

Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo Cauldron complexities and Shabby Foreign Meddling

الصراعات في جمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية: تعقيدات الوضع الراهن والتدخل الأجنبي المشين

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Abstract:

The violent events occurring in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) proved tragic and somehow inhuman. The scramble over natural resources or power rivalries may not be sufficient to explain the complex and enduring features of these events. However, the most horrendous feeling concerning the conflicts plaguing this country's development for many decades, resides in the silence observed by the international community and the world media over the persistence of mass killings, dour displacement of the populations, severe economic rampage, and outrageous interference of neighbouring countries for contemptible power influence.

This paper consists of a profound outcry in the face of these forgotten conflicts, the indifference shown by international organizations, world major powers, and human consciousness. It goes further beyond the attempts to complete an analysis of the Congolese spectrum and tragedies for mere academic purposes.

Keywords: Keywords: Democratic Republic of Congo/Foreign interventions: Human disasters/Natural resources/Violent conflicts

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Introduction

Like many African countries, DRC is witnessing enduring violent conflicts, because of the colonial legacy impact, the Post-colonial State crisis, and a scramble over its huge mineral resources. As a British historian, Dan Snow rightly pointed out "The Congo's apocalyptic present is a direct product of decisions and actions taken over the past five centuries" (Snow 2023). Like in many other African countries, such as Somalia, Sudan, Libya, the Congolese conflicts seem intricate, long lasting, and sometimes, strange and even ludicrous.

The Congolese conflicts concern a variety of political crises, the implication of several domestic actors and many foreign contenders. Indeed, they involve disparate centrifugal ruling elites, distinct insurgent movements, and the military incursions of Rwanda and Uganda, because of geographic contiguity, ethnical linkages, economic stakes, and regional leadership ambitions.

DRC went through several violent conflicts from 1998 to 2003 resulting in 5.4 million victims after the genocide committed against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 and 7 million dead people for the whole decade 1996-2006. The rate of mortality is 60% higher than the average in Sub-Sahara Africa (International Rescue 1988), a region that experiments also civil wars, the spread of terrorism, and separatist movements.

The conflicts in Congo encompass the first war (1996-7) including the effects of the genocide that occurred in Rwanda and the second war that broke out in 1998, which resulted in the deterioration of the relations between Kigali and Kinshasa (The Center 2024). Recent developments of the conflict in Congo consisted of the emergence of a radical Islamist movement, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), operating in Uganda from the eastern parts of Congo, and the resurfacing of the March 23 Movement (M23), made up primarily by Tutsi militias and supposedly backed by Rwanda. This movement succeeded in gaining control of large swathes of the rich province of North Kivu in July 2023. In return, Kinshasa accused Kigali of supporting rival Hutu militias, such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (DFLR). The implication of neighbouring countries such as Rwanda, and Uganda, has extended the Congolese war to a complex regional crisis along ethnic lines and over the geographic confines of the Great Lakes region.

Neither the Stabilization Mission of the United Nations to Congo (MONUSCO), nor the deployment of troops by the South African Development Community (SADC) or the East African Community (EAC), were able to put an end to the Congolese tragedy. On the contrary, the Congolese President Tshisekedi urged the UN mission to withdraw from Congo before December 2023, after a series of street protests. The EAC moved out its forces shortly before the New Year, but the UN Security Council extended the mandate of MONUSCO through the end of 2024 because it feared a security vacuum in this country. Since, then, renewed and bitter clashes between the Congolese regular army and the rebels of M 23 in particular have continued with much brutality and caused more victims and more displaced people.

These conflicts are quite old, as their roots dig into the ancient history of DRC, concerning the ethnical and socio-economic ferment of the conflicts facing this country. Their power dynamics consist of the contention of ruling elites for domination and influence, and the ‘curse or the blessing’ constituted by the existence of immense natural resources, mainly mineral deposits, which attract, inevitably, the lust of foreign powers.

Conversely, such protracted conflicts, human tragedies, and chaotic prospects did not spring from the figment of imagination, but they seem not substantial enough to attract the concerns of international public opinion. It is not striking that some incidents considered minor in many parts of the world have benefited from the intervention of major powers and coverage from international media.

To dwell on possible extrapolations, one cannot, unfortunately, refrain from assuming that what is happening in the Congo does not match the intensity of the tragedy occurring in Palestine, which has resulted in worldwide reactions for geostrategic reasons, identity confrontation, the survival of nations, and even for the clash of civilizations, in the pure line of Huntington’s postulate (Huntington 2000).

Although, RDC boasts the second largest territory (2.345 million sq./km), the fourth most populated country in Africa (105.6 million in 2024), and enjoys sizeable natural resources, it is situated in a remote place, at the heart of an "obscure" continent regarded as a scramble for raw materials (Iratni 2024), and considered sometimes with contempt by some world powers.

Political map of the Democratic Republic of Congo



Source: Canadian Military Journal, 11, 3, 2011.

This map shows the huge territory of DRC, the multiplicity of distinct provinces and the great number of neighbouring countries with long and porous borders.

The Congolese conflict constitutes a low-intense conflict on the scale of international affairs concerns, not susceptible to undermining international peace and stability. It is not also, a conflict to tilt the responsibility of the United Nations or shake up the perceptions of the Security Council, or the United States, considered as the gendarme, or the 'reluctant Sheriff' of the world after the end of the Cold War (Haass 1997).

During the semi-final tie of the African Cup of Nations played between RDC and Cote d'Ivoire in Abidjan, on 7 February 2024, the Congolese players, under camera lights, and before singing the national anthem, mimed with their finger, a gun

pointed at the head, and the other hand placed stickily over the mouth. This poignant message aimed to denounce the silence adopted by the international community in the face of the tragic conflict occurring in Congo (Pierre 2024). What an impressive, passionate, and touching mimic expression that transcends any other vibrant image or lyrical public discourse! As Jacques Bahati, a senior policy analyst at Africa Faith and Justice, rightly put it "To forget about the unfolding human tragedy happening in Congo daily will be a grave mistake" (Bahati 2023).

The conflicts in RDC have a long history that may go beyond the scope of this study. The focus will concern the period stretching from 2021 that witnessed the revival of M23 as the most dangerous and violent rebel movement opposing the Congolese regime, coupled with increasing meddling of Rwanda and Uganda in the Congolese domestic affairs (Tassamba 2024). Such interference has placed DRC on the brink of the war with its Rwanda neighbour. The paper will try to assess that, beyond the motivations explaining conflicts based on political rivalries and the scramble over Congo's riches, lay subjective reasons linked to human arrogance, greed, and irrational considerations.

The main contention of this study lies in the assumption that these conflicts are neither necessary nor unavoidable, for the reason that they are neither conflicts nor wars. They are, in fact, no wars. Such a contention received a strong confirmation when I came across a highly pertinent and appropriate article published by Jeffrey Gettleman in 2010, when he was then, the Head of the New York Times bureau in Nairobi. He poignantly captured the realities of the Congolese tragedy by asserting "There is a very simple reason why some of Africa's bloodiest, most brutal wars never seem to end: They are not really wars. Not in the traditional sense, at least. The combatants do not have much of an ideology; they do not have clear goals. They could not care less about taking over capitals or major cities - in fact, they prefer the deep bush, where it is far easier to commit crimes. Today's rebels seem especially uninterested in winning converts, content instead to steal other people's children, stick Kalashnikovs or axes in their hands, and make them do the killing. Look closely at some of the continent's most intractable conflicts, from the rebel-laden creeks of the Niger Delta to the inferno in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and this is what you will find" (Gettleman 2010).

Assessing the long gestation of the conflicts in Congo

Since getting rid of the Belgian colonial domination, the Congo has witnessed neither effective political emancipation nor genuine economic progress. It has rather gone through a long cycle of secession wars, ethnic conflicts, plunder of natural resources, and meddling of neighbouring countries in its domestic affairs. In his academic research, Jacob Cloete attempted to establish whether the conflict in North Kivu in 1993 that grabbed headlines, was the starting point of the current violence in eastern Congo. He argues that it was the culmination of a much older one rooted in Belgian and German colonialisms, by explaining that: based on a racist notion popular among African colonialists at the time, the two colonial administrations gave

privileged status to some of the local population based on ethnicity (Conflict in the RDC 2022).

Despite the sacrifice made by Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of Congo (June-September 1960) to maintain his new independent country free and unified Congo, two secession wars occurred in 1960 in the provinces of Katanga and Kasai. Since that year, the country has plunged into continuous wars and rebellions, despite a period of peace that followed the long reign of the dictator Mobutu Sesse Seko (1960-1995). Hard-negotiated democratic experiment took place resulting in the reunification of the country, the setting up of a transitional government from 2003 to 2005, and the organization of successive democratic elections amidst political turmoil and violence.

Conflicts in the Congo ignited from the burning ashes of the genocide in which extremists from the Hutu tribe exterminated over one million minority ethnic Tutsis mainly, in Rwanda in 1994. This irrational, foolish, and unpredictable event paved the way for the first Congolese war (1998-1997) because of the spill over from the Rwanda genocide, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of people fleeing to find refuge in neighbouring Congo.

During this war, the Tutsi-dominated rebels of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), led by Laurent-Desire Kabila, and troops from the neighbouring country Rwanda, which accused Mobutu's regime of providing refuge to the elements accused of perpetrating the genocide, carried out violent offensives in the Kivu province located in the eastern part of the Congo. Moreover, troops from the regular armies of Uganda, and Angola also invaded RDC to crack down on Hutu fighters emanating from Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Eritrea, and Burundi. These incursions accentuated the regional dimension of the Congolese conflict, which has still not withered away.

The warlord Laurent-Désiré Kabila seized power in May 1997, a new government was installed and Zaire was renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo, known as RCD. President Kabila closed an eye on the massacre committed against the Hutu population conducted by his Rwandan allies, according to media reports (Al Jazeera 2024).

The second Congolese war started when President Laurent-Désiré Kabila decided to push out Rwandan troops, as well as military units belonging to Ugandan and Burundi from his country. He also removed ethnic Tutsis from his government to have a free hand in managing Congolese affairs and lessen the military presence of some of his allied neighbouring countries. To achieve these strategic objectives, he moved to build a new coalition comprising forces from Namibia, Angolan Zimbabwe, and Zambia. As a retaliation, Rwanda's leader Paul Kagame backed a new rebel group, the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), and invaded the contiguous eastern part of Congo intending to create insecurity and turmoil in this region. Uganda also supported the Rally for Congolese Democracy to expand further the conflict in Congo.

Amidst insecurity and aggressions from neighbouring countries, Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rule appeared not much different from that of Mobutu, because the economy remained in severe disrepair and corruption proved endemic. Moreover, he launched a strong centralization programme to restore the State's prominence and expand his authority over large portions of the Congolese territory. Such Jacobin tendencies infuriated minorities in the western parts of this country and led to renewed rebellions and insurgencies against the central authorities (Kennes 2005).

When, presumably bodyguards, killed Laurent-Désiré Kabila in January 2001, his son Joseph seized power and continued past politics amid persistent rebellions in the eastern parts of the country. The insurgencies continued with more acuity when 300 troops from the Congress (CNDP) revolted in April 2012 against the poor treatment they received after joining the regular army (FARDC), following a cease-fire signed between the Tutsi-dominated Congress and the regime led by Joseph Kabila. The CNDP militias formed the M23, declared war against the Congolese regime, and succeeded in seizing Goma and several other towns, before being pushed back in 2013 by the FARDC, with the effective backing of a special UN force," a rare offensive brigade authorized by the Security Council under the mandate of MONUSCO."(The Center for Preventive Action 2024). As a result, M23 gave up military operations and went into lethargy until 2022.

The rise to power of Félix Tshisekedi did not help appease violent tensions in RDC, after the tumultuous presidential elections held in December 2018 and the prior political context marked by the determination of Joseph Kabila to extend unduly his mandate. Indeed, after the election of Tshisekedi, violent fights continued in North Kivu and expanded to the gold-rich province of Ituru, despite the East African Community-led Nairobi Peace Process launched in June 2022 and the Luanda Roadmap proposed in November of the same year that supported the negotiations between the Congolese authorities and the rebels of M23. Thus, this movement resumed fighting after a pause that lasted nearly a decade.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), with reported ties with the Islamic State and operating in eastern DRC and Uganda, has been involved in fewer violent acts than the M23 since 2013. It remains however, the most deadly threat to civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo, being responsible for over 1,000 reported fatalities in 2023 (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Strategic ADF positions in this country also allowed increased cross-border attacks into Uganda compared to the previous year, with fatalities arising from cross-border violence doubling in 2023.

Although President Tshisekedi won a second mandate in the December 2023 elections, political instability and renewed violence in the eastern parts of Congo did not stop as clashes occurred in February 2024 between the regular army and its supportive militias on the one hand, and various rebel groups, on the other.

Elections in Africa do not necessarily succeed in solving the Post-Colonial State crisis or bringing solid institutions to permit the perennial survival of the State. They allow competition between ruling groups within the process of the circulation of

elites, without sowing the seeds for political stability and the empowerment of civil societies, the only forces capable of sustaining political change and preserving the State's foundations and the continuity of a stable historical sequence.

The United Nations deployed a Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) in 2023, which took over an earlier UN mission set up in 2010 to "protect civilians, humanitarian personnel from physical threat and support the Congolese government in its stabilization and peace efforts" (Monusco). This ongoing mission did not help end the suffering of the Congolese people. MONUSCO constitutes one of the most important missions of the United Nations in the domain of peacekeeping in the world in the last three decades. It boasts more than 17.753 total personnel as of 2023, and a budget exceeding \$1 billion a year. It has provided logistic support to the Congolese regular army in its fight to reunify the country; however, it did not succeed in eradicating, the remaining pockets and the fiefdoms of rebel movements and banditry.

A political analyst, Jacques Bahati, argued that the situation in the Congo "is a combination of complex, political, economic, social, and historical factors that continue to fuel insecurity. These factors are, however so interconnected that they have together made DRC's conflict one of the deadliest and most challenging armed conflicts in the world "(Bahati 2023).

Murky features of the Congolese conflict

Disturbing features and anomalies did not fail to impact conflicts in Congo and make the evolution of the historical sequences of this country, not only complex but also as clumsy and as irrational as ever.

-The first disturbing feature marking conflicts in Congo consists of the persistence of the colonial legacy. This colonial predicament has accentuated animosities between ethnic groups, and tribes, and the continuous rebellions, starting from the first and second wars (1996-1998) to rebellions led by M23 in the early 2020s, for political ambitions and the control of the valuable natural resources of the country.

-The second disturbing anomaly lies in idiosyncratic factors and traits of personality. If rebellions occurred to topple the long dictatorship of President Mobutu from power, Laurent Desire Kabila, the leader of the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Liberation du Congo (AFDL) forged personal ambitions and did not fail to impose a personal and authoritarian rule after he rose to power in May 1997. His son, Joseph wanting to emulate the authoritarian rule of his father, refused to relinquish power after completing the second mandate permitted by the Congolese Constitution. Joseph Kabila fought as a part of the rebel forces that helped depose Mobutu. Such leniency to autocracy comes from a military career, as was the case of Mobutu, or the experiment of a warlord as with Laurent Kabila. It explains also the devotion to command, the cult of personality, respect of hierarchy, and the maintaining of internal order even through repressive means.

Paul Kagame represents a rare case of a warlord turning into an enlightened despot, or a charismatic leader unlike Charles Taylor, a guerrilla fighter before becoming the President of Liberia (1997-2003). Taylor incarnated one of the most brutal tyrants in modern African history. Kagame did not lead a revolutionary movement that fought colonialism, as Amilcar Cabral, Joachim Chissano, Robert Mugabe, Agostinho Neto, and Samora Machel, for instance, but he served as the commander of a rebel movement confronting central authorities. Revolutionary leaders, like warlords, seem tempted to erect a one-party system, impose State centralism, and practice a strong parastatal economy. However, a distinctive personality feature of Paul Kagame consists of his regional ambitions (Chabouni 2023). Like the example of the Libyan leader Kaddafi, he thinks he is bigger than his relatively small country and best entitled to regional leadership.

-The third disturbing anomaly consists of the implication of a great number of actors in the conflicts affecting the stability of Congo, as there are more than 120 warring factions in this country. The multiplicity of the intervening forces in Congo expresses the plethoric character of the rebel movements, their disparate convictions, and the impossibility of reconciling loose antagonist interests. In such a melting pot, a mosaic of tribes, cultures, and religions, and the search for political empowerment and economic embezzlement, efforts to reunite the components of the Congolese society may prove remote and hard to achieve.

-The fourth disturbing anomaly refers to the fact that rebel movements are tiny and disparate, despite their multiplicity. M23 is composed of no more than 5.000 combatants, while the Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO), formed in 1999, and operating in eastern Ituri was initially a small agricultural cooperative. However, it started to advocate for the Lendu ethnic group, believed unfairly dominated by the rival Hema ethnic group (The Center for Preventive Action 2024). This movement shifted from agro-pastoral vocation to defend a supposedly dominated tribe and moved to target mineral deposits through violent means, at the beginning of 2024. As set out, it seems hard to detect rational links between tilling a land, playing the role of a sheriff, and turning into a mineral predator.

-The fifth disturbing anomaly stems from the battle of several rebel groups, except M23, for the control of the eastern part of Congo, mostly. The provinces of North Kivu and Ituri have been under State emergency since May 2021, while another war is taking place in the South Kivu province. Thus, the threat of rebel movements does not target the control of the whole Congo. Therefore, these rebel movements cannot boast democratic values or nationalistic aspirations but express sectarian logics and economic interests, accessorially. Many of these groups enrol delinquent youngsters who resort to looting and banditry, lacking political awareness and socialization.

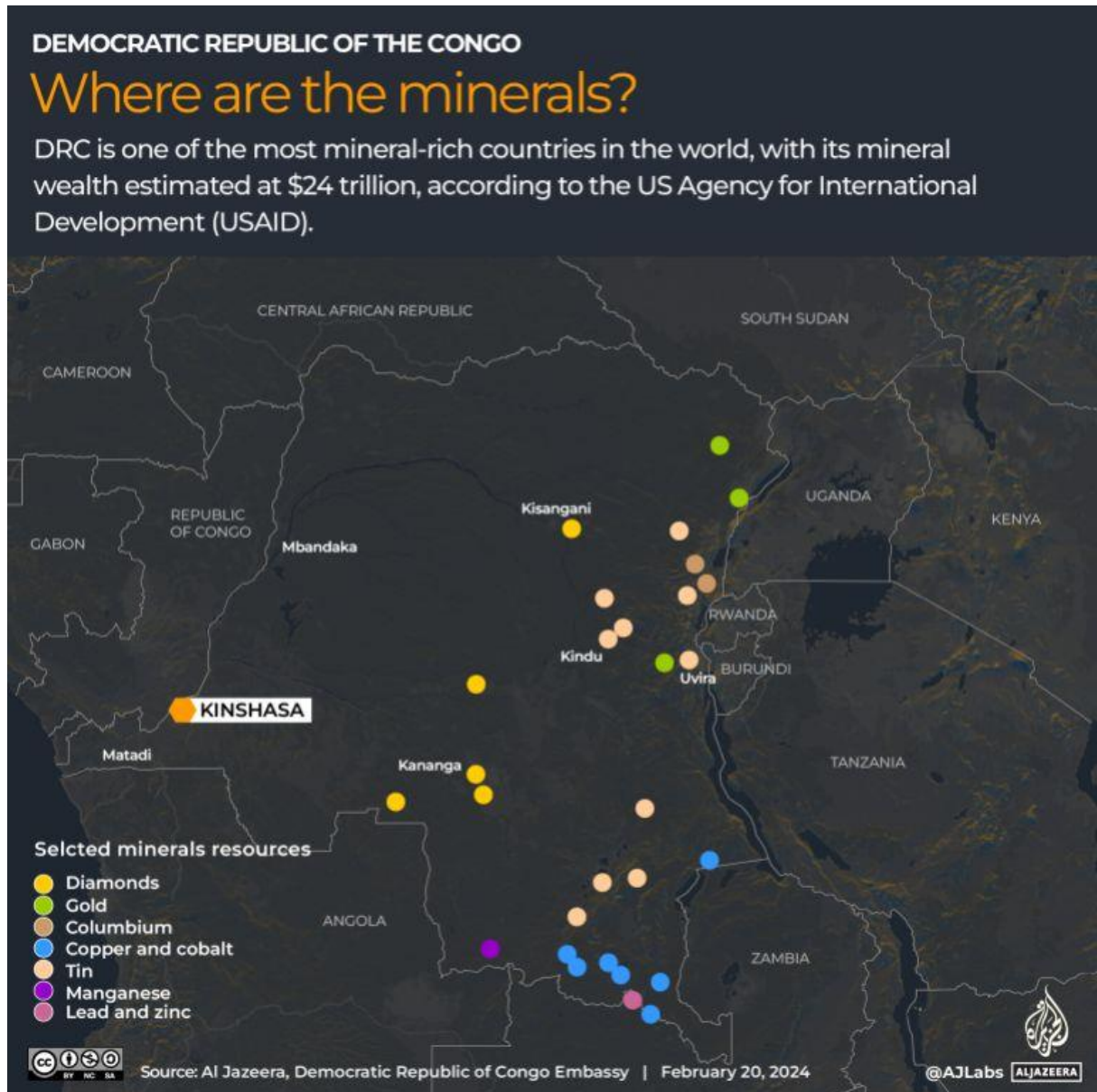
The rebel movements do not seem to pursue political objectives, as they have no intention to work to change the political nature of the regime of RDC, despite posing as democrats. In his research on the Banyamulenge, a sub-group of the

Congolese Tutsi ethnic group coming originally from the province of South Kivu, Christopher Davey found an interesting psychological observation. He argued that the experiences of this group illustrate "how violence in the Congo multiplies across borders, blurs the lines between victim and perpetrator and is used to win a place in government rather than to overthrow it" (Mania, Gacheche 2024). It is thus, not farfetched to ask how groups using violent means, pursuing sectarian policies, and benefiting from the support of neighbouring countries hostile to Congo can work for the democratization of this country.

-The sixth disturbing anomaly resides in the scramble over the natural resources of Congo. This immense country encompasses valuable minerals. The Britannica Encyclopaedia lists Congo's mineral deposits as follows:

"Minerals found in Katanga include [copper](#), [cobalt](#), [zinc](#), [cassiterite](#) (the chief source of metallic tin), [manganese](#), [coal](#), [silver](#), [cadmium](#), [germanium](#) (a brittle element used as a semiconductor), gold, [palladium](#) (a metallic element used as a [catalyst](#) and in alloys), [uranium](#), and platinum. The region west of Lake Kivu contains cassiterite, columbite-tantalite, [wolframite](#) (a source of [tungsten](#)), [beryl](#), [gold](#), and [monazite](#) (a phosphate of the [cerium](#) metals and [thorium](#)). [Lake Kivu](#) also harbours vast reserves of [methane](#), carbonic, and nitrogen natural gases. There are deposits of iron ore and gem-quality [diamonds](#) in south-central Congo, while the central regions are rich in industrial diamonds. In the northeast there are gold, coal, and iron-ore deposits; there are prospective deposits of gold, monazite, and diamonds in the northwest regions as well. Coastal Congo contains [bauxite](#), gold, and offshore deposits of petroleum. The limestone deposits that occur throughout the country are considered to be among the richest in Africa, in addition to the fact that Congo's forest reserves cover more than half of the country and are among the largest in Africa"(Britannica).

This exhaustive listing reveals that mineral deposits are not located only in the northwest part of Congo, the region targeted by rebel movements, in particular. In sum, Congo encompasses as much as 70% of the world's cobalt supply and huge quantities of Coltan, used to produce gadgets like PlayStations and phones. The following map shows the geographical location of Congo's mineral deposits:



As this map shows, mineral deposits are numerous and varied and well spread over many parts of RDC. In addition, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) evaluates the wealth of Congo at \$ 24 trillion. These assets would not only feed the Congolese population and largely cover the insatiable appetite of the warring factions and the lust of neighbouring countries for many decades to come.

-The seventh disturbing anomaly consists of the setting up of militias and "Mai Mai" vigilante groups jointly called the Wazalendos, supported military by current President Felix Tshisekedi. However, Some "Mai-Mai" rebel groups, consisting of local and community-based Congolese militias originally formed to resist the invasion of Rwandan forces, have recently moved to exploit the conflict for their advantage through looting, cattle rustling, and banditry (Wolfe 2020).

According to according to a *Human Rights Watch report released in 2022*, many rebel groups were assumed to committing extrajudicial civilian killings, sexual assaults, and exploiting local communities, (The Center for Preventive Action 2024).

-The eighth disturbing anomaly consists of the use of the eastern portions of the Congolese territory by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which claims to fight for an Islamic state in Uganda where Muslims make up a minority of between 15 and 35% of the population. The Congolese central authority provided support to ADF, in retaliation for the incursions carried out by Ugandan troops inside the territory of Congo.

Regional meddling and foreign powers stakes

Specific features of the conflict in Congo reside in the involvement of various rival tribes originating from this country and its neighbours in continuous violent rebellions against the successive regimes of Kinshasa and on the attractiveness for natural resources, Congo has in the eyes of foreign powers. Moreover, neither the intervention of the United Nations, nor the good offices carried out by AU and the African regional communities, nor the relief initiatives initiated by European countries, have succeeded in halting this conflict and its atrocities.

It may be worth focusing on two paradigms to scrutinize meaningfully the intricate complexities of the conflict in Congo, the various and contradictory interests pursued, insatiably, by its neighbours and foreign powers, as well as the efforts, of the international community, although timid, to solve this conflict which has proved vain so far.

-The first paradigm pertains to the strategies and concerns of two categories of forces intervening in the Congolese issue, the Shareholders and Stakeholders, which bear distinctive, but sometimes intertwining objectives.

The Shareholder State refers to a country whose security and stability has intimate links with the evolving situation in Congo because of geographic contiguity, common racial stock historical ties, and even shared destiny. In essence, the conflict in Congo represents a regional conflict, because of the existence of ethnic groups fighting each other in this country and having roots and tentacles in neighbouring countries, in addition to huge numbers of refugees belonging to rival tribes and coming from neighbouring countries, as well as millions of internally displaced people. The shareholders consist of neighbouring countries, fuelling the Congolese conflict such as Rwanda currently; Burundi and Uganda in the past, or facing its implications, such as Tanzania and Zambia with regard to the flows of refugees.

The Stakeholders refer to foreign powers, in search of economic interests, mainly. The stakeholder States pertain to countries that have interests in Congo, whether economic or geostrategic, but whose security has no structural links to the evolving situation in this country. Angola, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), in addition to major world powers such as China and the US, would fall into this category.

One of the shareholders directly implicated in the Congolese conflict remains Rwanda, accused by DRC of supporting M23 for many years and maintaining a military presence in the eastern parts of this country. For its part, Kigali refuted these accusations (Maina, Gacheche 2024). It went on to blame Kinshasa for backing the

Hutu-dominated Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) operating along the common border, as well as for harbouring some of the persons responsible for the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi community in Rwanda in 1994.

In putting the eastern provinces of Congo under the control of his troops, the Rwandan leader aimed to create a buffer zone from the Hutu groups, considered "sworn and implacable enemies," because the security-disturbed eastern parts of Congo would serve its ambitions for regional leadership and economic stakes in Congo. Richard Dowden, an associate reporter for London-based newspaper, *The Guardian* rightly argued, "Rwanda's success however is Congo's loss. Fearful that political opponents will gather in the forests and mountains across the border in eastern Congo, the Rwandan regime has armed militias there to protect the Tutsis of eastern Congo, Game's ethnic group, and guards mines and plantations controlled by senior Rwandan officers" (Dowden).

President Kagame resisted calls made by the United States in February 2024 to withdraw troops and missile systems from the eastern provinces of DRC, arguing that these instalments aimed at defending Rwanda from the FDLR rebels (Africa News 2024).

Unlike Rwanda, another shareholder country tried to mend fences with Congo. Kampala signed agreements with Kinshasa concerning the withdrawal of Ugandan troops from DRC and the initiation of a cooperation in June 2022. The Ugandan contingent deployed as part of the regional force in DRC completed its pull-out from North Kivu in December 2023. Both Kinshasa and Kampala seem determined to defeat the Ugandan Islamist Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), entrenched in the impassable border since 2007. Moreover, Ugandan troops have recently moved to reconstruct roads with the assistance of the Congolese army, rather than destroying DRC's infrastructure and utilities. Repairing roads and bridges consists of "an essential part of the military operation," as a Uganda high officer, has observed with pertinence (Schwikowski 2024). However, Kinshasa intended to end military cooperation with Kampala in eastern Congo, because it suspected its neighbour of secretly supporting the M23 insurgency (Africa Intelligence 2024).

The Congolese authorities seem to have a larger room of manoeuvre in finding Burundi a best defence ally since this country has been at odds with Rwanda because Kigali supported Burundian RED-Tabara militias hiding in South Kivu. Moreover, the Congolese leadership is now, comforted with the Southern African axis which has grafted Burundi, Tanzania, and the East African Community (Why DRC 2024). Angola and Namibia are also supporting Congo's territorial integrity and domestic stability.

All the neighbouring countries, or shareholders, except Rwanda, hope to see a stable Congo to reinforce regional stability and strengthen regional economic integration. If Shareholder countries like Rwanda, and to a lesser degree Uganda,

benefit from the extraction of mineral deposits through violence and the use of proxies constituted by rebel militias fighting the Congolese regular armies, it remains that Stakeholder countries of the Great Lakes region or foreign powers have also interested stakes in the Congolese natural resources.

Indeed, the existence of abundant precious minerals in the Congolese territory has globalized the conflict in the eastern provinces of this country. China currently controls the majority of foreign-owned cobalt, uranium, and copper mines in DRC. In return, Beijing provided arms and military assistance to the Congolese security force to fight rebels in the eastern provinces. China's involvement in mineral extraction in DRC certainly helps "boost China's comparative advantage in the energy and technology arenas and hinders U.S. clean energy aspirations"(The Centre for Perspective Action).

The United States has sold the assets it had in the Congolese mining sector and seems committed to self-imposed restrictions on imports from conflict-affected states and bans on importing conflict minerals,"*or so-called " blood diamonds. "

In addition to Swiss companies which own two copper and cobalt mines, the United Arab Emirates signed a \$1.9 billion deal with a state mining company in July 2023, to develop four mines (with tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold) in the turbulent eastern Kivu and Maniema provinces (Al Jazeera 2023).

-The second paradigm refers to the attempts made by international as well as regional institutions to put an end to the conflict in Congo and the various obstacles they have faced in this process.

International and regional institutions have long been involved in finding a solution to the Congolese conflict. The United Nations incepted a stabilization mission in 2010, which evolved with more troops and funds in 2023. The East African Community (EAC) convened three conclaves in Nairobi, between April and June 2022 (known as the Nairobi Peace Process) to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (EAC). In July 2022, Angola hosted, a tripartite Summit (known as the Luanda Roadmap) with DRC and Rwanda in Luanda (FAAPA) to adopt the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) related to the Pacification Process in the eastern region of the DRC. In June 2023, Luanda, under the auspices of the African Union, held a quadripartite summit between EAC, ICGLR, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Southern African Development Community. The objective of this summit, which regrouped most of the concerned and interested parties in the Congolese conflict, was to ease tensions between Kigali and Kinshasa and bring the M23 to conceive a negotiated peace. The Luanda Summit set up a Multilevel Coordination Working Group composed of the representatives of continental and regional institutions, including the United Nations, to focus on

political, diplomatic, military, humanitarian, and socio-economic dimensions of the Congolese conflict.

On the military level, SADC deployed troops to join MONUSCO before the December 2023 presidential elections. However, the Congolese leader called the UN mission to withdraw before the New Year to win, presumably, popular legitimacy. This move resulted from the street protests carried out against this mission for alleged inefficiency to stop fighting in the eastern parts of DRC. The UN/SC finally extended MONUSCO's mandate until the end of 2024 to avoid a security vacuum in the country, while the EAC troops, deployed in the framework of the Nairobi process, were quick to pull out. They were, previously accused by the Congolese authorities of collusion with the rebels and not launching offensives.

All these peacekeeping missions and political initiatives failed to temper continuous rebel activities carried out by the M23 Movement and the Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the eastern parts of DRC. However, the Congolese authorities seem to have a large room of manoeuvre in finding in Burundi a best defence ally, since this country has been at odds with Rwanda because Kigali supported Burundian Tabara militias hiding in South Kivu.

DRC's leadership is now, comforted with the Southern African axis, to which Burundi, Tanzania, and the East African Community have grafted all (Why DRC). Angola and Namibia are also supporting Congo's territorial integrity and domestic stability.

The Democratic Republic of Congo found substantial help from Western relief associations because the conflict in this country is primarily humanitarian. The Congolese landscape is still full of tragedies generated by the huge numbers of victims, the massive internal displacement of people, and the large contingents of Congolese seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. This gloomy picture embedded, also, the spread of misery and diseases, permanent insecurity, diverse abuses, and acts of violence, notably against gender and children.

In a report released in February 2024, the United Nations OCHA agency painted a gloomy picture of the human situation in DRC. It assessed that "until 31 December 2023, more than 9.6 million people were on the move in DRC, including 6.5 million internally displaced persons, 2.6 million returnees, and 527,000 refugees, making the displacement crisis in the country one of the largest in the world and second only to Sudan."(UNOCHA 2024).

In this context of insecurity and deprivation, international institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and United Nations agencies such as OCHA provided humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Congolese tragedy. Specialized organisms such as the USAID (US), CIDA (Canada), DFID (UK), GIZ (Germany), and ENABLE (Belgium) have granted multifarious aid in various sectors ranging from reconstructing basic infrastructures, food security, access to utilities (water, and health services), protection and exploitation of renewable natural resources to sustainable economic development (Working in Conflict and Crises).

Instruments, such as the International Conference on the Region of the Great Lakes (ICGLR), the Commission for the Forests of Central Africa (COMIFAC), and the Congo. The International Commission for the Congo-Ubangi-Sangha Basin (CICOS) and the Partnership for the Forests of the Congo Basin (CBFP) came to birth to sustain international and regional cooperation in protecting forests, wide life, and water resources in the region of the Great Lakes, including Congo.

A South African anthropologist thinks that the possible tracks of a global solution to the structural challenges facing sustained peace in Congo lie on the capacities of human assistance to mix up with the development initiatives to eradicate the continuous armed conflicts and promote sustained peace (Kabamba 2023). If human assistance and relief may not prove necessary to put an end to the conflict in Congo, it remains, however, that alleviating the suffering of people living in insecurity and harsh conditions of life, may prove an urgent need to give an even slim hope of survival to the victims of the Congolese tragedy. The dour reality is that the world's major powers remain in expectative and the United Nations, like the African Union, have failed so far, to find a gateway to this conflict.

A US aid agency rightly evoked that "making processes are essential to all interventions, humanitarian and protection services provided. The continued provision of humanitarian and protection services will reduce the suffering of internally displaced people and host communities, and when conditions are right, help launch them back on a path to normalcy by providing interim livelihood assistance; until they can benefit from more traditional development assistance"(USAID 2012-2017).

There may be hope that the countries of the Great Lake regions under the impulse of the South African-led SADC operations in the Congo will find a political solution to the conflict that is ravaging this country. The main obstacle to a long-lasting peace in the Great Lakes consists of Rwanda's ambitions for regional leadership and military presence in the eastern parts of Congo. However, the Rwandan leadership pretexts that the incursions of his troops in its neighbour territory eastern parts of Congo aim, primarily, at protecting the Tutsi communities and tracking down those responsible for the 1994 genocide, some of whom have found refuge in the Kivu provinces, according to the declarations of Rwanda's leadership (Curtis 2005).

The horrific images of the 1994 Rwanda genocide are still vivid. Until today, "new mass graves are still being discovered across the country of 14 million people, a grim reminder of the scale of the killings"(Associated Press 2024).

One possibility to alleviate the still haunting scars of this genocide consists of the pressures the international community may exert to bring before justice the persons convicted of involvement in these mass killings. The case of Charles Taylor has certainly contributed to appeasing violence and hatred in Liberia. The transfer to the custody of the International Court of Justice in June 2022 of Ali Abdurrahman, suspected of war crimes against humanity in Darfur in 2004, represents a good

example to follow. In addition, the trial of Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka by a court in North Kivu in 2020, provides" a compelling example of how to bring a war criminal to justice"(United Nations 2024).

The Congolese tragedy, or the forgotten war, is still going on and witnesses inhuman violence and horrible atrocities. It still causes numerous victims, and displaced people and exacerbates misery, diseases, human abuses, and severe damage to the national economy.

Conclusion

Yet, the Congolese tragedy is still going on amidst the passivity of the world's major powers, the inefficiency of institutions, such as the African Union (AU), the African Regional Economic groupings (RECs), and the silence of the international community and public opinion.

Human history can be horrendous; it can cruelly sacrifice a hero like Patrice Lumumba and glorify tyrants like Mobutu Sesse Seko, or dictators such as Laurent-Désiré Kabila. However, history is implacable and its lessons are hard to swallow. Historic facts and events are stubborn. If some people can forget these facts and events, no one, however, can whip them from human memory. History remains digging deep in the hearts of human beings, although the hearts of some people may appear to be made of stone.

Beyond academic purposes, treating the Congolese drama may be anything, but a passionate, tumultuous, and incredibly sensitive exercise. This essay remains only an outcry.

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