The United Nation’s Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, commonly known as MONUSCO, is still adjusting from significant budget cuts following a general reduction in peacekeeping funding from the United States.

Though scaling down its total cadre of peacekeepers, MONUSCO’s mandate was extended until 31 March 2018 in S/res/2348 (2017). With the ever-present threat to civilians in the DR Congo due multiple ethnic wars and extremist groups, MONUSCO mission still remains of vital importance. MONUSCO’s Intervention Brigade, one of the few peacekeeping units within the United Nations allowed to conduct offensive operations, has played a large part in its peacekeeping operations.

The dangers these extremist groups can pose was made quite clear only a few months ago, when on 7 December, 15 peacekeepers were killed defending an operating base in the North Kivu region of the DR Congo. The attack, being the deadliest a UN peacekeeping mission had incurred in nearly 25 years, was carried out by elements of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

Though the Congolese army has launched several recent offensives against the ADF, intelligence now indicates that the group is reorganizing, and stronger than previously anticipated. Equally concerning, reports have also indicated an alleged alliance between the ADF and the Lord’s Resistance Army.

-MONUSCO Headquarters, Kinshasa

**Allied Democratic Forces**

The ADF was founded in 1996 after the merger of several smaller rebel factions. While originally located in Uganda with religious justifications for its insurgency, the group has since expanded to the DR Congo, and abandoned much of its previous theological rhetoric.

The United Nations Security Council has formally sanctioned the group, citing multiple violations of international law, including the use of child soldiers, killing, maiming, acts of sexual violence, and multiple attacks against UN personnel. ADF Founder and leader, Jamil Mukulu, was arrested in 2015, and is currently awaiting trial in Uganda.

**Lords Resistance Army**

One of the most well known African extremist organizations in recent history, the group has committed gross human rights violations since its creation in 1989. After significant efforts to eliminate the group, it has seen its numbers significantly dwindle over the years, to the point where most anti LRA offensives have ceased operations.

While previous estimates of the LRA’s forces were around 200 core fighters, new intelligence suggests this could be much higher. If rumors that the group is working directly with the ADF prove true, it will present a credible risk to counter-insurgent efforts.
Update: Venezuela

As the crisis in Venezuela continues to unravel, the country’s preeminent problem continues to be spiraling inflation. The soaring inflation makes life extremely difficult for Venezuelan citizens and has prompted president Nicolas Maduro to take action to save his National currency.

In a recent address president Nicolas Maduro informed his nation of a new plan to help battle the out-of-control inflation in his country. The plan calls for chopping off the last three zeros of Venezuelan currency to reduce its apparent value by dividing it by 1000. By this plan the 100,000 bolivar note would be reduced to a 100 note. The hope of Maduro’s government is that the reduction in the face value of the currency will also reduce the effects of inflation. This plan could be too late, however, as over a one-year period that ended in February inflation in Venezuela skyrocketed an astounding 2600%, according to the constituent assembly. The plan will go into effect on June 1st of this year.

Many economists are skeptical that this plan will do much to help Venezuela. Some, like local economist Asdrubal Oliveros, are openly disdainful saying that “it’s a cosmetic measure, which does not impact the bottom line.” He went on to tweet that “dropping three zeros from the currency without solving the problem driving hyperinflation will help nothing.” As the crisis continues to spiral out of control Maduro seems to have a few other ideas to help his people. This latest proposal is, in fact, borrowed from and identical plan used by Hugo Chavez in 2008, to limited effect.

Maduro’s presidential opponent, Henri Falcon, has proposed that in the light of the bolivar dropping in value against the dollar over 99% there must be an alternative step taken. He proposes that the Venezuelan economy be dollarized, a move that has already become the relative norm among many black market venues. President Maduro strongly opposes this plan and calls on Venezuelans everywhere to "defend our Bolivar!" The presidential election is scheduled to take place this year but with an opposition party that seems committed to boycott the vote it is unlikely that Maduro will face much trouble getting reelected.

Repercussions

All of this is taking place as Venezuelans on the street continue to suffer. Some even go without food and medicine because they have become too expensive in the wake of out of control hyperinflation. Meanwhile a black market economy that has sprung up in Venezuela and continues to be the only means by which a Venezuelan can attain goods at a reasonable price while the official economy continues to crumble.

Sources:

Update: Myanmar

The Rakhine region has been militarized at an alarming pace. After a few deadly attacks on police stations, the Myanmar military has started to use force in the Rakhine state to crackdown on insurgents. The land in Rakhine state is now for the military’s taking. Bulldozers have made their way through the state paving the way for new infrastructure in place of the Rohingya villages. Following these actions, Myanmar has been accused of removing the evidence of horrendous crimes against the Rohingya. Myanmar has previously requested “clear evidence” that support the UN’s allegations of their “acts of genocide” against the Rohingya. In addition, Rakhine has been isolated from UN investigators, rights groups and media organizations, making it extremely difficult to document these reports. The situation raises urgent concerns about its implications for the future of the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya.

In response, some have chosen to flee rather than remain. Many have escaped the harsh conditions of Myanmar on boats and have been seeking solace in Malaysia. Though some have considered this to be a huge improvement from the happenings in Rakhine, their struggle is far from over. Sheltered Rohingya in Malaysia have no legal rights. They have no guarantee of work, education or shelter. Thousands have registered as refugees, but the total number of Rohingya in Malaysia has said to be double, counting the thousands who are there illegally. The director-general of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency said those fleeing violence in Myanmar are not to be turned away, and would be provided temporary shelter. However, as of recent, Wan Junaidi Jaafar, the Malaysian Deputy Home Minister, stated that the Rohingya arriving in the country illegally would be turned back. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are about 50 schools in Malaysia run by non-governmental organisations that are educating Rohingya children. Experts say Malaysia should look at improving the Rohingya’s access to employment, healthcare and education. Malaysia is afraid to commit formal arrangements for the refugees might cause more to arrive. But, despite the difficulties with work and education, the Rohingya students and parents at the Penang School say they are happy. According to them, Malaysia is peaceful compared to what he left behind.

Sources:
bbc.com/news/world-asia-4367720

Aung San Suu Kyi Seeks Humanitarian Help

Aung San Suu Kyi has been the de facto head of Myanmar’s civilian government since her party took power in Myanmar. However, she is limited in her control of the country by a constitution written by the outgoing junta. The military still has effective veto power over all legislation and controls key ministries, including security and defense. Suu Kyi has asked for humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya during a summit with regional leaders in Australia. Protests greeted Suu Kyi as she was accused of failing to prevent crimes against humanity towards the persecuted Muslim minority. Aung San Suu Kyi has faced international criticism on her ways of handling the Rohingya crisis. She met with Australia’s Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, in Canberra where she addressed the matter. Australia’s goal is to support a peaceful and efficient resolution to the matter. Human rights groups however, have criticised Australia for maintaining its limited military engagement with Myanmar.