



Situation Report

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The United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC): Experiences and Lessons

A landscape of seemingly "infinite impossibilities"

Five years ago, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was engulfed in what some called "Africa's First World War". Six foreign armies and numerous Congolese militias ravaged a country the size of Western Europe. In the globe's most deadly conflict since the Second World War, nearly 4 million people died, 800,000 refugees were scattered over the nine neighboring countries, and some 3 million Congolese were internally displaced. State services collapsed and, in an ironic, cruel twist of history, the Congo – one of Africa's potentially richest countries – became one of the world's poorest. The Congo's wars illustrated the post-Cold War reality: that most conflicts today are intra-state rather than inter-state – that is to say, they are conflicts in which internal factions fight for control of government, resources or territory, with or without external support. These conflicts usually occur in a "failed" or largely dysfunctional state.

Today, the sad heritage of this "silent war", and the preceding years of chronic instability and corruption, is still everywhere to be seen: an estimated 1,200 Congolese continue to die every day as a consequence of poverty, disease, hunger and violence, including shocking levels of gender-based physical abuse.

In addition, the Congo finds itself in a region characterised by trouble during the first forty-years of independence. In Central Africa there have been 13 UN peacekeeping operations in 7 countries since independence, 10 of these since 1990. Between 1994 and 2004 alone, the conflicts in Angola, Burundi, Congo and Rwanda caused an estimated six million deaths; countless wounded and HIV infected; more than 3.5 million IDPs; and nearly 4 million refugees. These figures do not reflect the incalculable economic and infrastructural destruction brought about by these wars.

Since the end of the Cold War, armed conflict or the prospect of armed conflict on a global scale or between world powers, has given way to a period of smaller, regional intra-state conflicts. These wars have been deadly, nonetheless, partly because of the proliferation of small arms, as the downsizing of many armies in the post-Cold War era resulted in surpluses of weaponry, which headed to the markets, in many cases with little or no control. For peacekeeping to have a chance of success, of course, there must be a peace to keep, and too often there has been none, in part because of the vicious circle of illegal arms bought with the proceeds of natural resources illegally exploited.

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In these unpromising circumstances, few observers believed that the Congo – that perpetual “Heart of Darkness” – coming out of two civil wars over five years with virtually no roads, no history of democracy or multi-party elections in forty years, no census in twenty years, and no identity cards in living memory – would ever be able to rise to the challenge of ending the conflict and holding its first democratic elections since independence in 1960.

But today the Congo is full of hope and promise following a remarkable series of steps towards democracy. December 2005 saw the completion of a five-month process of registering 25 million out of an estimated 28 million eligible voters and the adoption of a new constitution through a popular referendum – a document that most had never seen and very few had read in this largely illiterate society. In the two rounds of elections held in July and October 2006, Congolese voters chose their leadership for the first time since independence in 1960 – in polls held with surprisingly little violence – elections declared free and fair by all international electoral observer missions, including those from the United States, Europe and South Africa.

For the first time in forty years, the Congo now has legitimate institutions at virtually every level – President, National Assembly, Senate, Governors, Provincial Assemblies. Planning is now underway for local elections in 2008 to complete the initial electoral cycle.

In addition, the troubled Central African region has also been evolving in a positive manner over the past five or six years. Almost all the countries of the region have held elections recently, and the others are scheduled to follow shortly, starting with Angola’s parliamentary elections in 2008.

Process becomes the substance

We might ask how all these positive developments came about? One of the most instructive lessons to be learned from the Congo experience over the past eight or nine years is that **process** is all-important. In the Congo, in my view, the process ultimately became the substance. A credible, effective process is key to meeting peace-keeping challenges. At least three or four elements are essential to a successful process:

- **International legal framework** (In the case of the Congo, this consists, among other elements, of five major peace agreements since 1999; several other regional accords; more than 35 UN Security Council Resolutions and 24 reports by the Secretary-General to the Security Council; the International Great Lakes Pact on Security, Stability, Peace and Development; and a mandate that is appropriate to the crisis – one recognises that each conflict is *sui generis*.)
- **Implementing mechanisms** (MONUC, the International Committee to Accompany the Transition – CIAT; the Tripartite Commission Plus; Joint Verification Commission and Joint Verification Teams; the Eminent Persons Group; the Contact Group, *et al.*);
- **Financial resources** commensurate with the mandate (for example, with some \$5 billion invested in the Congolese Peace Process, MONUC is currently funded at \$1 billion per year; and national and provincial elections at \$495 million.)
- **Regional support:** although post-Cold War conflicts are largely intra-state, these can, and often do, have wider regional ramifications. Unsupportive neighbours can play a significant spoiling role. Their support of their neighbour’s peace process, on the other hand, can be critical to its success; by denying re-supply routes and safe havens to warring factions, for example, a neighbouring state can push these armed groups to abandon the military option in favour of negotiations.
- **Popular determination:** the essential element in the entire peace process, of course, is the **will of a people** to be free and to elect their leaders freely. This was true in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. It is true today in the Congo.

The people's thirst for change – after four decades of dictatorship, impunity, corruption and mismanagement punctuated by two deadly wars – has been the main driving force of the Congolese electoral process. All of us who had the honour and privilege of witnessing this historic landmark have enormous admiration for the Congolese people; in offering this lesson to the world, the Congolese people have a new sense of pride and dignity.

In terms of political will, great credit also goes to the DRC's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) – and in particular to its President, Abbé Malu Malu – none of whose members had ever voted. Starting from scratch, and operating in a war-torn country with little to no infrastructure, poor communications and limited transportation, the IEC registered more than 25 million voters in a period of five months; and held a referendum on the new constitution and national and provincial elections, for which the IEC trained and managed 260,000 electoral workers, often in precarious security conditions. The Electoral Commission delivered to and recovered ballots from 50,000 polling stations across the country under tight deadlines, sometimes using dugout canoes, headloads, motorbikes and bicycles to transport the ballots. Despite criticism, pressure and occasional threats from diverse quarters, the Electoral Commission was undaunted in carrying out its historic mission.

It is important to point out that the Congolese elections are the largest that the UN has ever supported: the largest country (the size of Western Europe); the largest electorate (25 million); and the largest challenge (no roads; no identity cards; no recent census; no multi-party elections in 40 years). In fact, the United Nations has never undertaken anything quite on the scale of the Congolese elections.

Regional support

Let me return for a moment to the importance of regional organisations and actors. UN multilateral peace operations are best undertaken in close collaboration with regional and sub-regional organisations. This worked well in Haiti, for example, where the UN furnished the peacekeeping force and the Organisation of American States (OAS) provided the human rights mission personnel, with substantial UN financing. In the same vein, in the Congo, despite the heavy UN investment in personnel, aircraft and financing, the process has remained quintessentially African. Our principal regional partners, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and, of course, South African President Mbeki, have been and remain major players in the process.

In addition, on two occasions, at the United Nations' request, the European Union came to MONUC's aid in emergencies: from June to September 2003 in Ituri with "Operation Artemis", a multilateral military force led by France to stabilise the regional capital, Bunia, and give the Secretary-General the three months he needed to assemble an Ituri brigade. Again, from July to December 2006, "EUFOR", a multilateral force led by Germany and France, helped MONUC to maintain stability in Kinshasa during the elections. This paradigm could be replicated to give other current and future United Nations missions a temporary surge capacity during emergencies.

The United Nations, however, still remains the single organisation capable of mounting a multidisciplinary response under the leadership of a single "commander in theatre" – the Special Representative of the Secretary-General – bringing together political, military, electoral, human rights, humanitarian and other skills under a single strategy in any part of the world.

Sustainment strategy

A plethora of tasks remain ahead for the Congo – and for the UN and the international community. A number of these tasks are left over from the transition: establishing a capable, responsible army and civilian police force; justice reform, including courts and prisons and generally helping establish the rule of law; local elections; an end to impunity and corruption; and numerous other issues still to be addressed. All of this requires time and raises the question: are UN member

states prepared to sustain their commitment in the Congo over a significantly long period to ensure that successful elections produce longer term stability ?

A major global challenge to us all in the global community is to remain engaged following successful elections in countries emerging from conflict. Our record as the international community in assisting “post-conflict” societies is better than our performance in responding to the immediate requirements of “post-electoral” societies. Ironically, the exponential increase in popular post-electoral expectations too often confronts a countervailing donor tendency to reduce support after successful elections. Since elections constitute the all-important bridge between peace-keeping and peace-building, continuity of support is vital.

The Congo provides us with a case in point. The rather remarkable international alliance that was built and maintained over the past eight years needs to continue, now more than ever. The Congo is a vast, potentially rich country that has no “lead nation” as partner; and daunting challenges await the Congo – a country in which everything is broken but the human spirit. A country in which everything is a legitimate priority, including security sector reform; humanitarian crisis; good governance; rule of law; army, police, and judicial reform, and so on.

In most post-election situations, therefore, a “sustainment strategy” is more urgent than an “exit strategy.” For this to happen, there must be a change in our own thinking. The UK’s ten-year commitment, for example, to help Sierra Leone build a new army reflects a realistic appreciation of the importance of remaining engaged if peace is to become enduring. To ensure that member states’ original investments in “post-conflict” societies achieve permanent positive results, further investment will be needed.

Congo’s economy and its vast riches will also have to be developed for the benefit of its long-suffering people to ensure longer-term growth and stability. Economically the DRC is a potential powerhouse. It has an estimated ten percent of the world’s hydroelectric potential; and more than fifty percent of Africa’s remaining rainforests. The Congo is a cornucopia of mineral resources, including diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, coltan, and cassiterite. With all these riches, the DRC need not depend on international aid for long, providing it seizes this chance to consolidate peace and develop its economic potential.

National budgets need to reflect peacekeeping realities

Three new budgetary realities in United Nations peacekeeping complicate efforts to develop and implement a “sustainment strategy”.

- The first of these is the exponential increase in the number of peacekeeping operations, leading to an massive expansion of the global budget for peacekeeping, with more growth to follow. From \$2.8 billion in 2001, for example, the United Nations’ worldwide budget for peacekeeping doubled to \$5.6 billion in 2006. It may well exceed \$7 billion in 2008.
- The number of such peace operations, 19 in all, is also unprecedented, with more than 100,000 personnel in the field – the second largest foreign deployed army in the world after the US. In 2006 alone, the UN negotiated memoranda of understanding with more than 100 troop contributing countries; MONUC’s military force itself is composed of 52 nationalities and MONUC as a whole of 116 nationalities; in 2006, the UN transported 800,000 passengers, and 160,000 metric tons of cargo by air; and operated more than 200 hospitals and clinics worldwide.
- The third new budgetary reality is the emergence of the “Big Mission”. MONUC is doing peacekeeping and supporting elections on a scale hitherto unknown in the United Nations. The same will apply in Sudan, no doubt, Elections in this Europe-size country required 106 aircraft – Africa’s second largest air fleet; 50,047 polling stations (Haiti had 890); and a budget of nearly \$500 million.

Although MONUC’s annual budget of \$1 billion is a lot of money, by any standard, it is important to recall that the United Nations has spent less than \$60 billion on

its 61 peacekeeping missions since 1948. This is less than the latest United States budget supplement for one year for two countries. This figure represents also less than one tenth of the world's annual expenditure on arms purchases. In any event, we know from hard-won experience that the most costly peace is a better bargain than the cheapest war.

In addition to being the organisation of choice for peacekeeping, the United Nations also keeps the peace more economically than can be done bilaterally. Two recent studies concerning peacekeeping in Haiti – one by the Rand Corporation, the other a GAO survey – reached the same conclusion independently: that United Nations peacekeeping in Haiti cost only half that of the United States peacekeeping effort there.

There are other reasons that the United Nations has become the organisation of choice for peacekeeping. Some governments and organisations have the requisite resources yet may not be perceived as impartial; while others with an image of impartiality may lack the resources. As a Security Council institution, a United Nations peacekeeping mission has the resources, and the image, reputation and record of impartiality to get the job done.

The Cold War's end has ushered in a new era of international activism in which negotiations and peacekeeping in intra-state conflicts are undergoing unprecedented expansion. This offers, for perhaps the first time on a global scale, an alternative to force in the settlement of disputes.

To be successful, these peacekeeping operations require new skills, regional partners, and more aggressive Chapter VII operations to protect civilian life. A new approach by governments is also currently required, one that recognises peacekeeping as a permanent global concern, both in budgetary and other terms. Admittedly, at a time of an exponential expansion of peacekeeping operations, the budgetary implications of these requirements are significant, but not if measured against the considerably greater loss on investment of abandoning "post-electoral" societies prematurely.

In summary, therefore, some of the lessons that have been learned from peacekeeping in the Congo and elsewhere are as follows:

1. Peacekeeping presupposes there is a peace to keep;
2. The changed nature of conflicts – now largely intra-state conflicts – requires new skills, notably peacekeeping and nation building capacity;
3. Resources should match the mandate;
4. A viable process is key to successful peacekeeping and requires an international legal framework; implementing mechanisms; adequate finances; and popular support;
5. Support by regional organisations and neighbouring countries is highly desirable;
6. Although conflicts share some generic characteristics, each is *sui generis*;
7. A Chapter VII mandate offers greater flexibility and more options than Chapter VI;
8. Peacekeeping's "exit strategy" consists of (a) electorally-legitimated state institutions and (b) sufficient in-country post-electoral capacity to protect citizens and borders without UN peacekeepers;
9. The post-electoral period is critical to durable peace, requiring sustained engagement;
10. As a permanent global concern, peacekeeping needs to be reflected commensurately in member states' budgets and the UN structure.

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