

Rebels attack UN base in Congo, killing 20 soldiers

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In the early morning hours on Thursday, armed militants carried out a raid on a UN base in Eastern Congo, killing 15 UN soldiers and five troops with the Congolese army. Some 40 more were critically wounded. The UN casualties, all soldiers from Tanzania, were deployed to the Congo under the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Thursday's attack is the deadliest assault on UN forces since 1993 in Somalia, when 22 UN soldiers were killed in the course of supporting the US military effort to prop up its puppet government. That military effort resulted in a devastating setback when 18 US special forces soldiers were killed during a raid on Mogadishu.

MONUSCO officials characterized the attack as "a well-coordinated and complex operation launched at dusk by attackers armed with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades," declaring the attack represented a "serious escalation." In addition to the casualties, the militia took out two armored personnel carriers and an ambulance and truck before withdrawing.

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres condemned the attack, and said it constituted a war crime. "I want to express my outrage and utter heartbreak at last night's attack on United Nations peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is another indication of the enormous sacrifices made by troop-contributing countries in the service of global peace."

Spokesperson for the US State Department Heather Nauert stated that Washington was "appalled by the horrific act."

MONUSCO head Maman Sidikou issued a statement condemning the attack: "Attacks against those who are working in the service of peace and stability in the

Democratic Republic of the Congo are cowardly. MONUSCO will take all actions to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable and brought to justice."

In fact, the so-called UN "peacekeepers" are doing anything but keeping the peace. With their mandate as a "rapid force brigade", the UN troops stationed at the base carry out offensive military operations, executing deadly raids and carrying out "seek and destroy" missions to neutralize rebel militias.

The UN's deployment of its "Force Intervention Brigade" in 2013 to Eastern Congo marked a new stage in the UN's offensive operations in the country, and was directed against the Rwandan M23 militia, marking a complete turn from the previous mandate restricting it to defensive operations.

Thursday's attack took place near Semuliki in North Kivu province, by the Ugandan border. Officials with MONUSCO claimed the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) were behind the attack.

Rebel militias have carried out attacks across North Kivu for the last several years in the aftermath of the Congo War, which devastated the country between 1996-2003. The war drew the military forces of six African countries into the conflict, resulting in an estimated 5 million killed. The ADF, along with other militias, have increased their ranks and influence amid the collapse of Congolese society, in particular Eastern Congo, which the seven-year war left in ruins.

In recent years, the 18,000-strong MONUSCO force has become a frequent target of various rebel militias in the mineral-rich region of Eastern Congo, with the militias battling for control over the spoils.

The ADF attack on the UN base is only the most recent offensive by the group. In October, ADF rebels ambushed a convoy of Congolese officials and civilians

near the town of Beni, also located in North Kivu and close to the Ugandan border. Twenty-six people were killed and 12 wounded; two UN soldiers were killed in a separate attack.

Frequently crossing the porous border between Congo and Uganda, the ADF have waged war with government forces from both countries since 1995. A key component of the conflict is the vast economic resources of the region, in the form of minerals and precious stones, such as diamonds.

Speaking to the UK *Guardian*, Jason Stearns, the director of the Congo Research Group at New York University, stated, “The ADF is an Islamist armed group which imposes discipline based on a strict interpretation of the sharia and which is known to be extremely brutal. It is very likely the ADF were involved but also other groups... The ADF have been in the area for 20 years and has deep links with all kinds of people.”

Despite its members holding religious affiliation with Islam, US officials have found no substantial ties or allegiances to other Islamist groups in Africa, such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia or Boko Haram in Nigeria.

The escalating conflict between various militias and UN forces takes place against the backdrop of a dire refugee crisis, economic deterioration, and political instability in the Congo.

Amidst the chaotic stew created by decades of imperialist interventions from Washington and Europe, the country has experienced a sharp increase of impoverishment and social misery, with 80 percent of the population living on a mere \$1.25 a day. Treatable diseases run rampant, with health care nonexistent over vast areas of the country while the use of child labor is rampant.

Speaking to the refugee crisis, last week Ulrika Blom, the director of the Norwegian Refugee Council for the DRC, said, “The scale of people fleeing violence [in the DRC] is off the charts, outpacing Syria, Yemen and Iraq.”

The escalation of conflict in the Congo coincides with the expansion of US military influence across the continent, particularly in Somalia and West Africa.

Roughly the size of Western Europe, the Democratic Republic of Congo has been the stage for an array of imperialist forces circling the country, above all the United States, which is seeking to exploit Congo’s vast

economic resources and impoverished working class in the interest of American corporations and banks.

In its scramble for Africa, Washington aims to secure for American capitalists the vast economic resources of the continent and to neutralize its economic rival China, which has procured significant economic influence across Africa over the last decade.

Washington’s relationship with its erstwhile partner in the ruling government of President Joseph Kabila has soured after the latter’s refusal to hold elections in 2016. Kabila is facing growing calls to step down.

Notably, Kabila recently provoked the ire of Washington when he secured deals with Beijing for the development of Congo’s mining sector and infrastructure, essentially cutting out American firms from the negotiations. Washington has indicated it is weary of Kabila, and is looking to place a more pliant government in Kinshasa, raising the specter of a wider military conflict which could surpass the horrors of the Congo War.



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