

Contemporary operational challenges facing United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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ABSTRACT

United Nations peacekeeping operations have become increasingly complex due to evolving conflict dynamics, asymmetric security threats and growing political pressures. Despite the substantial resources committed to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), persistent insecurity in eastern DRC continues to raise concerns regarding the operational effectiveness and credibility of UN peacekeeping. This study examined the contemporary operational challenges affecting UN peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Guided by Realism Theory and Organizational Legitimacy Theory, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from a stratified sample of 352 respondents drawn from UN military personnel, UN police, civilian staff, regional actors, NGOs and local leaders through questionnaires, interviews and document review. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively through IBM SPSS Statistics (v.28), while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis and triangulated with quantitative findings. The findings revealed that frequent changes in mandates and inconsistent interpretation of Rules of Engagement reduced operational clarity and delayed responses to civilian protection threats. Poor coordination, particularly between MONUSCO and host-government institutions, undermined operational coherence and emerged as a major constraint to mission effectiveness. Resource limitations, especially inadequate troop levels and poor-quality equipment supplied by troop-contributing countries, significantly constrained operational capacity. The study further established that geopolitical interests and political interference continued to shape operational priorities, thereby limiting mission autonomy and weakening institutional legitimacy. Collectively, these challenges diminished public confidence in MONUSCO's ability to deliver sustainable peace and effective civilian protection. The study contributes to knowledge by empirically linking these operational challenges to the credibility and legitimacy of UN peacekeeping through the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups, thereby extending existing scholarship that has largely examined such challenges separately or from strategic and institutional perspectives. Collectively, these challenges diminished public confidence in MONUSCO's ability to deliver sustainable peace and effective civilian protection. The study concludes that improving mandate clarity, strengthening inter-agency coordination, enhancing operational resources and insulating peacekeeping decisions from excessive political influence are essential for improving the effectiveness and credibility of UN peacekeeping operations in the DRC. It recommends harmonizing Rules of Engagement, strengthening coordination frameworks between MONUSCO and national institutions, investing in modern operational capabilities and promoting greater political neutrality in Security Council decision-making to enhance future peacekeeping performance.

Key Words: DRC, Organizational Legitimacy, Operational Challenges, MONUSCO, United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, peacekeeping operations have evolved in complexity since their inception in 1948, when the UN deployed military observers to the Middle East under the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). Early scholars such as Doyle (1995) and Paris (2004) noted that traditional peacekeeping missions were designed for post-conflict environments with clear ceasefires, impartiality and consent of parties. However, modern conflicts particularly in Africa have blurred these boundaries, introducing challenges in mandate interpretation, logistics and force protection. At the continental level, African missions such as those in Somalia, Sudan and the DRC highlight the UN's struggle to adapt its operational models to dynamic conflict theatres characterized by asymmetric threats and weak state structures. Similarly, Durch (1998) observed that resource inadequacies, complex mandates and host-government interference often led to operational paralysis.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has long been one of the most significant theatres of UN peacekeeping. Eastern DRC, particularly the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, have witnessed persistent armed conflict driven by political instability, ethnic divisions, competition over natural resources and regional interventions (Stearns,

2015). These dynamics have created a protracted humanitarian crisis, with millions displaced and communities subjected to repeated cycles of violence.

In response, the UN established the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) in 1999, which was later reconfigured into the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in 2010 through Security Council Resolution 1925. MONUSCO has remained one of the largest and most complex peacekeeping missions in UN history, although its personnel strength has not remained constant. At reconfiguration, Resolution 1925 authorized MONUSCO to have a maximum strength of 19,815 military personnel, 760 military observers, 391 police personnel and 1,050 formed police unit personnel. Subsequent mandate renewals, operational adjustments and drawdown processes changed both the authorized and deployed strength of the mission overtime. Therefore, references to approximately 14,000 military personnel describe a later period of deployment, while the higher figure reflects earlier authorization levels under the Security Council mandate. Its broad mandate has included the protection of civilians, support to stabilization and the neutralization of armed groups. However, despite this significant presence, MONUSCO has continued to face criticism regarding its effectiveness and the sustainability of its interventions (Tull, 2009; Autesserre, 2021). Tull (2018) adds that logistical challenges, including poor infrastructure, rugged terrain and overstretched supply lines, have consistently hindered operational mobility. Further, drawing on field-based research and interviews with peacekeepers and local communities in eastern DRC.

This study contributes to knowledge by providing an integrated empirical assessment of how contemporary operational challenges—particularly mandate ambiguity, coordination failures, resource constraints and political interference—affect both the operational effectiveness and credibility of UN peacekeeping in eastern DRC. Unlike studies that examine these challenges largely in isolation or from strategic and policy perspectives, the study consolidates the perspectives of UN personnel, regional actors, NGOs and local leaders to demonstrate how operational constraints translate into perceptions of mission legitimacy and credibility. The study therefore extends existing peacekeeping scholarship by linking field-level operational experiences with wider questions of institutional legitimacy and by providing evidence that can inform the design, coordination and implementation of future UN peacekeeping missions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

United Nations peacekeeping operations have contributed to the management of several conflicts around the world. In addition, these operations have been increasingly criticized for their limited effectiveness and declining credibility (Howard, 2019; Karlsrud, 2018). United Nations itself acknowledges that the legitimacy of its peacekeeping operations depends not only on the ability to deploy forces but also on their effectiveness in addressing the complex realities of contemporary conflicts (United Nations, 2018). Existing literature has extensively examined classical challenges such as inadequate funding, slow deployment, troop misconduct, and lack of impartiality and Security Council politics (Durch, 1996; Bellamy & Williams, 2021). Although these are important, they do not fully capture the evolving operational environment in which peacekeepers are deployed today. Contemporary missions face new and under-explored challenges that directly influence both operational performance and the credibility of peacekeeping as a whole. Over two decades since its deployment, the UN mission in eastern DRC has struggled to achieve sustainable peace in eastern region, where insecurity, armed violence and humanitarian crises persist. The gap between the mission's extensive resources and its limited impact raises fundamental questions about the efficiency of its operational strategies and the credibility of UN peacekeeping as a conflict management tool. MONUSCO operations face a myriad of emerging and multifaceted challenges that undermine its effectiveness and credibility. These include the rise of information warfare, where disinformation and propaganda are used to erode local trust and delegitimize missions. The psychological strain on peacekeepers results from the prolonged exposure to hostile environments, persistent gaps between expansive mandates and limited resources and coordination difficulties with regional or hybrid forces such as the African Union (AU), East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). Collectively, these factors weaken operational efficiency, reduce mission cohesion and contribute to perceptions of ineffectiveness in fulfilling peacekeeping objectives. In the case of MONUSCO, the persistence of armed groups, widespread displacement of the populace and recurring violence despite the mission's long-term presence highlight the disconnect between strategic intent and practical outcomes. This situation underscores the need to critically examine how operational challenges including mandate design, resource allocation, force coordination and community engagement affects the mission's credibility and overall success in stabilizing the DRC. Unless these contemporary challenges are systematically addressed, the credibility of UN peacekeeping will remain in question, jeopardizing both current and future missions. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate some of the critical operational challenges and their implications on the credibility of UN peacekeeping operations.

1.2 Research Objective

The objective of the study was to examine contemporary operational challenges facing UN peacekeeping operations in DRC.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on two key theories; Realism and Organizational Legitimacy Theories.

2.1.1 Realism Theory

Realism theory, grounded in the works of Hans Morgenthau (1948), Kenneth Waltz (1979) and John Mearsheimer (2001), argues that international relations are shaped by power politics and the pursuit of national interests in an anarchic world order. States prioritize their security and strategic interests above collective ideals and institutions like the UN merely reflect the power configurations of dominant states. Applied to UN peacekeeping, Realism explains how the political and economic interests of powerful member states, particularly those in the Security Council, often dictate mission priorities and resource allocation. Weiss (2018) asserts that peacekeeping mandates are frequently shaped by the strategic calculations of major powers, leading to partial interventions and inconsistent enforcement. Consequently, the UN's limited autonomy and dependence on member state consensus undermine operational effectiveness and credibility. From this perspective, the failures observed in the DRC peacekeeping mission stem partly from geopolitical rivalries and selective engagement by powerful states. While Realism provides a compelling explanation of how power asymmetries shape international institutions, it has been critiqued for its state-centric and pessimistic assumptions, which tend to downplay the role of international norms, cooperation and non-state actors in global governance. Critics such as Keohane (1984) and Nye (2009) argue that Realism overlooks the potential of institutions like the United Nations to foster collaboration and normative influence beyond mere power politics. Despite these limitations, Realism has been widely applied in studies of international security, peacekeeping and conflict management, particularly in explaining the influence of great powers in missions such as Bosnia, Iraq and Syria. Its relevance to this study lies in its ability to illuminate how the dominance of the P5 and their competing interests constrain the UN's operational independence, thereby contributing to the persistent credibility challenges witnessed in the eastern DRC peacekeeping mission.

Although Realism offers a vital explanation of how geopolitical interests, power asymmetries and the strategic preferences of powerful states influence UN peacekeeping mandates and operational decisions, its principal weakness is its state-centric focus. In particular, it emphasizes power and national interests while giving wide berth attention of how international organizations derive legitimacy, how institutional practices are perceived by stakeholders, and how operational performance influences public confidence. This limitation is particularly important in the DRC, where the effectiveness of MONUSCO cannot be explained solely by the political interests of states but also by how the mission performs and is perceived by peacekeepers, government institutions, regional actors and local communities.

Organizational Legitimacy Theory is therefore used to complement Realism by addressing this institutional and perceptual dimension. While Realism explains why political and geopolitical forces shape the mission, Organizational Legitimacy Theory explains how the resulting operational performance affects the mission's acceptance, credibility and perceived appropriateness among stakeholders. The two theories consequently provide complementary analytical lenses: Realism captures the external power and political constraints affecting MONUSCO, while Organizational Legitimacy Theory captures the institutional and stakeholder perceptions that determine whether the mission is regarded as effective, appropriate and legitimate.

2.1.2 Organizational Legitimacy Theory

John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977) introduced Organizational Legitimacy Theory within the broader field of institutional theory, arguing that organizations do not survive solely because of efficiency or performance, but because they conform to socially constructed norms, rules and expectations that make them appear appropriate and acceptable within their environment. They posited that organizations adopt formal structures and practices not only for operational effectiveness but also to signal conformity with widely accepted institutional standards. Building on this foundation, Mark C. Suchman (1995) provided a comprehensive conceptualization of legitimacy as "a generalized perception that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions." Suchman categorized legitimacy into three distinct but interrelated forms: pragmatic legitimacy which is based on the self-interest of stakeholders and the organization's ability to deliver expected outcomes; moral legitimacy derived from normative approval of the organization's actions as the "right thing to do" and cognitive legitimacy arising when the organization becomes taken for granted as necessary or inevitable. According to this theory, legitimacy is not static. Organizations must continuously maintain it through consistent performance, communication

and alignment with stakeholder expectations. When actions fail to meet these expectations, legitimacy erodes, leading to loss of trust, cooperation and support. Later scholars such as W. Richard Scott (2008) emphasized that institutions operate within regulatory, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars, all of which influence how legitimacy is constructed and judged. This perspective is particularly useful in analyzing international organizations whose authority depends largely on perception rather than coercive power. Organizational Legitimacy Theory has been widely applied in studies of international organizations, including the United Nations, where legitimacy is closely tied to the organization's ability to fulfill its mandate of maintaining international peace and security. In peacekeeping contexts, legitimacy is shaped not only by mandate authority from the UN Security Council but also by the observable performance of missions on the ground, the behavior of peacekeepers and the perceptions of host communities and troop-contributing countries. Within the context of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), this theory provides a useful lens for analyzing how operational challenges such as mandate ambiguity, coordination failures and slow response capacity affect how the mission is perceived by local populations, host government institutions and international stakeholders. When MONUSCO is perceived as unable to protect civilians or respond effectively to insecurity, its pragmatic legitimacy declines. When actions appear inconsistent with the principles of impartiality and protection, its moral legitimacy is questioned. Over time, repeated operational shortcomings risk undermining the cognitive legitimacy of the UN as an effective peacekeeping actor.

2.2 Empirical Review

Cutillo (2013) employed policy analysis and mission report reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) operations within MONUSCO. Their study found that while the Brigade introduced a more robust posture, its integration into the broader mission created coordination friction between offensive and traditional peacekeeping components. The study, however, relied primarily on secondary UN documentation and lacked field validation from deployed contingents. Using ethnographic fieldwork methods, Séverine Autesserre (2021) examined disconnect between MONUSCO's headquarters planning and realities on the ground. Her findings indicated that bureaucratic fragmentation between civilian, military and humanitarian pillars delayed operational response during crises, particularly in North Kivu. While her work provides rich ground-level insight, it does not sufficiently interrogate how command and control arrangements within the military component contribute to this fragmentation.

At the African level, UN peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and found that African peace operations face persistent operational difficulties arising from weak state institutions, asymmetric security threats and inadequate coordination among international and regional actors. Their findings emphasized that contemporary African conflicts require more flexible operational approaches than those adopted in traditional peacekeeping missions. The present study confirms these observations by revealing that ineffective coordination between MONUSCO, host-government institutions and regional actors remains a significant operational challenge that constrains mission effectiveness and weakens institutional credibility.

Durch (1998) analyzed operational experiences across several UN peacekeeping missions and found that complex mandates, inadequate logistical resources and weak institutional coordination frequently contribute to operational paralysis. Although the study comprehensively examined strategic operational challenges, it focused primarily on institutional capacity and provided limited empirical evidence on how these constraints influence perceptions of peacekeeping credibility. The findings of the present study support Durch's conclusions by demonstrating that weak mandates, poor coordination and resource limitations continue to impede effective peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC. Furthermore, the study extends his work by showing that these operational constraints collectively erode confidence in the legitimacy and effectiveness of MONUSCO among key stakeholders.

From a logistical perspective, Abdenur (2019) analyzed mission reports and UN logistics data to demonstrate how poor infrastructure, terrain and overstretched supply chains limited mobility and rapid deployment capabilities in eastern DRC. His analysis, though comprehensive at strategic level, does not assess how these logistical weaknesses affect force protection and protection-of-civilians tasks at sector level.

Similarly, Stearns (2015), through qualitative field research involving peacekeepers and local communities, found that mandate ambiguity constrained commanders' ability to balance robust military action with the principles of impartiality and protection of civilians. He argued that uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of mandates frequently resulted in delayed operational responses against armed groups. However, his analysis primarily focused on political dynamics and offered a limited assessment of how mandate ambiguity affected routine operational decision-making. Likewise, Tull (2018) argued that ambitious peacekeeping mandates are often undermined by implementation challenges arising from complex conflict environments, inadequate logistical support and institutional constraints. The study emphasized that the mismatch between mandate expectations and operational realities limits mission effectiveness.

Autesserre (2021), through ethnographic field research, found that bureaucratic fragmentation among military, civilian and humanitarian actors delayed operational responses and weakened civilian protection efforts in eastern DRC.

While her study provided detailed qualitative insights into institutional fragmentation, it did not comprehensively assess perceptions among operational personnel. The findings of the current study reinforce Autesserre's conclusions by demonstrating that ineffective coordination extends beyond internal institutional fragmentation to include weak collaboration with host-government institutions and regional actors. Consequently, coordination failures reduce both operational responsiveness and public confidence in MONUSCO's effectiveness.

Similarly, Karlsrud (2018) argued that multidimensional peacekeeping mandates have expanded considerably without corresponding improvements in operational capabilities, resulting in overstretched missions that struggle to fulfil increasingly complex responsibilities. The findings of the present study support this argument by demonstrating that operational effectiveness in eastern DRC is constrained by the interaction of mandate complexity, inadequate coordination, resource limitations and political influence, all of which reduce the mission's capacity to protect civilians effectively. Bellamy and Williams (2021) examined contemporary trends in UN peacekeeping and observed that changing conflict dynamics, political contestation and operational complexity continue to challenge the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions worldwide. They argued that improving mission performance requires stronger institutional coordination, clearer mandates and adequate operational resources. The present study reinforces these conclusions by demonstrating that these challenges remain central determinants of MONUSCO's operational effectiveness and credibility in eastern DRC.

Abdenur (2019) analyzed UN logistics reports and demonstrated that poor transport infrastructure, difficult terrain and overstretched supply systems significantly constrained troop mobility and rapid deployment in eastern DRC. However, the study did not examine how operational personnel perceived these logistical challenges. The present study confirms Abdenur findings by revealing that inadequate troop levels, poor-quality equipment supplied by troop-contributing countries and logistical limitations substantially reduce operational effectiveness. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that many respondents interpreted these constraints as operational capacity limitations rather than evidence of complete institutional failure, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between resources and mission credibility.

Howard (2019) examined the effectiveness of contemporary UN peacekeeping missions and concluded that operational success depends on the ability of missions to adapt to evolving conflict dynamics, implement clear mandates and maintain legitimacy among affected populations. The study observed that prolonged missions operating under ambiguous mandate often experience declining public confidence. These findings are consistent with the present study, which demonstrates that mandate ambiguity, coordination failures and operational constraints collectively diminish confidence in MONUSCO's effectiveness in stabilizing eastern DRC.

Collectively, these empirical studies demonstrate that MONUSCO's operational challenges stem from mandate interpretation difficulties, coordination gaps and logistical constraints. However, existing literature largely treats these challenges in isolation and from policy or strategic perspectives. There remains limited empirical analysis linking these operational constraints directly to the credibility of the UN mission in the perception of host populations and troop contributing countries, a gap this study seeks to address.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, where qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately and then integrated during interpretation. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), this design is appropriate when the researcher seeks to compare and corroborate findings from different data sources within the same study. The qualitative component explored the lived experiences and opinions of peacekeepers, government officials and local stakeholders, while the quantitative component measured patterns and frequencies of identified operational challenges and perceptions of UN credibility through structured questionnaires. This design ensured a comprehensive understanding of both the operational and perceptual dimensions of peacekeeping in eastern DRC.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, focusing on North Kivu and Ituri provinces. These regions have experienced persistent insecurity and host major UN peacekeeping operations under MONUSCO. They were selected because they represent the operational core of the UN mission, characterized by recurrent challenges such as armed group activities, humanitarian crises and local resistance to peacekeeping efforts (Autesserre, 2021). The area therefore provided an appropriate context for examining how operational challenges shape perceptions of the UN's credibility among local and international actors. In addition, North Kivu and Ituri provinces are among the most volatile and militarized regions in the country, hosting a multiplicity of local and foreign armed groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), CODECO militias and various Mai-Mai factions, whose activities

continue to undermine state authority and civilian security. The porous borders with Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan further complicate the security environment by enabling cross-border movements of armed actors, illicit trade and regional political interference. These dynamics make the region not only a domestic security concern for the DRC but also a matter of regional and international security interest. The provinces have also been the epicenter of repeated humanitarian emergencies, including large-scale internal displacement, attacks against civilians, sexual and gender-based violence and outbreaks of disease such as Ebola, all of which have required sustained MONUSCO involvement alongside humanitarian agencies. The complexity of operating in such an environment places significant operational, logistical and political demands on peacekeeping forces and often exposes the gap between mandate expectations and operational realities.

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this study was 4,000 respondents comprising categories directly involved in or affected by United Nations peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC. These included UN military personnel (1,364), UN police personnel (682), UN civilian staff (568), AU/regional actors (454) and NGOs/local leaders (932). These categories were selected because they provided both operational and community-level perspectives necessary for assessing the impact of operational challenges on the credibility of the United Nations.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

In line with the mixed-methods design, the study employed a combination of purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify key informants with specialized knowledge or direct experience in UN peacekeeping operations, including mission commanders, government officials and sector experts. This approach ensured that the qualitative component captured informed, experience-based insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For the quantitative strand, stratified random sampling was utilized to enhance representativeness and minimize sampling error. The total study population ($N = 4,000$) was divided into relevant strata such as mission sections, professional categories and gender and respondents were randomly selected from each stratum in proportion to its size. This combined approach ensured both depth through purposive selection and breadth through random representation, consistent with the logic of mixed-methods research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The sample size for the study was determined from a target population of 4,000 respondents drawn from key categories involved in, or affected by, United Nations peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC. The categories included UN military personnel, UN police, UN civilian staff, AU/regional actors and NGOs/local leaders. Since the target population was finite, the study used the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination formula, which is appropriate for determining sample size from a known population.

The formula is expressed as follows:

$$n = \frac{X^2 NP(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + X^2 P(1 - P)}$$

Where:

n = required sample size

X^2 = Chi-square value for 1 degree of freedom at 95% confidence level (3.841)

N = target population (4,000)

P = population proportion (0.5)

d = degree of accuracy (0.05)

Substituting into the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{3.841 \times 4000 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{0.05^2(4000 - 1) + 3.841 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)} \\ n &= \frac{3.841 \times 4000 \times 0.25}{0.0025(3999) + 3.841 \times 0.25} \\ n &= \frac{3841}{9.9975 + 0.96025} \\ n &= \frac{3841}{10.95775} \\ n &= 351.53 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the minimum sample size was approximately 351 respondents. The study rounded this upwards to 352 respondents to allow whole-number allocation across the selected strata.

After determining the total sample size, proportional stratified allocation was used to distribute the sample across the five respondent categories. Proportional allocation was appropriate because the study population was made up of different categories of respondents with different levels of involvement in peacekeeping operations. The allocation ensured that each stratum was represented according to its proportion in the target population.

The proportional allocation formula was:

$$n_h = \frac{N_h}{N} \times n$$

Where:

n_h = sample size for each stratum

N_h = population size of each stratum

N = total target population

n = total sample size

Table 1 presents the proportional allocation of the sample across the respondent categories.

Table 1

Proportional Allocation of Sample Size by Stratum

Stratum	Role in UN Operations	Target Population (N _h)	Proportional Allocation	Sample Size
UN Military Personnel	Direct mandate implementation and Rules of Engagement	1,364	$(1,364/4,000) \times 352$	120
UN Police	Civilian protection and local coordination	682	$(682/4,000) \times 352$	60
UN Civilian Staff	Policy, coordination and administration	568	$(568/4,000) \times 352$	50
AU/Regional Actors	External coordination and oversight	454	$(454/4,000) \times 352$	40
NGOs/Local Leaders	Community perception of UN credibility	932	$(932/4,000) \times 352$	82
Total		4,000		352

The distribution in Table 1 shows that UN military personnel were allocated the largest sample because they formed the largest operational category and were directly involved in mandate implementation, field deployment and protection of civilians. NGOs and local leaders were also allocated a substantial share because they provided community-level perspectives on UN credibility, local trust and perceptions of mission effectiveness. UN police, civilian staff and AU/regional actors were included to capture perspectives on local coordination, mission administration, institutional legitimacy and regional operational dynamics.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Primary data was collected using questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data was obtained through document review. The questionnaires capture quantifiable data on respondents' perceptions of UN effectiveness and credibility. They contain both closed- and open-ended questions organized around key study variables (operational challenges, host community relations and UN credibility). Interviews comprising open-ended questions aligned with the study objectives and enabled respondents to elaborate on experiences and perspectives. The interviews generated deeper qualitative insights into operational, logistical and coordination challenges affecting peacekeeping performance. Secondary sources comprising of document review checklist systematically extracts relevant information from policy and evaluation documents, ensuring consistency in secondary data analysis such as UN reports, journal articles and policy briefs providing contextual and corroborative evidence.

3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data from questionnaires was coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 28). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means and percentages) summarized data, while inferential statistics (including correlation analysis) examined relationships between operational challenges and perceptions of UN credibility. Results were presented through tables, charts and graphs. Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase framework: data familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, definition and interpretation. NVivo software supported data organization and theme development. The emerging themes were then compared with quantitative findings to identify convergence and divergence. Results from both strands were integrated during interpretation. Areas of convergence and divergence was analyzed to enhance the depth, validity and reliability of findings through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.6.1 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

To ensure validity and reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted involving ten respondents from a similar operational environment. Feedback from the pilot informed refinement of the clarity, relevance and structure of the questions, thereby enhancing content validity. Reliability was ensured through consistent administration of the instruments and systematic documentation of data collection procedures. Given the largely qualitative nature of the study, trustworthiness was further strengthened through triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing and detailed documentation of the research process, in line with the criteria of credibility, dependability and confirmability.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review committee prior to data collection. Participants were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained before administering questionnaires or conducting interviews. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Data was securely stored and all sources acknowledged in accordance with academic integrity standards. Where applicable, authorization from MONUSCO and host government offices was sought to ensure compliance with operational protocols.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

Examination of contemporary operational challenges facing UN peacekeeping operations in DRC

Table 2

Response Rate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires administered	352	100.0
Questionnaires returned	291	82.7
Questionnaires not returned	61	17.3

Table 2 shows that 352 questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents, out of which 291 were completed and returned. This represented a response rate of 82.7%. The response rate was therefore adequate for analysis because it was above the minimum level commonly accepted in survey research. The high return rate may be attributed to the relevance of the study topic to the respondents, the professional nature of the target population and the structured administration of the research instruments. The returned questionnaires formed the basis for quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics. The qualitative strand, consisting of open-ended questionnaire responses, interviews and observation checklist, was used to provide deeper explanations of the numerical findings. From the 15 anticipated interviews, the researcher managed to interview 7 interviewees. This integration was necessary because the study examined not only measurable operational challenges but also perceptions of credibility, trust, legitimacy and effectiveness.

4.1.1 Weak Mandates

Table 3 presents descriptive findings on weak mandates and Rules of Engagement as one of the operational challenges facing UN peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics on Weak Mandates and Rules of Engagement

Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean	Std. Dev.
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Rules of Engagement were open to varied interpretation	36	12.4%	39	13.4%	36	12.4%	32	11.0%	148	50.9%	3.746	1.492
There was a mismatch between the mandate and available capabilities	63	21.6%	63	21.6%	58	19.9%	54	18.6%	53	18.2%	2.900	1.412
Frequent mandate changes affected operational clarity	24	8.2%	31	10.7%	40	13.7%	28	9.6%	168	57.7%	3.979	1.374
Protection of civilians' thresholds were not clearly defined	57	19.6%	50	17.2%	56	19.2%	64	22.0%	64	22.0%	3.096	1.433

The findings in Table 3 show that weak mandate-related challenges were evident in UN peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC. On the statement that frequent mandate changes affected operational clarity, 196 respondents, representing 67.3%, either agreed or strongly agreed, while 55 respondents, representing 18.9%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. This was supported by a mean score of 3.979, indicating agreement. Similarly, 180 respondents, representing 61.9%, agreed or strongly agreed that Rules of Engagement were open to varied interpretation, while 75 respondents, representing 25.8%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.746 further shows that respondents generally agreed that Rules of Engagement were not always interpreted uniformly.

The findings also show that views were more divided on whether there was a mismatch between the mandate and available capabilities. A total of 126 respondents, representing 43.2%, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while 107 respondents, representing 36.8%, agreed or strongly agreed. The mean score of 2.900 shows neutrality, suggesting that respondents did not uniformly view the mandate-capability gap as the central mandate-related problem. A similar pattern was observed on protection of civilians' thresholds, where 128 respondents, representing 44.0%, agreed or strongly agreed that the thresholds were not clearly defined, while 107 respondents, representing 36.8%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.096 indicates neutrality, reflecting divided perceptions.

Overall, the findings suggest that the main weakness in the mandate was not necessarily the absence of mandate authority, but the difficulty of translating mandate provisions into clear operational action. Frequent mandate changes and varied interpretation of Rules of Engagement created uncertainty during field operations, especially in situations requiring quick response to civilian protection threats. This is important because when field personnel interpret the mandate differently, operational response may become hesitant, delayed or inconsistent. In the context of eastern DRC, such uncertainty may weaken both mission effectiveness and public confidence in the UN's ability to protect civilians.

The interview findings supported the quantitative results by showing that mandate-related challenges were not always about the absence of a mandate, but about how the mandate was interpreted and applied during field operations. Key informants noted that field personnel often operated in situations where threats to civilians developed quickly, yet decisions on response required careful interpretation of Rules of Engagement and command approval. One interviewee explained that

"...the mandate is broad on paper, but during an actual incident, officers still have to decide how far they can go without being accused of exceeding the mission's role" (Key informant interview with UN military personnel held on 12th August, 2025).

Another respondent observed that;

"Frequent adjustments in operational priorities sometimes created uncertainty among personnel, especially where civilian protection, cooperation with national forces and impartiality had to be balanced at the same time" (Key informant interview with UN police personnel held on 16th August, 2025).

The observation checklist also supported this finding indirectly. Observations on patrol coordination and response time showed that field operations were not only affected by physical mobility but also by the time taken to clarify responsibility and response procedures during security incidents (OBS 02; OBS 04). This explains why respondents agreed that frequent mandate changes affected operational clarity and that Rules of Engagement were open to varied interpretation. It also explains why the mean scores on protection thresholds and mandate-capability mismatch were neutral, since some respondents may have viewed the problem as less about the formal mandate itself and more about how the mandate was interpreted under pressure. The findings on weak mandates and Rules of Engagement are consistent with existing peacekeeping literature which argues that contemporary United Nations operations function under conditions that differ significantly from traditional peacekeeping environments. Stearns (2015) identified mandate ambiguity as a major operational challenge in MONUSCO, particularly where peacekeepers are expected to neutralize armed groups while simultaneously maintaining impartiality. Similarly, Tull (2018) argued that operational challenges in eastern DRC arise partly from the gap between ambitious mandates and the realities of implementation in the field. The present study supports these arguments and further demonstrates that mandate weakness is not only a policy-level concern but also an operational challenge experienced directly by field personnel. The findings showed that frequent mandate changes and varied interpretation of Rules of Engagement created uncertainty in decision-making and response processes. This extends existing literature by suggesting that credibility challenges may begin at the point where broad mandate provisions become difficult to translate into timely, clear and consistent operational action. The findings also support the view by Durch (1998) that complex mandates may contribute to operational paralysis when they are not matched with realistic planning, adequate resources and effective field coordination.

4.1.2 Poor Coordination

Table 4 presents descriptive findings on poor coordination among actors involved in UN peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC.

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics on Poor Coordination*

	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean	Std. Dev.
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Civil–military coordination gaps affected operations	50	17.2%	43	14.8%	48	16.5%	50	17.2%	100	34.4%	3.368	1.501
Intelligence sharing between components was inadequate	54	18.6%	61	21.0%	63	21.6%	47	16.2%	66	22.7%	3.034	1.424
Command structures appeared fragmented	54	18.6%	67	23.0%	69	23.7%	45	15.5%	56	19.2%	2.938	1.378
Coordination with the host government was ineffective	31	10.7%	36	12.4%	44	15.1%	29	10.0%	151	51.9%	3.801	1.446

The findings in Table 4 show that poor coordination was a significant operational challenge, particularly in relation to coordination with the host government. A total of 180 respondents, representing 61.9%, agreed or strongly agreed that coordination with the host government was ineffective, while 67 respondents, representing 23.1%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. This was supported by a mean score of 3.801, indicating agreement. The finding suggests that the relationship between the mission and host-government institutions was one of the most visible coordination concerns affecting peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC.

The results further show that 150 respondents, representing 51.6%, agreed or strongly agreed that civil-military coordination gaps affected operations while 93 respondents, representing 32.0%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, the mean score of 3.368 indicates neutrality, suggesting that although more respondents leaned toward agreement, the overall responses were still mixed. On intelligence sharing between components, 113 respondents, representing 38.9%, agreed or strongly agreed that intelligence sharing was inadequate, while 115 respondents, representing 39.6%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.034 confirms that perceptions were almost evenly divided. Similarly, 101 respondents, representing 34.7%, agreed or strongly agreed that command structures appeared fragmented, while 121 respondents, representing 41.6%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 2.938 reflects neutrality, with a slight leaning away from agreement.

These findings indicate that coordination challenges were most strongly experienced in the relationship between the UN mission and the host government, rather than uniformly across all internal coordination indicators. This is significant because host-government coordination is central to peacekeeping legitimacy, access, information sharing and joint response. Where this coordination is ineffective, the mission may experience delays in decision-making, confusion over roles and weakened operational consistency during crises. Even where internal mission structures are functioning, weak coordination with national authorities can still reduce the mission's ability to act quickly and credibly.

Interview findings provided deeper explanation for the poor coordination results. Respondents reported that coordination difficulties were most visible where MONUSCO had to work with host-government institutions, security agencies, humanitarian actors and local authorities during fast-moving incidents. One respondent stated that;

“Coordination meetings exist, but the difficulty comes when an incident happens and each actor waits for direction from a different chain of command” (Key informant interview with AU staff held on 20th August, 2025).

A local authority respondent similarly noted that communities often did not know whether to hold MONUSCO, national security forces or local authorities responsible when response to an attack was delayed (KII 05). This supports the quantitative finding that coordination with the host government was ineffective, which recorded the highest mean score under poor coordination.

The observation checklist also confirmed that coordination challenges were visible in the timing and organization of patrols and field operations. In some instances, patrols appeared structured and planned, but coordination between different actors was less clear when incidents required rapid response or follow-up engagement with communities (OBS 02). Observations on interaction between multinational contingents also suggested that the presence of different troop-contributing countries created a need for stronger communication, common operational understanding and synchronized field procedures (OBS 03). These findings help explain why poor coordination later emerged as the strongest negative predictor of UN credibility in the regression analysis. The findings on poor coordination strongly agree with existing literature on contemporary peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC. Autesserre (2021) observed that bureaucratic fragmentation between civilian, military and humanitarian actors contributed to delayed operational response and weakened mission effectiveness. Similarly, Abdenur (2019) found that unclear division of responsibility between MONUSCO, FARDC and humanitarian agencies often created confusion and blame-shifting during crises. The present study supports these arguments and further demonstrates that coordination failures extend beyond administrative inefficiency to become visible credibility challenges. The findings showed that respondents associated ineffective coordination particularly with host-government engagement and operational response. This suggests that communities

may not distinguish institutional boundaries during crises but instead judge the peacekeeping system collectively. The study therefore contributes to existing literature by showing that coordination failure not only reduces operational efficiency but also weakens confidence in the United Nations as a coherent and reliable peacekeeping actor. This finding also supports the argument by Cutillo (2013) that coordination remains central to mission effectiveness where multiple actors with different operational mandates and priorities operate within the same security environment.

4.1.3 Resource Constraints

Table 5 presents descriptive findings on resource constraints affecting UN peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics on Resource Constraints

Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean	Std. Dev.
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Troop levels were insufficient for the area of responsibility	24	8.2%	46	15.8%	22	7.6%	86	29.6%	113	38.8%	3.749	1.335
Lack of air assets slowed response to crises	39	13.4%	55	18.9%	60	20.6%	106	36.4%	31	10.7%	3.120	1.227
Logistics and mobility limitations affected presence	55	18.9%	51	17.5%	58	19.9%	45	15.5%	82	28.2%	3.165	1.481
Equipment quality from TCCs reduced effectiveness	6	2.1%	24	8.2%	15	5.2%	97	33.3%	149	51.2%	4.234	1.014

The findings in Table 5 show that resource constraints affected the operational effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC. The strongest concern was equipment quality from troop-contributing countries. A total of 246 respondents, representing 84.5%, agreed or strongly agreed that equipment quality from TCCs reduced effectiveness, while only 30 respondents, representing 10.3%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. This was supported by a mean score of 4.234, indicating strong agreement. The low standard deviation of 1.014 also shows that there was relatively stronger convergence around this view compared to other resource indicators.

The findings also show that 199 respondents, representing 68.4%, agreed or strongly agreed that troop levels were insufficient for the area of responsibility, while 70 respondents, representing 24.0%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.749 indicates agreement. This suggests that the size of the area covered by the mission remained a major operational concern, especially given the vastness of eastern DRC, difficult terrain and the presence of mobile armed groups. The issue was therefore not only whether troops were deployed, but whether the number and distribution of troops were adequate for the security demands of the area.

The findings were more moderate on-air assets, logistics and mobility. On whether lack of air assets slowed response to crises, 137 respondents, representing 47.1%, agreed or strongly agreed, while 94 respondents, representing 32.3%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.120 indicates neutrality, although the frequency distribution shows that more respondents leaned toward agreement. On logistics and mobility limitations, 127 respondents, representing 43.7%, agreed or strongly agreed, while 106 respondents, representing 36.4%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.165 also indicates neutrality. These results suggest that logistics, mobility and air assets were recognized as important, but they were not experienced uniformly by all respondent categories.

Overall, the findings show that resource constraints were mainly associated with the quality of equipment and adequacy of troop levels. This is important because operational effectiveness in eastern DRC depends heavily on whether peacekeepers are sufficiently equipped, mobile and able to respond across difficult terrain. A mission may have a formal mandate and personnel on the ground, but its effectiveness is limited if the available equipment is unsuitable, outdated or insufficient for the operational environment. Therefore, the resource challenge in eastern DRC should not be understood only in terms of budget or troop numbers, but in terms of the suitability of resources for the mission's actual field demands.

The interview findings reinforced the descriptive results on resource constraints. Respondents explained that resource limitations were experienced mainly in relation to equipment quality, transport capacity, communication systems, terrain and the size of the area of responsibility. One military respondent observed that;

“The problem is not only the number of troops, but whether the available troops have the mobility, communication and equipment needed to reach affected areas in time” (Key informant interview with UN military personnel held on 19th August, 2025).

Another respondent noted that some areas were difficult to access quickly, especially where roads were poor, distances were long and armed groups were mobile. These views support the quantitative finding that equipment quality

from troop-contributing countries reduced effectiveness and that troop levels were insufficient for the area of responsibility.

The observation checklist further supported this result. Observations on transport and communication equipment showed that the effectiveness of field operations depended on whether vehicles, radios, communication systems and other operational assets were available and functional (OBS 01). Observations on response time also indicated that delays in reaching local communities were sometimes connected to mobility and logistical limitations rather than unwillingness to respond (OBS 04). This helps explain why resource constraints had a strong positive relationship with UN credibility in the inferential analysis. Some respondents appeared to understand that the mission's limitations were partly caused by operational capacity gaps, meaning that resource problems were seen as constraints affecting performance rather than as evidence that the UN had entirely lost credibility. The findings on resource constraints are consistent with existing literature on peacekeeping effectiveness in eastern DRC. Abdenur (2019) argued that poor infrastructure, difficult terrain and overstretched supply systems limit mobility and rapid deployment capacity in United Nations operations. Similarly, Autesserre (2021) observed that a persistent mandate-resource gap may create perceptions that the UN overpromises and under-delivers. The present study supports these arguments by showing that operational effectiveness depended not only on troop numbers or budget allocation, but also on equipment quality, mobility, communication systems and suitability of resources to field conditions. However, the findings also provide a more nuanced interpretation of resource limitations. While existing literature often presents resource shortages as a direct cause of declining credibility, the findings suggest that some respondents viewed resource constraints as practical explanations for limited performance rather than evidence that the United Nations had lost legitimacy. This extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that stakeholders may distinguish between institutional credibility and operational capacity constraints. Therefore, resource limitations may weaken effectiveness without necessarily eliminating confidence in the mission as an international peacekeeping institution.

4.1.4 Political Interference

Table 6 presents descriptive findings on political interference as an operational challenge affecting UN peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics on Political Interference

Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA		Mean	Std. Dev.
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Political interests influenced mandate design	56	19.2%	36	12.4%	32	11.0%	44	15.1%	123	42.3%	3.488	1.583
National caveats affected uniformity of operations	47	16.2%	48	16.5%	44	15.1%	48	16.5%	104	35.7%	3.392	1.503
Host state pressure affected mission decisions	54	18.6%	50	17.2%	48	16.5%	36	12.4%	103	35.4%	3.289	1.542
Geopolitical interests overrode operational needs	10	3.4%	13	4.5%	4	1.4%	44	15.1%	220	75.6%	4.550	0.979

The findings in Table 6 show that political interference was a major concern in UN peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC, particularly through the influence of geopolitical interests. A total of 264 respondents, representing 90.7%, agreed or strongly agreed that geopolitical interests overrode operational needs, while only 23 respondents, representing 7.9%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. This was supported by a mean score of 4.550, indicating strong agreement. This was the highest-rated item among the political interference indicators, showing that respondents strongly perceived wider political interests as shaping mission priorities.

The results further show that 167 respondents, representing 57.4%, agreed or strongly agreed that political interests influenced mandate design, while 92 respondents, representing 31.6%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.488 indicates neutrality, suggesting that political influence was recognized in relation to mandate design, but respondents were more certain about the broader effect of geopolitics on operational priorities than about the specific mechanisms of mandate formulation.

On national caveats, 152 respondents, representing 52.2%, agreed or strongly agreed that national caveats affected uniformity of operations, while 95 respondents, representing 32.7%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.392 indicates neutrality, although the frequency distribution shows that more respondents leaned toward agreement. Similarly, 139 respondents, representing 47.8%, agreed or strongly agreed that host-state pressure affected mission decisions, while 104 respondents, representing 35.8%, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The mean score of 3.289 also indicates neutrality. These mixed results suggest that while political influence was recognized, its specific forms were not experienced or understood equally by all respondents.

The findings imply that political interference was mainly perceived as a broad structural constraint rather than a direct and visible operational command. In other words, respondents were more certain that geopolitical interests shaped mission priorities than they were about the specific effects of national caveats or host-state pressure. This is important because political interference may affect peacekeeping indirectly through mandate design, resource allocation, operational freedom and cooperation with host-state institutions. Even when political interference is not visible during daily operations, it may still shape the mission's capacity to respond independently and decisively.

The qualitative findings showed that political interference was mainly understood by respondents as an indirect operational constraint. Interviewees did not always describe political interference as direct instruction from national and international political actors, but as pressure that shaped mandate implementation, cooperation with host-state institutions, deployment decisions and the willingness of different actors to support robust operations. One key informant stated that;

"Peacekeeping decisions are never purely military because they are affected by the host state, the Security Council, troop-contributing countries and regional interests" (Key informant interview with UN police personnel held on 18th August, 2025).

Another respondent noted that political sensitivities sometimes made it difficult for the mission to act with the speed and firmness expected by local communities (KII 04). These interview findings help explain the quantitative results. Respondents strongly agreed that geopolitical interests overrode operational needs, but they were neutral on whether political interests influenced mandate design, national caveats affected uniformity of operations and host-state pressure affected mission decisions. This suggests that many respondents recognized the broad influence of geopolitics but may not have had direct knowledge of the specific mechanisms through which political interference affected mandate design or field decisions. Political interference therefore appeared to operate more as a background constraint that shaped other operational challenges, especially coordination, resource allocation and mandate interpretation. The findings on political interference agree with the assumptions of Realism Theory, particularly the arguments advanced by Morgenthau (1948), Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer (2001), who contend that international institutions are often shaped by the interests and power calculations of states. The findings showed that geopolitical interests influenced the broader operational environment and affected perceptions of mission priorities in eastern DRC. This supports Weiss (2018), who argued that peacekeeping mandates and operational decisions are frequently influenced by the strategic interests of powerful member states, particularly within the Security Council framework. The present study therefore confirms that operational challenges in eastern DRC are not purely technical or administrative, but are also shaped by political and strategic considerations. However, the findings further suggest that political influence may not always be directly visible to local communities. Instead, its effects appear to operate indirectly through more observable operational outcomes such as coordination effectiveness, mandate implementation, resource allocation and response capacity. The study therefore extends Realist explanations by showing that the credibility effects of political influence are often mediated through field-level operational experiences rather than direct political visibility.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the effectiveness and credibility of United Nations peacekeeping operations in eastern DRC are constrained by the interaction of mandate-related weaknesses, coordination failures, resource limitations and political interference. First, frequent changes in mandates and variations in the interpretation of Rules of Engagement created operational uncertainty, particularly during situations requiring rapid civilian protection. The findings therefore suggest that the challenge is not necessarily the absence of formal mandate authority, but the difficulty of translating broad mandate provisions into clear, consistent and timely field-level action. Second, poor coordination emerged as a significant constraint, with coordination between MONUSCO and host-government institutions being particularly problematic. Although perceptions of internal intelligence sharing, command structures and civil-military coordination were mixed, ineffective engagement with national institutions contributed to delays, unclear responsibilities and weakened operational coherence. This indicates that peacekeeping effectiveness depends not only on the capabilities of individual mission components but also on effective coordination among the multiple actors operating within the conflict environment.

Third, the study establishes that resource constraints, especially inadequate troop levels and poor-quality equipment supplied by troop-contributing countries, limited MONUSCO's capacity to operate effectively across the vast and difficult terrain of eastern DRC. However, the findings also indicate that stakeholders did not necessarily interpret resource limitations as evidence of complete institutional failure; rather, some viewed them as practical constraints on operational capacity. Finally, political interference and geopolitical interests constituted an important structural constraint. Respondents strongly perceived geopolitical interests as overriding operational needs, although perceptions were more divided regarding the specific effects of national caveats, mandate design and host-state pressure. This

suggests that political influence often operates indirectly by shaping mission priorities, operational autonomy, resource allocation and mandate implementation.

Conclusively, the findings demonstrate that MONUSCO's operational challenges are interconnected rather than isolated. Mandate ambiguity can complicate decision-making; weak coordination can delay responses; inadequate resources can restrict the implementation of decisions; and political interests can shape the broader environment within which these challenges occur. Their combined effect is to constrain operational effectiveness and, ultimately, weaken stakeholder confidence in the credibility and legitimacy of UN peacekeeping. The study therefore concludes that improving peacekeeping performance in eastern DRC requires an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses mandate clarity, inter-agency coordination, operational capabilities and the political conditions under which peacekeeping decisions are made.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following; firstly, the study recommends the need to strengthen mandate clarity and harmonize Rules of Engagement. In particular, the UN Security Council, MONUSCO leadership and troop-contributing countries should establish clearer operational interpretations of mandates and Rules of Engagement. This should be implemented through standardized operational guidelines, regular pre-deployment and in-mission briefings, scenario-based training, and periodic reviews of Rules of Engagement to ensure that field personnel understand the limits and responsibilities of their actions, particularly during civilian protection incidents. Secondly, the study recommends the urgent need to institutionalize coordination with the host government and other actors. MONUSCO should establish or strengthen permanent coordination mechanisms involving the Government of the DRC, FARDC, police, humanitarian agencies, regional organizations and local authorities. These mechanisms should include joint planning meetings, shared incident-reporting procedures, clearly defined responsibilities and coordinated rapid-response protocols. At field level, designated liaison officers should be responsible for maintaining communication and resolving coordination gaps during emergencies. Improve the adequacy and quality of operational resources. Regarding this, the UN and troop-contributing countries should conduct regular operational-capability assessments to identify deficiencies in troop strength, mobility, communications and equipment. Resource allocation should prioritize mission-critical capabilities, particularly equipment suitable for the difficult terrain of eastern DRC.

Troop-contributing countries should also be required to meet clearly defined equipment and readiness standards before and during deployment, with periodic inspections to verify operational preparedness. Furthermore, the study recommends that operational autonomy should be solidified while maintain political oversight. In particular, the UN Security Council and troop-contributing countries should establish mechanisms that minimize unnecessary political interference in operational decision-making while preserving legitimate strategic oversight. Mandate development should be informed by field-level operational assessments, and significant political or mandate changes should be accompanied by clear implementation guidance and corresponding adjustments in resources and capabilities. Similarly, stakeholder and community engagement should be reinforced. In particular, MONUSCO should establish systematic mechanisms for obtaining feedback from local communities, civil society organizations and local authorities regarding mission performance and civilian protection. Regular community consultations, feedback mechanisms and local liaison structures should be used to identify emerging concerns and improve communication between the mission and affected populations. This would enable the mission to respond not only to security threats but also to perceptions that influence its legitimacy and credibility. Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of peacekeeping performance should be established. In view of this, MONUSCO should develop measurable indicators for mandate implementation, response time, civilian protection, coordination effectiveness, resource readiness and stakeholder confidence. Periodic assessments should be undertaken at sector and mission levels, with findings used to identify operational gaps and adjust strategies. This would ensure that recommendations arising from operational assessments are translated into measurable improvements in mission performance.

Declaration of Interest

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