

Peacekeeping and Protection: Civilian Experiences in the DRC and Somalia

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Abstract

This paper analyses civilians' experiences with United Nations peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and African Union peacekeeping in the Federal Republic of Somalia (Somalia). Both are long-standing interventions that have increased their emphasis on the protection of civilians over the years. However, we have found that civilians not only feel mostly unprotected by international forces but have also developed distrust and even animosity towards them. Being exposed to regular attacks and killings by armed groups, despite a peacekeeping presence, means that civilians question the motivations of the peacekeeping personnel, as well as of the states and international and regional organizations they represent. While measures such as the closer cooperation with in-country security forces or the deployment of Female Engagement Teams (in the DRC context) were supposed to enhance the relationship between peacekeepers and civilians, the continued lack of physical safety and protection from attacks undermines these efforts.

Policy Recommendations

- UN and AU peace operations need to put increasing efforts into building relations with local populations. Bunkerization is detrimental to relationship- and trust-building.
- Infrastructure projects have a positive impact on the relation with civilian populations and contribute to improved visibility and acceptance of UN and AU peace operations. They should be further fostered, building on close cooperation with humanitarian actors to avoid mandate confusion and overstretch.
- Physical safety of civilians needs to always be prioritized. It provides the basis for all other PoC measures. Establishing points of contact and reporting mechanisms for civilians can enhance protection and build trust.
- Peacekeepers' conduct requires more accountability and stricter measures at the TCC level beyond SEA training and the UN's Zero Tolerance Policy. This includes establishing reporting mechanisms for civilians and investigating misconduct and potential compensation payments in a transparent manner.
- Civilians prefer international forces to cooperate with national security forces. Peacekeepers, nonetheless, should put measures in place that increases their visibility and better communicates protection measures.

Introduction

The Protection of Civilians (PoC) has become a core mandate for United Nations (UN) peace operations. Following the UN's own origin narrative, the first UN peace operation deployed with a PoC mandate was the UN mission in Sierra Leone in 1999 (UN 2020, 3). Protection has since been institutionalized and codified in policies, operational planning and monitoring tools, leading to the development of lessons learned and good practices. The African Union (AU), too, has adopted a PoC agenda and published Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians in Peace Support Operations in 2012, recommending, among others, to 'mainstream' the PoC into standard operating procedures (AU 2012; Conley 2017; Tchier and Kumalo 2023). Against this backdrop, the protection of civilians from violence has evolved into the yardstick for assessing the success of peace support operations (Hultman, Kathman, and Shannon 2013; UN 2020, 55–57).

The methods to ensure protection were, over the years, expanded and diversified in both UN and AU operations and increasingly include the use of force. At the same time, a broad number of peace support operations are mandated 'to use all necessary means, up to and including deadly force, to protect civilians under threat or imminent threat of physical violence' (UN 2020, 2).

Our research project was inspired by the growing body of research that attends to the lived experiences of international interventions (e.g. Pouligny 2006; Autesserre 2014). Focussing on robust peacekeeping and its relation to protection, we explored the daily experiences of military peacekeepers as those supposed to protect civilians and of the civilians at the

receiving end of (offensive) protection measures. While findings on the military peacekeepers' perspectives have already been published (Bakonyi and Flaspöler 2024; Bakonyi et al. 2023), this working paper engages with civilian experiences of protection in the context of so-called robust mandates that authorize peacekeepers to use force in defence of the mandate, including the protection of civilians, and against certain armed factions.

A second objective of the research project was the comparison of PoC experiences in United Nations and African Union peacekeeping operations. Following the regularly repeated slogan that African problems need African solutions, first raised in the context of the civil war and interventions in Somalia (Ayittey 1994), we were curious about differences in the approaches, performances and effects of PoC practices. We used two long-standing peacekeeping operations for this comparison: the intervention of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and of the African Union in the Federal Republic of Somalia (Somalia). To facilitate comparison, we only focussed on peacekeepers from African troop contributing countries (TCCs), and on those with a robust mandate. In Somalia, all intervening militaries have a robust mandate; in the DRC, our focus was on troops of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB).

Between 2020 and 2023, the researchers conducted 130 narrative interviews with civilians in Somalia and the DRC (77 in Somalia, 63 in the DRC) and six focus group discussions (four in Somalia, two in the DRC),¹ focussing on locations where international militaries with a robust mandate operated. In the DRC, this included the towns of Sake (including nearby villages like Mubambiro and Masisi) as well as Beni and

¹ In Somalia we conducted one all-female, one all-male and two mixed FGD, both FGD in the DRC were mixed.

surrounding villages in North Kivu. In Somalia, the focus was on urban areas in four AMISOM sectors, each with its own TCC. The cities included Mogadishu (main TCC is Uganda), Kismayo (Kenya), Baidoa (Ethiopia), and Jowhar (Burundi). Accessing rural areas was not possible due to the active presence of the militant Islamist organization al-Shabaab, which continues to control large parts of the countryside in south and central Somalia.

Due to travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews with civilians were conducted by our partner organizations in the DRC and Somalia, namely the Congolese Cercle National de Réflexion sur la Jeunesse (CNRJ-RDC) and the Somali South-West Livestock Professional Association (SOWELPA). Researchers from these organizations received online training, including ethical research practice, and we collaboratively developed an interview guide that covered a range of topics, such as questions on the times and types of civilian encounters with peacekeeping forces; interviewees' expectations of peacekeeping, and how and if so why these expectations changed; the impact peacekeepers generally have on the lives in the area; and what they changed, if anything at all. We also asked questions about the main providers of safety and security; if peacekeepers should stay or leave the country and why; and what the interviewee would suggest changing if they could influence peacekeeping mandates and peacekeepers' actions and behaviour. To enable discussion, carve out debates and identify controversies, we organized at least two focus group discussions in each city.

Interviewers were requested not to stick too closely to the interview guide, but to encourage respondents to speak freely and to develop their own narrative about peacekeeping and protection. The interviews were conducted in locally preferred languages, recorded and then transcribed into English, and later language

edited. After a first immersion in the transcripts, we developed a codebook that was regularly discussed and further finetuned. This working paper provides an initial overview of the findings of this analysis. The paper will illustrate that despite the expanded use of force, civilians' misgivings and grievances with both peace missions and peacekeepers have not changed drastically.

It is important to emphasize that the working paper reflects the subjective experiences and perceptions of civilians, which do not necessarily correspond to objective facts. For instance, civilians may assert that 'peacekeepers do nothing' or that 'they do not care about civilians'. While such and similar perceptions may not always be accurate, they are essential to understanding the performances and effects of peacekeeping. In this respect, it is also worth bearing in mind that some of the experiences might reflect Covid-19 contact restrictions and, in the case of the DRC, further restrictions caused by an Ebola outbreak. Both significantly impacted on the level and type of peacekeepers' actions and their interactions with civilians.

Lastly, we would like to take the opportunity to thank both the civilians, who gave us their time for interviews, and the researchers in Somalia as well as Jean Claude Buuma Mishiki, Alliance Nyota and Gentil Kombi in the DRC, who conducted the interviews under challenging conditions (including the Covid-19 pandemic). Due to security considerations, the two researchers from Somalia prefer to remain anonymous.

1 Peacekeeping and the Protection of Civilians in the DRC and Somalia

Our research project focussed on two long-standing peacekeeping interventions in the DRC

and Somalia, two countries characterized by prolonged civil wars, endemic violence and a civilian population trapped in protracted insecurities.

1.1 Peacekeeping in the DRC

In 2010, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) replaced a long-standing observer mission (1999–2010),² and was mandated to protect civilians (UN 2020, 3; Mhango and Kithatu-Kiwekete 2023, 33). Three years later, the UN Security Council (UNSC) additionally authorized the deployment of an ‘Intervention Brigade’ under the command of MONUSCO and tasked to carry out offensive operations against the multiple non-state armed groups active in the eastern provinces of the DRC. The decision for the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) followed the failure of MONUSCO to prevent the notorious *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23) from taking control over Goma, the regional capital of the North Kivu province, despite the presence of MONUSCO troops and the national Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC). The FIB consists of over 3,000 troops from Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa, authorized to use force within ‘targeted offensive operations’ aimed at reducing ‘the threat posed by armed groups on state authority and civilian security in eastern DRC’, either unilaterally or in support of the FARDC (S/RES/2098 2013, 7).

The FIB, in cooperation with the FARDC, launched a military campaign which led to the defeat of the M23 in November 2013 (Piiparinen 2016, 157). Initially limited to one year, the FIB mandate was renewed to fight against other rebel organizations that were, at the time, wreaking havoc in eastern DRC. The initial success of the FIB could not be repeated, among others because

plans to combat the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) were undermined by the DRC government. The FDLR, a remnant of the ex-Rwandan armed forces and aligned militia *Interahamwe* that carried out the Rwandan genocide in 1994, is embroiled in the geopolitical wrangles between the DRC and Rwanda. By 2015, the role of the FIB was increasingly confined to the provision of intelligence and logistical support to MONUSCO. Attempts to revive the cooperation of the FIB and the FARDC showed some success in 2016, but was then affected by allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse directed against different MONUSCO contingents, including some of the FIB troops (Mhango and Kithatu-Kiwekete 2023, 39–41).

When our partners conducted the interviews with civilians in Northern Kivu, armed groups not only continued with regular attacks, but the period also saw the revival of the M23, which escalated its guerilla-type warfare in 2021. Hundreds of people died in the new offensive, and ongoing mass displacements contributed to a severe humanitarian crisis in the region (Verweijen and Vogel 2023, May 30). While attacks of armed groups fluctuated over the years, the UN has been extending its mandate on an annual basis since 2014. MONUSCO planned to finally exit in December 2024. However, the M23 managed to retake control of Goma at the turn of 2025 and went on to expand its influence across the eastern DRC. The future of MONUSCO is currently under review. While we write this paper, mediation efforts have taken place between Rwanda and the DRC led by the US, as well as the Congolese government and the M23 led by Qatar. Although a peace agreement was signed and a joint declaration was issued, July

² MONUSCO primarily had an observer mission, but its mandate also evolved in the ten years of its operations.

2025 saw another wave of violence, claiming at least 319 civilian lives (SCR 2025).

1.2 Peacekeeping in Somalia

The African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) operated in Somalia from 2007 to 2022, when it was transformed into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), indicating the start of a two-year phased withdrawal and eventual exit by December 2024. As a full handover of military responsibilities to the Somali security forces could not be achieved, ATMIS was replaced by the African Union Stabilization and Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) in January 2025.

AMISOM and its successor ATMIS are among the biggest and most complex peace operations of the AU. They also provide an example for more recent forms of ‘partnership peacekeeping’ (Williams and Boutellis 2014). In the AMISOM model, African countries deploy troops which are funded by the European Union and other bilateral partners and receive logistic support from the United Nations, notably the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSO).³ The military intervention was initiated by the African Union Peace and Security Council in January 2007 and authorized by the UN Security Council in February 2007, which mandated AMISOM to contribute to the stabilization of the country by supporting and protecting the newly established transitional federal institutions (S/RES/1774 2007). To establish these institutions was considered the prime task of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), installed in Mogadishu with the support of Ethiopian troops at the end of 2006. AMISOM was additionally authorized to

take ‘all necessary measures as appropriate to provide security for key infrastructure’ and to contribute to the creation of ‘necessary security conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance’ (S/2008/113 2008, 2). African countries, however, were initially rather reluctant to provide troops to the dangerous Somali environment, and it took until 2010 for AMISOM to be able to realize its authorized force strength of 8,000. In 2012, AMISOM was further mandated ‘to take all necessary measures [...] to reduce the threat posed by Al Shabaab and other armed opposition groups’ (S/RES/2036 2012, 3–4).

AMISOM was, from the start of its deployment in Mogadishu, involved in urban warfare with Islamist militias, notably al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam,⁴ both using hit and run attacks against military and governmental targets. The Islamists also relied on indiscriminate mortar attacks, suicide bombings and improvised explosive devices causing high numbers of civilian casualties. However, the AU troops, alongside Ethiopian militaries and Somali armed groups, were also heavily criticized for violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including indiscriminate return fire and the shelling of residential neighbourhoods. Civilians in Mogadishu were ‘trapped in the middle’, with thousands of casualties and waves of displacement affecting tens of thousands of people (HRW 2010, 36–52). In the course of 2011, al-Shabaab withdrew from Mogadishu, and the city came under the control of the federal government and its allied local, national and international forces. In the following years, AMISOM managed to increase its force strength to over 22,000 and launched further offensives

³ Initially called UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA).

⁴ Hizbul Islam cooperated with al-Shabaab in the fight for Mogadishu, but both organizations later fell out competing for control of the southern port city

Kismayo. Al-Shabaab won the fight, the leadership of Hizbul Islam was dismantled, but many of its fighters integrated into al-Shabaab. The Hizbul leader, Ahmed Madobe, became part of the federal government and President of the southern Jubaland federal member state.

against al-Shabaab in 2014 and 2015, in cooperation with the newly built, yet still fragile Somali National Army (SNA) and allied clan militias. The consorted counterinsurgency forced al-Shabaab to withdraw from most urban centres, but large swathes of the south-central countryside remain under the control of the Islamists.

The mandate of AMISOM evolved during its deployment. The commitment to civilian protection and the obligation to uphold International Humanitarian Law were increasingly emphasized, but civilian protection was not explicitly integrated into AMISOM's mandate (Tchie and Kumalo 2023). Instead, AMISOM was primarily tasked with military objectives, such as fighting al-Shabaab, ensuring logistics for the troops and humanitarian supplies, and protecting the nascent governmental institutions and its international partners. The UNSC resolutions regularly reminded all parties in conflict of their obligations to comply with International Humanitarian Law. In the context of mounting concerns at human rights violations by AMISOM, including sexual exploitation and abuse of the civilian population (e.g. HRW 2014), AMISOM was additionally tasked with the development of 'an effective approach to the protection of civilians' in 2013. This included the request to establish a 'Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis and Response Cell (CCTARC)' and an effective reporting mechanism for the conduct of AMISOM troops (S/RES/2093 2013, 5; S/RES/2182 2014, 9, §31). CCTARC aims at assessing the impact of AMISOM's military operations on civilians to enable reparative measures for harm done and prevent future harm. It became operational in 2015. AMISOM also developed a zero-tolerance policy on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and improved reporting procedures. Transitioning to ATMIS, the troops were further mandated to support Somali security forces by 'providing protection for local communities' (S/RES/2628

2022, §23b). AUSSOM, beyond its support for fighting al-Shabaab, is explicitly tasked with '[prioritising] the protection of civilians in Somalia' (S/RES/2767 2024, §16a).

At the time of writing this paper, al-Shabaab has again increased its attacks on AUSSOM and government troops, retaken several smaller cities, and continues to launch attacks on Mogadishu, including the airport zone (Bakonyi 2022) and its surroundings, where most international organizations and many government officials reside.

2 Protection Experiences in Somalia

Interviewees in both the DRC and Somalia articulated a broad range of views on how peacekeepers respond to their protection needs, ranging from the perception that peacekeepers have significantly improved security to statements that they do not make a difference at all or even worsen the security situation. Many interviewees in both countries displayed ambiguous views on the security contribution of intervention forces. While they acknowledged some improvement, civilians more commonly attributed improved security to national and local forces. We will discuss these views and their rationalizations, attending first to interview findings in Somalia, and then to the DRC.

2.1 AMISOM's initial success in improving security

In the case of Somalia, around half of the interviewed civilians emphasized how the AU forces had initially – in the first years of their engagement – improved security. Accordingly, AU forces played a crucial role in removing al-Shabaab from urban centres and continue to prevent the Islamists from recapturing these cities, among other things, by supporting state

and regional security forces. As one participant in a FGD in Kismayo put it:

AMISOM has liberated the area [from al-Shabaab], along with the Jubaland army [...]. They are the reason why the town is being built. The [Jubaland] troops are trained by AMISOM. They have rebuilt the bases of the Jubaland army and trained them for one year.

Interviewees further acknowledged that AMISOM de-intensified violence, reducing both al-Shabaab attacks (Alias 137, Johar; Alias 33, Baidoa) and fighting between clan groups (Alias 8, Kismayo), overall increasing 'the safety of all residents' (Alias 5, Kismayo). In a focus group in Jowhar, participants additionally stressed the importance of AMISOM for protecting government sites and logistics hubs (especially airports) and applauded their role in ensuring the supply of humanitarian assistance and medicine. Driving al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu, Beledweyne, Kismayo and Baidoa, as one interviewee emphasized, had an overall positive impact on medical supplies and significantly improved the livelihoods of urban residents. The building of infrastructure and improved economic vibrancy were regularly used as indicators for improved security. Alias 102 (Mogadishu), for example, explained that before 2012, 'the country was not in a good condition. There were no proper roads like now, no tall buildings as you can see them now' in Mogadishu. In a similar vein, Alias 99 (Mogadishu) outlined how

security is improving, businesses are booming. You will find that shops are open until midnight, unlike before, when you could not go to hospital, even though you were in a critical condition. For instance, when mothers are in labour, the rickshaws are operating day and night and hospitals are open 24/7, with people working in day and night

shifts. So, I can say that our security and business is back on track.

Alias 98 (Mogadishu) confirmed this, saying,

previously, we never had electricity and people used to go home early, you [would] not see anyone outside. During those days, you couldn't use a cell phone like now, when you have security and electricity. You walk day and night freely without any problem.

However, interviewees also stressed an overall lack of progress after the initial victory over al-Shabaab. Some made the criticism that international forces stopped with the 'liberation' of the cities, while most rural areas continue to be controlled by al-Shabaab, making movement between cities difficult (Alias 94 and Alias 101, Mogadishu). Others, like Alias 102 (Mogadishu), emphasized that neither AMISOM nor the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) are in full control of the cities, as al-Shabaab still has a presence, even if underground, from where it continues its attacks.

2.2 Somali forces provide protection – AMISOM forces stay in camps

The AMISOM armies are everywhere in Somalia, and in terms of security they did something, but they failed the other side. How did they fail? They only sit inside the airport, but not even at the front line of the airport. When entering the airport, you first see the Somali army, and only when you pass two or up to three checkpoints, you see AMISOM. So, are they guarded by the Somali army or do they guard and take part [in] the security process? Likewise, at the frontline, when the peace refusers [al-Shabaab] are fought, they don't take part [...] although the heavy sound of their weapons and the qualities of their

armies is feared by al-Shabaab. But they don't go to the war zones [...]. I believe if the Somali army could gain the salary that the AMISOM army gets, they could have defeated al-Shabaab. (FGD Kismayo)

Similar sentiments to the one quoted above were echoed during interviews and focus group discussions across the four cities. Many research participants emphasized the pivotal role played by international forces in liberating towns from al-Shabaab. However, they also highlighted that day-to-day security within the cities is primarily upheld by national and regional forces. AMISOM was frequently criticized for its increasing isolation – remaining confined to military barracks and designated safe zones – and for its declining engagement overall. *One* interviewee in Mogadishu reflected:

I have never seen any visible actions they have taken. Sometimes, when places like hotels are attacked, they don't participate in the rescue efforts – only our national troops do. At times, it makes you wonder whether they are actually against the nation (Alias 94, Mogadishu).

A similar view was articulated by Alias 35 (Baidoa):

our security is stabilized by the government whether they come from the federal or the regional governments. If anything happens and soldiers were to die, it is our soldiers, especially the Southwest State soldiers, that are dying. The main thing AMISOM does is to sit at the checkpoints. The ones who know what's going on in every part of the city, patrolling the city every night, in the market and every other place, are the Somali police.

Although interviewees regularly recognized AMISOM's crucial role in building the security sector and training the army, many thought that the international forces restrict themselves too much to their barracks and camps, most of them located at cities' outskirts or within high-security zones established around airports (Bakonyi 2022). Complaints that AMISOM troops '*don't leave the airport' or their camps and stay 'in a comfort zone' where they mainly protect 'the members of the international community, guard the embassies and themselves'* (Alias 102, Mogadishu) *were common*.

Many interviewees noted a gradual reduction in AMISOM's level of engagement and operational presence over time. *A resident in Mogadishu described how AMISOM used to help the city's residents, but,*

after getting hit by mortars (referring to regular al-Shabaab attacks), they got scared and don't come out. They stay inside [...]. Before, they came out to get the bad guys, now they don't. [...] Before, they would come out and secure all village [city district] entrances but now they don't (*Alias 3, Mogadishu*).

Participants in Baidoa (Alias 31, 48) also acknowledged the previous efforts of AMISOM in fighting al-Shabaab. Alias 48, for example, outlined how AMISOM '*used to go to remote villages, would go to the outskirts of the city and would fight with al-Shabaab [... but have now] slowed down their efforts [... and instead] only stay in the airports'*. Another interviewee in Mogadishu referred to '*Operation Indian Ocean*' in 2014, when AMISOM troops managed to '*secure most of the Lower Shabelle [region]*' and concluded that '*if those fights would have continued, the country would have been secured within two years*' (Alias 105).

2.3 AMISOM is paid well while Somali security forces take high risks without payment

I believe that the ones who are dying for this country are the Somali military. I believe that the ones who are sacrificing themselves are the Somali soldiers because AMISOM does not do anything other than stay in the airport where planes take off and land. When they are going on a mission between Buur and Baidoa, they first send Somali soldiers [...]. They are sent to inspect whether there are landmines or explosives. (Alias 31, Baidoa)

Many interviewees contrasted AMISOM's seeming retreat to safe zones with the increased activities and improved organization of Somali security forces. While some attributed these changes to the continued AMISOM support for the building of a national security sector, most interviewees criticized AMISOM's overall lack of engagement. Alias 9 (Kismayo), for example, explained that 'if we are attacked, only the Somali troops fight back, AMISOM is just in their camp which is in the airport. [It is only] if they are attacked in the airport, they fight back to save their lives'. Interviewees regularly used the spatial segregation of AMISOM troops as proof of their lack of engagement and contrasted this with the continuous presence and visibility of Somali forces. Alias 10 from Kismayo, for example, stated that:

the general security is ensured by the Jubaland state troops, such as the police. AMISOM only stay at the airport. They don't come to the city. [...] For protecting someone, you need to be there for them for 24 hours. I haven't seen AMISOM at checkpoints; the Somali police are the ones who are there, and they are the ones to whom people report in case of being wronged. AMISOM, on the other hand, are in their camps and are seen only when they want to purchase products from the market,

running with their vehicles. Apart from the huge operations, they don't concern themselves with minor security issues in the city. [...] I wanted them to be at checkpoints, guard offices and ministries and I think that is their mandate – not fencing somewhere and staying within the fence and defending themselves and the ones at the airport, only guard[ing] the airport.

Comparing the perceived tendency of AMISOM to fence themselves in compounds, many interviewees emphasized that Somali forces are facing high risks, being sent into dangerous situations that can jeopardize their lives, 'sacrificing' themselves and 'dying for this country' (Alias 135, Jowhar), while AMISOM forces are getting 'easy money' as one interview participant in a focus group discussion in Mogadishu (FGD 1) noted.

Most interviewees agreed that their protection was provided by state and regional forces. They often stressed that Somali soldiers not only do a much better job than their international counterparts but also improve security without regular and sufficient payment. The salary differences of national and international troops came up frequently in interviews. An interviewee in Kismayo, for example, highlighted that AMISOM soldiers 'just stay in their camps and earn 1,000 US-dollars as salary while Jubaland troops may wait three or four months to receive their monthly salaries' (Alias 9). Many felt that Somali soldiers would have managed to defeat al-Shabaab if they had been paid properly and regularly. So, for example, Alias 103 (Mogadishu) stated that 'if the salary which the Ugandan soldier is earning [is] given to the Somali soldier, I am sure he will do a lot and will bring benefit to his country'. Similarly, Alias 47 (Baidoa) explained that 'if the salaries given to the foreign troops [had been] given to the Somali troops, the

country would have stabilized [a] long time ago'. Many felt that despite lacking regular salaries, Somali forces take much higher risks while they continue to fight al-Shabaab:

the Somali troops are the ones affected. AMISOM only accompany them with their bulletproof vehicles, [...] the ones killed are the Somali troops, soldiers who haven't eaten breakfast and lunch [...]. An AMISOM troop earns four times the salary of a Somali troop and they don't want to die. That's why I prefer them to withdraw from the country so that we remain with our troops and the funding given to AMISOM be given to our Somali troops (Alias 10, Kismayo).

One interviewee in Mogadishu offered the critique that even though 'the Somali forces are leading the Ugandan troops since they don't know the area geographically' (Alias 103), they still don't receive a proper salary. Alias 9 in Kismayo added that children of Somali soldiers who lost their lives fighting al-Shabaab do not receive support.

Many interviewees also believed that most AU forces stay in Somalia for their own interests, referring either to the geopolitical and economic interests of the sending countries or, and more often, to the high salaries of peacekeepers. Critique was most often raised against neighbouring troop contributing countries, which, as one participant of a FGD in Mogadishu outlined,

have a political and diplomatic interest in Somalia, and they have failed to transfer full power to the Somali government while looking [after] their self-interest. In the last five years, they have lowered the fulfilment of their mandate such as fighting with al-Shabaab. They started accumulating

themselves in the big cities and protecting themselves rather than fighting with al-Shabaab, which are some kilometres away from the cities.

Alias 103 (Mogadishu) additionally expressed his view that foreign soldiers 'compete for the deployment to Somalia because of the huge salary. The way we migrate to other countries, the same way they migrate to Somalia'. This view was not only widespread but also contributed to further assessments that AMISOM forces lack incentives to fulfil their mandate because 'they want to stay in the country' (Alias 104, Mogadishu), with some even claiming that they cooperate with al-Shabaab because insecurity in Somalia helps them to fulfil personal or geostrategic interests.

2.4 Somali security forces protect civilians

Nearly all interviewees in Somalia attributed the improvement of security to the establishment, continued training and more regular payment of Somali security forces. The regularity of payment was also highlighted as means to decrease corruption overall, and, more importantly, to limit harassment at checkpoints and during patrols. Alias 104 (Mogadishu), for example, described how

the [Somali] forces used to arrest people who have not committed crimes while demanding money to release them. Such things are not there now because of disciplinary action taken against them [... Also] the forces get their monthly salary, which has reduced soldiers ask[ing] for [a] bribe.

Being asked who should be responsible for their protection, interviewees nearly unanimously agreed that state forces and/or forces of the federal member states should provide security and protect civilians. They underlined the permanent presence of Somali armed forces,

while noting that foreign peacekeepers will unavoidably leave again (Alias 47, Baidoa; Alias 9, Kismayo). One interviewee pointed to former's increased accountability, as citizens have more options to deal with misconduct: 'if they offend you, you can navigate and complain to his family or tribe. But the foreign forces are strangers – you cannot navigate or complain about them' (Alias 6, Kismayo).

Only a few interviewees criticized Somali security forces and pointed to their failure to respect the law of engagement. In a focus group discussion, a young man in Mogadishu, for example, described how

the government forces are also creating insecurity. You will find someone is picked from his house [in the] wee hours of the night without any evidence that he [has] been suspected. In August 2013, I and two of my friends were arrested and we [were] detained for two nights until our parents came to ask why we [were being] held. [...] So even the government forces are harassing the people [...] There are insecurity incidents caused by the government and it is common in the entire country.

In their ensuing discussion, he nonetheless agreed with others that Somali forces mainly need more training and better salaries, emphasizing, however, that the political class also needs to change.

2.5 Peacekeepers' conduct

Interviewees across the cities outlined how security had improved considerably and often contrasted the relative peace with the protracted insecurity during the rule of the warlords (1991–2005). However, they also emphasized that AMISOM troops caused widespread insecurity, including due to its indiscriminate use of violence, especially in the first years of its engagement.

Another topic that came up regularly in interviews was traffic accidents caused by AMISOM convoys.

Indiscriminate use of violence

The Somali troops were just at the checkpoints and people used to avoid those checkpoints, where soldiers used to kill people. But the Ethiopians were different. We learnt names of some guns from them. We used to hear that an Ethiopian shot someone with that type of gun. They used to shoot people either civilian or armed. They later also started throwing missiles at people's houses. They also used to enter people's homes and [kill] everyone regardless of their gender and age [...] when the Ethiopians came, they shot everyone they saw. (Alias 93 Mogadishu)

Many interviewees pointed to the intensification of violence, the shelling of residential neighbourhoods and the waves of displacement that accompanied the Ethiopian military invasion at the turn of 2007 and the early years of the African Union intervention, especially in Mogadishu. During a focus group discussion, one government official recalled that 'the Ethiopian forces invaded Mogadishu in 2007 and massacred many people in the Somali capital'. Overall, indiscriminate acts of violence decreased after the formation of the federal government in 2012, but interviewees across the four cities pointed to AMISOM's continued violations of the rules of engagement and International Humanitarian Law. Accordingly, peacekeepers often fire at will when attacked or 'an explosion occurs in a place while AMISOM forces are using the road. After the blast, they open fire indiscriminately' (Alias 20, Kismayo). Alias 6 (Kismayo) similarly described how AMISOM peacekeepers shoot randomly when they feel at risk and often 'hit the wrong targets such as innocent people and livestock [...] until] people stopped letting their animals graze

on the land near [the airport] for the fear of bullets being shot at them’.

Indiscriminate use of violence was frequently recollected in Mogadishu, where for example, a participant in a focus group discussion explained that AMISOM forces:

don’t look out for the enemy only but kill anyone who is in their line of fire. At other times, they throw rockets from behind their barricaded compounds aimed at killing al-Shabaab. Since a rocket does not know who is good and who is bad, it ends up killing civilians and their properties.

Another participant added that

troubles were caused by both al-Shabaab and AMISOM. For instance, [when] something is thrown at AMISOM, they answer by throwing heavy weapons back. This behaviour plants fear in the civilians. [...] When I came back [to Mogadishu] in 2013, it was not safe. But in [the] last two years, i.e. 2020 and 2021, I think Mogadishu is 90% safe.

Participants in a focus group in Jowhar additionally discussed the lack of liability as international forces ‘kill innocent people without being held accountable for their actions’.

A decrease in random acts of violence was acknowledged, but this improvement was attributed to the retreat of AMISOM from both combat and patrolling and the handover of security responsibilities to Somali security forces. It generally seemed that an overall negative perception of peacekeepers, once established, is difficult to alter. While military peacekeepers themselves referred to lessons learned, improved training and clearer rules of conduct (Bakonyi et al. 2023), the civilians referred instead to the general decrease in activities and engagement of

AMISOM forces. This could also be seen in the context of traffic accidents, which were very frequently mentioned by interviewees in Somalia.

Traffic accidents

It is important to note here that not all violations of IHL were directly witnessed by participants, as they often referred to experiences heard from neighbours or relatives. When asked about encounters with peacekeepers in their daily activities, many interviewees reported that they have had only few or no direct encounters, and mostly referred to AMISOM patrols, but often also noted that such patrols had decreased considerably over the years. Interviewees nonetheless shared accounts of car accidents involving AMISOM peacekeepers, critiquing their reckless driving style and reluctance to take responsibility for the damage they cause. Some interviewees even accused AMISOM of just leaving people hurt and wounded at the roadside, without first aid or an attempt to take victims of road accidents to a hospital (FGD, Mogadishu). Another participant in the same focus group in Mogadishu explained that it was only because the public interfered and circulated media images about these accidents, that the AMISOM leadership started to acknowledge responsibilities towards the victims of such accidents. Many interviewees did not feel that AMISOM had changed its behaviour in relation to accidents, and two interviewees were even convinced that AMISOM forces had killed victims of accidents to avoid paying the ‘blood money’ (Alias 135, Jowhar; Alias 6, Kismayo), referring to the common practice in Somalia of compensation payment for inflicted physical harm.

However, many interviewees also acknowledged that AMISOM’s behaviour with respect to road accidents had changed after civilians aired their complaints through social media and protests, which accordingly forced the intervention forces

to acknowledge their actions and pay compensation:

they started fearing because they realized that they cannot get away with whatever [bad] they do. However, they can do whatever they like in rural areas but not in Mogadishu, because if they do something wrong it will be all over the media. [...] Now, there is a change since they fear [being] held accountable (FGD, Mogadishu).

Similar views were expressed and debated in another FGD in Mogadishu, as discussants referred to the public 'outcry against AMISOM' after they 'killed a taxi operator in the middle of the town' (FDG participant) and after 'they killed a man on the side of the airport towards Halane entrance because they felt he was suspicious' (FDG participant). Eventually, however, AMISOM 'acknowledged their wrongdoing and paid reparations to the family of the victim' after public outcry was caused by the sharing of videos of such acts on social media (FDG participant).

2.6 Should peacekeepers stay or go?

When interviewees were asked whether they would prefer that the international forces stay or leave the country, the vast majority argued for withdrawal, most often pointing to the failure to defeat al-Shabaab despite large salaries and other support. Interviewees frequently highlighted to the increased ability and higher motivation of the Somali security forces to fight al-Shabaab and their contribution in enhancing security across the country. A clear majority of interviewees across the cities felt that the Somali security forces were now ready to take full control of the country and provide security to the population. However, some interviewees were more sceptical and thought that the Somali security apparatus is still influenced by political figures and by clan considerations. Some also felt that governmental authorities themselves lack

trust in national forces, which explains why, as Alias 104 (Mogadishu) outlined, AMISOM continues to be responsible for the protection of government installations. These interviewees, therefore, preferred AMISOM forces to stay and 'finish the job' – which they summarized as defeating the Islamists and building a reliable security sector. In a focus group with participants from the local government in Kismayo, these opposing views were vividly discussed, as the following extract demonstrates:

personally, I don't support AMISOM's exit [...] the local Somali forces don't have the military capacity to defend the country because they are under a rebuilding process; even AMISOM is struggling. This morning, as you heard, there was an attack on a military base in Bariire – the SNA and Burundian forces that camped there have either been killed or wounded, while others were abducted. That clearly shows how the SNA forces are weak [...]. Therefore, we need to build the military capacity of our forces and reconsolidate the ability of the forces, even those of the regional states. But when we do an emergency exit of AMISOM, then we will obviously go back to square one in 1991. So I don't support the withdrawal of AMISOM forces from Somalia.

Another participant answered:

I have a different opinion on that. AMISOM has been in Somalia for several years and huge money is spent on them. The peacekeepers need a strategy which will make them hand over the national security mandate. Up to now, I don't see any plans from the Somali leaders [...] to take over the security mandate from AMISOM. [...] AMISOM has done a lot, but it failed in the fight against al-Shabaab in Somalia especially in the Jubba regions. A whole region is

not in the hands of the government [...]. After nine years of their mission, there are no signs of liberating such regions from al-Shabaab. When you ask the residents [about] why AMISOM has stopped their military operation against al-Shabaab, they tell you that AMISOM has given up and they are now stationed in defensive positions.

Such opposing views were expressed in a similar form by many interviewees, even though a clear majority wanted AMISOM to leave and eventually hand over to the Somali security forces.

2.7 Summary: Civilians' views on AMISOM in Somalia

Overall, civilians' experiences with international intervention forces differed widely in and across the cities in Somalia. While many acknowledged the important contribution of AMISOM in enhancing urban security, interviewees were often frustrated with the more recent lack of success. Many felt that AMISOM has failed their mandate, which many saw primarily as the fight against al-Shabaab across the country. A key complaint was the (perceived) retreat of AMISOM to guarded compounds and the salary difference between international and national security forces, the latter bearing the brunt of responsibilities in both the fight against al-Shabaab and the protection of civilians. With respect to the withdrawal of international forces, many interviewees felt that AMISOM needs to finally hand over responsibilities to the national forces, who – across the interview pool – were trusted more with respect to both the protection of civilians and the fight against the Islamists.

3 Protection Experiences in the DRC

The second part of this working paper attends to the experiences of civilians in the DRC. While interviewees were familiar with contingents from various TCCs, most did not distinguish between MONUSCO and the FIB, but referred to MONUSCO when talking about peacekeepers. Although interviews were conducted in areas patrolled by the FIB – and respondents are therefore likely to be recounting experiences specifically with the FIB – we have nonetheless retained their original wording.

3.1 MONUSCO provides aid and builds infrastructure

When asked about the positive contributions of MONUSCO in the DRC, interviewees predominantly talked about the provision of aid and infrastructure development. Many recognized the benefit of infrastructures built by MONUSCO, most often mentioning the bridges⁵ and roads⁶ they had built, or the piping they had constructed 'to bring water to some households in Mubambiro' (Alias 195, Beni). Others also acknowledged that these infrastructure projects, like public lighting projects, improved security, especially at night.⁷ In addition, interviewees recalled positively that MONUSCO built the court house (Alias 107, Beni) and a Youth Parliament building in Beni (Alias 108, Beni), an FARDC base in Madiba (Alias 108, Beni), a school in Oicha (Alias 111, Beni), the airport in Mavivi (Alias 157, Beni), different offices, such as those for civil society and state offices in Beni (Alias 114, Beni; Alias 108, Beni), as well as gifting the prosecutor's office building (Alias 115, Beni). Alias 190 (Beni),

⁵ In Beni, for example, Alias 107, 111, 114, 153, 157, 159, 162, 183; in Sake, for example, Alias 192, 198.

⁶ In Beni, for example, Alias 160, 162; in Sake, for example, Alias 198, Alias 203.

⁷ In Beni, for example, Alias 114, 159, 162, 188, 190, 183.

when asked about benefits she associates with MONUSCO, said:

MONUSCO is really working for development. [...] Sometimes they try to repair some ways leading to the fields [...]. They also help with street lighting. [...] We may say that since they installed public lights here in the centre, there hasn't been any incursion of the rebels. It is [t]o our advantage. [...] Some security is restored.

Others spoke positively about the work MONUSCO has done for young people. According to Alias 186 (Beni),

sometimes MONUSCO does good things. Sometimes they support the young people for leisure like arranging the football grounds and giving them goal nets.

Similarly, Alias 163 (Beni) described how MONUSCO peacekeepers 'help the young athletes with their needs, for example, jackets and boots [and that] they also maintain the stadium', and Alias 160 (Beni) referred to the building of football grounds for young people. Alias 199 (Sake) also raised MONUSCO's contribution in empowering youth, while Alias 185 (Beni) added that sometimes he has 'see[n] them giving jobs to the young people in the area; cutting grass, and they earn something'. A similar point on youth employment was also made by Alias 192 (Sake; also Alias 203, Sake), although he remarked critically that hiring young people 'is not in the interest of the entire population' (Alias 192, Sake). Alias 192 was, nonetheless, one of the few interviewees who described civilian-MONUSCO relations as 'good'. At the same time, he also criticized the difficulty in accessing MONUSCO premises, as civilians must be invited and 'have to struggle because of barriers that they have erected'.

Other advantages were MONUSCO's capacity-building programmes and charitable work (Alias 107, Beni). Alias 202 (Sake) recalled programmes on civilian protection, touching on subjects like: 'How to work with MONUSCO? What should we do and who should we call when we face a problem – MONUSCO, the police or the FARDC soldiers?'. Alias 110 (Beni) emphasized their training on 'gender promotion, SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence], Human Rights, [...] reducing gender-based violence, injustice at the judicial level'.

One interviewee recognized the importance of MONUSCO's presence in Beni for the economic development of the town, linking it to international investments:

from an economic point of view, I think that their presence can reassure some investors to come and settle in Beni; because Beni is very dynamic in terms of agricultural exports and imports in relation to the balance of trade. But if there are people who have funds that they want to eject; you know that capital flees insecurity. Some people have a certain guarantee, trust in MONUSCO in relation to the FARDC and I imagine that if they leave, it will be an economic blow to certain operators who are not from here. Beni itself is very important because it is a cosmopolitan town that brings everyone together. At the moment, there are even Indians and Chinese who are starting to invest here and if these people come, it is not because they have complete confidence in our army [but] because they base their confidence on the presence of MONUSCO (Alias 107, Beni).

Some interviewees also mentioned specific contingents when asked about the positive contributions of MONUSCO. For example, Alias 199 (Sake) shared his experience in gaining

support from the Malawian contingent to run a festival for all the musicians of the Masisi territory in 2018. According to him, he

wrote them a letter, asking them to help with some musical instruments and assuring security, and with tea or some food, things like that. They helped with the things they found they could find. The days of the shows, they arrived over there.

Similarly, Alias 186 (Beni) mentioned how members of the Tanzanian contingent ‘sometimes go to the Catholic Church [...] and once provided the dresses they wear [...] in church’. A similar point was raised by Alias 190 (Beni) who expressed appreciation that the Tanzanian contingent joined them to read mass and gave offerings. Despite their appreciation of the support given by specific FIB contingents, this did not necessarily result in a preference for peacekeepers from these countries. In fact, they were often regarded as being ‘all the same’,⁸ with Tanzanian peacekeepers afforded preference in some instances due to language skills and, thus, ease of communication,⁹ or being seen as more active or valiant.¹⁰

When asked about what MONUSCO should do more of, many interviewees stressed the need for more tangible development aid in addition to continued support for the FARDC. For example, Alias 153 (Beni) stressed:

all that I want MONUSCO to do more [of] is to continue supporting development actions for the population [...]. It’s now that people want to start a new life. For example, here in our school, you will find that some

classrooms are now destroyed, and some classrooms need to be renewed.

However, it seems significant that both Alias 186 and Alias 163 end this passage in their interviews with ‘apart from that, there is nothing else’ and ‘just that’, while Alias 192 summarized ‘but in terms of protection, nothing’. Similarly, Alias 160 (Beni), referring to the positive contribution of MONUSCO building roads and a football stadium for young people, immediately stressed that ‘these are the actions I know they did. But regarding war, I can’t see any intervention at all’. Alias 111 (Beni), acknowledged a bridge built by MONUSCO, and immediately continued ‘but it’s not peace’. Alias 154 (Beni) equally stated his frustration:

they help to support some projects, building bridges, supporting health structures, some vulnerable people – they try to do something. It is only with peace that we don’t see any quick change [...]. I would just say that if MONUSCO is here, it is for security.

But to uphold security or to bring about peace is, as Alias 154 and many other interviewees explained, where MONUSCO fails. Alias 153 (Beni) elaborated on this further:

thanks to their material, moral support or other, they have contributed to security in the area. [...] [MONUSCO] supports the vulnerable people like the orphans, the victims of massacres, and any other kind of support *apart from the protection of the civilians* (emphasis added).

Alias 115 (Beni) summarized these critiques:

⁸ In Beni, for example, Alias 107, 108, 115, 183; in Sake, for example, Alias 197.

⁹ In Beni, for example, Alias 111, 114, 188; in Sake, for example, Alias 195, 198.

¹⁰ In Beni, for example, Alias 154, 157, 153, 159.

in Beni, we don't need buildings and chairs. We need peace. With peace we can buy the necessary things ourselves. When there is peace, farmers will go to farm, we will cut trees and make furniture. Here, their presence is not founded on the donations they do. For them, helping the population is keeping the peace as their mission states it. When there is peace, and then donations, it will be fine. If not, their main mission is violated.

In short, while MONUSCO's development aid was positively acknowledged, it was overshadowed by its failure to improve security and establish lasting peace.

3.2 MONUSCO supports national security forces

Beyond the provision of aid and infrastructure, some interviewees emphasized the important contribution of MONUSCO to the development of the DRC's own security forces. They especially mentioned the building of capacity and the logistical support they provide for the FARDC. For example, as Alias 108 (Beni) explained:

with the killings of 2014, there was first insufficient personnel within the Congolese National Police, even within the FARDC, and within other services. Even at the logistics level, things blocked, until 2015, 2016 or 2017 – I think. Thanks to the alerts we were making to the government and their partners, in 2019, 2020, improvement was observable. It's not that I am trying to praise MONUSCO, but honestly, MONUSCO is helping quite a lot of different services with capacity building which helped both the police and FARDC to progress much more smoothly in terms of training and logistics. We can say there has been positive change since 2019. [...] There might be damage, or somebody might be killed in the town.

Even if the investigation team arrives while the murder actor had left, you will see him arrested a few days later, in two or three days. This did not happen before. There is some progress thanks to [training] and other things related.

In a similar vein, Alias 153 (Beni) underlined the positive impact of MONUSCO on the DRC's national forces:

yes, something changed. We hear that MONUSCO supports our army in terms of food, and other equipment. We suppose that it's thanks to that support that our soldiers succeed to secure us. [...] This support brought about change because a soldier who doesn't have food, for example, will not be strong to secure us. [...] It may happen that he robs the civilians' properties given that he has nothing to eat, but when he has food and has needed equipment, he will work better for our security.

This is not to undermine the voices among the interviewees that regarded MONUSCO's development support as part of their security contribution and saw their continued presence as vital (while a minority view). In fact, Alias 108 (Beni), when asked if the presence of MONUSCO makes him feel safer, responded:

I may say yes, because there is some change (improvement). [...] Somehow, we are protected because, as I said, there are no more killings like before, especially in our part of the Beni territory. It's true that the Kayinama and Ruwenzori parts are being attacked, but there are no more killings like before.

Interviewees in Sake made a similar point, emphasizing the significance of the presence of MONUSCO in scaring away armed groups that 'crisscross the hills' (Alias 198, Sake). As is the case in Somalia, however, the invisibility of the

intervention forces was also criticized. For example, Alias 153 (Beni) stated: 'I have never seen the MONUSCO soldiers coming to secure us. Maybe we would say they secure us through our army by supporting them'. Such voices that underlined the security contribution of MONUSCO, if only indirectly through their support for national forces, were rather few. Most interviewees referred to persistent insecurity and explained how their lives are overshadowed by the continued threat of violence despite the presence of MONUSCO.

3.3 MONUSCO failed to improve security and to protect civilians

MONUSCO has been here for a long time, but the insecurity is getting worse and worse. I didn't see any effective contribution of MONUSCO in the city. Maybe, theoretically, MONUSCO is doing its job. They can make the media or the people believe it, but in practice, or on the ground, I would say that they are perhaps there to observe. But I don't know if they have a mission that they are carrying out. If they are there to keep the peace, it must be felt on the ground. They should not say that they are here to keep peace while that peace is not felt. Although you are supposed to keep peace all around, killings continue. (Alias 115, Beni)

The population here detests MONUSCO, they no longer like the presence of MONUSCO, but personally I don't know ... for me, I remain a little bit objective. [...] MONUSCO does its best, but also our soldiers fight. We can't tell who assures and who [doesn't]. They do their job, but there is insecurity. That's the issue. Insecurity persists. There is insecurity in the town. [...] They are

there because there is insecurity. They struggle for security, but there are still attacks. (Alias 106, Beni)

These extracts capture the predominant view of civilians on MONUSCO's failure to improve security, protect civilians or restore peace. Only very few respondents identified an improvement in security and aligned this directly to the presence and activities of MONUSCO. For example, one of the Sake interviewees outlined that

their presence did a lot. We lived in Sake before the arrival of these soldiers (MONUSCO) but it was terrible. On the Sake Masisi Road, there were terrible kidnappings almost every time. [...] The arrival of MONUSCO stopped all this. [...] Their presence scared the bandits because [...] there are people who can defend us, and therefore the population benefits (Alias 198, Sake).

Others, as described above, acknowledged an indirect contribution to security through, for example, infrastructure development or training of the national army and the police. Most interviewees, however, criticized MONUSCO's passivity, also with respect to fighting rebels and protecting civilians, and felt that the intervention and presence of MONUSCO soldiers had no impact on their security.¹¹ Alias 196 (Sake) highlighted that 'we are still losing our friends, our parents, and are becoming more and more vulnerable and yet they are here'. Even interviewees who referred to patrols of MONUSCO and the FARDC stressed that 'the situation remains the same; killings, there are always killings, they persist' (Alias 106, Beni). Along these lines, interviewees thought that 'the presence of MONUSCO is useless' (Alias 110, Beni) or explained that they have not seen any

¹¹ In Beni, for example, Alias 154, 156, 160, 161, 192; in Sake, for example, Alias 197, 199, 200, 202.

change since MONUSCO is in Beni.¹² Many expressed frustration and felt that the situation is ‘going from bad to worse’ and that ‘the situation before MONUSCO was better than it has been after MONUSCO’ (Alias 161; similarly Alias 162, Beni). Across the towns and villages, interviewees emphasized their initial expectation and now frustration about the long duration of the intervention, which had not managed to restore peace. As an example, Alias 160 (Beni) stated that the people’s ‘only concern is peace, ending killings, [and] massacres’. Even in Sake, and despite the FIB’s (and thus MONUSCO’s) initial success against the M23 in 2013, many interviewees expressed their discouragement with the lack of further progress in restoring peace and often attributed the prevalence of insecurity to MONUSCO’s lack of active engagement.

Like interviewees in Somalia, people in Sake, Beni and the surrounding villages expressed feeling abandoned in the face of violence and criticized the inaction of intervention forces – even when those forces were direct witnesses to violent attacks, as Alias 199 (Sake) recounted:

personally, I can’t say they secure the area at 100% because as I said before, there are kidnapping cases, but they never intervene. A kidnapping case has eben taken place just next to their base. It was a place where they could easily intervene, but they didn’t. Since kidnappings and killings started being reported over here, we have never seen the MONUSCO soldiers intervening.

Similarly, Alias 200 (Sake) claimed that ‘MONUSCO hasn’t contributed to the restoration of peace’, while Alias 202 (Sake) stressed that:

I have never seen anything they improved since we started suffering war, nothing at all. Whether they are here or not, it is the same thing. Like now, as they are not here, we are suffering; and even if they were there, people would keep being attacked in their houses the same way [they] are being attacked [at] the moment.

Others, like Alias 161 and Alias 190 (Beni), expressed doubt in the motivation and interest of MONUSCO explaining that MONUSCO:

are not here for our interest, they are there for other people’s interest because when the enemy comes, for example, the MONUSCO soldiers tell us they see the enemies among whom are women and children. They say they shouldn’t kill women and children according to the International Human Rights Law. That’s what they tell us. But when the enemies come to kill the population, they kill children, women and men.

Many interviewees referred to the long deployment of the UN intervention, and expressed their frustration that ‘war persists’ (Alias 153, Beni), they ‘hadn’t seen anything good from their presence’ (Alias 157, Beni), and ‘can’t see any positive impact of their work’ (Alias 161, Beni) or ‘any change in their community’ (Alias 196, Sake). Alias 160 (Beni), when asked about feeling protected, responded immediately: ‘not by MONUSCO. We don’t hope for their protection at all’. Overall, interviewed civilians did not experience MONUSCO as a provider of protection.

3.4 Protection is provided by the FARDC and National Police (PNC)

¹² In Beni, for example, Alias 111, 154, 156, 157, 161, 163.

Similar to the experiences in Somalia, civilians in the DRC frequently expressed their preference for national military actors¹³ and the national police.¹⁴ This preference was often linked to the visibility of national forces, for example, because they regularly conduct patrols (Alias 106, Beni) and because of their continued presence. Some civilians in Beni explained that they feel safe because of an FARDC base nearby (Alias 152, 153, 154, Beni), or that the police are more accessible, providing toll-free numbers (Alias 152, Beni).

If civilians felt protected by MONUSCO, they more often related this to the assistance provided to the FARDC, and to cooperations in joint patrols (e.g. Alias 157, Beni). The influence of an FARDC base and the resulting reassurance in security was seen to have had positive effects on the quality of life, with Alias 153 (Beni), for example, describing how the town had managed to reopen a school when armed groups stayed away due the presence of the FARDC. An 'average lull' in violent attacks was ascribed to the efforts of the FARDC and the populations' intelligence shared with them (Alias 159, Beni). In fact, Alias 159 stressed that 'it is the FARDC that come[s] to the rescue and not MONUSCO'.

Overall, the FARDC also enjoyed more trust from the interviewees. In this vein, Alias 196 (Sake) explained:

according to me, concerning security in this area, I trust the FARDC soldiers, although they are not strong. Of course they try to work, but they have little strength. They help up with patrols, because in the past, when it was 6:00pm, people were being attacked on their way from the market.

Some interviewees demanded that MONUSCO follow the example of the FARDC as they 'really' ensure security, and especially 'ensure security at night' (Alias 204, Sake). Alias 161 (Beni) even claimed that the population had fled areas where MONUSCO settled, and some returned later once MONUSCO peacekeepers had been exchanged by the FARDC.

Furthermore, national forces were seen as more accessible and civilians often answered that they would first contact the national security forces (the FARDC and the police) if they were attacked or faced any other issues related to their safety. In this respect, Alias 152 (Beni) welcomed the toll-free numbers of the FARDC and the police, which can be called in times of need, such as in the case of a violent attack (similarly Alias 153, 154, Beni). However, the same interviewee was also of the opinion that some of these numbers are controlled by rebel groups, so 'even when you call the toll-free number, the phone is held by the same bandits who attacked you' (Alias 152, Beni). Alias 192 (Sake) described periodic security meetings of 'a local security committee composed of the commanders of FARDC, PNC [police], DGM, ANR, [and] seven village chiefs', aimed at improving security measures, so that 'the population can be a little bit secure' (Alias 192, Sake). To this end, interviewees referred to the organization of community policing, with mixed patrols of armed soldiers and/or police officers and unarmed civilians, usually young men. Accordingly, these 'mixed patrols' were put together on the suggestion of the national army (FARDC) and were evaluated as quite successful in restoring peace in Sake by Alias 192.

Again, and like the critique expressed in Somalia, civilians in the DRC regularly referred

¹³ In Beni, for example, Alias 116, 152, 153, 154, 157, 159, 161; in Sake, for example, Alias 196, 197, 198, 202, 204.

¹⁴ In Beni, for example, Alias 108, 110, 158, 160; in Sake, for example, Alias 195, 198, 200, 203.

to the bunkerization of MONUSCO, which they too contrasted with the activity and visibility of national security forces, and the high risks that national forces face. FARDC soldiers are sent into dangerous situations and risk losing their lives (Alias 159, 161, Beni; Alias 202, Sake), while MONUSCO peacekeepers were seen to prefer their safety in their bases and compounds or intervene too late (e.g. Alias 160, Beni; Alias 192, Sake). According to Alias 202 (Sake):

when there were attacks here, people were running to the MONUSCO base. They stayed there and felt they were protected as they knew that no armed group would attack the MONUSCO base. People trusted MONUSCO in that way. But personally, since the first time I saw MONUSCO here, I have never heard bullets were shot or houses were burnt down and MONUSCO intervened. We just stay with them here. They never go there (to places of violence). It is when the situation calms down that you see them patrolling. They just pass in their cars. How will you fight somebody while you stay in your car?

Civilians in the DRC regularly shared their critique of peacekeepers' lack of proactive engagement. Alias 154 (Beni) stated:

normally they should also go far to the countryside to make sure they are really patrolling. They could patrol together with the FARDC soldiers in the bushes, for example, and we will agree that they are really at work. You will just see them moving around in trucks, saying they are patrolling.

Like in Somalia, the fortified compounds of peacekeepers were taken as an indication of their indifference towards the suffering of civilians, prioritizing their own safety instead (e.g. Alias 186, 187, Beni). In this respect, civilians stressed that the support of national forces is more consistent and contrasted it with the occasional support of MONUSCO peacekeepers (Alias 152, Beni). Yet, the same interviewee also expressed the view that the nearby presence (300m) of an FARDC military camp does not reassure her (Alias 152, Beni). She continued to discuss the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) but emphasized that IDPs don't return because of the FARDC presence – they have simply 'had enough of [...] paying rent and staying in host families. They got tired of that, and some decided they[re] better off dying in their houses'. The decision to return is not only linked to security considerations, but as often to wider living conditions and the ability to secure an independent livelihood.

While the overall tone towards national security forces was more positive than towards the intervention forces, several civilians also criticized the FARDC and police forces. Alias 195 (Sake), for example, first described how the national security services are responsible for the safety of the Congolese people and try to do their job, but then suggested that 'among them are black sheep'. Similarly, Alias 116 (Beni), when asked if the FARDC confront armed groups when

receiving alerts from the population, responded 'if you have a good group they come and intervene', indicating biases towards certain population groups and the dependence of protection on relational ties.

Again, like the interviewees in Somalia, people in the DRC referred to the financial remuneration for FARDC soldiers and the negative consequences of limited and inconsistent payment on their motivation to engage. As an example, Alias 106 (Beni) reflected:

are our soldiers well paid? Are they motivated? I also wonder, our soldiers do their job, but are they motivated? One cannot sacrifice his life while he gets nothing in terms of war bonuses.

Other interviewees stressed their problem in distinguishing FARDC soldiers from armed groups¹⁵, with Alias 152 stating:

the enemies usually come wearing the same uniforms [as] the police and FARDC soldiers. We don't really trust them. This decreased the confidence we had in them. The enemy puts on the same uniform as the police and the FARDC soldier. How would you trust someone who offends you? It is quite difficult for us to differentiate the enemy from the FARDC soldiers or the police. We really have difficulties to differentiate them. That's why we don't trust them. But if there was a difference between the enemy and the FARDC soldiers or the police, we would trust either the police or the army. It is due to that confusion that we can't trust them.

In addition, some civilians complained about the FARDC's ineffectiveness or lack of will to fight rebels: 'they just shoot bullets, but you will never hear that a single bullet reached the body of the enemy. No ADF NALU rebel has ever been caught'

(Alias 186, Beni). Furthermore, a civil society president reiterated how he was threatened by an FARDC commander in 2021 when uncovering corruption. He explained:

there were cases of kidnapping here and after analysis and investigation. We concluded that there was an officer of the armed forces who was cooperating with these bandits. So, we sent correspondence to have it sent elsewhere, something that was not done. So, we mobilized the population for two days to walk and finally it was changed. So, he would send people to threaten me by saying that what I'm doing, if I don't give up, I'll see (Alias 195, Sake).

Other cases of corruption or FARDC members profiting from insecurity were reported by Alias 111 (Beni):

I even have proof. There is a colonel who lives in my neighbourhood who is from Kinshasa. He doesn't have a field, but he has cocoa. [...] His soldiers go and pick the cocoa for him. Even the wood, it's the soldiers who cut it and sell it. [...] The war in Beni is politicized – some make money while others lose their family members.

Due to these negative experiences with the security providers – national and international – civilians have little trust overall in armed forces, which was also illustrated in regularly used expressions such as 'the one who protects us is first of all my God' (in Beni, Alias 114, 111, 160, 158; in Sake, Alias 211) and 'I trust in God alone' (Alias 152, Beni; Alias 211, Sake). Civilians pointed to the daily challenges of navigating insecurity and often referred to the unpredictability of their lives. Who to trust with respect to safety became a difficult question in the eastern DRC.

3.4 Peacekeepers' conduct: cases of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (SEA)

¹⁵ In Beni, for example, Alias 114, 152, 156, 160.

When interviewees were asked about MONUSCO's overall conduct, responses from Beni as well as Sake often referred to sexual exploitation and pregnant women left behind without support for them or their children.¹⁶ For example, one of the interviewees stated that:

if they behaved well and respected their contract, they wouldn't have to make community blunders, for example, by knocking up our girls. Sometimes they can change vehicles to enter bars in civilian clothes so that they are not identified (Alias 155, Beni).

The social relevance of children fathered by peacekeepers was further underscored when Alias 193 and Alias 194 (Sake) recalled the involvement of the MONUSCO Conduct and Discipline Team (CDT). They started to provide alternative livelihood opportunities for 75 mothers from Sake and Beni and to pay school fees for those children fathered by MONUSCO peacekeepers, and launched campaigns to discourage peacekeepers and local women from having sexual contact (a similar account was also provided by Alias 196, Sake).¹⁷ Alias 208 (Sake) additionally referred to an increase in HIV cases in Mubambiro, due to prostitution and peacekeepers' sexual engagement with civilians. Asked if MONUSCO brought HIV to the area, he elaborated that they

were sensitizing people for a voluntary screening and we could see MONUSCO's agents. After the test, people were given condoms and cloths; that strategy made many people come. The first time we tested 300 positives but the following test reached 700 positive cases.

As a result, Alias 155 (Beni) pointed out sarcastically: 'That's an impact. That is our girls

[...] knocked up by the peacekeepers'. Similarly, when asked if members of the population have a phone number to contact MONUSCO (e.g. in case of violent attacks), Alias 197 (Sake) responded sarcastically, 'maybe the prostitutes', illustrating that SEA committed by peacekeepers despite interventions by the CDT taint the relationship with the civilian communities, diminishing their respect for their protectors and their trust in peacekeepers' values, professionalism and commitment.

3.5 MONUSCO cooperates with rebels and is motivated by greed

As outlined above, continued insecurity contributed to distrust of the foreign peacekeepers (and national security forces). Interviewees critiqued what they experienced as the unwillingness of MONUSCO to intervene and raised suspicions about the 'real' motivation of peacekeepers. Many shared Alias 184's (Beni) conviction 'that MONUSCO is not there to secure us, but they are there for their interests'. They often pointed to alternative reasons for the presence of peacekeepers in the DRC, most often – and again similar to interviewees in Somalia – to economic interests. In this respect, several interviewees were convinced that there was cooperation between MONUSCO and rebel groups (e.g. in Beni, Alias 183; in Sake, Alias 195, 196, 208). The following quotes provide some examples of the way this suspicion was raised.

We have never been able to explain this phenomenon. [...] Strangely, it is where [MONUSCO] are established that there are intrusions. Every time there is an intrusion in Beni, it is in these areas where there are MONUSCO bases. (Alias 110, Beni)

¹⁶ In Beni, for example, Alias 155, 184, 186; in Sake, for example, Alias 192, 193, 194, 195, 196.

¹⁷ The topic of children fathered and abandoned by peacekeepers in the DRC has also attracted academic attention (Vahedi et al. 2024; Wagner et al. 2020)

I have realized that MONUSCO is here for adventure, I don't see anything they came to do. Just moving around going here and there. To be frank, the population believes that it is MONUSCO who distributes weapons to the armed groups. When they go to a given area, just when they get back, attacks will be reported over there. (Alias 202, Sake)

As everybody says and the rumours say, normally the MONUSCO contingents should leave because it is repeatedly said that they are involved in this war. So, they have mafias. It is said that MONUSCO is supplying the rebels. We don't have proof yet, but that's what the community says. (Alias 155, Beni)

We think that it is MONUSCO that feeds the ADF a lot and therefore without MONUSCO the ADF could not be here. (Alias 156, Beni)

In addition to the above suspicion, Alias 157 (Beni) expressed the idea that MONUSCO is in the DRC to exploit minerals, and Alias 107 (Beni) described how even local pressure groups believe in the complicity of peacekeepers, and that most people are convinced that peacekeepers are providing cover for the operations of the ADF.

These suspicions and the questioning of foreign peacekeepers' motivations potentially contributed to the preference of national forces. Continuous disappointment, grief and distrust, and widespread suspicions of rebel-peacekeeper cooperation and peacekeepers' exploitative motivations fuelled demonstrations against MONUSCO, some of which turned violent.

3.6 Demonstrations against MONUSCO

The frustration with continued killings, perceived inaction and lack of intervention by MONUSCO led to demonstrations at some MONUSCO bases. As Alias 106 (Beni) outlined,

between 2019 and 2020, the population got angry with MONUSCO [...] [as] the population was unhappy with the killings. There were so many assassinations, murders, all evils. [...] They just wanted them to go. They declared that they were doing nothing and that they had to go. That was their level of understanding things. According to them, MONUSCO was doing nothing, and the best solution was to drive them away, to have them leave.

Similarly, Alias 110 (Beni), on being asked about the relationships between MONUSCO and the population, stated that

the relationships are negative. In fact, if they were good, we wouldn't have assisted in damaging [...] their base. This was motivated by the community. There was despair, lack of confidence between the community and MONUSCO. The community was even asking for the departure of MONUSCO. You know, we spent 30 days, 30 days of no activity, demanding the departure of MONUSCO.

Several interviewees related the demonstration to the perceived inaction of MONUSCO. One example is Alias 154 (Beni), who recalled:

they have machines which can be helpful to us to fight the enemies of peace, but you will find that even 200m from their base, rebels commit attacks. A little while later, you will hear people were killed, but 200m from the MONUSCO base and no ADF [were] captured or killed. This demotivates us [...] and this caused some young people to demonstrate [...], demanding that they should leave. If you can remember, the young people demonstrated in Beni town, and they even demolished their fence here in Boikene.

They described how people got so frustrated that they started to throw stones (Alias 152) or to block roads (Alias 160, 184, Beni) so that peacekeepers would not come into their village. Interviewees in this respect stressed that 'people are afraid of MONUSCO' (Alias 152), 'people have a bad image of MONUSCO' (Alias 152), and 'people don't trust MONUSCO' (Alias 152, Alias 161, Alias 160, Beni).

After talks were conducted in the aftermath of these demonstrations 'at the national level and at the central level' (Alias 160), the situation calmed down. However, the relationships between MONUSCO and the population remained fraught, with citizens no longer desiring the presence of MONUSCO, which is reflected in the many interviewees requesting that MONUSCO leave the country.

3.7 Should peacekeepers stay or go?

The relationship between MONUSCO and the civilian population is, as we have discussed above, overshadowed by disappointment and distrust. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that most interviewees responded that they would prefer that MONUSCO leave the country, when we asked for preferences. For example, they stressed that MONUSCO should leave 'because they do nothing' (Alias 202, Sake), and are 'of no use to us; we have no peace' (Alias 111, Beni). Others outlined that people 'haven't seen anything good from their presence' (Alias 157, Beni) or that they 'can't see any positive impact of [MONUSCO's] work' (Alias 161, Beni) and 'don't see any change' in their community (Alias 164, Beni; similarly Alias 197, 200, 207, Sake). Alias 202 (Sake) elaborated in more detail:

I have never seen anything they improved since we started suffering war, nothing at all. Whether they are here or not, it is the same thing. Like now as they are not here, we are

suffering; and even if they were here, people would keep being attacked in their houses the same way they are being attacked at the moment.

Often the frustration was linked to the long duration of the intervention:

they have been here more than 20 years; there is no peace in the east of Congo although they are here for that. That is why even if they remain [for] 50 years, nothing will change. Insecurity will always be there. I think that our army would help us secure the east (Alias 209).

More than merely pointing to the failure of MONUSCO to improve security and protect civilians, many referred again to the negative security impact of the intervention, as Alias 155's (Beni) response illustrates: 'the MONUSCO contingents should leave because it is repeatedly said that they are involved in this war'. Similarly, Alias 156 (Beni) explained that he wants MONUSCO to leave because he 'think[s] that it is MONUSCO that feeds the ADF a lot and therefore without MONUSCO, the ADF could not be here'; and Alias 196 (Sake) agreed that they should leave 'because we have found out that MONUSCO collaborate with the people who come to ill-treat us here; when we show MONUSCO the enemies, they never attack them'. Rather sarcastically, Alias 196 (Sake) stated: 'MONUSCO does nothing at all. And if they want, they should leave even right now. The only work they did was to take care of our girls'. When questioned further several respondents said they were convinced that the overall security would improve (Alias 111, Beni), or at least the population would eventually know that MONUSCO is not responsible for the deterioration:

if the situation deteriorated further after their departure, we would know

the real cause of the insecurity in the area, because before [MONUSCO's] presence, there was insecurity, [and with] their presence, there is insecurity. [If after] their departure there [is] insecurity, [...] we will say that it was not them who were at the root of this situation (Alias 114, Beni).

In the case of international forces, interviewees preferred national security forces, for the reasons outlined above, but also to make the government take on responsibility (e.g. Alias 114, 160, Beni).

Conclusion

The working paper aims to give a firsthand account of civilian experiences with international peacekeeping interventions in Somalia and the DRC. The comparison of civilians' (protection) experiences shows certain similarities but also clear differences. We found appreciative voices in both countries, in Somalia mainly related to the initial improvement of security in cities, in the DRC mainly related to infrastructure building. In both countries, peacekeepers were thought to contribute to the building of the national security sector and improved capacity of national forces. Civilians in both countries regarded the national forces as more visible, more accessible, more consistent in their support – due to their permanence, increased accountability, and their larger effort in fighting rebels and insurgents. The provision of protection was much more often attributed to national forces, whom respondents in both countries also thought should be responsible for it.

Based on their more positive evaluation of national forces, civilians in both countries, but with a stronger emphasis in Somalia, criticized pay gaps between international and national forces, referring to higher risks and lower, as well as more unreliable, pay. While critique in Somalia was drawn from the failure to fight al-Shabaab,

DRC civilians expressed the same dismay with continuous rebel attacks – both regularly leading to high losses of civilian lives. Peacekeepers in both countries were critiqued for their failure to protect civilians. The conduct of peacekeepers was also criticized in both countries – in Somalia mainly for using violence indiscriminately, but also for the lack of accountability when causing harm, including for traffic accidents. The main topic in the DRC was peacekeepers' exploitative and irresponsible behaviour towards women. Overall, the majority of interviewed civilians in both countries evaluate the activities of peacekeepers as a failure when it comes to fighting insurgents/rebels, protecting civilians and restoring peace. In consequence, the demand to withdraw international forces was frequent.

Beyond these similarities and differences, our research also shows that the robust approach, which provides peacekeepers with the right to use force to protect civilians, has not led to the outcomes that civilians expected. Civilians usually did not distinguish between country contingents or different brigades, such as the FIB in the DRC. In addition, their assessment of peacekeeping did not engage with the respective head of mission, be it the UN or AU. As the paper illustrates, civilians held similar grievances with both peace operations. Furthermore, they had in common a preference for their national armies while civilians, especially in the DRC, also regularly pointed at the failings of the FARDC and the police.

As Duffield (2010 already discussed effects of the 'fortified aid compound'. Interviewed civilians in both countries revealed how infrastructure to support (and protect) peacekeepers is experienced by civilians as barriers, impeding access and increasing social distance. Describing them as hidden behind walls or in convoys, peacekeepers are perceived as not caring, selfish, passive and insular. In this way, animosity and

distrust feature widely in the relationship between the protectors and the recipients of their protection.

Contrary to these prevalent experiences are those interviewees who witnessed a change in their security situation due to AMISOM or MONUSCO peacekeepers pushing al-Shabaab or rebel groups to the outskirts of towns or forcing them to retreat. As these security improvements were experienced as temporary, they are not regarded sufficient for all civilians, with some expecting more active engagement with the 'return' or 'reformation' of al-Shabaab in Somalia and rebel groups (especially the M23) in the DRC, eventually ending violence and restoring peace. Without an end to the violent conflicts, and in the context of endemic insecurity and violence, peacekeeping and its protection measures are

rarely regarded as successful. While experiences and perceptions differ and also reveal ambiguity, both AU and UN peacekeepers are more often than not seen as inactive and self-interested foreign agents, who protect themselves rather than the civilians, staying away from the danger and violence that dominate the civilian suffering.

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