

The Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Implications for U.S. National Security

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Chairwoman Sanchez, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the sub-committee, let me first express my appreciation for the opportunity to testify before your sub-committee. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has witnessed political turmoil, insecurity, and humanitarian crises for several decades. One of the most affected regions is eastern Congo. The first rebellion to oust the late President Mobutu Sese Seko began in the city of Goma in eastern Congo in the mid-1990s. The second rebellion in the late 1990s also began in eastern Congo. At the root of the crises in eastern Congo is the presence of over a dozen militia and extremist groups, both foreign and Congolese, and the failure of the central government to establish a strong governance structure and provide security to its people. Successive governments in DRC invested very little in infrastructure and left millions of Congolese without basic services. Millions of people are estimated to have died over the decades because of war related causes and due to neglect and preventable diseases.

In 1996, as a member of Congressional delegation, I met the late Laurent Kabila, former president of DRC, in newly liberated town of Goma in eastern Congo. The town did not have a single paved road or electricity, and the residents of Goma were dependent on hand-outs for survival. Yet, Kabila and his advisors were staying in a mansion with gold-plated sofas and a Jacuzzi. I asked Kabila if he was concerned at all that he was in a mansion while his people outside suffered? His response: I am their leader and conditions will change when I become president. Kabila became president of Congo in 1997, but the people of Congo saw little change under his leadership; they continued to face war, poverty, and an uncertain future. Congolese civilians have been the main victims of the crisis in Congo, targeted by all sides, including government forces, and foreign and domestic rebel groups.

In August 1998, open conflict erupted between Kabila and Congolese forces supported by Rwanda, Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe joined the fighting in support of Kabila. In July 1999, at a summit in Lusaka, Zambia, the leaders of Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola signed a peace agreement. The withdrawal of foreign forces from Congo was one of the key elements of the Lusaka Accords. The accords also called for political dialogue among Congolese political and armed groups to settle their differences peacefully and to map out a new political chapter for Congo. In January 2001, President Kabila was assassinated by a member of his security guard. A few weeks later, his son, Joseph Kabila, was sworn in as president. By late 2002, after a series of South African-U.N.-sponsored talks, foreign troops in DRC withdrew their forces. In December 2002, the inter-Congolese dialogue achieved a major breakthrough when President Kabila and the parties to the conflict agreed to a transitional

government headed by President Kabila and four vice presidents. In July 2003, the four vice presidents were sworn in, and the event was considered by some observers to be an historic step towards peace in the DRC.

Some progress has been made over the past several years in moving the DRC from political instability and civil war to relative stability and limited democratic rule, although eastern Congo remains a region marred by civil strife. The international community has been actively engaged in support of the transitional process, conflict resolution, and democracy promotion. On July 30, 2006, the DRC held its first presidential and parliamentary multi-party elections in almost four decades. The next presidential elections are scheduled for November 2011.

DRC and Regional Issues

The DRC continues to face serious challenges, although relations between the DRC and its neighbors have improved over the past three years. Relations between DRC and Burundi are warm. Uganda upgraded its diplomatic presence to ambassadorial level over a year ago. Relations with Rwanda have improved as well since 2008.

The presence of armed groups in parts of Congo is a major source of instability. As I will discuss below, some of the main rebel groups active in DRC include: the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the Mai Mai militia, and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)

Over the past 15 years, elements of the former Rwandan armed forces and the Interhamwe militia were given a safe haven in eastern Congo and have carried out many attacks inside Rwanda and against Congolese civilians. These well-armed forces are now known as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Analysts and officials in the region estimate their number between 6,000 and 8,000, now led by the most extremist leaders of the FDLR. Over the past year, the FDLR has reportedly intensified its recruitment campaign. Until recently, the FDLR reportedly received assistance from some Congolese government forces and in the past coordinated military operations with the Congolese army. The FDLR also receives assistance and guidance from Rwandans in Europe, Africa, and the United States. The government of Rwanda submitted a list of FDLR, Interhamwe and other militia leaders in early 2008 to United States government officials. A number of these FDLR still live in the United States and none of these individuals have been extradited to Rwanda. The United States does not have an extradition treaty with Rwanda. The United Nations, the United States, and some European countries have imposed sanctions, including travel ban, on some FDLR leaders. In October 2010, French security arrested a top leader of the FDLR in Paris, Callixte Mbarushimana.

The National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP)

The CNDP is DRC-based rebel group once led by Laurent Nkunda, who is currently under house-arrest in Rwanda. The CNDP claims that its main objective was to protect the Tutsi population in eastern Congo and to fight the FDLR. After the Congo-Rwanda joint military offensive in 2009, the CNDP no longer exists as a cohesive group. Many of its fighters have been reintegrated into the Congolese armed forces and some may have joined other militia groups. Some of these units in the Congolese armed forces are engaged in abuses against civilians, according to U.N. officials.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)

The ADF is a Ugandan Muslim rebel group with limited activities in Uganda and DRC. In 2010, ADF forces were active in Beni district near the Ugandan border. In June 2010, after consultations between the governments of Uganda and DRC, the Congolese armed forces launched a military operation known as Rwenzori against the ADF and its allies in Beni. The military operation dislodged ADF forces but also displaced an estimated 100,000 Congolese civilians, according to U.N. officials.

Mai Mai Militia

The Mai Mai is a loosely grouped set of Congolese militia, with no unified or consistently articulated political demands. They actively target civilians and U.N. peacekeeping forces in eastern Congo. In early October 2010, Congolese and U.N. peacekeeping troops in the DRC arrested the leader of a Mai Mai militia suspected of orchestrating mass rape. Lieutenant Colonel Mayele of Mai Mai Cheka was arrested in North Kivu province. More than 500 people were reportedly raped in July-August 2010, according to U.N. officials.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

The LRA is a Ugandan rebel group active since the mid-1980s. Under the leadership of Joseph Kony, the LRA has conducted military operations in northern Uganda, the DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Southern Sudan. The primary targets of the LRA have been the civilian population, especially women and children. The LRA was given protection, facilities for training, and supplies by the government of Sudan to wage war in northern Uganda and Southern Sudan until a few years ago. The takeover of the government in Southern Sudan by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) curtailed LRA activities in South Sudan. The Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has a provision that all foreign groups, which include the LRA, must be forced out of Sudan. In 2005, some LRA units went into DRC, reportedly looking for a new home after the SPLM took power. Over the past several years, the LRA has been weakened significantly and has lost a number of its top leaders in battle or defection. The LRA currently has presence in parts of DRC and the Central African Republic (CAR). The LRA is not operational in northern Uganda. The government of Uganda has carried out a number of military operations against LRA forces in CAR and jointly with Congolese forces in DRC.

Targeting the CNDP and FDLR

In late 2008, the governments of Rwanda and Congo agreed on a wide range of issues, including an agreement to launch a joint military offensive against the CNDP and the FDLR. In January 2009, Rwanda and Congo launched the joint military operation in eastern Congo. The military operation dislodged and seriously weakened the CNDP forces. In January, the leader of the CNDP, General Laurent Nkunda, was arrested inside Rwanda, after he fled eastern Congo. The FDLR forces were also dislodged from their stronghold in north Kivu, although some have returned in recent months. The defeat of FDLR forces in some areas enabled more than 20,000 Rwandese refugees to return home. In addition, an estimated 5,200 FDLR elements have been repatriated to Rwanda. In late February 2009, Rwandese troops pulled out of Congo as part of the agreement with the Kabila government.

DRC-Based Rebel Groups Links to International Terrorist Groups

In the late 1990s, the ADF carried out a number of terrorist attacks in Uganda, although there was no evidence linking ADF with international terror groups at that time. On July 11, 2010, the Somali terrorist group Al-Shabaab carried out multiple suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda. An estimated 76 people, including one American, were killed and more than 80 injured. Several ADF operatives were reportedly engaged in providing assistance to Al-Shabaab. A number of ADF operatives are currently in custody in Uganda.

In the 1990s, the LRA received significant assistance from the Sudanese security services at a time when the same security organs were hosting and providing assistance to Osama bin Laden in Khartoum, Sudan. However, there is no clear linkages between the LRA and Al Qaeda.

United Nations Peacekeeping Operation

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in DRC is one of the largest in the world. On May 28, 2010, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1925. The Congolese government had asked for the gradual withdrawal of the U.N. peacekeeping force. The resolution converted the name and mission of the current peacekeeping force from the U.N. Organization Mission in DRC (MONUC) to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), effective July 1, 2010. The resolution also authorized MONUSCO's mandate until June 30, 2011, and ordered the withdrawal of up to 2,000 peacekeeping troops by June 30, 2010. As of August 2010, MONUSCO has completed the withdrawal of more than 1,500 peacekeeping troops from DRC. The resolution also called for the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers; support for the DRC government on a wide range of issues; and support for international efforts to bring perpetrators of war crimes to justice. As of August 2010, MONUSCO had a total of 19,544 uniformed personnel.

Economic Conditions

Bilateral and multilateral donors have made significant investments in support of DRC's transitional process. The World Bank has a number of active projects in DRC. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is requiring the DRC to implement reforms in macroeconomic stability before it will begin a poverty reduction and growth facility program. A tight fiscal policy is thought to be necessary for the DRC to improve economic conditions. The DRC's fiscal policy is primarily focused on increasing domestic revenue and shifting state expenditures toward infrastructure and the social sectors. The Central Bank of the DRC appears committed to maintaining price stability and tight control of the country's money supply, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Real GDP growth is expected at 5.2% in 2010 and 6% in 2011, according to the EIU.¹ Inflation rates, however, are expected to reach 22% in 2010 and 28% in 2011.

¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit. *Country Report: Democratic Republic of Congo*, March 2010.

U.S.-Congo Relations

Relations between the United States and Congo are warm, although there are a number of areas of concern. Over the past decade, the United States played a key role in mediation efforts to bring peace and stability to the Great Lakes region. In August 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Kinshasa and Goma in eastern Congo. At a press conference with Foreign Minister Alexis Thambwe, Secretary Clinton stated that “the DRC, its government, and the people face many serious challenges, from the lack of investment and development to the problem of corruption and difficulties with governance to the horrible sexual and gender-based violence visited upon the women and children in the country.” The Secretary assured the minister that the United States would help the DRC government address these challenges. Secretary Clinton and the DRC government identified five areas of focus for reform: security sector reform, corruption, sexual and gender violence, economic governance, and agriculture. In May 2010, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Johnnie Carson, testified before the House Sub-committee on Africa that “the continuing presence of illegal armed groups has been exacerbated by the lack of state authority throughout much of the east.” In late July 2010, President Obama signed into law the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (P.L. 111-203). The 2,300-page legislation contains an amendment on Congo Conflict Minerals. The law requires that American companies disclose what kind of measures they have taken to ensure that minerals imported from Congo do not contain “conflict minerals.” One of the main objectives of the bill is to deny negative forces from benefitting from conflict minerals.

U.S. Assistance to Congo

One of the major objectives of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) program in the DRC is to support the country’s transition to democracy and to strengthen its healthcare and education systems. Special attention is being paid to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with \$4 million of funding designated for AIDS treatment and prevention programs. In FY2011, Economic Support Funds (ESF) are targeted to support the government of Congo’s “stabilization and recovery program through support to community recovery and reconciliation, conflict mitigation and resolution, and the extension of authority.” International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds are intended to focus on training Congolese officers on military justice, human rights and joint operations. The United States also provides assistance in security sector reform and significant humanitarian assistance to DRC. The United States provided \$205.1 million in FY2008 and \$296.5 million in FY2009. The DRC received an estimated \$183 million in FY2010. The Obama Administration has requested \$213.2 million for FY2011.

Members of the subcommittee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have .
