

Congo War: Is the End in Sight?

By Tom Turner

Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed an agreement on July 30, promising to put an end to the war that has raged in Congo since 1998. However, it is too soon to rejoice. The signatories are deeply suspicious of one another, and implementation of the agreement could break down.

Failure could result from the complexity of the war, which involves interlocking conflicts on the local, national, regional, and global levels. At the local level, a series of conflicts pits self-styled "native" Congolese against people they consider to be foreigners. Rwanda intervened in Congo/Zaire in 1996, allegedly in order to protect Congolese Tutsi speakers of the Rwandan language from the threat of massacre.

Ethnic Groups Organized

These people, known as Banyamulenge in South Kivu province and Banyarwanda in North Kivu, had been deprived of Congolese nationality in the early 1990s, and were involved in armed clashes with their neighbors. Rwanda put together a coalition of four groups opposing the Mobutu regime in Kinshasa, including one group representing Banyamulenge and another representing Banyarwanda of North Kivu. Veteran opposition leader Laurent Kabila, originally from Katanga province, was named spokesman for the coalition.

Shortly after Kabila ousted President Mobutu Sese Seko, he had a falling out with his backers, the governments of Rwanda and Uganda and the Congolese Tutsi. His effort to expel the Rwandan military from Congo, to rally the Congolese public against Tutsi domination, and to consolidate his hold on power led to the second Congo war, beginning in 1998.

Whether the initial desire to protect the Banyamulenge was genuine, or whether the Banyamulenge question only provided moral cover to a Rwandan effort to install a client regime in Kinshasa, relations between the Banyamulenge and their supposed protectors have deteriorated. Early in 2002, Banyamulenge troops led by Patrick Masunzu mutinied against the Rwanda-backed Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD). Although the mutineers were outnumbered and outgunned, they were fighting on familiar terrain and the RCD and Rwandan troops found it difficult to defeat them.

In North Kivu, conflict initially pitted "locals" of the Hunde, Nyanga, and other ethnic groups against Banyarwanda. After 1990, ethnic polarization spilled over from Rwanda, dividing the Banyarwanda into their Hutu and Tutsi components. In the aftermath of the genocide of 1994, hundreds of thousands of new Rwandan Tutsi refugees entered North Kivu, threatening creation of a "Hutuland" on Congolese soil. The campaign of the Rwandan army and its RCD allies against Hutu génocidaires has been complicated by the presence of Mayi-Mayi guerrillas drawn from local populations.

National and Regional Conflicts

On the national level, a civil war pitted the Congolese Democracy Rally (RCD) against the Kabila regime. The RCD, supposedly a coalition opposed to the dictatorship being consolidated by Kabila, brought together democrats, Tutsi activists, and supporters of former dictator Mobutu. Its credibility was further undermined by its dependence on outsiders, demonstrated by the successive replacement of Prof. Wamba dia Wamba by Emile Ilunga, then of Ilunga by Dr. Adolphe Onusumba. A series of splits led to the emergence of rival factions,

including the Bunia-based RCD-ML (Mouvement de Libération).

On the regional level, two alliances faced off. Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia backed the Kabila government, with Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda as opponents. Following the failure of the Rwandan-led alliance to seize Kinshasa, the war settled into a stalemate. Rwanda and Uganda clashed and the RCD fragmented. Rwanda continued to occupy a big slice of eastern Congo, in cooperation with its ally the RCD-Goma. Uganda provided assistance to the Congo Liberation Movement (MLC), RCD-ML, and other rebel groups in a wide swath of northern Congo.

Multiple Motives

Each of the foreign participants has multiple motives. Rwanda and Uganda intervened to combat rebel groups fighting from Congolese territory but their officers apparently became involved in exploiting mineral wealth. Kabila gave Zimbabwe and Namibia control of diamond deposits. Angola initially regarded the Congo war as an extension of its own civil war against Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) but later established a controlling interest in Congo's oil industry.

Recently, it has been alleged that Zimbabwe and Rwanda have been delaying a peace settlement because of their stake in Congo's resources. A report by *The Observer*, for example, noted that "occupying troops are spinning out the violence to grab Congo's riches," while a new book, *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, edited by Africa specialist John Clark also points to the way resource con-

licts are obstructing the peace process.

Intercontinental Dimension

The Congo war also has an intercontinental dimension. In this post-cold war era, the United States has been motivated by its fight against Islamic extremism. Uganda and Rwanda were Clinton administration allies, along with Eritrea and Ethiopia, in an effort to combat the extremist regime in Sudan. Mobutu, a former cold war ally, was anathema because of his collaboration with the Sudanese.

France interpreted events in Central Africa in terms of threats to the French-speaking world from "Anglo-Saxons." It backed Mobutu and Rwanda's Habyarimana, up to the eve of 1994's genocide. Its "humanitarian" intervention, known as Operation Turquoise, allowed many Hutu—including the organizers of the genocide—to escape from the predominantly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front and take refuge in Congo/Zaire.

When the second war began, the U.S. provided a degree of support to the "Anglophones," i.e. Uganda and the Rwanda RPF regime, led by English-speaking Tutsi who had been refugees in Uganda. France backed first Laurent Kabila and then Joseph Kabila. The view of Central Africa as a front in a global culture war was confirmed, in French eyes, by the fact that Britain emerged as the strongest backer of the RPF regime.

George W. Bush, coming into office, signaled that he wanted to reject the entire Clinton foreign policy. Africa had been a high priority for Clinton

so it would be a low priority for him. Clinton, feeling guilty for inaction in 1994, had been committed to the new government in Rwanda. Bush felt no such guilt. But in the past few months, the U.S. appears to have become more engaged.

As a result, a tentative agreement has been reached between Congo and Rwanda. It seems likely that concerted international pressure, exerted by France on the Congolese government and by the U.S., Britain, and South Africa on Rwanda, has led to this result.

The inter-Congolese dialogue and the partial agreement reached at Sun City failed to bring peace, at least in part because the dialogue brought together Congolese parties to the conflict but excluded their foreign backers. Rwanda apparently declined to allow the RCD-Goma to sign on to a power-sharing plan. Now we have an agreement between two of the governmental parties that does not directly involve nongovernmental groups such as the MLC and the various RCD factions.

A crucial question is whether international pressure will be sustained, leading to power-sharing, disarmament of Hutu fighters in Congo, and Rwandan troop withdrawal.

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