

SCHAEFER: Maintain opposition to U.N. peace enforcement

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U.N. peacekeeping has had its share of successes, but its failures are more memorable. Two have been memorialized in the movies: the Somali debacle in “Black Hawk Down” and the Rwandan genocide in “Hotel Rwanda.”

After these disasters, the [United Nations](#) re-examined the capabilities of peacekeeping and concluded that it had been too ambitious. Enforcing peace on belligerents, it determined, is a task better left to ad hoc coalitions.

Two recent decisions, however, could represent a reversal and should raise concerns in Washington and Turtle Bay.

In March, the [U.N. Security Council](#) unanimously approved Resolution 2098 authorizing an “intervention brigade” to supplement the [U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission](#) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The brigade is charged with neutralizing and disarming militant groups in eastern [Congo](#). Having [U.N.](#) peacekeepers directly confront armed adversaries makes MONUSCO a partisan in the conflict — and a target.

The “intervention brigade” was deemed necessary after MONUSCO peacekeepers — already possessed of the most aggressive mandate among [U.N.](#) missions — failed to fulfill their charge to prioritize “protection of civilians.” Instead, they retreated in the face of rebel attacks earlier this year. In essence, the [United Nations](#) is dubiously calculating that the new peacekeepers will act when the previous peacekeepers did not.

The problem, however, is more fundamental than a lack of will among peacekeepers. It is the lack of effective government in eastern [Congo](#). Resolution 2098 states that “the [Government of the DRC](#) bears primary

responsibility for security, protection of civilians, national reconciliation, peacebuilding and development in the country.” But armed rebels infest the region precisely because the power vacuum there allows them to advance their political and economic objectives.

The [United Nations](#) can’t replace an absent government. The [U.N.](#) peacekeeping mission has been in place for a decade and made little or no progress. That’s not for lack of resources. The [United Nations](#) has spent more than \$11 billion on peacekeeping alone. Since 2000, [Congo](#) has received \$27.6 billion in foreign aid, including \$4.8 billion from the U.S.

The [Security Council](#)’s authorization of a U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), anticipated to cost \$800 million annually, should evoke similar concerns. Resolution 2100 instructs peacekeepers to use “all necessary means” to stabilize “key population centres and support for the reestablishment of State authority throughout the country” and protect “civilians and [United Nations](#) personnel” in [Mali](#).

Thankfully, the [United Nations](#) did not replicate the error in [Congo](#) of creating an offensive [U.N.](#) force in [Mali](#). Instead, the resolution authorizes an independent French force to “intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat.”

But, as with [Congo](#), the [government](#) has minimal authority in northern [Mali](#). There is no peace agreement between the [provisional government](#) and rebel groups, and radical Islamists continue to conduct terrorist attacks. Notwithstanding the French presence, in [U.N.](#) parlance “all necessary means” encompasses the use of force. Peacekeepers likely will have to act aggressively to re-establish state authority and protect civilians. They will not be seen as a neutral force but as an extension of the Malian government, making them a target.

It is understandable why the [Security Council](#) feels compelled to address these chaotic situations, but the unfortunate reality is that there is no peace to keep and precious little government authority to bolster in either [Congo](#) or [Mali](#).

The world never runs short of peacekeeping “opportunities.” But history shows us that, under the wrong circumstances, [U.N.](#) peacekeeping can misfire badly. The U.S. should not let pressure to act override prudence.

Missions in [Congo](#) and [Mali](#) entail peace enforcement, not peacekeeping. Peace is best enforced by national militaries and ad hoc interventions, supported as appropriate by the U.S. or the [U.N.](#), which can transition to peacekeeping missions when circumstances warrant. Ignoring the lessons of the past only makes a repeat of past tragedy more likely.