

The DRC Diplomatic Flurry: Quo Vadis?

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the seven-month rebellion in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continue apace. What are the various efforts and what have they achieved? What are the lessons from all the activity?

Diplomatic initiatives were stepped up at all levels during the last week of February 1999, and continued in the first week of March 1999 with talks between President **Nelson Mandela**, Zimbabwean President **Robert Mugabe** and Namibian President **Sam Nujoma**.

Internationally, diplomatic efforts by the United States resumed when the US Under-Secretary of State (Political Affairs), **Thomas Pickering**, held talks with President Robert Mugabe, on Sunday 28 February. *Pickering's trip to Harare followed shortly after talks on Thursday 25 February, between the US special envoy to the Great Lakes region, **Howard Wolpe** and Mugabe.* Pickering's visit indicated that the US was playing down recent differences with Mugabe over the detention of two journalists, in order to secure the latter's co-operation in achieving a peaceful solution to conflict in the DRC. Earlier in February, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, **Witney W. Schneidman**, paid a visit to Luanda on a fact-finding mission. Also on 25 February, the British Foreign Office Minister, **Tony Lloyd**, held talks with Mugabe. Lloyd, was on a four-day, nine-country mission aimed at seeking a peaceful resolution to the DRC conflict on behalf of the British Prime Minister **Tony Blair**. He thereafter flew to Luanda to hold similar talks with Angolan President **José Eduardo dos Santos**.

Mugabe, given his military support for **Laurent Kabila's** DRC government, is a key target for diplomatic efforts to end the conflict. He is also the chairman of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, a guise which he has used to justify military involvement in the DRC. Pickering, Wolpe and Lloyd were apparently optimistic on reaching a negotiated settlement in the DRC. Pickering, on his first stop of an African tour scheduled to include Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria, described

his talks with Mugabe as 'wonderful'. Wolpe said he believed 'the space can be created for serious negotiations on both the internal and external issues that underlie the conflict'. Lloyd reflected that Mugabe had agreed on the need for an early ceasefire and negotiated settlement, though his meeting with the Zimbabwean leader was apparently short and heated.

This latest flurry of international missions has raised important questions. Did the high-level US and British talks with Mugabe achieve the kind of commitment needed for a peaceful solution to the DRC conflict? How different was this round of shuttle diplomacy by Western countries from those previously undertaken? Do Africans still need the

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West to solve their problems and does this suggest the end of the much-vaunted diplomatic campaign to bring about 'African solutions to African problems'? Did Kabila's announcement on 20 February 1999 of dissolving his cabinet and unbanning political parties stimulate these diplomatic efforts?

On returning from a summit with his allies in Kinshasa from 28 February to 1 March, Mugabe announced additional backing for Kabila as a 're-examination of other means' to put an end to the war in the Congo. Although Mugabe declined to divulge actual details of the support offered, military analysts argued that this was as good as announcing an all-out offensive. This has led diplomatic sources to suggest that this round of US and British peace missions to Harare has failed. European Union Special Envoy **Aldo Ajello** was pessimistic after his own tour of the region during the same time. He said that the Congo crisis was 'far from a solution'.

Bilateral efforts at the regional level were undertaken on 24 February when President Nelson Mandela held talks with Namibian President Sam Nujoma

in South Africa. Although both Heads of State declined to provide any detail on the content of their discussions, the conflict in the DRC was nevertheless at the centre of the talks. At the same time, President **Joaquim Chissano** of Mozambique, the Vice-Chairman of SADC and a mediator in the DRC conflict, met with President dos Santos. Their talks were focused on the ongoing conflict in Angola, and Angola's role in the DRC. South African Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo, was also dispatched to Luanda on 24 February to discuss the issue of conflict in the DRC with Dos Santos.

Zambian President **Frederick Chiluba**, a key mediator in the Congo conflict, is not a welcome visitor in Angola at the moment given Luanda's allegations of Zambia's role in resupplying UNITA with arms. The Zambian President appeared in Uganda on 27 February to hold talks with President **Yoweri Museveni** on a possible ceasefire and endorsement of Chiluba's peace plan. The Zambian President was also scheduled to meet with the Rwandan government, but had to cut short his trip after the Lusaka bombings on 28 February. President Nelson Mandela also held talks in Cape Town with DRC opposition leader, **Bishop Musengwa**, on 25 February 1999. Reports indicate that Sam Nujoma was in Libya on Saturday, 27 February. Libya has backed Chad's military involvement in the Congo, and Nujoma, a new mediator in the conflict, could have been securing Colonel **Muammar Gaddafi's** support for a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement.

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A Chronology of Diplomatic Efforts

The diplomatic efforts over the DRC can be divided into various levels: First-track (governmental) initiatives at the international, continental (OAU), regional (SADC) and bilateral levels. Second-track efforts have been conducted by some Non-Governmental Organisations in South Africa.

First Track Efforts

Outlined below is a selection of the meetings which have occurred within the various SADC, OAU, UN, and bilateral efforts. The latter includes US, UK and the mooted Portuguese initiative of Foreign Minister **Jaime Gama**.

International:

- 28 August - 3 September 1998: at the 12th Non-Aligned Members Summit held in Durban, President Mandela called an urgent meeting with the leaders from both sides of the Congo divide. In what was referred to as a 'summit within a summit', SADC leaders together with the UN Secretary-General **Kofi Annan** agreed upon a speedy and peaceful solution to the DRC crisis.
- 23 September 1998: Deputy UN Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, **Martin Griffiths** commenced monitoring massacres of civilians and the humanitarian situation around the Great Lakes.

- 29 September 1998: the European Union's Special Envoy **Aldo Ajello** started his twelve-day trip to several African countries, including South Africa, to find a possible solution to this crisis.
- 22 October 1998: UN Security Council called for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the military offensive and hostilities, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC.
- 30 October 1998: US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs **Susan Rice** commenced a regional tour with the aim of brokering peace in the Great Lakes region. She held talks with all parties in the DRC conflict and asserted the need for a diplomatic solution to the then three-month war.
- 26-28 November 1998: at the 20th Franco-African Summit held in Paris, Ugandan President **Yoweri Museveni** and Rwandan President **Pasteur Bizumungu** were verbally attacked by 34 African leaders for invading the DRC. French President **Jacques Chirac** announced that a ceasefire agreement would be signed in December 1998. Kabila dismissed such claims while the rebels rejected ceasefire proposals made in their absence.
- 9-11 February 1999: US Defence Secretary **William Cohen** made an official three-day visit to South Africa. He reaffirmed the US position about finding a peaceful solution to the DRC conflict, reiterating that there could be no military solution.
- 15-18 February 1999: Belgian Prime Minister **Jean-Luc Dehaene** visited South Africa and called on all parties in the DRC conflict to reach a peaceful solution through talks.

Continental:

- 10 September 1998: Defence Ministers from the DRC and its allies, together with those from Rwanda and Uganda met in Addis Ababa to discuss, under the auspices of the OAU, means of implementing a ceasefire accord agreed to at the Pretoria and Victoria Falls summits. A ceasefire agreement was drafted but not signed because Rwanda refused to admit that it had troops in the DRC.
- 17-18 December 1998: Leaders at the OAU summit in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso reaffirmed their support for peace initiatives agreed to at the Franco-African summit in Paris.

Regional:

- 7 August 1998: three South African Cabinet Ministers were dispatched to Lubumbashi on a fact-finding mission.
- 8 August 1998: a summit called by President Mugabe at Victoria Falls, involving Angola, the DRC, Namibia and Botswana, established a commission to investigate Kabila's charges against Rwanda and Uganda. South Africa was not invited.

- 23 August 1998: the Pretoria Summit, called by President Mandela, issued a communique calling for an immediate ceasefire in the DRC. This summit which was attended by SADC Heads of State together with leaders from Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, produced a ten-point plan on a ceasefire, troop standstill and negotiations.
- 8 September 1998: a summit at Victoria Falls produced an agreement drawn up by the seven attending Heads of State, but with the exclusion of the rebels who were not permitted to attend the formal talks.
- 14 September 1998: the SADC annual Heads of State summit held in Mauritius, where Kabila was urged to meet the rebels.
- 24 September 1998: Central African Summit in the Gabonese Capital Libreville, organised the President Omar Bongo to discuss peace mechanisms. Attended by Chad, the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Angola, Congo-Brazzaville and Namibia.
- 19-20 September 1998: **Zambian President Chiluba** and President **Benjamin Mkapa** of Tanzania met with Rwandan and Ugandan leaders as part of SADC efforts to resolve the DRC crisis.
- 29-30 September 1998: SADC army leadership agreed after two days of talks in Luanda that a threat to any member of the 14-member regional grouping could justify allied military intervention.
- 26 October 1998: meeting of SADC foreign and defence ministers in Lusaka. The talks was also attended by representatives of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, the OAU Secretary-General **Salim Ahmed Salim**, a delegation from the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) and Libyan observers.
- 18 January 1999: Windhoek summit, attended by the five nations with troops in the DRC. Namibian President Sam Nujoma announced that a draft ceasefire would shortly be signed by the rebels, without a face-to-face meeting with Kinshasa. This has yet to be accomplished.

Bilateral:

- 6 November 1998: President Mandela hosts talks with Rwandan Vice-President **Paul Kagame**. The latter admitted that Rwandan troops were backing the rebels trying to oust Kabila.
- 29 November 1998: President Mandela hosts talks with the RCD leader, **Ernest Wamba dia Wamba**.
- 26-28 November 1998: President Chissano staged bilateral talks with President Museveni at the Franco-African summit.
- 5 March 1999: President Mandela hosted President Mugabe and President Nujoma in Pretoria. All three

leaders were confident progress was being made in bringing about a peaceful solution to the DRC conflict.

Second Track Efforts by NGOs

- Second track efforts were embarked upon by the Africa study group of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). On 11 November 1998, the group hosted the president of the Federal Committee of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), the main opposition group in the DRC, **Mutomo Kabundji**. On 3 December 1998, **Thomas Nziratimana**, the representative of the Congolese Coalition for Democracy (CDC) in southern Africa, explained the political agenda of the RCD.
- The Durban-based African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (Accord) has been engaged with key role players in the DRC conflict and has been facilitating talks between the different parties.
- Policy Studies (CPS) hosted a conference on the Great Lakes crisis.

Where to now?

From the onset diplomatic efforts have been, and continue to be, dogged by Kabila's refusal to meet in face-to-face talks with the rebels in spite of the considerable diplomatic efforts.

The RCD, in turn, refuses to accept any ceasefire plan that they have no role in drafting. A regional peace summit scheduled to take place in Lusaka during December 1998 has been continuously postponed as a result of Kabila's refusal to meet with the rebels. Growing tension between Angola and Zambia has also led to President dos Santos's objections to meet in Lusaka or to endorse any peace plan drawn up by Chiluba. However Namibia is likely to object to a shift in venue to Botswana (a mooted option) given the unsettled border and extradition issues between the two countries.

Nevertheless a regional summit is crucial for the signing of a ceasefire. South African NGOs may play a role, despite Kabila's general suspicion of South African intentions.

Possible Lessons?

One should not mistake diplomatic activity on the DRC for actual achievement. No quick and easy solution is possible, and a lack of coordination between the different and complex diplomatic efforts complicates finding a viable avenue for sustained mediation. A more controlled diplomatic process is needed, yet it is not clear who can or should control such a process. African efforts continue to trip over personality tensions, past suspicions and fragile egos.