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# **Weak States In Africa: U.S. Policy Options in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

**By**

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## **Introduction**

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the scene of a complex and devastating war involving six nations, two Congolese rebel groups, local Congolese militias, and Rwandan and Burundian Hutu rebels. The war has caused a tremendous loss of life, property, and economic development opportunities in a potentially rich country. The central African conflict has produced a major humanitarian crisis with some two million people displaced and an estimated 2.5 million deaths from war-related causes. Government and rebel troops have perpetrated gross abuses of human rights. The conflict has generated large refugee flows into neighboring countries, such as the Republic of Congo, and diverted scarce economic resources to military expenditures, particularly in the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

## **U.S. Interests**

The U.S. interests are to:

- End the conflict;
- Restore stability in the Great Lakes region;
- Ameliorate the humanitarian and HIV/AIDS crises;
- Promote a democratic government and respect for human rights; and
- Promote economic development and reform.

## **The Lusaka Cease-Fire Agreement**

The U.S. supports implementation of the *Lusaka Cease-Fire Agreement* as the best means to achieve a just and stable peace in the region. The agreement signed in 1999 by the Congo, Rwanda, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and the Congolese rebel groups known as the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) and the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) provides a framework for resolution of the DRC conflict. It calls for a cease-fire, a national dialogue leading to a new political dispensation, the disarmament and repatriation of armed groups in the Congo, and United Nations monitoring of the withdrawal of foreign troops. We are working with the parties to the *Lusaka Cease-Fire Agreement*, the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, our European allies and key regional leaders to help implement this agreement. President Bush met with President Kabila last fall to discuss ways to end the conflict. Secretary Powell has urged implementation of the agreement in meetings with Presidents Kabila and Kagame and other regional leaders.

I was in Kinshasa two weeks ago and reiterated to the Congolese government the importance of finding a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Walter Kansteiner, Assistant Secretary for

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African Affairs, visited the Congo and Rwanda in January. In his discussions with Congolese President Joseph Kabila and Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Mr. Kansteiner also urged both leaders to support the *Lusaka Cease-Fire Agreement*. We will continue to make peace in the Great Lakes region a top priority for the Administration.

### **Cease-Fire**

Of the non-Congolese signatories, only Rwanda and Zimbabwe retain significant numbers of forces in the Congo. A cease-fire among the signatories to the Lusaka Agreement has mostly held, except in eastern Congo. Fighting in the East involves, among others, Rwandan-backed Congolese rebels, Congolese-backed Rwandan rebels, local Congolese militia, the Rwandan Army, and Congolese supported Burundian Hutu rebels. We have provided two million dollars for the Joint Military Commission, a commission of the signatories to the *Lusaka Agreement* whose duties are to resolve military problems connected with the agreement, including cease-fire violations. We intend to notify Congress shortly that we will provide additional assistance in fiscal year 2002.

### **The Inter-Congolese Dialogue**

The Inter-Congolese Dialogue is currently taking place in Sun City, South Africa. The participants include all the Congolese signatories to the *Lusaka Agreement*, as well as representatives of Congolese opposition political parties and Congolese civil society. The United States has provided \$1.5 million to support the work of former Botswanan President Ketumile Masire, the facilitator of the Dialogue. We are pleased that the talks in Sun City have occurred and hope that when the meeting ends this week, the participants will have charted the way forward to further negotiations and to a comprehensive and enduring political settlement.

At the same time, we believe that to end the war, meaningful demobilization and disarmament of militias and rebel groups, most importantly of Rwandan Hutu rebels, and a cessation of foreign support to Congolese rebels must occur.

### **Demobilization and Disarmament**

Progress on demobilization and disarmament has been limited. We believe that a broad-based agreement between Presidents Kagame and Kabila will be necessary before any general demobilization and disarmament can occur. The Congolese government continues to give some supplies to the Rwandan rebels and the Congolese Mai-Mai militia, while the Rwandan government continues its support to Congolese rebels and its occupation of most of Eastern Congo. Both countries are reluctant to make the first move in fear that the other threatens their national security.

### **The United Nations Observer Mission for the Congo**

The United Nations Security Council established in February 2000 a United Nations Mission in the Congo (MONUC). Former President Laurent Kabila consistently blocked deployment of MONUC. Following his father's assassination in January, Joseph Kabila reversed this policy. MONUC has now deployed 3,688 observers in the Congo and has effectively monitored the cease-fire line in accordance with its mandate.

In his February 15 report to the Security Council, Secretary General Kofi Annan recommended an increase in MONUC's troop ceiling from 5,537 to 6,387. The Secretary General said this increase is needed to support MONUC's deployment to Kisangani and Kindu in advance of a voluntary demobilization and disarmament program.

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At this time we do not see the need for an increase in the troop ceiling. However, if events on the ground should move forward, a more robust MONUC could be useful. For example, an agreement among the Congolese parties over an interim government or a complete or partial withdrawal of foreign troops, could yield opportunities for demobilization and disarmament of irregular forces and the need for monitoring the withdrawal of foreign forces in larger areas of the Congo.

### **Humanitarian and Development Assistance**

The United States provided about \$98 million in assistance to the Congo in fiscal year 2001 including about \$6 million in development assistance. This aid was mostly directed at emergency food relief, including operation of humanitarian aircraft outside areas of government control, food security programs, and improving health services. We have also provided money for programs targeting refugees and internally displaced persons in the DRC. We expect total U.S. assistance in fiscal year 2002 for the DRC to be about the same order of magnitude as last year. USAID's Development Assistance for fiscal year 2002 is estimated at \$21 million. Projects will concentrate on improving primary health care services in rural areas, increasing immunization coverage, combating HIV/AIDS and malaria, enhancing food security, promoting a peaceful transition process, and protecting the environment.

The cease-fire has created an increased opportunity for humanitarian assistance to reach previously isolated populations. Nonetheless, the war continues to restrict aid organizations and normal economic activity. As a result, the condition of Congolese civilians, especially in the East, remains truly horrific.

### **International Crime and Terrorism in the DRC**

We do not have any hard evidence of links between groups operating out of the Congo and international terrorism. However, the United States has an interest in a just and strong Congolese government that can contribute to the war on terrorism. Both the war and the lack of an effective central government create an environment that is conducive to international crime. The Congo is rife in illegal trade in mineral wealth and arms. The foreign armies and rebel groups in the Congo steal diamonds, coltan, gold, and timber and use the proceeds to finance the war and line the pockets of government officials and army officers.

Moreover, the Congolese government grants concessions to its allies, most notably Zimbabwe, in order to win their military support. The Congolese government has conceded to the Zimbabweans the right to set up commercial ventures to explore, research, exploit, and market mineral, timber, and other resources. Zimbabwean troops provide the military muscle to secure these commercial activities. Top Congolese officials also have personal financial interests in these concessions to the Zimbabweans.

The Congolese government lacks the ability to control trade in these minerals or to set up a legal buying system that offers attractive prices to buyers. As a result, dealers take the goods over international borders, wherever they perceive they will get the best price. The Congolese government liberalized the legal diamond trade in April 2001, which may help steer more diamonds through legal channels. Nonetheless, smuggling in diamonds and other Congolese natural resources will continue to be a problem.

### **A Few Final Thoughts**

In summary, let me just reiterate, Mr. Chairman, that the United States has a strong interest in bringing a lasting peace to the Congo. We must use our influence to guide the belligerents to a

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political agreement. The Congolese people deserve stability, good governance, and economic prosperity. I believe they have the ability to achieve this, and the international community has a duty to help them do so.