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# The situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

*The Historical Security Council*



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## Introduction

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is often referred to as “Africa’s World War,” is a complex regional conflict that, by October 31, 2002, has become one of the world’s most critical humanitarian and security crises. This crisis involves several state armies and also non-state armed groups, destabilising effects across Central and East Africa. The heart of the conflicts is a desperate struggle for authority over territory and the DRC’s vast natural resources, specifically in the east. In spite of the increased international awareness such as the intervention of the United Nations and numerous peace agreements, the war still remains unresolved.

The roots of the conflict extend deep into the DRC’s colonial legacy and post-independence confusion. The arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers diverse and often rival ethnic communities together, while the protracted, extractive rule of Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997) systematically eroded state institutions, creating a power vacuum and a culture of governance based on patronage rather than service. This fragile foundation was shattered by the regional aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, which sent a flood of refugees and armed *génocidaires* into eastern Zaire (now DRC). This event transformed the region into a timebomb of ethnic strife and cross-border security threats, setting the stage for the internationalized war that began in 1998.

The war is characterized by its multiplicity of overlapping motives. While framed in political and security terms, it is also a brutal economic competition. The exploitation of the DRC’s diamonds, gold, coltan and other riches by both national elites and foreign interests provides the financial fuel for the conflict, enabling armed groups to sustain themselves and creating powerful incentives to undermine peace.

Millions of civilians have borne the brunt of the violence through mass displacement, disease, and several atrocities. The prolonged conflict has brutally weakened state authority, leaving large areas which are beyond government control and allowing armed groups to operate with freedom from consequences. Whilst recent diplomatic developments such as foreign troop withdrawals, show signs of progress, the situation on the ground still remains fragile. Persistent ceasefire violation and delays in implementing peace accords have fostered an atmosphere of mistrust, underscoring the severe need for both immediate security measures and a sustained, inclusive political solution.

## Definition of key terms

### **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR):**

A process which was aimed at disbanding armed groups by removing weapons from combatants and helping former fighters in reintegrating into civilian life.

### **Foreign Troop Withdrawal:**

This is a process where foreign military forces agreed to leave Congolese territory under bilateral and multilateral agreements.

### **Inter-Congolese Dialogue:**

Series of negotiations intended to bring together the Congolese government, rebel groups, civil society and political opposition to form a transitional government.

### **MONUC ( United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo):**

A peacekeeping mission established by the United Nations to monitor ceasefires, assist in disarmament efforts and support the peace process

### **Second Congo War:**

The Second Congo war began in 1998 following a rebellion against the Congolese government which involved multiple African states and armed groups.

## General Overview

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the result of a long history of political instability, weak governance, and economic exploitation. Decades of authoritarian rule under Mobutu Sese Seko (1965–1997) severely weakened state institutions, leaving the country vulnerable to internal unrest. This institutional collapse allowed numerous armed movements to emerge and operate with little resistance, particularly in the nation's remote eastern regions.

Regional instability intensified dramatically following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. The massive influx of refugees and armed génocidaire groups into eastern Zaire (later the DRC) imported deep ethnic tensions and created acute cross-border security concerns. Neighboring states, especially Rwanda and Uganda, became directly involved, justified by the legitimate fear that hostile militias were using Congolese territory as a base for attacks. In 1998, these tensions escalated into the open warfare of the Second Congo War. A rebellion broke out against President Laurent-Désiré Kabila's government, backed by Rwanda and Uganda. What began as an internal uprising rapidly expanded into a vast regional conflict. Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe intervened in support of the Congolese government, while Rwanda and Uganda backed various rebel factions, dramatically increasing the war's scale and complexity.

However, the conflict quickly evolved beyond a straightforward interstate war. The initial alliances fractured, giving way to a decentralized struggle characterized by shifting loyalties and localized violence. Foreign armies, national rebel groups, and community-based militias (like the Mai-Mai) all competed for control, not only for political power but also for access to the DRC's immense mineral wealth. This transformation turned eastern Congo into a patchwork of contested zones where economic predation and survival often overshadowed the original political objectives of the warring parties.

This fragmentation made the conflict exceptionally difficult to resolve through conventional diplomacy. Peace agreements negotiated at the highest levels between states and major rebel movements frequently failed to account for or control the multitude of armed actors on the ground. Local commanders and militias, motivated by self-defense, ethnic rivalry, or resource control, had little incentive to adhere to ceasefires brokered in distant capitals, leading to the persistent cycle of violation and retaliation that undermined every peace initiative.

The war has had devastating humanitarian consequences. Widespread fighting, forced displacement, and the destruction of infrastructure have led to severe food shortages and catastrophic limits on access to medical care. Human rights violations—including massacres, sexual violence, and the recruitment of child soldiers—have been committed by all sides. Civilians, rather than combatants, have borne the greatest burden, a reality that has further poisoned social relations and complicated all efforts toward reconciliation and sustainable peace.

Following the assassination of President Laurent-Désiré Kabila in January 2001, his son, Joseph Kabila, assumed the presidency. The new leader signaled a greater willingness to engage with international peace initiatives, leading to renewed diplomatic efforts such as the Inter-Congolese Dialogue and a series of bilateral agreements aimed at securing the withdrawal of foreign troops. By late 2002, these agreements provided a fragile framework for peace, but the deeply entrenched drivers of violence on the ground remained a formidable challenge.

## Major parties involved

### **Angola**

*Angola had intervened militarily in support of the Congolese government to prevent many rebel groups from being able to use Eastern Congo as a base of operation to destabilise its territory*

### **Democratic Republic of the Congo (Government)**

*The government of the Democratic Republic of The Congo, was led by President Joseph, who sought to maintain national sovereignty and regain the control over rebel-held regions*

### **Interahamwe/ Rwandan Hutu Militias**

*Armed groups linked to 1994 Rwandan genocide, operating in eastern DRC. They posed a direct security threat to Rwanda and were a primary justification for Rwanda's military involvement*

### **Mai-Mai Militias**

*The local Congolese militias were known as the Mai-Mai who fought against foreign forces and rebel groups, whilst claiming to defend national territory and the local communities.*

### **Movement For the Liberation of the Congo (MLC)**

*A major rebel group backed by Uganda, which controlled significant territory in northern Congo and opposed the central government.*

### **Rwanda**

*Officially intervened to pursue and dismantle hostile Hutu militias that participated in the 1994 genocide and were operating from eastern DRC. It also sought to secure its borders and supported the RCD to establish a friendly regime in Kinshasa*

### **Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD)**

*The RCD was a key rebel group backed by Rwanda which controlled large areas of eastern Congo and went against the authority of the central government*

### **Uganda**

*Cited security concerns and economic interests to justify its intervention. It supported rebel groups like the MLC and operated independently in parts of northern and eastern DRC*

**United Nations (MONUC)**

*The UN peacekeeping mission deployed to monitor ceasefires, support the implementation of peace agreements, protect civilians, and assist in stabilising the region. It aimed to be a neutral facilitator.*

## Timeline of events

**1994 July 18th** After the end of the Rwandan Genocide, massive numbers of the Hutu extremist militias had fled across into eastern Zaire (Later the DRC) which contributed to long-term regional instability.

**1997 May 17th** The President Laurent-Désiré Kabila captured Kinshasa and overthrew the Mobutu Sese Seko and then officially renamed the nation to Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**1998 August 2nd** During this time the Second Congo War had begun when the rally for RCD which was backed by Rwanda and Uganda, launched a rebellion against the president.

**1998 August 23rd** The nations of Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia then formally intervened with military in support of the Congolese Government which further expanded the conflict into a regional war.

**1999 July 10th** The Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement was signed by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia which called for a ceasefire and the deployment of the UN.

**1999 November 30th** The UNSC adopted S/RES/1279 which established MONUC to monitor the ceasefire and help with peace efforts.

**2001 January 16th** President Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated in Kinshasa.

**2001 January 26th** Joseph Kabila was officially in as President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**2002 April 19th** The Sun City Agreement was officially signed in South Africa between the Congolese government and many rebel groups which outlined plans for a transitional government.

**2002 July 30th** The Pretoria Accord had been signed between The Democratic Republic of The Congo and Rwanda where Rwanda was committed to withdraw its troops in exchange for actions to take place against Hutu militias.

**2002 September 6th** The Luanda Agreement was signed between The Democratic Republic of the Congo which designated a timetable for the withdrawal of Ugandan forces.

## Relevant UN treaties and events

**S/RES/1279:** Established the MONUC which would look over the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement and it would support communication between the conflicting parties.

**S/RES/1291:** This expanded MONUC's mandate and had authorised the deployment of armed personnel for self defence.

**Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement:** Committed the conflicting parties to an immediate cease and called for the withdrawal of foreign forces.

**Sun City Agreement:** Was aimed to establish a transitional government and to promote political dialogue between the Congolese government and rebel groups.

**Pretoria Accord:** The Pretoria Accord required Rwanda to withdraw its troops from The Democratic Republic of The Congo in exchange for taking action against Hutu militias. This represented a major step in reducing foreign military involvement

**Luanda Agreement:** This agreement outlined the withdraw of the Ugandan forces the east of Congo.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

The primary attempts to resolve the conflict by October 31, 2002, were based on a series of negotiated agreements. However, each faced significant challenges in implementation, leading to repeated ceasefire failures and fragile progress.

The Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (1999) brought the warring parties, including the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, together to commit to a ceasefire, disengagement of troops, and a framework for political dialogue and disarmament. While it created a crucial basis for UN involvement and future talks, its immediate effectiveness was limited. The ceasefire repeatedly failed due to a fundamental lack of trust and commitment among signatories, who often used ceasefires as tactical pauses. Continued competition over the DRC's natural resources provided the economic means for all sides to sustain their war efforts. Furthermore, not all armed groups on the ground, particularly the Rwandan Hutu militias (ex-FAR/Interahamwe), were bound by the agreement, and the initial UN mission (MONUC) lacked the mandate and capacity to enforce compliance.

The Pretoria Accord (2002) was a bilateral agreement between the DRC and Rwanda, in which Rwanda committed to withdrawing its troops from Congolese territory in exchange for the DRC's cooperation in disarming the Hutu militias. This represented a major step in reducing direct foreign military involvement. However, the process was undermined by mistrust. Rwanda doubted the Congolese government's willingness or ability to neutralize the militias, while Kinshasa suspected Rwanda of maintaining influence through proxy rebel groups like the RCD. This mutual suspicion led to delays and accusations of bad faith, preventing a clean and complete withdrawal.

The Sun City Agreement (2002), signed in South Africa between the Congolese government and key rebel groups, aimed to establish a framework for a transitional government and advance the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. It showed important diplomatic progress by formalizing plans for power-sharing. Yet, it failed to immediately stop hostilities or fully integrate armed factions. The agreement did not adequately address the underlying economic drivers of the conflict or include all local militia groups (like various Mai-Mai factions). Without simultaneous, robust Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs and a mechanism to share resource wealth, the incentive for armed groups to maintain their military capacity remained high, leading to continued violence.

## Possible solutions

A key solution could be to strengthen the peacekeeping missions set by the United Nations so that MONUC can more watch over all the ceasefires in a more effective manner, be able to protect civilians, and also support disarmament processes. This will help expand the level of troops, logistical support, and the power to intervene in violations which would enhance a missions ability to stabilise the conflict zones and enforce peace agreements.

Ensuring a verified and transparent withdrawal of all the foreign military forces as mention in the Pretoria and Luanda agreements, it is necessary to reducing all the external influence and de-escalating the conflict.

Promotion of inclusive political dialogue such as an inter-Congolese Dialogue which would incorporate every armed groups, political factions and the civil society could be highly beneficial for long term peace. Along with implementing Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programs for combatants which would reduce the capacity for violence and the support of social reintegration

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