Challenges and Opportunities Faced by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in Fulfilling Its Mandate for Peace and Security in the DRC

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ABSTRACT

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been marred by protracted conflict, instability, and human suffering for decades. Studies on or and around United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo with respect to conflict, peace and security, portray shortcomings bordering on ineffectiveness. This presents a serious paradox and a question on conflict intervention by MONUSCO's peace and security processes. The study objective was to evaluate challenges and opportunities faced by MONUSCO in fulfilling its mandate on peace and security processes in the DRC. The study explored Liberal Theory, Power Theory and Theory of Functionalism from which a conceptual model was drawn. The target population was 49,871 with a unit of analysis of 21,105 civilians comprising 5052 refugees, 4053 internally displaced persons and 12,000 local traders, 16,161 MONUSCO staff, 7,895 from major none governmental organizations (NGOs), and 4,710 from the political class, the rebel groups, and immigration. The study used random, stratified, snowball, and purposive sampling techniques to select 384 participants. The study was conducted in Eastern DRC. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The primary and secondary data were collected using questionnaires, focus group discussions, observation guides, and key informant interviews. Content analysis was done for all qualitative data; statistical data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study indicate that, MONUSCO's key challenges include; persistent violence of attacks by armed groups, mistrust and limited cooperation from government and local authorities, and logistical difficulties in accessing remote areas. The study concluded that mistrust and dearth of cooperation, non-guaranteed protection of the civilian population, and weak governance institutions are the major problems facing MONUSCO in achieving its mandate. The study recommends supporting the establishment of local and international judicial mechanisms to investigate and prosecute war crimes and human rights abuses, by ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable and encourage truth and reconciliation processes to address past injustices and promote healing within communities.

Keywords: Hegemony, Insurgencies, International Militaries

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I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Institute of Economics and Peace (2022), sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are globally categorized as regions experiencing political instability and further termed as low-resilience regions (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2022). As part of the sub-Saharan Africa, East Africa to which the Democratic Republic of Congo belongs has been characterized by a number of internal wars over the past five decades, leaving a legacy of unresolved animosities and militarization (Mulata, 2017). The regional arrangement covering East Africa is the East African Community.

The international conflict intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo, known as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or its French designation, Mission de l'Organization des Nations Unies pour la Stabilization en République Démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO), represents a UN peacekeeping force established by the UN Security Council through resolutions 1279 (1999) and 1291 (2000). Their mandate involved overseeing the peace process associated with the Second Congo War, often referred to as the Great War of Africa, which began in 1998 (Johnson, 2022). Nevertheless, a significant portion of its attention shifted towards the Ituri conflict, the Kivu conflict, and the Congo conflict. The MONUSCO succeeded the prior UN peacekeeping initiative – the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), on 1 July 2010, in alignment with Security Council resolution 1925 of 28 May 2010, to signify the new phase attained in the nation. The recently sanctioned UN mission is empowered to employ all requisite measures to fulfill its mandate, which includes, among other objectives, safeguarding civilians, humanitarian workers, and human rights advocates facing immediate threats of physical harm, as well as assisting the Government of the DRC in its endeavours toward stabilization and the consolidation of peace (Reeves, 2016). Initially comprising approximately 19,815 troops, the MONUSCO uniformed personnel has now diminished to roughly 16,161 individuals. This total

includes a maximum authorized strength of 13,500 military personnel, which encompasses contingent troops and staff officers, alongside 660 military observers and staff officers, 591 police personnel, and 1,410 members of uniformed police units. The personnel hail from over 50 nations across the globe. MONUSCO receives its funding from a distinct account that is sanctioned annually by the General Assembly. Approved budget: $1,123,346,000 (A/RES/75/300) (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2021) (07/2021–06/2022).

Despite the interventions by MONUSCO from July 2010 to-date and later East Africa Community Regional Force (EACRF) from November 2022 to December 2023, the conflict in eastern DRC has continued to spike up (Ntanyoma, 2021). This resuscitation of the conflict has been a great concern not only to DRC but also to the neighbouring states because of conflict spillover. However, due to the absence of DRC government security forces protection to the civilians, communities have taken the initiative of defending themselves. According to Okoth *et al.*, (2018) on peace, security, and development in 21st century Africa, there is a shift from state safety to individual and communities' safety. The initial causes of the wars in East Africa are thus not always the same as the factors that perpetuate them. On the other hand, the porous borders across East Africa countries are unmarked and usually contested. When incidents occur or valuable resources are discovered in these areas, tensions spike between neighbouring states, complicating peace-building efforts.

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has become a matter of grave concern to the regional states with the re-emergence of M23 rebels in late 2021. M23 off-shot from the National Congress for the Defence of the People (NCDP) is popular in its French acronym CNDP. This was a rebel group which fought against the government of DRC from 2006 to 2009. M23's main claim is that the Congolese Tutsi and other ethnic communities in North and South Kivu provinces are discriminated against by the DRC Government considering them as "Rwandophones" since they are Rwandese by origin (Ntanyoma, 2021).

On 09 May, 2023 the DR Congo President Félix Tshisekedi while on an official visit in Gaborone - Botswana noted with concern that EACRF was not performing as per their mandate and accused them of cohabiting with rebels after the regional troops declined to enter into combat. However, during the 21st extra ordinary meeting of Heads of State and governments summit held in Bujumbura on 31 May 2023, it was agreed to the extension of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) for six months from March to September 2023 (East African Community, 2023). This was in order to consolidate the gains made by EACRF. However, the EACRF mandate was later extended to 8 December 2023 in which the government of DRC maintained its none renewal. During extra ordinary meeting in Bujumbura, the summit reiterated its call to all parties to de-escalate tensions and use established regional, continental and international mechanisms to resolve any disputes in the implementation of peace in eastern DR Congo (Tull, 2019). On the other hand, MONUSCO has been observed by the region as an occupational force and has done little for the last few decades to achieve its mandate on peace and security.

The statement of the problem is that, with the conflict intervention efforts through MONUSCO, there is a common assumption that the UN peacekeeping mission is a panacea for the issues facing the DRC, particularly as an approach to conflict management. The initial soft mandate of MONUSCO of observation quickly changed to offensive peacekeeping mission, prioritizing the protection of civilians and creating political space for dialogue on stability and institutional building. Illunga (2019) notes that the key elements and turning points in the change of the mission mandate were always motivated by the negative impact of political actions and/or behavior of armed groups on the population, rather than a perspective of incremental sustainable change based on successful functioning. Over time, this type of strategic response has placed MONUSCO in a reactive rather than proactive position and made it difficult to establish a sustainable framework for peace, let alone to contemplate an exit strategy (Illunga, 2019). In principle, such an international arrangement should promote growth and development within individual member states as it strengthens integration processes, enhances intergovernmental cooperation creating a global identity in the comity of nations, avers Cickecka (2018).

This is said to be true of underdeveloped and dysfunctional counties as further contended by Cickecka (2018). Today's conflicts in the country are, to a large extent, a reincarnation of those of the past, ideological antagonism, constitutional orientation crisis, dispute control of natural resources and ethnic dimensions of the conflict. This indicates that the structural causes of the conflicts have not been adequately addressed. The DRC is the third largest country in Africa, with vast natural resources around 1,100 minerals and precious metals with an estimate of 77 million inhabitants, less than 40% live in urban areas (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2022). According to Gebrekidan, DRC is an example of how colonial experience had a great negative impact (Tim, 2005). Even after independence in 1960, positive peace and prosperity was elusive due to internal divisions (Tim, 2005). Despite a number of interventions including MONUSCO, the conflict in DRC, being the most violent after WWII, has caused loss of millions of lives and is among those conflicts that are in serious need to get resolved. Since mainstream mechanisms to conflict resolution have been unsuccessful so far in finding a lasting solution to the DRC problem, there is need to find some alternative mechanisms and regionalism that can serve as a good solution to the problem. Although few studies have been found to recommend this approach for establishment of peace in Africa, a thorough analysis of a potential regional mechanism in case of African conflicts has not been conducted so far. Furthermore, the

studies on regionalism are often found to focus on the role of regional organizations and states actors operating within that region (Kumar, 2023).

On December 20, 2022, the United Nations Security Council enacted resolution 2666, extending the mandate of MONUSCO for an additional year, concluding on December 20, 2023, and, "on an exceptional basis," the mandate of its force intervention brigade (FIB). The revitalized strategic priorities of MONUSCO encompass the safeguarding of civilians and the enhancement of State institutions in the DRC, alongside essential governance and security reforms. Nonetheless, in spite of the endeavours undertaken by the United Nations Stabilization Mission, the security landscape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been increasingly precarious, characterized by rampant violence perpetrated by armed factions in the eastern part of the nation. This raises a significant paradox and poses a profound inquiry regarding the implications of conflict intervention in the DRC by the United Nations via MONUSCO.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

There is little on academic research findings on the conflict intervention by MONUSCO and effects on peace and security in the DRC. The Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), prioritize the protection of civilians during peacekeeping operations by MONUSCO in the DRC. It argues that despite of improved security in some areas, civilians in the eastern DR Congo contend with hundreds of armed groups committing horrific abuses, including large-scale extrajudicial killing and sexual violence. There is little mention on the stabilization and strengthening of State institutions, key governance and security reforms in the DRC. The majority of Congolese people reject the East African Regional Force (EACRF) for its inability to combat M23 rebels as per their expectations (Magabo & Mushitsi, 2024). The DRC government has been under strong popular pressure to resolve this crisis while the EAC strategy to deploy EACRF remains deeply unpopular. Having been deployed in the DRC conflict theatre in November 2022, there is hardly little that can be said in terms of achievements for EACRF. Thus, many media reports, most of which are negative at the moment, warrant an academic research study. For this reason, when more focused and thorough studies are done, more literature will be available for academicians to make a balanced and policy-oriented judgment on peace and security issues (Magabo & Mushitsi, 2024).

The continued deployment of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) without a definitive drawdown has given rise to different policy rationales and findings. These conclusions may differ by viewpoints and opinions, but they have several similar trends, which are important to take into consideration in order to analyze this process. The first major direction is the analysis and consolidation of MONUSCO's mandate. Other reasons for policy include increasing cooperation at the regional level. However, the conflict in the DRC is not limited to the country; it has spillover effects on neighboring countries and systems. As a result, there is an existing policy need for increasing cooperation and collaboration among these countries. Therefore, by fighting cross-border threats and gaining regional cooperation concerning peace, the international system can build a favorable environment for sustainable peace (Tull, 2021). Therefore, it is critical to note that MONUSCO has not managed to solve the conflict in the DRC due to the fact that the challenges that underpin the conflict are complex and structural in nature.

The philosophical position that was used in this research study is pragmatism. When assessing geopolitical realities in determining conflict management in the DRC through the efficiency of MONUSCO, pragmatism dismisses the adaptability of meso-level institutional frameworks in favor of a results-oriented approach. This means measuring the impact that MONUSCO's operations have had in the enhancement of peace and security, as opposed to the measures that used in the testing of theories. The study would thus focus on exploring the feasibility of the strategies that have a proven track record bearing in mind the conditions in the DRC. Challenging the conceptual narrative of peace and security as a consequence of international conflict interventions through MONUSCO implies an analysis of the impact of these interventions on the people of DRC and the stability of the wider region. Therefore, the rationale of using philosophy of pragmatism was because of the following reasons: The positive assertion of pragmatism on the actual consequences; flexibility, and integration of interpretations from practice and experience.

1.3 Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the challenges and opportunities faced by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in fulfilling its mandate on peace and security processes in the DRC.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 Theoretical Review
2.1.1 Liberal Peace Theory

The study was underpinned by Immanuel Kant's liberalism peace theory, which was first proposed in the 18th century (Kant, 1964). The theory explains that the peace of liberalism is inextricably linked to the stability of democracies, which is not well understood from a military standpoint (Tim, 2005). Kant liberal peace theory provides a foundation for comprehending and establishing long-term peace and security that is based on democratic values. Interdependence encourages mutual political contacts in this situation, which creates favourable conditions for economic development as a result of collaboration between people, communities, and governments.

This idea   helped determine whether DRC's enormous security challenges are indicative of the stabilization path. It should be noted that the region has adopted East Africa Community (EAC) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as architectures to peace and security. There are strong interdependences between economic progress and political ideologies, according to liberalism's notion. Respondent political ideologues encourage economic development in this setting, while economic resources define political ideology. Peace is built and sustained as a result of such interdependences, necessitating research into the extent to which political and democratic institutions are firmly linked to conflict, limiting East Africa Community's economic progress (Kilomba, 2023).

2.1.2 Power Theory

According to Spalding (2013), power is a central factor in international relations and that states act primarily to pursue their national interests. This is a theoretical framework used in the study of conflicts that examines how the distribution and exercise of power among various actors, such as governments, rebel groups, international organizations, and neighbouring states, impact the origins, development, and outcomes of conflicts. Power theory explores how disparities in political, economic, and military power can contribute to the escalation or resolution of conflicts and how power struggles can shape the behaviour of parties involved in a conflict.

The conflict intervention in the DRC by the UN can be analyzed through the lens of power theory, particularly in the context of realist and structural realist perspectives. Realism emphasizes the central role of power and self-interest in international relations. The theory suggests that power imbalances among states can be a source of conflict. In the case of the DRC, the conflict is characterized by a complex web of domestic and international factors. The DRC is rich in natural resources, including minerals, which are of significant economic and strategic value. Various regional and international actors, including neighbouring states and multinational corporations, have interests in controlling or exploiting these resources. The UN intervened in the DRC conflict to restore stability and protect civilians. However, the effectiveness of MONUSCO has been influenced by the power dynamics at play. While the UN wields considerable soft power and legitimacy in the international system, it lacks a standing military force of its own. This perspective highlights the complex interplay of power dynamics, self-interest, and international politics that shape the dynamics of conflict intervention and peacekeeping efforts in the DRC (Kilomba, 2023).

2.2.3 The Theory of Functionalism

Functionalist theory argues that international organizations arise to address common challenges that individual states cannot manage alone. MONUSCO's deployment in the DRC exemplifies this by providing security, humanitarian aid, and support for governance in a country grappling with persistent conflict and instability (Hassett, 2015). According to Bellamy and Williams (2015), MONUSCO serves a critical function by acting as a stabilizing force in a fragile state environment, thereby preventing the escalation of conflict that could have broader regional implications.

Functionalism suggests that international organizations facilitate cooperation among states to solve transnational problems. In the context of the DRC, MONUSCO plays a crucial role in coordinating international efforts to manage the conflict and its spillover effects on neighbouring countries. As noted by Weiss and Daws (2018), MONUSCO's mandate includes working with regional actors and organizations to address cross-border issues such as armed groups, refugee flows, and illicit trade, reflecting the functionalist idea that international cooperation is essential for peace and stability.

Functionalism posits that international organizations help create and promote norms that reduce conflict and maintain order. MONUSCO's role in promoting international norms, such as human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law, aligns with the functionalist perspective that the UN and its missions are instruments for diffusing these norms globally. Barnett and Weiss (2008) argue that peacekeeping missions are essential in embedding international norms and standards within local practices, thereby fostering a predictable and peaceful international environment.

2.2 Empirical Review

Wasike and Odhiambo (2016) discuss the role of theories in guiding the thrust of academic studies. They emphasize the importance of theories in offering compelling and incisive causal explanations with calculated

precision. They buttress their argument by quoting Smith (1986) who asserts that theories play the role of predicting, prescribing and evaluating socio-political phenomena hence they cannot be ignored.

2.2.1 Challenges and Opportunities faced by Peacekeeping Missions during Conflict Interventions

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) stands as one of the largest and most complex peacekeeping operations globally. Tasked with fostering stability and security in a nation marred by decades of conflict, MONUSCO faces a myriad of challenges in fulfilling its mandate. Since its inception in 1999, MONUSCO has grappled with the daunting task of navigating the intricate socio-political landscape of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to mitigate conflict, protect civilians, and support the country's transition to peace and stability. However, the mission encounters a plethora of challenges and constraints that impede its effectiveness and hinder progress towards sustainable peace (Apuuli, 2004).

Weak governance structures and institutional capacity in the DRC undermine the government's ability to exert control over its territory and provide basic services to its citizens. This lack of state authority hampers MONUSCO's efforts to support state-building initiatives, security sector reform, and the rule of law. Moreover, political instability and corruption further exacerbate these challenges. Akin to the challenges faced by MONUSCO in the DRC, it is also observed that other conflict-affected regions like in Haiti have fragile governance structures and lack institutional capacity. According to Lanteigne (2013), in Haiti, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) encountered challenges related to weak governance structures, political instability, corruption and their implications for peace building efforts.

The ramifications and implications of armed conflicts and humanitarian disasters in Africa present a profound opportunity for analysis, inviting a deeper exploration into the underlying reasons for the continent's enduring and dramatic history of violence and crisis. It is enlightening to observe that numerous strategic analyses regarding the fundamental origins of conflicts in Africa highlight the significant concentration and/or abundance of unique natural and human resources distributed throughout the continent. Secondly, the continent's challenges in identifying and managing the proliferation of subversive and illegitimate armed enterprises are notable. Thirdly, there exists a somewhat systematic and relentless cycle of production, trade, and recycling of illicit activities related to viral diseases within Africa. Lastly, there is a persistent struggle to transcend ethnic nationalism, narrow-mindedness, and the influence of externally driven yet dubious interests concerning Africa's natural resources. The pursuit of foreign interests manifests through a complex array of strategies, encompassing strategic deceptions, colonial endeavours, collaborations, and the sponsorship of insurgencies and acts of terrorism throughout the region. Additionally, it involves political subversions, inequitable trade practices concerning Africa's predominantly non-renewable resources, manipulations within capital markets, and the imposition of perilous, repressive, and unstable international fiscal regimes and austerity measures across the continent. At its core, this approach often entails a form of psycho-ideological warfare aimed at undermining the integrity of African culture and its peoples, all under the pretence of modernity (Baregu & Landsberg, 2003).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is currently navigating the aftermath of a prolonged period characterized by political turmoil and violent strife, which nearly precipitated an economic collapse, resulting in a significant decline in annual per capita income to $120 in 2005, a stark decrease from $380 in 1985. This phenomenon is termed 'development in reverse' (Egeland, cited in Shekhawat 2009). Political interference in peacekeeping missions represents a prevalent challenge. MONUSCO faces obstacles stemming from political interference and manipulation by a range of actors, such as government officials, armed groups, and external stakeholders. These actors might endeavour to hinder or subvert the mission's mandate for their own purposes, thereby compromising MONUSCO's neutrality, efficacy, and capacity to fulfill its mandate. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) faced challenges stemming from political interference and manipulation by local elites (Hehir, 2007).

Resource constraints often hinder the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions worldwide. Despite international support, MONUSCO operates with limited resources, including personnel, equipment, and funding. The vastness of the DRC's territory and the complexity of the conflict require significant logistical and operational capabilities. Resource constraints hinder MONUSCO's ability to deploy personnel to remote and inaccessible areas, procure necessary equipment, and sustain long-term operations. In Mali, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) face challenges related to limited resources, including personnel, equipment, and funding (Gowlland-Debbas, 2015). The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines manual (2008) outlines the impact of resource constraints on peacekeeping missions and provides guidance on addressing these challenges (United Nations, 2008).

However, amidst these challenges, there are also opportunities that MONUSCO can leverage to enhance its effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate in the DRC. MONUSCO has the opportunity to engage with local communities and empower them to take ownership of peace and security processes. By involving communities in decision-making and conflict resolution, MONUSCO can build trust and legitimacy (Dobbins, 2018). This will promote inclusive

peacebuilding processes, empower marginalized groups, and address the root causes of conflict. The United Nations in Haiti (MINUSTAH) leveraged opportunities to collaborate with local stakeholders, including civil society organizations and grassroots movements, to promote democratic governance, human rights, and socioeconomic development (Meunier, 2017).

MONUSCO can invest in early warning systems and conflict prevention mechanisms to identify and address potential sources of conflict before they escalate. By working proactively to prevent violence, MONUSCO can contribute to long-term stability (Ghani & Lockhart, 2018). In information gathering and analysis, MONUSCO has the potential to collect and analyze information from various sources, including local communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, to identify emerging threats and conflict dynamics. This information   serve as the basis for early warning alerts and to inform on MONUSCO's strategic planning and decision-making processes.

One-way MONUSCO can promote gender mainstreaming is by incorporating gender considerations into its policies, programs, and activities. This includes conducting gender analyses to understand the specific needs, priorities, and experiences of women and men in conflict-affected communities (Bastos, 2020). By integrating gender considerations into its planning and implementation processes, MONUSCO can ensure that its interventions are responsive to the diverse needs of women, men, girls, and boys. Additionally, MONUSCO can actively support women's participation and leadership in peace and security processes by creating opportunities for women to engage in decision-making forums, such as peace negotiations, conflict resolution mechanisms, and community dialogues. This can involve providing training and capacity-building support to women leaders and civil society organizations, as well as advocating for the inclusion of women in formal peace processes (Bastos, 2020). For example, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) established gender focal points and conducted training workshops to raise awareness about gender issues and promote women's participation in decision-making (UN Women, 2018). Similarly, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) supported women's peace dialogues and provided funding for women-led initiatives aimed at promoting reconciliation and social cohesion (UN Women, 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study used both a descriptive survey and an evaluative research design. The data collected was qualitative. Besides, descriptive survey design focuses on ways of formulating the objectives of data collection, data collection instruments, data analysis, and proper reporting of the findings (Anjalo, 2018; Okoth, 2022; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The area of study is in the Eastern DR Congo and borders the republics of South Sudan to the North East, Uganda to the East, Rwanda and Burundi to the South East, Tanzania to the South South East and Zambia to the South. It is characterized by plains, valleys and high grounds with thick tropical rain forest and water masses. In this region, changes in elevation bring marked changes in vegetation, which ranges from montane savanna to heavy montane forest. The Rwenzori Mountains, lakes Albert and Edward are prominent physical features shared between DRC and Uganda. Lake Kivu is shared by Rwanda and DRC while Lake Tanganyika is shared by DRC and Tanzania. The Sabyinyo mountains is shared between DR Congo, Rwanda and Uganda and it is the headquarters of M23 rebels. Virunga National Park is Africa's most biodiverse protected area, home to over one thousand species of mammal, bird, reptile, and amphibian as well as 1/3 of the world's endangered mountain gorillas. Mount Nyiragongo is a volcanic mountain located in Virunga national park and its last eruption was reported in May 2021. The Eastern region of DR Congo is characterized by tropical high rainfall, high humidity and with average daily temperatures of about 25 degrees. The Eastern DR Congo is endowed with fertile volcanic soil and exceptional natural resources, including minerals such as cobalt, copper, gold, coal, and iron-ore deposits, bauxite, offshore deposits of petroleum, diamonds, lithium, tin, tantalum, tungsten etc. The major human activity is subsistence farming and cattle rearing; however, a large number of people are traders and miners.
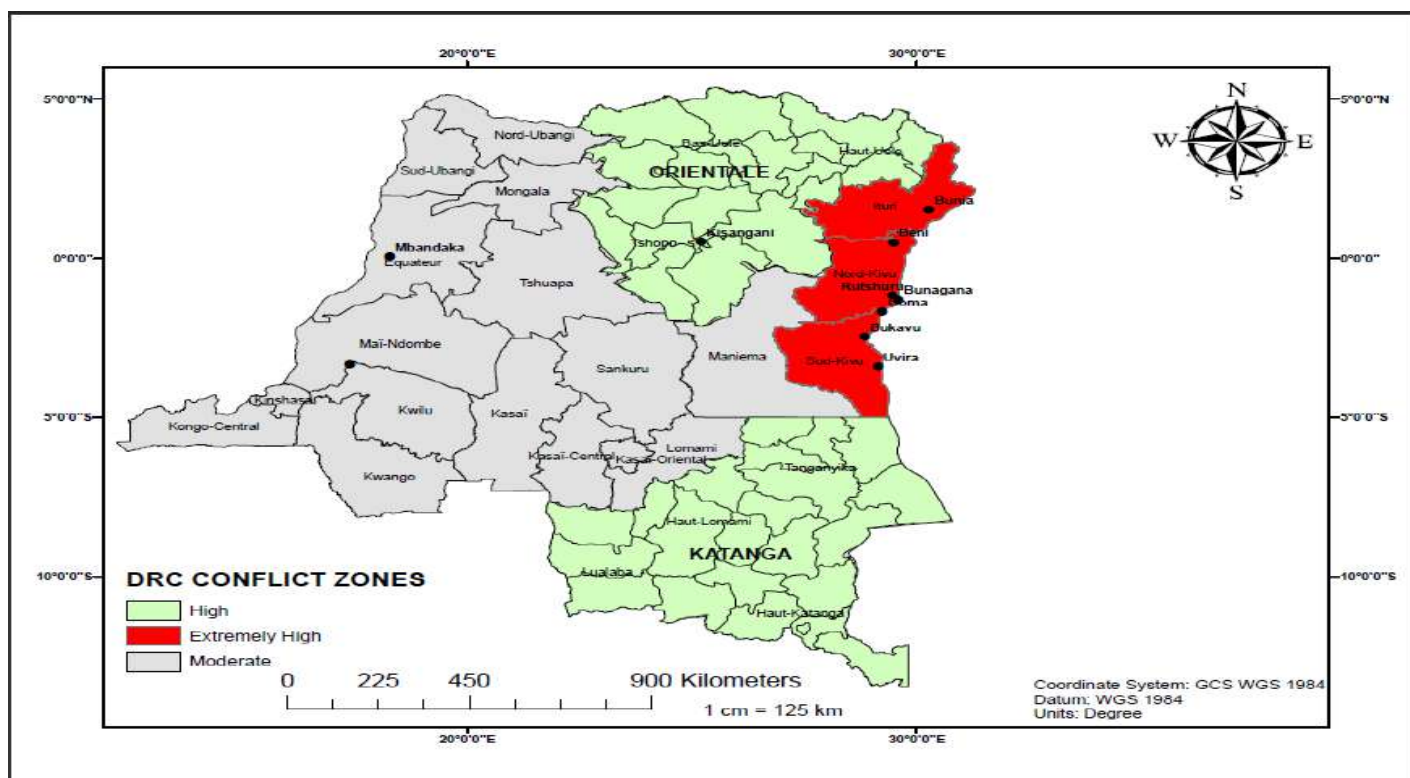
Figure 1
Map of DRC showing conflict zones
Source: *GIS Expert,* 2023.

Data collection instruments include interviews, questionnaires, documentary analysis, focus group discussion and observation.

Analysis was done using content analysis where quantitative measures of the frequency of appearance of particular elements in the text are taken: qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings as charged by Okoth (2022).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Presence of Multiple Armed Groups

The study sought to evaluate whether the presence of multiple armed groups was a challenge facing MONUSCO in DRC. Out of 310 respondents,171 (55.2%) agreed that the presence of multiple armed groups facing MONUSCO in DRC, 91(29.4%) disagreed with the inquiry,39(12.6%) was undecided,6 (1.9%) had no knowledge of the question and 3(1.0%) had no response. The results are illustrated in table 1.

Table 1
Presence of Multiple Armed Groups

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	171	55.2
Disagree	91	29.4
Undecided	39	12.6
No Knowledge	6	1.9
No response	3	1.0
Total	**310**	**100.0**

Based on the findings regarding whether the presence of multiple armed groups poses a challenge for MONUSCO in fulfilling its mandate in the DRC, insights from the 310 respondents reveal varied perspectives and considerations. A majority, 171 (55.2%) of respondents, agreed that the presence of multiple armed groups is indeed a significant challenge facing MONUSCO. This viewpoint reflected the complex security environment in the DRC, where various armed factions operate independently or in collaboration, posing threats to civilian safety, stability, and the implementation of peace agreements. The sheer number and diversity of armed groups complicate efforts to achieve lasting peace and security, requiring robust and adaptable strategies from MONUSCO.

Conversely, 91 (29.4%) disagreed with the assertion that the presence of multiple armed groups presents a major challenge. Their perspective emphasized other factors such as political instability, weak governance structures, or socioeconomic factors as primary impediments to MONUSCO's mandate fulfillment. They   argued that while armed groups are a concern, addressing root causes and building inclusive political processes are equally or more crucial in achieving sustainable peace.

The 39 (12.6%) who were undecided indicated a recognition of the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by MONUSCO. They   acknowledged the presence of armed groups as a challenge but hesitate to prioritize it over other complex factors influencing peace and security in the DRC.A small percentage 6 (1.9%) had no knowledge of the question, potentially indicating a lack of familiarity with the specific dynamics of armed groups in the DRC context or the intricacies of MONUSCO's operational challenges. Similarly, those who provided no response 3 (1.0%)   chose not to engage with the question, possibly due to its complexity or a lack of direct involvement or interest in issues related to international peacekeeping missions.

Accordingly, the varied responses underscore the diverse perceptions of the challenges MONUSCO faces in the DRC, particularly regarding the presence of multiple armed groups. While many recognize this as a significant obstacle, others highlight the broader array of factors impacting peace and security processes in the region. These findings underscore the complex landscape in which MONUSCO operates and the ongoing need for adaptive strategies to effectively fulfill its mandate amid multifaceted challenges.

4.2 Mistrust and dearth of cooperation among political actors

The study sought to evaluate whether mistrust and dearth of cooperation among political actors was a challenge facing MONUSCO in DRC. Out of 310 respondents, 177 (57.1%) agreed that mistrust and dearth of cooperation among political actors was a challenge facing MONUSCO in DRC, 89 (28.7%) disagreed with the inquiry,32 (10.3%) were undecided, 7 (2.3%) had no knowledge of the question and 5 (1.6%) had no response. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Mistrust and Dearth of Cooperation among Political Actors

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	177	57.1
Disagree	89	28.7
Undecided	32	10.3
No knowledge	7	2.3
No response	5	1.6
Total	**310**	**100.0**

Based on the findings regarding whether mistrust and a dearth of cooperation among political actors pose a challenge for MONUSCO in fulfilling its mandate in the DRC, insights from the 310 respondents reveal significant perspectives and insights. A majority, 177 (57.1%) of respondents, agreed that mistrust and a lack of cooperation among political actors are indeed significant challenges facing MONUSCO.

This viewpoint   reflected the critical role that political stability and cooperation play in implementing peace agreements and maintaining security. Political infighting, power struggles, and distrust among key stakeholders can hinder the establishment of inclusive governance structures and undermine efforts to resolve conflicts peacefully. This environment complicates MONUSCO's efforts by reducing the effectiveness of diplomatic interventions and complicating the implementation of peace building initiatives.

On the contrary, 89 (28.7%) disagreed with the assertion that mistrust and dearth of cooperation among political actors are major challenges. Their perspective emphasizes other factors such as economic instability, ethnic tensions, or external influences as primary obstacles to MONUSCO's mandate fulfillment. They argued that while political cooperation is important, addressing broader structural issues and engaging with grassroots communities are equally or more crucial in achieving sustainable peace.

The 32 (10.3%) who were undecided   indicated a recognition of the complex interplay of factors affecting peace and security in the DRC. They   acknowledged the potential impact of political mistrust and lack of cooperation while also considering the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by MONUSCO in navigating the political landscape. A small percentage 7 (2.3%) had no knowledge of the question, potentially indicating a lack of familiarity with specific political dynamics in the DRC or the intricacies of MONUSCO's interactions with political actors. Similarly, those who provided no response 5 (1.6%) chose not to engage with the question, possibly due to its complexity or a lack of direct involvement or interest in issues related to international peacekeeping missions.

According to Smith (2021), historical grievances and power struggles among political elites perpetuate cycles of distrust, complicating peace negotiations and governance reforms. Furthermore, the fragmentation of political interests contributes to volatile alliances and undermines cohesive state-building efforts (Jones, 2020). Cooperative

security theory posits that overcoming mistrust requires inclusive dialogue and participatory decision-making processes (Gupta, 2020). However, conflicting political agendas and personal rivalries, as highlighted by Johnson (2023), often impede effective cooperation and compromise necessary for conflict resolution.

4.3 Protection of Civilian Population

The study sought to evaluate whether the protection of the Civilian Population a challenge facing MONUSCO in DRC. Out of 310 respondents, 161 (51.9%) agreed that protection of Civilian Population a challenge facing MONUSCO in DRC, 92 (29.7%) disagreed with the inquiry, 35 (11.3%) were undecided, 12 (3.9%) had no knowledge of the question and 10 (3.2%) had no response. The results are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3
Protection of Civilian Population

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	161	51.9
Disagree	92	29.7
Undecided	35	11.3
No Knowledge	12	3.9
No response	10	3.2
Total	**310**	**100.0**

Based on the findings regarding whether the protection of the civilian population poses a challenge for MONUSCO in fulfilling its mandate in the DRC, insights from the 310 respondents highlight varying perspectives and considerations. Approximately 161 (51.9%) of respondents agreed that protecting the civilian population is indeed a significant challenge facing MONUSCO. This viewpoint reflected the ongoing insecurity and violence experienced by civilians in conflict-affected areas of the DRC. Armed groups, intercommunal tensions, and sporadic outbreaks of violence threaten civilian lives and livelihoods, necessitating robust and proactive measures from MONUSCO to provide effective protection. Challenges such as limited resources, logistical constraints, and the vast geographical scope of operations can further complicate efforts to safeguard civilians, leading to frustrations and gaps in protection.

Conversely, 92 (29.7%) disagreed with the assertion that civilian protection is a major challenge for MONUSCO. Their perspective emphasized improvements in MONUSCO's operational strategies, local partnerships, and international support as effective means to mitigate risks and enhance civilian security. They argued that while challenges exist, MONUSCO's presence and efforts have contributed to reducing violence and protecting vulnerable populations in certain areas of the DRC. The 35 (11.3%) who were undecided indicated a need for more nuanced understanding or additional information on the complexities of civilian protection efforts in conflict zones. They recognized the importance of civilian protection but hesitate to form a definitive opinion without clearer insights into MONUSCO's operational effectiveness and the broader context of humanitarian challenges in the DRC.

A small percentage 12 (3.9%) had no knowledge of the question, potentially indicating a lack of familiarity with specific incidents or challenges related to civilian protection in the DRC. These respondents did not have sufficient information to assess the extent of MONUSCO's role and challenges in this regard. Similarly, those who provided no response 10 (3.2%) chose not to engage with the question, possibly due to its sensitivity or a lack of direct involvement or interest in issues related to international peacekeeping missions. Addressing the protection of the civilian population in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) poses a significant challenge amid ongoing conflict and instability. The pervasive violence perpetrated by armed groups, alongside the complex humanitarian crises it engenders, underscores the urgent need for effective strategies grounded in cooperative security theory.

4.4 Dearth of International Support for MONUSCO

The study sought to evaluate whether dearth of international support was a challenge facing MONUSCO in DRC. Out of 310 respondents, 155 (50.0%) agreed that dearth of international support a challenge facing MONUSCO in DRC, 87 (28.1%) disagreed with the inquiry, 34 (11.0%) were undecided, 19 (6.1%) had no knowledge of the question and 15 (4.8%) had no response. The results are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4
Dearth of International Support for MONUSCO

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	155	50.0
Disagree	87	28.1
Undecided	34	11.0
No Knowledge	19	6.1
No response	15	4.8
Total	**310**	**100.0**

Based on the findings regarding whether the dearth of international support is a challenge for MONUSCO in fulfilling its mandate in the DRC, insights from the 310 respondents reveal a range of perspectives and considerations. A significant portion, 155 (50.0%) of respondents, agreed that the dearth of international support is indeed a challenge facing MONUSCO.

This viewpoint   stemmed from perceptions that insufficient political backing, financial resources, and logistical support from the international community hinder MONUSCO's effectiveness. Inadequate international support   limited MONUSCO's capacity to deploy personnel, acquire necessary equipment, and sustain operations in complex and volatile environments like the DRC. This lack of support can also affect the credibility and legitimacy of MONUSCO's efforts, impacting its ability to achieve sustainable peace and security outcomes.

Conversely, 87 (28.1%) disagreed with the assertion that the dearth of international support is a major challenge. Their perspective   emphasized the contributions and commitments of key international stakeholders, such as troop-contributing countries and financial donors, in supporting MONUSCO's mandate. They   argued that while challenges exist, ongoing international engagement and partnerships are crucial for bolstering MONUSCO's capabilities and effectiveness in addressing peace and security challenges in the DRC. The 34 (11.0%) who were undecided   indicated a need for more information or a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding international support for MONUSCO. They   recognized the importance of international solidarity but hesitate to form a definitive opinion without clearer insights into the specific impacts and dynamics of international support in peacekeeping operations.

A small percentage 19 (6.1%) had no knowledge of the question, potentially indicating a lack of familiarity with specific details or recent developments related to international support for MONUSCO in the DRC context. These respondents did not have sufficient information to assess the extent of international contributions or challenges faced by MONUSCO. Similarly, those who provided no response 15 (4.8%) chose not to engage with the question, possibly due to its complexity or a lack of direct involvement or interest in issues related to international peacekeeping missions.

In support of the finding, one of the MONUSCO respondents argued,

> *"I have been in this mission area for the last eight (8) months now, however we only know some areas of our responsivity (AOR) from the maps……there are road networks there, only foot paths, there are no UN troops or government forces deployments in those localities. We hear local communities pay protection fee to militia for security......our major challenge is on logistics"*. (R48, 12/04/2024). Source: Field Data (12/04/2024).

4.5 Opportunities Emerging from MONUSCO in Fulfilling its Mandate on Peace and Security Processes in the DRC

4.5.1 Enhanced Community Engagement

MONUSCO has the opportunity to strengthen its relationships with local communities through community outreach programs, dialogue initiatives, and partnerships with local leaders and civil society organizations. This engagement fosters trust, enhances local support for peace initiatives, and improves information-sharing crucial for effective conflict management. Enhanced community engagement stands as a pivotal opportunity for MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), crucial for fostering trust, building local support for peace initiatives, and improving conflict management strategies. Community engagement initiatives, such as outreach programs, dialogue sessions, and partnerships with local leaders and civil society organizations, are integral to MONUSCO's mandate to protect civilians and promote stability in the region. Research supports the effectiveness of community engagement in peacekeeping missions.

For instance, a study by the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations found that proactive community engagement not only enhances security but also strengthens relationships between peacekeepers and local populations, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of peace operations (UN, 2020). In the context of the DRC, where decades of conflict have eroded trust in external interventions, MONUSCO's efforts to engage with local communities have shown promising results. According to a report by the International Peace Institute, sustained community engagement

by MONUSCO has contributed to improved local perceptions of peacekeepers, increased willingness of communities to share information on security threats, and enhanced cooperation in implementing peacebuilding activities (IPI, 2021).

Moreover, partnerships with local civil society organizations have been instrumental in MONUSCO's ability to access remote and conflict-affected areas, facilitate humanitarian assistance, and mediate local disputes. These partnerships not only amplify MONUSCO's operational reach but also ensure that interventions are grounded in local needs and priorities (UNDP, 2022).

4.5.2 Capacity Building and Training

MONUSCO can contribute to long-term peace and stability by investing in capacity building and training programs for local security forces, government institutions, and community leaders. By improving local capacities in conflict prevention, resolution, and governance, MONUSCO empowers local actors to take a more active role in maintaining security and addressing root causes of conflict. Investing in capacity building and training programs is a critical strategy for MONUSCO to contribute to long-term peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). By enhancing the capabilities of local security forces, government institutions, and community leaders, MONUSCO aims to empower these actors in conflict prevention, resolution, and governance, thereby fostering sustainable peace processes.

Scholarly literature underscores the importance of capacity building in peacekeeping missions. According to Di Salvatore & Ruggeri, 2017), effective capacity building enhances the operational effectiveness of peacekeepers by improving local institutions' ability to manage security challenges independently. This approach not only strengthens the legitimacy of peace operations but also supports state-building efforts crucial for long-term stability (Bellamy *et al*., 2020).

In the context of the DRC, MONUSCO's capacity building initiatives have shown promising results. For instance, training programs for the Congolese National Police (PNC) have focused on enhancing their capabilities in law enforcement, human rights protection, and community policing (UN, 2021). Such initiatives not only improve the professionalism and accountability of local security forces but also build trust and cooperation between security providers and communities, essential for effective peacekeeping (UN, 2021).

Furthermore, capacity building extends to strengthening governance structures and empowering local leaders to participate meaningfully in peacebuilding processes. MONUSCO's support for local governance reforms and institutional development has aimed at promoting inclusive decision-making and conflict resolution mechanisms (UNDP, 2021). These efforts are crucial for addressing the root causes of conflict, such as marginalization and governance deficits, which perpetuate instability in the DRC (UNDP, 2021).

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

MONUSCO can contribute to long-term peace and stability by investing in capacity building and training programs for local security forces, government institutions, and community leaders. By improving local capacities in conflict prevention, resolution, and governance, MONUSCO empowers local actors to take a more active role in maintaining security and addressing root causes of conflict. MONUSCO plays a pivotal role in facilitating political dialogue, mediation efforts, and reconciliation processes among conflicting parties in the DRC. The study concludes that mistrust and dearth of cooperation, non-guaranteed protection of the civilian population, and weak governance institutions are the major problems facing MONUSCO in achieving its mandate in the DRC.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends that, there is need to strengthen Judicial Mechanisms. In the same vein, supporting the establishment of local and international judicial mechanisms to investigate and prosecute war crimes and human rights abuses, by ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable is imperative. Quintessentially, there is need to encourage truth and reconciliation processes to address past injustices and promote healing within communities. This will be dependent on international coordination and monitoring among international actors who will ensure that international efforts are well-coordinated and aligned with the DRC's national priorities, avoiding duplication and enhancing the effectiveness of interventions.

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