

PART III Aerial Surveillance: Eyes in the Sky¹

To be effective, UN missions need comprehensive situational awareness, covering the range of key actors and conditions in the field. Where are the armed combatants located? Who is firing on whom? Who is attacking civilians? Who is exploiting the natural resources, legally and illegally? Where are the refugees? And if they are on the move, what direction are they headed in? What are the conditions of the roads and bridges on which the peacekeepers and the “peacekept” must travel? The answers to these pertinent questions and many more can be greatly aided by aerial reconnaissance, as is shown in Chapter 7 by A. Walter Dorn. Aircraft can usually get to the observed targets faster than ground personnel; they can cover more territory in a flyby or can loiter on station; and they offer a different but complementary (bird’s-eye) view to land-based observers. Additionally, aircraft can remain at a safe distance above most raging conflicts to avoid risk to the observer, particularly with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), where pilots are far from the battlefield.

The United Nations has gained plenty of experience with aerial reconnaissance over the years, though few advanced systems have been deployed. The first UN peacekeeping force, deployed into the Sinai in 1956, used small twin-propeller Otter aircraft to reconnoiter the positions of Israeli and Egyptian troops. As described by A. Walter Dorn in Chapter 8, the 1958 UN observer mission in Lebanon used aircraft equipped with rudimentary night-vision equipment to spot arms-laden convoys covertly supplying rebel forces. In the UN’s next mission, a large expansion in the Congo in 1960–1964, Swedish reconnaissance jets helped the United Nations repel ground and air attacks and determine targets for air attacks in Katanga. Returning to the Congo 40 years later, the United Nations deployed armed helicopters with fourth-generation infrared cameras to help locate and target rebel forces who, despite repeated UN demands, did not cease to attack towns in the eastern Congo. The night-vision capabilities helped halt the rebel advances in 2006 and 2008. The eastern Congo was also the location for the UN’s first deployment of UAVs. After decades of modern militaries using surveillance UAVs in operational theatres (including American UAVs in Bosnia in the early 1990s and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) UAVs in Libya in 2011), the United Nations is finally contracting surveillance UAVs from a commercial vendor to augment its situational awareness. Wisely, the United Nations is not contemplating armed UAVs, which have been so controversially applied by the United States in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen. Nonetheless, the UN’s UAVs can serve as potent *force enablers* and *force multipliers* to make ground troops better informed and better able to defend themselves and civilian populations. In Chapter 9 David Neil gives a view from industry involved with UAVs, enhanced by his many years of military service. In summary, aerial reconnaissance is essential for any UN operations that seek to be robust, effective, and efficient in using its military, police, and civilian capabilities.

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