UN Monitors Murdered in Congo--Where $18.3B Spent on Peacekeeping

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<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/un-experts-murdered-african-nation-where-conflict-continues-despite>

The murder in the Democratic Republic of Congo of two U.N. experts, one of whom was decapitated, has drawn renewed attention to a convoluted conflict that is estimated to have caused [more than five million deaths](https://www.rescue.org/country/democratic-republic-congo#what-caused-the-current-crisis-in-congo) from violence, disease and malnutrition since the late 1990s.

Over the same period, U.N. peacekeeping efforts in the DRC have cost more than $18.3 billion.

The U.N. secretariat confirmed that the bodies of Michael Sharp, an American, and Zaida Catalan, a Swedish national, had been found, two weeks after they were abducted by unidentified individuals in DRC’s Kasai-Central province. The DRC government said Catalan had been beheaded.

The discovery came on the eve of an annual U.N. Security Council vote on extending for another year the peacekeeping mission known as MONUSCO – the biggest and most expensive of the 16 current U.N. peacekeeping missions around the world.

It also came days before the United States assumes the rotating presidency of the council; Ambassador Nikki Haley said Wednesday reforming peacekeeping would be a major priority during her presidency in April.

MONUSCO (the U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in the D.R. Congo) has cost some $9.62 billion since it was established in 2010, including a $1.23 billion budget for the year ending June 30, 2017. Its predecessor, MONUC, cost $8.73 billion between 1999 and 2010.

In FY 2016, U.S. taxpayers accounted for $440.6 million of the costs of the DRC mission, and the Obama administration last fall requested $440.0 million for FY 2017.

The United States currently pays 28.57 percent of the total U.N. peacekeeping budget, even though U.S. law signed by President Clinton in 1994 set a 25 percent cap on the U.S. contributions.

U.S. contributions to peacekeeping mission overall in FY 2016 amounted to an estimated $2.460 billion, and President Obama requested $2.394 billion for FY2017.

The Trump administration’s proposed FY 2018 budget would reduce the U.S. funding of U.N. peacekeeping to a maximum of 25 percent.

In the DRC (formerly Zaire), a series of wars and rebellions since 1998 have been characterized by brutality, widespread rape and displacement in sub-Saharan Africa’s biggest country.

The country has never had a peaceful handover of power since it achieved independence from Belgium in 1960. Attempts by President Joseph Kabila, who has been in power since 2001, to extend his term triggered protests late last year. In a deal brokered by the Catholic Church last December, he then agreed to step down by the end of 2017.

**‘Do we have an exit plan?’**

Speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations on Wednesday, Haley said the U.S. would take a different approach to the peacekeeping issue during its council presidency.

“We will lay out a comprehensive vision for how peacekeeping missions should be reviewed moving forward,” she said. “We will go back to first principles and ask hard questions: What was the original intent of the mission? Is the mission achieving its objective? Are we lifting up the people in the region towards independence? What are the mission countries doing to help themselves? Do we have an exit plan? And is there accountability?”

Haley said the review would identify which missions need structural reform, “where we need to augment, where we need to restructure, and where we need to cut back.”

CFR president Richard Haass pointed out that the U.S. does not have exit plans for its own long running troop deployments in Asia and Europe, and asked what was wrong with having open-ended U.N. peacekeeping missions if they are “doing a good job at a reasonable cost.”

“There should never be a time we don’t want to lift up countries [and] … make them more independent,” Haley replied. “If we’re there all the time, all we’re doing is creating dependence.”

“We’re should never just stay somewhere just because we got there,” she said, adding that that was not fair to American taxpayers, to the governments of the countries concerned, or to the peacekeepers deployed there.

Sharp and Catalan were members of a six-strong group of experts appointed to monitor the implementation of U.N. Security Council sanctions, including an arms embargo and assets freeze, on armed groups in the DRC.

Catalan focused on humanitarian issues and Sharp, who also led the team, on armed groups.

“Michael and Zaida lost their lives seeking to understand the causes of conflict and insecurity in the DRC in order to help bring peace to the country and its people,” secretary-general Antonio Guterres said in a [statement](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-03-28/statement-secretary-general-death-two-members-group-experts).

He said the U.N. would carry out an inquiry into their deaths, and do all in its power to ensure justice was done. Four Congolese nationals who disappeared with Sharp and Catalan are still missing, and Guterres urged the authorities to continue searching for them.

In her response to the deaths, Haley send “prayers and heartfelt condolences to the two families.

“It is always difficult to lose a brave American dedicated to service,” she said, adding that Sharp had “selflessly put himself in harm’s way to try to make a difference in the lives of the Congolese people.”

MONUSCO’s troop complement is capped at 22,500, and currently some 19,000 are deployed. One hundred and seven MONUSCO peacekeepers have been killed, and another 161 were killed during the MONUC period.