

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2124
November 7, 2008

Crisis in Congo and the Challenge for the International Community

Thomas M. Woods

Deadly clashes resumed in North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) just one day before the African Union–sponsored Nairobi summit aimed at ending the crisis was convened. The shaky cease-fire declared by the renegade Tutsi General Laurent Nkunda and his National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) broke down in the Rutshuru region only days after the U.N. had managed to begin delivery of humanitarian assistance to the area's 250,000 displaced people.

Conflict is nothing new to the war-weary provinces of eastern Congo. That is precisely why the U.N. Security Council decided in 1999 to establish the world's largest U.N. peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC). MONUC and its 17,000-strong force has been in existence since the stabilization of the DRC's "world war," which included armed forces from six countries and led to the deaths of 3–4 million Congolese civilians. Now, some nine years later and at a cost of more than \$1 billion per year, it would be difficult to cite MONUC's specific achievements. In fact, MONUC has disgraced itself more than once as a result of misconduct while failing to deal with the DRC's underlying security threats.

The Current Crisis: Failure to Deal with the Root Problem. For those who have not followed the troubled history of eastern Congo's Kivu provinces, the underlying conflict is strikingly unchanged since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda laid the foundation for the current chaos.

Following the successful overthrow of Rwanda's Hutu government by the rebel Tutsi Rwanda Patriotic Front, Rwanda's Hutu genocidaires—responsible for the deaths of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus during the 1994 genocide—fled to eastern Congo. These ex-Rwandan Armed Forces created and allied with numerous ethnic-based militia groups such as the Interahamwe and the Mai-Mai and formed the base of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) in eastern Congo. With 8,000 troops, the FDLR has been able to defy the weak efforts of DRC President Joseph Kabila and MONUC to disarm and demobilize the group.

The failure to disarm or demobilize the FDLR problem has led Rwanda's sponsorship of proxy militias as a means to defend its borders against the FDLR's incursions. The extent to which the Rwandan government continues to support these groups is uncertain. However, one of these Rwandan-backed (at least initially) proxies is Nkunda's CNDP, which has now encircled the major border town of Goma, forcing thousands of Congolese to flee. While Rwandan President Paul Kagame denies any role in the current crisis, it is clear that he blames the U.N. and DRC President Kabila for failing to address the problem of the Hutu combatants now

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/wm2124.cfm

Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002–4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

openly fighting alongside the Congolese armed forces. Despite his savage disregard for civilians caught in the crossfire, Nkunda remains unapologetic for what he describes as his movement's defense of Tutsi and other minorities in North Kivu.

The Patient Could Die on the Table. It is estimated that as many as 45,000 people die each month in the Congo as a result of the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. The current spike in violence will certainly increase that number. Yet, the challenges for regional leaders and the international community go beyond addressing the immediate crisis; the underlying causes of instability in eastern Congo must be treated as well.

African leaders are heading to Nairobi to discuss the DRC's troubles. Hosted by the African Union (AU) and the U.N., the event will include the Presidents of Kenya, DRC, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Africa. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will also attend and has appointed former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo to serve as his Special Envoy on the issue. Tanzanian President and AU Chairman Jakaya Kikwete pledged to work toward a lasting solution in the DRC.

The first order of business must be negotiating a renewed, sustainable cease-fire. Only when the fighting stops can the U.N. effectively care for the humanitarian needs of the displaced, including the 135,000 people in six camps in and around Goma. These are desperate times for the refugees from the recent conflict: They had little before they were forced to leave their homes and are now dependent upon international aid.

Next Steps. In order to end the current Congolese crisis and achieve stability in the eastern Congo, the following steps should be taken:

- The AU and U.N. should use the Nairobi summit to pressure Kabila to rein in his troops and commit to disarming and demobilizing the FDLR as a means for securing an immediate cease-fire with Nkunda's CNDP. MONUC must help secure the stability required for unhindered humanitarian

assistance to reach those who need it in North Kivu province, especially in and around Goma.

- In return for the withdrawal of Congo forces and a pledge to disarm the FDLR, the AU and the U.N. should demand that Nkunda voluntarily withdraw his forces from its positions near Goma.
- Led by the AU, the international community must hold Kabila to his commitment to disarm and demobilize the FDLR.
- MONUC's Chapter 7 mandate should be reviewed to reinforce MONUC's status as a neutral party in the conflict and ensure that it is sufficient to assist in the forceful, if necessary, disarmament of the FDLR and other armed groups that pose a threat to regional stability.
- The United States should continue to support regional mediation efforts in the near term and insist upon a full-scale review of MONUC's mandate and exit strategy in the medium term.

Toward Peace and Security. As a result of neglect by the international community, perverse motivations by regional leaders, and a poorly defined U.N. mission that has cost billions of dollars with very few achievements to show, the eastern DRC continues to languish in conflict and despair.

The people of the Kivus suffer a general lack of governance and security, which has given rise to armed groups that operate with near impunity. The current humanitarian crisis is the first order of business that the United States, regional leaders, and the U.N. must address. However, continued failure to address the root causes of the crisis in eastern Congo only ensures that many thousands of additional lives will be lost and peace and security will remain elusive.

—Thomas M. Woods is Senior Associate Fellow in African Affairs in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.