

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Population: 52.0 million

Life expectancy: 49 years

National capital: Kinshasa

Independence from Belgium: 30 June 1960



Abstract

The resource-rich Congo was colonised and privately exploited by the Belgian king Leopold II. In 1908 country was transferred to the Belgian state. With very little preparatory work, the country became independent with Patrice Lumumba as its first prime minister. The secession of Southern Katanga was prevented with the help of the United Nations. In 1965 Mobutu Sese Seko, who was supported by the Western Countries, took power from the civilian government. His “kleptocratic” rule in the newly named Zaire ruined the economy and led to political disintegration. In 1997 a rebellion started from the eastern part of the country, when the citizenship question of the so-called Banyamulenge population (originally from Rwanda) constituted a difficult political problem, exacerbated by the flow of Rwandan Hutu refugees to the area after the 1994 genocide. With strong support from Uganda and Rwanda, the rebellion brought Laurent Desiré Kabila to power in the renamed Democratic Republic of Congo. In August 1998, a new rebellion started. It was again motivated by Uganda’s and Rwanda’s security concerns and the discontent of the Banyamulenge towards the new regime. Eight African countries and about 20 private armies have been involved in the fighting since August 1998. The eastern areas of the Congo are controlled by the rebels, which is disintegrating as a political group. The government with its allies control the western and southern parts of the country. From the beginning of the conflict, SADC, OAU, the non-aligned movement, the UN as well as several African and Western initiatives called for peace and offered mediation. These efforts led to the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement on 10 July 1999 by the six countries involved in the conflict and a few months later by the rebel movements. However, the implementation of the agreement has encountered difficulties and there have been frequent reports of ceasefire violations.

“Africa’s First World War” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Agents

The war in the Congo is linking together African civil wars that had very little to do with each other before. Thus the war is sometimes referred to as “Africa’s First World War”. The parties of the civil wars in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Angola are also parties in the war in the DRC. From Uganda the most notable one is the ADF, fighting against the Ugandan government. It is backed by Sudan and includes soldiers from the former Zairian and former Rwandan armies. The former Rwandan army and Interahamwe, that was responsible for the Rwandan genocide in 1994, came to eastern Congo, Kivu, together with the Rwandan refugees and have been attacking the current Rwandan RPF government since then. One apparent explanation of the Ugandan and Rwandan involvement is their interest to create a kind of buffer zone to safeguard their borders. While the progress in the Burundian peace process represents perhaps the single sign of hope in the region, also the security of Burundi is threatened by the insurgent activities across its border to the DRC. (International Crisis Group 1998b, Lemarchand 1997.)

On the domestic dimension of the conflict, there is president Laurent Desiré Kabila’s government of Congo and its internal opposition. This opposition is very heterogeneous as the splits between its components illustrate. In the Kivu region, there are the disappointed Banyamulenge, whose expectations concerning citizenship rights have not been fulfilled in spite of their significance for the rebellion in 1996-97. There are the ex-Mobutists who have been excluded from government power by Kabila. And finally there are many critiques of Kabila’s nepotistic rule, who had been looking forward to the long-awaited democratization. Initially this movement was more or less united under the RCD.

¹ This chapter is based on Liisa Laakso’s study in Kennes *et al* 1999.

During the campaign, the RCD has suffered from serious internal rifts and has consequently split into two competing factions. Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, the original political leader of the RCD was thrown out of the movement in Spring 1999. Emile Ilunga replaced him. His faction, known as RCD-Goma continued under Rwandan protection. Wamba-dia-Wamba quickly established RCD-ML (also known as RCD-Kigali) under Uganda's protection. The other main rebel group, the Uganda-backed MLC, led by Jean-Pierre Bemba is gradually becoming more of an equal partner with the RCD. (International Crisis Group 1999, Collins 1998, International Crisis Group 1998b, Reyntjens & Marysse 1996)

Parties in the conflict are summarized in Table 1:

Parties in the conflict in the DRC						
Acronym	Explanation	Established	Represents	Affiliation	Support	Conflict with
FAC	Congolese Armed Forces	1997	Government Comités de pouvoir populaire (Former Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL))	Mayi-Mayi	Zimbabwe Namibia Angola, Sudan, Chad	RCD, MLC, Rwanda, Uganda
FAA	Angolan armed forces	1975	Angolan government. MPLA (Luanda; Kimbundu, Mesticos)	FAC		UNITA
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola	1966	Angola: Ovimbundu Central Highlands	RCD MLC RPA	no foreign support formerly USA, Zaire	FAA, MPLA
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces	1996	Tabliq moslem extremists rebels from the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda ex-FAR, EX-FAZ (<i>Forces Armées Zaïreanes</i> , former Zairian army)	ex-Far ex-FAZ	Sudan	Uganda
ex-FAR	Former Rwandan armed forces	Took refuge in 1994	Hutu extremists	FAC	DRC, Sudan	RPF
	Inter-ahamwe	1992	Hutu extremists	FAC		Rwanda

RCD-ML	Congolese Assembly for Democracy/ Mouvement de Liberation faction	1999	Ex-mobutist, Banyamulenge, South Kivu		Uganda	FAC, CPP/ ex-ADFL
RCD-Goma	Congolese Assembly for Democracy/ Goma faction	1999	Ex-mobutist, Banyamulenge, South Kivu	RPA	Rwanda	FAC, CPP/ ex-ADFL
MLC	Congolese Liberation Movement	1998	Equator, Province orientale		Uganda	FAC, CPP/ex-ADFL
Mayi-Mayi	Traditional warriors	1960s	North Kivu: Banande, Batembo, Banyanga and Hunde, also in South Kivu			Rwanda, RCD
(NRA)	Ugandan National Army (National Resistance Army)	1981	Government of Uganda; President Museveni	ADF SPLA	Israel Rwanda, Burundi USA	ADF
APR	Armée Patriotique Rwandaise	1988 (RPF)	Government of Rwanda, RPF Former Rwandan Tutsi refugees in Uganda. Now also Tutsi form Rwanda and diaspora		Uganda, Burundi USA	ex-FAR Interahamwe, DRC, FAC

The sheer size and location of the Congo inevitably gives the conflict a continental character. Thus the conflict also reflects tensions between Southern African, East African and North African power blocks. The involvement of Zimbabwe in the conflict on the side of Kabila's government reflects president Mugabe's disregard for South Africa's focus on conciliation. The fact that from the SADC countries Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia were so eager to protect the government of the Congo (the newest member state of SADC) also reflects the warm relations between the leaders of these countries and the DRC. (Malan 1998.)

Although Kabila came to power with the support of Uganda and Rwanda, his relations with these countries soon started to cool down. President Museveni of Uganda ("Bismarck of Africa") has ambitious plans about the integration of central and eastern African states (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Tanzania), not least for common defence. For this "federation", control over the eastern parts of the Congo would be

essential. And indeed it can be argued that economically and culturally Kivu is very much part of East Africa, too. (Museveni 1998.)

Uganda and Rwanda can be seen as important actors behind the rebel groups. However, since the spring 1999, tensions and disagreements between the two allies were exacerbated by local disputes over the control of natural resources and surfaced after the signing of the Lusaka ceasefire agreement in July 1999. The fact that Uganda and Rwanda are backing different rebel groups slowed the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. The disagreement degenerated into open urban warfare between the two armies on 14 August in Kisangani. After the incident the two countries signed a ceasefire and cooperation agreement to normalize their relationship. Despite these efforts there have been numerous reports of clashes between Ugandan and Rwandan troops in eastern Congo. These disagreements pose a serious threat to the security of the region and could have vast implications for the geopolitical order of the area. (Pendergast & Smock 1999.)

Finally the northern dimension of this “continental war” is in the support that has been given by Sudan and Chad to the government of Kabila. Chadian troops have been fighting alongside Kabila’s troops in the DRC. Sudan, in turn, has financed the ex-FAR/Interahamwe militia fighting against the Rwandan and Ugandan troops and the rebels. It is apparent that the military power behind Sudan and Chad is Libya, which has also played a role in the mediation of the conflict (after getting rid of its pariah status in international politics). Libya hosted the Sirte meeting in April 1999. It proved to be major step forward in the peace process and eventually helped to establish the Lusaka ceasefire agreement. After the Sirte meeting Chad has withdrawn its troops from the DRC.

A further factor, which is both a consequence and part of the conflict, is the huge number of displaced people in the region. Especially Rwandan refugees entering the DRC from the neighbouring countries are taking part in the conflict.

As a positive and countervailing element, the nascent civil society movement is one of the few movements capable of contributing to the realisation of a minimal social order. To a certain extent the current war has also united the Congolese people behind their legal government against the Ugandan and Rwandan invasion.

Motivation

In many countries of the region, political and economic problems have led to a serious legitimacy crisis of the state institution. The pressure towards economic and political liberalization has alleviated this crisis only inadequately and sometimes even exacerbated it. Furthermore the post-colonial balance of power in the region, paradoxically checked by the Cold War superpower rivalry, broke down in the 1990s. Anarchic warlord politics has been a logical response to the emerging power vacuum and breakdown of state capacity.

There is no doubt that in addition to strategic reasons, Rwanda is also looking for economic opportunities for its people. Also Zimbabwe's involvement can be explained by its economic interests, although these probably play a role more on the level of the political and military elite than in the national economy.

Violent developments in the neighbouring countries: genocide in Rwanda and the exclusionary politics following it, similar tendencies in Burundi, the intensifying war between UNITA and the Angolan MPLA government, and the continuing guerrilla activities in Uganda, all spilled over to the DRC, simply because the government of Kabila did not have the capacity inside its borders to halt the insurgencies directed against its neighbouring governments in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

Kabila's new government did not have the economic means and the necessary skills to restructure the state and the national economy, which was and still is necessary after the abuse of power by Mobutu. This incapacity involved even the army. The new regime could not proceed towards democratic elections together with its opposition. Instead a

political culture of distrust, intolerance and personalised power prevailed. The atmosphere also affected potential investors, among whom only those who were ready to take risks, to make dubious deals with different armed forces and even to get involved in criminal activities, have had enough courage to start or continue their business in the country. (Kennes, 1997.)

The continuing “nationality” problem of the so-called Banyamulenge population is one of the most important root causes of the conflict. Banyamulenge are mainly Tutsi of Rwandan origin who migrated to the eastern parts of Congo decades ago. Related to the question of their right to claim citizenship are the land rights, without which this largely peasant population feels its position is very insecure. According to many analysts the peace plan fails to address the issues for which the Banyamulenge forces are fighting. This could mean a new war in the not-too-distant future. (Pendergast & Smock, 1999.)

Instruments

Mobilization of the fighters on different sides of the conflict has been fuelled by the struggle for land and mining resources, and by the extremely serious problem of the unemployed youth without any perspective for social advancement except through the power of the gun. Local militias who succeeded in mobilizing thousands of youth lead the reaction against the attacks by Rwanda and Uganda. The official armies also have been recruiting child soldiers. The control by the states and governments over their forces on the ground and over the various militias they are supporting against their enemies is constantly diminishing. In addition, parallel military actors like the former Rwandan army (from the pre-RPF regime) and the UNITA movement are weighing heavily on the political and military situation.

The war is also an opportunity for personal enrichment by politicians and several high-ranking army officers, in collaboration with trading and mining companies. Since Mobutu’s rule there have been private security groups safeguarding the functioning of the mining companies. In addition to them independent militias are exploiting the

mineral resources in the country. Behind many of the more structured mining projects, and on all sides of the war, bigger companies like Anglo American are more or less visibly present. Their action is probably part of a long-term strategy for a continent-wide control of mineral resources, considered as strategic reserves.

South Africa, the Sudan and the Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine) have been accused of supplying arms to the rebels. Among the national armies especially those of Zimbabwe and Angola can be regarded as very well equipped.

Even though the Lusaka ceasefire agreement unquestionably can be seen as a major step forward on the road to peace, many problems have remained unsolved and new problems have surfaced. Many analysts consider the agreement as vague and unrealistic. In theory the agreement addresses two of the three main problems concerning peace in the region: the equitable distribution of power throughout the Congo and integrated, coordinated and multifaceted counterinsurgency campaigns against the nonstate actors that continue to feed off the DRC vacuum and destabilize neighbouring countries. However, it fails to address a strategy for the complex issues in Eastern Kivu, including the security issue of Congolese Tutsi and demobilization of militia groups residing in the area. (Prendergast and Smock 1999.)

As anticipated the implementation of the ceasefire agreement has proven to be an arduous task. The implementation has continuously suffered from delays and lack of commitment from different actors. The work of the Joint Military Commission has been long delayed by internal disagreements over mandates and procedural issues, and by financial and logistical problems. Many questions, including decisions over the possible UN peacekeeping mission, remain unanswered. (International Crisis Group 1999.)

The signing of the Lusaka peace agreement signals in many ways the war-weariness of the different actors. The government of Zimbabwe is probably reluctant to keep up its presence in the Congo, especially because the economic gains are becoming much smaller. Back home popular opinion is against involvement in the war, and the Lusaka

agreement could be seen as a face-saving exit from the war for Zimbabwe. The stakes for the Namibian government are not very high, due to its relatively limited engagement. Chad has apparently withdrawn its troops from the Congo after the signing of Sirte agreement in April 1999. Angola's interest is to contain UNITA's movement throughout the region, particularly its ability to regroup. Even though Angola has withdrawn most of its troops from the DRC to resume war with UNITA, it still holds an interest in the DRC situation. A direct threat to Kabila's government in strategically important areas could once again entail Angolan intervention.

The mediation process, which led to the signing of the Lusaka ceasefire agreement, can be very much seen as an African-led effort. However, in order to succeed, the peace process will need serious financial and diplomatic support from the international community. So far, little seems to have been done. The UN has been able to send a logistical team to the Congo to prepare a way for a possible peacekeeping mission. But the donations made by different international actors, including the EU and the USA, to support the work of the JMC have mainly symbolic significance. More coherent and focused efforts are needed from the international community to prevent the peace process from falling through.

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Chronology

- **October 1996 - May 1997:** FPR's "clean-up" operation in Kivu against the former Rwandan army in the refugee camps. Kabila becomes the leader, supported from Rwanda, Uganda and Angola. Mobutu was forced into exile. Kabila declares himself President on May 17, 1997 and renames the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- **July 1998:** Remaining Rwandan troops are sent home. Rwandan and Ugandan units make incursions into Kivu area to fight the Hutu militias and Interahamwe. Two prominent Tutsi politicians resign from the government?.
- **August 1998:** Rebel uprising begins with the capture of Goma (Aug 2). Congolese troops mutiny. Curfew in Kinshasa. Hundreds of Tutsi arrested in Kinshasa. Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia send troops to support Kabila.
- **September 1998:** Sudan promises support for Kabila.
- **October 1998:** Uganda admits it has troops in eastern Congo.
- **November 1998:** Rwanda admits its soldiers are helping rebel forces in the Congo fighting. A new rebel group, led by Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo. Chad is said to support Kabila. The France-Africa summit in Paris (Nov 27-28): Of the conflicting parties, Kabila and his allies from Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia and Chad together with Rwanda and Uganda were present. In addition there were representatives from OAU, Mozambique and Zambia. The rebels were not invited. Kabila ready to create a neutral zone controlled by "probably an African force financed by the UN".
- **January 1999:** Splits within the leadership of the rebel RCD. The rebel RCD restructures its movement. Wamba-dia-Wamba continues as head of the movement but as member of the collective presidency. Clashes between Rwandan and Banyamulenge troops. Banyamulenge rebel forces have killed at least 500 civilians in Makobla village in South Kivu.
- **February 1999:** Third rebel faction has been launched by Deogratias Bugera. Reports of escalating tension between the rebel MLC and RCD. A notable former Mobutu general Baramoto has joined the Bemba-led rebel faction. Wamba-dia-Wamba is reported to be opposed to former Mobutu military officers joining the rebel coalition. Kabila dissolves his cabinet. A decree linked this to the "need to reaffirm the national cohesion of the entire people around the government". Mozambique's president Chissano offers to help Zambia's president Chiluba in the mediation of the crisis. He also stressed the need to examine Angola's claims that Zambia is supplying arms to UNITA.
- **March 1999:** Kabila announced a new government, which includes the father of rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba.
- **April 1999:** President Kabila has agreed to the "principle of having an international mediator for administering internal dialogue". The sub-committee responsible for finalising the conditions of the cease-fire met for the first time in Lusaka, with the full participation of a delegation from the Congolese

government and representatives of the military rebellion. Kabila announces the dissolution of the ADFL . It is replaced by Comites du pouvoir populaire (CPP). Presidents Kabila and Museveni, together with Presidents Afeworki of Eritrea and Derby of Chad, hold talks in Sirte, Libya and sign a peace agreement.

- **May 1999:** The RCD split into two factions. RCD-Goma is led by Emile Ilunga and backed by Rwanda. RCD-Kisangani (later renamed RCD-Mouvement de liberation or RCD-ML) is led by Wambadia-Wamba and backed by Uganda. Reports claim that Chad begins withdrawing its troops from the DRC.
- **July-August 1999:** After three weeks of continuous talks, the DRC ceasefire agreement is signed at Lusaka on July 10th by six countries. MLC signs the accord on Aug 1st. The RCD's 50 founding members sign the treaty on Aug 31st. In general the treaty is seen as a significant but ambitious road map towards peace in the DRC. However, there have been continuous claims of ceasefire violations by both sides after the signing.
- **September 1999:** There are more reports of increasing tension between Rwanda and Uganda over the DRC with alleged troop clashes in mid-August in Kisangani. Both countries are backing different rebel factions and disagree on battle strategies. Other reasons include Museveni's alleged sympathies towards Zimbabwe.
- **November 1999:** The Joint Military Commission (JMC), established under the Lusaka peace deal, on Sunday divides the country into four operational zones. Each zone will be chaired by a military officer from a neutral African nation. The peace process is suffering from delays and is viewed with growing suspicion among different parties. One of the main problems is the lack of human and monetary resources needed to implement the accords.