

# The UN's Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: U.S. Support and Potential Foreign Policy Advantages

MAY 2013

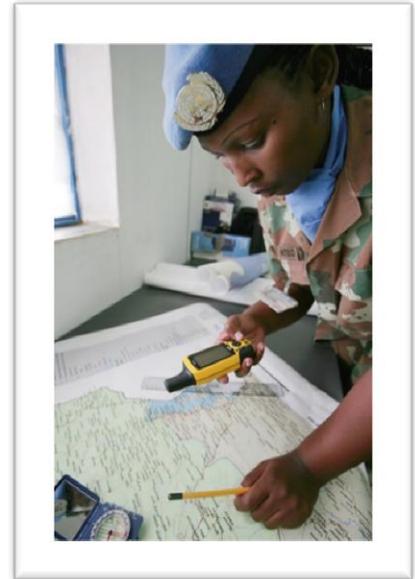


## OVERVIEW

Over the past four years, there has been much discussion of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and how they have reshaped global military strategies. There has been less discussion on the use of *unarmed* UAV's and how they could reshape the world's strategy for peace.

This January, the United Nations Security Council, with support from the United States, approved the use of unarmed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) by the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known by its French acronym MONUSCO.

By way of background, there are 19,000 UN peacekeepers including troops, police, and civilians currently serving in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to promote peace and security in a country that is about the size of the U.S. east of the Mississippi river,<sup>1</sup> yet possessing only 1,500 miles of paved roads, limited government authority, and more than two dozen armed rebel groups operating in the country. Due to the difficult conditions and renewed violence by these rebel groups, the UN Security Council called for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to modernize the MONUSCO mandate and provide a comprehensive strategy that accounts for the country's unique challenges and to address its ongoing conflicts. This strategy includes the use of UAVs to provide surveillance to help peacekeepers better fulfill their mandates and protect civilians in eastern Congo.



**To that end, MONUSCO will utilize the unarmed UAVs for four basic functions:**

- To augment situational awareness on the ground and, consequently, the ability to protect civilians and peacekeeping troops;
- To monitor armed groups and trafficking of arms;
- To assess the movements of displaced refugees in order to better address their needs;
- To evaluate environmental challenges, including assessing damages from natural disasters.<sup>2</sup>

The unarmed UAV system will reflect the UN Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines to work within the constraints of the Security Council mandate, obtain consent of disputing parties, observe non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate, and impartially implement the mandate.<sup>3</sup>

The pilot program, which will be carried out in the summer of 2013, has been met with U.S. support to-date. In addition to receiving U.S. support in the UN Security Council, a new bipartisan poll shows that 60 percent of Americans support the use of UAVs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by UN peacekeepers.

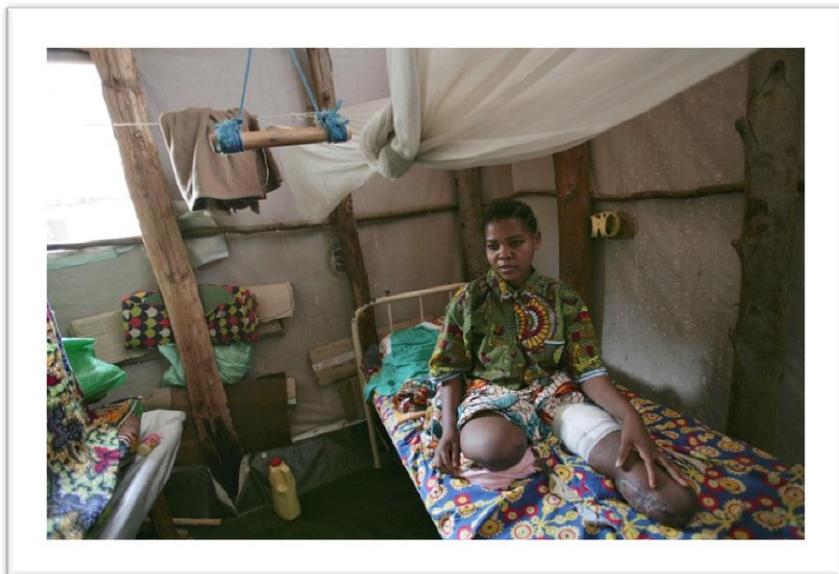
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<sup>1</sup> Polgreen, Lydia. "Congo's Death Rate Unchanged Since War Ended." *New York Times*. 23 Jan. 2008

<sup>2</sup> "Briefing of the Under Secretary-General DPKO on Unmanned Aerial Systems employment in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo." The United Nations, 01 Aug. 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines*. Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations Secretariat, 18 Jan. 2008.

## An Acute Need for UAVs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



The eastern provinces of North and South Kivus of the DRC are huge expanses — an area larger than the state of Pennsylvania with very few roads. The lack of infrastructure and dense forests combined makes it very difficult and dangerous for the UN to patrol and secure the country. In addition to these significant operational difficulties, UN peacekeepers also have to contend with more than a dozen armed groups that operate in the region.<sup>4</sup> Rebel groups in the region include Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), Mai Mai,

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the March 23 (M23) faction.<sup>5</sup> These threats persist in the eastern provinces because of its mineral wealth, porous borders, lack of government authority, and the lingering ethnic tensions between rebel factions. Many of these rebel groups and some within the armed forces of DRC commit heinous acts of violence against civilians. This past year in eastern Congo, hundreds of civilians have been killed, including 143 children and over two million people have been displaced.<sup>6</sup>

Due to the difficult conditions and in an attempt to better monitor armed groups, the UN has had to operate helicopters and planes for surveillance and transport, but this can be costly. In addition, the UN has lost 55 staff members over the last three years, including a devastating airplane crash in 2011 that claimed the lives of 24 UN employees<sup>7</sup> and a helicopter crash this March in the eastern province of South Kivu, killing four Russian nationals.<sup>8</sup>

While no peacekeeping operation can be expected to protect all of the people in their areas of operation all of the time, especially given current resources in an environment like eastern DRC, UAVs are intended to substantially increase prevention and response by increasing visibility and decreasing reaction time.

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<sup>4</sup> Doyle, Mark. "DR Congo's rebel kaleidoscope" *BBC*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 4 Dec. 2012.

<sup>5</sup> *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region*. S/2013/119. United Nations Security Council, 27 Feb. 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Faul, Michelle and Rodney Muhumuza. "Congo Violence: Hundreds Of Civilians Killed in Goma, Oxfam Says." *Huffington Post*. 7 Aug. 2012.

"DR Congo rebels, troops accused of killing, rape." Agence France-Presse. 7 Dec. 2012.

"DR Congo Overview." *Refugees International.org*.

<sup>7</sup> "More than 30 People Perish in UN Plane Crash in DR Congo." *UN News Center*. The United Nations, 04 Apr. 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Nichols, Michelle. "Four Russians killed in U.N. helicopter crash in Congo." *Reuters*. 12 Mar. 2013.

With more than 2.6 million internally displaced persons in DRC, nearly half a million more in neighboring nations, and widespread exploitation of natural resources by rebels, a great need remains for peacekeepers to fulfill their mandate.<sup>9</sup> To enable them to do so most effectively, the UN has the full consent of the DRC government to use unarmed UAVs within the country. DRC's neighbors, Uganda and Rwanda have also been informed of the use of these aircrafts.

## How the Use of Unarmed UAVs by the UN Will Function

The UAVs that the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations plans to deploy are not equipped with weapons. Rather, they are essentially flying cameras. These vehicles can fly up to 12 hours at a time with a range of 150 miles. The initial system will include three unarmed UAVs, which would be deployed in North Kivu at night for around 10-12 hours at a time. The unarmed UAVs will carry day/night cameras with electro-optical and infrared thermal technology, would be able to operate from a height of 18,000 feet, and can capture and relay still and video images. The images captured by the UAVs will be relayed to a command and control base, which will in turn store the data, providing both near real-time analysis and identifying trends over time. The unarmed UAV system will not be operational, however, without the qualified personnel.<sup>10</sup>

This technology would allow the UN to “track movements of armed militias, assist patrol heading into hostile territory, and document atrocities,” one UN official stated.<sup>11</sup> An individual operating the plane from a terminal can further investigate a situation if something looks suspicious or amiss. This will support the UN's early warning system by providing real-time data to MONUSCO's force commander on the two

### MONUSCO's Impact in DRC

- Since 2007, MONUSCO has helped to demobilize over 33,000 child soldiers and reintegrate them into society.<sup>1</sup>
- Since 2002, 14,850 foreign rebel combatants have been repatriated back to their home countries.
- MONUSCO has also improved the DRC's national police forces by training more than 1,800 new police officers, including 97 women.<sup>2</sup>
- MONUSCO has been one of the most innovative peacekeeping operations to develop strategies to protect civilians including the distribution of high-frequency solar-powered radios and construction of cell phone towers, to help communities in the region report on the movement and activities of rebel groups. This and other new strategies are now serving as good practices that are being adopted in other missions in Sudan, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Lebanon.
- Furthermore, between November 2012 and February 2013, MONUSCO removed 13,649 unexploded ordnance and 98,274 small arms ammunition. It also educated 25,588 people on mine risks.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “DRC: Rebuilding the lives of children associated with armed groups.” IRIN news service. 16 Jan. 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.* S/2011/298. United Nations Security Council. 12 May 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.* S/2013/96. United Nations Security Council, 15 Feb. 2013.

<sup>9</sup> “2013 UNHCR country operations profile - Democratic Republic of the Congo.” *UNHCR.org*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

<sup>10</sup> “Briefing of the Under Secretary-General DPKO on Unmanned Aerial Systems employment in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo.” 01 Aug. 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Lynch, Colum. “U.N. Wants to Use Drones for Peacekeeping Missions.” *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 08 Jan. 2013.

dozen armed militias operating in the area.<sup>12</sup>

The unarmed UAV technology will be unclassified, and the troop contributing country or contractor will work in a transparent manner, unless specific circumstances dictate otherwise. However, the results of data analysis will normally be for United Nations use only. All data, imagery, and UAS derived analysis products will remain the property of the UN. The UN will only seek, collect, and use this information that is relevant to its Security Council mandate and/or its ability to efficiently and effectively carry out its mandated tasks. The UN will share operationally relevant information with the host country if it is relevant to MONUSCO's Security Council mandate.

## **Potential Benefits of Unarmed UAVs in DRC**

Due to the difficult conditions in eastern DRC and lack of infrastructure, it can take peacekeepers five to six hours to patrol a 10 to 15 mile radius. Complicating matters even further, the troops in this region are night blind because of the limitations of their current resources and must stop patrolling at sunset. Armed groups in the region realize this and travel mostly at night. The UN's UAVs will be conducting nighttime surveillance. The real-time imagery can help improve the UN's early warning system by providing peacekeepers on the ground with more accurate and timely information on the movements of rebel groups. This, in turn, will improve the mission's ability to protect civilians under threat of violence, a key aspect of MONUSCO's mandate.

This technology may prove particularly valuable as the UN works to address the notorious M23 rebel movement. This armed rebel group, which operates in the Kivus, is responsible for serious and widespread acts of violence and looting, summary executions, recruitment of child soldiers, and sexual violence against women and children. In December 2012 alone, more than 285,000 people were forced to flee their homes due to M23 activities in the region.

One UN official commented that, "our best method of protection is early warning. We recently had a patrol ambushed in Darfur. If you had a drone ahead of the patrol, it could have seen the ambush party."<sup>13</sup>

**In addition to enhancing its early warning capabilities, the use of UAVs could benefit MONUSCO's activities in a number of other ways. For example:**

- MONUSCO currently depends on helicopters and foot patrols for its surveillance activities. Adding UAVs will free up helicopter flying hours so they can be used for other critical tasks, such as deploying a quick reaction force in a crisis, extracting, medevacking, and supplying UN staff. This would allow UN peacekeepers to be deployed into more remote field locations to provide security and protect civilians.

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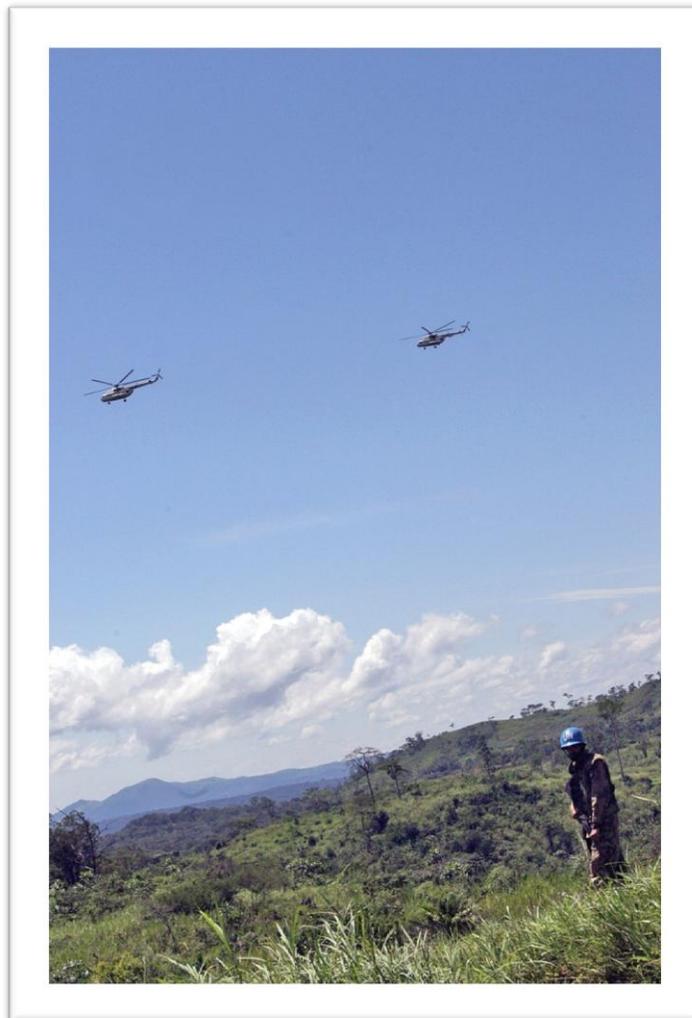
<sup>12</sup> Doyle, Mark. "DR Congo's Rebel Kaleidoscope." *BBC News*. BBC, 04 Dec. 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Lynch, Colum. "U.N. Wants to Use Drones for Peacekeeping Missions." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 08 Jan. 2013.

- UAVs are more efficient and effective when it comes to surveillance activities than helicopters. In one month, an Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) can accomplish what it would take 15-19 helicopters to do. In the same timeframe, UAS can complete the same surveillance in 200-250 flying hours, compared to 600-700 helicopter flying hours.
- UAV's may have a deterrent effect if armed groups know that the UN is watching their movement or hear them overhead.

In light of the fact that the UN is increasingly being asked to do more with less, cost is a key consideration. UAS has comparably minimal maintenance requirements (aside from the provision of fuel), and the use of UAVs is cheaper than other surveillance mechanisms including infantry patrols and helicopters.

## **Broad-Based Support for Unarmed UAVs**



The UAV proposal was backed by Western members of the Security Council, including the U.S. On January 9, 2013, State Department Spokesperson Victoria Nuland explicitly confirmed this, stating, “The United States does support the UN's proposal to use unarmed, unmanned aerial vehicles. We're also looking at other missions where this might be possible. We think that building on MONUSCO surveillance capacity will better enable it to protect civilians and will support the efforts of the DRC to restore stability in the eastern part of the country.”<sup>14</sup>

Further, American voters have voiced broad approval for the UN plan to use unarmed UAVs in the DRC. A March 2013 poll of more than 1,000 adults conducted by the bipartisan polling team of Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies (commissioned by the Better World Campaign) found that 54 percent of Americans support the use of unarmed UAVs by the UN to monitor regional conflicts, and 60 percent approve the use of unarmed UAVs in the DRC to provide peacekeepers real-time information from the ground to help them better carry out their mandate. Only 5 percent voiced any disapproval of their use in the DRC. Results among registered voters were essentially the same as for all adults, with no significant difference in responses between Democrats and Republicans.

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<sup>14</sup> “US Supports UN Surveillance Drones For Eastern Congo.” VOA News. Voice of America, 09 Jan. 2013.

### Polling Question 1

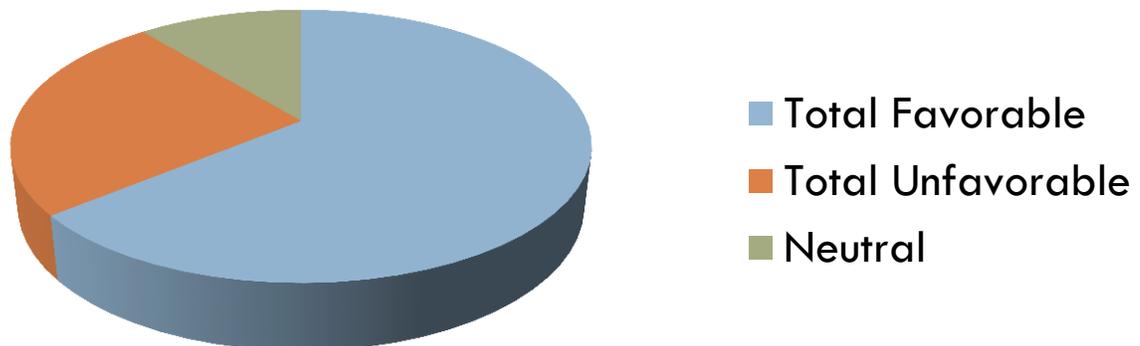
As you may know, unmanned aerial vehicles, which also are referred to as drones, are remotely guided aircraft. These unmanned aerial vehicles are sometimes armed with weapons to attack a specific target, but in many cases they are UNARMED and can be used by police to study crime scenes, by U.S. intelligence agencies to monitor potential terrorist activity abroad, or by international organizations like the United Nations to keep track of regional conflicts.

What is your general opinion on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles when they are NOT armed—very favorable, somewhat favorable, neutral, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

Very favorable .....	31
Somewhat favorable.....	23
Neutral.....	27
Somewhat unfavorable.....	8
Very unfavorable .....	10
Not sure (this option not read) .....	1

**Total Favorable 54**  
**Total Unfavorable 18**

### General Opinion on the Use of Unarmed UAVs



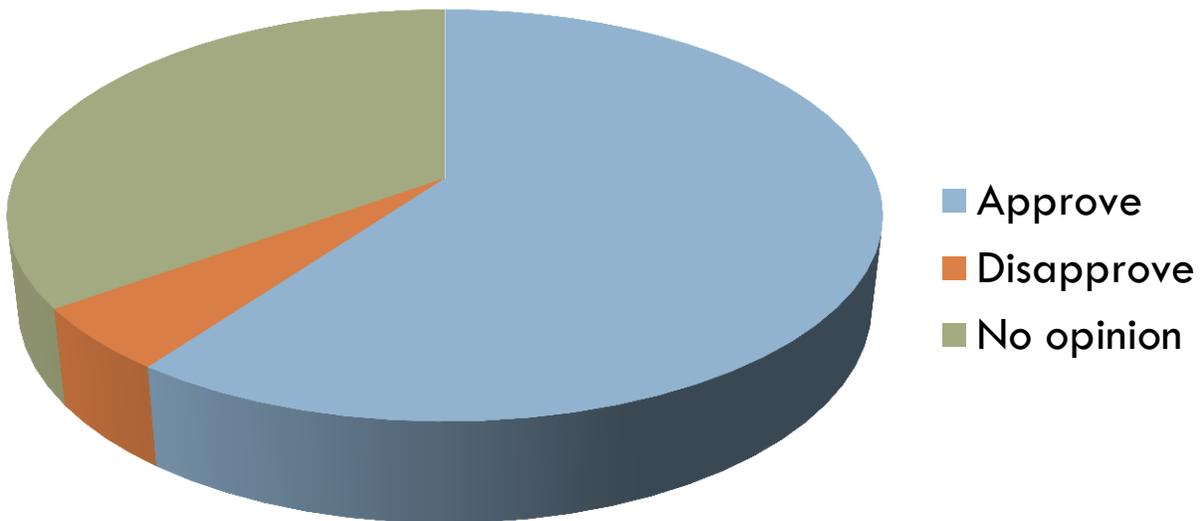
**Polling Question II**

In recent months, rebel forces have attacked and terrorized civilian populations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In response, the United Nations Security Council has authorized the use of unmanned aerial vehicles that are UNARMED to provide non-stop surveillance of that region. These unmanned aerial vehicles carry cameras that will provide U.N. peacekeepers real-time information about rebel troop movements, which they can use for immediate decision-making and action to protect civilians. The use of these unmanned aerial vehicles will free up other U.N. peacekeeping resources like helicopters, so they can be used for rapid response.

Remembering that these unmanned aerial vehicles would not be armed, do you approve or disapprove of the United Nations' use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or do you have no opinion about this?

**Approve.** ..... 60  
**Disapprove** ..... 5  
No opinion ..... 35  
Not sure/refused ..... -

**United Nations' Use of UAVs in the DRC**



## Promoting U.S. Interests in Africa through the use of UAVs



The U.S. has substantial foreign policy interests in Africa, which may be furthered by MONUSCO's use of unarmed UAVs.

In February 2013, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson announced more robust U.S. policies in the DRC, which is reliant on the work of MONUSCO and the UN more broadly. "The DRC's chronic instability has consequences for U.S. national interests," said Carson. "These interests range from multi-nation efforts to dismantle the Lord's Resistance

Army, to climate change and the protection of one of the world's most important ecosystems, to advancing global energy security, and to the economic benefits that derive from open and secure borders."<sup>15</sup>

Carson also highlighted the need for peacekeepers to better protect civilians, especially in light of the M23 rebel group. "The M23's takeover of Goma at the end of last year, showed the world that the collective efforts of the DRC, its neighbors and the broader international community have not been sufficient to lay the foundation for a durable solution," said Carson.<sup>16</sup>

In response to this incident in Goma, in December 2012, the Security Council requested a report to improve MONUSCO's ability to implement its mandate. The Secretary General assembled a special report with recommendations to address the root causes of the conflict, including the use of unarmed UAVs as part of a comprehensive strategy to promote sustainable peace in DRC.<sup>17</sup>

The U.S. precedent of using of UAVs in Africa may demonstrate the need for the UN to follow suit, particularly given the threats posed by terrorists, arms traffickers, and rebel groups that are able to move with virtual impunity across national borders in the region.<sup>18</sup> The seven peacekeeping missions currently operating in Africa need to be equipped with accurate and timely information in order to better carry out their mandates. Previously, the UN has asked individual Members States to provide over flight imagery, including the U.S. and other governments. In the 1990s, Rolf Ekeus, a former Swedish chief of the UN Special Commission in Iraq, persuaded the U.S. to lend the UN U-2 spy planes to monitor Saddam Hussein's weapons-of-mass-destruction program. More recently, Ireland, France, and Belgium supplied unmanned aircraft to UN-backed, European-led missions in Chad, Lebanon, and the Congo. During the 2011 Presidential election in the DRC, Belgium sent four UAVs to help with security. Last year, UN deployed its first UAV to Port-au-Prince, Haiti to survey the earthquake damage and help coordinate recovery efforts.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Carson, Johnnie. "Finding a Lasting Solution to Instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Conversation with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson." The Brookings Institution, 11 Feb. 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region*. S/2013/119. United Nations Security Council, 27 Feb. 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Crawford, Jamie, and Chris Lawrence. "U.S. to Base Surveillance Drones in Niger, Ambassador Says." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 07 Feb. 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Lynch, Colum. "U.N. Wants to Use Drones for Peacekeeping Missions." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 08 Jan. 2013.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The UAV debate is controversial but the use of unarmed UAVs does have potential to enhance UN peacekeeping. The UN's use of this cutting-edge technology will support its mandate in the DRC to promote peace and security by enhancing operational and cost efficiency. These tools also stand to enhance MONUSCO's surveillance capabilities and potentially minimize violence or even in some cases, deter it.

Still, as the pilot program in DRC opens the door for UN peacekeepers to better protect the civilians in the Kivus—who have lived in conflict for nearly twenty years—it is important to note that, while UAVs are a tool that UN peacekeepers can use to help create the conditions for peace, the onus for maintaining peace ultimately lies with the Congolese government and its people.

Nevertheless, the capacities of UAVs to further efforts for peace are strong, and are strongly in the U.S. national security and humanitarian interests. As we begin to understand the possibility of unarmed UAVs in peacekeeping, the Better World Campaign advises the U.S. and UN to embrace the following recommendations:

### ***Recommendations to the United States:***

- The U.S. should support and promote the use of unarmed UAVs in UN peacekeeping, not just in DRC but also other missions where: peacekeepers face a difficult operating environment with large expanses of area to cover, insecurity, and where UAV use can free up other air assets to be used more strategically.

### ***Recommendations to the United Nations***

- The UN should assess the use of unarmed UAVs in DRC and administer a cost-benefit analysis of their usages. A projection should be delivered as part of the contract bidding process, and subsequent analysis should be provided after full-scale implementation.
- After implementation, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations should provide a detailed assessment regarding the success of UAVs in enabling peacekeepers to better realize the MONUSCO mandate. The assessment should include lessons learned and areas for improvement, as to maximize their continued use in the DRC and/or other UN peacekeeping missions.
- The UN should continue to consider innovative methods and new technologies that may help peacekeepers be more effective and efficient in carrying out their mandate of promoting peace and security.
- The UN should educate the DRC population on the use of UAVs in the region. Both to inform them that UAVs are unarmed and also because it may have a deterring effect for rebel groups to know of their existence and continuous use.

### **Sidebar: The U.S. and Unarmed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles**

As the UN begins to utilize unarmed UAVs, the U.S. has established a precedent of using UAVs over the last ten years. The U.S. military began its UAV program in 2001 with fewer than 200 in its fleet.<sup>20</sup> Today, it uses 7,500 of these aircraft for unmanned aerial surveillance (UAS). These are aerial robots with navigating systems that are remotely piloted. UAVs currently make up one-third of the Air Force's total fleet, and in the next ten years, one-third of U.S. attack aircrafts will be UAVs. As a result, the military is currently training more UAV pilots than traditional pilots.

In one illustration of how unarmed UAVs are shaping American military strategy, the U.S. has begun to sanction the use of unarmed UAVs to monitor extremist groups in the Sahel. In early 2012, the security vacuum created by a coup in northern Mali allowed Islamist extremist groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to take control of the northern two-thirds of the country. In response to this new terrorist threat in Mali, the U.S. signed a deal with the neighboring country of Niger on February 1, 2013, to allow the deployment of surveillance UAVs from the country to monitor developments in the region. This agreement demonstrates the continued interests of the U.S. in Africa, especially in regards to the movement of extremists and terrorist organizations. The U.S. is also supporting France in its efforts in Mali "by sharing intelligence, flying French troops to neighboring countries and refueling French Jets."<sup>21</sup> In addition to Niger, the U.S. already has surveillance UAVs deployed to monitor a variety of security situations in other parts of the African continent, including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Djibouti.

Outside of the military, unarmed UAVs are also being utilized for a variety of purposes, for example:

- Washington State's Department of Transportation is seeking to use UAVs for avalanche control.
- The U.S. Forest Services' intend to use UAVs to help fight fires.
- State and local police departments in Maryland, Alabama, Texas, Florida, Washington, Arkansas, and Utah have sought permission to fly UAVs as a law enforcement tool.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Finn, Peter. "Rise of the Drone: From Calif. Garage to Multibillion-dollar Defense Industry." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 23 Dec. 2011

<sup>21</sup> Crawford, Jamie, and Chris Lawrence. "U.S. to Base Surveillance Drones in Niger, Ambassador Says." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 07 Feb. 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Grossman, Lev. "Drone Home." *Time*. Time Magazine, 11 Feb. 2013.