

UN Africa commanders call for better technology

June 27 2013, by Alexandra Olson

(AP)—The commanders of two peacekeeping missions in Africa appealed Wednesday for more sophisticated military technology to stay ahead of armed groups threatening civilians and government.

Lt. Gen. Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, the commander of the 19,000-member U.N. peacekeeping mission in eastern Congo, welcomed the decision to equip the force with drone surveillance planes to help new "intervention brigades" neutralize and disarm rebel groups under a more robust mandate from the Security Council.

Dos Santos Cruz, who is from Brazil, spoke before the Security Council along with the commanders of other U.N. peacekeeping missions. He said he expects the [unmanned aircraft](#) to help identify the logistical hubs of armed groups and provide early warning of their movements and intentions.

He also spoke to the council about other advanced [military technology](#) that could benefit peacekeepers. Those included equipment to intercept [communication signals](#) of armed groups that "regularly change their locations and methods of operating," and effective warning and neutralizing devices against improvised [explosive devices](#).

"If, as seems to be the case, negative forces are increasingly resorting to the use of more sophisticated military technology to achieve their objectives, so there will be a need for U.N. forces to at least match that capability," dos Santos Cruz said. "This is an area that needs to be

continually monitored if U.N. peacekeeping is to avoid being outpaced and its effectiveness diluted."

At a news conference following the Security Council briefing, the commander of the 7,600-member peacekeeping mission in South Sudan said he wants [drones](#) for his force, too.

Maj. Gen. Delali Johnson Sakyi says drones would greatly help the peacekeepers quickly identify and reach violent flashpoints in their mandate to protect villagers from armed attack.

"The importance of information collection and verification to decide when or how to launch troops cannot be overemphasized, particularly in South Sudan," said Sakyi, who is from Ghana. Unmanned surveillance aircraft "can really help identify flashpoints in time so that the appropriate forces will be engaged to mitigate conflict. So it's a welcome idea."

Johnson Sakyi said protecting villagers from attacks such as cattle raids is a key part of his force's mission, which allows the use of force to protect civilians if necessary. He said the peacekeepers rely on patrols to learn about planned attacks, along with one infrared device wanted mounted on a helicopter. He appealed for more such devices and for more helicopters.

"Inadequacy of helicopters to launch troops and sustain troops continues to be our very big challenge," he said. "Get there on time, or we act too late."

Sakyi's comments came amid rising tensions between South Sudan and Sudan, which peacefully separated in 2011 after a six-year peace process that ended 20 years of war. Both countries accuse each other of supporting rebel groups that continue fighting on either side of the

border.

For Congo, the Security Council authorized the "intervention brigades" and the use of drones in March, an unprecedented decision that gave the peacekeepers an offensive mandate. The move came three months after M23 rebels occupied the Congolese city of Goma as peacekeepers with no authority to intervene stood by.

Dos Santos Cruz said at the news conference that two of the new brigades have arrived, one from Tanzania and the other from South Africa. A third from Malawi is expected to arrive in late July. The United Nations is still in the process of procuring the drones, and the commander said he hopes they will arrive in the fall.

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