

Diplomacy and the DRC

With the latest round of shuttle diplomacy to secure a peace settlement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), questions are being asked about the likelihood of South African peacekeeping involvement in that part of the region. Is a peacekeeping mission on the cards, and what are the current dynamics in trying to engineer a conclusive end to the conflict?

The Current Situation

The rebel Congolese Democratic Coalition (CDC) movement has recently regained the military initiative in the south-eastern part of the DRC with the capture of Kindu and Kamina in October. This has intensified the war and sucked in greater troop numbers from the region, and now also threatens the control of Katanga province by the government of Laurent Kabila. Paradoxically, a military 'solution' is no more likely now than at the start of the conflict in August. Instead, the possibility of a diplomatic solution has probably been strengthened.

The Political-Military Balance

The DRC Government

- ◆ *Force Armée Congolaise (FAC)* — Kabila is estimated to have 3-4,000 FAC troops under arms, although he claimed an army of 140,000 in August. This number includes elements of Mobutu Sese Seko's former army (FAZ), but excludes the untrained Interhaumwe (Hutu) and tribal Mai-Mai militia forces. Kabila's son, Joseph (who is said to be involved in various mining concessions along with President Robert Mugabe's nephew, Leo) was recently replaced as Chief of Staff, and a new Chief of Military Logistics has also been appointed.

- ◆ *Zimbabwe* — 5,000 troops, based largely in Kinshasa, and used also to bolster the defences of Lubumbashi, Kananga, Kamina (from where Zimbabwe Air Force Hawker Hunter fighters were flown until it fell at the end of October) and Mbuji-Mayi. The cost to the Zimbabwean taxpayer of keeping these troops in the DRC is estimated to be between US\$500,000-US\$1 million per day.

- ◆ *Angola* — 2,800 troops, mainly in the western area of Bas-Congo. These forces have recently been joined by a 3,000-strong detachment of 'Katangan Tigers' who have been deployed to Kolwezi, it is believed as a

safeguard against attacks on mining installations in which Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos has a stake. The Tigers are among the best trained and equipped units of the Angolan army (and now with new vehicle transports), and have their origins in the Katangese secessionist attempts of the 1960s. Although now Portuguese-speaking third generation Angolans, there must still be doubts about their reliability to the Angolan/DRC cause. Gaining influence over Kolwezi is critical to controlling access to Katanga.

- ◆ *Namibia* — 100+, mainly in Kinshasa.

- ◆ *Sudan* — numbers unknown (although claimed by the rebels to be as high as 2,000 including ex-FAZ elements), mainly in the north-eastern Haut-Uela province. Khartoum has admitted only to 'political' support for Kabila.

- ◆ *Chad* — 1,000 personnel deployed in late-September in Kasai and northern Katanga, possibly involving Libyan and Sudanese officers.

- ◆ *Mercenaries* — there have been reports of Ukrainian mercenaries amongst others in Kinshasa.

The Rebels

- ◆ *FAC elements* — four brigades numbering approximately 1,200 each, plus Banyamulenge rebels and ex-FAZ elements. (Kabila's forces recently claimed to have taken more than 2,000 rebel prisoners, a figure which can be discounted in the circumstances.)

- ◆ *Uganda and Rwanda* — three battalions each. Kampala has recently admitted the presence of its troops for the purposes of curbing the activities of the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels operating from DRC territory, though its troops are also being used to strengthen the strategically vital airfield of Kisangani. Rwanda continues to deny involvement.

- ◆ *Burundi* — one battalion in the DRC border area to guard primarily against the threat posed by the Interhaumwe rebels.

- ◆ *UNITA* — numbers unknown.

The Angola-Zimbabwe-Uganda Nexus

The role of Angola and Uganda in bringing about a diplomatic solution to the conflict is critical. Yet rapprochement between the two and the hope for a reciprocal disengagement has been undermined continuously by the role played by President Mugabe of Zimbabwe in raising the military stakes. In October, Mugabe committed an additional 2,000 personnel to the conflict including (scarce) air assets.

In Angola, the death of the Deputy Chief of Staff (and former Chief of Staff of UNITA and Jonas Savimbi's nephew), General **Arlindo Chenda Isaac** ('Ben Ben') **Pena**, in mysterious circumstances in a South African hospital on 19 October, has paralleled deteriorating relations between UNITA and the MPLA government both militarily in the field and in Luanda. The UNITA parliamentary faction itself remains split, with some members actually voting in favour of the revoking of Savimbi's special status as the 'leader of the largest opposition party' on 21 October.

UNITA's military position has, however, been considerably enhanced by the war in the DRC. Not only has it established a *de facto* alliance with Uganda, Rwanda and rebel elements, but the Angolan army's (FAA) deployment in support of Kabila has weakened FAA's capabilities. In fact this may be a most useful pretext for not involving FAA in an unwinnable and debilitating war against UNITA. The war is now reaching a similar *modus operandi* to that of the 1980s: with each side capturing towns and moving on, only to have them recaptured once they have been vacated.

Given a lack of government army resources and UNITA's guerrilla abilities, without foreign or mercenary assistance, there remains no prospect of a military solution in Angola. The trend instead appears to be to try to increase Savimbi's political isolation so as to try to strike a deal with UNITA under different leadership — possibly the head of the parliamentary faction, **Abel Chivukuvuku**. Similarly, the MPLA congress this December may throw up new contenders to President dos Santos.

Diplomacy in the Region

Since the Victoria Falls conference on 7-8 September, in which the rebels were not allowed to participate in the formal deliberations, the prospects for a diplomatic solution have improved as Kabila's military situation in the south has deteriorated.

Recent African peace initiatives have included: the visits by Zambian and Tanzanian delegations to Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda; the Southern African Development Community (SADC) conferences in Victoria Falls, Mauritius on 16 September and, on 27 October, in Lusaka; visits to the DRC

by South African government ministers and President Mandela's visits to Namibia and, more indirectly, to Nigeria; visits to SA by DRC ministers, along with leaders from Uganda, Rwanda and the rebels; and, perhaps most important, the discussions in mid-October in Luanda between Angolan and Ugandan delegations.

Before a peace deal is struck, such efforts, first, have to be dovetailed with intensified efforts by the international community to mediate a solution through the promotion of a cease-fire and inclusive political settlement. The US Assistant Secretary of State, **Susan Rice**, the Africa Director of the National Security Council, **Gayle Smith**, and the US Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region and former US Congressman, **Howard Wolpe**, have been touring the region to this end. A similar programme in support of a comprehensive negotiated settlement has been undertaken by the Special Envoy of the European Union, **Aldo Ajello**. Washington's principal concern remains the need to prevent further genocide in the Great Lakes — a policy response that has inevitably emphasised the relationship with Rwanda and Uganda at the expense of better ties with Kabila and his allies.

While a long-term military solution to the conflict is not possible, clearly a negotiated settlement will first have to address the security fears of Angola, Uganda and Rwanda, and, second, provide for the establishment of a broad(er)-based government in the DRC. Current African sub-regional peace efforts are hampered by a number of other factors:

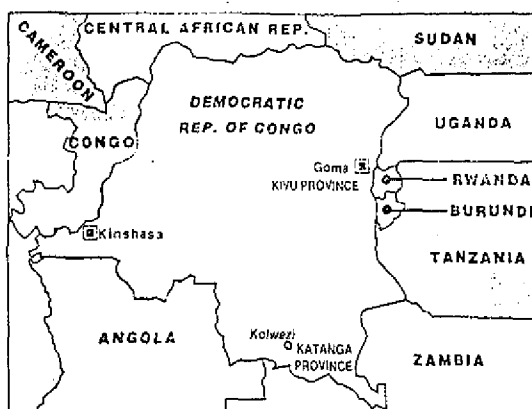
- ◆ First, the unpredictability and irascibility of Kabila's leadership which is compounded by his continuing sense of vulnerability;
- ◆ Second, the fact that neither Rwanda nor Uganda are members of the SADC;

- ◆ Third, President Mugabe's determination to maintain military support for Kabila;
- ◆ Fourth, the need to co-ordinate the variety of diplomatic efforts;
- ◆ Fifth, an awareness that South Africa possesses only limited political capital in mediating a solution.

For Rwanda, in particular, the war cannot be removed from the context of its own recent history and the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsis and moderate Hutu in 1994. As a result, the choice as seen by Kigali is stark: between aggressive self-defence and ethnic suicide.

Is Peacekeeping Possible?

Even if a peace settlement were to be negotiated in the DRC and a clear political mandate and entrance/exit strategies established for a peacekeeping mission, a number of formidable military problems remain.



First, it should be remembered that the UN Congo force deployed between 1960-64 (*Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo* — ONUC) numbered at its peak 19,828 troops at a time when, during the immediate post-colonial period, much of Congo's infrastructure remained relatively intact. Today the limited and unreliable road and rail networks would necessitate the use of extensive air logistical support.

Second, unlike the conflict in the early 1960s which was geographically contained to, first, the Katanga and, later, Kwilu provinces, today there is a war on a number of wide fronts involving its neighbours Angola, Chad, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda, in addition to Zimbabwe and Namibia. This would spread observer/ peacekeeping forces over a vast geographic area.

Third, related to the above point, a peacekeeping mission would have to be drawn from outside the militaries of the countries already involved in the conflict. It is difficult to see how Africa (in the likely absence of any substantial international assistance beyond limited logistical support) would obtain the troops numbers, finances or technical/ logistical assets. The French RECAMP (*De Renforcement des Capacites Africaines de Maintien de la Paix*) African peacekeeping support initiative is designed ultimately to provide prepositioned equipment (under French control) for one battalion (600 men) each in Libreville, Dakar, Djibouti and Reunion. The US African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) similarly aims at the provision of battalion-sized peacekeeping units from Ghana, Mali, Uganda, Senegal, Ethiopia and Malawi, although this initiative would now appear to have largely fizzled out.

Fourth, if the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) were to be employed it is difficult to see where it would obtain either the necessary trained personnel and/or finances. The ideal capital/operating/personnel expenditure ratio for the SANDF is 30:30:40. However, due to budget cuts, 58% of the budget is currently spent on personnel, and just 8% on new equipment. Unless the defence force is able to downsize (which is politically sensitive at this pre-election juncture within an environment of high unemployment) from its current strength of 90,100 to 75,756 in 2000. Without the costly Lesotho intervention, the SANDF was already anticipated to run a budget deficit of R400 million in 1998/99. Internal restructuring will be necessary if the SANDF is to acquire the items of equipment currently mooted (fighter aircraft, jet trainers, submarines, corvettes, light utility helicopters, tanks, and maritime helicopters) and if it is to have a capability in accordance with its regional ambitions and stature.

Fifth, given that this mission would presumably be undertaken under a UN Security Council mandate (unlike the Lesotho operation), all participating troops will be required to take a HIV test contrary to current practice in the SANDF.

It is unclear what effect the Lesotho mission has had on the

finances and readiness of the SANDF which has 3,500 troops (to be reduced during November to 2,000) tied up in operations the mountain kingdom. (It should be recalled that the cost of fighting the 'border' war in Angola in the 1980s with a maximum deployment of 3,500 'old' SADF troops and with a defence budget over twice that of today's in real terms, was crippling for the SA economy). Predictably, morale is said to be high among the troops in Lesotho. The lack of a clear political mandate and the almost complete exclusion of the SA Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) from the decision-making and advisory process over Lesotho may signal a transfer of authority on these matters to military-security elements within the South African government. The statement made (though later denied) by the head of SANDF Military Intelligence, Lt-General Mojo Motau, in late-September in Luanda, in support of SA military involvement in the Angolan conflict against UNITA. The SA military are known to be investigating the operating parameters of such an Angolan mission as well as a peacekeeping operation in the DRC.

The DRC and SADC

Given its huge natural resources particularly in mining and water/electricity, stability in the DRC — at least in its southern part — is critical to the development of the economies of the SADC region.

Yet the DRC's inclusion into the SADC at its Blantyre summit in 1997 illustrates the conundrum faced by the Community between the need to widen its political membership and deepen its trade/technical linkages. The vast spread of Congolese territory coupled with ongoing political instability and severe economic neglect undermines the already limited political consensus within the SADC. The inclusion of the DRC has emphasised the SADC's political rather than trade focus, yet the divisions within the Community over the Congo have deepened any political divisions that were already present.

Conclusion

Recent rebel military victories over Kabila's forces could threaten Lubumbashi and Kolwezi in the southern province of Katanga. This has heightened Kabila's sense of vulnerability yet, paradoxically, could improve the chances of a regionally-brokered peace agreement being struck. It is likely that Pretoria will continue to push for a regional agreement, particularly since as the SA government seeks to win appeal for its African renaissance vision in the run-up to the 1999 election. Critical to the success of the diplomatic initiative is the need for a common understanding between Kampala and Luanda. Growing opposition in Zimbabwe to the war could force Mugabe to play a more positive role in this regard. No peace-enforcement type of operation by the international community is likely at this stage, and even a limited peacekeeping/ observer mission is problematic without the total withdrawal of all foreign forces and the establishment of a firm peace settlement at the diplomatic level.

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