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Article:

Verweijen, J. (2017) Strange battlefield fellows: The diagonal interoperability between blue helmets and the Congolese army. *International Peacekeeping*, 24 (3). pp. 363-387. ISSN: 1353-3312

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2017.1294486>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *International Peacekeeping* on 14 Mar 2017, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13533312.2017.1294486>.

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Strange battlefield fellows: The diagonal interoperability between blue helmets and the Congolese army

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Published in: *International Peacekeeping* 24, 3, (2017): 363–387

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2017.1294486>

Abstract

The literature on peacekeeping has paid scant attention to the interaction between peacekeeping troops and host country military. Addressing this gap in scholarly knowledge, this paper conceptualizes such interaction as ‘diagonal interoperability’. The latter is situated in-between ‘horizontal interoperability’ on the one hand, relating to interaction between different components of a peacekeeping mission, and ‘vertical interoperability’ on the other, referring to the relations between international peacekeepers and ‘peace-kept’ populations. The paper focuses on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where UN forces and the Congolese army are engaged in joint military operations and army reform is part of the peacekeeping mission’s mandate. Studying both mutual representations and joint practices, the paper explores the organizational, political, discursive, and security-related factors that shape diagonal interoperability. It concludes that diagonal interoperability between the two forces is weak, as reflected in mutual distrust and ‘not-so joint’ joint operations. Perhaps surprisingly, it finds that shared military identities do not seem to facilitate collaboration. Rather, mutual perceptions of the ‘military Other’ are infused with discourses of cultural and political difference, therefore accentuating the power asymmetries that undermine diagonal interoperability.

Key words: diagonal interoperability; UN peacekeeping; security sector reform; DR Congo, MONUSCO

Introduction

A growing body of work studies the micro-dynamics and socio-cultural aspects of peacekeeping establishments and their interaction with the populations of so-called host countries.¹ Two lines of enquiry dominate this emerging field of study: the first examines the relations between peacekeeping personnel, in particular between different national

¹ Autesserre, ‘Going Micro’.

² This line of enquiry was pioneered by Moskos, *Peace Soldiers*.

contingents or between military and civilian components.² The second focuses on peacekeepers' interaction with host country societies, and studies, among other dimensions, everyday social and security practices and how these relate to mutual perceptions and the production of security and insecurity.³ This last strand encompasses the growing literature on 'peacekeeping economies', referring to the socio-economic spaces of peacekeeping that are constituted by the day-to-day interactions between 'the international' and 'the local'.⁴ While covering a rich and expanding range of themes and approaches, to date, this emerging body of mostly sociological and anthropological literature on peacekeeping has paid scant attention to the interactions between international peacekeeping troops on the one hand, and host countries' national armed forces on the other. Given that it involves two sets of military actors, these interactions differ from those between host country (civilian) populations and peacekeeping troops. Since host country military is not integrated in the peacekeeping mission, they also diverge from the military-to-military interactions found within multinational peacekeeping missions.

The near-absence of elaborate studies on the relations between peacekeeping and host country troops is remarkable, not least as these relations have substantial security implications. Contacts between peacekeeping and national troops generally occur in the framework of efforts to fulfil mission mandates, like stabilization or securing elections. Moreover, national armed forces in (post)conflict zones often undergo a process of restructuration or reform in which the peacekeeping mission is involved. In some cases, peacekeeping troops also execute joint security tasks with host country military, for example joint patrols and military operations against armed groups. Studying the relations between host country and peacekeeping troops may provide important insights into the modalities and outcomes of these joint activities, and into the extent to which peacekeeping missions are able to fulfil their mandates more generally. It is also crucial for assessing the workings and effects of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces that was issued at the end of 2011. Only the in-depth study of the overall relations between peacekeeping and non-UN forces will allow for assessing the (potential) impact of this policy on the human rights record of non-UN forces, and its wider effects on collaboration with those forces.

This paper provides one such an in-depth study, focusing on the interaction between Pakistani and Indian blue helmets of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo* (MONUSCO) and personnel of the Congolese armed forces, the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC). How do UN and Congolese troops interact with and perceive each other? What factors inform these images and practices and how? More specifically, what is the role of discourses (e.g. around national and military culture), political factors (e.g. unequal power relations), organizational modalities (e.g. living and working conditions) and security-related factors (e.g. differential security performances) in shaping the level of interoperability between these two forces?

² This line of enquiry was pioneered by Moskos, *Peace Soldiers*.

³ Early attention to these themes can be found in Galtung and Hveem, 'Participants in Peace-keeping Forces' and Heiberg and Holst, 'Comparing UNIFIL and the MNF'.

⁴ Jennings, 'Life in a « Peace-kept » City'; Jennings and Bøås, 'Transactions and Interactions'.

While not unique, the case of the Congo is particularly relevant due to MONUSCO's emphasis on support to and collaboration with the FARDC within its approach to stabilization and statebuilding. In the light of the FARDC's poor human rights record and organizational shape, however, this collaboration has evoked political and ethical questions. In particular, it has raised doubts concerning the extent to which it is reconcilable with MONUSCO's civilian protection mandate and jeopardizes its neutrality and impartiality.⁵ Furthermore, UN–FARDC collaboration seems to rest upon as yet unproven assumptions, in particular that the performance and behaviour of the host country's troops would be influenced by their exposure to the international peacekeeping force. While this contribution is an exploratory study and does not allow for a definite assessment of these assumptions, its findings do enhance the understanding of the general relations between the two forces, which is a prerequisite for grasping possible behavioural impact. The issue of impact is also of specific concern to the HRDDP, which states that the goal of UN support to non-UN forces is 'to help recipients to attain a stage where compliance with these [i.e. human rights] principles and bodies of law becomes the norm, ensured by the rule of law'.⁶

The paper is structured as follows. After providing a brief explanation on data collection, it discusses relevant theoretical frameworks and bodies of literature. The next section reviews FARDC–MONUSCO relations at the macro level, and the ways these relations are shaped by factors internal to MONUSCO and the UN system, and those related to the Congo's political environment. Subsequently, the paper zooms in on the micro level, exploring first the mutual representations held by officers of the FARDC and MONUSCO's Pakistani and Indian contingents, and then discussing their experiences of joint operations and security activities. The concluding analysis reflects upon the low level of interoperability between the two forces, and suggests viewing their relationship in the light of divergent approaches to the notion of '(pretended) partnership'.

Brief note on data collection

Most of the data for this article were gathered during fourteen months of field research conducted between 2010 and 2012 in a variety of operational zones in North and South Kivu, in particular in zones of deployment of the Pakistani and Indian contingents of MONUSCO. The article also draws on additional fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2016 in South Kivu. Methods of data collection included formal interviews, informal conversations and observations made around UN and FARDC bases. Although the research prior to 2014 mainly aimed to study micro-level interactions between the Congolese military and civilians, the impact of the presence of UN military on the practices of the FARDC towards civilians was one of the factors studied. To that end, 19 peacekeepers, all of whom were officers of the Pakistani and Indian contingents, were contacted on their views on FARDC behaviour and joint activities in their area of responsibility. While some respondents were approached at the level of the headquarters (HQ) of MONUSCO's South Kivu Brigade in Bukavu (which is dominated by the Pakistani contingent) and of the North Kivu Brigade in Goma (dominated

⁵ Human Rights Watch, *You Will Be Punished*; Paddon Rhoads, *Taking Sides in Peacekeeping*.

⁶ General Assembly of the UN Security Council, *Identical Letters*.

by the Indian contingent), the majority were contacted in different COBs (Company Operating Bases) in the Kivus. COBs are semi-permanent bases that host one company (between 75 and 175 troops) of a single national peacekeeping contingent. They are placed under the command of the battalion of which they form part (which is part of a national contingent, as reflected in the names ‘PakBatt’ and ‘IndBatt’), the HQ of which is located at a Main Operating Base (MOB, with support company totalling up to 400 troops). One of the COBs visited hosted the Training Task Force (TTF) responsible for conducting training with the FARDC in South Kivu. It was deemed important to contact the TTF to gauge peacekeepers’ perceptions on the process and effects of (attempted) knowledge and skills transfer. Most of the officers visited at the field-level operating bases appeared to have limited interaction with peacekeepers from other nationalities, operating primarily within the framework of their national contingent. Each of these national contingents has its own worldviews, professional identities, norms and values, and visions on peacekeeping, as rooted in the national armed forces of which they form part.⁷ The findings of this study can therefore not be generalized to MONUSCO peacekeepers as a whole.

On the side of the Congolese armed forces, in-depth discussions on MONUSCO were held with about 35 officers, who were part of a wider sample of 150 military personnel interviewed between 2010 and 2012.⁸ It should be emphasized that most of the research was conducted before the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), a unit consisting uniquely of African troops that was deployed to North Kivu in 2013 as part of MONUSCO to conduct targeted offensive operations against armed groups. Therefore, the FARDC perceptions of MONUSCO presented herein are not based on experiences with the FIB. FARDC officers were contacted along the command chain, including at the HQ of the Military Regions of North and South Kivu, the HQs of the operational sectors and sub-sectors located within these regions, and at the level of field-based units, ranging from brigade (from 2011, regiment) to battalion to platoon to company.⁹

Given the FARDC’s nature as an amalgamation of (former) government and rebel troops, efforts were made to contact both officers who had always served in the government forces and those coming from different armed groups. At the time of the 2010–2012 field research, certain former armed groups who had recently been integrated into the army constituted parallel command chains, implying that their troops and officers were loyal and responded to their former armed group hierarchy, even while formally part of a new command structure. While the cohesion of the army had always been weak due to competing power factions intersecting with formal command chains, this time, such divisions were accentuated by the fact that some of the former armed groups maintained distinct identities, interests and worldviews.¹⁰ Despite this, few differences were observed in respect of the views expressed towards MONUSCO between officers from ‘ex-government’ or ex-armed group factions. Where such differences were detected, they related primarily to levels of education (with higher educated officers speaking in more nuanced terms about MONUSCO) and personal

⁷ Ben-Ari and Elron, ‘Blue Helmets and White Armor’.

⁸ Verweijen, ‘Ambiguity of Militarization’.

⁹ For an explanation of the FARDC command chain and the 2011 reform process that transformed brigades into regiments, see Verweijen, ‘Ambiguity of Militarization’.

¹⁰ Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen, ‘Volatility’.

experiences with MONUSCO, irrespective of military background. Given the relatively balanced composition of the sample of FARDC officers interviewed for this research, and the substantial amount of FARDC personnel contacted between 2010 and 2016, it was deemed safe to generalize findings up to the level of the FARDC as a whole. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, and as respondents were guaranteed anonymity, the location and exact date of the interviews are withheld herein to avoid identification.

Studying ‘diagonal interoperability’

Rubinstein et al.¹¹ make a distinction between on the one hand, ‘horizontal interoperability’, relating to the interaction between different components of a peacekeeping mission, and on the other hand, ‘vertical interoperability’, characterizing the interaction between international peacekeepers and host country populations. Being in-between these two sets of relations, this paper proposes to conceptualize the nature of the interaction between UN and host country military as ‘diagonal interoperability’. Given that this form of interoperability is likely to share—by approximation—several characteristics of vertical and horizontal interoperability, the bodies of literature on these phenomena offer a useful entry point to its study.

The extant literature distinguishes four broad clusters of factors that shape the interaction both among peacekeeping troops and between these troops and their deployment environment. These clusters should not be seen as mutually exclusive, for they may partly overlap. They encompass 1) factors pertaining to culture, discourse, and forms of social identification, and how these notions shape and are shaped by everyday practices; 2) political factors, notably relating to geopolitics and global power asymmetries, as well as the political contexts of troop-contributing and host countries; 3) factors relating to the security environment, including perceptions of security performance and military professionalism and how these perceptions co-create security and insecurity; and 4) (formal) organizational and coordinating mechanisms, such as command structures, standard operating procedures, and institutions to regulate civil–military cooperation.

Analysing troop interaction within multinational peacekeeping forces in a comprehensive manner, Elron et al. identify a wide range of factors that shape the integration of such forces.¹² They divide these into ‘integrating conditions’ and ‘integrating mechanisms’, respectively. The principal integrating conditions include: a common military culture; the structural similarities between military forces in terms of hierarchical and bureaucratic set-up; shared conditions and experiences, in particular uncertainty and foreignness; and integrative missions in the form of pursuing shared objectives. Concerning integrative mechanisms, the main elements identified encompass: joint operations and training, including cross-cultural training; internal divisions of labour; formal coordinating mechanisms; and shared information flows and knowledge.

In a subsequent piece that elaborates on Rubinstein’s work on the cultural dimensions of peacekeeping,¹³ Ben-Ari and Elron highlight how shared professional identities facilitate

¹¹ Rubinstein et al., ‘Culture and Interoperability in Integrated missions’.

¹² Elron et al., ‘Why Don’t They Fight Each Other?’

¹³ Rubinstein, ‘Cultural Aspects of Peacekeeping’.

military-to-military interaction.¹⁴ However, similar to Duffey,¹⁵ they also find that the organizational set-up and cultural aspects of multinational peacekeeping missions tend to accentuate the importance of ‘national culture’, and of national differences in security styles. As they observe, multinational missions foster homogenizing and essentialist interpretations of ‘national culture’, which are moreover informed by the dichotomy between ‘civilized/developed’ vs. ‘un(der)developed/uncivilized’ spaces. Thus, countries become conceptualized as ‘entities that are arranged along continuums of superior and inferior nation-states’,¹⁶ based on criteria like levels of technological advancement, military style and behaviour. The resulting (perceived) differences are often linked to national contingents’ unequal access to military and financial resources, like differences in pay.¹⁷

Higate and Henry detect a similar imprint of stereotypes on military-to-military interaction.¹⁸ In their study, officers from ‘white European backgrounds’ would often construct peacekeeping troops from ‘developing countries’ as underperforming or not living up to the same (professional) standards. Similar stereotyped framings were adopted by host country populations, who would assess military professionalism and security performance against peacekeepers’ national identities. Based on these findings, Higate and Henry conclude that racialized, nationalist and ethnicized forms of identification overdetermine perceptions of security styles and performance. The connection between national identity and perceived security performance, however, is never straightforward. Not only are perceptions of security performance shaped by a range of different factors, including geopolitical imperatives, ethnic and racialized imaginaries, and actual security activities, the interplay between these factors is complex and its outcomes contingent.¹⁹

Aside from discourses, identities and security practices, the literature on the everyday interaction between peacekeepers and their civilian deployment environment highlights a series of institutional and organizational elements that shape mutual perceptions and relations. The most important of these are the factors underlying the so-called peacekeeping bubble, or the relative isolation of peacekeepers from the societies to which they are deployed.²⁰ These factors include modes of personnel recruitment, which lead to peacekeepers not speaking local languages and having limited knowledge of the context; specific spatial and temporal arrangements that cause peacekeepers to live in fortified compounds while having to respect curfews; and the organizational set-up of missions, including the types of communication channels and meeting platforms between populations and peacekeepers.²¹ In the following, it is explored how these organizational factors, in conjunction with the described discursive, political and security-related elements, shape the diagonal interoperability between FARDC military and MONUSCO blue helmets, starting at the macro level.

¹⁴ Ben-Ari and Elron, ‘Blue Helmets and White Armor’.

¹⁵ Duffey, ‘Cultural Issues’.

¹⁶ Ben-Ari and Elron, ‘Blue Helmets and White Armor’, 297.

¹⁷ See also Moskos, *Peace Soldiers*.

¹⁸ Higate and Henry, *Insecure Spaces*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Jennings, ‘Blue Helmet Havens’.

²¹ Pouligny, *Peacekeeping Missions Seen From Below*; Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Higate and Henry, *Insecure Spaces*.

MONUSCO-FARDC macro-relations: conflict and collaboration

Established in 1999 as a small liaison team to monitor the implementation of the Lusaka ceasefire agreement, what was up to 2010 called MONUC²² gradually transformed into a complex, multidimensional peacekeeping operation. With an annual budget of nearly USD 1.4 billion and counting 19,784 uniformed personnel mid-2015,²³ MONUSCO is the largest and most expensive UN peacekeeping operation in history. It is also one of the more controversial missions in terms of its impact on the ongoing violent conflict and its relations with the host country population.²⁴ Since the adoption of a peace accord in 2003 by the main belligerents of the Second Congo War (1998–2003), armed violence of varying intensity and nature has been ongoing in the country's east. As evidenced by the continuing proliferation of armed groups, running into the tens of dozens, MONUSCO presence contributes little to the demobilization of armed groups or addressing the drivers of armed mobilization.²⁵ Additionally, despite occasional contributions, the mission has generally not been able to effectively protect civilians against the harm inflicted by armed groups or the national army nor to address other sources of insecurity, like the rampant banditry that is a growing problem in many areas in the east. Due to the increasing emphasis on civilian protection in its mandate, and the general importance of security performance for host country populations' perceptions of peacekeeping missions,²⁶ it is particularly these weak security contributions that are at the root of the lukewarm international and local enthusiasm for the mission.²⁷

There is a substantial body of literature providing explanations for MONUSCO's weak security performance. These are generally divided into factors internal to the mission and the UN system, and those related to the political environment to which it is deployed. In relation to the mission's internal set-up and dynamics, some of the main factors highlighted are: the small number of personnel in relation to the vastness of the Congo's territory and amount of inhabitants; inadequate funding and insufficient means of transport and supplies; limited synergy between civilian and military components; and weakly developed mechanisms of communication with the population.²⁸ In respect of factors relating to the wider UN system, the most salient elements advanced include: a lack of strong backing for MONUSCO from the UN Security Council, the broad formulation of the mission's mandate, representing the 'lowest common denominator' between the Congolese government and council members,²⁹ and limited guidance as to the mandate's operationalization and prioritization.³⁰ Unclear directions, in turn, widen the leeway for the interpretation of the rules of engagement under which contingents of troop-contributing countries (TCC) are deployed,

²² Even while anachronistic when referring to the mission before 2010, this contribution uniquely employs the designation MONUSCO for the sake of simplicity.

²³ While on 30 June 2015, total uniformed personnel was 19,784, Security Council resolution 2277 (2016) of 30 March 2016 authorizes a deployment of 22,016 uniformed personnel. MONUSCO, 'Facts and Figures'.

²⁴ Tull, 'Peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of Congo'.

²⁵ Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo*; Stearns et al. *The National Army*.

²⁶ Pouligny, *Peacekeeping Missions Seen from Below*; Higate and Henry, *Insecure Spaces*.

²⁷ Tull, 'Peacekeeping'; De Vries, *Going Around in Circles*.

²⁸ E.g. Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo*; Reynaert, *MONUC/MONUSCO and Civilian Protection*; De Vries, *Going Around in Circles*; Holt and Berkman, *The Impossible Mandate?*

²⁹ De Vries, *Going Around in Circles*, 32.

³⁰ Quick, *Follies in Fragile States*.

in particular as regards the operationalization of robust peacekeeping and the protection of civilians.³¹

While MONUSCO is deployed under a Chapter VII mandate that authorizes the use of force for the protection of civilians, some of its major TCC, notably India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, have advocated a more classic approach to peacekeeping. Such an approach centres on guaranteeing impartiality and neutrality and the minimal use of force. By contrast, certain mostly Western council members, ironically primarily countries that do not contribute troops themselves, have advocated a more robust approach to peacekeeping, which includes active engagement in military operations against armed groups. Although some force commanders managed to temporarily push through a more proactive interpretation of MONUSCO's mandate,³² as also characterizes the FIB, the more conservative approach to peacekeeping has overall dominated. One reason is the preference of most TCC for low-risk behaviour, as is also evidence by the caveats they impose on deploying their troops. For instance, certain TCC refuse that their troops engage in foot patrols or patrol far from COBs. Together with the Congo's infrastructural deficiencies, such conditions have rendered the mission relatively inert and have limited its radius of action.³³

Aside from factors pertaining to the mission and the wider UN system, MONUSCO has been plagued by the difficult political environment in which it operates. Crucially, the Congolese government displays only half-hearted and wavering commitment to the UN mission and the objectives set in its mandate. In particular, it resists interventions that threaten existing power relations, often labelling these as 'infringements on its sovereignty'. Such resistance has put MONUSCO in a difficult position, not only as its presence depends on the consent of the Congolese government, but also as it is mandated to reinforce and reform the state apparatus, including the security sector, as part of the consolidation of state authority in the east.³⁴ In general, MONUSCO's role in army reform has been relatively limited, and has been confined to more technical interventions like training FARDC battalions and rehabilitating military infrastructure.³⁵ This has not only been a result of the government's reluctance to address the more politically sensitive dimensions of defence reform, but also its opposition to the involvement of multilateral institutions in such reform, preferring bilateral defence cooperation agreements instead.³⁶

The political difficulties surrounding the peacekeeping mission's collaboration with the army also extend to military operations. From 2004 onwards, MONUSCO has assisted the FARDC with conducting military operations, including by providing transport, rations and fuel, medical and casualties evacuation, psy-ops (notably the diffusion of messages to enemy combatants) and the creation of safe corridors. In some cases, it has also engaged in more direct battlefield interventions, such as fire-support and search and sweep actions. In line with MONUSCO's mandate to support FARDC-led operations to disarm foreign combatants, more

³¹ Holt and Berkman, *The Impossible Mandate?*

³² An example is the more robust approach adopted in Ituri in 2005 and 2006, see Cammaert and Blythe, *The UN Intervention Brigade*.

³³ Tull, 'Peacekeeping'; Cammaert and Blythe, *The UN Intervention Brigade*.

³⁴ De Vries, *Going Around in Circles*.

³⁵ Between 2007 and 2008, MONUSCO trained 12 FARDC battalions, see UN Secretary-General, *Fourth Special Report*.

³⁶ Kets and De Vries, *Limits*; Onana and Taylor, 'MONUSCO and SSR'.

comprehensive military collaboration initially took primarily place during operations against foreign rebel groups, like the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Congo* (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU). In 2009, when the FARDC launched massive, Kivus-wide military operations against the FDLR and other armed groups, named first *Kimia II* and then *Amani Leo*, MONUSCO support was scaled up. These operations followed on the heels of the integration of thousands of rebel troops of the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* (CNDP) and a number of other armed groups into the FARDC as part of a peace deal.

The peace deal between the Congolese government and the CNDP, formalized by an agreement signed on 23 March 2009, starkly revealed the bad shape of FARDC–MONUSCO collaboration, in particular in relation to information-sharing. The deal, including the modalities of army integration and the subsequent military operations, had been negotiated behind closed doors with the involvement of Kigali, the CNDP’s long-time sponsor. MONUSCO had been entirely sidelined in the process, and had not even been informed of the joint military operations against the FDLR launched by the Rwandan military and the FARDC in January 2009. Fearing to lose further grip and influence over the evolving military dynamics, MONUSCO decided to collaborate with the FARDC in the *Kimia II* operations that started in March that year.³⁷ One of the assumptions underlying this decision was that MONUSCO support to the FARDC would improve the latter’s behaviour. As stated by a UN Secretary-General report on MONUSCO: ‘By providing rations and logistical support to the troops involved in *Kimia II*’, MONUSCO ‘continued to help prevent 16,000 troops from living off the population’.³⁸

MONUSCO’s involvement in *Kimia II*, however, drew widespread criticism from human rights and humanitarian actors, who highlighted the detrimental effects on the mission’s impartiality, and the shrinking humanitarian space. They also expressed grave concerns about the high civilian costs.³⁹ The hastily planned and badly executed military offensives provoked massive displacement and led to rampant insecurity. They intensified reprisal attacks on civilians by armed groups, and led to serious human rights violations committed by the Congolese army.⁴⁰ Due to a variety of factors, including weak cohesion within units and the military as a whole, the low quality of command stemming from non-meritocratic appointments, frustrations about bad service conditions, and a generalized focus on revenue generation, the FARDC’s behaviour towards civilians is often poor, in particular during military operations.⁴¹

The FARDC’s widespread engagement in human rights abuses raised doubts about MONUSCO support to the operations and the extent to which this could be reconciled with its civilian protection mandate.⁴² In reaction, MONUSCO formulated a conditionality policy for support to the FARDC at the end of 2009, which provided the impetus for the development of the HRDDP (the due diligence policy). The conditionality policy consisted of a number of measures to ensure that MONUSCO-supported security activities, including joint operations,

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, ‘*You Will Be Punished*’; International Crisis Group, *No Stability*.

³⁸ UN Secretary General, *Thirtieth Report*, 4.

³⁹ NGOs on DRC, ‘Too Much Lost’.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, ‘*You Will Be Punished*’.

⁴¹ Verweijen, ‘Ambiguity of Militarization’.

⁴² Human Rights Watch, ‘*You Will Be Punished*’; International Crisis Group, *No Stability*.

confirm to international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law standards. These measures included: full MONUSCO involvement in operational planning; the screening of the commanders of the battalions selected for MONUSCO support; the suspension of support to units and commanders involved in serious abuses; and the joint verification of human rights violations. The implementation of these measures partly revolved around military-to-military monitoring and pressure, charging MONUSCO military with documenting and addressing abusive behaviour by the FARDC.⁴³

In part due to its ad-hoc conception, the conditionality policy was rolled out erratically. An inter-agency mission charged with assessing the policy in 2010 identified numerous obstacles to its implementation, including ‘the adequate screening and monitoring of the behaviour of FARDC units receiving support’ and ‘applying the policy consistently across the country’. The mission also found that it was not possible at that point to demonstrate whether the conditionality policy was ‘having an impact on FARDC behaviour, which is a central objective’.⁴⁴ What the mission’s report failed to mention, however, was that one of the main factors undermining consistency in the policy’s implementation was MONUSCO’s limited political leeway. Crucially, in spite of the *de facto* deputy commander of the Kimia II/Amani Leo operations in North Kivu being an ex-CNDP general against whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) had issued an arrest warrant, MONUSCO continued collaboration with the FARDC. Yet, the political climate was such that this issue could not be addressed.⁴⁵

In 2012, the lukewarm relations between MONUSCO and the FARDC temporarily warmed due to their common interest in defeating a new Rwanda-backed rebel group, the *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23), which grew out to be a major threat to Kinshasa. With the Congolese government realizing they needed the UN to contain this threat, collaboration and coordination between the two forces, particularly the FIB, substantially improved.⁴⁶ This détente, however, would not last long: At the start of 2015, MONUSCO officially suspended its participation in upcoming joint operations against the FDLR, as Kinshasa had nominated two ‘blacklisted’ generals in leadership positions. Many FARDC officers viewed the suspension negatively, highlighting the inconsistency with MONUSCO’s earlier decision to let the ex-CNDP general wanted by the ICC off the hook. The measures were also seen as paternalistic and as interference in the Congo’s sovereign (military) affairs. Moreover, some FARDC officers emphasized what they saw as the UN’s historic responsibility for the very creation of the FDLR problem. Not only did the UN fail to prevent or halt the Rwandan genocide in 1994, it also did little to stop humanitarian aid from falling into the hands of the Rwandan Hutu combatants who had fled to the eastern Congo (then Zaire) after the genocide together with thousands of refugees. This lack of oversight allowed these combatants to regroup militarily, paving the way for their later evolution into the FDLR.⁴⁷ The FARDC’s framings of the suspension of collaboration show how certain deeply held representations of

⁴³ UN Secretary General, *Thirtieth Report*.

⁴⁴ UN Secretary General, *Report of the Secretary-General*, 11.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, ‘Arrest Bosco Ntaganda’.

⁴⁶ Olivier, ‘How M23 Was Rolled Back’.

⁴⁷ Interviews FARDC Lt.col. and major, May 2016 ; Interview FARDC col., Jul. 2015; Interview FARDC major, Jul. 2015. Such views were also circulated in the press, e.g. Le Palmarès, ‘Traque des FDLR’.

MONUSCO and the UN form a lens through which events are read and interpreted. Understanding these representations is therefore crucial for grasping diagonal interoperability.

Seeing Self and Other: FARDC and UN military's mutual representations

This section discusses the mutual representations held by FARDC military and officers of the Pakistani and Indian contingents of MONUSCO. These representations are anchored in broad generalizations of two complex and diverse entities at a high level of abstraction, which are at times shot through with national, ethnic and racial stereotypes. While FARDC officers mostly spoke about 'MONUSCO' as an undifferentiated entity (sometimes equalled to 'the UN' and 'the international community'), at other moments, they referred more specifically to the national contingents. For instance, some FARDC officers stated that the French-speaking troops from Benin deployed in the Rutshuru region of North Kivu in 2010 compared favourably to other MONUSCO troops. These peacekeepers were described as understanding more of the security situation, and of being closer to the population. Differences were also detected in relation to the South African troops, who were more often described in more positive terms. For one FARDC officer, this was in part because: 'At least they are African. They are our brothers. They understand us'.⁴⁸ Yet 'being African' or being able to speak local languages did not always seem to make a difference for the better. As one intelligence officer commented on the Swahili speaking Tanzanian troops deployed as part of the FIB: 'The Tanzanians are very mean (*méchants*). They are hypocrites. They say one thing but do another'.⁴⁹ Despite these generalizations and stereotypes, both MONUSCO and FARDC officers also articulated more nuanced views, especially when concerning individual experiences. Officers from both forces stated for instance that they could observe differences in behaviour between the various commanding officers of the other force. Such articulations of individual difference were however still combined with and contrasted against general representations. The latter primarily focused on notions of military professionalism and security performance, which appeared to serve as a point of reference in relation to which other differences (e.g. levels of 'development', 'culture') were articulated.

FARDC discourses on MONUSCO: 'Touristes armés'

In line with findings by Higate and Henry,⁵⁰ FARDC representations of blue helmets' security performance revolved around peacekeepers' perceived spatial and security practices, and their access to technologically advanced military equipment. FARDC officers would, for example, highlight that MONUSCO troops only patrol on main road axes that are accessible by car, and have a limited radius of action, being clustered around their bases. This limited spatial reach was seen as all the more surprising given the equipment available to UN troops. As noted by one officer:

⁴⁸ Interview FARDC lt.col., Jan. 2012.

⁴⁹ Interview FARDC sous-lt., Apr. 2016.

⁵⁰ Higate and Henry, *Insecure Spaces*.

They [MONUSCO] have all sophisticated and modern equipment. They have for example tanks, but all they do is drive around in the big towns, that makes no sense. But in the isolated zones, where the enemy is present and there is insecurity, we rarely see them. They have no impact on the ground.⁵¹

These spatial arrangements were seen to have temporal implications, causing MONUSCO military to always intervene with considerable delay. As one Lt.col. described: ‘The MONUSCO always arrives too late on the scene [after the FARDC is already deployed], and then appropriates the fruits of our labour’.⁵² This perceived lack of (timely) action was also reflected in the running gag that the abbreviation MONUC (which continues to be more often used than MONUSCO) signifies *Mission d’Observation* [instead of *de l’Organisation*] *des Nations Unies en RD Congo*, indicating how, in the words of one FARDC officer, ‘we call it an observer mission, for all they do is observe’.⁵³ Another domain of military practice in which MONUSCO’s military competence was contested was intelligence and situational awareness. Several FARDC officers claimed that they always had to provide MONUSCO with all the information on armed groups, for the mission would otherwise have no idea what they were doing.⁵⁴ In the words of one officer, MONUSCO operates like a ‘blind man’ in the Congo.⁵⁵ In the discourses of yet others, MONUSCO’s limited knowledge and capabilities were portrayed as being at the root of role inversion. An FARDC civil–military relations officer explained it as follows: ‘They [MONUSCO soldiers] learn a lot here; it is us who teach them. They often criticize us, but they are not open to criticism. So they come here to train us in what domains’?⁵⁶

The circumscribed spatial reach of MONUSCO, in spite of the force having ample means of transport compared to the FARDC, was presented as standing in stark contrast to the Congolese army’s modes and zones of operating. The FARDC has a presence and operates in areas with limited accessibility, often by covering vast distances on foot in difficult terrain, like dense forest and mountain areas. While going on foot can be seen as illustrative of a ‘rag-tag army’, since partly induced by a lack of means of transport, when juxtaposed to UN troops’ reliance on vehicles, it was portrayed as a sign of ‘toughness’, of being more ‘genuine’ military than UN peacekeepers. The same inversion, or presenting a putative weakness as a putative strength, could be detected in relation to the FARDC’s abominable service conditions. Rather than seeing these as signs of inferiority, they were generally presented as providing testimony to the FARDC’s high levels of discipline, hence its superiority. In the words of one officer:

They call the FARDC undisciplined, but we are actually very disciplined. In the US army they have everything, good salaries, social benefits, advanced weaponry. If a

⁵¹ Interview FARDC major, Mar. 2010.

⁵² Interview FARDC Lt. col., Apr. 2016.

⁵³ Interview FARDC col., Feb. 2012.

⁵⁴ A recent report similarly highlights the dependence of MONUSCO on FARDC intelligence, see Spink, *From Mandate to Mission*.

⁵⁵ Interview FARDC major, Nov. 2011.

⁵⁶ Interview FARDC major, Feb. 2010.

soldier of the US army would be in the conditions that we are in, do you think he will remain disciplined?⁵⁷

The stark contrast in service conditions was often analysed in conjunction with MONUSCO's alleged abysmal security performance, leading to descriptions of blue helmets as *soldats de luxe* (luxury soldiers) or *touristes armés* (armed tourists), reflecting designations of peacekeepers also found in many other contexts.⁵⁸ Much to the regret and sometimes anger of FARDC officers, these disparities in security performance and bravery are however not reflected in international appreciation for the two forces. One way in which this unequal appreciation is manifested is the distribution of medals. As an FARDC intelligence officer explained: 'Each time, they invite us to the medal ceremony [for MONUSCO contingents], but we [FARDC] are never decorated, we are never thanked. The international community does not recognize our efforts'.⁵⁹ FARDC personnel often explained these perceived differences in international appreciation by pointing to wider geopolitical factors, in particular global power asymmetries.

One of the most widely circulating geopolitical narratives on MONUSCO within the FARDC is the idea that the UN mission is part of a wider conspiracy of imperialist powers to foster insecurity in the Congo. As one FARDC officer said: 'What are they [MONUSCO] doing here? Sometimes we think they are here for fostering insecurity, for sowing chaos and confusion.'⁶⁰ The reasons for the detrimental role of MONUSCO are believed to be twofold. First, it is thought that MONUSCO's presence in the Congo allows its personnel to enrich itself, both via high salaries and the (perceived) opportunity to engage in illegal forms of enrichment, like minerals trafficking. To prolong this ongoing lucrative presence, MONUSCO has to promote insecurity. This idea is well captured in the popular expression (in English) 'No Nkunda no job', which refers to the former leader of the CNDP, Laurent Nkunda. A second reason for MONUSCO's alleged contribution to insecurity is that the mission is an extension of (neo)imperialist powers that aim to maintain the Congo in a state of chaos in order to dominate it and plunder its rich resources. This idea is nourished by earlier experiences with UN activity in the Congo, in particular with the *Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo* (ONUC), the first UN mission that was deployed to the country in the 1960s. Within the Congo, many memorize the ONUC intervention as having been geared towards containing the anti-imperialist, nationalist, Lumumbist side with the aim of promoting pro-Western forces that were friendly to Western business interests.⁶¹ The importance of these memories confirms Higate and Henry's findings that previous peacekeeping shapes perceptions of subsequent missions, and that historical context influences broader notions of bias.⁶² Indeed, many FARDC officers were convinced that MONUSCO is supporting the 'enemy side', stating for example that the mission provides arms and ammunition to certain rebel groups. According to one officer: 'We see the FDLR and think: "How do they get their

⁵⁷ Interview FARDC major, Mar. 2010.

⁵⁸ There is a striking parallel with the ways in which MINUSTHA peacekeepers in Haiti are labeled 'Turista' peacekeepers. See Higate and Henry, *Insecure Spaces*.

⁵⁹ Interview FARDC Lt., Nov. 2011.

⁶⁰ Interview FARDC major, Mar. 2010.

⁶¹ This reading of the ONUC intervention is shared by certain scholars. E.g. Gibbs, 'The United Nations'.

⁶² Higate and Henry, *Insecure Spaces*.

arms?” When we tried to conduct operations the MONUC DDR [sic]⁶³ told us we had to stop. How do you explain that? Each time we get to the enemy, they tell us to withdraw.’⁶⁴ Such stories highlight the complex interplay between geopolitical imaginaries and perceived security performance. Similar factors shape the ways in which MONUSCO peacekeepers of the Indian and Pakistani contingents view the FARDC, representations that equally centre on military professionalism and security performance.

Blue helmet discourses on the FARDC: ‘They have no pride in wearing the uniform’

Reflecting the discourses of aid donors on the FARDC, which highlight its dysfunctionality,⁶⁵ the PakBatt and IndBatt officers contacted for this research were unanimous in their views of the FARDC as a rag-tag, disorganized, undisciplined and ‘underdeveloped’ military that engages in human rights abuses and makes a limited contribution to the population’s security. The following quote is illustrative in this respect:

Troops can be controlled if there is some mechanism, however this army lacks command and control. Soldiers also tend to get drunk and take their weapons everywhere, there is no discipline at all. If they want to clean their weapon they shoot in the air. There are not even checks whether they wear their uniforms properly, so even at the basic level there is no discipline.⁶⁶

While in peacekeepers’ narratives, nearly all dimensions of the FARDC were portrayed as ‘deviant’, it was especially the workings of command chains and discipline that were seen as deficient, creating an image of ‘disorder’. As an IndBatt officer commented: ‘A hierarchic system? I don’t think it exists’.⁶⁷ Similarly, a PakBatt officer observed how ‘military leaders do not seem to have the respect of their subalterns’.⁶⁸ This state of disorder and chaos was linked to the seeming unpredictability of the FARDC, which was generally flagged as hampering collaboration: ‘Everything is possible here, everything can happen...we never know what’s going on’.⁶⁹

Aside from hierarchy and discipline, two other common themes in portrayals of the FARDC’s military ‘unprofessionalism’ were military equipment and fighting skills. Mirroring FARDC narratives on MONUSCO, military equipment stood central in assessments of the force’s security performance. As one PakBatt officer commented: ‘They do not even have small arms, how will they drive tanks? They will drive them like tractors’.⁷⁰ Others highlighted the FARDC’s inferior fighting skills, ascribing these to a lack of military training and education. In the words of an officer working with the TTF:

⁶³ Reference is made to DDRRR, or the Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, Resettlement, of foreign fighters.

⁶⁴ Interview FARDC major, Dec. 2010.

⁶⁵ Eriksson Baaz and Stern, ‘Willing Reform’.

⁶⁶ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2010.

⁶⁷ Interview IndBatt officer, Jan. 2012.

⁶⁸ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2010.

⁶⁹ Interview IndBatt officer, Jan. 2012.

⁷⁰ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2011.

They have a totally different concept of fighting. We are used to having first cover and then fire, but they shoot and then run in the same direction as they fire. It is a very different concept. We had to learn them a lot.⁷¹

This quote clearly reveals the experienced feelings of superiority in terms of military professionalism and how this feeds into a sense of paternalism, of having to ‘teach’ and ‘guide’ the FARDC.⁷²

From the interviews, it emerged that Pakistani and Indian blue helmets generally identify three reasons for the FARDC’s perceived underperformance and lack of military professionalism. The first relates to the FARDC’s bad service conditions, including limited pay. As one COB commander explained: ‘There is no order in this military. An army is a tough profession, if you get no benefits, why would you obey orders? That’s why discipline is very loose.’⁷³ The second reason is FARDC personnel’s lack of motivation for serving in the military. As an IndBatt officer put it: ‘They have no pride in wearing the uniform’.⁷⁴ An officer from the same COB further elaborated: ‘The only motivating factor for them right now is to have power. A weapon gives them access to power’.⁷⁵ A third reason that was commonly invoked was that the FARDC belongs to a ‘backward’ society. Stating that ‘whatever organization you have in the military, it is a reflection of your networks within the society’, a PakBatt officer commented: ‘You can not make a comparison between military of the NATO countries and the FARDC, it is a military in development’.⁷⁶

The importance attached to the Congo’s ‘underdevelopment’ for understanding the characteristics of its army could also be discerned in more general discussions on the country, which was often depicted as being in a lower stage of an evolutionary path towards civilization/modernization. For instance, one officer, after expressing his amazement at the absence of large-scale mechanized agriculture on such fertile land, commented: ‘This country will remain in the same state for a long time’.⁷⁷ In sum, Pakistani and Indian blue helmets’ discourses on the FARDC reproduce the same undeveloped/uncivilized vs. developed/civilized dichotomy identified to play a role within military-to-military interaction within multinational peacekeeping forces.⁷⁸

Joint military activities: ‘Working together apart’?

The negative mutual representations held by FARDC and MONUSCO military also shone through in the way they spoke about joint activities. That collaboration was perceived to be of low quality is not surprising in light of the short time spent together and the rudimentary state of organizational mechanisms to promote and facilitate interaction. Peacekeeping troops are

⁷¹ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2010.

⁷² Cf. Eriksson Baaz and Stern, ‘Willing Reform’.

⁷³ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2011.

⁷⁴ Interview IndBatt officer, Jan. 2012.

⁷⁵ Interview IndBatt officer, Jan. 2012.

⁷⁶ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2011.

⁷⁷ Interview PakBatt officer, Dec. 2010.

⁷⁸ E.g. Ben-Ari and Elron, ‘Blue Helmets and White Armor’.

only deployed to the Congo for a limited amount of time (generally between 6 and 12 months per assignment). This hampers the development of in-depth relations, especially since FARDC regiments also rotate regularly (albeit erratically, with important differences per regiment and sector, but generally every two years). Linguistic differences further undermine interaction. PakBatt and IndBatt officers rarely speak French (or any of the Congo's four official languages), while only few FARDC officers can communicate in English. Furthermore, there are almost no joint trainings, including cross-cultural ones, to facilitate collaboration. Additionally, spatially, the two forces are 'worlds apart', staying in different areas and bases, which limits informal interaction. Contact is mostly limited to formal occasions like joint patrolling or security meetings. Yet, due to mutual distrust and what are seen as deficient divisions of labour, joint security activities seem to nourish, rather than break down, negative representations. For instance, since MONUSCO often only provides air support during joint operations, FARDC troops feel they have to do the dangerous and dirty groundwork on their own. MONUSCO military, for their part, believe that the FARDC does not include them sufficiently in planning operations and provides them with selective information on what happens in operational zones.⁷⁹

One FARDC brigade commander was very straightforward about the shallow character of 'collaboration': 'The MONUC is only there for propaganda or marketing. It's like Coca Cola. They are there to trick us. These [joint] patrols are rather symbolic, it's only for taking some pictures'.⁸⁰ Other FARDC officers similarly expressed the feeling that collaboration remained on a superficial level. Civilians working in the domain of civilian-military interaction shared this observation. For instance, one human rights defender monitoring FARDC abuses said:

The impact of MONUC on FARDC is really small, there is little interaction between the two and they stay pretty much separated. They all do their own business. The biggest impact is perhaps that it drives the FARDC to hypocrisy. To cover up their acts, which they would otherwise do more openly. They hide when the MONUC patrol passes, but afterwards they continue with business as usual. They do behave differently in front of MONUC troops, they fear them, they execute their orders differently. But this impact is only near MONUC bases, but not where MONUC hardly goes.⁸¹

During informal conversations, some FARDC officers admitted they were primarily interested in obtaining fuel, rations and transport from MONUSCO. At the same time, they tried to avoid MONUSCO interference in their daily and security activities as much as possible, and provided them with limited information. Indeed, from observations it was gleaned that the FARDC shared information with COB commanders only selectively, often primarily for instrumental purposes. For instance, it was once witnessed how an FARDC regiment commander spoke to a COB commander in South Kivu about upcoming operations, for which he demanded fuel. However, the operations and intelligence officers of this regiment were not

⁷⁹ See also Spink, *From Mandate to Mission*.

⁸⁰ Interview FARDC col., May 2010.

⁸¹ Interview human rights defender, Mar. 2010.

aware of these operations, which were never held. It therefore appears that the presented operational plans were primarily a way to obtain fuel from the COB commander.⁸²

Non-UN foreign military working with the FARDC also observed the ‘not so joint’ character of the ‘joint’ activities with MONUSCO. As a European officer working with the FARDC in the framework of defence reform testified: ‘There are no “joint operations” here in North Kivu. The FARDC do not share information (...) The “jointness” is a total failure, there is no communication’.⁸³ The same officer explained that due to limited information sharing, joint planning was often merely hypothetical. Moreover, the FARDC commonly lack detailed operational plans and maps, and do not stick to the determined timelines, often due to logistical problems.⁸⁴ Such loose time schedules and planning are fundamentally at odds with blue helmets’ own work practices, and their notions of military professionalism more generally. As they commented, they are used to ‘everything running like clockwork’,⁸⁵ ‘respecting the schedule’⁸⁶ and ‘detailed advance planning’.⁸⁷ Therefore, the FARDC’s ad-hoc and often reactive manner of working profoundly upset their ways of operating, causing them to fear collaboration.

Indeed, PakBatt and IndBatt officers often assessed collaboration with the FARDC as difficult. Furthermore, they were generally convinced that jointly operating with the FARDC had not much impact on the FARDC’s behaviour. Commenting on the joint patrols, one PakBatt officer said:

When we patrol with them many are hungry and they are more occupied with their empty stomach. They see how we handle weapons, they observe how we treat civilians, they see how we behave as military. However, it is not clear this has a big impact on them.⁸⁸

Similarly, a TTF officer having conducted numerous trainings with the FARDC said:

We can only do military training, no character building, that’s for the political leadership. Training helps them to some extent to become a soldier psychologically, but there are many other elements that determine whether they can become one. Especially morale, but also ideology. And soldiers march on their bellies. So without logistics, they will not have any morale. If these elements are not there, no matter how hard we try, we will not get them into the military mindset.⁸⁹

Additionally, several PakBatt and IndBatt officers conveyed the impression that explicit efforts to improve the conduct of the FARDC, like by raising the issue of abuse during meetings and exerting pressure to stop or alter certain practices, met with limited success. For

⁸² Fieldwork observations South Kivu, Dec. 2011.

⁸³ Interview, European officer, Apr. 2011.

⁸⁴ cf. Verweijen, ‘Ambiguity of Militarization’.

⁸⁵ Interview PakBatt officer, Jan. 2012.

⁸⁶ Interview PakBatt officer, Dec. 2010.

⁸⁷ Interview PakBatt officer, Dec. 2010.

⁸⁸ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2010.

⁸⁹ Interview PakBatt officer, Mar. 2010.

instance, a COB commander in South Kivu told how every security meeting with the FARDC, he would bring up the fact that the military were asking for money at roadblocks, as he had been told by human rights defenders. However, each meeting, the FARDC would simply deny this. Since the commander and his troops could not observe this practice when patrolling, given that the FARDC would never stop passers-by in view of MONUSCO vehicles, they felt they had limited leverage on the Congolese army and could do little to stop the extortion.⁹⁰

In spite of these difficulties, MONUSCO officers did seem to be aware that the FARDC has superior situational awareness and intelligence, and that cultivating good relations is necessary to guard access to that information. For instance, a Muslim FARDC brigade commander told how he had once received a Koran from a PakBatt COB commander. In his eyes, this was not primarily an act of solidarity between co-religionists, but related to the fact that ‘they [MONUSCO] know they need us to survive’.⁹¹ Indeed, one COB commander admitted that despite its limited functionality, the FARDC did ‘hold the line’ when it comes to containing armed groups and that they ‘do go out deep into the bush’.⁹²

In sum, when looking at practices and experiences of interaction, we can observe that most of the ‘integrative mechanisms and conditions’ identified by Elron et al.⁹³ are absent, ill-developed, or do little to foster integration. For instance, rather than promoting integration, internal divisions of labour and shared information flows accentuate asymmetries and foster distrust. Furthermore, while there are similarities between the FARDC and MONUSCO in terms of hierarchical and bureaucratic set-up, which is theorized to facilitate interaction, in relation to day-to-day functioning, the two forces see more deviance than common ground. For instance, while MONUSCO military do not see a regular hierarchy at work in the FARDC, FARDC personnel judge MONUSCO’s inertia as abnormal for a military force. Hence, structural similarities between the two forces do not facilitate joint activities.

Concluding reflections

As emerges from the above discussion, military from the Pakistani and Indian contingents of MONUSCO and the FARDC have fundamentally different interests in, motivations for and perceptions of their mutual relations. While blue helmets fear the FARDC, they also need them for intelligence and ground operations in the fight against armed groups. Furthermore, they are mandated to reinforce the FARDC’s capacity, supervise it and improve its conduct, which fosters feelings of superiority that are importantly fed by racial and national stereotypes. This mix of contradictory feelings makes their attitude towards the Congolese military one that can best be described as ‘paternalistic (pretended) partnership’. The FARDC’s attitude vis-à-vis MONUSCO, in turn, is strongly geared towards drawing immediate (material) benefits while limiting interference in its business, a position that can be conceptualized as ‘opportunistic (pretended) partnership’. These diverging approaches to

⁹⁰ Interview COB commander, Dec. 2010.

⁹¹ Interview FARDC col., Mar. 2010.

⁹² Interview COB commander, Dec. 2010.

⁹³ Elron et al. ‘Why Don't They Fight Each Other?’

‘(pretended) partnership’ reflect and further undermine already limited mutual understanding and respect, pointing to weak diagonal interoperability.

The weak diagonal interoperability between UN and FARDC forces can be ascribed to a plethora of overlapping organizational, discursive, security-related and political factors. Organizationally, limited mechanisms have been developed for fostering closer integration, causing the two forces to remain ‘worlds apart’. Politically, integration is hampered by the difficult relations between MONUSCO and the Congolese government, and the asymmetries in wealth and power between the two forces, as reflected in the varying availability of advanced military equipment and soldiers’ service conditions. These asymmetries feed into and are aggravated by certain imaginaries of the international political order. FARDC personnel deeply believe in MONUSCO’s complicity with (neo)imperialist conspiracies to divide the Congo and plunder its natural resources. Officers from MONUSCO’s Indian and Pakistani contingents, on the other hand, circulate a geopolitical narrative centred on the dichotomy between developed/civilized vs. undeveloped/uncivilized nations, clearly placing the Congo in the latter category. While most of the literature on peacekeeping links such essentializing images to the Global North/Global South division, in the case of MONUSCO–FARDC interaction, it are UN peacekeepers from ‘the Global South’ who draw upon racialized cultural stereotypes to frame military colleagues who are equally from ‘the South’. This indicates that ‘within South’ military-to-military interaction may be shaped by similar discursive tropes as ‘North-South’ military relations.

In fact, within FARDC–MONUSCO interaction, the salience of the developed/underdeveloped dichotomy seems to overshadow that of a shared military culture and professional identity, identified by Ben-Ari and Elron as allowing ‘for a common base of fellowship and loyalty among members of different national cultures’.⁹⁴ Instead, military professional identity appears largely a divisionary mechanism, constituting a symbolic battleground where inequalities and wider tensions between UN peacekeepers and the Congolese military are played out. To the FARDC, the presence of UN peacekeepers is a permanent reminder that their own security performance is internationally judged to be insufficient, which incentivizes them to exalt their military superiority. UN peacekeepers, for their part, are mandated to supervise, correct, teach and train the FARDC, which generates a climate in which the FARDC cannot be but ‘inferior’ in military terms. These contrasting views on each other’s presence shape and are shaped by mutually contested security performances, whereby each force claims to provide more security—and more efficiently—than the other.

The resulting weak diagonal interoperability between the two forces clearly undermines the effectiveness of joint military activities and reduces the scope for mutual influence. This calls some of the premises on which MONUSCO support for FARDC operations is based, as well as the expectations surrounding the HRDDP, into question. While no definite conclusions can be drawn based on this study, its findings do preliminarily indicate that MONUSCO presence, monitoring and coaching have limited structural influence on the overall behaviour of the FARDC. Certainly, this is not only the result of the uneasy collaboration between FARDC and MONUSCO military, but relates to an array of factors,

⁹⁴ Ben-Ari and Elron, ‘Blue Helmets and White Armor’, 273.

including MONUSCO's minimal political leverage in the Congo, and the limits to externally driven security sector reform more generally.⁹⁵ Yet these findings do highlight the need for more reflection on the ways such strange battlefield fellows could become more friendly forces, and on how to create the conditions for mutually beneficial cross-fertilization.

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⁹⁵ Kets and De Vries, *Limits*.

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