



Conflict Background

Since the mid-1990s, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has witnessed one of the largest humanitarian crises since World War II. When the Rwandan genocide ended in June 1994, an estimated two million refugees fled to camps in eastern DRC. Unhappy with the Congolese government's refusal to disarm militants and impatient with the UNHCR's lackluster efforts to close the camps, Rwanda invaded the DRC with the support of Uganda

and other allies. During the First Congo War (1996-1997), Rwanda supported the overthrow of President Mobutu and installation of Laurent Kabila as President. The ensuing instability, coupled with decades of state decline under Mobutu, made the DRC vulnerable to regional pillage and invasions by external actors.

The Second Congo War (1998-2003) began when President Laurent Kabila, the father of incumbent President Joseph Kabila, allowed the FDLR to regroup in eastern DRC, resulting in an invasion by former allies Rwanda and Uganda. Though formally at peace since 2003, eastern DRC has experienced persistent violence, wrought by rebel groups backed by foreign powers, local rebel groups and community self-defense groups, and local conflicts over land, identity, and power. As of 2013, at least forty armed groups were active in the DRC, and Congolese civilians in the east still live in a climate of high insecurity.

2016 Elections

Major threats to sustainable peace in Congo include local and regional militias, many of which fund themselves through the illicit mineral trade; the countless human rights abuses committed by the Congolese army and police; and the threat to democracy posed by current Congolese President Joseph Kabila. Fervent political tensions surround the upcoming 2016 elections, which will likely be delayed as President Kabila refuses to commit to relinquishing power, despite completing the maximum two terms as outlined in the Congolese constitution. Many in the opposition have protested the delay of elections, leading to arrests and killings of opposition members by Congolese police.

Key Terms

Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC): The Congolese military; works in collaboration with MONUSCO. FARDC has been consistently slow in efforts to defeat the FDLR. And their shortcomings, frequent abuse of power, and violence against civilians mirror the legacy of military mismanagement of Belgian colonial rule.

Forces Démocratique de Libération de Rwanda (FDLR): The FDLR fled into Eastern DRC from Rwanda in 1994. Since then, FDLR militants have embedded themselves in eastern Congolese communities and terrorized civilians. The Hutu militia group, comprised of Rwandan *genocidaires* and more recent recruits, ostensibly still aims to overthrow the Rwandan government, but lacks the military capacity to do so.

Allied Democratic Forces (ADF): Founded in 1995 in Uganda, the ADF is an Islamist extremist group, initially created to establish an Islamic State in Uganda. The group now operates in Beni, North Kivu, in Eastern Congo. The ADF commits many attacks against civilians and is particularly notorious for its use of machetes.

United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO): The UN Peacekeeping force in DRC, operational since 2000. The Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), a specialized unit trained to seek out and neutralize armed militias, was created in 2013. The mission's authorization for offensive measures is unprecedented among UN forces.