

Possible Solutions to the Crisis in the DRC

The current crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is not one of warlords and saints. It is a multivariable conflict between many small, mobile militia forces all vying for resource power and the relatively new democratic government trying to rebuild after the Second Congo War. This essay focuses on providing two recommendations to the United Nations on how to act in response to the new explosion of violent conflict in the DRC. I start by examining the causes of the DRC's current state, mainly the lack of resource power sharing and subsequent absence of government legitimacy in the eyes of the warring factions. While many other factors contributed to this crisis, I focus my analysis through the lens of liberalist international relations theory, as defined by the writings of Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye and Michael Doyle. Although I maintain that ethnicity was originally a byproduct of the economic and political situation, I discuss, in a more constructivist accent, its importance as an emerging challenge to positive peace. I end by presenting my two-part recommendation for action that will address both the critical short-term needs for stabilizing the country, as well as the long-term needs for conflict resolution and the pursuit of positive peace through legitimizing the government, establishing mechanisms for resource power sharing, and reconciling the various ethnic groups.

Congo's condition reflects a history of brutal resource violence, beginning with colonialism and continuing into the present. During the late 19th century, King

Leopold II of Belgium used militias left over from the slave trade to extract resources through terrorizing the civilian community. The militias would “descend upon villages and demand rubber and ivory, if the tribute was not paid, the locals were killed or dismembered.”¹ From 1965 to 1997, Mobutu Sese Seko “systematically used the country’s mineral wealth to consolidate power, co-opt rivals and enrich himself and allies through patronage.”²

The tension over access to natural resources remains key to Congo’s current conflict dynamic. “Congolese army soldiers, as well as members of armed groups, are... involved in illicit mining activities in the rich gold and tin mines across the Kivu provinces, systematically extorting civilians, in particular through the imposition of illegal ‘taxes.’”³ The participation of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) in illegal resource extraction not only demonstrates the centrality of resources to the conflict, but also explains in part why the current government remains unable to negotiate a lasting ceasefire with the rebel militias: the rebels don’t regard the government as legitimate. In addition, “profits from Congo’s resources have historically been extracted by whoever controls the soldiers at the mine gates, making demilitarization unattractive to those with bank accounts on the receiving end.”⁴ Since

¹ Christian Parenti, “Congo’s Crisis, Congo’s History,” 2007, International Herald Tribune, 18 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/12/27/opinion/edparenti.php>>

² “Conflict History: DR Congo”, 2008, International Crisis Group, 17 Nov. 2008 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=37>

³ “DR Congo: Humanitarian Crisis Deepens as Peace Process Falter,” 2008, Human Rights Watch, 17 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/09/25/dr-congo-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-peace-process-falters>>

⁴ “Congo (DR) Conflict,” 2008, Reuters AlertNet, 23 Nov. 2008 <http://www.alertnet.org/db/crisisprofiles/ZR_CON.htm?v=in_detail>

the government lacks the capability to redistribute resource revenues and break this trend, direct access has become a necessity for survival. In recent years “major problems with food security due to poor agricultural yields and insect infestations, together with regional floods, have added to a complex humanitarian situation.”⁵ The desperation is reflected in the nature of the violence. The major militias, namely Nkunda’s CNDP, the Mai Mai and the FDLR, as well as the national army have been witnessed raping, slaughtering, and displacing civilians in attempts to gain control over key resource sites.

Congo’s resource wealth has also fueled the fire vis-à-vis international pressure. Regional powers, namely Rwanda and Uganda, have contributed to the conflict by funding militia groups in exchange for Congolese resources. There is also evidence that both countries have directly engaged in cross-border resource extraction. “The major activity of the Ugandan army in north-eastern Congo until 2003 was the systematic looting of natural resources.”⁶ Direct or indirect acquisition of Congolese resources without consent from the government only causes resource violence to escalate. In addition to solving the internal resource problem, the DRC must break the direct connection between other states and its own natural wealth.

Breaking these ties between internal/external armed forces and Congolese resources requires a respected, democratic government in place that carries legitimate negotiating power. Although the first democratic election in forty years was held in 2006

⁵ Benjamin Coghlan et al., “Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis,” 2007, International Rescue Committee, 16 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2829&l=1>>

⁶ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, “The International Dimensions of the Congo Crisis,” *Global Dialogue*, Vol. 6, No. 3-4 2004, pp. 116-126.

and proved to be fair and free, the government's failure to make visible headway on integrating the various rebel factions into the government's decision-making mechanisms has left the rebels bitter and skeptical of the government's legitimacy. In addition, "the Congolese army has been supported in some military operations by the local militia known as the Mai Mai and another militia known as PARECO, as well as by an armed group led by Rwandan Hutu called the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)," which carries soldiers who participated in the Rwandan genocide.⁷ In and outside combat zones, Congolese army soldiers and fighters from these militia groups have "killed or injured civilians, often in the process of pillaging their property."⁸ Rape has become an immense problem. According to the CBS 60 Minutes Special "War Against Women: The Use of Rape as a Weapon in Congo's Civil War," rape has become a method of demonstrating authority and tearing the very fabric of communities. Its widespread use by both militia's and government soldiers is taking its toll on Congolese women and threatens to destroy the most basic aspects of civil society.

The government's inability to control their troops, combined with visible ties to the Mai Mai, PARECO, and the FDLR, has severely undermined state authority. The Goma Peace Agreement, signed on January 23, 2008 between the government, rebel leader Laurent Nkunda, and the Mai Mai militia has been completely disregarded. "The UN recorded at least 200 ceasefire violations in less than six months between January and

⁷ "DR Congo: New Attacks on Civilians," 2008, [Human Rights Watch](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/06/dr-congo-new-attacks-civilians), 15 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/06/dr-congo-new-attacks-civilians>>

⁸ "DR Congo: Humanitarian Crisis Deepens as Peace Process Falter," 2008, [Human Rights Watch](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/09/25/dr-congo-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-peace-process-falters), 17 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/09/25/dr-congo-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-peace-process-falters>>

July, with August reports suggesting groups were rearming.”⁹ Rebel factions have stopped believing in the need to talk and returned to believing in the need to fight. Before dialogue will ever be possible or productive between the government and the various rebel factions, the government must restore its image as a legitimate democracy.

Although the lack of resource power sharing and the absence of state authority are the main causes of the current crisis, ethnicity has become a definite challenge to creating positive peace in the region. Ethnicity was originally a byproduct of economic tension and resource violence. However, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the horrors of regional ethnic atrocities have sent shockwaves that have further destabilized the already fragile population. “On at least two occasions since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 of Tutsis and moderate Hutus by an extremist Hutu regime, the Rwandan army, one of the toughest in Africa, has directly invaded DR Congo” to supposedly stamp out the remains of the Hutu extremists.¹⁰ Internally, militia groups like Laurent Nkunda’s National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) have begun fighting for ethnic protection. “In a brief interview last year, Nkunda told this reporter that he simply wanted to protect his people from armed groups who have a long history of attacking and killing Tutsis, namely the... FDLR.”¹¹ Nkunda’s rebel army is supported by the Rwandan government, which has led to the emerging proxy war between Rwanda and

⁹ “Conflict in Congo,” 2008, International Crisis Group, 16 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2829>>

¹⁰ Mark Doyle, “Rwanda’s role in DR Congo conflict,” 2008, BBC News, 23 Nov. 24 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7714629.stm>>

¹¹ Scott Baldauf, “What does Congo’s Gen. Nkunda Want?,” 2008, The Christian Science Monitor, 14 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1114/p06s01-woaf.html>>

DR Congo. Since Nkunda's CNDP is currently the biggest threat to Joseph Nabila's government, it is imperative to address the issue of ethnicity by agreeing to compromise on Nkunda's demands for Tutsi security and protection, and by including all ethnic groups in future resource policy discussion.

By addressing these root causes of conflict, we can begin laying the groundwork for a future of positive peace in the DRC. My two-part recommendation for UN action first calls for an immediate increase in the breadth and intensity of the current peace mission, MONUC, to stabilize the country and end direct violence. The second stage consists of a joint venture of conflict resolution and peace building that would address the root causes of the conflict. These two actions would provide a short-term response to the violence that has left civilians physically and psychologically helpless and a long-term reconstruction and reconciliation process that would prevent the conflict from reoccurring.

The first part of this strategy requires immediately increasing the breadth and intensity of MONUC, which translates into more peace enforcement troops on the ground to end direct violence and stabilize the country. This call for action would be legitimized by the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, which states that the international community has a right and an obligation to intervene militarily in a sovereign state if that state is deemed to be unable to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity.¹² It is obvious enough, from the number of

¹² Garth Evens, "The Responsibility to Protect: The Power of an Idea," Keynote Address to Human Rights Center, UC Berkley, 14 March 2007

civilians killed, brutalized or displaced, that the government is currently unable to protect its people from any of these human rights violations, and in some cases, has even been participatory. “The killing of civilians, the destruction of camps, and the forced return of displaced people are all war crimes.”¹³ This course of action follows a 2nd Generation approach to peace keeping, which calls upon the human security norm to allow the use of force in ending preventing human rights abuses. Peace enforcement should also be deployed along the border to prevent international militia support and resource extraction.

In addition to sending more peace enforcement troops to end direct violence, the UN should provide the Congolese government with the resources necessary to regain control of the FARDC. These resources could come in the form of an integrated UN-Congolese army that would keep soldiers accountable for their actions and prevent them from intentionally harming civilians. The UN should also put direct pressure on the Congolese government to cut all economic and military ties with the Mai Mai militia and the FLDR, both of which have committed large-scale human rights abuses. The FLDR, in particular, consists in part of soldiers who participated in the Rwandan genocide. Considering the ethnic tensions already present in the conflict, it is crucial for the government to remain unacquainted with such a force. On a more international scale, the UN should call for the Rwandan President Paul Kagame to end his unpublicized support for Nkunda’s rebel force and to cut any ties to Congolese natural resources, which would

¹³ “DR Congo: New Attacks on Civilians,” 2008, [Human Rights Watch](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/06/dr-congo-new-attacks-civilians), 15 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/06/dr-congo-new-attacks-civilians>>

help end the proxy war that has begun between Rwanda and the DRC.¹⁴

Once the DRC is relatively stable, the UN should begin addressing the root causes of the conflict through conflict resolution and peace building, a strategy defined in part by Nicole Ball in her article “The Challenge of Rebuilding War-Torn Societies.” First, the DRC should attempt to restore democratic authority by pursuing a national policy of disarmament and reintegration of rebel forces. Reintegrating the militias into the army will require the government to include the various factions in power sharing dialogue, which brings us to the second necessary action to continue the peace building process. To begin to address the deepest cause of the crisis, resource access and distribution, the government should set up a Resource Access and Distribution Council, which would allow for economic power sharing between the warring groups. These negotiations and reforms would help establish government legitimacy and simultaneously initiate economic revitalization efforts. Finally, inter-community reconciliation should be triggered through economic and social recovery programs, which would address problems of identity, ethnicity, and gender discrimination.

In conclusion, the conflict within the Democratic Republic of Congo has many factors that all must be addressed in order to establish reasonable hope for a future of positive peace. The government must regain its legitimacy in the eyes of the militia groups by taking control of its armed forces. Only then can they begin negotiations that could lead to reintegration of rebels into the national army. Simultaneously, the

¹⁴ “DR Congo: International Leaders Should Act Now to Protect Civilians,” 2008, [Human Rights Watch](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/10/30/dr-congo-international-leaders-should-act-now-protect-civilians) 17 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/10/30/dr-congo-international-leaders-should-act-now-protect-civilians>>

government must provide compensation in the form of representation in resource access and distribution committees that would resolve resource violence. Only then will communities be able to begin the long process of reconciliation and inter-ethnic acceptance. But first, before any of the structural causes of violence can be solved, the shooting must stop. Currently MONUC does not have the personnel or the resources to protect civilians who are being attacked.¹⁵ Therefore, the UN and the international community must take a stance. Although the rape, murder and displacement of civilians may appear to be impossible to understand, it's happening for a reason. This conflict is solvable. The only question is whether we will decide to solve it.

¹⁵ "DR Congo: New Attacks on Civilians," 2008, [Human Rights Watch](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/06/dr-congo-new-attacks-civilians), 15 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/06/dr-congo-new-attacks-civilians>>

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