

THE ATTACK IS THE SECOND DEADLIEST SINCE 26 PAKISTANI PEACEKEEPERS WERE KILLED IN SOMALIA IN 1993

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

At least 14 UN peacekeepers were killed and more than 50 wounded, when armed men attacked their base in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the UN mission, known as MONUSCO, said on Friday.

The attack on the troops in Semuliki, in North Kivu's Beni region, began in the evening on Thursday and lasted several hours.

At least 12 of the peacekeepers killed were Tanzanian soldiers. Five Congolese soldiers were also killed, and the Congolese army put the number of rebel deaths at 72. UN officials said the toll could still rise as some peacekeepers were still missing and others gravely injured.

UN officials said it was likely that the attack was perpetrated by members of the shadowy Allied Democratic Forces, which has been active in the area for years. The ADF, which originated in Uganda, has not claimed responsibility.

Peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix said the UN would "get to the bottom of this".

The Tanzanian troops were part of the UN's Force Intervention Brigade - the specialised contingent authorised in 2013 by the Security Council to target and disarm rebel groups in the country.

Lacroix said the incident was a response "to our increasingly robust posture in that region". The Tanzanian unit is believed to be among the UN's most effective troops in the region.

Jim Sinclair, the director of the United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre, said the attack was the third, aimed at Tanzanian soldiers in the same area over the past several months.

Who did it?

Sinclair said the base is situated on the "fringes" of the forest and positioned at obstruct routes used by groups, including the ADF, into the Beni area. But analyst Christoph Vogel believes it is too early to draw firm conclusions that the ADF was responsible for this attack.

Over the past 15 years, the ADF's main military camps have been in the Rwenzori Mountains and in the Semuliki Valley.

It is a highly secretive organisation with strong historical ties to other armed groups in the area and local customary chiefs.

They are known to cooperate with other local militia and there is also enough evidence to suggest that some attacks attributed to the ADF in the past were, in fact, conducted by the Congolese army.

"It's quite possible that the ADF is involved, but there is no proof," concluded Vogel.

"It's absolutely possible that the ADF teamed up with other militia or more mysterious actors."

Attacks in the region are often attributed to "suspected ADF rebels" with little in the way of proof.

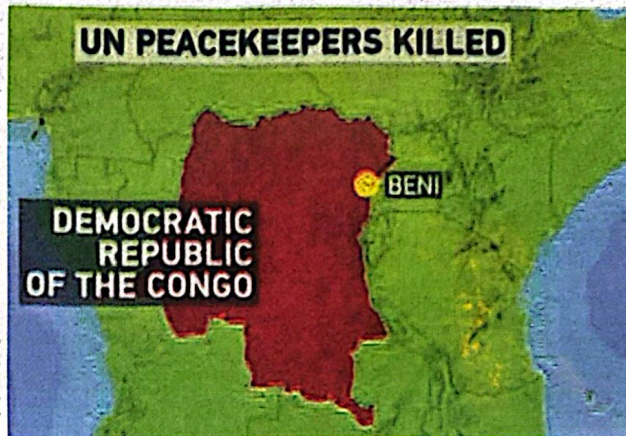
Recent incidents include the killing of 26 civilians a few weeks ago, which led to the closure of the main road back to the city of Beni.

In late October, the Congolese commander in Beni survived an ambush when a rocket hit his jeep, killing another soldier.

The shock of this attack, though, is the scale of it, involving scores of heavily armed attackers and lasting several hours.

It will have significant humanitarian

14 UN peacekeepers killed in DR Congo, 50 others wounded



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UN STATEMENT

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repercussions in a region where mounting violence involving several armed groups and the Congolese army has displaced a million people in the first half of this year, on top of 922,000 last year.

As a result of the ongoing fighting, Congo was declared a Level 3 emergency by the UN in October, its highest level of crisis.

"The immediate impact (of this attack) is that MONUSCO will turn inwards," said Vogel. "There will be less patrolling, and less armed escorts available to humanitarian workers who rely on them to help provide access."

The attack is likely the second deadliest ever on UN blue helmets - the highest toll since 26 Pakistani peacekeepers were killed in Somalia in 1993. Last year, that many peacekeepers were killed across all UN operations.

"This is the worst attack on UN peacekeepers in the organisation's recent history," said UN Secretary-General António Guterres. "These

deliberate attacks against UN peacekeepers are unacceptable and constitute a war crime."

There is a perception that the changing nature of peacekeeping, epitomised by the offensive-minded Force Intervention Brigade, has increased the risks for blue helmets.

They are increasingly deployed in

Killings shock Tanzania's Magufuli

Tanzania's President John Magufuli said Saturday he was shocked by an attack on a UN base in the restive Democratic Republic of Congo, which killed 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers.

The soldiers were all members of the Tanzania People's Defence Forces participating in a peacekeeping operation in the conflict-torn eastern region of the country.

"I am very shocked and saddened to hear of the deaths of our young, brave soldiers and heroes, who lost their lives carrying out their peace mission in our neighbour, the DRC," Magufuli said in a statement in Swahili.

He added that two other soldiers were still unaccounted for, though it was unclear if one of those was already included in the death toll.

The UN base in North Kivu province came under attack by suspected Ugandan rebels on Thursday.

Five Congolese soldiers and a further 53 personnel were also injured, the UN Security Council said.

The attack is the worst loss of life to a UN peacekeeping force since 1993 when 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed in Somalia during clashes with a local warlord.

DR Congo's huge eastern region has long been wracked by violence, but fighting between government soldiers and militia groups, as well as inter-ethnic clashes, has increased significantly this year.

UN chief Antonio Guterres led an outpouring of outrage over the deadly ambush, calling it a "heinous" act.

AFP

President Magufuli condemned the attacks on Tanzanian soldiers who were on operation in the conflict-torn eastern region of the DR Congo