

Understanding the Conflict in Congo

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ABSTRACT The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is slowly getting back on its feet from what is known as 'Africa's world war',¹ which claimed some five million lives between 1994 and 2003. Yet many areas, especially in the east, are still enmeshed in conflict, and peace and stability has yet to take root in the country. This paper describes the conflicts in Congo and argues that such hostilities have been exacerbated by the involvement of external state actors surrounding the republic. Despite agreements forged and the UN's efforts, peace has been elusive in this region, and for many reasons, including conflicting claims to natural resources, and the realpolitik aims of various countries and of ethnic groups in and outside the DRC. This paper gives a sketch of current developments in the country and the prospects for genuine peace.

INTRODUCTION: BEFORE THE FIRST CONGO WAR

The Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) size is nearly that of Western Europe. The population is around 70 million, making it the most populous Francophone country in the world. Congo's borders were originally laid down by its former coloniser, Belgium, in 1885. After the Congolese attained independence in 1960, Patrice Lumumba gained rule, with his party being the only one to be organised on both national and regional basis. Lumumba's reign was brief, however, as he would eventually be assassinated. A parliamentary commission in Belgium enquired into the killing, and in its November 2001 report concluded that "certain members of the Belgian government and other Belgian participants were morally

responsible for the circumstances leading to the death of Lumumba."²

In November 1965 Mobutu Sese Seko came to power through a coup d'état³; he would remain in his seat for 30 years. He changed the country's name to Zaire, and in 1967 initiated the so-called 'Zairianisation' of the country where foreign-owned, small and medium-size businesses were either nationalised or distributed to private individuals. In 1974, he introduced 'radicalisation'—a program supposedly aimed at addressing the country's economic problems such as unemployment and inflation, as well as the lack of social justice. The result was that the remaining large Belgian-owned companies were

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nationalised. In order to attain complete domination over the nation's vast mineral resources, Mobutu created the *Societe Zairoise pour la Commercialisation des Minerais* (SOZACOM) which was mandated to market the country's mineral resources. The effects, however, were devastating. It damaged private sector confidence at home and abroad, creditworthiness got undermined, leading to a steep decline in private lending. As a result, Mobutu turned to bilateral lenders by using his position as a strategic ally of the West. As Mobutu's government accumulated huge loans, only a fraction of those funds was used in legitimate ways; the rest was diverted by Mobutu and his supporters, leading to capital flight. Though Mobutu undertook some attempts through structural adjustments sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), the effects were minimal, with real per capita income declining at the rate of 1.2 percent from 1978 to 1988 and inflation reaching an average rate of 56 percent.

The IMF resuscitated the Zairian economy by making Mobutu settle the country's debts and backing Kengo Wa Dondo for the seat of prime minister with the authority to resume structural adjustment. The US, Belgium, Germany and France decided to write off portions of their bilateral loans to Zaire, providing Mobutu with a lifeline which he would fail to utilise. By then he had also been seduced by wealth and power, and instability would rise as he presided over a corrupt regime. In May 1990, as students staged a protest against Mobutu for rescinding on his promise of bringing about democratic reforms, Mobutu's troops responded violently; nearly 300 students were killed. In the aftermath, both the US and France announced that further aid to Zaire would depend on Mobutu bringing about democratic reforms. Mobutu refused to cooperate, and his old allies in the West abandoned him, suspending foreign aid.⁴

THE FIRST CONGO WAR: OVERTHROW OF MOBUTU

In 1994, Mobutu's downfall would be further fuelled by the genocide in neighbouring

Rwanda—where some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed by extremist Hutus and the army of Rwanda's Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana. After the Rwandan Patriotic Front under Paul Kagame seized power from the Hutus, more than two million⁵ Hutus are thought to have fled to Congo—whose eastern borders have historically been porous—and there set up camps. Among these refugees were militiamen who perpetrated the genocide.⁶ About a million people shifted to the Kivu regions. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps were set up close to the Rwandan borders where the militiamen had also re-established themselves.

New attacks against Rwanda were allegedly launched from these camps. From the Congolese perspective, this altered the ethnic balance of the Kivu. The Hutus dominated in some regions and started attacking the Congolese Tutsis. This had the tactical support of Mobutu, the Zairean army, and some Kivu politicians, too. Moreover, foreign aid was channelled mostly to the new immigrants, leaving out the Congolese villagers; this would escalate the tensions soon enough. In early and mid-1996, the Tutsis in South Kivu (also called 'Banyamulenge' and who were a minority in the region) faced enormous pressure.⁷ To appease the native Congolese people who had grown restive, Mobutu initiated drastic measures against all Kinyarwanda-speaking people, including the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda. While Banyamulenge refers only to the Congolese Tutsis who are concentrated in South Kivu, the Banyarwanda refers to the Tutsi, Hutu and Batwa people who are concentrated both in North Kivu and South Kivu.

THE HUTU TUTSI CRISIS

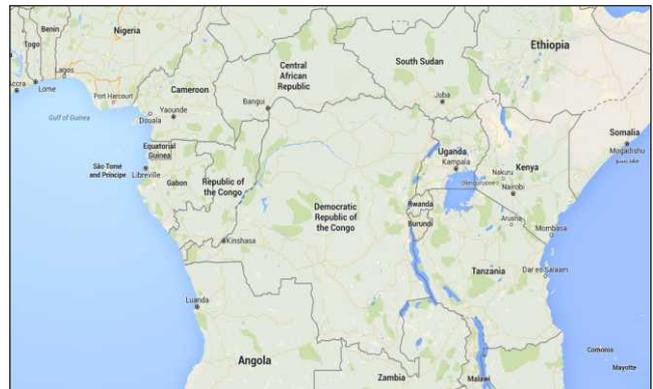
Some of the Hutus had begun migrating to North Kivus long before colonial rule. The same was true of the Tutsis, especially the Banyamulenge, a Tutsi subgroup of South Kivu. Apart from this, *transplantes* (mostly Hutus) were brought to Kivu as migrant labour in the tea and coffee plantations. The Tutsi refugees constitute a third group and they left Rwanda in the early 1960s

during the Hutu revolution. For all these differences, the Banyarwanda were classified as 'foreigners' and therefore disqualified from claiming citizenship rights. The 1981 Nationality Act took away the citizenship rights; this was the issue that had the severest impact. With a massive number of Hutu refugees and *interahamwe* coming into the DRC after the Rwandan genocide, irrespective of other identities, references became quickly dissolved into a Hutu-Tutsi conflict. Tactical alliances began to be formed in North Kivu. Native Hutus joined hands with the *interahamwe*, the ex-FAR and Hunde elements and the native Tutsis began to join hands with the RPA.⁸

There were three triggers for the escalation of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict. The first was the 1990 invasion of Rwanda by the RPF. Four years later, the RPF claimed victory, though at a huge cost. The assassination of Burundi's first elected President Ndadaye was the second trigger. The final one was the surface-to-air missiles that brought down the Rwandan President Habyarimana's plane in Kigali on 6 April 1993.

On 28 April 1995, the government adopted a resolution stripping the Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge of their Congolese nationality.⁹ With ethnic cleansing lurking in the shadows, the Banyamulenge launched pre-emptive strikes against the National Zairean Army (ANZ) soldiers and the Hutu refugee camps in September 1996. This was immediately followed by the Rwandan army coming into the DRC. The battle against Mobutu—and the First Congo War thus began. Gen. Paul Kagame pleaded with the international community that the Hutu militia and the *interahamwe* be segregated from the ordinary civilians so that Rwanda would not be targeted. When this was not done, he warned that Rwanda would act on its own. The Rwandan army made swift attacks against the ex-Armed Forces of Rwanda (ex-FAR) men and the *interahamwe* (the Hutu paramilitary group that participated in the Rwandan genocide) and they fled in the western direction. But no genocide was perpetrated against them. Immediately, Uganda joined in along with Rwanda and came in to Zaire.¹⁰

The case was similar for Uganda. The DRC was being used as a base to launch attacks by anti-Museveni forces like the Lord's Resistance Army, the West Nile Bank Front, and the Allied Democratic Forces—some of which were being supported by the government in Sudan. Angola also intervened in the attempts to oust Mobutu. Here, too, the reason was similar. Apart from providing support to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the Mobutu regime also let them set up bases in the DRC. These circumstances brought into the forefront the *Alliances des Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation du Congo* (AFDL), and rebel leader Laurent-Desire Kabila. The AFDL became the main Congolese partner of an invasion which consisted of Rwanda, Uganda, Angola and other African countries whose eyes were set on ousting Mobutu.¹¹ Mobutu was forced to flee and the AFDL emerged victorious in May 1997. In the same month, Kabila was installed as the President of the DRC.



During the First Congo War, Mobutu supported Sudan in its own war against South Sudan. Zaire was also used as a base to launch attacks against Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Further, Mobutu's support to the Angolan rebel government UNITA did not end with the 1994 Lusaka peace accords. There were two reasons for Mobutu's defeat. One was the lack of strength of the Zaire army - *the Forces Armees Zairoises'* (FAZ). The other was the presence of a formidable coalition in support of Kabila. Five of Zaire's immediate neighbours played a role in Mobutu's defeat. This can be seen from the fact that the Presidents of Angola, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia

were present at the inauguration ceremony of President Kabila on 29 May 1997. In a little less than a year, however, the Presidents of Uganda and Rwanda boycotted the celebrations organised by Kabila to mark his one year in power. Events will then build up to the Second Congo War of 1998. What changed in one year?

CONGO WAR II: THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE AND ETHNIC TENSIONS

The main reason why Rwanda and Uganda—and to a lesser extent, Burundi—intervened in the First Congo War was that rebel groups used the DRC as a base for launching attacks on these countries. In the case of Uganda, it was the ADF; for Rwanda, it was the FAR (the former government army and *interahamwe*); for Burundi, it was the CNDD-FDD (*Conseil National Pour la Defense de la Democratie-Forces pour la Defense de la Democratie*). To a lesser extent, these rebel groups benefited from the complicity shown by the Kabila government. The DRC was already a collapsed state by then, trying to recover from a civil war. With ethnic tensions going on, Kabila did not have total control over the entire territory. The rebel groups exploited the situation and used the Congolese territory as bases to launch attacks on their countries.

The identity of the Kinyarwanda speakers ('the Banyarwanda') in the Kivu region was an important factor for these countries' decision to intervene. While these comprised both the Tutsi and the Hutu people, the Hutus managed to establish links with the autochthonous or indigenous groups. The Tutsis, for some reason, were not able to do so. As a result, in early 1996, the Tutsis in North Kivu were targeted for ethnic cleansing. By mid-1996, a similar fate befell the Tutsis in South Kivu, specifically against the Banyamulenge clan. They decided to fight back, however; and they were capable of doing so as many of them were earlier members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). From mid-1996, the RPF was training and sending arms to the Banyamulenge people. The fight back of the Banyamulenge started in September 1996 with a huge backing from Rwanda. This was the catalyst

that brought Kabila into power. Thus two factors were involved: one was the genuine concern of the Tutsis that they were targeted for ethnic cleansing, and the second was that Rwanda used this as a pretext for intervening in the DRC.

Kabila's sponsors—principally, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi—expected him to take action against the rebel groups there. But this was not done. A number of local militia including the *mai-mai* and the Bembe—who felt threatened due to the increasing presence of Tutsis—gave a helping hand to the rebel groups in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Even the new army of the DRC, the Forces Armées Congolaises (FAC), supported the insurgents and, for instance, escorted them to the Rwandan borders. It also must be mentioned that the Tutsis did not make things easier, behaving as if they were colonisers in occupied land: They harassed and insulted the local people, seized materials from the localities, and usurped the powers of traditional chiefs, even killing some of them. The best positions in the army were given to the 'new rulers'. Thousands of innocent people were killed as part of anti-insurgency operations by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) and Banyarwanda elements of the FAC.¹² At the same time, Kabila faced challenges. Though initially well received, the presence of many foreigners in Kabila's army—who were given posts to assist Kabila as a 'repayment' for the role that they played in the overthrow of Mobutu—was soon seen as a liability because he was called a 'puppet' of Rwanda and, to a lesser extent, of Uganda. Meanwhile, the DRC government thwarted the UN Secretary General's attempts to investigate human rights abuses as the rebellion advanced. This was related to the crimes that were committed on the Rwandan Hutu refugees by the RPA. Essentially, Kabila was covering up for Rwanda. Neither could he admit that Rwanda had done this as it would be tantamount to owning up that Rwanda had assisted in the overthrow of Mobutu. Nor could he acknowledge that he was guilty of human rights abuses because he himself had not committed them. Further, Kabila felt threatened by the Rwandans that they would act against him if he allowed the investigations to take place.¹³

Rwanda and Uganda refused to attend the first anniversary of Kabila's coming to power. On 22 May 1998, one minister from the Kabila Cabinet warned Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni to deal with affairs of his own country instead of targeting Kabila. He also accused an unnamed Ugandan official of smuggling DRC's resources like gold, timber and diamonds. This was probably in reference to Museveni's brother - Salim Saleh. The last straw came on 26 July when Kabila, due to security threat perceptions, ordered all foreign troops out of the DRC.¹⁴ Rwanda and Uganda initiated an anti-Kabila revolt which began on 2 August 1998, when the *Armee nationale congolaise* (ANC) declared that he no longer recognised Kabila as the leader. In Kinshasa, a firefight started between the other FAC which consisted of mostly Katangan soldiers and the Congolese Tutsi soldiers. The Tutsis were routed. Paul Kagame launched a highly ambitious transcontinental attack from the eastern town of Goma to the western military base of Kitona—which was at a distance of some 1,600 km.¹⁵ Within days, they managed to capture many towns and the strategic Inga hydroelectric dam, from where they cut off electrical supply to Kinshasa and Katanga. Kabila immediately called for the population to arm themselves; the call was heeded, and innocent civilians were targeted. On 20 August, a new front against Kabila—named *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie* (RCD)—was formed. It consisted of former Alliance for Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADLF) members and people from the former Mobutu regime. On 23 and 26 August, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Chad also sent troops in support of Kabila. This saved Kabila.¹⁶ After eight months of intense fighting, international pressure led to a halt of the fighting. The Lusaka agreement was eventually signed, with the negotiations being driven by South Africa and facilitated by Zimbabwe.¹⁷

In the First Congo War, there was popular opinion in the international community against Mobutu. It was perceived, after all, that Mobutu had squandered resources at the cost of Zaire's economy. He had also begun to intervene in

other countries' affairs, giving tacit support, for example, to the Hutu groups to go on the offensive against the Tutsi population.¹⁸ The revolution did not come as a surprise to analysts. Kabila's situation, however, was different as he could have done more to ensure the ouster of Hutu genocaiders. At the same time, his perceived inaction did not warrant interference by Rwanda, Uganda and, to a lesser extent Burundi. Added to that is the intervening countries' selfish interests, principally the desire to exploit the country's natural resources and create spheres of influence. The developments led to a stalemate.

FOREIGN POWERS AND THE DRC

The inter-imperialist rivalry has played an important role in the conflict of the DRC. Mwesiga Baregu states that there is a three-cornered imperialist rivalry in the Great Lakes region.¹⁹ The four countries that comprise the Great Lakes region are the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda.²⁰ On one side is the US with its ambition to be the most powerful country in the world with its insatiable appetite for strategic minerals. On the other side are the Franco-Belgium interests who want to maintain their foothold. In the third corner lies the United Kingdom (UK) which seeks to change the domination of France with assistance from the US.²¹

For the last few decades, Zaire's principal supporter was France which had taken over the mantle from post-Vietnam US. The fact was that the US itself had taken over from Belgium. French companies contracted for a number of prestigious infrastructure projects which were major contributory factors to Zaire's national debt which reached US \$ 8 billion by 1996, in exchange for guaranteed military protection for Mobutu. A military technical assistance was signed and Mobutu was saved thanks to the French assistance not once but twice. The first time was in 1977 when the secessionists from Katanga – the *Front pour la Liberation Nationale du Congo* (FLNC) launched an attack into the Shaba province; help was provided by Morocco due to

pressure from France. The second time in the following year, another attack was launched by the FLNC, this time through Zambia. The French directly intervened in a spectacular manner this time. When rebellion broke out against Mobutu in 1996, by that time the US's interests, following the disasters in Somalia during the Operation Restoration Hope, had become the same as those of Rwanda, Uganda and the AFDL. Belgium had already disassociated from Mobutu. After the fall of Kisangani in March 1997, when the AFDL victory looked imminent, the US decided to support the anti-Mobutu campaign in Africa. Only France declared its stand that it was necessary for Mobutu to survive as he alone could ensure the absence of an ethnic strife that would follow otherwise. The French campaigned for a humanitarian intervention and also to put pressure on the AFDL into a power sharing formula with Mobutu. But the international sentiment was overwhelmingly against the French stand, and Mobutu had to go.²²

THE FIRST AND SECOND CONGO WARS: A BRIEF COMPARISON

In the first war, almost the entire African community and even the international community welcomed the fall of Mobutu. The only forces that had supported Mobutu were the Hutu ex-FAR / *intetrahamwe*, the UNITA forces of Jonas Savimbi, and some Serbian mercenaries. France also provided modest support. The Mobutu regime tried but failed to convince the world that what was happening was a foreign invasion. Neither the UN nor the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) condemned the invasion as they saw it rather as a revolution against the Mobutu regime. His army, while retreating on all fronts, also looted, raped and killed Congolese civilians. This was one reason why the Congolese soon welcomed the AFDL.²³ The dynamics of the Second Congo War were far different. It was far more divisive, to begin with. While Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi led the front against Kabila, he was in turn supported by Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia. This was on the basis of the DRC being a member of the Southern Africa

Development Community (SADC). Subsequently, Sudan, Chad and Libya entered the fray in support of Kabila, either directly or indirectly. Many Francophone West African countries also expressed support for Kabila.

Kabila made some crucial blunders, too—getting involved, for one, in the civil war that happened in Congo-Brazzaville between Sassou-Nguesso from the North and Lissouba from the South. Lissouba declared that Sassou-Nguesso's forces consisted of ex-FAR elements and also people from Mobutu's ex forces. Immediately after hearing this, Kabila decided to send soldiers in support of Lissouba. This created an unwanted complication because Saasou-Nguesso's forces had Angola's involvement because of UNITA's mercenaries. Thus Angola, which provided major backing to Kabila, soon turned against him.²⁴ In spite of this development, Angola backed Kabila in the war and this intervention would prove crucial for Kabila being saved. The rebels—with Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi backing them—had made precious gains and would have succeeded in overthrowing Kabila if Angola had backed them. Colette Braeckmann, a Belgian journalist, reported that Angola had received information that Rwanda and Uganda had been in contact with UNITA and that pushed them into supporting Kabila.²⁵ Angola intervened mainly because of fears that the UNITA would grow stronger if Kabila was overthrown. UNITA under Jonas Savimbi, when they were supported by Mobutu, smuggled diamonds in the DRC and financed itself. But when Kabila took over, they were not able to do the same. Thus they thought that if Kabila was overthrown, they could resume the diamond smuggling activities. This is how Angola, in spite of falling out with Kabila, ended up backing him.²⁶

The RCD was formed but was unable to gain significant support from among the Congolese as they were seen as foreign outfits (Rwandan and Ugandan). The RCD split into RCD Goma and RCD ML. Uganda supported the latter, which was led by Ernest Wamba. The former was led by Emile Ilunga and backed by Rwanda. Thus while in the First Congo War, there was a united front in ADLF

which was carried by Kabila, in the Second Congo War, countries were split into two divisions. Within these divisions were sub-divisions. A new anti-Kabila movement—known as the MLC (*Mouvement pour la Liberation du Congo*) and backed by Uganda—soon emerged. It was the only one movement that was not backed by Tutsis.²⁷

AFTER THE LUSAKA PEACE TALKS

Although in 2003 the war was declared officially over after five years, the east of the country remained unstable. In 2006 the DRC held its first democratic elections, and Joseph Kabila was voted president. Following this, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) led by Laurent Nkunda which represented the interests of the Tutsis became more active in pursuing the *Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda* (FDLR) in eastern Congo. In spite of a peace agreement being signed between 22 armed groups, fighting between the Congolese army, FDLR, CNDP and other armed militias continued. Rwandan officials arrested Laurent Nkunda in January 2009; he remains under house arrest. The Rwandan and the Congo governments began cooperating on neutralising the FDLR forces that carried out the Rwandan genocide and had remained in eastern Congo. Although these attempts have relatively weakened the FDLR, they still continue to create problems and instability in eastern Congo. In the northeast, a Ugandan military group called the Lord's Resistance has emerged as the main destabiliser.²⁸

The Lusaka talks started when it became clear that both parties would not be able to win – Rwandan and Ugandan forces had to admit that they could not overthrow Kabila, and Kabila had to admit that he could not clear the DRC of Rwandan and Ugandan forces. The three main parties were the DRC government, the RCD-Goma, and the MLC. The lack of agreement on power-sharing issues simply meant the failure of the ICD and the continuation of war. For example, when the negotiations started Joseph Kabila was ready to appoint rebel leaders at high positions within the interim institutions; but he also aimed to be confirmed as the Head of State and he was

not willing to give it up while the opposition was keen on unseating him. So the MLC proposed a revolving Presidency of three years. Also, all sides in principle agreed that the Congolese army should be restructured and include members from all three parties. However, in order to ensure that they continued to dominate, the ruling delegation was ready to grant the opposition only low-level delegation membership. On the contrary, the rebel movements demanded that the three armies be completely merged on the basis of a quota system and claimed their share of the command structure. Fundamentally, in spite of the fact that the talks were poorly prepared and a lot of time was spent on solving representative issues, much of the blame as to why the talks went wrong should lay on the parties themselves. The main party to be blamed would be the Rwandan camp. In fact the RCD Goma was probably prevented from agreeing to a deal by the Rwandan government itself which had given up the idea of controlling Kinshasha but not the Kivus, and was therefore not ready to accept the DRC's sovereignty throughout all Congolese territory. They had resource exploitation and creation of a zone of influence in eastern Congo in mind. This was incompatible with the idea of a united DRC, which an all-inclusive agreement would have heralded. Also one more factor was that greedy warlords managed to come into the negotiating table and as a result, finding solutions and coming to agreements became more complex.²⁹

THE ROLE OF CONGO'S NATURAL WEALTH

The conflicts in Congo have not been for political reasons alone; economic factors have played a substantial role. After the 1998 conquest of the eastern DRC, the armies of Rwanda and Uganda, with the assistance of the Congolese soldiers in the RCD spent a year looting valuable resources found in the DRC. There are no diamond resources in Rwanda and Uganda. Yet both these countries have exported diamonds. From 1997 to 1998, Uganda's diamond exports increased 12 times. While the combined exports of Rwanda and Uganda more than doubled from 1998 to 2000, the DRC exports decreased by more than 50

percent. Congolese exports came down by US\$ 458 million while Rwandan and Ugandan exports had grown merely by US\$ 1.6 million. Through the systematic exploitation of coltan, Uganda earned huge amounts of some US\$ 250 million in only 18 months between 1999 and 2000, when world market prices peaked. During these years, the re-export of coltan alone provided the finances that Rwanda required for the war.³⁰

The First UN report on the exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth in the DRC, which was released in April 2001,³¹ estimated that between 1998 and 2001, the rate of deforestation increased at an alarming rate due to Rwandan and Ugandan companies' exploitation of timber. The second report, released in October 2001,³² then reiterated that the DRC's resources were continuing to be exploited. Official figures from the Bank of Uganda indicated that Ugandan gold exports increased from US\$ 12.4 million in 1994-95 to US\$ 110 million in 1996. This helped Uganda improve its balance of trade by around US\$ 600 million, even though gold represented only 0.2 percent of its exports in the 1996-97 period. Similarly, Rwanda's gold production—which remained at a quite minimal rate averaging eight kg a year—saw a sudden surge in 1997.

Following the 1998 conquest of the eastern DRC, the Rwandan and the Ugandan armies, with the assistance of the Congolese soldiers in RCD, spent a year looting valuable goods and money in the DRC. Coltan, timber and coffee were more important than diamonds. The Rwandan government earned substantial amounts of money from selling arms to RCD-Goma. The RCD-Goma collected eight percent of total mineral exports from its own shops apart from a US\$ 15,000 annual license fee. Right from the beginning, the RCD-ML invested in gold trade. It even signed a mining contract with the offshore bank of Grenada for the organisation of an African Union reserve system for the financial administration and development of the DRC.³³

Zimbabwe, too, had succeeded in using diamonds as a means to finance its wars. While Uganda has existing networks in the region and thus even if the war had ended, it would have been able to exploit the natural resources in the DRC.

But for Rwanda and Zimbabwe, it was imperative that the conflict does not end in order for them to continue the exploitation.³⁴ Moreover, Uganda and Rwanda exported huge amounts of cassiterite, gold, coltan and tin especially in the mid-2000s. The Rwandan state-owned company, Redemi, was the major exporter of tin and cassiterite. The government of Rwanda, instead of acting as a neutral player and transitioning on a smooth basis, acted in a partisan manner by strengthening the military, economic and political clout of the groups that it supported.³⁵

CONCLUSION

The deal between the DRC and Rwanda has collapsed and a new rebel group M23, comprising mainly Nkunda loyalists, has become increasingly active in eastern DR Congo since 2012.³⁶ M23 was named after the region's peace agreement, signed on 23 March in 2009. The agreement facilitated the mostly Tutsi dominated CNDP rebel group into the Congolese army.³⁷ The DRC has repeatedly accused Rwanda of backing the M23. The group was reportedly led by Bosco "Terminator" Ntaganda during the initial stages. He is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of having committed war crimes. The UN investigation panel has said that Rwanda provided the M23 with heavy weapons and stepped up recruitment for the group. According to the UN, the M23 receives direct military orders from Rwanda's Chief of Defence Staff who, in turn, takes their instructions from the minister of Defence. Further, the UN has also accused Uganda of backing the rebels. Both Rwanda and Uganda have denied these allegations.

The UN Peacekeeping mission has been in Congo since 1999. It has deployed around 20,000 personnel in the country and is one of the biggest peacekeeping operations in the world. But a 2009 report by UN experts has mentioned that the UN special forces has not done anything substantial to reduce or stop the violence since the rebels are continuing to kill and loot the country's natural resources. The Congolese government wants the UN forces to leave the DRC and claims that it is capable of maintaining law and order.³⁸

Following the rise of M23, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the UN was led by the US to a fresh peace process which was regional. Coordination was done with the International Conference of the Great Lakes Regions (ICGLR)—a group of central African governments. The result of these talks was the Nairobi Declaration of December 2013, which laid out a process of disarming, demobilising the M23 group and holding its fighters accountable. These steps forward, however, have failed to bring about permanent peace in the region.

It is clear that a complex combination of reasons had led to a prolonged conflict in the DRC. Initially, it was the threat perception of the local populations against the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda clan that led to an attack by the Tutsis. At the same time, if Mobutu had pursued the democratic reforms that he had promised, there is every possibility that things could have stabilised and the ethnic tensions would have eased out. But he did not do so, as the reforms—though good from the country's perspective—would have been detrimental to his own interests. The rich mineral resources and easy access to them made Rwanda, Uganda and others continue their interventions.

It is a fact that the intervening countries did not respect the sovereignty of the DRC. If they had done that, much of the conflict could have been averted. It is also true that when Laurent Kabila took over, he could have addressed Rwanda's concerns of the Hutu perpetrators of genocide. After all, he came to power because of the backing of countries like Rwanda and Uganda (also Angola, Burundi, and others). Unfortunately, he failed to address the concerns of these countries. But clearly that did not warrant another round of interventions by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, who did so also to exploit the mineral resources in the DRC.

Joseph Kabila, through his recent actions, has proved that he is similarly driven by selfish interests and is keen on holding on to power. He cannot run for another term, according to the

Constitution. There are speculations, though, that he in fact has his eyes on a third term and has been deliberately delaying the elections for this.³⁹ This could result in the unfortunate consequence of a repeat of the past: the emergence of disgruntled groups and rebel movements, and interventions from foreign countries. If Kabila can ensure a proper democratic transition, it might help pave the way for a more genuine peace in the DRC.⁴⁰

But Africa has already witnessed enough precedents of leaders manipulating the Constitution to capture a third term. It took place, for example, in Burkina Faso in 2014. The interesting development is that this has also led to popular opposition and uprisings against such attempts by despotic leaders. For instance, in Burkina Faso, it led to the ouster of President Blaise Campaore in October 2014. This was followed by the uprising against Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza in May 2015;⁴¹ he managed to survive the scare. President Museveni of Uganda too managed to steer his country to amending the Constitution and ensure that he would contest for a third term, which he did.⁴²

Many of the countries in Africa are suffering from poverty not due to lack of natural resources. An effective administration by the state through an able leader could go a long way in resolving the country's difficult situation. To sum up the conflict in the DRC, between Mobutu and the two Kabilas, not one of them put the country's interests above their own. Even if one of the three had done it, the country and the region would have seen not only peace but also economic development. The same holds true for the intervening countries like Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Zimbabwe, and Angola. There is reason to suppose that once Joseph Kabila announces his intentions to contest elections for a third term, the world may see another uprising in the DRC. Time will tell if this then will again lead to a new set of interventions from the same foreign actors who will use the opportunity to push their own interests. 

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