our analysis is also based on careful review of key UN documents shared with CIVIC researchers during the course of our assessment. While not directly cited in this publication, CIVIC’s understanding of civilian perspectives and MONUSCO’s protection role is founded on interviews conducted with several hundred participants across North Kivu Province in 2016.

Between July and October 2017, CIVIC interviewed 21 Congolese civilians, three members of the Congolese army, 24 MONUSCO civilian officials, seven MONUSCO military officials, 11 humanitarians, and seven other subject matter experts. All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. CIVIC took steps to ensure that the civilian voices incorporated into our research and report reflect a balanced gender ratio and a variety of different perspectives, including people of different ethnicities and education levels.

For the security and privacy of the people interviewed, CIVIC has withheld names and identifying information throughout the report. Most people spoke on condition of anonymity.

BACKGROUND

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was wracked by two wars during the 1990s, both of which were characterized by brutal attacks against civilians and amplified by international involvement and support for armed groups. The Second Congo War officially ended in 1999 with the signing of the Lusaka Peace Accord, after which a United Nations peacekeeping Mission known as MONUC was deployed with 5,000 personnel to support the peace agreement. Approximately 3.9 million people are estimated to have died between 1998 and 2004 as a result of direct violence and the collapse of infrastructure and health services caused by the violence.

In July of 2010, MONUC was transformed into the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) to reflect its shifting focus toward strengthening stability and peace in the country. Protection of civilians has remained a core part of MONUSCO’s mandate throughout its existence, and MONUSCO is authorized to “take all necessary measures” to carry out its protection of civilians responsibilities. In March 2013, the UN Security Council authorized the creation of a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) within MONUSCO, which was authorized to “carry out targeted offensive operations” to “neutralize armed groups” operating in the country.

As one of the UN’s largest and longest-running peacekeeping operations, MONUSCO has often been at the forefront of developing tools and practices to protect civilians. These initiatives have included the development of tailored strategies to combat different armed groups, the creation of protection matrices that draw on mission and external stakeholder information to identify and prioritize protection responses, the use of Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) for deploying civilian staff with specialized skills to the field alongside military peacekeepers, and the creation of Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs), who are Congolese nationals tasked with a variety of responsibilities to improve communication and information sharing between the Mission and civilians. MONUSCO has also developed protection working groups at every level of the Mission that bring together high-level Mission personnel, UN...
agencies, and other humanitarian representatives to discuss protection concerns.

MONUSCO’s presence in the country and a formal end to the conflict, however, have failed to eradicate violence by non-state armed actors or produce actual peace and progress for the civilian men and women living in eastern DRC. Over the last decade, armed groups in the east have fractured and multiplied. Currently, there are over 80 armed groups operating in eastern DRC. In North Kivu Province alone, civilians report hundreds of security violations at the hands of these armed groups to the UN each month, including extortion, violence, sexual violence, abduction, and forced recruitment into armed groups. The Congolese national army (FARDC) and police (PNC) are equally abusive, routinely committing approximately half of the violations recorded by the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC.

President Kabila’s official term ended in 2016, but he has remained in power following announcements by the National Electoral Commission that the country is unable to hold credible elections before 2018. The country’s highest court ruled that Kabila can retain his post until elections are held. President Kabila’s reluctance to step down is fueling political tension, protests in urban centers, and armed group violence, including in areas of the country that were previously peaceful. For example, violence that broke out in the Kasai region in 2016 and escalated in 2017 has left thousands dead. In order to respond to the violence, MONUSCO quickly scaled up its presence in the region, first through mobile monitoring teams and then by establishing three larger and more permanent company operating bases (COBs) along with a number of temporary positions. Although MONUSCO’s scale-up in the Kasais was a commendable response to egregious violence against civilians, the need to respond to violence in the Kasais and in other emerging hot spots has stretched Mission resources thin.

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10 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support (UNDPKO/DFS), Protection of Civilians Coordination Mechanisms in UN Peacekeeping Missions, 2012.

11 This number reflects the latest figure being used by a UN official who spoke with CIVIC in August 2017. Other sources may cite a different number, as the number depends on whether particular branches of militias and self-defense groups are considered linked or autonomous. For additional information on armed groups, see Center on International Cooperation, The Landscape of Armed Groups in Eastern Congo, December 2015.

12 Information on weekly and monthly violations is recorded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the DRC.


15 The Secretary-General’s recent report on the strategic review of MONUSCO, for example, concluded that “the current political impasse and the continued uncertainty around the electoral timetable are fueling much of the insecurity witnessed across the country over the past year.” See United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Strategic Review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, September 29, 2017, UN Doc. S/2017/826, para. 17.

In the DRC, troop reductions and a decreased budget are driving real changes in how the peacekeeping Mission operates.
PROTECTION THROUGH PROJECTION

MONUSCO has been under pressure for several years to increase its flexibility and responsiveness to protection threats. The Mission was in the process of generating new mobile capabilities in 2017 when a reduction in resources coincided with an increase in the number and types of protection threats. These changing circumstances prompted MONUSCO to create a new model for protection called “protection through projection,” as opposed to relying primarily on protection by presence. Both military and civilian components of the peacekeeping operation are adjusting their capabilities and strategies to function within the model.

The protection through projection plan is being adopted at a time when aviation assets and travel budgets for civilian sections of MONUSCO are being cut, which could undermine the Mission’s mobility and ability to reach areas affected by base closures if violence escalates. Therefore, enhanced joint civilian-military planning will be vital to the success of the protection through projection model. Field deployments will need to reflect the coordinated priorities of both military and civilian components of MONUSCO and enable civilian sections to continue carrying out core Mission activities that build on the gains of short-term military operations.

MONUSCO’s decreasing permanent presence in some areas of North Kivu also means that collaboration with humanitarians will become even more important for civilian protection. However, as will be explored later in this report, the need for closer communication and collaboration between the Mission and humanitarians is raising difficult questions around information sharing, distinction between the Mission and humanitarian actors, and humanitarian principles that allow humanitarian actors to deliver assistance safely and effectively.

Perhaps most importantly, Congolese civilians who depend on MONUSCO’s presence for their safety and security may have to adjust their self-protection strategies as MONUSCO shifts to the protection through projection model. MONUSCO’s withdrawal from territories as it implements the new protection model should be structured along timelines that allow the Mission to consult with and support communities under threat. Additional clarity on how protection through projection will function would better enable humanitarians, civilians, and the Congolese government to adjust their own capacities and protection tools to function with less MONUSCO presence. MONUSCO should regularly review and evaluate how the new protection model is functioning and make adjustments as needed. In order to strengthen its mobile operations, MONUSCO could also reflect on and draw on lessons learned from the challenges it encountered deploying rapidly deployable battalions (RDBs) in 2016 and repositioning to the Kasai region in 2017.

The Origins of “Protection through Projection”

When MONUSCO’s mandate was renewed in 2015, language was added instructing MONUSCO to develop rapidly deployable units to increase the Mission’s flexibility.17 The 2016 mandate built on this recommendation by emphasizing the need for transformation of MONUSCO’s military component—referred to as the Force—to be more mobile. It also called for security sector reform, and encouraged dialogue between the Mission and the Congolese government on the gradual exit of MONUSCO.18 Based on these directives, MONUSCO began to develop RDBs with the logistics, engineering, medical, and military capacity to sustain themselves in the field for short periods of time.

In North Kivu Province, in particular, MONUSCO determined that it was overstretched—it was maintaining more bases throughout the province than it had the troop levels and support capacity to effectively operate. According to Mission personnel, this meant that too many troops were needed to guard static positions, leaving too few to conduct patrols or deploy to areas where conflict was escalating and civilians were under threat.19 As part of its Force transformation, MONUSCO began identifying company operating bases (COBs) and temporary operating bases (TOBs) for closure in North Kivu to allow the Force to become more flexible and mobile.

In March 2017, UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2348 reduced MONUSCO’s troop ceiling from 19,815 to 16,215. While MONUSCO was already operating with several thousand fewer personnel on the ground than its mandate allowed, the reduced troop ceiling required MONUSCO to remove the equivalent of a full battalion from its operation. The troop reduction accelerated the process of Force transformation and placed MONUSCO in a position where it had to close more bases more

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19 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #15, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with development actor, #23, Goma, August 2017.
quickly than expected. In order to continue delivering protection to civilians with a smaller permanent presence on the ground, MONUSCO officials developed an updated plan for their operations, which was labeled “protection through projection.”

While not formally a different concept of operations, protection through projection is a new way of understanding how security will be delivered to civilians in North Kivu. Although MONUSCO still maintains over 75 bases throughout the country, under the new model the Mission will maintain a less static presence and will increasingly rely on highly mobile troops and civilian Mission personnel to deploy to areas for a period of approximately one to three weeks. Teams will carry out both military and civilian operations without establishing a base. Because deployments will be launched to areas where the Mission has no existing presence, MONUSCO will rely on small contingents of special operations troops within Force to deploy ahead of other personnel to prepare the security and logistics for an operation. Rapidly deployable battalions (RDBs) and civilian staff will then follow as needed to carry out the shorter-term field missions—termed Standing Combat Deployments (SCDs). When RDBs are unavailable for deployment, other Force troops will perform short-term joint military and civilian field missions within their capabilities.

As part of its new protection concept, MONUSCO intends to deploy SCDs with civilian and military staff either in response to a deteriorating security situation or when a mission is requested by civilian staff to implement their regular activities in an insecure area. The time required to deploy an SCD depends on how many staff are involved in the operation, what equipment they need deployed alongside personnel, and the location of the operation. While SCDs are a new concept, experience with RDBs in 2016 and 2017 indicates that, in most cases, it takes days rather than hours to deploy an RDB. Therefore, in many cases, even MONUSCO’s more mobile RDB or SCD operations will not allow staff to intervene and protect civilians if they are only mobilized after violence has already begun. In interviews with CIVIC, MONUSCO staff stressed that, in order for the concept to be successful, SCD deployments will have to focus on prevention and deploy at the first early warning signs of tension. This type of preventative response will be a challenge for MONUSCO. As one MONUSCO official told CIVIC, “On paper, it is nice, but translating it into effective action not just reaction will be difficult.”

### Adjusting MONUSCO’s Capabilities to Protect with Less Presence

Rapid deployment capacity is vital to the success of protection through projection. Therefore, MONUSCO officials have worked with UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO) staff to remove some of the barriers that have prevented rapid deployment by MONUSCO’s uniformed personnel in the past. One key improvement was the renegotiation of Mission agreements with troop contributing countries so that there are no longer any geographic restrictions on where troops can be deployed within the DRC. In principle, all MONUSCO troops can now be deployed anywhere within the country. MONUSCO officials also adjusted the boundaries of Mission sectors to better cover the current hotspots where the Mission is focusing activities. For each of the four sectors, MONUSCO has developed an RDB to be headquartered in the region. The Mission is planning to develop additional RDBs in the coming year. Besides creating these RDBs, MONUSCO plans to replace some conventional troops with troops who have special capabilities, such as those equipped for operating in jungle terrain.

All of these adjustments are important steps, building the Force’s flexibility and ability to respond in emerging hotspots. MONUSCO’s recent strategic review concluded that, “An enhanced number of RDBs would allow the Mission to intervene in an increased number of priority locations, and thereby reduce its footprint.” In interviews with CIVIC, several MONUSCO officials also noted that the protection through projection...
model creates opportunities for MONUSCO to increase its reach to new areas of the country, albeit with a temporary presence.\(^{27}\)

However, many MONUSCO officials and humanitarians raised concerns that sectors are now too large, creating a risk that sector and company commanders will struggle to cover areas under their authority, and that COB commanders and mobile troops will not have a strong working knowledge of the context within which they are operating. They also voiced fears that MONUSCO does not have enough truly mobile forces to respond to the number of hotspots they may encounter in the coming months.\(^{28}\) Success of the model therefore hinges on MONUSCO and UNDPKO’s ability to develop additional RDBs, generate troops equipped for rapid deployment, ensure that all troops have a strong understanding of their area of operations, and make certain that there are clear lines of communication and command between battalions and COBs inside the new sectors.\(^{29}\)

Many civilian sections of the Mission, including Civil Affairs, the Joint Human Rights Office (JHRO), the department of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), and the Stabilization Support Unit (SSU)\(^{10}\) rely on the presence of Force and MONUSCO bases to implement core activities. For example, Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)—Congolese national staff managed by the Civil Affairs division—are deployed to the field alongside Force. They manage community alert networks (CANs) that give MONUSCO early warning of deteriorating security situations, support community protection activities, and disseminate important information from MONUSCO to communities. CLAs will be a vital tool under the protection through projection model, deploying alongside Force to help them understand the local context, communicate with communities, and understand protection needs in areas where MONUSCO does not have a regular presence. However, as bases close, CLAs will have to withdraw from communities and maintain alert networks remotely. Given the importance of these networks, Civil Affairs is planning to focus resources on maintaining existing alert networks and building additional networks quickly during SCD deployments. Overall, MONUSCO will be less able to focus on building the capacity of local protection groups.\(^{31}\)

Similarly, JHRO recognizes that, in the future, it will be unable to maintain as strong a field presence to monitor human rights violations. Therefore, JHRO staff will continue reinforcing the ability of local human rights advocates to collect information on violations and share that information with JHRO through a growing variety of social and multimedia platforms. They will maintain local contacts remotely by telephone.\(^{32}\) The DDR section intends to work with local partners and focus on encouraging large-scale combatant surrenders so that ex-combatants can be extracted through fewer operations. They will use community violence reduction (CVR) programming such as infrastructure and training projects aimed at socio-economic reintegration of demobilized combatants as an incentive to encourage surrenders.\(^{33}\)

While civilian sections are adjusting their activities to the more mobile operations model, significant concerns persist. MONUSCO personnel and humanitarians voiced concerns in interviews with CIVIC that both Civil Affairs and JHRO staff will struggle to maintain their contact networks over time, particularly if civilians are discouraged by the absence of MONUSCO staff and feel that their alerts do not translate into action.\(^{34}\) Weakened CANs could reduce the Mission’s ability to predict and respond to outbursts of violence. Moreover, many actors who spoke with CIVIC noted that adult and child combatants are afraid to surrender to Congolese security forces, instead seeking

\(^{27}\) CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #7, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{28}\) CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #33, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #45, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{29}\) CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #29, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #45, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{30}\) Since 2010, MONUSCO has been mandated to carry out stabilization activities that contribute to short- and medium-term reduction of violence by reinforcing legitimacy and trust between civilians and state actors and institutions. Stabilization activities are overseen by the Stabilization Support Unit (SSU).

\(^{31}\) CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #7, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #44, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{32}\) CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{33}\) CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #19, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{34}\) CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #24, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #8, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #36, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Goma, August 2017.
demobilization at MONUSCO bases. With fewer MONUSCO bases, they may be less able to surrender or face threats if they try to do so. SSU staff often implement their stabilization programs through local and international non-governmental organizations that may be able to continue working in communities where there is no presence of MONUSCO or MONUSCO bases. Yet, SSU’s target areas for programming must also meet a set of minimum stability conditions; if security deteriorates in areas where bases have closed, they may be unable to continue implementing their programs.

Perhaps the largest challenge facing MONUSCO’s civilian sections is a reduction in their travel budgets and aviation assets. As MONUSCO’s strategic review observed, “Effective protection through projection will also depend on the availability of a range of transport capabilities, including ground transportation and air lift capabilities.” One MONUSCO official who spoke with CIVIC emphasized this point, saying, “If you do protection [through] projection but without the means to make it work, you are setting yourself up for failure.”

Despite recognition that these resources are vital, they are being reduced due to the overall cuts made to MONUSCO’s budget in June 2017. Asking MONUSCO personnel to be more mobile while reducing both the travel budget of civilian sections and the air support to move personnel around the country is problematic. MONUSCO staff from several sections noted that, because of financial concerns, they are already under pressure to reduce the length of field missions and the number of staff deployed on them. One section had to cancel a field mission to investigate abuses against civilians due to a lack of funds, and other sections anticipate having to do so in the future.
CIVILIAN SELF-PROTECTION STRATEGIES TIED TO MONUSCO PRESENCE

In North Kivu Province, armed groups control large areas of terrain where the Congolese security forces and MONUSCO do not have a strong presence. In these areas, non-state armed groups subject civilians to taxation, intimidation, displacement, forced recruitment of their children, violence, and sexual violence. Having experienced decades of predatory behavior by armed groups, civilians are reluctant to plant crops, start businesses, or invest in improving their houses, knowing that their crops can be stolen, their businesses taxed, and their houses burned. Insecurity prevents many farmers from accessing their crops and children from attending school.42

A 30-year-old male teacher explained this situation to CIVIC, saying, “Armed conflicts are at the root of our underdevelopment. We cannot develop in a climate of fear and uncertainty...I can consider building a nice house, but after I realize that our zone is full of armed groups and that one day these fighters will come to plunder and destroy it.”43 Echoing these concerns, a 31-year-old female farmer said, “We are affected by conflict in many ways, but mostly by poverty. We cannot invest for fear of looting. If you stay here long, you will realize that enough women have become widows and children are orphans. These are the visible signs of the cycles of war that we have known.”44

In this environment, MONUSCO bases often create a hub of security that allows civilians some semblance of normalcy and stability. CIVIC spoke with a 42-year-old woman who fled from her home in a rural area to the relative safety of a town with a MONUSCO base after a militia group tried to forcibly recruit her children. She said, “If I came here, it was to seek the protection of MONUSCO because, at home, I could not live anymore.”45

CIVIC also spoke with Congolese civilians who explained that they have sought shelter in the past at MONUSCO bases or planned to do so in the future during attacks or when insecurity increased in surrounding areas. Because it is a challenge for MONUSCO to anticipate and prevent attacks through proactive patrolling, civilians feel that their best hope for protection when armed group activity increases in an area is to move towards MONUSCO bases, which armed groups rarely approach or attack.46 In the words of one young woman: “I felt protected by MONUSCO because every time there were rumors that Pinga would be attacked... I told myself that I would enter the MONUSCO base to hide from the rebels.”47 Humanitarians speaking with CIVIC expressed concern that, under the protection through projection model, civilians now have fewer safe areas to shelter during attacks.48 To cope with the changing circumstances, civilians will likely have to adjust their self-protection strategies or face further displacement and insecurity.

42 CIVIC interview with civilian, #54, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #55, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #59, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #62, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #64, Pinga, July 2017.
43 CIVIC interview with civilian, #54, Pinga, July 2017.
44 CIVIC interview with civilian, #64, Pinga, July 2017.
45 CIVIC interview with civilian, #66, Pinga, July 2017.
47 CIVIC interview with civilian, #58, Pinga, July 2017.
48 CIVIC interview with subject matter expert, #2, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #5, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #21, Goma, August 2017.
Collaboration with Humanitarians Under the New Model

MONUSCO and humanitarian actors have separate mandates and carry out different activities, but both parties focus on protecting civilians and rely on each other to a certain extent. Currently, many humanitarians turn to MONUSCO for logistics support—including for flights. Numerous organizations also look to MONUSCO for security analysis and to aid in contributing to the creation of a secure environment for humanitarian operations. Consequently, humanitarians operating in North Kivu anticipate that MONUSCO’s decreased field presence in the province may lead to a deterioration in the security environment, an increase in attacks against humanitarians, and shrinking humanitarian access. Several humanitarian actors stressed to CIVIC that humanitarian organizations will need to increasingly develop their own logistics and security capacity, be more willing to negotiate access directly with stakeholders and armed actors, and rely on local partners to implement activities in areas they cannot access.49

UN agencies are required to comply with security restrictions laid out by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). If UNDSS assessed security level changes in certain areas, UN agencies would be unable to travel to them without an armed MONUSCO escort. Non-UN humanitarian organizations, while technically not required to comply with UNDSS security protocols, often rely on these assessments to determine whether travel is safe for their staff. MONUSCO has proposed that it can continue to facilitate the movement of humanitarian personnel by allowing them to accompany MONUSCO SCD deployments and patrols. Many humanitarian agencies, however, believe that participation in armed patrols would violate humanitarian principles of neutrality,50 in part because MONUSCO’s Force Intervention Brigade has an offensive mandate to target certain armed groups and also because MONUSCO supports the operations of the Congolese armed forces (FARDC).51

MONUSCO’s recent strategic review, which was released in October 2017, advised that “MONUSCO should strengthen its collaboration with humanitarian actors and streamline coordination mechanisms with humanitarian agencies in areas where the Force is not deployed, to ensure information sharing on protection risks to vulnerable populations.”52 Certainly, the realization that MONUSCO will likely have a shrinking field presence in eastern DRC has spurred interest in closer collaboration between MONUSCO and humanitarian officials. However, it is also initiating debates between those humanitarians who advocate closer coordination and information sharing between the two parties to help them maintain awareness of protection concerns and other humanitarians who advocate a standard of co-existence but oppose closer collaboration to protect distinction—their clear separation from parties to the conflict.

As a first step, MONUSCO is attempting to launch a review of coordination mechanisms to see how they are functioning.53 Additionally, humanitarians are trying to revive the use of protection matrices, which emerged in the DRC as a form of collaboration between humanitarians and MONUSCO. Protection matrices identify which areas are highest priority for protection by categorizing them as “must,” “could,” or “should” protect.54 In recent years, they have fallen out of use, but if revived, they could allow humanitarians to share information on threats to civilians without disclosing confidential information on victim or witness identity. According to the national guidelines drafted by the UN Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) on coordination between MONUSCO and humanitarian actors, humanitarians can share relevant security information with MONUSCO so long as that information does not compromise the confidentiality of informants or expose individuals to additional risks.55 When used in the past, these matrices were shared and discussed in the Provincial Senior Management Group on Protection (SMG-PP), which brings together key MONUSCO, humanitarian, and Congolese focal points—including Congolese army and

49 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #14, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #42, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #74, New York, November 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #75, conducted via Skype, November 2017.

50 Neutrality in the humanitarian context is defined by UN OCHA as the obligation of humanitarian actors not to take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature. See UN Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles, June 2012.

51 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #1, conducted via Skype, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #33, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #47, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #75, conducted via Skype, November 2017.

52 UNSC, Report of the Secretary General on MONUSCO’s Strategic Review, para. 68.

53 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #12, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #26, Goma, August 2017.

54 UNDPKO/DFS, Protection of Civilians Coordination Mechanisms in UN Peacekeeping Missions, 2012.

police officials—to discuss protection concerns. If the matrices are brought back into use, MONUSCO and humanitarians may need to identify a different setting to share the matrices that does not include government actors, as Congolese security forces may pose threats to civilians. Protection matrices should also not make specific recommendations on where intervention by MONUSCO should take place, so as to avoid a situation in which humanitarians appear to be directing military operations.

One further area of coordination could be to integrate, in some form, the many existing alert networks in the DRC. Congolese authorities and some humanitarian organizations have their own early warning and alert systems that function alongside MONUSCO’s CANs. Discussions are ongoing to determine how humanitarians, MONUSCO, and Congolese authorities might better integrate their alert systems without endangering civilians. MONUSCO understands that its shrinking presence in some territories could leave gaps and is mapping protection actors and activities in areas where bases have closed. These are important initial steps. Humanitarians might also be more willing to collaborate and share information with MONUSCO if Mission officials increase their level of discussion and consultation with humanitarians around how MONUSCO’s decreasing field presence will affect them and how protection through projection is being implemented.

Early Lessons Learned on Protection through Projection

In September, MONUSCO launched Operation Molo, a Force SCD operation in North Kivu intended to demonstrate how protection through projection will work, by deploying troops to patrol an area where MONUSCO bases have recently closed and showing communities and armed groups that MONUSCO has not abandoned the terrain. MONUSCO officials who spoke with CIVIC shared early lessons learned on the protection through projection strategy based on their analysis of Operation Molo and other recent attempts to quickly mobilize military and civilian personnel in response to protection threats.

One of the most common observations by MONUSCO personnel was the need for improved joint civilian-military planning within the Mission and for this coordination to begin at the earliest stages of operational planning. With a smaller permanent field presence and fewer air assets, civilian sections will become increasingly dependent on Force operations to provide protection as they conduct their core protection activities in insecure areas. This shift means that civilian and military components of the Mission have to ensure their operational plans and activities are aligned. One MONUSCO civilian official said, “Without joint planning, we will not focus on the areas that are a mutual concern to us.” Several others emphasized that protection is a whole of Mission activity, but that without joint planning, military objectives and priorities will drive and dominate the Mission as MONUSCO’s field presence decreases. MONUSCO officials have begun to draft a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on joint civilian-military planning. The drafting process should involve consultation with both civilian and military Mission personnel. But even the best SOP will not ensure that joint planning takes place. A sense of commitment to the process and implementation of the SOP will be key, as will the involvement of Mission leadership and Heads of Field Offices—who lead sub-national level offices and manage all MONUSCO civilian staff in an area—to spearhead joint planning.

When speaking to CIVIC, MONUSCO personnel also noted that earlier and more extensive planning is needed while increased flexibility has also become necessary so that MONUSCO can respond to

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56 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #1, conducted via Skype, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #47, Goma, August 2017.
57 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #16, Goma, August 2017.
58 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #12, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #18, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #19, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #28, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #29, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #43, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #44, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Goma, August 2017.
59 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Goma, August 2017.
60 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #36, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #45, Goma, August 2017.
61 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #12, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #18, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017.
62 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #44, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Goma, August 2017.
MONUSCO Indian Army troops and the Congolese army crossing obstacles in thick rain forest during operation 'Busurugi' focused on joint effective area Domination patrols in Busurugi, Walikale Territory. MONUSCO’s base in Walikale was closed in August 2017. MONUSCO/ Force.
Field deployments will need to reflect the coordinated priorities of both military and civilian components of MONUSCO.
During a limited timeframe. While prioritization and a few priority objectives that they hope to accomplish when they arrive on site and will need to select only personnel will need to begin activities quickly. In interviews with CIVIC, MONUSCO officials reflected reduce their travel budget requests, and ultimately deployments may clash with pressure on civilians to limited objectives. The practical need for longer field operations will likely need to be of longer duration than Operation Molo, with civilian sections needing advance planning can make operations more efficient, MONUSCO personnel also reflected that, in the future, missions becoming the norm, personnel need preparation for field operations. MONUSCO civilian counterparts and humanitarians can take part in field missions, the Force will need to communicate information on its movements at an earlier stage, such as during joint planning or coordination meetings. Civilian and humanitarian participation in planned Force missions will also require MONUSCO to streamline its administrative processes for travel by civilian staff and humanitarians, including by reducing the number of high-level Mission personnel required to approve staff travel and travel budget allocations.

Greater mobility on the part of the peacekeeping Mission also requires equipment that allows rapid deployment. To meet this need, MONUSCO plans to exchange some of its attack helicopters for transport helicopters to increase its ability to move troops and equipment around the country. However, it will also require troop contributing countries (TCCs) to provide updated, smaller, and more lightweight equipment. Currently, some of the armored personnel carriers (APCs) do not fit inside MONUSCO helicopters, which delays troop deployments. To overcome this problem, MONUSCO sometimes resorts to renting unmarked humanitarian helicopters—an expensive process, and one that can also delay deployments if humanitarian helicopters are unavailable.

MONUSCO, the UN Secretariat, and Member States will need to work together closely to ensure the Mission has the appropriate personnel and enablers that protection through projection requires. Even with appropriate equipment, MONUSCO is unable to transport staff with helicopters if the weather is inclement, if it cannot guarantee minimum-security conditions on the ground, or if an airstrip is in poor shape or too small to accommodate UN air assets. Appropriate road conditions will therefore need to be built or maintained if MONUSCO is expected to continue to provide protection for civilians in areas where bases have closed.

As MONUSCO develops into a more mobile operation, its need for actionable information will also grow. Decisions on where and when to move troops in response to protection threats will hinge on effective early warning. While the need for information is growing, MONUSCO will have less staff in the field to engage with interlocutors who contribute to MONUSCO’s situational awareness. As already noted, improved information sharing with humanitarians could

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63 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #43, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #45, Goma, August 2017.
64 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #18, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #42, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Goma, August 2017.
65 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with development actor, #23, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #42, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #39, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #43, Goma, August 2017.
66 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017.
67 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #15, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #39, Goma, August 2017.
68 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #39, Goma, August 2017.
69 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #41, Goma, August 2017.
70 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #15, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #17, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #41, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #43, Goma, August 2017.
71 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #12, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #18, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #40, Goma, August 2017. 
alleviate some of these concerns. MONUSCO will also have to review its own processes for information sharing and analysis to ensure that the Mission is internally sharing and optimally using the information it has.\textsuperscript{72}

Finally, according to MONUSCO civilian personnel and humanitarian actors, greater clarity is needed around how RDBs and SCDs will function. Specifically, there is currently confusion over what type of deteriorating security conditions or operational needs will trigger an RDB deployment, whether and how deployments can be requested, who will make decisions on whether a deployment is warranted, how long RDBs will be able to operate in the field, and what equipment civilian personnel and humanitarians will be able to bring on deployments.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{ENSURING PROTECTION FOR CIVILIANS AS MONUSCO BASES CLOSE}

Although MONUSCO was already planning to carry out base closures in early 2017 as part of its Force transformation, the Security Council decision to reduce MONUSCO’s troop ceiling in March 2017 and cuts to the Mission’s budget in June 2017 have resulted in the closure of more MONUSCO bases more quickly than previously planned. Between July and August 2017, MONUSCO initiated the closure of five bases in North Kivu Province—those in Walikale, Bunyampuri, Luofo, Nyabiondo, and Masisi Center. As this section of the report will explore, the expedited process did not allow for proper consultation internally between civilian and military sections of the Mission or externally with humanitarians to determine which bases should be closed. There was also a compressed timeline for informing local Congolese stakeholders of the closures. Before withdrawing, MONUSCO was unable to put in place many of the measures that its personnel identified—through pre-closure assessments—as important for guarding against an increase in protection threats. MONUSCO is now coordinating with external stakeholders to retroactively roll out mitigating measures.

Humanitarians, MONUSCO officials, and civil society leaders anticipate that the closures will lead to protection concerns as armed groups progressively gain control in areas where peacekeepers have withdrawn. Going forward, a longer timeline is needed to ensure additional base closures can be conducted in a responsible manner and to minimize the negative repercussions of withdrawal. MONUSCO and humanitarians will also need to carefully monitor the impact of base closures and capture lessons learned for future closures.

\textbf{Base Closures in Policy and Practice}

In the past, MONUSCO has often closed company operating bases (COBs) and temporary operating bases (TOBs) and relocated personnel when it determines that security has improved in an area or that staff members are vitally needed in other locations. MONUSCO has a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on base closures to promote consistency and minimize protection concerns around closures. The SOP clarifies the roles and responsibilities assigned to different MONUSCO actors in the event of a closure; outlines a consultation process that will take place between MONUSCO’s

\textsuperscript{72} CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, \#27, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, \#40, Goma, August 2017.

\textsuperscript{73} CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, \#22, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, \#33, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, \#42, Goma, August 2017.
military leadership, MONUSCO civilian components, Congolese authorities, and UN humanitarian agencies; and explains how and when different stakeholders will be informed of the closure. MONUSCO officials explained to CIVIC that, according to Mission guidelines, the base closure process should take three months to allow MONUSCO to inform stakeholders and put in place mitigating measures.

Some MONUSCO officials and humanitarians highlighted three ways that the SOP could be strengthened. First, the timeline of three months may be insufficient when closing particularly large or geographically important bases. Second, the SOP does not sufficiently address the issue of how MONUSCO will communicate the closure to civilians or international and national non-governmental organizations. Third, the SOP could recommend that the Mission consult humanitarian actors outside the UN Country Team.

Despite these limitations, most MONUSCO officials and humanitarians interviewed agreed that the SOP is adequate in its current form and that the primary issue lies in how the SOP has, at times, been implemented. The UN Security Council’s decision to reduce MONUSCO’s troop ceiling in March 2017 and the June 2017 reduction in MONUSCO’s overall operating budget placed the Mission in the difficult position of having to close bases on a shorter timeline than specified in MONUSCO guidance on closures.

Between June and August 2017, MONUSCO moved forward with the closure of five bases, that, although part of the larger Force transformation plan, were primarily driven by troop and budget cuts. In interviews with CIVIC, Mission officials widely recognized that MONUSCO was unable to follow their SOP on closures for these five bases. Civilian components of the peacekeeping Mission and humanitarians, including UN agency officials, felt that they were informed of which bases would be closed only after decisions were finalized, rather than being consulted in advance. Interviewees believed that integrated assessments and consultations on the closures focused on identifying measures to mitigate possible negative consequences of closures instead of being joint evaluations of the risks involved in withdrawal to inform whether a base should be closed. While the lack of genuine consultation between MONUSCO military officials, civilian Mission personnel, and humanitarians was particularly acute in the case of the five most recent closures, interviewees indicated that it had also been an issue with other base closures that took place in 2017 before troop and budget reductions were made.

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74 MONUSCO, Joint Mission Standard Operating Procedure for the Closure or Relocation of COBs/TOBs, August 6, 2015.
75 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #26, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #35, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #36, Goma, August 2017.
76 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #31, conducted via Skype, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #45, Goma, August 2017.
77 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #26, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #31, conducted via Skype, August 2017.
78 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #15, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #31, conducted via Skype, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #36, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #43, Goma, August 2017.
79 CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #1, conducted via Skype, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #4, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #5, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #12, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #14, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #17, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #21, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #31, conducted via Skype, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #42, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #44, Goma, August 2017.
DECIDING WHICH BASES TO CLOSE

In the DRC, MONUSCO faces more protection threats than it can address with its allocated resources. Deciding where to close bases is therefore a challenge with no clear or easy answer. MONUSCO’s military leadership is authorized to make the final decision on closures. In the case of the five most recent base closures, these leaders appear to have primarily considered rates of protection-related incidents in the months preceding closures, Mission analysis of inter-communal fault lines that might affect the likelihood of conflict, and logistical support needs.80

In conversations with CIVIC, MONUSCO civilian officials and humanitarians observed that it is problematic to measure insecurity primarily by relying on the number of violations in an area over a period of several months. First, bases may contribute to stability, driving down the number of violations in the area. Second, some types of violence can be cyclical—prompted by seasonal or political factors that may not be clear over a short time period. Interviewees raised a number of other factors that should be taken into consideration in advance of future base closures, including the importance of a base to the presence and programming of MONUSCO’s civilian staff, the geographic importance of a base for liaising with local Congolese government officials, the number and tactics of armed groups operating in an area, the presence or absence of Congolese security forces deployed nearby, and the ease of reaching an area via road or air transport after withdrawal.81 It is unclear whether MONUSCO’s military leadership took any of these factors into consideration. Increased transparency of the decision-making process would clarify whether they were considered, which could either alleviate the concerns of some MONUSCO civilian officials and humanitarians or highlight the need to consider additional factors going forward.

80 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #47, Goma, August 2017.
81 CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #5, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #15, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #19, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #20, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian official, #21, Goma, August 2017.
Mitigating Measures

Although MONUSCO’s joint civilian-military pre-closure assessments do not appear to have influenced which bases were closed, the assessments did identify priority mitigating measures that could reduce risk to civilians after MONUSCO’s withdrawal. MONUSCO’s consultation with local actors during these assessments highlighted, among other issues, the need for improved telephone and road networks to protect civilians after MONUSCO’s withdrawal and so that civilians can continue reporting protection threats and receive vital security information. Based on these assessments, MONUSCO has worked with Congolese telecommunication companies to extend network coverage to priority protection areas, including areas where bases have closed. Some progress has also been made installing additional radio antennas and using relatively small amounts of funding that the Mission has at its disposal for community projects—referred to as Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)—to install solar panels that will allow civilians to charge portable phones.82 Although Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) are no longer present in locations where bases have closed, MONUSCO has ensured that CLA telephone numbers remain active and are managed by Civil Affairs staff after CLAs depart to maintain community alert networks (CANS).83

To avoid creating a security vacuum that armed groups can exploit, MONUSCO officials have advocated for the deployment of additional Congolese security forces ahead of MONUSCO’s withdrawal. However, this advocacy has shown limited results. MONUSCO exercises little influence over whether these security forces are actually deployed and, if deployed, how long they remain in the area before being shifted to other theaters by a Congolese government with different security priorities than the peacekeeping operation.84 Humanitarian actors interviewed by CIVIC also expressed concerns that Congolese security forces, themselves responsible for many violations against civilians in North Kivu, could drive rather than resolve insecurity for civilians if they move in to replace MONUSCO troops. Moreover, it will be difficult for MONUSCO to monitor and influence the behavior of FARDC and PNC contingents without consistent presence in areas where they operate.

When speaking with CIVIC in July, civilians affected by a base closure that was planned before the troop and budget cuts felt that while the FARDC might provide some additional security after MONUSCO’s withdrawal, there were also risks to having them deployed.85 One 35-year-old female farmer told CIVIC, “We have no choice. We are forced to accept FARDC protection, but we sincerely do not like the way FARDC works.”86 A 40-year-old male teacher agreed, saying, “No, I do not see myself protected by the FARDC. The FARDC are, in a way, the accomplices of our suffering.”87

Due to the short timeframe of the closures, MONUSCO was unable to put in place many mitigating measures ahead of its withdrawal from the five bases in North Kivu. Instead, many of the mitigation measures are being implemented retroactively, after the base closures have been initiated or completed. MONUSCO has carried out follow-up assessment missions to continue evaluating what measures are needed to reduce protection threats to civilians that might arise after the base closures. During pre- and post-closure assessment missions, MONUSCO identified a need to reinforce the capacity of local civil society organizations and protection actors, including local protection committees (LPCs) that MONUSCO has helped develop. Accordingly, MONUSCO officials have carried out additional trainings for local protection actors in Masisi Center and Nyabiondo.88

Within their current resource constraints, MONUSCO personnel will need to continue conducting post-closure assessments to evaluate key measures for reducing risks to civilians where the Mission has withdrawn its static presence. Moreover, if MONUSCO anticipates having to progressively close additional bases in North Kivu Province, it should dedicate resources and attention to addressing some of the priority mitigating measures that have been identified across base closure locations—such as working with external partners to improve roads, telecommunications networks, and CAN systems.

82 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #12, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #14, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #35, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #38, Goma, August 2017.
83 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #44, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #50, conducted via Skype, October 2017.
84 Confidential MONUSCO documents, on file with CIVIC; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #44, Goma, August 2017.
85 CIVIC interview with civilian, #51, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #52, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #53, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #55, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #57, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #61, Pinga, July 2017.
86 CIVIC interview with civilian, #56, Pinga, July 2017.
87 CIVIC interview with civilian, #60, Pinga, July 2017.
88 Confidential MONUSCO documents, on file with CIVIC.
Communicating with Communities on Base Closures

Civilians are the main stakeholders affected by base closures. They make major decisions and build self-protection strategies around MONUSCO’s presence or absence in an area. Consequently, sharing information with civilians on base closures and how MONUSCO plans to continue operating in areas without a permanent presence is key to their protection. As one humanitarian actor noted, “The closure of a base is not just a matter of SOPs. If you follow the procedure, the population will still be afraid.” Base closures also have the potential to negatively affect civilian perceptions of the Mission if the rationale behind closures is misunderstood or if civilians fail to grasp the constraints of the Mission. Negative perceptions in areas of base closures have the potential to undermine MONUSCO’s future engagement with these communities, whether MONUSCO is aiming to provide temporary protection or achieve other mandated objectives. Good communication could minimize damage to MONUSCO’s reputation caused by withdrawal.

To a degree, MONUSCO appears to have recognized the importance of communicating with civilians about the closures. MONUSCO’s Public Information Division and Radio Okapi staff members drafted a communication strategy to guide their messaging on the closures. Senior Mission personnel have travelled to field locations to host meetings and public forums explaining the closures. Throughout July and August 2017, MONUSCO officials continued to hold press briefings on the issue and broadcast information about closures through Radio Okapi, while Civil Affairs staff held meetings with civil society leaders to spread information about the closures. Despite these efforts, the short timeline around the five most recent closures meant that civil society leaders and MONUSCO’s local NGO partners were informed, at most, one month ahead of the closures and, in some cases, only several weeks in advance. Civil society leaders and NGO staff reported that, at times, information circulated through rumors before being officially announced, and that they had to reach out to personal contacts at the Mission to clarify whether the rumors were accurate. Humanitarian actors working closely with communities felt that additional communication to civilians would be beneficial, including concerted efforts to reach out to civilians through local forums where they often receive and share information, such as churches and schools.

In May 2017, MONUSCO closed a base in Pinga within North Kivu Province. The Pinga base closure occurred before MONUSCO’s current communication strategy was in place and was not part of the five expedited closures driven by troop and budget cuts. However, it presents lessons learned on the importance of communication with communities. CIVIC spoke with a number of civilians and civil society leaders in Pinga who stressed the lack of communication ahead of MONUSCO’s withdrawal. Many civilians were unaware that the base was closing until they witnessed troops departing from the town. A 27-year-old woman who fled to Pinga because of insecurity in her village described the prevailing confusion to CIVIC:

We did not have enough information about the closure of the MONUSCO base here. We just observed that the peacekeepers were leaving. I was personally upset. I thought that the blue helmets were moving but would be replaced by other units. I was surprised to finally understand that the base was closed.

89 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #33, Goma, August 2017.
90 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #18, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #43, Goma, August 2017.
91 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #7, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #35, Goma, August 2017.
92 CIVIC interview with subject matter expert, #2, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #5, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #21, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #50, conducted via Skype, October 2017.
93 CIVIC interview with subject matter expert, #2, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #5, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #20, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #21, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with development actor, #23, Goma, August 2017.
94 CIVIC interview with civilian, #51, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #52, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #53, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #54, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #55, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #56, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #57, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #58, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #60, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #61, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #62, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #63, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #64, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #65, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #66, Pinga, July 2017.
95 CIVIC interview with civilian, #53, Pinga, July 2017.
A member of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) inside an armored vehicle during patrol near Beni, where MONUSCO is supporting the Congolese army in an operation against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel militia.

UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti
Civil society leaders likewise told CIVIC that they were not formally notified of the closure. One civil society leader said, “Although we are the nucleus of civil society, we were not formally told about the closure of the MONUSCO base. We learned this information through unauthorized conversations and especially by rumors. MONUSCO did not publicly or officially inform the population.”

Without communication, the prevailing sentiment among civilians and civil society leaders in Pinga was that the Mission had abandoned them without fulfilling its promise to restore security to the area. “They told us that they came to give us peace,” one Pinga resident complained to CIVIC. “They even called themselves peacekeepers. But they decided to leave without warning us, even though peace was not there.” A young woman echoed this sentiment, saying, “I think the time was not yet right for MONUSCO to close its base here in Pinga. We remain insecure. My opinion is that MONUSCO and even the United Nations have abandoned us.” These civilian perceptions underline the importance of MONUSCO’s new communications strategy and ensuring that it is followed, even in remote locations like Pinga where MONUSCO may have difficulty deploying or may not have strong relationships with civil society organizations that facilitate information sharing.

Understanding the Impact of Base Closures

At the time of CIVIC’s research, most interlocutors felt that it was still too soon to understand or measure the effects of base closures on the security and protection environment in North Kivu Province.

However, as discussed previously, MONUSCO officials, humanitarians, and local development actors expressed concern that non-state armed groups will quickly retake territory that MONUSCO has vacated, that violations committed against civilians by both state and non-state security forces would increase, that humanitarian access would decrease, and that closures might trigger population movements or increased displacement.

Recent events seem to confirm that these are credible security concerns. An FARDC base four kilometers from Pinga was attacked by armed group members less than 24 hours after MONUSCO withdrew from the area. In interviews with CIVIC, civilians and civil society leaders from Pinga and Walikale cited the attack as evidence of the security vacuum left by MONUSCO’s withdrawal. In both locations, interviewees reported increased activity by armed groups since the base closures, including activity closer to towns. Many civilians in Pinga described living in a state of heightened fear since MONUSCO's withdrawal, including one 44-year-old man who said:

The security environment in which we live is stressful, very often we do not have the hope of a better tomorrow, all because of the armed conflicts that have made their home in our region. After the closure of the MONUSCO base here, the insecurity has greatly increased, so the security environment is stressful and it affects me and affects our family.

Analysis collected by MONUSCO officials in Masisi and Nyabiondo also reveals that civilians are reporting heightened armed group activity in these areas, including distribution of weapons and threats to seize control of towns vacated by MONUSCO.

96 CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #67, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #68, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #69, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #70, Pinga, July 2017.
97 CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #69, Pinga, July 2017.
99 CIVIC interview with civilian, #63, Pinga, July 2017.
100 CIVIC interview with civilian, #53, Pinga, July 2017.
101 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #5, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #17, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #21, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #24, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with development actor, #25, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #27, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #33, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #75, conducted via Skype, November 2017.
102 CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #33, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #50, conducted via Skype, October 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #51, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #52, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #53, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #54, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #55, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #56, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #57, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #58, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #59, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with civilian, #60, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #68, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #69, Pinga, July 2017; CIVIC interview with Congolese civil society leader, #70, Pinga, July 2017.
103 CIVIC interview with civilian, #52, Pinga, July 2017.
104 Confidential MONUSCO documents, on file with CIVIC.
MONUSCO officials, humanitarians, and diplomats were almost unanimous in their agreement that closer monitoring of protection threats in areas where bases have closed is needed. With less MONUSCO field presence in many territories of North Kivu Province and with the potential for decreased humanitarian access to areas where MONUSCO bases have closed, monitoring the protection-related effects of base closures may be a challenge. There is a risk that data will appear to show a decrease in human rights violations in these areas if there are fewer international organizations collecting data on violations.\(^\text{105}\)

Nevertheless, several humanitarian actors who spoke with CIVIC are planning to invest additional resources in tracking protection threats and in assessing how MONUSCO’s decreasing static field presence is affecting the security environment.\(^\text{106}\) MONUSCO is also planning to conduct an After Action Review of the closure process to collect lessons learned. As noted, the Mission has carried out post-closure assessments. Furthermore, MONUSCO is reviewing how data collected by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) on civilian perspectives of security can capture changing perceptions of safety and confidence in MONUSCO as the Mission progressively decreases its static field presence.\(^\text{107}\) HHI data has, for years, provided valuable information on shifting civilian perspectives.

MONUSCO can continue to make use of HHI surveys and can potentially partner with HHI or other external partners to conduct new research specifically investigating the effects of base closures. The Mission should also continue to conduct post-closure assessments to complement the quantitative information compiled by HHI and collaborate with humanitarian actors who record protection violations to ensure that it has multiple sources of information to understand how its reduced field presence is affecting civilian protection.

### MOVING TOWARD AN EXIT STRATEGY

When plans for MONUSCO’s Force transformation were being developed, the process was envisioned as a necessary step toward allowing MONUSCO to gradually and progressively exit from the DRC. MONUSCO’s base closures and decreasing permanent presence throughout North Kivu are now drawing attention to many larger concerns that will need to be addressed as MONUSCO develops an exit strategy to withdraw from other areas where it has traditionally maintained a presence. During CIVIC’s assessment, MONUSCO officials, humanitarian actors, and Congolese stakeholders stressed the need for MONUSCO to build local and institutional capacity as it carries out Mission activities. While long a component of MONUSCO’s activities, capacity building is critical to MONUSCO’s ability to draw down, and a particular focus should be placed on how capacity of local protection partners and government institutions can be built ahead of withdrawal. For example, security sector reform and demobilization of armed group combatants remain key issues that need to be addressed by a number of stakeholders including and beyond the Mission before security is restored for Congolese civilians.

MONUSCO regularly considers how it can involve local state and non-state actors in the implementation of its activities—whether it be to monitor human rights violations, initiate dialogues on how long-term stability can be achieved, or manage community alert networks. Still, MONUSCO’s shrinking presence in North Kivu has raised concerns that local protection mechanisms will cease functioning without regular MONUSCO encouragement. MONUSCO personnel, humanitarian officials, and local development actors stressed to CIVIC that a heavier focus on capacity building is needed. As discussed in this report, under protection through projection, civilian sections of the Mission will likely have less ability to build sustained relationships and local protection capacity in many areas of the country once they have withdrawn. Therefore, MONUSCO should ensure that it develops forward-looking plans that anticipate gradual drawdown and develop strategies for reinforcing capacity of local protection actors well before withdrawal and while MONUSCO still has a steady presence in the area.

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\(^{105}\) CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #8, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #12, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #14, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #47, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{106}\) CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #33, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #47, Goma, August 2017.

\(^{107}\) CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #4, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #15, Goma, August 2017.
The commander of the standing combat deployment (SCD) of Rwindi, Rutshuru Territory in North Kivu talks with members of the community during a patrol in the locality of Kisheshe to inquire about the security situation on the ground. MONUSCO/Force
Individuals across a variety of sectors who spoke with CIVIC strongly emphasized that demobilization of armed groups and security sector reform (SSR) need to be effective and expedited if MONUSCO is to withdraw.\textsuperscript{108} MONUSCO is revising and creating comprehensive strategies to tackle armed groups in different areas of the country, which could be an important element of its exit strategy. Speaking about SSR, one MONUSCO military official observed, “If Congolese security forces can take control and provide security, then surely that is the exit plan for MONUSCO.”\textsuperscript{109} A humanitarian actor further explained, “We can’t have a conversation about pulling bases out without having a conversation on SSR and without having well-trained and equipped forces there and a plan for monitoring them.”\textsuperscript{109} Both the demobilization of armed groups and SSR will require genuine will and engagement by the Congolese government. Member States and international actors with financial resources, SSR and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) expertise, and influence with the Congolese government will also need to increase and sustain their engagement to achieve these objectives in the DRC. MONUSCO may not necessarily be well placed to play a large role in DDR and SSR, but it can play a vital coordinating role for these activities and can stress these issues in its political engagement with Congolese and international actors.

An exit strategy for MONUSCO will also need to include coordinated and progressive transfer of some of MONUSCO’s protection, monitoring, and state and society-building activities to UN agencies and NGOs. However, several protection and development actors noted to CIVIC that MONUSCO officials are overly optimistic about the number of activities that can be turned over to UN agencies and NGOs, as these actors are also facing shrinking resources while responding to a growing range of protection threats in the DRC.\textsuperscript{111} These stakeholders stressed that there will likely be gaps that cannot be filled by other external actors if MONUSCO draws down too quickly, and that this should be openly recognized and communicated to beneficiaries, the UNSC, donors, and the Secretariat. Conversations on transfer of capacities will need to be coordinated, not only across MONUSCO components and UN Country Team agencies, but also between field and headquarters offices within the DRC.\textsuperscript{112}

It can be valuable for peacekeeping missions to develop thinking around an exit strategy long before they begin to draw down. Exit strategy planning can, for example, promote operational planning that focuses on impact and outcomes rather than activities, and can encourage peacekeeping personnel to develop methods for measuring their impact on the protection environment.\textsuperscript{113} Several MONUSCO officials observed to CIVIC that MONUSCO will need to improve its ability to measure its impact as it develops an exit strategy.\textsuperscript{114} However, decisions on whether and when MONUSCO draws down or withdraws from specific areas in the DRC and from the country as a whole should be based on established benchmarks related to improvements in the security situation and reductions in threats to civilians.\textsuperscript{115} Civilian and military MONUSCO officials

\textsuperscript{108} CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #8, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #18, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #19, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #20, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #21, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #24, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with development actor, #25, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #42, Goma, August 2017.

\textsuperscript{109} CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #29, Goma, August 2017.

\textsuperscript{110} CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #42, Goma, August 2017.

\textsuperscript{111} CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #8, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #10, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #13, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #14, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #42, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #47, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with subject matter expert, #48, conducted via Skype, September 2017.

\textsuperscript{112} CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #42, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #75, conducted via Skype, November 2017.


\textsuperscript{114} CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #32, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #36, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017.

\textsuperscript{115} CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #32, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #36, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with subject matter expert, #48, conducted via Skype, September 2017.
who spoke with CIVIC shared concerns that recent decisions to reduce the size of the Mission were divorced from the realities of conflict on the ground and the tasks that MONUSCO is being asked to perform under its mandate. One MONUSCO official said, “It cannot be the budget driving the mandate.” According to him, withdrawal “needs to be governed by concrete, definitive indicators of the situation on the ground.”

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If Congolese security forces can take control and provide security, then surely that is the exit plan for MONUSCO.

–MONUSCO military official

116 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #8, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #11, Goma, August 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #28, Goma, August 2017.

117 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #37, Goma, August 2017.
CONCLUSION

The latest round of troop and budget cuts to MONUSCO is not business as usual. The cuts come at a time when the peacekeeping Mission is facing an increase in the variety and number of crises and threats to civilians. Budget cuts may force some degree of reform at the mission level, but if enacted too quickly and without being tied to changes in mandated tasks or aligned with strategic reviews, they can lead to significant gaps in protection for civilians in conflict-affected areas. This is the concern in the DRC, where MONUSCO officials recognize that recent cuts may result in an inability to respond to serious potential protection threats against civilians.

To comply with previous Mission mandates that stressed the need for MONUSCO to become more mobile and flexible and to deliver on its protection mandate with fewer resources, MONUSCO has developed a new operational strategy based on protection through projection rather than protection by presence. MONUSCO and UNDPKO have taken important steps to increase the mobility of the Mission’s peacekeeping personnel to enable the rapid deployment on which the new model will rely. However, to deliver on the new strategy, the Mission will need consistent support from Member States and the UN Secretariat to ensure that it has the personnel, enablers, and guidance necessary for rapid deployment. In order for MONUSCO’s new protection strategy to succeed, peacekeeping personnel will need to strengthen their ability to predict and prevent crises by reinforcing information collection and sharing, ensuring that strong coordination mechanisms are in place, and revising administrative procedures to allow more flexibility. MONUSCO’s leadership will need to proactively deploy personnel based on early warning analysis.

MONUSCO’s new strategy involves progressively decreasing its field presence by closing MONUSCO bases. To ensure that base closures have as little negative impact on the civilian population as possible, base closure decisions should be informed by consultation across MONUSCO military and civilian sections and externally with humanitarians and communities that will be affected. Consultations should happen at an early stage in the decision-making process. When possible, timelines for base closures may need to be lengthened to allow proper communication with Congolese communities and to allow the implementation of measures to mitigate increases in security threats to civilians.

There is a risk that MONUSCO will struggle to adequately protect civilians under its new protection through projection model and that base closures will leave critical protection gaps around the country. MONUSCO has already made efforts to assess its new protection strategy and monitor the effects of base closures. It will need to continue adjusting and clarifying how rapidly deployable operations such as RDBs and SCDs function and critically assessing the impact of its withdrawal from specific areas in eastern DRC.

The UN Security Council, Member States, and the Secretariat have a responsibility to provide the Mission with adequate resources, tools, and support to implement its mandate. MONUSCO and the UN Secretariat should also work together to find and reduce or eliminate systemic inefficiencies, and they should identify areas where future budget cuts can be absorbed with the lowest impact on protection of civilians. MONUSCO’s leadership can ensure that the Mission performs as strongly as possible in an environment of decreasing resources by designating clear protection priorities and promoting a unified effort to address these protection concerns across Mission sections, with the UN Country Team, and with other external actors, including through joint planning. As MONUSCO shifts how it provides protection to civilians in the DRC, consultation and coordination with humanitarians is needed as is continued engagement with Congolese civilians to understand their concerns and perspectives.
RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.