Adapting to the Challenges of UN Peacekeeping: Protection of Civilians and the Use of Force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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ABSTRACT

Adapting to the Challenges of UN Peacekeeping: Protection of Civilians and the Use of Force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Kristen Zbikowski

Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations (UN) has been assigned a growing number of tasks in its peacekeeping missions with which the international organization (IO) has had little or no previous experience. Among the most controversial components of contemporary multidimensional peacekeeping mandates are protection of civilians (POC) and the use of force (UOF), and yet they have been added to the agenda of UN peacekeeping tasks with increasing frequency over the past decade. In this thesis, I investigate whether the UN has learned from its ten years of experience in applying the protection of civilians concept in the field. I then examine the influence of norms on this learning process.

Using the ongoing United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) as a case study, I analyze what the mission has learned from its experience in the field and explore how shared understandings and standards of appropriate behavior have impacted the process of learning. Applying Lise Morjé Howard's descriptive model of organizational learning, the study seeks to contribute to the burgeoning research on organizational learning in peace operations. Drawing on primary data from more than 30 interviews with UN officials and MONUC staff, I trace the evolution of the POC mandate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 2000 to 2009 and find that norms are an important factor in improving learning within peace operations. Considering the lack of clarity and consensus regarding the POC concept and

UOF at the international level as well as the numerous actors on the ground coming from diverse cultural backgrounds and holding diverging beliefs, this thesis suggests that shared norms play a unifying role in clarifying the grey areas of POC and UOF and as such promote learning within peacekeeping missions.

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List of Abbreviations

AAR: After Action Review

AFDL: Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo

AU: African Union

CNDP: National Congress for the Defense of the People

DPKO: Department of Peacekeeping Operations

DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo

DSRSG: Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General

EU: European Union

FAR: Armed Forces of Rwanda

FARDC: Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

FC: Force Commander

FDLR: Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda

FNI: Front for National Integration

FRPI: Patriotic Force of Resistance in Ituri

IGO: Intergovernmental Organization

JMAC: Joint Mission Analysis Cell

JOC: Joint Operation Centre

JPT: Joint Protection Team

LRA: Lord's Resistance Army

Milob: Military observer

MLC: Movement for the Liberation of Congo

MOB: Mobile Operating Base

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding

MONUC: United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo

NGO: Nongovernmental organization

NYHQ: New York Headquarters

OAU: Organization of African Unity

OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OLMs: Organizational Learning Mechanisms

P-5: Permanent Five Members of the Security Council

PARECO: Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance

PBPS: Peacekeeping Best Practices Section

PK: Peacekeeping

PNC: Congolese National Police

PO: Peace Operation

POC: Protection of Civilians

POCC: Protection of Civilians Inter-Agency Committee

RREWC: Rapid Response and Early Warning Cell

R2P: Responsibility to Protect

RCD: Rally for Congolese Democracy

RCD-Goma: Rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma

ROE: Rules of Engagement RPA: Rwandan Patriotic Army

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SG: Secretary-General

SOP: Standard Operating Procedures

SRSG: Special Representative of the Secretary-General

TCC: Troop Contributing Countries TOB: Temporary Operating Base

UN: United Nations

UNAMSIL: United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

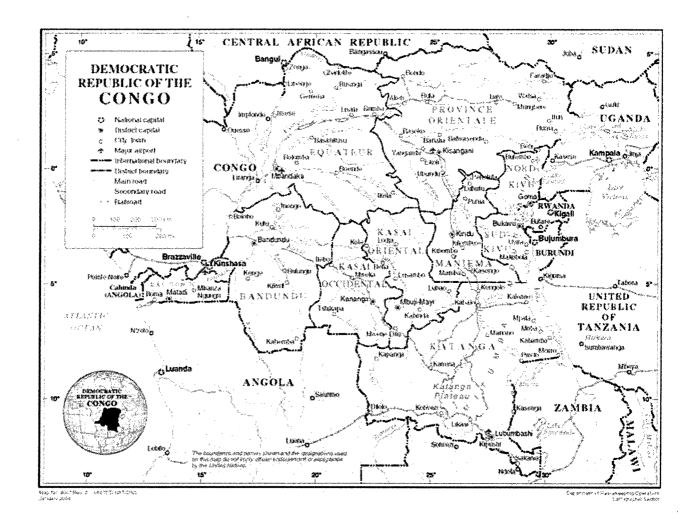
UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UPC: Union of Congolese Patriots

UPDF: Ugandan People's Defence Forces

UOF: Use of Force

Map of the Democratic Republic of the Congo



Introduction: An Emerging Norm?

Do institutions facing complex and dangerous tasks learn over time? This question is of obvious importance to scholars studying the United Nations (UN), which has been assigned a growing number of tasks in its peacekeeping missions. Among the most controversial components of contemporary multidimensional peacekeeping mandates are the protection of civilians (POC) and the use of force (UOF), and yet they have been added to the agenda of UN peacekeeping tasks with increasing frequency over the past decade. This should come as little surprise, considering the growing number of intra-state conflicts and the increased violent targeting of civilian populations by combatants in the post-Cold War period. This thesis investigates whether the UN has learned from its ten years of experience in applying the protection of civilians concept in the field, and then goes on to examine the influence of norms on this learning process, employing a case study of one of the more complex theaters of conflict, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Peacekeeping operations have evolved significantly since the inception of the United Nations, largely in response to shifting threats to international peace and security, but also as a result of new or developing international norms regarding appropriate responses to such threats. With these changes there has been a gradual move from traditional peacekeeping involving military observers monitoring a ceasefire or peace agreement to more complex multidimensional peace operations (POs) that consist of a

¹ Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001, 4.

wide variety of activities and the challenges that inevitably come with them. With the expansion of UN peace operation mandates have come endless criticisms of the international organization's limitations and failures, especially with respect to accusations of the UN's inability to learn and its inexcusable lack of institutional memory. While many of these charges are warranted, it is worth noting that the UN is often mandated to carry out tasks that are entirely new to the various actors working under the UN banner. As such, in some areas UN peace missions are essentially working without a blueprint or roadmap and without any applicable lessons or best practices from the past to adapt and apply to new contexts. Barnett and Finnemore remark that international organizations are often assigned tasks about which there is little knowledge and which have never previously been attempted.³ Benner and Rotmann also specify that "many field missions in the 1990s were confronted with genuinely new tasks for which there were no precedents."⁴ Protection of civilian mandates are an example of this uncharted peacekeeping territory. The use of force, which had been tried in the early years of UN peacekeeping, specifically in the first UN peacekeeping assignment in the Congo, was met with acutely unfavorable reactions by many peacekeeping scholars and UN practitioners and significantly reinforced opposition to the use of force by UN blue helmets. Yet through processes of trial and error and evaluation, the UN should presumably be acquiring new knowledge and collecting lessons based on its experiences in the field. In light of growing research on the role of organizational learning (OL) in peacekeeping success stories, this thesis explores whether the UN is learning in the

² Benner et al. 2008; United Nations, Report of the UN Panel on Peace Operations [Brahimi Report] 2000; Power 2008: Weiss 2009.

³ Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 25.

⁴ Benner and Rotmann 2008, 47.

inherently important area of protection of civilians and the not unrelated area of robust use of force, and argues that shared normative understandings influence organizational learning both in the field and more broadly within the entire organization. I will argue that the UN has also been learning from both its experiences in the field and from normative developments at the international level, and this has given the IO a unique opportunity to "breathe life" into the emerging Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm by translating rhetoric into practice.

It is important to acknowledge early on that although the role of norms as independent variables in IR has been increasingly recognized and studied empirically, "a key insight of research on norms is their contested nature." Norms are not static or frozen in time and they can exist in varying stages of development. As such, there is often disagreement as to their power or significance. It is likewise challenging to isolate norms from exogenous forces in world politics. Furthermore, OL is an inherently difficult phenomenon to study and there remains a lack of agreement regarding what constitutes OL, what does not, and how OL can be measured. These knotty issues have been widely recognized, and yet the study of norms and OL in IR remain worthwhile academic pursuits. It must, however, be understood that precise measurement of such concepts continues to remain elusive—at present ascertaining their causal influence through process tracing, visiting archives, interviews and other less stringent social science methods remain important steps in understanding the role of norms and OL in IR.

⁵ Checkel 1997, 482.

⁶ See Benner et al. 2007 and Benner et al. 2008.

The UN Security Council first explicitly directed peacekeepers to protect civilians under imminent threat in 1999.⁷ That same year marked a new surge in demand for UN multidimensional peacekeeping operations. One of the earliest missions to experiment with this new concept of civilian protection was the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, commonly referred to by its French acronym, MONUC. This ongoing mission has frequently been identified as one of the UN's most challenging and problematic peace operations and it has experienced several major crises which have called its mere presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo into question. According to some sober assessments of the situational difficulty of the DRC, the country may simply be "in the 'too hard' category for civilian protection."8 Moreover, many have been quick to note that "More civilians have died in the DRC concurrent with a UN peacekeeping operation than in any other country, and this alarming fact has caused analysts and UN personnel alike to question the existence of a peacekeeping mission that cannot keep the peace and cannot prevent widespread human rights violations and devastating massacres from taking place. 10 Such claims and the difficult and complex realities surrounding MONUC have made it an unappealing and discouraging case study for many analysts, and yet in 2009, the year marking the UN mission's tenth anniversary as well as the Security Council's tenth anniversary of formally considering the concept of protection of civilians, MONUC is certainly not the mission it once was. In fact, the mission has evolved and adapted enormously since it

⁷ Holt 2006, 3.

⁸ Holt and Berkman 2006, 156.

⁹ Ihid

¹⁰ The IRC estimates that 5.4 million excess deaths occurred in the DRC between August 1998 and April 2007. (International Rescue Committee 2008, 3).

was first established as a modest observer mission with a severely limited mandate to protect civilians.

This thesis is concerned with whether the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is learning about the protection of civilians and the use of force in its peace operations and with the impact of norms on this learning process. While all UN peace operations have been constrained to some extent by political considerations and the willingness of member states to fund them and provide them with adequate troops. personnel and equipment, it has become clear that the DPKO and the many actors in the field also have a significant degree of agenda-setting power and autonomy in terms of their approach to mandate implementation and how they go about carrying out the mission's day-to-day tasks. In the case of MONUC, which has always been endlessly underfunded and understaffed in one of the most daunting environments in the world to conduct a peacekeeping operation, it would therefore be inaccurate to place all of the blame or praise outside of the mission. As Dennis M. Tull points out, "it would be mistaken to explain success and failure simply as a function of resources. As important, and analytically more interesting, are determinants over which a peacekeeping mission has some leverage." Thus, while it would be difficult to argue that the mission has received adequate attention from the Security Council and sufficient resources from UN member states, MONUC has been active on the ground, working with the tools and mechanisms available for a decade. I contend that it has also been learning from both its experiences in the field and from normative developments at the international level.

Norms in International Relations

¹¹ Tull 2009, 226.

While it is now commonplace in IR scholarship to acknowledge that "norms matter," it is their degree of independent influence that remains deeply contested. While realists and liberal theorists have tended to emphasize material factors that shape and explain international relations—specifically state behavior—constructivists have placed norms either alongside material factors—revealing a tendency to strive for a "middle ground" in IR theory—or at the center of their investigations of international phenomena. While constructivists such as Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore have built their careers on establishing the importance of rules and norms in IR, specifically in relation to international organizations (IOs), they have not arrived at what Andy W. Knight calls:

a comprehensive theory of international norms that can adequately explain how norms emerge, how they are diffused (locally, nationally, regionally and globally), how they challenge and weaken existing norms, how they become robust, how they undermine or soften other norms, how they are routinized and institutionalized, how they are replaced or diminished in importance, and how they eventually die. 12

According to this assessment, an enormous amount of empirical work has yet to be done in relation to furthering our understanding of norms. Despite the challenges that lie ahead for IR scholars interested in the role of norms, Knight contends that we know enough about norms to observe and trace their development over time. Thus, according to many constructivists, norms matter greatly in IR, norms can change, and behavior can be influenced by norms. According to Finnemore and Sikkink, the process of norm development can be as simple a process as 1) the emergence of a norm; 2) advocacy on the part of norm entrepreneurs and growing acceptance of an international norm; and

¹² Knight 2003, 1.

¹³ Finnemore 2008, 219.

finally 3) internalization of the norm.¹⁴ Of course, these authors acknowledge that completion of this process is not inevitable, and that a given norm may never reach the final stage of the norm "life cycle," but they seek to uncover and improve our understanding of the processes involved in the evolution of norms in world politics.

The Emerging "Responsibility to Protect" Norm

The emerging, albeit deeply contested, R2P norm cannot be considered in isolation from difficult peacekeeping lessons learned in the 1990s. The major peacekeeping failures in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia horrified observers and deeply shamed the UN, eventually leading to a significant period of reflection on the part of the international community and the UN specifically. Lise Morjé Howard points to a shift in perception regarding the protection of civilians concept which resulted "from the scathing, self-critical reports on the UN's failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica, the 2000 Millennium Report, and the 2001 report entitled 'The Responsibility to Protect.'"¹⁵ The general trend since the peacekeeping disasters of the early post-Cold War years and the soul-searching that followed has been a "new determination to prevent mass killings." 16 In 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1296 officially included the intentional targeting of civilian populations as a threat to international peace and security and signaled new concern over the vulnerability of civilians trapped in conflict situations.¹⁷ That same year, MONUC's mandate was updated to include a reference to protection of civilians. The emerging POC norm thus moved from promise to mandated task with

¹⁴ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, pp. 887-917.

¹⁵ Howard 2008, 338.

¹⁶ Ibid, 339.

¹⁷ United Nations, S/RES/1296 (2000).

considerable speed. The actual application of the concept on the ground, however, has not taken place in an equally swift or consistent manner.

Two levels of norm development exist in relation to the deeply related concepts of POC and R2P: one at the level of the international community and one being carried out in field operations involving targeted violence against civilians. In the case of the MONUC, the two levels of development have essentially evolved in tandem as the concept of protection of civilians has been increasingly deliberated and endorsed at the international level as well as through the mission's mandate. Judging from MONUC's evolving mandate alone, it would appear that it has followed the growth in acceptance of R2P over the past eight years, from its original framing by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in December 2001 to the formal endorsement of the concept at the 2005 World Summit. Yet the two levels represent the difference between theory and practice. A concept that remains unresolved in theory has been assigned to UN peacekeeping missions for the past decade, with disastrous (yet entirely predictable) results. The interesting questions have now shifted to how the United Nations has proceeded to act in response to the as yet unsettled "schizophrenias of R2P."18

While the evolving international norm concerning protection of civilians in interstate and intrastate conflicts has been widely examined and continues to be debated, the more immediate and urgent question now turns to the UN's track record in protecting civilians when mandated to do so. Many peacekeeping scholars have explored the potential causes of peacekeeping success and failure, and while such empirical investigations are highly valuable, the question of *how* to protect civilians should receive

¹⁸ Alvarez 2007.

greater attention. For as Dennis M. Tull reminds us, "the reduction of large-scale violence...is the overall goal of every peacekeeping mission." The DPKO's own mission statement notes that all of the UN's peacekeeping operations aim "to alleviate human suffering."²⁰ Lise Morié Howard's 2008 study suggests that organizational learning is a crucial factor in successful peacekeeping operations and thus in ending the violence and uncertainty that affects civilians in times of war.²¹ Approaching her case studies with a constructivist international relations (IR) lens, Howard treats the UN and its Secretariat as actors in their own right, suggesting ultimately that what matters to a considerable extent is how mandates are implemented in the field. As she puts it, "It is in the field, in the end, where peacekeeping operations rise and fall."²² Yet her focus on outcomes (mission success or failure) overlooks the equally important process which leads to learning within peace operations. This study therefore adapts and applies Howard's model of organizational learning in peace operations to examine the process of learning rather than the overall outcome of a mission (which in the case of the DRC has yet to be determined).

Organizational Learning and MONUC

Organizational learning within IOs has not generated much academic research, particularly in the area of international peacekeeping. As Benner et al. have emphasized, organizational learning is a fuzzy concept and peacekeeping performance is inherently qualitative (there is no exact peacekeeping "science", these scholars are quick to

¹⁹ Tull 2009, 219.

²⁰ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Mission Statement," http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/info/page3.htm, Accessed January 2, 2009.

²¹ Howard 2008.

²² Ibid, 334.

underscore). Determining which factors enhance or hinder organizational learning in complex peace operations is thus a considerable challenge. Nevertheless, the importance of learning in UN peace operations has received increased attention as the organization has begun to institutionalize learning mechanisms and best practices. The pioneering work of Ernst Haas has laid some of the groundwork for future theorizing on organizational learning in international organizations. Haas, who argues that "learning clearly depends on our ability to share meanings across cultural and ideological chasms," significantly informs both Howard's descriptive model of organizational learning as well as this research project.

Ernst Haas, the founder of neofunctionalism and a key figure in IR theorizing, devoted the latter years of his career to the study of learning in IR, specifically learning in international organizations. Drawing on the works of German sociologist Max Weber as a key influence, Haas used typologies and relied heavily on qualitative case studies to explore how ideas and interests impact world politics. Without denying the importance of the self-interested state in IR, Haas studied the role of knowledge in organizational learning, taking interest in the cognitive and sociological processes contributing to adaptation and OL, and concluding that learning is rare in international organizations and tends to take place incrementally. Although he will undoubtedly continue to influence current and future generations of OL and IR scholars, his emphasis on scientific knowledge, specifically in the form of "epistemic communities," has prompted some to question the applicability of his model of learning to UN peacekeeping.

A great deal of academic research in the area of organizational learning in international organizations and bureaucracies has yet to be done, specifically in the area

²³ Haas 1990, 40.

of peace operations.²⁴ Campbell points out that the influence of OL on the outcome of peacebuilding activities "is a relatively unexplored area of research". and Benner et al. have noted that the study of an international peacekeeping bureaucracy has only been attempted in the past 10 years. As such, any examination of organizational learning, protection of civilians and use of force within the context of UN peacekeeping is clearly dealing with a new area of study riddled with question marks and lacking in findings and empirically verified conclusions. The case study examined in this thesis will thus serve as a preliminary attempt to discern whether the UN is learning about civilian protection and what forces might be guiding the process. The study relies significantly on primary data obtained through interviews with current and past UN officials, many of whom served with MONUC and were thus in a position to track the mission's progress, setbacks and efforts to grapple with the difficult concepts of civilian protection and the use of force. One immediate issue that came up in interviews was the fact that the staff turnover rate is high in UN peace operations in general and in MONUC in particular. Therefore, many participants were able to ascertain variation in the mission suggestive of learning but were rarely able to provide first-hand accounts of variation from 2000, when allusions to POC and the mission's Chapter VII status were first made in the mission's mandate, all the way to 2009, when the mission's mandate was updated to its most robust, clear and refined point yet. UN internal documents, Security Council resolutions and special reports were thus frequently consulted in order to fill in gaps in interview accounts, as were secondary sources and newspaper articles to provide a clearer picture of the approach to protection of civilians and the use of force from 2000 to 2009. Ultimately,

²⁴ See Benner et al. 2007 and Benner et al. 2008.

²⁵ Campbell 2008, 21.

despite the fluidity and changing dynamics of the situation on the ground in the DRC as well as the numerous changes in troop numbers and contextual understanding of the situation, the essential challenge of determining how to protect civilians facing the imminent threat of violence has not changed dramatically over the years.

The findings of this thesis suggest that the UN is learning in the field and that shared norms are one factor influencing this organizational learning process. Constructivists have long insisted on the importance of shared meanings and understandings in the construction of reality and the power of constitutive norms to influence actors' interests and preferences. Yet the numerous accounts highlighting that various actors in United Nations peace operations "do not share a joint understanding of what civilian protection means"²⁶ have not been directly linked to the UN's inability to learn lessons in this area. Two major obstacles to learning about protection and the use of force stood out in the DRC case study. First, because of the lack of formal and universal definitions of the contentious concepts of POC and UOF within the UN, various actors in the field unsurprisingly applied inconsistent and often incoherent approaches. Interview participants emphasized problems related to different cultures, languages, values and beliefs, different individual interpretations, confusion, and ultimately the importance of collectively shared meanings and clear mandates, rules of engagement and standard operating procedures. Ernst B. Haas claims that "[t]he emergence of shared meanings constitutes learning"²⁷ and this case points to a similar conclusion. Haas also suggests that the process of establishing shared meanings is issue-specific.²⁸ As such, meaning must be attached to specific concepts rather than one overarching and all-

²⁶ Holt 2006, 1.

²⁷ Ernst B. Haas 1990, 46.

²⁸ Ibid. 48.

encompassing UN approach. Second, and perhaps more surprising, was the finding that a lack of incentives and motivations for UN personnel may be another significant obstacle to organizational learning. Many participants recommended improved promotion of a "one UN" mentality or approach and other UN scholars have stressed the importance of incentives for staff in promoting learning.²⁹ Several UN officials remarked that the UN is not currently an organization that strives for excellence. Rather, the culture at the UN often induces personnel to limit their performance to mediocrity and routine as opposed to introducing innovative and fresh new ideas that might enhance performance.

Recent work on the obstacles to improving protection of civilians and the use of force in the field has noted that the problem largely relates to how concepts are operationalized and implemented and whether they are then applied in a consistent manner. While mission mandates often lack clarity (sometimes intentionally),³⁰ this does not preclude a coherent and explicit understanding of the mandate as it is carried out on the ground. Critics of the UN's uneven and incoherent implementation of tricky concepts in the field have insisted that "While a mandate is intended to clearly define the role of the mission, its implementation is inevitably dependent upon the interpretation and enforcement of each force commander as well as the context of each conflict." It would appear that despite the difficulty the UN mission in the DRC has had in disseminating one clear and refined message throughout its various components and despite the discouraging length of time this has taken, new tools and mechanisms have begun to appear in the mission to address discrepancies, different interpretations of the mandate and appropriate rules of engagement. It has been noted that "we are seeing more

²⁹ Campbell 2008, 24.

³⁰ Findlay 2002, 151.

³¹ Ford Institute for Human Security 2009, 10.

missions beginning to develop mission-specific protection of civilians strategies and plans of action."³² In the case of MONUC, the protection of civilians has now become the central component of the mandate. As Trevor Findlay has noted on the subject of UN doctrine, "the precise terms adopted would not matter so long as a common understanding of their meaning could be established."³³ The meaning has begun to surface in the DRC mission, albeit after significant confusion and incoherence.

Thus, the normative development on the issues of civilian protection and robust rules of engagement in UN peace operations appears to have opened the door to more refined implementation in the field. Despite the many critiques of MONUC's ineffectiveness and its inadequate protection efforts, the mission is learning about the complex and challenging concepts of civilian protection and robust operations, despite the fact that the process has taken years to get to this point and the institutionalization of this learning has not yet been guaranteed. A significant obstacle to institutionalizing UN peacekeeping lessons results from constant troop rotation and personnel turnover, yet this is, according to numerous experts and UN practitioners, an unavoidable obstacle. While the organization cannot expect to have a permanent corps of individuals deployed in the field, the regular turnover inevitably leads to some loss of lessons learned by individuals. Most would agree that the goal with respect to staff turnover is to strike a balance, avoiding the rigidity that comes with lengthy field deployments and bringing in fresh ideas on the one hand, and retaining lessons learned and as much institutional memory as possible on the other.³⁴ The UN has, after much delay, begun implementing mechanisms

³² Internal UN document 2009, 11.

³³ Findlay 2002, 387.

³⁴ The need for this balance came up in several interviews with UN officials, although some recommend even longer deployments while others lament the unnecessarily lengthy postings.

for collecting and retaining "best practices," although many of these efforts remain works-in-progress.

The framework for this thesis proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview of the most relevant peacekeeping literature as well as the most pertinent literature on organizational learning, highlighting the limited state of the art in the specific area of learning in peace operations. Chapter 3 offers background on the DRC context, tracing the UN's involvement in the country over the past 50 years as well as the early examples of organizational learning. This chapter also details a case study of MONUC, focusing on the major mission crises as well as the major changes in the mission mandate and how these developments impacted interpretations and understandings of POC and UOF for personnel at various levels of the mission. Chapter 4 applies Howard's descriptive model of organizational learning to the case of the UN mission in the DRC, focusing primarily on first-level organizational learning, but also considering the possibilities of UN-wide learning based on this case. Chapter 5 offers general theoretical conclusions and policy implications and points to a number of avenues for future research on learning within peace operations and improving coherence and conceptual clarity in field operations. Finally, while recognizing the difficulty in evaluating the impact of norms and ascertaining organizational learning, the concluding chapter stresses the importance of study in this area and similar areas where new concepts are just being introduced but which have real and pressing life-and-death consequences in practice.

Chapter 2: United Nations Peacekeeping and Organizational Learning

United Nations Peacekeeping and Organizational Learning

For an organization that has faced almost endless criticism since its inception, the UN and its peacekeeping apparatus have evolved and adapted considerably over the past six decades. Comparing today's complex multidimensional peace operations with the earliest examples of UN peacekeeping highlights the undeniable fact that the nature of conflict and the type and scope of response have changed over the years. Furthermore, whereas traditional peacekeeping missions were largely ad hoc in nature and often almost entirely improvised, today's missions have relied increasingly on institutionalized rules, principles and procedures. Two prominent areas that reveal a shift in the UN's approach to peace operations include protecting civilian populations and the use of force. While neither of these two potential aspects of a peacekeeping mandate received significant attention prior to the end of the Cold War period (and if they did, it was deeply undesired), 35 today the protection of civilians "has emerged as a prominent issue on the global security agenda."36 Moreover, any discussion of civilian protection would be incomplete without broaching upon the subject of use of force, since demonstrating a credible threat to act as a deterrent is often necessary to protect civilian populations caught in the throes or remnants of violent conflict.³⁷

³⁵ ONUC, the UN's first peace operation in the Congo, departed from the basic principles of peacekeeping by mandating the use of force that went beyond self-defense "and showed the dangers of so doing." This left a long-lasting impression on the UN and the Security Council and future willingness to authorize robust use of force in peace operations. (In Gray 2008, 263).

³⁶ Carpenter 2006, 2.

³⁷ Numerous peacekeeping experts, UN officials and UN publications emphasize the importance of projecting significant force so as to remain a credible threat, particularly in robust peace operations. Many hypothesize that projection of force also alleviates the need for troops to employ force. For more on

At first glance, then, UN peace operations do appear to have undergone substantial changes since they were first attempted in the early days of sending blue helmets out into post-conflict zones to monitor and "keep the peace." What is much less obvious is whether the UN Secretariat has been learning from its experiences in troubled parts of the world or whether it has simply been reacting and essentially starting from scratch with each new mission. According to some critics, because of a number of factors including constant turnover in staff membership and in the delegations of even its permanent members, "the Security Council lacks a collective memory and has a tendency to reinvent the wheel every time a crisis arises."38 Others have focused their attention on the UN Secretariat, particularly the DPKO, emphasizing recently instituted learning mechanisms such as Lessons Learned units and Best Practices sections.³⁹ In addition, while there remains disagreement about the UN's ability to learn from one peace operation to the next, there is also the pressing question of whether the UN is learning within each of its missions. In short, there remain numerous questions with regard to whether the UN is in fact learning about peacekeeping.

The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Between Rhetoric and Action

Despite the heightened salience of the concept of civilian protection in peace operations over the past decade, "the targeting of civilian populations has been a feature of international politics throughout history." Early international focus on this phenomenon resulted in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1949

deterrence and credibility in peacekeeping, see Fortna 2008. The *Brahimi Report* also stresses the importance of robust deterrent capabilities in peacekeeping.

³⁸ Findlay 2002, 352; Interviews with UN officials, March-April 2009.

³⁹ See Benner et al. 2007, pp. 23-36 and Benner and Rotmann 2008, pp. 45-54.

⁴⁰ Carpenter 2006, 2.

Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols in 1977. Yet even these early declarations had much more to do with ideas and ideals than with specific ways of putting them into practice. More recent endorsements of the POC concept have continued to emphasize its importance while avoiding the issue of how peace operations can and should protect civilian populations. On April 13, 1998, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan "addressed for the first time the protection of civilians in situations of conflict, calling it a 'humanitarian imperative.'" Over the next decade, the UN formally devoted increased attention to the issue.⁴² While civilian protection was certainly discussed in the preceding decades, it had not been the subject of such extensive UN focus, nor had it been a mandated peacekeeping task. UN Security Council Resolution 1296 (2000), for instance, first identified "the deliberate targeting of civilian populations" as a threat to international peace and security. 43 In 2002, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) first published an Aide Memoire on civilian protection, which served as a first attempt to establish basic protection guidelines. 44 In 2005, the Responsibility to Protect was endorsed at the World Summit (though "it proved impossible to find consensus language" at this momentous meeting). 45 By 2009, the UN Security Council affirmed the unequivocal importance of civilian protection in contemporary international peace operations: "the responsibility to protect – and now deliver – is an idea whose time has come. The alacrity with which public and

⁴¹ Security Council Report, "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Historical Chronology," January 30, 2009, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glkWLeMTIsG/b.4012209/.

⁴² Many have credited this heightened focus on POC to the Secretary-General himself as well as certain governments such as Canada. Together these interested parties served as "norm entrepreneurs," pushing the concept into the spotlight and ultimately seeking to garner international acceptance of what would become known as "The Responsibility to Protect" in 2001.

⁴³ Howard 2008, 338.

⁴⁴ Holt and Berkman 2006, 46.

⁴⁵ United Nations, A/63/677, 2009, 5.

civil society groups in every part of the world have embraced the responsibility to protect confirms this."46 In light of the many endorsements and affirmations made under the auspices of the UN, the past decade has seen a steadily growing international movement in support of the notion that the international community has a responsibility to protect civilians caught in the midst of armed conflict. Yet as many observers have been quick to point out, there remains a significant gap "between the rhetoric and reality of protection."47 While the international discussion on civilian protection and R2P has moved forward fairly rapidly, the fact that protection operations are actually being carried out in the field has often been overlooked. Many theoretical debates in IR often lead to ruminations regarding practical implications, but in the case of POC, the questions are not merely theoretical. As two astute observers have commented, "Even as policy debates over the "responsibility to protect" continue, military personnel today are already deployed worldwide in peace and stability operations with mandates to protect civilians sometimes in horrific circumstances. These forces need clear guidance."48 As long as the killing of civilians remains "the norm, not the exception,"⁴⁹ and as long as the UN continues to take on mandates involving protection responsibilities, practical considerations will urgently require enhanced focus from scholars and practitioners alike.

Because the mandated practice of protecting civilians in UN peace operations has had an extremely brief history to date, there remains a limited body of literature on the subject.⁵⁰ What has become apparent is that the lack of consensus at the international

⁴⁶ Ibid, 30.

⁴⁷Oxfam International 2008, 93.

⁴⁸ Holt and Berkman 2006, 55.

⁴⁹ Oxfam International 2008, 51.

⁵⁰ In late 1999, the UN peace operation in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was the first UN mission to explicitly authorize the protection of civilians. (In Holt and Berkman 2006, 85.)

level certainly has not helped the UN to operationalize the concept of POC or to implement POC mandates in the field. Over the past decade, however, the UN Security Council has authorized over a dozen peace operations mandated to "protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence."51 This number translates into more than one new POC mission mandate per year, underscoring the increasing need for clarification of the concept of protection and the UN approach to it. The debates over the legitimacy, legality and feasibility of R2P and POC will likely continue to evolve as the number and types of interventions increase in the years to come. In the meantime, "the 'doctrinal deficit' that currently exists when it comes to protection"⁵² needs to be addressed and more work needs to be devoted to the practice of POC. Specifically, the "hidden dangers" involved in diverging interpretations of UN protection mandates urgently need to be eradicated from current and future missions. Because precise POC guidelines and directions have been lacking. UN missions have been forced to clarify (or fail to clarify) the meaning and scope of protection in the field. And as various scholars and peacekeeping practitioners have made clear, without UN doctrine, "[c]ertainly the meaning of "protection" is not the same for everyone."53

The Use of Force in UN Peace Operations: Credibility and the Protection of Civilians

Unlike protection of civilians, the history of grappling with the idea of use of force in UN peacekeeping goes back to its inception. Traditional doctrine explicitly

⁵¹ Holt and Smith 2008, 1. Missions other than MONUC that have contained similar protection language include those in Haiti, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan. See Holt and Berkman 2006, 22.

⁵² Ibid, 36.

⁵³ Holt and Berkman 2006, 35; Interviews with UN officials, March-April 2009. See also Marks 2007, 68.

limited the use of deadly force by peacekeepers,⁵⁴ and the non-use of force except in self-defense remained one of the bedrock principles of UN peacekeeping over the decades. The logic behind this principle was of course to reduce threats to UN troops and personnel, as well as to remain neutral in the eyes of the beligerent groups in the host country. Chesterman notes that "[p]eacekeepers themselves have been inconsistent in their actual use of force, though by and large they have been extremely reticent about using any force at all." Overall, the UN has a checkered past with respect to resort to force in certain circumstances. Findlay argues that the actual use of force in UN peace operations has been largely "inconsistent and incoherent," involving "widespread confusion, both real and contrived, about whether peacekeepers are entitled to use force at all." Overall, the literature on the conditions required for effective use of force in peace operations remains inconclusive. In practice, the UN peacekeeping principle has expanded over the decades to embrace "impartiality" rather than strict neutrality, as blatant aggression from any spoiler should be suppressed wherever possible.

What has been less uncertain is evidence of a gradual shift from traditional peacekeeping to more robust UN peace operations. While the 2000 Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (better known as the Brahimi Report) insisted that "the United Nations does not wage war" and noted that peace enforcement is best left to coalitions of willing states, 58 there has nevertheless been a visible move toward what some have called "gray area" missions that fall somewhere in between peacekeeping and

⁵⁴ Penny 2007, 354.

⁵⁵ Chesterman 2004, 123.

⁵⁶ Findlay 2002, 355.

⁵⁷ Fortna and Howard 2008, 292.

⁵⁸ United Nations, *Report of the UN Panel on Peace Operations* [Brahimi Report] A/55/305 - S/2000/809, 2000, 26.

peace enforcement. As one source put it, "the old walls that initially segregated peace operations from war-fighting clearly have been crumbling."59 Much of the early distaste for robust peacekeeping authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter stems from the experience of the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC), the first UN mission in the Central African country. According to many sources, this early experiment with muscular peacekeeping led to a less than promising result: "the UN Secretariat and the member states were 'more interested in forgetting than in learning, more interested in avoiding future ONUCs than in doing them better." This early attempt thus colored the approach to UN peacekeeping for many years to come. As knowledge has accumulated, however, use of force again came into vogue in the post-Cold War era, first as peacekeeping doctrine expanded to include 'defence of the mandate' or the mission⁶¹ and more recently in efforts to effectively protect civilian populations. Chesterman and others have emphasized that "[a] key finding from surveying past operations is that, very often, the more willing and able an operation is to use force, the less likely it is to have to do so."62 Despite this useful notation in the peacekeeping literature, the UN's track record in using force is as inconsistent as its history in protecting civilians.

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⁵⁹ Holt and Berkman 2006, 30.

⁶⁰ Chesterman 2004, 105.

⁶¹ Penny 2007, 357. According to Penny, UN authorization of force beyond personal self-defence began with ONUC, the first UN mission in the Congo. In the case of ONUC, the mandate included the prevention of civil war in the Congo. As a result, the use of force was authorized to prevent civil war in the country. This "doctrinal expansion," which has remained "the conceptual basis for subsequent UN peacekeeping doctrine," means that self-defence is deemed to include situations wherein UN troops are impeded from carrying out their designated mandate. The use of force 'in defence of the mandate' is a controversial shift away from the traditional and narrowly defined notion of use of force in self-defence.

⁶² Chesterman 2004, 125.

A key finding of a 2004 workshop on POC suggested that UN Security Council mandates "do not authorize force robustly enough." Despite this conclusion, a number of UN peace operations are now authorized under Chapter VII of the Charter and peacekeepers are expected to use robust force in various situations. The lingering apprehension regarding the UN's actual use of force in peace operations, however, has translated into ambiguous understandings and oftentimes incoherent actions in the field. As Findlay suggests, "the possibility of misunderstandings and outright disagreements over the use of force is high." The evolution of "gray area" UN peace operations has thus resulted in a significant lack of clarity in terms of implementing robust protection mandates in the field. Observers have argued that all actors involved, including the DPKO, the UN Secretariat, troop contributing countries (TCCs), the Security Council and other UN members must work on creating unambiguous mandates and rules of engagement (ROE). ⁶⁵

The limited studies that have focused on UN peace operations engaged in protection activities suggest that the protection of civilians mandate requires consistency in approach and a muscular show of force in order to appear as a credible threat and deter would-be spoilers seeking to revert to violence if they think it feasible and likely to succeed. Despite the continued reluctance to engage in peace enforcement and the controversies that continue to be played out rhetorically, the UN has ultimately shown a willingness to engage in "grey area" missions since the end of the Cold War and the Congo is once again serving as a testing ground for robust peacekeeping. The results of these newer types of UN peace operations have not yet been comprehensively or

⁶³ Holt and Berkman 2006, 53.

⁶⁴ Findlay 2002, 355.

⁶⁵ Tull 2009, 227.

systematically evaluated and some of them are ongoing. After a decade of trial and error, however, it would seem due time to investigate whether the UN is learning in its efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict and put an end to widespread human suffering.

Conceptual Framework: A Constructivist Project

According to Howard and other IR scholars adopting and applying a constructivist approach, "[t]here has...been an important shift in the international role of the UN Secretariat: since the end of the Cold War, the Secretariat has begun to function as something of an international actor."66 While these scholars do not deny the influence of states in international politics, they recognize international organizations as independent actors in their own right. They suggest that the only approach to organizational learning that treats the UN as an independent actor is constructivism and as such it is the only IR lens that can be applied to examinations of learning within the UN. Skeptics would be quick to claim that ultimately the Security Council calls all of the shots for the intergovernmental organization (IGO), but this thesis points out that the Security Council is not in the field on a daily basis, ensuring that a peace operation is carried out effectively and immediately evaluating progress. As Howard argues, "While it is undoubtedly true that the Security Council is the ultimate decision-maker as to whether to create a peacekeeping mission, once this decision is made, no small amount of power is transferred to the Secretariat in order to specify and carry out that decision."⁶⁷ I take this statement as a starting point and examine the process that follows the "big

⁶⁶ Howard 2008, 339. See also Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Reus-Smit 2009, pp. 212-236; Checkel 1997, pp. 473-495.

⁶⁷ Howard 2008, 341.

decisions" made by the UN Security Council. Without denying the importance of power politics in IR, this thesis is primarily concerned with the central theme of constructivism, which Ruggie describes as "human consciousness and its role in international life." As Christian Reus-Smit points out, the rise of constructivism in the field has placed greater emphasis on "a more sociological, historical and practice oriented" brand of IR scholarship, ⁶⁹ one that often focuses on "process questions." Moreover, "only by assuming that international organizations have autonomy, albeit limited, can we allow for processes of organizational learning to take place." According to individuals employing this IR perspective, a constructivist lens is the most appropriate for studying international bureaucracies and peacekeeping activities in the field. Moreover, some constructivists tend to emphasize that all research enterprises involve interpretation, denying the suggestion that there is an objectively knowable world.⁷² Rather, our political world and the knowledge we have about it is socially constructed, complete with ambiguity, bias and uncertainty. Constructivist thinkers also take into account contingency and history in world politics, which may not always lead to parsimonious theories, but this does allow for an examination of the independent role of norms, ideas, identity, discourse and human agency. Constructivism is the logical choice over liberal institutionalism when examining OL because it does not give primacy to material structures, but rather holds that normative or ideational structures are just as important.⁷³ While liberal institutionalists recognize the importance of international institutions, they

⁶⁸ Quoted in Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 392.

⁶⁹ Reus-Smit 2009, 234.

⁷⁰ Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 394.

⁷¹ Benner et al. 2007, 18.

⁷² Finnemore and Sikkink 2001, 395.

⁷³ Reus-Smit 2009, pp. 220 & 230.

nevertheless hold the state as the key player in IR and rely on many of the key assumptions held by realists. Constructivists such as Barnett and Finnemore, on the other hand, show that IOs can gain autonomy and thus engage in international agenda-setting and action.⁷⁴ For these reasons, constructivism serves as the obvious candidate for the study of OL in the area of UN peacekeeping.

Studying organizational learning both within and between peace operations has obvious implications for advancing the understanding and practice of UN peacekeeping. Within the UN itself, evaluation and learning mechanisms were slow to develop. The organization carried on for decades without any formal learning mechanisms and experienced several major crises before significant attention turned to institutional memory and the international organization's capacity to learn. Benner et al. highlight "the dearth of knowledge within the UN about its track record on organizational learning. Scholarly work on this subject has also been notably lacking. Only recently have scholars in the fields of IR and peacekeeping begun examining the role of organizational learning in peace operations.

The UN's learning infrastructure only began to develop forty years after the organization's first experiment with blue helmets in 1956. This fact alone supports claims that the organization truly was not concerned with compiling lessons from experiences in the field for a considerable period of its history. Yet as has become

⁷⁴ Barnett and Finnemore 2004.

⁷⁵ Among the organization's major crises were the peace operation in Somalia which was ultimately aborted in 1993; the failure to intervene and stop the 1994 Rwandan genocide; the 1995 Srebrenica massacre; as well as a host of funding crises, sexual exploitation and abuse scandals and the oil-for-food scandal. The UN has certainly had its share of high-profile disasters, with the genocide in Rwanda receiving an unprecedented amount of worldwide attention, due perhaps to the scale of the slaughter and widespread acceptance of the event as "genocide."

⁷⁶ Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 5.

increasingly clear, "[c]ontinuous efforts to learn within and across missions can offer an important antidote to the ad-hocism that characterizes the day-to-day operations of peace-building" and other initiatives aimed at enhancing international peace and security.

Despite the need to tailor each mission to the unique aspects of the conflict and the specific environment, there is great value in improving the organization's ability to learn. As some observers have noted, highly uncertain environments increase the need for learning. Therefore, while some degree of ad-hocism in peace operations is to be expected (and some argue absolutely necessary), having learning mechanisms in place will ensure that each mission will not have to begin from square one. ⁷⁹

The UN's DPKO was only created in 1992, the same year that UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* was published. This early work was eventually overshadowed by the 2000 *Brahimi Report*, but it was the first significant and widely read call for UN reform to improve the organization's learning capacity. In April 1995, DPKO's Lessons Learned Unit was established, and as Benner et al. point out, "However small and understaffed, the unit was the first of its kind in the UN's peacebuilding bureaucracy." Eventually DPKO's Peacekeeping Best Practices Section (PBPS) was developed, and since then an array of name changes and amendments have taken place, suggesting steadily increasing focus on and interest in the UN's learning infrastructure. Thus, while this understudied and underfunded area of UN peacekeeping is finally receiving sorely needed attention and study, it is nonetheless in its early stages of development.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 4.

⁷⁸ Dodgson 1993, 387.

⁷⁹ Michael Barnett, for example, emphasizes the dangers of one-size-fits-all approaches to peacekeeping. (In Benner and Rotmann 2008, 58.)

⁸⁰ Benner et al. 2007, 25.

An Organizational Learning Model

An examination of the literature on organizational learning reveals an immediate challenge: determining how to distinguish it from individual learning. Many scholars who struggle with the concept conclude that OL "is still more akin to a metaphor than a clearly specified scientific concept usable for empirical research."81 Benner et al. argue that the process involved in organizational learning is inherently complex as well as nonobservable⁸² and Simon and Dodgson point to the fact that humans, not organizations, have brains, and hence the ability to learn lessons. Simon, however, cautions students of OL against "reifying the organization and talking about it as 'knowing' something or 'learning' something." Thus, some scholars have allowed organizational learning to simply serve as a metaphor or to accept that this "fuzzy" concept cannot be observed empirically. Popper and Lipshitz, on the other hand, suggest that despite the complexity and contextuality of OL, learning at the level of the organization can be observed in the form of organizational learning mechanisms (OLMs). As they suggest, "OLMs are institutionalized structural and procedural arrangements that allow organizations to learn."84 These authors point to after-action reviews as one example of integrated OLMs and thus contend that organizational learning can be directly observed through the development and use of such mechanisms. I would suggest that an improved method of ascertaining learning in an organization would require recognition of a dysfunction or lack of learning in the organization, followed by the implementation of OLMs or

⁸¹ Ibid, 21.

⁸² Ibid, 65.

⁸³ Simon 1991, 126.

⁸⁴ Popper and Lipshitz 2000, pp. 184-185.

measures to address this dysfunction, followed by the explicit use of such OLMs or measures in efforts to improve organizational performance. It would seem important to assess the utility and effectiveness of such OLMs before concluding that they exemplify institutional learning. As Susan A. Campbell remarks, learning is based more on interpreting the past than anticipating the future. Simply creating mechanisms that allow an organization to learn does not imply that the organization will in fact learn as a result. The process of applying past lessons must also be discernible to suggest OL.

Several OL scholars have emphasized the importance of social construction in the context of organizational learning. Easterby-Smith, for example, suggests that learning is understood to be both the process and outcome of social construction. ⁸⁶ Other scholars point specifically to shared norms and values as indicative of organizational learning ⁸⁷ and others still note that what makes learning possible at the organizational level is a shared culture or what Popper and Lipshitz refer to as organizational culture, as opposed to individual learning which does not necessarily include this social component.

Although such works suggest the need for continued research on the influence of norms and culture on the learning process, inclined IR scholars have consistently emphasized the lack of scholarly attention devoted specifically to IGOs in the context of organizational learning. ⁸⁸ Unfortunately for the purposes of this and other studies concerned with international organizations and IR, a great deal of the existing literature on organizational learning examines business organizations rather than IGOs ⁸⁹ and as such points to a need to investigate whether the factors that have been found to cause

85 Campbell 2008, 28.

⁸⁶ Easterby-Smith 1997, 1095.

⁸⁷ Dodgson 1993, 382.

⁸⁸ Wright 2003, 1.

⁸⁹ Benner et al. 2007, 19.

learning in business firms are the same as those influencing IGOs in conflict and peacekeeping settings.

Lise Morjé Howard provides one of the first attempts at understanding the impact of OL on peacekeeping. In concurrence with her work, this thesis builds on the assumption that organizational learning does matter and can contribute to successful UN peacekeeping. A number of recent studies of peacekeeping operations have also highlighted the importance or potential importance of OL on both processes and outcomes. 90 Howard's in-depth book-length study of the factors contributing to peacekeeping success stories is the first to point to the causal importance of organizational learning. Building on her findings about peacekeeping outcomes, this thesis seeks to uncover causally important factors influencing the process of organizational learning in the context of peace operations. Howard identifies four basic preconditions for organizational learning within a mission that contribute to a potential successful outcome. These are: 1) widespread mechanisms for collecting and analyzing information; 2) substantial coordination between different internal components of the UN mission and non-UN actors such as IGOs and NGOs; 3) the distribution and profile of the organization in the host country; and 4) strong leadership, even during periods of crisis. In addition, she uses three indicators for learning itself. These are: "mandate interpretation, altering the goals of the warring parties, and crisis management."91 Using Howard's indicators, I examine the process of learning in one of the conflicts that she

⁹⁰ See the following for analyses of how OL contributes to UN peacekeeping: Campbell 2008; Wright 2003; Benner and Rotmann 2008.

⁹¹ Howard 2008, 18,

omits in her case studies. ⁹² Howard notes that the UN may at times exhibit partial learning when some but not all of the components of learning are satisfied. As this thesis is primarily interested in what factors are driving the learning process, the stage of organizational learning is of less concern than what factors have caused it, but the stages of OL will nevertheless be explored briefly as well.

Key Terms

Organizational Learning

Most definitions of OL contain both a cognitive element (often described as acquisition of knowledge) and a manifestation of this element (often described as some form of change based on the new knowledge). Haas's simple definition "covers any organizational behavior involving self-reflection leading to change" while many others elaborate by specifying that such change tends to be manifested in the form of new rules, routines, procedures, strategies, structures and goals. Still others distinguish between organizational learning and a learning organization, but since this thesis is primarily concerned with first-level organizational learning, the question of its status as a learning organization will largely be left to future researchers. Giving this area a cursory glance, the UN appears to be a long way off from being recognized as a learning organization, although it has demonstrated a growing concern for second-level learning over the past two decades. Even the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section itself, however, recognizes

⁹² Howard does, however, claim that her general argument holds true for the ongoing UN peace operation in the DRC. Ibid, pp. 15-16.

⁹³ Haas 1990, 24.

⁹⁴ Howard 2008, pp. 15-16; Benner et al. 2007, 44.

that in terms of peacekeeping, "the bulk of the lessons-learning activity should be in the field." ⁹⁵

Norms

Finnemore and Sikkink's frequently used concise definition of a norm as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity", suits the purposes of this study, with respect to both the emerging R2P norm and the norms governing peacekeeping operations.

Peace Operations

Peace operations or peacekeeping will serve as umbrella terms encompassing everything from traditional peacekeeping to complex multidimensional peacekeeping to peacebuilding and robust peacekeeping, as is generally the case in the literature. Peace enforcement will be distinguished as something significantly different so as not to fall under the general label of 'peace operation.'

Terminology in the OL Literature

There appears to be significant disagreement over the use of some of the most common terms in the OL literature and this suggests the need for clarification as to usage. Howard, borrowing from Ernst Haas, identifies three stages of organizational learning or non-learning: learning, incremental adaptation (an intermediate stage) and organizational dysfunction (the opposite of learning). According to Howard, "organizational

⁹⁵ United Nations, A/62/593, 2007, 1.

⁹⁶ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891.

dysfunction has dominated the current picture. However, given that many of the successful multidimensional peacekeeping operations began in a state of organizational dysfunction, but later moved into learning modes and were eventually successful, there is cause for optimism." While Haas and Howard's classifications are fairly straightforward, other OL scholars offer slightly different understandings. For instance, Dodgson suggests that "learning is the highest form of adaptation".98 whereas others claim that "successful adaptation is contingent on effective learning." Barnett and Finnemore offer another slightly different understanding, noting that organizational change, which consists largely of revising existing rules, may be regarded as adaptation. ¹⁰⁰ As such, it would appear that there is some divergence in treatments of learning and adaptation. This thesis understands adaptation to be a form of organizational learning, though certainly not the highest form. Most OL scholars have deemed the highest form of learning to be learning that takes place when an organization questions the underlying principles upon which it is based. 101 Jack S. Levy refers to this form of learning as "complex learning" while Argyris and Schön call such higher-order learning "deuterolearning." 102 While OL scholars concede that learning in organizations is generally quite rare, this type of profound learning is even less common. Unlike some of the scholars writing on OL, I argue that adaptation is an important form of learning for the UN precisely because it is an organization consisting of a large bureaucracy—one where big decisions take significant periods of time to reach fruition. Moreover, because many

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⁹⁷ Howard 2008, 346.

⁹⁸ Dodgson 1993, 378.

⁹⁹ Popper and Lipshitz 2000, 189.

¹⁰⁰ Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 43.

¹⁰¹ Knight 2005, 30.

¹⁰² Levy 1994, pp. 279-312; Argyris and Schön 1978.

changes within the organization rest on uncertain or contested knowledge, huge changes could potentially be catastrophic (not to mention unrealistic for the most part). Thus, I include adaptation as a significant step in the process that leads to institutionalized learning, which Benner et al. describe as similar to Finnemore and Sikkink's three-stage process of norm influence in IR: 1) knowledge acquisition; 2) advocacy; and 3) institutionalization. In would insert adaptation as a process that comes before or concomitantly to the institutionalization of lessons learned. Because UN peacekeeping frequently involves collecting lessons from unique experiences in the field, adaptation is essentially the "learning in practice" that takes place before major lessons are institutionalized. Such adaptation or "tinkering" is arguably more significant than some authors have suggested.

Howard's study distinguishes between two types of learning which she identifies as first-level learning (intra-mission learning) and second-level learning (inter-mission learning). While recognizing the importance of both types of OL, she argues that learning within a mission is the most crucial type of learning in terms of reaching a successful outcome. Howard finds that "[i]n the field during a peacekeeping mission, members of the organization learn innumerable daily lessons" and that first-level learning in key areas will increase the likelihood of a successful mission outcome. Benner et al. suggest that first-level learning may be easier to achieve as it skirts a number of the difficulties encountered in institutionalizing best practices "across missions or into headquarters doctrine." Despite prospects for first-level organizational learning, many of the continued critiques of UN peacekeeping relate to claims that the organization is

¹⁰³ Benner et al. 2007, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Howard 2008, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Benner et al. 2007, 35.

still repeating the same mistakes and constantly reinventing the wheel. Such accusations have to do with knowledge retention and organizational memory. Future studies should focus on investigating the factors contributing to or hindering the institutionalization of lessons learned across UN peace operations, particularly as the number of operations with protection mandates continues to grow.

Studies that have examined the impact of failures or crises on OL offer mixed messages to OL scholars. While a negative event in itself may not be enough to cause or influence learning, some observers have noted the triggering effect that a crisis can have on OL. 106 In some cases, such as the UN's experience in Sierra Leone, an extreme crisis can bring about increased evaluation and thus greatly contribute to learning within a mission. 107 Yet as Howard points out, "each division of every peacekeeping mission will experience one or more important *crises*" [italics in the original], 108 but this does not imply that a crisis always results in a learning experience. Sitkin, on the other hand, emphasizes learning through failure and contends that failure is "an *essential* part of the learning process for organizations." 109 Thus, the role of crisis has yielded mixed results. Finally, some scholars have considered issues such as mislearning and difficulties in "unlearning" lessons from the past. Campbell notes that a lesson presumably learned may not in fact even be the right lesson 110 and it may also be the case that an organization simply does not appear to be learning when learning is in reality taking place. False

¹⁰⁶ Ulmer et al. 2007, 142.

¹⁰⁷ Benner et al. 2007, 43. In the case of Sierra Leone, according to these authors, a severe crisis which constituted "one of the UN's major humiliations," namely the capture of over 500 military personnel by a rebel group in May 2000, led to intra-mission learning which ultimately helped to stabilize both the UN operation and the country. See also Olonisakin 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Howard 2008, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Ulmer et al. 2007, 145.

¹¹⁰ Campbell 2008, 28.

learning, as March points out, "can lead to actions that compound an error rather than correct it." These examples alone highlight the many difficulties involved in the study of OL. Yet, as March insists:

Despite the difficulties, it is important to study the process of learning in organizations. Individuals try to make sense of their experience, even when that experience is ambiguous or misleading and even when that learning does not affect organizational actions. They impose order, attribute meaning, and provide explanations. ¹¹²

In the context of learning about learning in UN missions concerned with protecting vulnerable civilian populations, such attempts at providing meaning and explanations represent far more than simple intellectual exercises; they could help pave the way forward for the UN's ability to improve its capacity to protect civilians.

Methodology: Looking For Learning

This thesis hypothesizes that international norms and shared normative understandings (in the form of OLMs and their application) within UN peace operations influence learning in the field. While many scholars have been quick to point out how difficult it is to operationalize concepts such as organizational learning and protection of civilians, particularly as a result of diverging perceptions and interpretations, this thesis emphasizes the importance of perception and interpretation. Nevertheless, OL can be operationalized as the creation and application of a common set of tools and mechanisms to respond to acquired knowledge and lessons from the field. The concept of POC remains a challenge to define, but for the purposes of this thesis will not include a broad understanding of various aspects of human security but rather a more limited

¹¹¹ March 1988, 10.

¹¹² Ibid. 356.

understanding of civilians protected from egregious physical harm or loss of life. It must also be noted that UN peacekeepers simply cannot be *everywhere*, *all the time* without adequate resources, and as such organizational learning in the field will not be based on devising a means of protecting every single Congolese civilian at all times but instead devising a means of protecting civilians in the UN mission's area of operations.

In order to carry out the necessary research for this thesis, I relied on semi-structured in-depth interviews with MONUC officials, academics and NGO representatives. Quotations of interview respondents by name are used only with their permission. In addition, in order to fill in gaps in interview responses and to improve the process tracing in my research, I consulted primary and secondary source books, journal articles, newspaper articles, government records and UN publications. While the informal approach I adopted for interviews does not meet the rigid positivist standards of scientific objectivity, it was deemed the most appropriate approach for the type of research I was conducting where individual interpretations and understandings are part of the "peacekeeping picture." In other words, bias cannot be eliminated from interview accounts of respondents' own personal interpretations of events and as such it is possible only to look for similarities and note discrepancies.

Case Selection

While the UN mission in the DRC is one of the most complex and challenging missions to date, it does have a robust protection mandate comparable to some other UN peace operations. Thus, despite the extreme complexity of the case of MONUC, it does resemble other multidimensional UN missions grappling with the issues of the protection

of civilians and the use of force. This case can and should therefore serve as a model, both in terms what works and what does not, and where the UN is learning and where the UN is failing to learn lessons in the field. Specifically, this case has generalizability in terms of its robust protection of civilian mandate. Newer missions such as the UN peace operation in Darfur as well as older missions such as UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone can and should be compared with MONUC in future studies looking at OL and POC.

The lengthy duration of this mission and its evolving protection mandate also allow observers to examine how the mission has changed or progressed in response to international normative developments such as R2P. The nine-year time frame (2000-2009) also provides a significant period over which learning could have taken place. Change within the UN bureaucracy is oftentimes notoriously slow and peace operations rarely take place overnight. This case provides enough time for at least some learning to be observed.

The case of MONUC is also important in its own right as it holds the inglorious title of the UN mission that has suffered the most civilian casualties among the local population while deployed in a country. The mission has also lost a significant number of its own staff over the years. Moreover, the conflict in the DRC itself holds the title for most excess civilian deaths since World War II. The complexity of this case is evident in terms of the length of the conflict, the UN's past difficulties in the host country, involvement of external state and non-state military actors, the number of civilian deaths, and the many components of the UN peace operation that has been deployed to restore and maintain peace and security in the DRC.

¹¹³ A total of 152 fatalities among MONUC troops and personnel have been recorded. (United Nations, "Democratic Republic of the Congo – MONUC – Facts and Figures," http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/monuc/facts.html, Accessed December 7, 2009.)

Chapter 3: MONUC and the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Background to the DRC Conflict

The relatively undercovered and little understood conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not received the attention that many other humanitarian disasters of the past decade have been given. Largely ignored by the Western media, academics and policy makers alike, its complex humanitarian emergencies have remained mostly hidden from view, away from public consumption, contemplation and moral consideration. 114 Nevertheless, the DRC conflict is arguably the world's deadliest crisis, described by Refugees International as a "slow-motion holocaust." The scale of death, destruction and unimaginable horror for civilians has had few parallels in recent times. In fact, according to Virgil Hawkins, "The scale of the conflict in the DRC utterly dwarfs any other in the post-Cold War world."¹¹⁵ Yet this particular case is often curiously omitted from anthologies on modern conflict and peace operations. The complexity of this case study explains, to some extent, its omission in both academic and non-academic circles, but its complexity, fluidity and enormity in terms of the damage it has caused are what make it a case in urgent need of increased study. Hawkins makes an even more incisive case, claiming that "[t]he failure of the Western academic community to

¹¹⁴ Virgil Hawkins argues convincingly that the Congo conflict has not elicited a serious response from the world outside the region in *Stealth Conflicts: How the World's Worst Violence is Ignored*, 2008. While the atrocities committed in the Congo during the colonial period did eventually elicit significant international attention and much has been written on the first UN mission to the country in the immediate post-independence period, Hawkins notes that today one could be forgiven for not even knowing that a conflict currently exists in the DRC. Using its death toll as the key indicator of its scale, he goes on to provide a number of reasons why the Congo conflict has been largely ignored. Among his main reasons are lack of state interest, lack of geographic proximity to the West, identity factors, the use of frames, and no clearly defined "bad guys," among other explanations.

¹¹⁵ Hawkins 2008, 12.

adequately analyse the world's largest conflict since World War II...can only be described as collective academic negligence." ¹¹⁶ In short, the Congo conflict is comparatively massive and yet it has been largely ignored in academia.

The current conflict in the DRC cannot be examined without considering the country's colonial past and legacy and its virtually endless history of external interference, rape and brutality. When attempting to understand the historical origins of the violence that continues to plague the country today, many begin with King Leopold II of Belgium's decision to appropriate the Congo and rename it the Congo Free State in 1885. 117 While slavery and acts of barbarism were certainly practiced in the Congo before the king's appropriation of its territory, the scale of destruction and unspeakable crimes against humanity were massive during his time as the country's sovereign. 118 Under Leopold's rule, the Congolese were forced into labor in order to harvest ivory and rubber, both of which were abundantly available in the country. Under his rule and the brutal policies he implemented, the Congolese population also began their traumatizing journey into the realm of large-scale horror and victimization. It is believed that some 10 million Congolese, or half the population, were killed or died of disease and malnutrition during his tyranny from afar (Leopold never even set foot in his prized African colony). 119 By 1908, international public outcry over the atrocities committed during

¹¹⁶ Hawkins 2004, 9.

¹¹⁷ McCullum 2006, viii.

¹¹⁸ Disputing the myth of the "Noble Savage," Adam Hochschild comments that "[a]lthough some Congo peoples, like the Pygmies, were admirably peaceful, it would be a mistake to see most of them as paragons of primeval innocence. Many practiced slavery and ritual cannibalism and were as likely to make war on other clans or ethnic groups as people anywhere on earth." (In Hochschild 1998, 73.)

¹¹⁹ According to Hochschild, few officials kept statistics about African deaths during this time and Leopold was careful to destroy as much of the paper trail of what took place in his Congo Free State as possible. Moreover, the first territory-wide census took place long after the "rubber terror." As a result, "estimating the number of casualties today requires considerable historical detective work." Ibid, 233. Nevertheless, a

King Leopold's rule led Belgium to take authority over the colony, which subsequently became the Belgian Congo. This early experience in foreign intervention has had long-lasting reverberations that continue to be felt by the Congolese population today.

By the time the Congo achieved independence in 1960, it was almost immediately swallowed up in disorder and violence which once more involved foreign interventions in the new country, first on the part of the Belgians, and soon after on the part of the UN, and ultimately involving the playing out of Cold War rivalries on Congolese soil. When the Congolese population asserted its desire for self-determination forcefully enough to convince its most recent colonizers to acquiesce in 1960, the Belgians left the newly independent Congolese state in a precarious position. Simply put, the Congolese were, through no fault of their own, highly unprepared for self-government. For instance, at the time of independence, only 15 Congolese citizens were university graduates. ¹²⁰ The Congo lacked native doctors and professionals in virtually every field. The new state was consequently extremely tenuous and unstable, which was the unavoidable result of a long history of colonization and Congolese exclusion from governance and public life. Thus, even with the arrival of independence, the Belgians maintained administrative and technical control over much of the country. It was not long before revolt broke out, however, specifically in a number of military camps with mixed white and Congolese soldiers. As Souaré puts it, "[t]his revolt was the starting point of the whole affair," and the country unsurprisingly soon fell into a state of chaos, thus prompting the Belgians to return unilaterally, with the pretext of restoring law and order and protecting remaining

number of authoritative estimates suggest that the population was cut in half. One of the motivations for the first census was in fact Belgian concern over the dwindling numbers of Congolese in the country.

120 Reno 2006, 45.

Belgian nationals. 121 The UN was eventually called on to assist the fledgling Congolese government, and in the summer of 1960, the UN responded to the Congo crisis with extraordinary speed. Congolese officials requested military support and sought to have the invading Belgian forces expelled from its territory. Within four days of the July 14 Security Council resolution authorizing the mission, 3,000 UN peacekeeping troops had arrived, and 10,000 were deployed within three weeks. 122 At its peak strength, the UN force consisted of more than 20,000 officers and men, with most of its troops coming from African countries. 123 While the UN eventually implemented its mandated tasks and withdrew in 1964, the experience left the organization deeply traumatized. Although ONUC supported the Congolese militarily, prevented civil war and achieved the withdrawal of outside forces including the Belgians and foreign mercenaries, it paid a high price in terms of UN personnel casualties and in terms of its decision to depart from the traditional UN peacekeeping principle of non-use of force except in self-defence in taking on an enforcement role. 124 Moreover, despite its highly qualified successes, this mission ended with the notable deaths of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, whose plane crashed under mysterious circumstances in September 1961 while he was on official UN business in the Congo, and the country's first democratically elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, who was assassinated with suspected Belgian and American involvement. The mission was thus extremely costly in terms of lives lost as well as the \$400 million it cost to run ONUC for four years. Perhaps most important of all, however, this early UN stint in the Congo, about which much has been written, had a deep impact

¹²¹ Souaré 2006, pp. 93 & 94.

¹²² Roessler and Prendergast 2006, 230.

¹²³ United Nations, n.d., 2.

ONUC experienced 250 fatalities. United Nations, "Republic of the Congo – ONUC: Facts and Figures," http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/onucF.html, Accessed June 27, 2009.

on the international organization, significantly coloring the approach adopted in future UN missions. The experience also taught the UN that the sprawling Central African country, the third largest on the continent, was a particularly hostile environment for peace operations. In terms of the country's immense size, geography, climate, weak or nonexistent state infrastructure and institutions in some regions, hundreds of ethnic groups and prized natural resources, then as now, the Congo has not served as an ideal environment for a UN peacekeeping mission. Nevertheless, a 1968 publication eerily foreshadowed events to come four decades later, noting that "the dominant factor in the history of the Congo since independence has been that of foreign intervention, and the nature of this intervention is always changing." This forecast has proven true, and the interventions have continued into the post-Cold War era.

Following the post-independence crisis and the UN intervention, the Congo experienced a three-decade period of stability – or rather, a false sense of stability during which time the country's newest leader, Mobutu Sese Seko, gradually drove the Congo's state institutions and economy to a point of total collapse. While this would seem to be an instance of homegrown misrule, the Mobutuist state was permitted to exist for 32 years because of U.S. support. By 1990, however, the end of the Cold War meant the end of international aid to Zaire (as the country was known from 1971 to 1997). Before the country had a chance to completely implode on its own, however, external factors would yet again spark upheaval within its territory. The 100-day genocide in neighboring Rwanda beginning in April 1994 had a profound effect on Zaire, and while the genocide and its consequences did not cause the crisis in the country and the surrounding region, it

¹²⁵ Gott 1968, 1.

did serve as a catalyst. ¹²⁶ The effects of the massive influx of over one million Rwandan Hutu into eastern Zaire following the slaughter of an estimated 800,000 ethnic Rwandan Tutsi are still being felt today. Because the complex emergency was not sufficiently addressed in the late 1990s, perpetrators of the genocide remained in neighboring Zaire/the DRC for 15 years, and thousands of the Rwandans who fled their homes continue to hunt and terrorize the Congolese civilian population today. Furthermore, the failure to remove these refugees in the 1990s has given Zaire/the DRC's African neighbors a convincing pretext for invading the country on numerous occasions since 1994. Ultimately, the international community's unwillingness to deal with the problem near the end of the decade would reveal that instead of simply disappearing, problems of this magnitude tend to grow and transform, eventually becoming deeply entrenched. Following the early lessons of ONUC and the complications involved in UN peace enforcement in the 1960s, this lesson of the 1990s would clearly illustrate the dangers of failing to act.

The Congo Wars (1996-1997 and 1998-2002)

While there were talks of a humanitarian rescue mission to defuse the crisis in eastern Zaire following the genocide and a Canadian-led mission was briefly established in late 1996 to do just that, the international community ultimately balked at the idea of sending in help, recognizing the enormity of the refugee problem and the extreme challenges that an intervention force would certainly face. As one observer noted in reference to the current crisis in the DRC, "The gravity of the crisis, located at the

¹²⁶ Prunier 2009, xxxi.

¹²⁷ See Adelman 2001 and Hennessy 2001.

crossroads of most regions of the continent, made it impossible to ignore, yet the complexity of the conflict dynamics and the failure of the state made it one of the most daunting cases for intervention." This was already true in 1996, before the two Congo Wars, and it became increasing challenging to imagine a feasible let alone successful international intervention after that point. Thus, Central Africa was left to sort out its own monumental problems during the mid- and late 1990s. For Zaire, this meant a welcome rebellion that led to the overthrow of President Mobutu in May of 1997. Many saw these events in Zaire, which was renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo by its new leader, Laurent Kabila, as a sign of hope for a new Africa, one where "African solutions" were found for "African problems." The West, particularly the United States, welcomed Kabila and bade farewell to the country's Cold War "dinosaur," Mobutu, who was dying of prostate cancer and had lost international favor. The Zairian population was also overwhelmingly supportive of Mobutu's ousting, despite the fact that this was quite simply an invasion with a "Zairian face." Western nations even downplayed the unknown numbers of massacred Hutu refugees who had been targeted by the Rwandasponsored rebels sweeping across Zaire in 1996 and 1997. The United Nations was prevented by the rebel movement from completing investigations into these massacres, and the UN team left the country in 1998, its work unfinished. 130 Sadly, Kabila and his assembled rebel movement, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), had relied heavily on support from his neighbors, and when he attempted to distance himself from his Rwandan and Ugandan allies and adopt an autonomous stance, they invaded the country a second time in August 1998, aiming to replace him

¹²⁸ Marks 2007, 68.

¹²⁹ Turner 2007, 5.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 2.

with someone more malleable. 131 Both Rwanda and Uganda had legitimate security concerns, as they shared extremely porous borders with eastern Zaire. Rwanda's leader Paul Kagame in particular had expressed concerns over violent Hutu incursions into Rwanda from refugee camps across the border prior to the first invasion. Many observers eventually came to understand that the ex-FAR and the Interahamwe, the perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, were in essence rebuilding in the Zairian camps while being shielded by Mobutu, who sided with and supported the Hutus. Thus, while the two countries had veritable security issues to consider when they first launched their invasion in Zaire, once they had a leader they supported propped up next door, they expected him to serve their interests. The one-year "honeymoon period" with Laurent Kabila unfortunately did not last, however, and when he began asserting his independence, his former supporters turned against him and initiated a new round of conflict, with the dust from the first war barely settled. This second war, which some observers have referred to as "Africa's first world war" because of the number of countries eventually involved, overtook much of Africa and created a far more complex, multidimensional crisis. 132

Following the Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi interventions, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and to a lesser extent Chad and Sudan intervened on behalf of the Kabila government. This intervention was explicitly launched as a regional peace enforcement operation, codenamed "Operation Sovereign Legitimacy," under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). ¹³³ In reality, many of the countries involved had either significant security interests or a strong economic motivation—or

¹³¹ Ibid, 92.

¹³² Madeleine Albright, then America's secretary of state, most famously used this description. "Central Africa: Bloody History, Unhappy Future," *The Economist*, January 22, 2009, http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=12970793.

¹³³ Coleman 2007.

both—for being in the DRC. 134 Renton et al. argue that the real reason for the war in the Congo was economic, noting that "Rwanda and Uganda conducted the great part of the mineral exploitation in the Congo."135 Most recent commentators have remarked that many of the participating African countries had more than one motivation, and that motives may have changed over time. Thus, while Rwanda invaded the DRC for security purposes, it quickly took up resource exploitation, along with a number of the other countries involved, including most notably Zimbabwe, which signed on to lucrative extraction deals almost immediately. The Congo's resource curse, while nothing new, added an economic dimension to the conflict, which many argue convincingly began to fuel it. While King Leopold II's Congo was already a cash cow, the country's territory has since been found to contain "large quantities of copper, cobalt, gold, diamonds and other minerals, massive hydroelectric potential, oil, fertile lands, and dense forests."136 In short, the country remains an immensely rich source of natural resources, one which experts have said gives the DRC the potential to be the "breadbasket of Africa." For the time being, the country's resources continue to serve largely as a curse rather than a blessing, adding to the ongoing violent exploitation and leaving the Congolese population poor and hungry. While at one point up to fourteen foreign armies were implicated in the fighting on Congolese soil, ¹³⁸ the Lusaka ceasefire agreement was signed on July 10, 1999 by the major players, namely the DRC, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Uganda. Although this did not end the fighting and numerous other agreements were to

¹³⁴ For analyses of the regional dynamics of the DRC conflict, see John F. Clark, ed. 2004 and Prunier 2009.

¹³⁵ Renton et al. 2007, 194.

¹³⁶ Englebert 2006, 54.

¹³⁷ Gambino 2008, 24.

¹³⁸ Autesserre 2009, 257.

follow in the years to come, Lusaka signaled that the DRC was ready for a UN peace operation to enter the picture. A year after this first peace agreement was reached, the IRC estimated that 1.7 million Congolese had died since the beginning of Africa's "world war," in addition to an unknown death toll from the preceding Congo War. 139

The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known as MONUC (its French acronym), was established on November 30, 1999 as an observer mission. Over a decade later, the mission remains in the DRC, but it has undergone numerous changes over the years. Congo scholars have insisted that an understanding of the volatility in eastern DRC today requires an understanding of the country's historical roots. 140 As this brief overview of the Congo's history suggests, the country has been in a virtually endless state of crisis since it came into existence, and the theme of intervention or outside interference has been strong throughout. The "paradox of plenty" has also been a theme from the reign of King Leopold to the 1960s crisis to today's plundering of the country's many valuable minerals and natural resources. The Congolese population has been described as "traumatized" by numerous observers, and the country itself is reported to be one of the most troubled spots on earth. Enter MONUC, and "what is arguably the most complicated and ambitious post-Cold War experiment in the creation of peace from chaos with fairly modest resources."¹⁴¹ In terms of what the UN had ostensibly learned about peace operations in the Congo up until this point, the organization's first potential learning experience in the country—ONUC revealed just how tough and risky robust peacekeeping was, even with significant U.S.

¹³⁹ Hawkins 2008, 1; French notes that although the death toll in the Congo is indisputably huge, it remains and will remain the subject on ongoing debate for the foreseeable future. See French 2004, 141.

¹⁴⁰ Malan and Gomes Porto, eds. 2004, Introduction.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

interest and financial backing. As a result of inaction in response to the humanitarian crisis in eastern Zaire in 1996 and on, the UN would once more come to see the results of failing to act when confronted with a highly explosive situation.

MONUC (1999-2003)

The UN mission in the Congo did not get off to an impressive start. Beginning as a tiny observer mission, little was expected of MONUC and very little was achieved. The limited interests of the five permanent members of the Security Council in adequately dealing with the conflict constrained what the mission was capable of doing from the onset, thus hindering its effectiveness. While African countries proposed a force of 15,000 to 20,000 peacekeepers, Resolution 1279 (1999) authorized only 500 UN military observers. 142 Calling on the Security Council for swift action in response to this African crisis were Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. China also urged the Council to act in Africa as it had in Kosovo and East Timor. 143 France suggested that even 10,000 troops would be sufficient to address the conflict. Taylor and Williams decry the number that was ultimately agreed upon as "nothing short of shambolic." ¹⁴⁴ It was widely felt that the mandate was entirely insufficient to deal with the task at hand. In addition, troop deployment was delayed for years. While no single explanation for the lack of enthusiasm in New York for a major UN intervention has been offered, critics at the time argued that the Congo conflict should receive comparable attention to the conflict in Bosnia. Yet some scholars have pointed out that humanitarian policies for Africa are altogether different from humanitarian policies for the rest of the world. A sad but

¹⁴² Marks 2007, 69.

¹⁴³ Gray 2008, 300.

¹⁴⁴ Tayler and Williams 2001, 282.

possible explanation for the failure to act robustly and rapidly could have been that "[b]lack-on-black violence in Africa...holds little in the way of ties based on identity for actors in the Western world, thereby failing to spark or sustain interest." ¹⁴⁵ Memories of the failed Somalia intervention likely further cemented reluctance to act on the part of the international community and the Clinton administration in particular. The collective guilt following the West's inaction in response to the Rwandan genocide has also been identified as one reason why Rwanda was permitted to invade and occupy its neighbor. Early American experience with ONUC may also have added to apprehension on the part of the Clinton administration to intervene in such a complex and likely "messy" conflict to resolve. Whatever the reasons behind the reluctant international response to the Congo crisis, it is clear that strategic interest in a large and muscular Congo mission was lacking, and as a result, by April 2000, the UN had deployed only 111 UN military men in eastcentral Africa¹⁴⁶ and by the end of 2000 only 224 military observers and staff officers were deployed in the Congo and its surroundings. 147 This first phase of the mission revealed that "The United Nations...had little option but to make the attempt, regardless of how well- or ill-equipped it was for the task. The inescapable truth was that no other actor, whether state or international organization, was either willing or able to do so."148 Constrained by the lack of political will on the part of the international community, the UN Secretariat was essentially impotent at this point in its efforts to solve the Congo problem. Despite the endorsement of Resolution 1291 on February 24, 2000, whereby the Security Council authorized the expansion of MONUC and made explicit reference to

¹⁴⁵ Hawkins 2008, 192.

¹⁴⁶ Turner 2007, 158.

¹⁴⁷ Roessler and Prendergast 2006, 266.

¹⁴⁸ MacOueen 2002, 96.

protection of civilians for the first time, the mission simply did not have the resources to carry out the tasks it was authorized to complete as a Chapter VII mission.

Part of the reason for the significantly delayed deployment of troops was the result of non-cooperation from Congolese President Laurent Kabila. As Norrie MacQueen notes, "The freedom of movement throughout the country essential to their proper functioning was denied to MONUC observers as it had earlier been to the liaison officers." Kabila's assassination in January 2001 by one of his own bodyguards and replacement by his son, Joseph Kabila, smoothed relations between the UN and the Congo. Thus, in February 2001, the UN began actually deploying civilian and military personnel to the troubled country. Two months later, however, Kofi Annan announced that "MONUC has neither the mandate nor the means to ensure the safety of the civilian populations." The size and population of the Congo compared to the size and mandate of MONUC did not add up. The mandate's reference to civilian protection had, however, created expectations among the Congolese population and interested observers that were not being met.

The situation in the DRC following the 1999 Lusaka ceasefire agreement was for several years virtually indistinguishable from the situation beforehand. Although the agreement included the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Congolese territory, Rwanda and Uganda in particular remained active through their respective proxy rebel groups, the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC), as well as their various splinter groups. By early 2000, fighting between factions had already resumed in various parts of the DRC. MacQueen points to

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 92.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 219.

¹⁵⁰ Le Pape 2004, 214.

what had become "the apparently permanent warfare in parts of the country" despite a peacekeeping presence. The frequent characterization of the conflict as a civil war was therefore inaccurate, as the foreign presence was a key factor in the continued fighting for years to come. Certainly there was an internal dimension to the conflict, but the regional meddling was significant, despite Rwandan and Ugandan efforts to downplay their involvement. Thus, after the two dramatic Congo Wars, the Congo—specifically eastern DRC—settled into a prolonged period of low-scale warfare. While the names of rebel groups and their various alliances changed fairly often, and while the dynamics shifted over time, the suffering of the Congolese population was constant. Although the UN's actual presence in the country was only felt much later, "[t]he Security Council gradually abandoned its silence on violation of human rights and pillage" and sent in troops to stifle the violence. The suffering of the Congolese population was constant.

The 2002 Kisangani Crisis

On May 14, 2002, massacres took place in Kisangani, the third largest city in the DRC, and the UN failed to intervene. This was the first major incident where MONUC forces were on the ground with a mandate to protect civilians where they failed to do so. The strategically located and diamond-rich city in northern Congo became the site of human rights abuses and war crimes after a localized mutiny culminated in a massacre of civilians. The mutiny, led by mid-level officers of the Rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma (RCD-Goma), involved the takeover of a local radio station and calls for the Congolese population to kill Rwandans and Congolese of Rwandan origin. RCD-

¹⁵² MacOueen 2006, 232.

¹⁵³ Turner 2007, pp. 157-158.

¹⁵⁴ Caravannis 2003, 245.

Goma, one of Rwanda's proxy rebel groups in the Congo, was not supported by the majority of the local population. For its part, the Rwandan army denied playing a role in the May 2002 crisis in Kisangani. 155 Interestingly, Laurent Nkunda, an individual who was to feature prominently in future crises in the Congo, was a central player in the killings in Kisangani in 2002. The RCD-Goma forces suppressed the revolt with little difficulty, and subsequently proceeded to beat and rape civilians and loot a number of homes. Over 180 people were killed in the rebel group's assault on the mutineers and suspected sympathizers. The Kisangani massacres took place despite the presence of dozens of MONUC observers and roughly 1,000 soldiers. According to Human Rights Watch, MONUC's capacity was a significant issue at this time and the mission's deputy force commander Brigadier-General Roberto Martinelli was concerned about MONUC casualties. 156 Thus, although UN troops were in this instance deployed in the area and they were informed of the crisis and the killings taking place, MONUC did not actively or forcefully attempt to suppress the attacks. There remained at this time concerns over the mission's resources as well as ostensible confusion regarding the civilian protection clause in the mission's mandate. According to Marks, "reports of the events in Kisangani apparently led to the first discussions in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations...on the meaning of civilian protection."157 While the R2P concept became available for international public consumption in 2001, the practice of the responsibility had not received significant attention. Not surprisingly, one month after the Kisangani crisis, UN Resolution 1417 (2002) reaffirmed MONUC's mandate to "protect civilians

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch 2002, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 23

¹⁵⁷ Marks 2007, 71.

under immediate threat of physical violence."¹⁵⁸ Clearly, the normative pressures to protect civilians and prevent large-scale massacres were significant, despite the extremely limited UN capacity at this time. It would take years, however, for the organization to move towards a clarification of what exactly this meant and how such a mandate might be implemented.



Figure 1: Map of MONUC (UN Department of Field Support)

¹⁵⁸ Mansson 2005, 507.

The 2003 Ituri Crisis and Operation Artemis

By April 2003, despite a December 2002 authorized increase in MONUC's troop ceiling of up to 8,700 personnel, there were only around 4,700 MONUC troops on the ground. This did not bode well for Uganda's planned withdrawal from Bunia, the capital of Ituri district in northeastern Congo. Many observers of this particular pocket of conflict or "war within a war" warned ahead of time that such a withdrawal would leave a sizeable security vacuum, which is precisely what happened. Once Uganda's 7,000 troops withdrew from Bunia and the DRC in accordance with the Luanda agreement on May 6, all hell broke loose. 159 MONUC briefly attempted to gain control of the town of Bunia, but swiftly gave up and abandoned its mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat. Although aware of the potential for disaster in Ituri, the UN "had only ten military observers in the region in 2002 and little solid intelligence even though it had known since 2001 that the situation was 'highly explosive.'"160 Uganda's presence in Ituri, based primarily on resource extraction, had heightened tribal tensions between two main ethnic groups, the Hema, mainly pastoralists, and the Lendu, mainly settled agriculturalists and hunters. 161 Conflict between the groups had in fact been stoked for years, with grievances based primarily on land and resource control, though these issues often took on an ethnic character. President Mobutu had played the two groups against one another, creating tribal rivalries which are said to have resembled the Tutsi-Hutu ethnic conflict next door. 162 Bryan Mealer, one of the few Western journalists covering the Ituri conflict from the field in 2003, notes that beginning in 1999, "the Lendu

¹⁵⁹ Ulriksen et al. 2004, 511.

¹⁶⁰ Marks 2007, 72.

¹⁶¹ Roessler and Prendergast 2006, 241.

¹⁶² According to Bryan Mealer (2008), Mobutu always favored the Hema, and this alienated the Lendu.

assembled their warriors and staged vigilante raids against Hema in the region, killing some ten thousand people in eighteen months...[o]ver the next several years, the number of slaughtered Hema and Lendu civilians exceeded fifty thousand."¹⁶³

By May 2003, the slaughter finally began to register on the international humanitarian emergency radar as Lendu militias hunted down and murdered Hema civilians in Ituri. On May 16, facing the unfolding disaster in Ituri and claims that ethnic cleansing or even genocide was taking place in Bunia, the Security Council endorsed the Secretary-General's appeal for an emergency interim force. 164 Within less than a month. a French-led (and predominantly French) International Emergency Multinational Force (IEMF), codenamed Operation Artemis, was formally launched by the European Union Council. 165 The IEMF deployed with a Chapter VII mandate authorizing the use of force to protect civilians – one that it was equipped and prepared to implement. The temporary emergency EU force produced quick results and had the requisite willingness to use force when necessary and, as Marks points out, it "appeared to have set the example for carrying out a true Chapter VII operation in the DRC."166 While many called Operation Artemis a success, this was qualified success. The IEMF was limited in geographic scope and duration. The mission was restricted to the town of Bunia in the Ituri district and it had a strict exit date. Moreover, it had the advantage being able to rely on the groundwork already laid out by the UN mission. Nevertheless, it showed the UN what robust action could achieve. In response to Artemis, the Security Council increased the UN mission's military strength to 10,800 and authorized MONUC to use all necessary

¹⁶³ Mealer 2008, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Ulriksen et al. 2004, 512.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 512.

¹⁶⁶ Marks 2007, 73.

means to fulfill its mandate in Ituri and North and South Kivu – the most troubled spots in the DRC. On September 1, 2003, Artemis was replaced by a MONUC brigade of 2,500 troops with a robust mandate. ¹⁶⁷ The new Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), William Swing, decided to redeploy 80 percent of MONUC's troops to eastern Congo, the region where most of the violence was being played out. Many observers agree that it was not until this point that MONUC "had the means to take seriously its mandate to protect civilians under the imminent threat of attack." ¹⁶⁸ In fact, many mistakenly claim that MONUC only acquired a Chapter VII mandate in mid-2003. In reality, the mission was always designated as a Chapter VII mission, but it did not acquire the means or "teeth" to carry out the mandate until much later.

The 2004 Bukavu Crisis

Despite the lessons of Ituri, MONUC again encountered trouble that it was not prepared for in May 2004 when renegade soldiers, led by Laurent Nkunda, ¹⁶⁹ seized the city of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province in the east of the country. ¹⁷⁰ Following clashes with transitional government troops, the renegade soldiers captured and held the town of Bukavu "from June 2 to June 9, leaving several hundred people dead and sending more than 30,000 Congolese fleeing into Burundi and Rwanda." ¹⁷¹ When the crisis struck, MONUC had only 600 troops in Bukavu. The armed rebels

¹⁶⁷ Gray 2008, 337.

¹⁶⁸ Roessler and Prendergast 2006, 260.

¹⁶⁹ It is worth noting that Nkunda was a central figure in the Kisangani crisis of 2002, the Bukavu crisis of 2004 and the most recent crisis in North Kivu province in 2008. Nkunda was finally arrested by his previous backer, Rwanda, on January 22, 2009, amidst Rwanda's efforts to repair diplomatic relations with the DRC government.

¹⁷⁰ Mealer 2008, 60.

¹⁷¹ Evans 2004.

consisted of between 2,000 and 3,000 men. Following the fall of Bukavu, there were riots throughout the DRC directed at both MONUC and the transitional Congolese government, and the mission was tainted with a general sense of failure. According to one observer, "[t]he UN mission's behavior appeared impotent and naïve." MONUC was widely and harshly criticized for the 2004 crisis. A report released by the Department of Peacekeeping's Best Practices Unit shortly after the crisis concludes:

MONUC's failure to use force during the Bukavu crisis smeared the Mission with the taint of impotence and cowardice. It made UN military and civilian personnel objects of contempt to the Congolese people they were supposed to be helping. It emboldened enemies of MONUC and of the Transition.¹⁷⁴

While MONUC was criticized for its insufficient deployment in Kisangani in 2002 and Ituri in 2003, the mission was criticized primarily for its inaction in Bukavu. In response to yet another damaging crisis, MONUC was again given a stronger mandate and additional troops. However, when the Secretary-General asked the Security Council "to increase MONUC's troop ceiling from 10,800 to 23,900" in August 2004, this was more than the Council was willing to accept. To On October 1, Resolution 1565 (2004) redefined MONUC's mandate and mission, strengthening both. This resolution authorized an increase of MONUC's strength by 5,900 personnel and gave the green light for troops to use the necessary force to undertake almost all of its mandated tasks, including civilian protection.

¹⁷² Prunier 2009, 298; United Nations Peacekeeping Best Practices, "MONUC and the Bukavu Crisis 2004," March 2005. Riots in the capital, Kinshasa, can be explained by the large population from the Kivu provinces living there. Moreover, perceptions of MONUC have been shown to differ within the country, with more hostile views of the UN coming from the west.

¹⁷³ Evans 2004.

¹⁷⁴ Traub 2006, 340.

¹⁷⁵Roessler and Prendergast 2006, 293.

¹⁷⁶ Zeebroek 2008, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Mansson 2005, 514.

According to former SRSG William Lacy Swing, "We at MONUC have pushed the Chapter VII envelope further than perhaps any other mission." Indeed, the UN in the Congo has a history of robust mandates, beginning with ONUC, and this strengthening made MONUC one of the UN's most muscular missions as well as something of a test case in terms of how to implement a robust operation on the ground. In addition, the mission's capacities and operations were transformed. But of course a peace operation's mandate may not correspond closely with the manner in which it is interpreted and executed. Nevertheless, the more combat-ready Pakistani and Indian peacekeepers replaced the Uruguayans in North and South Kivu and a major-general, Patrick Cammaert, was nominated to command the entire eastern division of peacekeepers." After three major crises, the mission began to receive the mandate it had necessitated for over four years.

MONUC (2004-2008)

Although some UN officials distinguish between the phases of MONUC using pre-Artemis and post-Artemis categories, Marks divides the mission into two slightly different periods: 2000-2004 (the more passive phase) and 2005 and on (a more active phase). While Operation Artemis did mark a turning point for the mission, only in 2005 did it adopt a truly robust approach. Moreover, MONUC's reputation was said to improve significantly, especially after 2005. In February 2005, UN officials in the field did begin to interpret the mission's mandate more robustly, particularly in Ituri,

¹⁷⁸ Internal UN document 2007.

¹⁷⁹ Telephone interview with UN official, March 27, 2009.

¹⁸⁰ Marks 2007, 75.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Zeebroek 2008, 17.

where UN troops went on the offensive following an ambush which left nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers dead. 183 The new deputy force commander, Major General Patrick Cammaert, was also deployed in early 2005. He envisioned a more muscular approach to operations and had a reputation as a strong leader. Cordon and search operations, forcibly demilitarizing zones and killing militiamen all became part of MONUC's new approach. According to Holt and Berkman, "[flrom early 2005, MONUC conducted some of the most aggressive actions by blue-helmeted forces in recent memory."¹⁸⁴ Though the mission was criticized for allegedly retaliating in response to the 2005 ambush when UN troops from Nepal, Pakistan and South Africa engaged in significant combat with rebels, leaving 50 to 60 Front for National Integration (FNI) militia members dead, 185 its robust actions did achieve results. By June of 2005, MONUC had disarmed roughly 15,000 fighters in the region. Lambert suggests that MONUC's "newfound toughness" was a combination of "soul-searching, a change in leadership and shrewd deployments." 186 Others argue that the Bukavu crisis taught MONUC that its reputation could not withstand another major failure. In the words of one mid-level UN official, "The lesson was: Bukavu shall not happen again." Whatever the precise combination of factors contributing to this shift in approach, there was a discernible new emphasis on robust operations. In light of the headway made in these robust operations, in March 2005 the Security Council explicitly gave MONUC troops authorization to

Lambert, "UN Steps Up Peace Efforts in Congo ahead of April Vote," *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 30, 2006, http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0130/p04s01-woaf.html?s=widep.

¹⁸⁴ Holt and Berkman 2006, 165.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Lambert, "UN Steps Up Peace Efforts in Congo ahead of April Vote," *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 30, 2006, http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0130/p04s01-woaf.html?s=widep.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with UN official in New York, March 20, 2009.

engage in coercive tactics, specifically with the aim of countering armed groups and protecting civilians.¹⁸⁸

The 2008 Eastern Congo Crisis: A Robust Approach to Civilian Protection

The most recent crisis in the DRC took place in late August 2008 when the latest peace agreement between the Congolese government and a major rebel group, the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), Laurent Nkunda's new armed group, broke down in North Kivu province. Up until this point, MONUC had been involved in numerous offensives in several conflict-ridden provinces in eastern Congo, especially in Ituri and North and South Kivu. In January 2006, for example, MONUC had launched "a sensitive and high-risk operation" against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Garamba national park, in the far northeast of the country near the border with Sudan. Eight Guatemalan soldiers were killed during the operation. Other robust operations had met with varying degrees of success, and the overall trend continued to move in the direction of a muscular approach when dealing with armed rebel assaults. On the political front, the Congolese population concluded its first democratic elections in 40 years when it elected Joseph Kabila as its new president and the UN mission was now playing a supporting role to the DRC government and the Congolese army.

Following August 28, 2008, when the Goma peace agreement essentially disintegrated, MONUC resorted to robust measures, "including the use of attack helicopters to respond to the renewed fighting" and to prevent the rebel group from

¹⁸⁸ Holt and Berkman 2006, 166.

¹⁸⁹ Center on International Cooperation 2007, 62.

advancing on key towns.¹⁹⁰ Despite the efforts of the UN mission to suppress this latest large-scale offensive in the east, on November 4 and 5 an estimated 150 civilians were killed in the town of Kiwanja.¹⁹¹ According to Human Rights Watch, MONUC "failed to keep the CNDP from taking Kiwanja and Rutshuru on October 29 and failed to prevent the killings and other abuses by CNDP and Mai Mai combatants in early November."¹⁹² Restrictions on MONUC patrols and inadequate resources are blamed for the mission's failure to protect civilians: "MONUC lacked the capacity to actively go out and protect the civilian population under attack. All it proved able to do was offer shelter to those who came to cluster in and around its bases."¹⁹³ In response to these shortcomings, on November 20 Resolution 1843 (2008) authorized a temporary increase of MONUC's military strength by up to 2,785 military personnel, and the strength of its formed police unit by up to 300 personnel. This reinforcement has not yet been sent to the DRC.¹⁹⁴ One month later, Resolution 1856 (2008) refocused MONUC's mandate more sharply on the protection of civilians in the volatile eastern provinces.

During the late 2008-early 2009 security crisis, the political situation and conflict dynamics in eastern Congo changed rather dramatically. With the shift have come several offensives against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)—many of whose members are implicated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide—said to be the biggest obstacle to peace in the east, and joint offensives against the LRA, a dangerous Ugandan group active in northeastern Congo. A new challenge for MONUC since the

¹⁹⁰ Center on International Cooperation 2009, 52.

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch 2008, 1.

¹⁹² Ibid, 15.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 18.

¹⁹⁴ The first advanced team of this reinforcement was only sent to the DRC in late August 2009, eight months after the Security Council resolution. Contributions are expected through to the end of 2009.

beginning of these offensives against the FDLR and the LRA has been dealing with reprisal attacks against civilian populations and cooperating with the unpredictable and often entirely undisciplined Congolese army. A July 2009 Human Rights Watch report notes that FDLR and LRA fighters are currently responsible for "the great majority of killings of civilians." Furthermore, it is estimated that anti-FDLR operations and FDLR counter-attacks have led to the displacement of at least two million civilians in eastern Congo since the beginning of 2009. While the mission continues to struggle to find the capacity to protect civilians, it has developed an overall strategy and very recently developed several innovative means of improving POC. After a decade of continued protection crises, the mission has established itself as a robust Chapter VII peace operation with POC as its number one priority. Yet with its newfound posture and resolve to use force have come a number of undesirable side-effects, including reprisal attacks and massive displacements. The next chapter will assess whether MONUC has learned how to protect civilians and what factors contributed to the evolution of the mission's POC mandate.

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¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch 2009.

¹⁹⁶ IRIN, "DRC: Mutinous Soldiers Add to Civilian Fear in East," August 28, 2009, http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85903, Accessed August 28, 2009.

Chapter 4: MONUC and UN Learning

Appraisal of MONUC: What Did the UN Learn, if Anything?

One would hope that after a decade of doing anything, at least some basic adaptation or organizational learning takes place with regard to the tasks which an organization has been assigned. In the case of MONUC, there are signs of an evolution in approach and understanding in the mission as well as normative developments at the international level. Some obvious changes include the mission's shift in focus from western Congo to the east, where the majority of the violent conflict has played out. While the mission was initially deployed to the west of the country, this changed over time and by April 2008 between 90 and 92 percent of MONUC's blue helmets were deployed in eastern Congo. 197 By 2003, the mission's concept of operations was revised to relocate most resources to the east, and although the adjustment took time, it did eventually result in change. 198 This modification and others that have materialized over the past 10 years stem from the buildup of local knowledge of the country, the conflict, the relevant armed groups and the shifting dynamics of the violence. Having been involved in the DRC for a decade, even when taking staff turnover into account, the UN has established itself in the country and has consequently learned about it while carrying out its mandated tasks. Zeebroek notes that "[k]nowledge of the terrain has unquestionably improved," as have a number of other aspects associated with maintaining a significant presence in the country. 199 Another area of the mission that has evolved significantly relates to the fact that the protection of civilians was first introduced

¹⁹⁷ "Eastern DR Congo will Remain Focus of Mission's Resources, UN Envoy Says," *UN News Centre*, April 15, 2008, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26340&Cr=drc&Cr1=monuc.

¹⁹⁸ Malan and Gomes Porto, eds. 2004, 68.

¹⁹⁹ Zeebroek 2008, 17.

into the mission, then became a central component of the mission and has now become *the* central component of the mandate. Today POC is MONUC's number one priority. This is unusual for a UN peace operation, at least in such explicit terms. Another noteworthy change relates to the debate over R2P, which has evolved within the mission and within the UN more generally. At the level of the international community, the concept was first publicized in 2001 and was endorsed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document. Since then, it has continued to make headway within the UN DPKO, the entire Secretariat and among member states. Finally, what began as a small observer mission is now a robust peacekeeping operation with one of the strongest mandates and ROE of any UN mission. All of these changes reveal that MONUC has undergone an obvious transformation since its inception, as most observers would have predicted. UN peace operations are not static, but rather living, evolving projects with fluid participation and contexts.

While it is obvious that MONUC has changed, it is less clear whether the changes have been due to organizational learning in the field or any number of other factors such as Security Council interest, key member state support of the mission, or sheer chance as the conflict dynamics have evolved over time. It is also much less clear what factors have influenced OL, if it indeed has taken place. An application of Lise Morjé Howard's descriptive model of first-level organizational learning to the case of MONUC reveals that OL is a relevant factor contributing to the evolution of the mission.

The Model: First-Level Organizational Learning

According to Howard, first-level organizational learning, which is essentially learning from experiences in the field, is one of the most important independent or causal variables influencing peacekeeping success or failure.²⁰⁰ Her research finds evidence that the likelihood of a successful outcome is greater when the UN is actively learning from the environment in which it is deployed. While she ostensibly evades a satisfactory explanation of how organizational learning can be empirically observed, stating only that it is "in a sense a metaphor for individual learning, since individual learning is manifest as organizational change,"²⁰¹ she clearly asserts that OL is causally important as it correlates with success under certain conditions.

Beginning with Howard's three conditions for successful peace operations, her model identifies favorable situational factors, moderate Security Council interest and first-level organizational learning in the UN Secretariat. Howard argues that the first two conditions are necessary though not sufficient for success. "Situational difficulty" includes elements such as various internal characteristics of the civil war, consent of the warring factions for the UN's operation, a detailed peace agreement signed by all sides, the support or lack thereof from regional or neighboring (non-Security Council) states as well as the country's infrastructure. According to Howard, "[o]f these factors...the consent of the warring parties appears to be the most decisive." 202

Security Council Interest

The international community has been deeply reluctant to intervene in the Congo or even face the troubling realities there since the humanitarian crisis following the flight

²⁰⁰ Howard 2008, 327.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 15.

²⁰² Ibid, 10.

of Rwandan Hutu into eastern Zaire in 1994. The disaster that might have been halted at that time has instead morphed into a monstrous ordeal of unimaginable proportions. The UN Security Council and the P-5 have been reluctant to become involved in the country partially because of past experience with ONUC as well as because of the recognition that this would be no swift in-and-out mission. As Bernath and Edgerton point out, "Security Council officials in New York were loath to accept responsibility for what they expected to be a disaster."²⁰³ According to Gérard Prunier, beginning with a December 11, 1998 Security Council statement on the Congo conflict, "UN pronouncements...were the ultimate experience in toothlessness."²⁰⁴ Although the Council did eventually become involved, its unwillingness to contribute sufficient troops and funds in a timely manner meant that the situation in the DRC was given time to worsen, more lives were lost, and the challenges grew in scope and complexity. Over the years, however, the Security Council has devoted increasing attention to the DRC conflict. Most often this has come during and after a crisis, but increased interest has nevertheless developed over time. Howard suggests that both "very high and very low levels of Security Council interest intensity tend to undermine the Secretariat's ability to implement mandates successfully."205 In the case of the Congo, it has taken years for the Security Council to devote increased attention to the ongoing violence, but the Council's interest has progressed from noticeably absent to enough to make MONUC one of the DPKO's most important and complex missions. With its current budget of \$1.3 billion, it would be

²⁰³ Bernath and Edgerton 2003, 10.

²⁰⁴ Prunier 2009, 309.

²⁰⁵ Howard 2008, 13.

inaccurate to describe MONUC as an insignificant mission.²⁰⁶ The Council's decision to designate POC as a priority for MONUC also suggests interest in taking on considerable challenges.

Situational Difficulty

A snapshot of the DRC conflict makes clear that it has devolved into an awful mess of a situation. Words such as "quagmire," "disaster" and "nightmare" easily come to mind when one attempts to describe the country's current state. Among some of the most glaring situational problems are the utter lack of infrastructure, government institutions, the size of the country, the large population of the country, numerous rival ethnic groups, the number of armed belligerents, the large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the longevity of the violence and the toll of death, the involvement of the Congo's neighbors in the conflict, and the country's intense climaté. Even this list is not exhaustive. As the world's nineteenth most populous country, the DRC is estimated to have a population of 68,692,542.²⁰⁷ As such, per head of population, MONUC's 18,000strong mission has one of the smallest numbers of blue helmets compared to other UN missions around the world despite the fact that it is currently the UN's largest peace operation. ²⁰⁸ As one senior DPKO military officer is said to have put it, "The troop strength in MONUC is a drop in the bucket."²⁰⁹ The size of the country is also a huge problem. It is as large as Western Europe, yet lacks basic infrastructure such as roads and

²⁰⁶ United Nations, "Democratic Republic of the Congo – MONUC – Facts and Figures," http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/monuc/facts.html, Accessed October 6, 2009.

²⁰⁷ CIA World Factbook, "Democratic Republic of the Congo," July 2009 estimate. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/CG.html, Accessed July 3, 2009.

²⁰⁸ Gambino 2008, 21.

²⁰⁹ Bernath and Edgerton 2003, 9.

electricity throughout large portions of its territory. Ranked as one of only three states that are considered to be failed states in the 2008 *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World*, most institutions, if they even exist at all, do not function adequately. These factors and others contribute to making MONUC an expensive and frustrating mission. It runs an annual tab of over 1 billion dollars, rendering it the UN's most expensive peace operation in addition to being its largest.

Overall, the situational complexities of the DRC are colossal. The environment is highly volatile and the Congo has not had the support of Rwanda or Uganda during much of the conflict. While countless ceasefires have been reached and several peace agreements have been signed (and subsequently broken) since 1999, armed groups have remained active, many times with the presumed support of the Congo's neighbors (which they have most often denied). While the list of factors contributing to situational difficulty could go on, suffice it to say that the DRC is a daunting and discouraging environment for a UN peace operation. In addition to the many man-made impediments to favorable circumstances for peacekeeping, the country also has tropical diseases, the jungle, gorillas and other wild creatures, ²¹¹ as well as natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcano eruptions to contend with. According to one of the mission's field commanders, MONUC "is the hardest operation the UN has ever undertaken." Others agree, noting that "the DRC is one of the most challenging logistics areas in the world." The country is an undeniably challenging location for peacekeeping.

²¹⁰ Gambino 2008, 10.

²¹¹ Telephone interview with former MONUC chief of staff, April 17, 2009.

²¹² Quoted in Howard 2008, 308.

²¹³ Bernath and Edgerton 2003, 21.

Nevertheless, it has had many years to build an infrastructure of its own and to implement its mandate under less than ideal circumstances. And as Dennis M. Tull suggests,

MONUC's mixed performance cannot be fully explained by resource constraints and the DRC's difficult environment. Equally important were problems in interpreting and implementing the vague concept of robust peacekeeping and flaws in adapting strategies to a quickly changing situation.

There is more to the case of MONUC than logistical and environmental hazards and obstacles, though they are significant. As some UN officials have remarked, peacekeeping missions have been sent to environments that have not had a UN presence for years and they are often a greater challenge for personnel deployed in the field.²¹⁴

Recent Developments in the DRC

The overall lack of Security Council interest and the many unfavorable situational factors in the DRC would lead some to conclude that Howard's model simply does not apply and this case belongs in the category of intractable African problems. Yet the political climate in the Great Lakes region underwent what some have called an unexpected but thoroughly welcomed "sea change" in late 2008 and early 2009. Relations between the governments of the DRC and Rwanda improved remarkably, allegedly due to strong political negotiations on the part of the United States. In addition, the notorious rebel leader who had been involved in the Kisangani crisis, the Bukavu crisis and the most recent 2008 crisis was arrested by Rwandan authorities and his group, the CNDP, was disbanded. With the improvement of regional relations, enhanced diplomatic efforts and the apparent reinvigoration of the peace process, "a lot has

²¹⁴ Interviews with two UN officials in New York, March 17, 2009 and March 19, 2009.

changed in recent months," as one former MONUC official put it.²¹⁵ This improved political climate has opened up a space for real progress to occur. In essence, the recent political developments mark an increase in Security Council interest and a reduction in situational difficulty, and although the situation is far from ideal, it has inspired cautious optimism in some observers.

Learning within MONUC

Although Howard ultimately applies her model to determine peacekeeping outcomes, she does examine the process of learning in order to do so. Based on an overview of the multidimensional peace operation in the DRC, she concludes that MONUC is not presently in a learning mode. 216 The author of this thesis, however, is concerned above all with the civilian protection component of the mission rather than the eventual peacekeeping outcome and interview responses suggest that the mission is learning with respect to this part of the mandate. Many UN officials contend that MONUC is learning in the sense that POC has become the mission's priority as well as in terms of Howard's four indicators of first-level learning, suggesting that the mission could be on the road to eventual success now that the preconditions for learning have been met. While past and present MONUC staff by and large recognize that the mission has experienced "definite progress" and "enormous improvement," none are overly optimistic, adding that the changes have not been perfect and that many areas are still lacking. 217 Yet the overall picture has been one of improvement and learning in terms of protecting civilians. Moreover, one former MONUC official recognized a sincere desire

²¹⁵ Interview with former MONUC official in Montreal, April 18, 2009.

²¹⁶ Howard 2008, 300

²¹⁷ Interview with François Grignon in Montreal, April 30, 2009.

to adapt and learn, both at the DPKO and in the field.²¹⁸ Numerous efforts have been made to implement the MONUC protection mandate under incredibly challenging circumstances. The same could not be said about the institutionalization of learning, however, which was seen to be sorely lacking.²¹⁹

Howard's four basic indicators of first-level learning are 1) information gathering and analysis; 2) coordination between different components of the mission; 3) engagement with the population and what she calls the UN's "profile;" and 4) strong leadership. While each of these indicators would intuitively appear to contribute to learning or a lack thereof, there may very well be other additional indicators of organizational learning in peacekeeping settings which have not been present in some cases. As has been pointed out, however, there is a dearth of evidence in the literature regarding what factors have an impact on OL in the realm of peace operations, although emphasis on this area of study does appear to be growing.

1) Information Gathering and Analysis

Howard argues that "widespread mechanisms for gathering information are one of the most important preconditions for learning, while sound analysis of that information indicates actual learning." Many MONUC officials remarked on how mechanisms were significantly lacking up until the 2004 Bukavu crisis and the critical report that was put together by the mission's Best Practices officer and released shortly after the debacle. As one former mid-level MONUC official pointed out, Bukavu, which she described as the "seminal event" in terms of lessons learned, "drove home the need to have systems in

²¹⁸ Telephone interview with Acton Kilby, April 17, 2009.

²¹⁹ Telephone interview with UN official, April 27, 2009.

²²⁰ Howard 2008, 16.

place (which includes things such as JOCs, JMACs, Crisis Management Teams and an overall framework)."221 When the Bukavu crisis took place, JMACs were just being developed and JOCs and Crisis Management Teams were non-existent.²²² MONUC subsequently established its Joint Mission Analysis Cell (JMAC) as well as its Joint Operation Center (JOC), both of which were intended to improve collection of information and overall mission understanding. While JMAC focuses on risk analysis and longer-term issues and threats, JOC focuses on information gathering and situational awareness.²²³ These mechanisms are generally well-regarded by MONUC staff who consider them to be examples of learning within the mission. 224 JMAC in particular "allows for feedback from components of the mission and back to those components, thus enhancing coordination and information gathering and analysis." A former chief of JMAC for MONUC considers the creation of this mechanism to be an example of institutional innovation as it promoted more proactive, preventive thinking and contributed to improved prevention. ²²⁶ In short, the "new tools have made the mission more functional,"227 but there remains room for improvement, especially in terms of capacity to analyze the information that is collected.²²⁸ Overall, then, while imperfect, MONUC has made significant headway on the issue of information gathering and analysis despite a slow start and the crises that preceded the establishment of such tools.

²²¹ Telephone interview with former MONUC official, March 24, 2009.

²²² Ibid

²²³ Interview with UN official in New York, March 20, 2009.

²²⁴ Telephone interview with Danilo Rosales Diaz, April 29, 2009; Interview with François Grignon in Montreal, April 30, 2009.

²²⁵ Telephone interview with Danilo Rosales Diaz, April 29, 2009.

²²⁶ Interview with François Grignon in Montreal, April 30, 2009.

²²⁷ Ibid

²²⁸ Interview with Yannick Lemieux in Montreal, April 18, 2009; Telephone interview with MONUC official, April 24, 2009.

Howard's model suggests that possible learning is indicated through extensive mechanisms for gathering and sharing technical information whereas few mechanisms indicate dysfunction.²²⁹ MONUC has certainly demonstrated improvement in this area.

2) Coordination

A peace operation experiences dysfunction when different components of the UN mission or groups carrying out field activities with the UN are working at cross-purposes or simply with uncoordinated mandates and objectives. According to UN officials, MONUC was criticized in the past, specifically because the military was unwilling to coordinate with other actors. This has changed.²³⁰ Today MONUC is an integrated mission and this serves as an example of learning within the mission. MONUC originally adapted by developing civilian protection clusters, which were jointly chaired by MONUC and UNHCR, in the key areas of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu in May 2005.²³¹ These protection clusters brought together various actors in the field to improve overall efforts at POC. More recently, Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) have been established to further enhance coordination, communication and joint effectiveness between the military and civilian components of MONUC and of course to enhance protection. The JPT concept, which was first put into practice in North Kivu province in February 2009, was an on-the-ground initiative created to enhance POC in the volatile east. 232 According to individuals directly involved in the launching of the first teams, the North Kivu Brigade civilians were the "pioneers" of the innovation, which is new to the

²²⁹ Howard 2008, 16.

²³⁰ Telephone interview with UN official, April 6, 2009.

²³¹ Telephone interview with Danilo Rosales Diaz, April 29, 2009.

²³² Telephone interview with UN official, April 27, 2009.

UN. These JPTs have reportedly been helpful in sensitizing the population about the role of MONUC and the manner in which the mission will support the population in the event of conflict escalation. In addition, the JPTs have served a cautionary function for armed groups in the region, warning them that MONUC is anticipating hostile activity. ²³³

During the Congolese-Rwandan offensives against the FDLR in early 2009, these military-civilian routine outings were set up as preventative mechanisms in anticipation of potential attacks against civilians. ²³⁴ They were designed as a strategic tool to improve communication, cooperation and understanding between UN troops, civilian personnel and the Congolese population. A shift in perception has occurred for some actors within the mission who now recognize the mutual advantages of cooperation, whereas in the past relations could be highly antagonistic. While more work needs to be done in this area, joint initiatives have brought various MONUC actors together and added to communication and information sharing.

3) Engagement with the Environment

Many interview respondents noted that MONUC has struggled to convey the mission's mandate to the local population in simple, understandable terms.²³⁵ One UN official referred to a "huge engagement gap" which he said was now being addressed.²³⁶ A MONUC political affairs officer claimed that as a result of improved MONUC engagement with the population, there is a much better perception of the mission now

²³³ E-mail communication with MONUC official, April 22, 2009.

²³⁴ Interview with former UN staff member in Montreal, April 10, 2009.

²³⁵ Interview with UN staff member in New York, March 20, 2009.

²³⁶ Telephone interview with UN official, April 24, 2009.

than there was a couple of years ago. ²³⁷ Of course, different segments of the Congolese population have diverging perceptions of the UN, but in general MONUC has adapted and is learning to engage. Almost all interview respondents agreed that Radio Okapi, established by the mission in February 2002, has been a successful initiative and a valuable source of information for the Congolese population. The radio station, which continues to run today, is broadcast in several local languages and serves as a valuable source of information dissemination and MONUC propaganda for the Congolese population. The mission has also enhanced engagement with the environment through JPTs, which are related to interaction with the civilian population, but there remain overall limitations relating to insufficient translators. ²³⁸ Many of the MONUC staff who were interviewed identified language barriers as a significant problem. One UN official remarked that in the past, MONUC soldiers would not always necessarily understand what was going on in front of them because of cultural, linguistic and contextual barriers. Civilian-military coordination has improved this "understanding gap."

In light of MONUC's less than impeccable track record with engaging with the population, it has demonstrated significant improvement. Following a huge sex scandal implicating numerous UN staff members in allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation in addition to a slew of other accusations including UN personnel involved in illegal trafficking in arms and natural resources, the mission has updated policies on fraternizing with the local population and efforts have been made to reduce instances of abuse.²⁴⁰ At

²³⁷ Telephone interview with MONUC political affairs officer, May 4, 2009.

²³⁸ Telephone interview with UN official, April 24, 2009.

²³⁹ Ibid

²⁴⁰ See Dahrendorf 2006; Rasmussen 2005; Singh, "10 Peacekeepers in Congo Sex Scandal," *Hindustan Times*, October 12, 2008,

the same time, "[t]he UN cannot afford to be living in its own goldfish bowl," as one former UN official pointed out.²⁴¹ UN missions in general and MONUC in particular are often known for their white vehicles that zoom around the host country as well as the accommodating hotels, restaurants and discos they set up for UN staff rather than for interaction with the very people they have been dispatched to help and protect. Journalist Bryan Mealer described the presence of UN peacekeepers in Ituri in the early years of the mission as "bubble people." This has changed. Howard suggests that a peace operation should ideally be widely distributed in the field and among the local population and that its profile can range from "colonial" to "integrative," both in terms of how it approaches its environment and how it is perceived by the local population. MONUC unfortunately began as a "colonial" mission, which was part of the reason why it suffered a tremendous lack of appreciation and credibility on the ground, but one journalist commented that some of the attacks against MONUC have been unfair as the local population should blame their own soldiers and politicians for much of what has transpired in the country.²⁴⁴ MONUC has often been used as a scapegoat and accusations have at times been unfair, yet the mission's early abuses and misguided approach did tarnish its profile to some extent. Nonetheless, there have been initiatives to improve engagement and understanding and its position on the continuum of engagement has shifted toward a more integrative approach. Many peacekeeping scholars and practitioners have noted that the expectations of locals inevitably increase when a large

http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/StoryPage.aspx?sectionName=Cricket&id=dba2bd1a-440a-4bc9-a34c-5325b8368282&Headline=Indian+peacekeepers+in+Congo+sex+scandal.

²⁴¹ Telephone interview with UN official, March 27, 2009.

²⁴² Telephone interview with Bryan Mealer, March 26, 2009.

²⁴³ The introduction of JPTs is one of the tools that has been used to improve the mission's profile in the DRC.

²⁴⁴ Telephone interview with Lionel Healing, March 25, 2009.

UN mission is deployed in their country. Part of the UN's job, therefore, is to manage expectations. Such efforts are made possible through communication and interaction with the population. Of course, excessive integration may become problematic for a mission, but in the case of MONUC, which is now serving a supporting function to the democratically elected Congolese government and army, concerns over undue integration would be unfounded. Cultural and linguistic barriers also impede integration with the Congolese population. Overall, the mission is improving in this area, but maintaining a positive mission profile remains a great challenge in the country, especially considering the prevalence of rumors. Contact with the locals and Radio Okapi have been crucial in diffusing rumors and managing the expectations of civilians.

4) Leadership

Virtually every interview respondent agreed that leadership was a critical factor contributing to learning within MONUC and in UN peace operations in general. One of the valuable lessons from the Bukavu crisis was that senior management had failed in a number of ways. Several UN officials noted that the introduction of Deputy Force Commander Patrick Cammaert in 2005 made a significant difference to the mission. He was credited with much of the progress in the field after the low point of the Bukavu disaster, namely in that he was not afraid to use force to protect civilians. According to one respondent, "Cammaert's willingness to use force was a key element in moving the mission forward." Leadership was frequently discussed in combination with

²⁴⁵ Internal UN draft document 2007, 18.

²⁴⁶ Ibid

²⁴⁷ Telephone interview with Carol McOueen, April 20, 2009.

differences among personnel or that the right combination of personalities can result in strong, effective leadership. Some participants argued that MONUC now has strong leadership while others were somewhat reserved in their appraisal of the mission's current leadership. Howard suggests that "each division of every peacekeeping mission will experience one or more important crises. Leaders of a learning organization are able to defuse the crises.",²⁴⁸ Interestingly, the UN staff members whom I interviewed often spoke of leadership in relation to crises. One UN official, for example, suggested that the recent prioritization of civilian protection was influenced by a combination of crises and leadership engagement (SRSG Alan Doss of the UK, Force Commander Babacar Gave of Senegal and DSRSG Ross Mountain of New Zealand were all mentioned by name as strong and committed leaders). Their collaboration or collective leadership was said to be important in bringing about the change.²⁴⁹ Another participant suggested that strong leadership was ostensibly what led to the origination of JPTs in the field. In his words, leadership seemed to be "wise enough to listen and give the 'okay." In this case, MONUC leadership responded favorably to an innovation that originated in the field – namely the JPT concept.

MONUC has demonstrated marked improvement in all four of the areas identified by Howard as indicators of learning in the field. These four areas have not all shown the same degree of amelioration at the same time, but Howard suggests that "partial" organizational learning is still possible when one or more of the four "components of

²⁴⁸ Howard 2008, 19.

²⁴⁹ Telephone interview with UN official, April 6, 2009.

²⁵⁰ Telephone interview with MONUC political affairs officer, May 4, 2009.

learning" are satisfied.²⁵¹ Yet one of the major factors influencing learning about protection of civilians is not addressed in Howard's model: the role of norms.

Protecting Civilians and Using Force: The Importance of Norms in the Learning Process

Because peacekeeping mandates to protect civilians are a recent development, there were no POC blueprints or guidelines for peacekeepers to follow for quite some time. Moreover, some have noted that POC mandates must be tailored to the context in which they are to be implemented. In the case of MONUC, there were few examples of missions explicitly mandated to protect civilians which mission members could even use as reference or guidance and the mandate itself, in its various forms, was hopelessly ambiguous. While it is understood that in order to reach Security Council consensus on mandates, a certain degree of ambiguity is often required, this is not particularly helpful for peacekeepers implementing the mandate in the field. And while this ambiguity may also allow for flexibility on the ground as the situation changes, it also leaves the door open to innumerable interpretations. This inherent contradiction between "the competing requirements of clarity and flexibility"252 inhibited effective action in the DRC for nearly a decade. According to Béatrice Pouligny, "[t]he biggest source of vulnerability for peacekeepers relates to the imprecision and incoherence contained in the mandates at the time of their adoption."²⁵³ While this may be true, a protection mandate also creates expectations among civilians who believe that the blue helmets will at least attempt to step in and prevent an attack should the threat arise. Regardless of the growing

²⁵¹ Howard 2008, 19.

²⁵² Gray 2008, 319.

²⁵³ Pouligny 2006, 123.

awareness that unclear mandates lead to varying interpretations, "mandates continue to be couched in unclear language susceptible to multiple interpretations, difficult to translate into operational orders.""²⁵⁴ For MONUC, the lack of normative clarity surrounding protection and robust actions impeded organizational learning until just recently, when the need for greater specificity with regard to POC and UOF was addressed.

Implementing MONUC's Protection of Civilians Mandate

On a number of occasions, the "schizophrenias of R2P" have become the schizophrenias of various UN peace operations. In Sierra Leone, Darfur, the DRC and elsewhere, civilian protection has plagued the UN DPKO and made learning extremely difficult. There is widespread recognition among UN officials that one factor that has made learning very hard for MONUC is "the radically different interpretations of civilian protection." Varying interpretations have led to inconsistent applications of force in the field as well as inaction when blue helmets simply did not know what they were supposed to do. One UN staff member suggested that the bottom line is: "The clearer the mandate, the more you see results." In the case of MONUC, only the second mission ever mandated to protect civilians in 2000, progress in operationalizing the concept of POC took a considerable amount of time and usually followed some form of mission-wide crisis. By the time of the 2004 Bukavu crisis, which was described as MONUC's "lowest point" following the Kisangani crisis of May 2002, 257 the concept remained

²⁵⁴ Wills 2009, 71.

²⁵⁵ Interview with UN official in New York, March 20, 2009.

²⁵⁶ Telephone interview with UN staff member, March 23, 2009.

²⁵⁷ United Nations Peacekeeping Best Practices, "MONUC and the Bukavu Crisis 2004," March 2005, 4.

unclear and subject to a wide variety of interpretations. As the UN Lessons Learned report on the crisis acknowledged, the violence that erupted in Bukavu had been sufficient for the mission to employ the use of force, yet the peacekeepers were still confused about what constituted 'protection of civilians.' For years MONUC struggled to define and implement its POC mandate to no avail. Holt and Berkman suggest that because the mission's POC efforts remained undefined, numerous ideas and strategies were embraced rather than one coherent and unified approach. This led some observers to call the mission "rudderless" and to suggest that MONUC was experiencing a crisis of identity.

Implementing MONUC's Robust Mandate

In addition to the problem of adequately operationalizing POC, the UN mission in the DRC has experienced difficulties establishing a coherent approach to the use of force. As Howard points out, "[t]he question of how much force to use has plagued this operation, as it has others." Many at the UN remain divided on the issue of force, with some (including Howard herself) believing that it is best left to actors other than the UN. While there are many views on UOF, commentators often disagree primarily over whether the UN should use force at all. Some feel that Operation Artemis should be the model for enforcement-type activities, while others have been relieved to see an increased willingness within the UN to use force to protect civilians facing the imminent threat of violence. As one former MONUC official suggested, the reality on the ground is that "the Africans respect the use of force" (as was demonstrated in 2003 in Ituri with

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Holt and Berkman 2006, 177.

²⁶⁰ Howard 2008, 309.

Operation Artemis). He concluded that "The use of force produces results." 261 MONUC more generally learned that robust action is often necessary in the context of protecting civilians. As Zeebroek points out, "[a]fter the twofold shock of the massacres in Ituri (2003) and the taking of Bukavu (2004), a doctrine of limited recourse to force was gradually drawn up in the field."262 Despite the fact that it did take these two disasters to convince the mission to adapt its use of force to the circumstances it was confronted with, since 2005 the mission has adopted a more aggressive stance. In July 2005, for instance, UN and Congolese troops, with the assistance of MONUC's Guatemalan Special Forces, embarked on an aggressive campaign to disarm rebels in Walungu and surrounding territories. 263 In a widely publicized initiative, after MONUC had increased patrols and cordon-and-search operations in Ituri in 2005, armed rebels ambushed and killed nine peacekeepers. Undeterred, the mission responded aggressively to the ambush. This was in stark contrast to the deeply meek and hesitant MONUC approach discernible during the early crises in Ituri and Bukayu. The seminal reports that came out following the Ituri crisis and the Bukavu crisis were instructive and influential in the shift in approach that began in 2005. Criticized for being too reactive and risk-averse, MONUC has developed a stronger backbone. This robust posture, according to the UN, has "considerably improved the security situation for the local population on the ground."²⁶⁴ Robust operations have continued to be carried out since February 2005 and remain ongoing in North Kivu. Force was used on numerous occasions by MONUC peacekeepers during the 2008 CNDP crisis and there now appears to be greater acceptance of the use of force

²⁶¹ Telephone interview with former MONUC staff member, April 16, 2009.

²⁶² Zeebroek 2008, 9.

²⁶³ Marks 2007, 76.

²⁶⁴ Internal UN document.

in the context of this particular mission.²⁶⁵ While "confusion" regarding the appropriate use of force was frequently cited as a significant problem for the mission prior to 2005, today many MONUC officials feel that the ROE for the mission are clear, robust and well understood.²⁶⁶ Similar to the concept of POC, a common understanding of UOF must run throughout the mission. As Wills reminds us, "[t]he military after all, 'cannot operate in an environment of ambiguity.'"²⁶⁷

Evidence of Learning within MONUC

The general consensus regarding MONUC is that is has improved drastically in its efforts to protect civilians and that the mission is presently in a learning mode. Many UN officials point to very new developments as evidence of UN learning, some of it as recent as a few months, with some tools still undergoing a process of refinement. As Holt and Berkman remind us, the Security Council essentially left the decision to protect civilians up to MONUC leadership in the field. After a great deal of difficulty and failure, the mission has begun to seriously consider POC and introduce mechanisms and tools to prevent civilian suffering and actively save lives. In his discussion of POC in UN peace operations, Alex J. Bellamy contends that while considerable progress has been made in thinking about protecting civilian populations in peacekeeping scenarios, what is still lacking is "the development of standard meanings." MONUC is now addressing this deficiency. Many UN officials identified the introduction of the concept of Mobile Operating Bases (MOBs) in 2006 as an example of learning. These MOBs, which consist

²⁶⁵ Telephone interview with UN official, April 27, 2009.

²⁶⁶ Interview with former UN staff member in Montreal, April 10, 2009.

²⁶⁷ Wills 2009, 70.

²⁶⁸ Bellamy 2009, 123.

of MONUC military deployed in the field and are composed of a maximum of 160 military personnel (company strength), are said to have the ability to move as threat situations arise and require action. As of August-September there were 17 MOBs in South Kivu and 36 MOBs in North Kivu. 269 MONUC's former deputy chief of staff noted that although MOBs are not new concepts, their use in MONUC was new.²⁷⁰ MONUC officials coming from a military background agreed that MOBs are normal military practices, but for the purposes of MONUC, the greatest gain was a shared definition and "doctrine" regarding their aim, method and purpose throughout the Force and mission in general. Others pointed to Temporary Operating Bases (TOBs), which are even newer than MOBs, as another effort to improve civilian protection. These smaller bases, composed of a maximum of 40 military personnel, deploy for short periods of time in specific areas for two to three weeks or less.²⁷¹ Both initiatives are designed to keep MONUC one step ahead of armed groups and give the mission the capacity to deploy where it is most needed. Adding elements of aggressiveness and unpredictability to MONUC military operations, MOBs seek to tip the strategic balance in a given area in favor of the UN rather than the armed groups. They have also been complemented by the use of attack and surveillance helicopters. According to the November 2008 Special Report of the UN Secretary-General on DRC mission, "MONUC has provided protection to tens of thousands of civilians through regular patrols and to those who have sought

²⁶⁹ MONUC. See

http://monuc.unmissions.org/Portals/MONUC/Images/Map/Interactive/NorthKivu 290809.pdf and http://monuc.unmissions.org/Portals/MONUC/Images/Map/Interactive/southkivu-15sep09.pdf. ²⁷⁰ Telephone interview with Acton Kilby, April 17, 2009.

²⁷¹ MONUC. See

http://monuc.unmissions.org/Portals/MONUC/Images/Map/Interactive/NorthKivu_290809.pdf and http://monuc.unmissions.org/Portals/MONUC/Images/Map/Interactive/southkivu-15sep09.pdf.

shelter around its mobile and company operating bases across North Kivu."²⁷² Since MONUC's first reported success in operationalizing the MOB concept in Katanga in 2006, the mission has doubled its presence in North and South Kivu through the use of these mobile operating bases. ²⁷³ While some more skeptical observers have noted that the MOBs are not particularly mobile, thus reducing MONUC's ability to remain unpredictable and offer pre-emptive capabilities in protecting locals in dangerous "hot spots," others have noted that excessively short-term deployments also pose problems for civilians as they are simply temporary solutions to much longer-term threats. The original one-week deployments of MOBs have since been increased to a maximum of four weeks, and despite the many obstacles and their ongoing shortcomings, many UN officials have suggested that the MOBs have moved to trouble spots in the east and adapted very well in light of the mission's limited capacity. ²⁷⁴

Even more recent than the MOBs are MONUC's Joint Protection Teams (JPTs). Again, this concept is not novel, but its name is new and its implementation in the mission is a new development.²⁷⁵ With the prioritization of civilian protection in the renewed mission mandate, MONUC introduced the JPTs to address a number of its shortcomings. The JPTs are groups composed of civilians from various sections of the mission who are routinely deployed to "hot spots" with the military. The civilians include experts from MONUC's Civil Affairs, Political Affairs, Human Rights and Child

²⁷² United Nations, S/2008/728, 2008, 11.

²⁷³ Internal UN draft document: Center on International Cooperation 2009, 52.

²⁷⁴ Interviews with UN officials, March-April 2009.

²⁷⁵ Interview with former UN staff member in Montreal, April 10, 2009.

Protection sections.²⁷⁶ As one former MONUC staff member put it, "they are essentially military-civilian outings." Despite the fact that these teams have only been used since February 2009, they have become considerably popular within the mission. According to a number of MONUC officials, the JPTs have improved information gathering, intelligence and mission interaction with the population and they have enhanced coordination and mutual understanding between different components of the UN. In essence, this one innovation addresses Howard's four basic criteria for learning in the field. Yet what makes tools such as MOBs and JPTs valuable is that they offer a shared set of terms for the military and civilian components of the mission. Actors with diverse perspectives arrive at a common understanding of POC, one that has been utterly lacking through much of the mission's lifespan.²⁷⁸ Many observers suggest that MONUC now has a system for mobility and early warning and peacekeepers are better able to anticipate threats to the civilian population. One MONUC official even went so far as to claim that "JPTs are a popular and valid concept" which could potentially be used as a model for future UN peace operations.²⁷⁹

Finally, in addition to these new protection innovations, a booklet on protection designed for peacekeepers as well as a common database are currently in development.

The booklet, which was just recently finalized, includes basic instructions for blue

²⁷⁶ MONUC. See

http://monuc.unmissions.org/Portals/MONUC/Images/Map/Interactive/NorthKivu_290809.pdf and http://monuc.unmissions.org/Portals/MONUC/Images/Map/Interactive/southkivu-15sep09.pdf.

²⁷⁷ Interview with former UN staff member in Montreal, April 10, 2009.

One former MONUC official called relations between the civilian and military components of the mission "horrific" and "unworkable," emphasizing the need for improvement in this particular area of MONUC. Telephone interview with Acton Kilby, April 17, 2009.

²⁷⁹ Telephone interview with MONUC official, May 4, 2009.

helmets on how to act or react in certain situations. A "peace operations Intranet" was also launched in November 2006. Both developments constitute additional concrete efforts to enhance understanding among actors in the field and both suggest the prospect of learning within the mission. It remains to be seen whether these tools will prove useful to MONUC staff in the field. While the training of hundreds of national police is also underway and 300 officers have now been deployed, marking some degree of progress, police in the DRC have a long way to go before they can take over public order from the Congolese army. If and when a significant and lasting degree of security in the east is achieved, policing will likely become more important.

In general, MONUC officials agree that the entire mission's understanding of what civilian protection means has improved.²⁸¹ MONUC has now developed an overall strategy on POC, and as one former UN official noted, a collective understanding and integrated framework are essential to a mission.²⁸² The mission has achieved greater clarity, reducing much of the "fuzziness" that has surrounded the concept of POC. One official referred to a "definite sharpening" of the arguments about civilian protection within MONUC.²⁸³ The new protection initiatives, it appears, have reduced the problem of multiple interpretations on the ground which previously led to confusion and incoherent action. Some UN officials noted that MONUC now has a clearer idea of civilian protection than other missions still struggling to address and operationalize the concept.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Telephone interview with UN official, April 24, 2009.

²⁸¹ Ibid

²⁸² Telephone interview with UN official, March 27, 2009.

²⁸³ Ihid

²⁸⁴ Telephone interview with former MONUC official, March 24, 2009; Telephone interview with UN official, April 6, 2009.

Norms and Learning: The Impact of R2P

Many MONUC officials have been quick to claim that the mission is learning about POC and UOF and just as easily provide concrete examples of this so-called learning. Yet when it comes to the issue of what factors have contributed to organizational learning, answers are hard to come by. The causal influence of international normative development remains in dispute, but according to one former MONUC official, "MONUC's mandate has always been R2P-inspired," even before the R2P concept itself was formally articulated. 285 This view suggests MONUC's protection mandate has followed the trajectory of the international norm as it gained acceptance and endorsement. This would also explain why "[t]he majority of peacekeeping mission mandates...now include reference to obligations of peacekeepers in relation to civilian protection, often in language that reflects the 'responsibility to protect' concept."²⁸⁶ Regardless of the ongoing debates regarding the concept of R2P as well as its feasibility and legitimacy and the many implications it may have in practice, "the normative framework has evolved" and protection issues have consequently become increasingly important in UN peacekeeping operations in general.²⁸⁷ Offering a different understanding of this normative development, one UN official who served with MONUC for nearly five years suggested that POC on the ground is entirely disconnected from international debates. As such, he argues that UN missions are capable of implementing protection mandates without being contaminated by the remaining controversies

²⁸⁵ Interview with François Grignon in Montreal, April 30, 2009.

²⁸⁶ Wills 2009, 51.

²⁸⁷ Telephone interview with MONUC official, April 24, 2009.

surrounding the concept of R2P.²⁸⁸ Whether this is unequivocally true or false is difficult to ascertain, but what is clear is that a normative shift outside of the mission has been taking place since the responsibility to protect endangered civilian populations was first endorsed as a concept by the ICISS and a shift within the mission has been taking place prompting MONUC to tackle the issue of protection more seriously. The difficulty lies in ascertaining the precise interplay between the international norm and UN learning in the field.

Second-Level Learning: Applying Previous Lessons in the DRC

Although Howard's model of OL emphasizes the importance of learning within missions, she does devote some time to considering and evaluating second-level learning, ultimately finding that learning between UN peace operations has been inconsistent.

Other observers have been deeply critical of this area in particular, arguing that "all too often the UN appears poised to reinvent the wheel and repeat its own mistakes." This phrase—"reinventing the wheel"—comes up endlessly in reference to MONUC. Part of this may result from the fact that much of what the mission has had to do has been from scratch—it has in a sense been *inventing* the wheel in the Congo, especially in relation to protection and appropriate use of force. Moreover, as Campbell maintains, "the war-to-peace trajectory has to be discovered anew in each country." The dangers of simply applying a lesson learned in a previous mission to a new and completely different context have been well documented. According to Howard, however, UN practice has been slow to correct the deficiency in second-level learning. She argues that the problem is ongoing

²⁸⁸ Telephone interview with Danilo Rosales Diaz, April 29, 2009

²⁸⁹ Benner et al. 2007, 10.

²⁹⁰ Campbell 2008, 26.

as "tactics, standard operating procedures, or programs are transferred almost automatically from one context to another."²⁹¹

MONUC's track record with respect to second-level learning is not an area about which the mission can boast a great deal. While some UN officials have noted that 'after action reviews' and 'end of assignment reports' allow for institutional memory to develop at the UN, one former MONUC official mused that troop rotation combined with the lack of institutional memory meant that "the UN has not been in the Congo for 10 years, but rather 20 times in 6-month increments." 292 Assigning a Best Practices officer to the mission has improved retention of lessons learned to some extent, as this individual documents lessons from the mission and disseminates reports—such as the widely discussed 2005 Bukavu report. Many interview respondents nonetheless highlighted the challenges associated with troop rotation and staff turnover, noting that when personnel leave the mission they often take valuable learning experiences and lessons with them. In fact, some pointed to the lack of systematic, institutionalized learning as the biggest obstacle the mission faces. This is a problem throughout the UN and it has steadily been addressed by the UN's Peacekeeping Best Practices Section. In September 2005, for example, the Best Practices Toolbox was launched. It consists of an assortment of guidance materials intended to help UN staff navigate through new assignments and contribute to the institutionalization of the lessons they learn.²⁹³ While many MONUC staff are deeply critical of the UN's ability to institutionalize lessons, there is evidence that the organization hasn't forgotten some lessons. Béatrice Pouligny notes that "[d]espite the weakness of the UN's institutional memory—on which there has been very

²⁹¹ Howard 2008, 334.

²⁹² Interview with Yannick Lemieux in Montreal, April 18, 2009.

²⁹³ United Nations, A/62/593, 2007.

clear progress in recent years—missions do not make interventions completely *ex nihilo*."²⁹⁴ It is also possible to point to specific lessons that have been incorporated into the UN's memory, such as the need to protect civilians and avoid future Rwandas as well as an understanding that the appropriate response to an attack against peacekeepers is not retreat. MONUC troops remained undeterred after the 2005 ambush against its Bangladeshi contingent and have continued to carry out robust operations despite the mission's comparatively high number of total troop and staff casualties. Undoubtedly, the UN's institutional memory has been growing since the 2000 Brahimi Report criticized the UN on this point, even if the process has been slow and often painful.

Investing in People

The general consensus with respect to second-level learning and the institutionalization of peacekeeping lessons among UN staff is that there is a significant lack of institutional incentives for members of the organization to share lessons.

According to a number of officials, staff turnover and a high rate of attrition in the field continue to hinder second-level learning and this will continue into the foreseeable future because it relates to how personnel are treated. Of greater concern for the UN is what some former staff referred to as a general "don't care" attitude that inhibits motivation and serves as a disincentive for many UN personnel to excel in their careers within the international bureaucracy. One respondent was essentially told: "You don't come to MONUC to perform" when he arrived in the field. He came to the conclusion that the system does not motivate troops or UN staff and is consequently skewed in favor of

²⁹⁴ Pouligny 2006, 142.

²⁹⁵ Telephone interview with Danilo Rosales Diaz, April 29, 2009.

²⁹⁶ Interview with François Grignon in Montreal, April 30, 2009.

routine rather than motivation and excellence. Another former MONUC official claimed that "UN culture is not a culture striving for excellence." There is, according to such observers, a general lack of team-building and investment in the men and women in the field. And yet it has been shown that "[i]nvesting in people is a crucial component of strengthening the overall learning capacity of the UN peacebuilding apparatus."298 One UN official suggested that the lack of investment in individuals deployed in the DRC may originally have been due to a failure on the part of the DPKO to envision that permanent UN staff could potentially be deployed in the DRC for many years. Reform in this area is reportedly ongoing and all new civilian staff members now attend mandatory induction programs.²⁹⁹ This form of training and development for permanent UN staff does not, however, address the issue of motivation for the non-permanent members of a mission—the vast majority—or even the issue of motivation for permanent members who may require more than basic training to excel in exceedingly challenging environments. The UN will need to invest more in the members of its organization if it strives to motivate them and promote innovation and initiative. As one former MONUC official noted, institutional memory is actually *human* memory.³⁰⁰ It is, in the first place, a serious challenge to spread myriad lessons and best practices throughout such an immense organization. Without motivation, innovation and hearty commitment to improvement and learning, the organization will continue to struggle to learn between missions and apply general lessons in appropriate circumstances. Without institutional

²⁹⁷ Interview with Yannick Lemieux in Montreal, April 18, 2009.

²⁹⁸ Benner and Rotmann 2008, 59.

²⁹⁹ E-mail communication with MONUC official, May 25, 2009.

³⁰⁰ Telephone interview with Danilo Rosales Diaz, April 29, 2009.

memory, the UN will continue to reinvent the wheel each time it is sent to a conflict zone to keep the peace.

MONUC Then and Now: Lessons Learned?

MONUC did not get off to a commendable start, nor did the mission appear to adapt to its environment quickly. For many years, however, this was primarily due to the woefully inadequate resources authorized by the Security Council to deal with the complex situation on the ground. As James Traub remarked, "Congo's capacity to generate chaos seemed vastly greater than the UN's capacity to contain it." Yet the mission also began with a deeply hesitant minimalist approach which was reactive and risk-averse. As this evolved into a much broader approach to securing peace in the DRC, the mission still had a tendency to wait for a crisis before responding aggressively. Nevertheless, 10 years after its inception, MONUC is not the mission it once was and substantial learning has taken place in the field. The developments in the mission's protection of civilians mandate have also followed the trajectory of both the responsibility to protect norm and the development and application of learning mechanisms within the UN Secretariat, specifically in the DPKO. Empirically, these

³⁰¹ Traub 2006, 341.

While this apprehensiveness or aversion to risk was to some extent related to MONUC's insufficient capacity, disagreement remains over the significance of troop numbers for the mission and over the importance of troop quantity versus quality. For instance, some UN officials have emphasized the crucial importance of lack of capacity in the mission's progress, yet others note that the mission could be doing a great deal more with the capacity it has been given by the Security Council. One military official, emphasizing the need for a clear mandate and robust ROE, asserted that 3,000 NATO troops would have been more effective that the 14,000 MONUC troops deployed in the east. Most of these arguments lean on counterfactual claims and are as such of limited use. They do, however, suggest that there remains substantial disagreement within the UN on the issue of MONUC's capacity. (Interviews conducted with MONUC and UN officials in March-April 2009.)

developments were not found to be isolated occurrences. Rather, both the emergence of the international R2P norm and its strengthening through endorsement by the UN General Assembly as well as the DPKO's development of its lessons learned capacity contributed to MONUC's progress in adopting a coherent and feasible approach to protection of civilians.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Influence of Norms on Organizational Learning

Debates regarding the feasibility, legality and legitimacy of the international responsibility to protect endangered civilians caught in the throes of conflict will no doubt continue indefinitely, but as many scholars have begun to acknowledge, attempts at protecting civilian populations have already become common practice for the United Nations—regardless of whether the international organization is best suited for the job or not. In a sense, the responsibility to protect civilians in danger was essentially handed to the UN to grapple with because disagreement over the concept's practical implications could not be put to rest. It should come as no surprise, then, that the UN struggled with the implementation of its early protection mandates. One UN official noted that in the context of MONUC, "[w]e've seen crisis response more than learning." The organization was asked to carry out a new and challenging task in a variety of different conflict and post-conflict environments and as such, its performance was clearly lacking in several areas. Yet the organization has actively worked on improving its POC capacity as well as its capacity to learn lessons and what has driven both areas forward is normative development. As Gowan and Johnstone observe, "The mandate and conduct of peace operations are shaped by the normative climate in which they occur; in turn, the operations shape that climate."304

A fundamental challenge in ascertaining learning in organizations, as many have noted, is the "slipperiness" or "fuzziness" of the concept itself. As Jack Levy contends,

³⁰³ Telephone interview with UN official, March 27, 2009.

³⁰⁴ Gowan and Johnstone 2007, 4.

"learning is 'difficult to define, isolate, measure, and apply empirically." One significant obstacle is the simple definition of OL in the context of international bureaucracies. Even in the comparatively limited amount of literature on learning in international organizations, what is perturbing is the lack of consensus on a definition of learning. Certainly, many scholars have pointed to common features of organizational learning, yet terms in this branch of study tend not to mean the same thing to different scholars. Thus, for Howard, relying heavily on Haas's learning typology, "incremental adaptation" exists as an intermediate stage between OL and its opposite, "organizational dysfunction."306 According to W. Andy Knight, "[o]rganizational learning can take place within the adaptation mode of change, but it is generally more radical than both adaptation and reform." For these scholars, the essential difference between learning and adaptation is the level of transformation or change the organization undergoes namely, whether it questions its fundamental purposes and objectives or whether it simply "tinkers" and adapts in increments to new challenges and organizational tasks. Knight and others suggest that organizational learning, or what Haas refers to as "managed interdependence," is quite rare within international organizations. It is this author's belief that adaptation is a form of learning rather than a form of minimized dysfunction, and that adaptation can pave the way to transformative learning, or what OL scholars variously term "organizational learning" or "cognitive learning."

Howard concludes that in the context of the UN's involvement in peacekeeping, "incremental adaptation has arguably been the norm." This may not only be the best

³⁰⁵ Knight 2000, 55.

³⁰⁶ Howard 2008, 330.

³⁰⁷ Knight 2000, pp. 39-40.

³⁰⁸ Howard 2008, 334.

approach for UN peacekeeping, but the only feasible approach. Several UN officials whom I interviewed underscored the point that change takes a great deal of time in an international bureaucracy.³⁰⁹ This has often been a source of harsh criticism for the international organization, yet in approaching fundamentally contentious areas of activity such as the use of nonconsensual force and a responsibility to protect civilians facing the imminent threat of violence, adapting and "tinkering" may well be the best mode of implementing a new and contentious approach to peacekeeping—something that often appears more akin to enforcement or warfighting. Michael Lipson notes that "[r]ecent practice in complex peace operations reflects an emerging consensus in peace operations doctrine on the need for peacekeepers to possess, and be mandated and prepared to use, robust capabilities to deter spoilers and defend civilians." At the same time, however, he adds that there remains extensive support for traditional peacekeeping principles which include consent, impartiality and the use of force only in self-defense. This tension is problematic, but it is arguably what might allow the UN to survive and continue to carry out new and old peacekeeping functions simultaneously. Through a process of adaptive learning, the UN may be able to establish what works and what does not work in practice and base future theories of POC and UOF on its lessons in the field. In short, theory has not yet caught up with practice in the area of civilian protection and despite the many shortcomings discernible in UN peace operations, this may be a good thing for UN peacekeeping overall. Moreover, there may be additional advantages in proceeding with caution. As James G. March suggests, "rapid learning is frequently a poor learning strategy. Rapid learning tends to overreact to noise and to foreclose the

³⁰⁹ Interviews with UN officials, April-May 2009.

³¹⁰ Lipson 2007, 21.

experimentation necessary for discovering good alternatives."³¹¹ In the case of MONUC in particular and robust peace operations with POC mandates more generally, a number of significant challenges result from attempts to protect civilians. These include reprisal attacks by armed groups, population displacements, and the likelihood of increased risks and casualties, especially in the short term. It would therefore appear to be in the best interests of the UN to proceed delicately through this new terrain, lest it ruin its chances as an organization that does effectively deal with protection of civilians and use of force when necessary.

Wright's classification of several different types of learning is instructive in putting the messy interplay of norms and learning into understandable terms.

Distinguishing between "operational learning" and "normative learning," she suggests that normative learning contains the key components of existing norms, emerging norms and contested norms and emphasizes "decisions and behavior according to what *should* be done rather than what *can* be done." Faced with emerging norms, operational learning within the organization speeds up in order to respond to these norms, thus prompting the organization to find new modes of behavior. In many cases, this operational learning is essentially adaptation, which allows the organization to function on a day-to-day basis as it confronts the contradictions and tensions inherent in many international norms. And this is what we see happening in various UN attempts at dealing with the emerging R2P norm in the field.

Although it might well be desirable, change within an international organization tends not to take place overnight. As such, it should come as no great surprise that the

³¹¹ March 1988, 10.

³¹² Wright 2003, 7.

³¹³ Ibid. 15.

UN has not implemented the new task of protecting civilians into its peacekeeping mandates without considerable challenges and setbacks. Yet it has arguably shifted from an organization with zero protection mandates in early 1999 to an organization frequently assigned protection of civilian mandates.³¹⁴ It is interesting to note the parallel progression that some scholars have noted between the "norm life cycle" famously outlined by Finnemore and Sikkink and some basic models of the learning process. The three-stage process of norm influence in IR is described as norm emergence, norm cascade and finally internalization.³¹⁵ Benner et al. describe the learning process in terms of knowledge acquisition, advocacy or decision-making, and finally institutionalization.³¹⁶ The similarity is clear, and this is perhaps what makes the normative learning process so difficult to examine. I would argue that a critical step in the process of normative development is missing in both models of these fuzzy processes, namely that of adaptation or putting norms or newfound knowledge into practice. Surely this step comes before or concomitant to institutionalization, and it is this aspect of the process of OL that make the terms "learning" and "adapting" difficult to distinguish in theory and in practice.

³¹⁴ Certainly there were numerous attempts to protect civilians prior to the formally mandated task, such as the use of "safe havens" in the former Yugoslavia and the simple positioning of UN peacekeeping troops between armed groups and civilians in efforts to protect them regardless of whether this was part of the mission's mandate. The formal assignment of POC to UN troops, however, is a new development, as are developing rules and guidelines related to POC.

³¹⁵ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 896.

³¹⁶ Benner et al. 2007, 5.

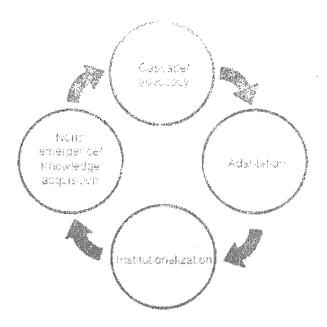


Figure 2: A Four-Stage Learning Process

In line with Popper and Lipshitz's recognition of organizational learning mechanisms as evidence of organizational learning, Wright suggests that organizational self-assessments are the output of attempted learning and that "[e]valuations, especially internal evaluations and solicited external evaluations, are the clearest indicators of attempts to learn from the past." In the case of the UN peace operation in the DRC, peacekeeping best practices reports were identified as extremely valuable in capturing areas of weakness and failure within the mission and instructing MONUC personnel on how to improve. Unfortunately, the two most important reports came following the Ituri crisis and the Bukavu crisis, as is often the case with UN self-reflection, but it is worth noting that field operations are often responses to tenuous peace agreements and crisis situations in the first place and thus one of the big lessons for the UN is how to avert a crisis and what not to do in a potential crisis situation.

³¹⁷ Wright 2003, 14.

In addition to the lessons learned studies which were found to be helpful, a number of individuals at the UN pointed to the very new joint protection teams as well as the fairly new mobile operating bases and temporary operating bases created within MONUC as examples of learning and possible models for future missions with POC mandates, approaching them with cautious optimism. Others said that these concepts were not necessarily new (only the names are new) and are likely to be abandoned and forgotten for other concepts and thus never institutionalized. What I was able to parse out of these different views was that these were new concepts which began in the field and as such suggest adaptation on the ground through the establishment of strategies, structures, routines and standard operating procedures (SOPs). It is still too early to ascertain the effectiveness of such innovations or to determine whether they will be institutionalized as SOPs for future protection initiatives. It is also premature to discern whether they will ultimately represent examples of mislearning, as the side effects or unanticipated consequences of POC and significant UOF in various contexts are fairly new issues for the UN. Overall, it was clear that some interview participants did not always know what led to various developments or changes within the mission, and the best they could do was venture a guess. Even those who have experienced what they believe to be organizational learning first-hand have difficulties pinpointing causal variables and explaining the process involved. The influence of R2P was certainly acknowledged by some participants and internal mission documents make explicit reference to the concept. This would make it difficult to argue that R2P is completely divorced from the evolution of POC mandates in the field. Others have noted how mandated civilian protection in UN missions has implicitly reflected the spirit of R2P.

Wills, for example, remarks that in June 2006, a number of delegates to the Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict at least implicitly acknowledged "[t]he conceptual link between peacekeepers' protection responsibilities and the collective international 'responsibility to protect." With all of the work that has been done on norms in IR over the past decade, it is now possible to empirically trace the development of international norms over time. Based on the frequent references to and endorsements of the emerging norm of R2P at the international level, it is relatively safe to suggest that it has evolved significantly since it was introduced in 2001. It remains much more challenging to ascertain whether the international norm has directly influenced learning within the UN or whether it has simply opened the door to enhanced UN efforts to protect civilians in extant peace operations.

It is more likely that norms developing within UN missions are contributing to organizational learning. In a broad sense, intra-mission evaluations and self-reflection represent newly institutionalized practices. There is a great deal of room for improvement, but the repertoire of UN lessons learned reports is steadily increasing.

Among other internal UN documents, the investigations and subsequent reports following the 2002 Kisangani crisis, the 2003 Ituri crisis and the 2004 Bukavu crisis all contributed to improved understandings of what went wrong—to past, present and potentially future UN personnel. The deeply critical 2005 Bukavu report in particular highlighted the usefulness of best practices when MONUC made use of it in preparation for its response to the upsurge in CNDP violence in 2007-2008.

³¹⁸ Wills 2009, 51.

³¹⁹ Interview with UN official in New York, March 20, 2009 and telephone interview with UN official, March 24, 2009.

protection strategy for MONUC as well as the creation of on-the-ground civilian protection initiatives shows an evolving approach to POC and UOF which recognizes the importance of shared understandings among a diverse body of actors.

Ultimately, the significance of norms both outside of the mission and within the mission suggests that there may be cases where the promise of constructivism in IR becomes practice fairly rapidly. Many constructivists argue that "contemporary empirical research on norms is aimed at showing how the "ought" becomes the "is." 320 but this has often left critics unsatisfied insofar as what "should be" remains an unrealizable ideal or a utopian fantasy. The case of MONUC in particular and civilian protection in UN peacekeeping more generally, however, may present evidence of the "ought" becoming the "is" as a result of international normative evolution as well as normative development within missions. This is not to say that the development will result in swift triumph for the organization as it tackles issues of justice and questions related to the protection of entire populations with limited resources head-on, but it does open the door to civilian protection in ways unforeseen and unanticipated with the as-yet unaccepted norm of humanitarian intervention. This is essentially a case of growing practice without a great deal of theory to guide actions on the ground, which is the reverse of what is typically seen in IR. Practitioners are moving faster than the theorists, as is often the case in the areas of conflict and humanitarian response, and the theory has yet to catch up to the fact that R2P or civilian protection or whatever one chooses to call it is no longer simply an idea or a hope but a mandated task for the UN with practical demands and implications.

³²⁰ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 916.

Alternative Explanations

The potential applicability of a constructivist approach in addressing civilian protection in UN field operations does not eliminate or even deny the importance of strategic state interests and the role of the state as a unit of analysis in international relations. Yet constructivism does purport to demonstrate that norms matter, and, more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, that norms have an independent causal effect on IR, suggesting that we must look beyond material state interests to get a more complete picture of the role and relevance of IGOs as forums of debate, agenda-setting powers, and even norm entrepreneurs. In recent years the UN has been assigned the daunting task of intervening to protect civilians in a diverse array of conflicts when no lead nation or coalition of states was willing, able or justified in doing so. What this essentially meant was that the UN became the international community's most likely scapegoat, and while this placed a great deal of pressure on the IGO in its efforts to protect civilians, it also gave the international organization an opportunity to define civilian protection as it saw fit. Observers could easily argue that UN member states were simply paying lip service to R2P with their many endorsements of the concept (who, after all, wants to openly suggest that they are in favor of genocide, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity under any circumstances?) and that they willingly turned the job of POC in many instances over to the UN DPKO, never expecting concrete results, but there has been an evolution in acceptance and practice of protecting civilians precisely because the UN has been tasked with implementing the challenging idea. Finnemore and Sikkink point to the constitutive nature of norms, arguing that over time,

ideas and practices can become norms.³²¹ Without denying the importance of state interests, it would appear that in the area of R2P, which states remain unprepared to address in specific terms, an international organization has been granted considerable autonomy in determining how to implement the concept in practice taking into account limited capacity and interest in most cases.

Some theorists would contend that a case study on its own offers little guidance unless several are performed. The case of MONUC stands out in terms of its complexity, however, thus making it difficult to compare to other UN peace operations with robust POC mandates and how they have fared. Nevertheless, similar experiences and a variety of lessons can most likely be drawn from many of the UN's protection mandates and their implementation and should thus be compared for similarities and differences in interpretation, operationalization and learning on the ground. Case study comparisons might also reveal examples of second-level learning (or a lack thereof) that had hitherto been uncovered and unexplored.

Because R2P and civilian protection remain new and only slightly familiar concepts, much additional research will be required to ascertain organizational learning within and between missions and to empirically observe the influence of norms on various aspects of OL, specifically in the context of peace operations.

The Future of MONUC

According to Bernath and Edgerton, as early as 2003 many MONUC observers tended to interpret the level of success or failure of this particular mission based on the

³²¹ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 916.

element of protection of the civilian population.³²² The case of MONUC has certainly been a mixed bag with numerous setbacks and several enormous failures, but it has evolved and the UN has been learning about robust Chapter VII civilian protection mandates. As James Traub remarks,

MONUC's performance argued that peacekeeping really was a progressive enterprise. DPKO had learned something from the failures of the past, not only in the Congo but elsewhere; and for all the shortcomings, it had applied that knowledge profitably. Disciplined soldiers equipped with helicopter gunships and armored personnel carriers, or sometimes just with guns they were willing to use, had taken the fight to the bad guys, demonstrating that robust peacekeeping could accomplish a great deal that timid peacekeeping could not.³²³

Surely this did take time and surely lives were lost as the mission shifted its approach from traditional peacekeeping to a complex multidimensional peace operation. And although many observers criticized the mission's "toothlessness," there are advantages to proceeding cautiously despite the urgency and immediacy of the situations confronted in the field every day, particularly when a significant degree of ad-hocism is simply unavoidable due to the nature of the tasks at hand. MONUC has learned about collateral damage and reprisal killings and ambushes that follow robust operations. It has proceeded at a pace suggesting that many of the activities it has undertaken are new and where apprehension is to be expected.

As many others have noted, the UN mission to the Congo in the 1960s was essentially an experiment in peace enforcement that did not leave a positive impression on the organization. The Congo mission that began 40 years later originated in quite a different international context, and while it has constituted yet another great UN peacekeeping experiment, it has also helped to reveal the shift from traditional

³²² Bernath and Edgerton 2003, 8.

³²³ Traub 2006, 349.

peacekeeping to complex multidimensional peace operations and a new emphasis on protecting civilians. Yet the UN's return to the DRC in the post-Cold War era has also shown the clear constraints of a peace operation with limited capacity. Given the limited size of the mission compared to the complex context of the DRC, Holt and Berkman remark that peacekeepers "cannot hope to protect every civilian all the time from everything [italics in original]."³²⁴ The current SRSG Alan Doss has reiterated this admission, stating: "We cannot be everywhere all of the time." Considering the monumental task and constrained resources, the mission may be capable of improving and even succeeding, but it will not be able to guarantee the safety of every Congolese civilian. On the other hand, one UN official remarked, "If you can do it in the Congo, you can do it anywhere"326 The sheer magnitude of difficulty in the case of MONUC makes it rather exceptional and possibly less generalizable than other UN peace operations mandated to protect civilians, but it also suggests that significant progress in MONUC could signal improvement in other UN field operations. Another issue with MONUC and post-conflict situation evaluations is the problem of counterfactual claims. In the realm of UN peace operations, no news is often good news. Some UN officials suggested that "another Bukavu" simply could not be permitted to take place or the mission would fail. As "evidence" of improvement they point to the fact that there has not been another Bukavu since 2004. This argument and similar types of arguments are mostly unconvincing, but they do come up relatively often in the context of peacekeeping and post-conflict situations.

³²⁴ Holt and Berkman 2006, 54.

Perry, "What Kind of Peace is there to Keep in Congo?" *Time*, November 24, 2008, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1861498,00.html.

³²⁶ Interview with UN official in New York, March 19.

Another reason for deeply cautious optimism or hope for the future of MONUC is the reality that protection of civilians is essentially a temporary military solution. Reports on the continuing attacks on civilians in eastern Congo frequently call for a political—as opposed to strictly military—solution to the continuing conflict in the country. It is important to note that the UN cannot simply prevent attacks in the Congo indefinitely. Efforts to protect civilians must be understood as stopgap measures for dealing with larger problems. This means that MONUC's protection mandate may currently be its priority, but overall success or failure of the mission will depend on both political and military factors.

The Future of UN Peace Operations and Future Challenges

The significant developments in UN peace operations since the end of the Cold War point to the continued relevance of the international organization in resolving intrastate conflicts and attempting to reduce widespread suffering and death around the globe. Despite the decades-old question of whether the UN has become obsolete, the organization has continually been assigned new and more complex tasks reflecting shifting international norms and priorities as well as the growing role of international organizations in world politics. And while some may argue that the designation of many new tasks to the UN is essentially the skirting of responsibilities on the part of state actors, the UN's development over the past decade, since the much lauded *Brahimi Report* came out, suggests that the organization has been willing to take on tough jobs where member states are unwilling to do so. The responsibility to protect is one such area. And while much of what the UN has been doing in this regard is groping around in

³²⁷ See Prendergast and Atama 2009.

the dark, the organization appears to be learning from its experiences and developing mission-specific guidelines on how to protect civilians in a robust fashion where necessary. The responsibility is enormous, yet it is one that powerful member states have all too frequently avoided. The UN, while facing blunders along the way, appears to be adapting and piecing together an approach to robust civilian protection operations that does more good than harm. While much work remains to be accomplished and many more lessons have yet to be learned, the influence of norms on the process of learning in organizations appears to be substantial both internally and externally and future research on UN practice in the area of civilian protection will likely continue to inspire theoretical innovation.

Limitations of the Research

The author concedes that this thesis serves simply as a starting point for future research on learning in peace operations and additional case studies and comparative studies on UN missions mandated to protect civilian populations. Moreover, there are likely numerous factors that contribute to organizational learning in different contexts, and the interplay between these factors may lead to entirely different impacts on learning. It is hoped that this modest effort will be one of many research projects to explore the nature of organizational learning within UN peace operations mandated to protect civilians. It is likewise hoped that this research and similar endeavors will contribute to tangible improvements and results in ongoing and future peace operations, not only in their processes but also in their outcomes.

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Annex: List of Interviews

Africa scholar – Telephone interview on February 24, 2009

Africa expert – Telephone interview on February 26, 2009

UN official – Interviewed on March 17, 2009 in New York (in person)

UN official – Interviewed on March 19, 2009 in New York (in person)

UN official – Interviewed on March 19, 2009 in New York (in person)

UN official - Interviewed on March 20, 2009 in New York (in person)

Mid-level UN official – Interviewed on March 20, 2009 in New York (in person)

Koko Essien (UN official) – Interviewed on March 20, 2009 in New York (in person)

Former MONUC staff member – Telephone interviewed on March 23, 2009

UN official – Interviewed on March 19, 2009 in New York (in person)

UN official – Telephone interview on March 24, 2009

Lionel Healing – Telephone interview on March 25, 2009

Bryan Mealer – Telephone interview on March 26, 2009

Former UN official – Telephone interview on March 27, 2009

UN official – Telephone interview on March 27, 2009

UN official – Telephone interviewed on April 6, 2009

Congolese civilian (Based in Bunia, DRC) – Answered questions via e-mail on April 3, 2009

Former MONUC staff member – Telephone interview on April 8, 2009

Former MONUC staff member – Informal interview in Montreal on April 9, 2009 (in person)

Former MONUC staff member – Interviewed in Montreal on April 10, 2009 (in person)

Former MONUC staff member – Telephone interview on April 16, 2009

Acton Kilby (Deputy Chief of Staff for the Mission for 2007-08) – Telephone interview on April 17 and April 20

Yannick Lemieux (Former MONUC staff member) – Interviewed in Montreal on April 18, 2009 (in person)

Carol McQueen (Former MONUC Political Affairs Officer) – Telephone interview on April 20, 2009

MONUC staff member – Submitted written responses to interview questions on April 22, 2009

MONUC staff member – Telephone interviewed on April 24, 2009

James Cunliffe (MONUC staff member) - Telephone interview on April 27, 2009

UN official – Telephone interview on April 27, 2009

Danilo Rosales-Dias (Former MONUC Political Affairs Officer) – Telephone interview on April 29, 2009

François Grignon (International Crisis Group, Africa Program Director & Former Chief of JMAC (2004-2006)) – Interviewed in Montreal on April 30, 2009 (in person)

MONUC Political Affairs Officer – Telephone interview on May 4, 2009

MONUC official – Submitted written response to interview questions on May 25, 2009