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## **Congo (formerly Zaire)**

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Raymond W. Copson  
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

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## Congo (formerly Zaire)

### SUMMARY

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire, is a vast-resource-rich country of 49 million people. Events there affect much of sub-Saharan Africa. In August 1998, Congo was plunged into its second civil war in 2 years. A peace accord was concluded in Lusaka, Zambia, in July and August 1999, and the U.N. Security Council later agreed to send peace monitors and protecting troops, in a force known as MONUC, to assist in the peace process. Deployment was slow, but the assassination of President Laurent Kabila on January 16, 2001, was followed by progress in the peace process. By May 30, 2,150 peacekeepers of a force projected at 3,000 had arrived, and the United Nations is soon expected to propose MONUC enlargement.

The rebellion is rooted in ethnic and political unrest in eastern Congo, where guerrillas seeking the overthrow of the governments of Rwanda and Uganda are based. In response, both countries have sent troops into Congo to support different rebel factions. Some reports indicate that interests in both countries are exploiting Congo's rich resources of timber, gold, and diamonds. Many Congolese view the conflict as essentially an invasion by Rwanda-based Tutsi, who are unpopular.

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has deployed more than 11,000 troops to back the Congo government, and reports allege that Zimbabwe interests are also profiting from Congo's resources. Angola has also intervened on behalf of the regime, evidently in the hope that this will help prevent UNITA, the Angolan armed opposition movement, from using bases in Congo. Foreign intervention in Congo has provoked fears of a wider conflict. South Africa and Zambia have led mediation efforts among the governments involved.

The 1996-1997 rebellion was launched in eastern Zaire by local Tutsi known as Banyamulenge, but won broad support due to high levels of poverty and unemployment. At that time, Rwanda, which had suffered an anti-Tutsi genocide in 1994, supported Kabila, then a rebel leader, and broke up large Hutu refugee camps in eastern Zaire. These camps had been sheltering Hutu militants who were staging incursions into Rwanda.

Kabila took power in May 1997, and suspended the activities of all political parties, except for his Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). Human rights activists maintain that he suppressed dissent in an attempt to hold onto power indefinitely. President Kabila showed considerable distrust of the western donor community, which has pressed for democratization, and this sharply limited aid inflows. Ousted President Mobutu Sese Seko, who died in September 1997, left Congo with a \$14 billion foreign debt.

Congo was ill-prepared for independence in 1960; its first civil war broke out almost immediately, leading to U.N. intervention. U.S. policy-makers took a strong interest in Zaire during the Cold War years because of its resources and central location, but relations with Mobutu cooled in the post-Cold War era. Policy makers initially welcomed Kabila's pledge of elections in 2 years, but problems in democratization and economic reform complicated relations. A limited aid program focusing on democracy, health, the private sector, and the environment has been resumed. Secretary of State Colin Powell has urged all parties to respect the Lusaka agreement and said he is "cautiously optimistic" about implementation.

## MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

*On May 25, Rwanda President Paul Kagame reiterated that Rwandan troops would not withdraw from eastern Congo as long as Interahamwe militia there threatened Rwanda's security. The Congo government released a report on May 23, 2001, blaming Uganda and Rwanda for the assassination of President Laurent Kabila, adding to concerns over the future of the Lusaka peace process. On May 22, however, the rebel Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC) agreed to pullbacks in northwest Congo as U.N. peace monitors arrived. The MLC was the last protagonist in the Congo war to commit to a pullback. The United Nations announced on May 21 that the Congo River was re-opening to commerce and that a U.N. fuel tanker would be sent to Kisangani on June 8. On May 17, President Joseph Kabila lifted the ban on political party activities. (Opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi wa Mulumba had returned from a 15-month exile on April 23.) The European Union announced on May 7 that it would resume development aid to Congo, pledging \$110 million in assistance.*

## BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

On February 22, 2001, the United Nations Security Council, after a three-day meeting on the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), passed resolution 1341 demanding that the parties begin an initial 15-kilometer pullback by March 15, 2001. The resolution urged the adoption by May 15 of plans for the complete withdrawal of all foreign forces and the demobilization of internal armed groups. It also endorsed U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan's scaled-down proposal for the early deployment of 3,000 peacekeepers, including 500 military observers and 1,900 armed personnel.

The resolution came in the wake of several positive developments since the January 16, 2001 assassination of DRC President Laurent Kabila. On January 27, Joseph Kabila, the little-known son of Laurent, was sworn in as president and immediately left on a four-day foreign trip apparently aimed at reviving the Congo peace process. Joseph Kabila met with Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington on February 1. At the United Nations on February 2, Kabila said that he was willing to begin a dialogue with his military and political enemies and urged them to reciprocate. Kabila announced on February 15 that his government would resume cooperation with Sir Ketumile Masire, former president of Botswana and U.N.-appointed facilitator of the domestic political dialogue. Shortly thereafter, both Rwanda and Uganda announced partial troop withdrawal plans.

### **Lusaka Agreement**

United Nations involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire, is based on the 1999 Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement, which resulted from a peace initiative led by President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, acting on behalf of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). On July 10, 1999, at a summit in Lusaka, Zambia's capital, leaders of Congo, Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Rwanda, and Uganda signed the agreement following difficult negotiations. Angola,

Namibia, and Zimbabwe have troops in Congo supporting the government, while troops from Uganda and Rwanda support different rebel groups.

The rebel groups in Congo did not sign the accord until August 1999 due to factional disputes. Those signing included Emile Ilunga, then leader of the main faction of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), which is backed by Rwanda and based in Goma in eastern Congo; Wamba dia Wamba, head of a Uganda-backed RCD faction based in Bunia, close to the Ugandan border; and Jean-Pierre Bemba, leader of the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), a Uganda-backed rebel group active in the northwest.

## Implementation

Progress toward implementing the Lusaka Agreement has accelerated since the assassination of Laurent Kabila.

**Cease-fire.** The Lusaka agreement called for a cease-fire within 24 hours, but there were many subsequent outbreaks of fighting punctuated by efforts by diplomats to establish a genuine halt to hostilities. On April 8, 2000, the Lusaka parties, meeting in Kampala, Uganda, agreed to a new cease-fire to take effect on April 14, but this was respected only briefly. In late 2000, substantial fighting occurred in the northwest, around Mbandaka, and in Katanga (Shaba) province, where Rwanda-backed RCD forces made gains around Lake Mweru. Nonetheless, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, in his December 6, 2000 report to the Security Council (S/2000/1156), said that there was “substantial compliance with the cease-fire in most parts” of the DRC. This compliance seems to have deepened since the death of Laurent Kabila. In February 2001, Annan reported that the line of confrontation separating the five foreign armies in Congo had been “calm” for five weeks. Rebel armies as well as the DRC army and foreign troops appear to be continuing to observe the ceasefire as the disengagement of forces proceeds.

**Joint Military Commission.** The Lusaka accord called for the creation of a Joint Military Commission (JMC), including representatives of the signatories and a neutral chairman, within one week. The responsibilities of the commission were to include the investigation of cease-fire violations and the development of mechanisms to disarm militia groups in Congo. The convening of the JMC was initially delayed because the rebel groups could not agree on how they would be represented, but the commission finally held its first full meeting on October 11-12 in Kampala, Uganda, and on December 8, the JMC met in Lusaka and set up a number of committees. Unable to operate within the DRC due to the prevailing unsettled conditions, the JMC has focused on drawing up disengagement and redeployment plans for the Congo combatants. At an April 6, 2001 meeting in Lusaka, the JMC reportedly agreed on a draft plan for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed groups in Congo.

**Withdrawal of Foreign Forces.** Under the Lusaka agreement, all foreign forces, apart from peacekeepers, were to withdraw from Congo within nine months, according to a timetable to be worked out by the U.N., the OAU, and the JMC. For many months, there was no sign of progress on this aspect of the agreement, but in July 2000, Uganda began to bring home 3,000 to 4,000 troops that had been based in Kisangani. The withdrawal came after Rwanda and Uganda had mutually agreed to pull their forces out of Kisangani and may reflect growing dissatisfaction within Uganda with the costly Congo deployment. (See below,

**Foreign Involvement.)** Both Uganda and Rwanda maintain that they have intervened in Congo to protect their countries from incursions by Congo-based rebel groups, and that they cannot withdraw entirely until eastern Congo has been stabilized. On June 16, 2000, however, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1304, which demanded that Uganda and Rwanda withdraw all their forces from Congo “without further delay.” South African President Thabo Mbeki convened a regional mini-summit at Maputo, Mozambique, on October 16, 2000, and leaders of the DRC, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe agreed that armed forces in the DRC should begin to disengage. In December, Defense chiefs from the RCD and the six governments involved in the conflict ratified plans for a pullback by all forces from frontline positions.

Laurent Kabila’s death seemed to accelerate progress on troop withdrawals. Rwanda announced on February 21, 2001, that it would pull its troops back 200 kilometers to the east. That same day, Uganda announced that it would withdraw two battalions, while on April 7, Zimbabwe said it would withdraw 5,000 troops from Congo in the immediate future. Reports indicate that rebel forces are complying with the Security Council’s demand for a 15-kilometer pullback, although Bemba delayed committing to a pullback. MLC forces were slated to begin their withdrawal on June 1. Information from the frontlines is sketchy, and there have been some allegations of violations of withdrawal pledges by rebel armies and the DRC.

**Political Dialogue.** Within 45 days, under the Lusaka agreement, the Congo government was to enter into a dialogue with the RCD and , as well as domestic opposition groups and civil society, on the country’s future. After six weeks of dialogue, there was to be agreement on new national political arrangements. The first sign of progress on the dialogue appeared on December 14, 1999, when the Congo parties agreed that the former president of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire, should serve as a neutral facilitator. The Laurent Kabila government was soon accusing Masire of being biased against it, however, and in June 2000, it briefly sealed his office. Laurent Kabila unilaterally appointed a “transition” parliament of 300 members, which convened in August 2000 at Lubumbashi, capital of Katanga province. Joseph Kabila, however, has resumed cooperation with Masire, who is again actively mediating with the aim of convening an “inter-Congolese dialogue” – although some observers maintain that he is moving too slowly. A Declaration of Principles for the conduct of the dialogue was signed in Lusaka on May 17, 2001, and Masire has announced that he will convene a preparatory meeting on July 16.

**United Nations Force.** According to the Lusaka agreement, the United Nations Security Council, in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), was to deploy a large force to Congo in order to ensure implementation of the accord and provide humanitarian assistance to civilians. This did not happen initially because the United States and other likely sponsors of such a force were wary of a prolonged and expensive entanglement with an uncertain mandate. They were also concerned about the potential for violence, since the cease-fire was not being respected.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1258 of August 6, 1999, did authorize the deployment of 90 U.N. military liaison personnel for three months to assist the JMC and report back to the Secretary General on the situation. The operation thus created – and later expanded – is known as the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or by its French acronym as MONUC. In a January 17, 2000 report (S/2000/30), the

Secretary General proposed expanding MONUC to a “Phase II” force of 5,537 personnel – consisting of 500 observers to be protected by the remainder of the force. On February 24, 2000, the Security Council endorsed this proposal in Resolution 1291 but emphasized that actual deployment would be based on the assumption that parties to the Lusaka accord respect the cease-fire. MONUC is to monitor implementation of the cease-fire, investigate violations, and supervise and verify the disengagement of forces. At the same time, it is to facilitate humanitarian assistance and human rights monitoring, support the national dialogue, and launch a survey of landmines and unexploded ordinance.

The Secretary General’s initial reports to the Security Council on MONUC deployment consistently complained of obstacles created by the Laurent Kabila government and rebel forces that have denied full freedom of movement to MONUC personnel. As a result of the many problems encountered, only 224 liaison officers and military observers had been sent to Congo by December 1, 2000, although the U.N. had succeeded in deploying liaison officers at the headquarters of each rebel group and at several other key locations, such as Mbandaka.

In his December 6, 2000 report, the Secretary General stated that the Congo government had been showing a “more positive attitude” and was relaxing some restrictions on MONUC. With Laurent Kabila’s death and subsequent progress in Lusaka implementation, the United Nations has been able to increase the number of peacekeepers for its scaled down, 3,000 member force. By May 30, 2001, 490 military observers had been deployed, supported by 1,660 troops, and MONUC was focusing on verifying promised redeployments by the armed forces of the contending parties.

Secretary General Annan is expected to make recommendations on deployment of a larger Phase III force in mid-June 2001. Estimates of the scale of any Phase III deployment have typically ranged between 10,000 and 25,000. A U.N. force deployed in Congo from 1960-1964 reached nearly 20,000 troops and incurred 250 fatalities, including accidental and natural deaths as well as 126 deaths in combat.

In its FY2002 budget submission to Congress, the Department of State reports that the United States contributed \$30.2 million to MONUC in FY2000 and estimates the FY2001 contribution at \$5.3 million. The Bush Administration has requested \$83.5 million for FY2002.

## **Background to the Congo Conflict**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC or DROC), formerly Zaire, is a vast, resource-rich country at the heart of Central Africa. It borders nine other countries, and events there can have an impact over much of the sub-Saharan region. Secure transport on the Congo River, as well as potential road and rail routes across Congo, could be a great economic boon to the region, and Congo could be an important market for neighboring states. As recently as the 1980s, Zaire was the world’s largest producer of cobalt and a leading producer of industrial diamonds as well as copper. It has petroleum deposits, much good farmland, and great hydroelectric potential. Yet Congo’s economy today is in ruins, following a prolonged breakdown in governance and periodic outbreaks of political unrest.

Zaire, long troubled by economic decline and political stagnation, seemed to be entering a new era on May 17, 1997, when troops of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the

Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), swept into Kinshasa, the capital. AFDL leader Laurent Kabila immediately renamed the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo, declared himself president, and was formally sworn into office, with sweeping powers, on May 29, 1997. The ousted president, Mobutu Sese Seko, who had ruled since 1965 — and had given Congo the unpopular name of “Zaire” — died in exile on September 7, 1997.

In a May 17, 1998 speech commemorating the anniversary of the revolution, Kabila claimed credit for ending the looting and intimidation practiced by Mobutu’s soldiers, stabilizing the country’s currency, and dealing with underlying social problems, such as tribalism. Observers generally agreed that the security situation had indeed improved, except in eastern Congo. Inflation had been reduced, and in June 1998, the government launched a new currency, the Congolese franc. Kabila seemed to enjoy broad public support in recognition of his success in ousting Mobutu, even if he was not deeply popular everywhere. Some sensed that Congo’s sense of national unity seemed stronger as well.

Yet Congo was still a deeply troubled nation, and the situation soon deteriorated further. Government authority was weak even in regions ostensibly under Kabila’s control, and civil servants were paid irregularly, just as in the Mobutu era. The Kabila regime was probably obtaining some financial backing from contracts with foreign mining firms but failed to attract the large-scale foreign investment needed to spark an economic recovery. Political uncertainties, erratic behavior toward particular foreign firms, rapid inflation, and the absence of a legal regime governing business affairs were particular problems. In September 1999, Kabila closed all foreign exchange offices and imposed a \$500,000 fee, termed a financial guarantee, on all foreigners engaged in commercial activities. Fuel prices nearly tripled in June 2000, following a 60% devaluation in the Congolese franc. Congo’s relations with the donor community and non-governmental organizations were seriously strained over issues related to democratization, human rights, and economic reform.

**Rebellion in the East.** The unsettled eastern Congo, particularly North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, remained torn by violence and highly unstable, as it is even today. Ex-soldiers from Mobutu’s army (“ex-FAZ”) operate in the area; while militant Hutu bands exiled from Rwanda and known as Interahamwe (see below), as well as Hutu soldiers belonging to the former armed forces of Rwanda (“ex-FAR”) and Hutu exiles from Burundi, contribute to the unrest. The governments of Rwanda and Burundi are dominated by individuals of the Tutsi ethnic group, and they want to prevent incursions by Hutu militants from Congo into their countries. (The Hutu are a majority in both countries.) Leaders of Rwanda and Burundi also sympathize with persecuted Tutsi living in Congo. “Mai Mai” guerrillas in Congo, known for their supposed belief that water and amulets can shield them from bullets,

#### **Tutsi and Hutu**

*Burundi:* Tutsi, 14% of population; Hutu, 85%. Tutsi, concentrated in capital, dominate government and army.

*Rwanda:* Tutsi, 9% of population; Hutu, 90%. Tutsi dominate government and army. Hutu dominated until 1994, when a Tutsi armed force seized power in reaction to an anti-Tutsi genocide.

*Congo:* 300,000-400,000 Tutsi settlers in South Kivu; other Tutsi in North Kivu; Hutu farmers of long residence in eastern Congo; thousands of Hutu militants who fled Rwanda after the 1994 events.

*Sources include CIA World Factbook and press accounts.*



are strongly anti-Tutsi and are a major factor in the unrest in the east, as are the Bembe people of South Kivu, who have long resented Tutsi settlers.

During the 1996-1997 revolution in Congo, Rwanda had given military support to Kabila against Mobutu, believing the rebel leader would be willing and able to control the Hutu militants in eastern Congo. Once in power, however, Kabila found he had to cope with the unpopularity of Tutsi soldiers in Kinshasa, where they were widely viewed as arrogant foreigners, and with popular resentment of the Tutsi who held influential positions in his government and party. Kabila himself seemed to grow increasingly suspicious of his Tutsi lieutenants.

A July 27, 1998 Congolese government announcement that the presence of Rwandan soldiers in Congo had been “terminated” seemed to trigger the outbreak of the new rebellion. Whether the rebellion had been planned long in advance or came about spontaneously remains a subject of speculation, but on August 2, the Tenth Battalion of the Congolese army, based at Goma in North Kivu, broadcast a communique accusing Kabila of corruption and nepotism and stating that the army had decided to remove him from power. The major towns in eastern Congo quickly fell into rebel hands, and in a surprise strategic move, rebels flew troops to western Congo and seized the military base and airfield at Kitona. Rebels soon gained control of Congo’s seaports and a hydroelectric dam supplying Kinshasa, a city of 5 million people. Periodic blackouts ensued as rebels predicted the fall of Kinshasa by the end of August.

In mid-August 1998, the armies of Zimbabwe and Angola came to Kabila’s aid, breaking the siege of Kinshasa and eventually stabilizing the military situation. Today, rebel forces and their foreign supporters hold roughly the eastern third of the country along a fluctuating line running from somewhere south of Zongo in the northwest to the north end of Lake Mweru in the southeast.

**Foreign Involvement.** The second Congo rebellion, like the first, has clearly been backed by Uganda and Rwanda from the outset. On November 7, 1998, Rwanda acknowledged that it had troops in Congo to protect itself from Congo-based Hutu militants. Uganda, which like Rwanda has had to deal with incursions by Congo-based rebels, also acknowledged sending troops into Congo for national security reasons. Some observers suspect Uganda and Rwanda of territorial ambitions in Congo and of seeking to exploit the eastern region’s resources — charges both countries deny. However, repeated clashes in 1999 and 2000 between Ugandan and Rwandan troops in Kisangani, at the center of a resource-rich region, lent credence to the view that the two erstwhile allies were actually rivals for Congo’s riches. The clashes, which killed hundreds of civilians and brought heavy international condemnation, came to an end in June 2000, then the two countries agreed to withdraw their forces from Kisangani. In South Kivu, meanwhile, troops from the Tutsi-dominated Burundi army have reportedly conducted operations against Burundi Hutu rebels.

Under Kabila, Congo had joined the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and this move proved crucial in winning support against the rebellion. The head of SADC’s security organ, Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, became an advocate of SADC armed intervention on Kabila’s behalf. Analysts speculate that Mugabe saw a chance in the Congo crisis to restore his reputation as a key African leader and to reduce what he may see as the undue regional influence enjoyed by South Africa. Angola also favored backing the Kabila government, betting that Kabila would help prevent Congo from being used as a rear

base by the armed Angolan opposition force known as UNITA. The thousands of exiled Hutu militants from Rwanda, including Interahamwe and ex-FAR, also joined the fight on Kabila's behalf.

News reports estimate the number of Zimbabwe troops in Congo at 11,000 or more. There have been protests in Harare, the Zimbabwe capital, against this deployment, and Zimbabwe's troops are believed to have suffered a number of casualties. IMF and World Bank lending to Zimbabwe is suspended in part because of concerns the two multilateral lenders have over Zimbabwe spending in Congo. (See CRS Issue Brief IB10059, *Zimbabwe: Current Issues*.)

A United Nations Security Council report released on April 16, 2001 (S/2001/357) (at [<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc.htm>] using the search option) provided detailed information on what it charged was illegal exploitation of Congo's resources, including timber and diamonds, as well as massive looting of coffee and other goods, by rebel forces, Uganda, and Rwanda. Those criticized denied the charges and maintained that the report was one-sided in that it failed to report on by exploitation of Congo resources by Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia. Zimbabwe business interests have reportedly been active in Congo; and in June 2000, there were reports that a Zimbabwe-linked company had been formed to mine diamonds around Mbuji Mayi. Namibia acknowledged on February 22, 2001 that it had acquired an interest in a diamond mine in Congo near Tshikapa, close to the Angolan border.

There have been some reports of a North Korean presence at an abandoned uranium mine in Congo. (*The Times*, London, October 12, 1999; *Sunday Telegraph*, London, January 16, 2000.) Firm evidence to substantiate these reports appears to be lacking, however; nor is there clear confirmation of reports of large shipments of weapons from China to the Congo army.

**The RCD and MLC.** The principal rebel movement in eastern Congo calls itself the Congolese Democratic Assembly (or Rally, RCD), which is now broken into two factions. Despite its apparent foreign backing, it has a civilian, Congolese leadership core that includes individuals from around the country. Until he was ousted on May 17, 1999, the RCD president or "co-ordinator" was Wamba dia Wamba, who is from the lower Congo region in western Congo. Wamba had been a professor in Tanzania, and was reportedly a friend of the late former Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere. Jailed for a time during the Mobutu era for conducting research in Zaire, he was active in the Sovereign National Conference (see below) in the early 1990s. Wamba has kept control of the smaller RCD faction, but this group has been weakened by internal rivalries and ethnic strife around its base at Bunia.

Emile Ilunga, who initially replaced Wamba as head of the main body of the RCD, is a Katangan formerly associated with a Katanga separatist movement based in Angola. A physician, Ilunga has reportedly practiced in Belgium and spent time in South Africa. RCD leaders say the movement seeks a multiparty, federal system. In October 2000, Ilunga acknowledged mistakes of leadership and resigned in favor of Adolphe Onusumba Yemba, known as Onusumba, who is reportedly from the Kasai region and considerably younger than Ilunga.

Another rebel group, the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), emerged in northwestern Congo in November 1998. This faction is led by Jean-Pierre Bemba, whose

family was closely allied to Mobutu, and is believed to include former members of Mobutu's Presidential Guard. The MLC holds Gbadolite, a former Mobutu stronghold, and has repeatedly threatened the Congo River port of Mbandaka. The capture of Mbandaka, analysts believe, would endanger Kinshasa, the capital, since no natural obstacles or major towns lie between the two cities.

## **Zaire's 1996-1997 Civil War**

During Congo/Zaire's 1996-1997 civil war, Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) managed to conquer a country nearly as large as the European Union in just seven months. The takeover was made possible by the refusal of the rarely-paid Zairian army to fight, the lack of support for Mobutu among the Zairian people, and backing for the rebels from neighboring states. President Mobutu was gravely ill with prostate cancer and unable to make critical military and political decisions.

Armed conflict first broke out in South Kivu province in mid-October 1996 between the army and indigenous ethnic Tutsi — a group found primarily in neighboring Rwanda and Burundi, where Tutsi minorities dominate government and the armed forces. Known as the Banyamulenge, the South Kivu Tutsi are descendants of herders who came to the area as long as 200 years ago and may number 300,000 to 400,000 or more today. They had been targets of increasing local resentment arising from ethnic differences and economic grievances, and the Mobutu regime was intensifying an effort to deprive them of their citizenship. In October 1996, Tutsi in South Kivu were ordered to leave by the region's deputy governor, but Tutsi guerrillas, some of whom may have had experience in the Rwanda civil war, fought back with surprising effectiveness. In North Kivu, other Tutsi guerrillas, acting in alliance with local, non-Tutsi militia, completed the capture of Goma. Tutsi had first arrived in North Kivu during the colonial period. Tutsi rebels were motivated in part by anger over a local anti-Tutsi campaign, beginning in 1993, that had displaced large numbers of their people and reportedly killed thousands.

Ethnic tensions in eastern Zaire had been gravely exacerbated by the July 1994 arrival in eastern Zaire of an estimated 1.2 million Hutu refugees from Rwanda. The Hutu, traditional rivals of the Tutsi, had fled Rwanda as the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) was consolidating its conquest of Rwanda. The RPF had been provoked into a military offensive in April 1994, when Hutu militants, including armed bands known as Interahamwe ("those who attack together"), launched an anti-Tutsi genocide. When the Zaire rebellion broke out, Goma was surrounded by Hutu refugee camps housing 700,000 people or more, and there were Hutu refugees in other locations as well.

Interahamwe and ex-FAR at the camps, as well former Rwanda government officials, were widely suspected of intimidating civilian refugees to prevent them from returning to Rwanda. These Hutu militants were also thought to have organized armed incursions back into Rwanda and to be preparing for an attempt to retake the country. Rwandan authorities demanded that the international community take steps to curb their activities, but nothing was done. The initial Tutsi victories exposed the weakness of the Mobutu regime, and the rebellion broadened with the early and unexpected emergence of the AFDL, uniting the Tutsi groups with other Zaire opposition forces. The AFDL coalition leader, the late Laurent Kabila (born in 1939) was initially described as a Lunda, the predominant ethnic group in Shaba province, but was later said to be a "Balubakat." These are Luba people, originally

from the Kasais, who settled in Shaba province — then named Katanga — in search of economic opportunities during the colonial era.

Kabila was a veteran of previous revolutionary struggles, and worked with Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara when Che was supporting a revolution in eastern Zaire in the mid-1960s. Kabila's Party of the Popular Revolution (PRP) survived for years in the mountains around Uvira, and originally had a Marxist orientation. In 1975, Kabila guerrillas crossed Lake Tanganyika and kidnaped three American and one Dutch student working at the chimpanzee study center run by British naturalist Jane Goodall. Held under harsh conditions before they were ransomed, the four victims remained bitter toward Kabila. They wrote Secretary of State Albright on May 23, 1997, asking the Clinton Administration to confront the rebel leader about his record of "kidnaping, slavery, and terrorism." (*Washington Post*, October 25, 1997.)

There was considerable foreign involvement in the Zaire revolution. In a July 9, 1997, *Washington Post* interview, Paul Kagame, now Rwanda's president, claimed that his government had planned and carried out the overthrow of Mobutu, sending soldiers and officers to participate in the fighting. Many observers also believe that Uganda played a role, and Angola also evidently gave direct support to the rebels. Its government resented Mobutu for the covert aid, shelter, and political support he gave over many years to the UNITA opposition movement. UNITA meanwhile, was widely reported to have aided Mobutu.

## Democratization Issues

After his 1997 takeover, Kabila promised elections by April 1999, but later said these could not be held until the rebellion ended. A draft constitution provided for a strong presidency, although there was also to be a bicameral parliament. Opposition figures suspected that Kabila would try to arrange any elections process to assure that he remained in power. The activities of political parties other than the AFDL were suspended after Kabila took over, and anti-government demonstrations were banned.

Kabila's treatment of the press and opposition voices in society raised grave concerns among human rights and democracy advocates. Several journalists were arrested or harassed, some newspapers were closed, and the opposition was denied access to the broadcast media, which the government controls. Some opposition politicians, other government critics, and figures from the former regime were also arrested.

Etienne Tshisekedi wa Mulumba, who led the non-violent political struggle against Mobutu, at great personal cost over many years, was exiled to his remote home village by Kabila in February 1998, although he was later allowed to return to Kinshasa and then went into exile in Belgium. Tshisekedi, who regards himself as Congo's rightful prime minister, is an advocate of what he calls "plural democracy" and a strong critic of the political party ban. Laurent Kabila criticized Tshisekedi and the rest of the non-violent opposition to Mobutu for their fractiousness and ineffectiveness against Mobutu. Tshisekedi is reportedly regarded as a "difficult person" and "tempestuous" by some western observers (*Washington Post*, June 27, 1997).

## Humanitarian Situation

Both phases of the Congo conflict have been marked by serious human rights abuses, hunger, killings of civilians, and the forcible displacement of civilian populations; but detailed and reliable information on the humanitarian situation has been difficult to obtain. On June 29, 1998, U.N. Secretary General Annan transmitted to the Security Council the report of a U.N. team that had been investigating allegations of massacres and other human rights violations during the 1996-1997 civil war. The Secretary General said two conclusions stood out: that all parties to the conflict had committed serious human rights violations; and that killings by the AFDL and elements of the Rwandan Patriotic Army constituted crimes against humanity and may have constituted genocide, pending further investigation. The Secretary General noted with "deep regret" that the investigating team had not been allowed to carry out its mission fully and without hindrance by the Congolese government. The governments of Congo and Rwanda rejected the findings of the report.

Non-governmental organizations have released a number of reports alleging widespread human rights abuses during the current phase of the Congo conflict. For example, a Human Rights Watch [<http://www.hrw.org>] study issued on May 16, 2000, charged that Congo rebels and Rwandan soldiers have carried out rapes and civilian killings on a massive scale. Amnesty International charged on June 1, 2000 that Ugandan troops had played a role in ethnic unrest in the Ituri region, near the Ugandan border, that killed 7,000 civilians in 1999. Uganda firmly denied the charge, and a spokesman claimed that Ugandan troops were noted for their good discipline. (*Africa News Service*, June 1, 2000.)

On May 8, 2001, the International Rescue Committee released a report indicating that since August 1998, 2.5 million people in eastern Congo who would not otherwise have perished had died because of the war [<http://www.theIRC.org/mortality.cfm>]. Based on 11 mortality surveys in five eastern provinces, the report found high levels of indiscriminate violence and disproportionate deaths among children.

UNICEF reported in February 2000 that more than 160 Congolese children were being trained for possible service in Congo at a camp in western Uganda. Uganda subsequently placed the children in a camp run by the charity World Vision in preparation for their return to their homes in Congo. Representative Frank Wolf, after returning from a January 2001 trip to several African countries, reported widespread suffering in eastern Congo, including numerous incidents of rape carried out by soldiers of all sides.

## Historical Background

Congo's difficulties result in part from the stunning rate of change it has confronted over a short span of history. In 1930, Congo was a rural, peasant-based society under the control of a tiny elite of Belgian bureaucrats assisted by a few senior Congolese clerks. Today, the country has a sprawling capital of five to eight million inhabitants, an overall population nearing 45 million (up from 20 million in 1970), and a complex social structure that includes a kaleidoscope of conflicting ethnic loyalties as well as sharp economic and social class divisions. (Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, 1985, p. 79.)

Congo has posed challenges for the broader international system for more than a century. The Conference of Berlin (1884-1885) accepted the claims of King Léopold II to this sprawling territory of diverse peoples and many languages in order to stave off a destabilizing scramble for the region among Europe's great powers. The brutal repression, mutilations, and forced labor characteristic of Léopold's rule were exposed by human rights activists and missionaries at the turn of the century, and the situation in the Congo became an international scandal. (Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, Houghton-Mifflin, 1998). In 1908, the Belgian parliament voted to remove the colony from Léopold's personal control and make it a Belgian colony. Belgium adopted a highly paternalistic style of rule, treating Congolese as incapable of self-government. Reportedly, when independence came in 1960, not one Congo citizen had received a university degree. Political parties only began to emerge in the 1950's, and according to a leading authority, "Large-scale contact with the outside world dates only from the Brussels Exposition (World Fair) of 1958, where several hundred Congolese were brought to Belgium as showpieces for the Congolese pavilion." (Young, *Politics in the Congo*, 1965, pp. 280-281).

Congo's initial upheaval broke out in July 1960, just after independence. The Belgian government had agreed to set a date for independence only in January, finally acknowledging that a small European country could not hope to maintain a large colony in Africa in the face of rising nationalism around the continent. Nonetheless, Belgian officers attempted to retain control of the Congolese army after independence, leading to a mutiny and attacks on Europeans. A United Nations peacekeeping force intervened in the resulting unrest in an effort to prevent the situation from becoming a Cold War crisis. In fact, however, Congo did become a major Cold War issue after Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who enjoyed the sympathy and backing of the Soviet Union, was killed in 1961. The Soviets halted their contributions to U.N. peacekeeping, leading to a financial crisis that crippled the United Nations for years. Dag Hammarskjöld, who had shown himself to be a strong and effective U.N. Secretary General, was killed in a suspicious plane crash as he flew to negotiations on an end to the secession of rebellious Katanga province.

The U.N. force withdrew in 1964, leaving the country united, but politically unsettled and facing continued secessionist threats in key regions. In November 1965, General Joseph Mobutu, a former journalist who had risen to command the armed forces, seized power in a bloodless coup. The coup won ready acceptance in western capitals, where Mobutu already had many advocates, because of concern that the civilian regime was moving to the left. Over the next few years, Mobutu managed to neutralize his political opposition, thwart secessionist tendencies in key regions, and consolidate his power base. His methods, which included the arrest and humiliation of former allies and the elimination of independent labor unions, were authoritarian but perhaps not unusual among Third World countries at that time.

In the 1970s, however, Mobutu began a series of disruptive political and economic initiatives that brought a prolonged decline in the nation's fortunes — leading to eventual economic collapse and finally to the political crisis of 1991. His "authenticity" campaign, launched in 1971, in addition to requiring Zairians to abandon western styles of dress, included banning Christian forenames and prohibiting religious broadcasts. Mobutu himself adopted a series of honorific titles, such as Guide, Helmsman, and Father of the Nation. At the end of 1973, he launched his "Zairianization" campaign for the economy, which resulted in the seizure of foreign-owned properties and their redistribution to Mobutu loyalists. Many of the extreme measures undertaken by Mobutu in the first half of the 1970s had to be eased

or retracted in subsequent years. But the confidence of foreign investors and lenders had been badly shaken, and the economy never recovered. A long era of negative growth set in, worsened by low world prices for copper, the high cost of oil imports, and what analysts described as pervasive corruption. Nonetheless, some observers credited Mobutu's policies with maintaining stability and minimizing ethnic conflict. Critics argued, however, that in stifling political dissent and impoverishing Zaire's people, Mobutu was only bottling up resentments that were bound to explode at some point.

## Political Change after 1990

Mobutu's political position deteriorated sharply in 1990, as domestic and international pressures forced him into major policy changes and concessions. The denouement of the Cold War reduced the incentives for western governments to offer him political or economic support. Meanwhile, Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) joined with student groups to mount a series of protests and demonstrations. Police and military repression of these protests brought fresh international criticism.

In 1990, Mobutu finally accepted the creation of a full multi-party system in principle. The continued deterioration of the economy, however, was adding fuel to popular anger, and large demonstrations broke out. In April 1991, Mobutu acceded to a key opposition demand by announcing that a national political conference would be convened. The Sovereign National Conference finally began its work in April 1992, and a long contest for power with Mobutu ensued. But while Kinshasa politicians were pre-occupied with this power struggle, the power of the central government was declining, contributing to concerns over the possible breakup of Zaire. East Kasai and its capital, Mbuji-Mayi, experienced relative prosperity based on a black market diamond industry. Investments by South African companies helped to re-orient the economy of mineral-rich Shaba province toward English-speaking southern Africa rather than Kinshasa.

<b>DRC IN BRIEF</b>	
<b>Area:</b>	more than one-fourth the United States
<b>Population:</b>	49.8 million (1999 est.) Growth rate: 3.2% (1997 est.)
<b>Independence:</b>	June 30, 1960, from Belgium
<b>GDP:</b>	\$6.6 billion (1999 est.) per capita : \$110 (1998 est.)
<b>Real GDP Growth:</b>	-8% (annual average, 1988-1999)
<b>Ethnic groups:</b>	more than 200
<b>Religion:</b>	Roman Catholic, 50%; Protestant, 20%; Kimbanguist (syncretic), 10%; Moslem 10%
Sources, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, <i>World Factbook</i> ; World Bank, <i>African</i>	

Despite growing regionalism, some observers were encouraged during the mid-1990s by the emergence of a civil society in Zaire, centered around churches and non-governmental organizations. Student groups, human rights organizations, and political parties were increasingly effective and typically led by articulate, outspoken individuals. With a loosening of economic controls, the private enterprise sector grew stronger, although major business figures tended to be closely connected to Mobutu.

## Prospects for the Future

Diplomats in Africa and the West had hoped that the months following the signing of the Lusaka agreement would see the arrival of growing numbers of peacekeepers, and – as confidence in the process built – a gradual withdrawal of foreign forces and the launching of a substantive dialogue between rebel leaders and the Kabila regime. Laurent Kabila came to be seen as an obstacle to the peace process, and there is much hope that the new Joseph Kabila government will move the process forward.

During his February 2001 overseas trip, Joseph Kabila impressed foreign leaders with his willingness to compromise and to permit a resumption of the internal political dialogue. Some regard this dialogue as the best hope for the country's future, since it has the potential to restore political unity and promote reconciliation, while creating the basis for the eventual election of a legitimate, civilian government. Yet many are concerned that the divisions among Congo politicians, including ethnic divisions as well as differences between the internal and exiled opposition, as well as between the armed rebel groups and internal non-violent opposition, will prove too wide to bridge. There is also concern that Joseph Kabila, who is reportedly just 29 years of age, lacks the experience to guide the peace process to a successful conclusion. Already, there have been rumors of coup attempts and some key figures have reportedly been jailed on suspicion of involvement in the assassination of Laurent Kabila.

Conceivably, fighting could resume if rebel groups and their external backers come to feel that their interests are not being protected – and if the numbers of peacekeepers remain small. If the process falters, Congo, the country could fall into a prolonged, de-facto breakup leaving an unstable central government backed by Angola and/or Zimbabwe in control of the capital region and the coast; Bemba and ex-Mobutuists dominant in the northwest, with support from Uganda; Uganda in control of the northeast in alliance with the small dia Wamba RCD faction; and South Kivu together with an undefined area to the west under the RCD with backing from Rwanda. The fate of mineral-rich Katanga (Shaba) and the Kasais, including the diamond center at Mbuji Mayi, in this break-up scenario is not yet clear.

If the peace process does move forward, deployment of the Phase II peacekeeping force will face major difficulties in view of the large number of armed groups, the large stores of weapons that have accumulated over years of conflict, and the country's gravely deteriorated infrastructure. Nonetheless, such a force, working in cooperation with an actively engaged JMC and backed by pressure from donors, could eventually prepare the way for a Phase III deployment and other steps toward long-term stabilization.

## U.S. Policy

Congo was a contentious issue in U.S. foreign policy from 1960 into the early 1990s. The Cold War and the emergence of a communist regime in Cuba were very much on the minds of policymakers in 1960 and lent a special urgency to their efforts to stabilize Congo through U.N. peacekeeping. Policy-makers saw this approach as the best available means for minimizing Soviet influence in Congo. Some U.S. critics of this policy, however, regarded the United Nations itself as a leftist influence and thought that the United States should have fostered the secession of Katanga province as a bastion against communism.



The most controversial event of that era was the death of Prime Minister Lumumba in January 1961. Many American observers regarded him as a communist and Soviet agent; although others argued that he was essentially a nationalist and populist. Evidence developed at 1975 Senate hearings indicated that U.S. officials had attempted to implement a plan to assassinate Lumumba through poisoning or exposure to a virus. This plot evidently failed, and Lumumba died in Katanga after falling into the hands of secessionist forces. Whether the United States played a role in this event was a matter of controversy, but it is widely believed in Congo that the United States was indeed responsible. Many Congolese also blame the United Nations, which had a peacekeeping force in Congo at the time, for failing to protect Lumumba.

Mobutu enjoyed good relations with the United States in the first years of his regime. President Carter, however, pressed for human rights improvements as well as political and economic reforms. Nonetheless, Carter found himself lending air transport to an intervention by Belgium, France, and other countries during the 1978 Shaba uprising because of concern over Soviet gains in Africa. Mobutu's relations with the Reagan Administration were close, and in 1983 Reagan described the Zairian leader as "a faithful friend to the United States for some 20 years." In the late 1980s, officials often expressed reservations about Mobutu's human rights record and economic policies but suggested that no alternative leader appeared capable of maintaining stability in Zaire.

In the early 1960s, U.S. economic aid to Zaire amounted to between one-quarter and one-third of all U.S. economic assistance to sub-Saharan Africa. Aid reached high levels again in FY1976 through FY1978 in response to perceived Soviet gains in Africa and the crises in Shaba province. Aid rose once more in the second half of the 1980s, reflecting Zaire's deteriorating economic situation and perhaps Zaire's cooperative role in the Angola situation. Since the beginning of 1986, the executive branch had publicly acknowledged giving covert assistance to UNITA in Angola, and according to many press reports, important facilities for channeling this aid to UNITA were located in Zaire. The focus of U.S. Angola policy after 1991 shifted to implementation of the Angolan peace agreements, and Zaire lost any value it might have had as a staging area for covert U.S. military aid.

The deteriorating situation in Zaire after the beginning of 1990, the end of the Cold War, and the Angolan agreements decisively shifted executive branch views of Mobutu. Secretary of State James Baker visited Zaire in March 1990 and urged Mobutu to undertake reforms — or risk being swept aside. The Clinton Administration continued to pressure Mobutu for reforms, and efforts were launched to persuade Zairians across the political spectrum, including Mobutu, to move forward with a free and fair vote. U.S. policy on Zaire was impeded by the weakening of policy coordination in the "troika" of major external actors — France, Belgium, and the United States — after the May 1995 election of President Jacques Chirac in France. Chirac met personally with Mobutu in April 1996, and Paris said it would resume aid to Zaire. French policymakers appeared to see the United States as a competitor for economic and political influence in Zaire.

In May 1997, then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson carried out an urgent round of diplomacy in Zaire and the region aimed at arranging what he later called a "soft-landing" for Kabila's rebels when they reached the capital to avoid "bloodshed and chaos." Secretary Albright announced during a December 12, 1997 press conference with Kabila that she would be working with Congress on a substantial aid package to assist the

Congolese people and their government in building democratic institutions and governing capacity. The Clinton Administration strongly supported the Lusaka peace process.

With the deteriorating political situation in Congo, discussion heard in 1997 of a substantial aid program faded. For FY2001, assistance is estimated at \$15.7 million in development assistance as well as \$4.5 million in food aid. The Bush Administration is seeking \$18.6 million in aid for Congo in FY2002.

Secretary of State Colin Powell discussed Congo with African leaders during a visit to the continent in May 2001, urging all parties to respect the Lusaka agreement. He told an audience in South Africa that he had been meeting with protagonists in the conflict since January and was “cautiously optimistic” that the Lusaka agreement would bring peace to Congo.

## **Congressional Involvement**

Congressional concerns over the Mobutu regime began to grow in the late 1970s. In subsequent years, a series of hearings and reports, sometimes growing out of Member and staff visits, focused on allegations of corruption, human rights violations, and shortcomings in the U.S. aid program. In 1985, Congress imposed restrictions on security assistance to Zaire, and in the early 1990s, as instability and human rights violations mounted in Zaire, both the House and Senate passed resolutions urging Mobutu to step down (102nd Congress, H.Con.Res. 238, S.Con.Res. 80). After the Rwanda upheaval, several Members studied the refugee situation directly through visits to the camps around Goma.

The obstacles created by the Laurent Kabila regime to the U.N. investigation of human rights violations during the first rebellion, as well as reports of ongoing human rights violations, gave rise to some skepticism toward the new regime — and toward Clinton Administration policy. The Foreign Operations Appropriations legislation for FY2001 (P.L. 106-429) prohibits assistance to the central government to the Congo.

On January 30, 2001, Representative Alcee Hastings introduced H.Con.Res. 16 calling for a peaceful transition to stability and democracy in the DRC.

Figure 1. Democratic Republic of the Congo



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