

PEACE ENFORCEMENT AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

an OEF Research Policy Brief
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OEF Research

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Peace enforcement has become the subject of vigorous debate among both policy makers and academics working in the field of peace operations. However, there has been relatively little empirical examination of how this emerging strategy affects another key objective of contemporary peace operations: reducing violence against civilians. This policy brief discusses the policy implications of an initial study of peace enforcement and its impact on where actors use violence against civilians.

Policy Implications:

- ▶ Post-intervention violence against civilians is most likely to remain in the areas that previously had the highest density of such violence. The report finds that targeted actors use violence against civilians over smaller areas after peace enforcement, but that the mean center of events of violence against civilians remains fairly stable.
- ▶ Troop presence should be concentrated in areas that have experienced the highest concentrations of previous violence. The contraction of and stability in the distribution of post-intervention violence against civilians means intervening forces attempting to protect civilians have a fairly distinct and predictable area in which this violence is most likely to occur. Given the limited numbers of troops in intervening forces, defining an area of highest threat for violence against civilians allows forces to concentrate troop presence. More dispersed deployments over a smaller area should allow forces to deter and rapidly react to violence against civilians more effectively.
- ▶ Intelligence assets should be focused in the areas where previous violence against civilians has been concentrated. The ability to better define the area in which violence against civilians is most likely to occur during peace enforcement missions also gives forces the ability to more effectively task intelligence assets. Intervening forces often lack the kind of situational awareness critical for effective civilian protection. The ability to more effectively task intelligence collection (imagery, signals, human, etc.) improves situational awareness, force protection, and civilian protection.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Question

The central question of this report is **whether and how peace enforcement changes where an actor targeted with intervention uses violence against civilians**. Peace enforcement is a military intervention in an ongoing conflict by an outside actor which targets a specific conflict actor in an attempt to reduce violence or end the conflict. There has been increasing academic and policy debate in recent years over the efficacy of such interventions, particularly in the context of UN operations. This report contributes to that debate by looking at the effects of peace enforcement on violence against civilians in terms of both intensity and geographic distribution.

Methods

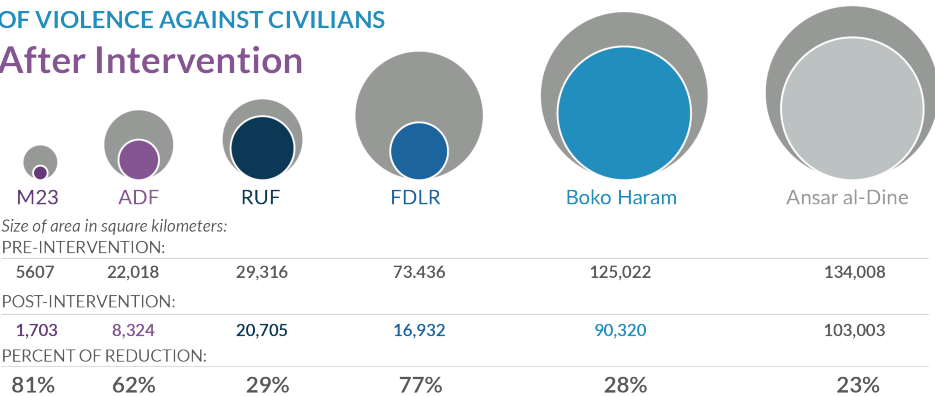
The report looks at six cases of peace enforcement in Africa and uses GIS mapping to compare the geographic distribution of violence against civilians by the targeted armed actor prior to and during/after intervention. Cases include interventions against M23, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Ansar al-Dine in Mali; the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone; and Boko Haram in Nigeria. The report is based on event data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) dataset. Standard ellipses are the primary tool used to represent the area over which violence against civilians most frequently occurs. The report measures the size of and change in pre- and post-intervention standard ellipses, the shift in the mean center of events of violence against civilians, and the change in violence against civilians as a proportion of the actor’s violent actions.

Cross-Case Patterns

Of the three characteristics of violence against civilians that were measured, the two geographic characteristics (standard ellipse and mean center) display clear patterns, while the measure of violence against civilians as a proportion of violent events varies across cases. As a percentage of an actor’s violent actions, civilian targeting increased post-intervention in two cases (ADF and Boko Haram) and declined in all other cases. Further research may help determine if characteristics of the actor, conflict, or intervening force help explain these divergent responses to the change in the strategic environment.

The more consistent and interesting pattern was the **universal reduction in the size of the standard ellipse generated by events of violence against civilians during/after intervention**. Cases saw reductions ranging from 23.1% to 80.1%, with an average reduction of 50.1%. It is striking that all of these diverse actors reacted to peace enforcement by dramatically reducing the area over which they committed violence against civilians, regardless of whether violence against civilians increased or declined as a proportion of their activities

Size of Reduction in GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS After Intervention



Finally, all cases also saw **relatively limited movement in the mean center of events of violence against civilians** pre- and post-intervention. Mean centers of violence against civilians shifted between 18 and 130 km, with an average of 62 km. This seems a surprisingly limited amount of movement given the distances encompassed by the conflict areas.

Taking these two trends together, it appears that targeted actors reduce the area over which they commit violence against civilians and, rather than committing such actions in new areas as a result of intervention, they withdraw into the areas in which they have previously used violence against civilians most frequently.

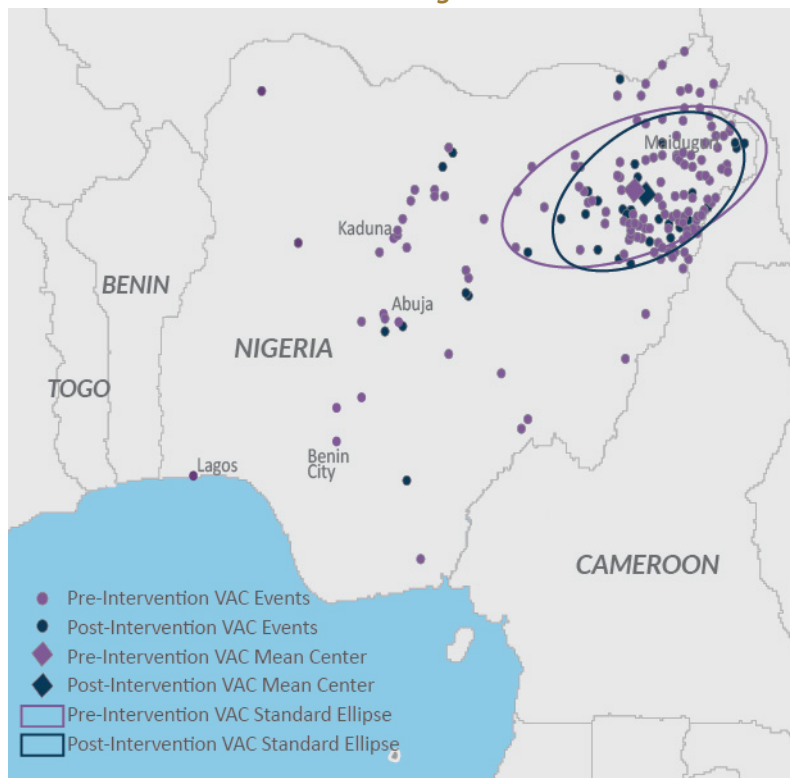
Policy Implications

The first simple implication of the research is that peace enforcement can, on the average, be a valuable tool for civilian protection. In the majority of cases in this study, targeted actors decreased their use of violence against civilians as a share of their violent activities by an average of 9.2%. It will be important for future research to dive deeper in identifying how the characteristics of conflicts and the actors involved predict changes in levels of violence against civilians in response to peace enforcement.

What is clearer from this report is that **peace enforcement appears to contain the geographic scope of events of violence against civilians**. This containment effect could be particularly valuable information for policy makers who are attempting to define the scope of civilian protection needs. Containing the scope of violence is helpful for the planning of efforts to prevent and rapidly react to ongoing violence against civilians.

When anticipating where violence against civilians is most likely to be committed by targeted actors, peace enforcement missions should primarily look where these actors have used this form of violence in the past. Peace enforcement missions are often under-resourced for the incredibly demanding task of civilian protection. Civilian protection operations require an accurate and timely understanding of the movements of targeted actors in order to rapidly react to impending or ongoing acts of violence against civilians. However, forces often do not have the adequate technical and human intelligence assets to achieve such a high state of situational awareness. The findings of this report may help fill this gap in tactical intelligence and situational awareness.

Boko Haram Violence Against Civilians



Reducing the area of operation to that most likely to experience continued violence against civilians may help missions deploy limited troops and intelligence-collection resources more efficiently. A higher density of troops and intelligence assets can be tasked with **monitoring smaller areas that have a higher probability of experiencing violence against civilians. Focusing resources in this manner gives missions increased situational awareness and an enhanced capacity for rapid deployment in areas most likely to experience violence against civilians.** The findings of this study should not be overstated. They do not offer a predictive model of which town, district, or village will be the next to experience acts of violence against civilians by a target actor. With that said, this study may provide some insights for force commanders prioritizing the deployment of limited resources in the herculean task of civilian protection.



BACKGROUND

OEF Research, a program of the One Earth Future Foundation, believes that policy and practice reflect the quality of available information. We promote empirically-informed research developed using methodologically rigorous approaches as a tool for policy making in peace, security, and good governance. It believes in analyzing evidence using both quantitative and qualitative best practices. We also believe the most innovative solutions to problems of conflict and peace necessarily involve a diverse set of disciplinary and sectoral viewpoints. Much of our work aims to break down the barriers between these different perspectives.

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Cover: Chadian troops patrol near Kidal, Mali, as part of MINUSMA, December 2016. Photo by Sylvain Liechti/MINUSMA.