

**GREAT LAKES POLICY FORUM  
MEETING REPORT  
February 6, 2003**

This month's forum included words and thoughts from Alan Eastham, director of Central African Affairs in the State Department; Ambassador Richard Bogosian, who has most recently served as the Special Assistant for the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative; Doug Brooks, President of the International Peacekeeping Operations Association (IPOA); and Paul Slaughter, CEO of Task International. The forum provided general political analysis of the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and explored a proposal to privatize peacekeeping efforts in the DRC.

The current peace process and search for a transitional government in the DRC remains tenuous at best. At the national level, the political groups continue to discuss peace, yet act in ways that seem to be at odds with the negotiations. On a local level, the situation in the East continues to decline and is in serious danger of an explosion if fighting continues. At the international level, many actors remain involved, including neighboring countries, the UN, and western nations. All these players make the situation increasingly complex.

On the national level, the real goal at present is providing the structure for a transitional government. However, the recent violence and lack of adherence to the Pretoria Agreement raise the question of whether all parties are serious about peace and ready to work for transition. There is also the question of whether or not security can be assured for non-central government groups in Kinshasa. Each group fighting for power in the DRC has delayed the peace process in one way or another. Exploitation of natural resources by opposing groups continues to hinder resolution. One of the keys to creating a transitional government is the unification of the differing armies into a national army. The factions need to work together to create a new political structure and then work together within that structure. Each party must be willing to take some risks in order to achieve success—in order for people's lives to improve and the transitional government to take shape. The Lusaka, Pretoria, and Luanda Accords, along with the ongoing Inter-Congolese Dialogue, provide a basis from which to work. The current problems lie in the implementation of these agreements. On the national level, these existing political and security issues are taking top priority, while economic development programs that would have effect on a more local level are being put on hold. The recent human rights violations in the East are cause for concern and call to question whether the DRC's leaders can overcome personal ambitions to realize peace and transition.

On a local level, the fighting in the East continues. Hundreds of thousands of Congolese have fled to the forests to escape the violence of various combating groups. The violation of agreements and violent actions of such groups must not be ignored, yet at the same time should not be rewarded by allowing human rights violators to go unpunished and instead giving them political power in the transitional government. This is a problem that must be addressed by Kinshasa and within the ICD.

One new strategy for addressing the special needs of the Eastern Congo is the Ituri Pacification Commission (IPC), which attempts to address the struggles for disengagement in the Ituri region. The IPC is broken into three commissions: the bilateral commission, which aims to deal with the political situation between the DRC and Uganda, including full implementation of Luanda; the belligerent commission, which is attempting to pacify the military situation on the ground involving the armed Congolese groups; and a commission created to ameliorate tensions between different ethnic groups. One of the ongoing troubles is that external actors, most notably Uganda, exacerbate the deep animosity between ethnic groups. The current tension between Uganda and another Great Lakes neighbor Rwanda makes the situation even more worrisome and complicated.

With these issues in mind, what role does Uganda now play in the DRC? Troops have remained by request of the international community so as not to create a vacuum in the East. However, with the association of rebels to Ugandan troops, many feel their exit would aid in the peace process. This takes on greater importance in light of the aforementioned tension between Uganda and Rwanda. Rwanda is an influential actor in the region (whether positively or negatively). Kigali is determined to have some of its interests met in Eastern DRC, irrespective of what its neighbors or anyone else think. It remains (and will remain) a key player as it is responsible for the repatriation, resettlement, and reinsertion of Rwandan troops back into Rwanda. However, the FDLR (Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda) has a stronghold over former troops who want to be repatriated. What must happen to break this hold and allow Rwandan citizens to return home?

The efforts of the Angolan government provide a bright spot for regional diplomacy. Angola is presently mediating between Uganda and the DRC in the IPC. This is seen as a sign of hope in an increasingly difficult and potentially disastrous situation that is cause for great concern in the DRC, the region and the international community as well.

The international presence in the DRC is still quite strong. The French, American, and Belgian embassies are leading the way in terms of western diplomatic support. These embassies are working well together to do what they can to help achieve peace and security as quickly as possible. For instance, the IPC was originally proposed by the American embassy and promptly supported by the French and the Belgians and subsequently implemented. Further, if a transitional government becomes a reality, the DRC will become eligible for foreign assistance through programs such as the UN's fund for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) and the U.S.'s Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The UN peacekeeping operation MONUC remains the most visible international presence in the DRC.

It is becoming increasingly doubtful that MONUC can fulfill adequately its mandate. The management capabilities of MONUC are being called into question: whether or not it has the will to enforce the mandate, which becomes useless without that will. Critics continue to call for a more aggressive interpretation of the mandate. However, if MONUC goes beyond the boundaries of its mandate, the organization risks international

consequences and individuals risk personal consequences. Still the critics claim MONUC is not fulfilling its security role in the DRC. One criticism of MONUC is that the operation has no western lead nation, such as the British role in UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone. MONUC also faces the question of whether it should have a role in the transition, and what its role should be. However, at this time, the fact remains that fighting continues in the East, and therefore MONUC's most immediate concern continues to be security.

Some private groups, such as the IPOA and Task International, argue that the use of private security groups to supplement MONUC would allow for a more effective peacekeeping operation. The private companies would like to propose to work within and support the full MONUC mandate. They would offer a number of useful services such as: disarming rebel groups; monitoring the DRC-Rwandan border; bringing human rights violators to justice; and a continual effort to bring security to the most troubled areas. The privatization operation would be financed through UN funds currently supporting MONUC: the private contractors would contract with the UN and continue to support the UN mandate under which MONUC currently operates. Private contractors could focus on providing a security solution, without drawing the kinds of questions MONUC faces about its political role.

2.5 million Congolese have died in the East in the past three years for war-related reasons; 2000 die prematurely daily; ethnic cleansing that has included gross human rights atrocities has been and remains a reality; millions of IDP's have no homes. The peace process will take time. The need for a transitional government in name and practice is paramount. People need a stake in their own lives, which will only come when political negotiations address the situation on the ground and become more connected in improving the lives of the people. Progress will come when negotiating groups take responsibility for the peace process, and the international community seeks the best solutions for peace, whether through privatizing peacekeeping operations, upping MONUC's capabilities, removing foreign troops, or however peace can best be achieved.