THE CONGO-K

National Flag and Emblem

Locator Map

TEXT HIGHLIGHTS: Diaries updates, key events, brief analysis and relating news articles in timeline

Overview

Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire): A vast country with immense economic resources at the heart of Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) has been at the centre of what could be termed Africa’s world war.

Formerly Belgian colony of "Congo Leopoldville".

The Congo is located at the heart of Africa with a narrow strip of land along the Congo river estuary leading to the Atlantic ocean in the west. The Congo is vast, fertile, diverse and mineral rich is also Africa’s second largest country (2.3 million sq km) with over 200 ethnic groups. With just over 70 million people, the Congo has the second largest Christian population in Africa with lots of natural resources.
Prior to European colonization, several native kingdoms had emerged in the Congo. The Congo free state was established in 1885 with Leopold II of Belgium as absolute monarch, it became the Belgian colony of middle Congo in 1908. The Congo is strategically placed region at the centre of Africa, and because of it's various mineral resources and it's size. DRC (formerly Zaire) gained independence from Belgium in 30th June, 1960. Following a period of political instability, General Mobutu, the Chief of the Army, came to power in an army coup in 1965 and remained largely unchallenged throughout the 1970s and 1980s. President Mobutu presided over endemic corruption and reputedly built up a large personal fortune. Moves towards democratisation in the early 1990s did not succeed in removing him from power. It's early years were marred by political and social instability, but an already-fragile state was further weakened by the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide of 1994, when in October 1996 dissident groups, led by Laurent Kabila and strongly supported by Rwanda and Uganda, rose in revolt. They entered Kinshasa on 17 May 1997. Laurent Kabila declared himself President. Mobutu fled to Morocco where he subsequently lived. Internal and external dissatisfaction with the new President grew until late summer 1998, when a new rebel group announced itself, again backed by Rwanda and Uganda, and a second conflict broke out. SADC states led by Zimbabwe and Angola intervened on the side of the Kabila Government. By mid-1999 front-lines had stabilised, with 3 belligerent groups respectively controlling a third of the country, each backed by different regional states. A cease-fire was signed in Lusaka in August 1999. The United Nations Security Council established a peacekeeping force known as MONUC to facilitate the implementation of the Lusaka Accord. It has a budget exceeding US$1 billion and is now over 17,000 strong making it the largest current UN peacekeeping mission. In January 2001 President Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. His son, Joseph Kabila, took over as the new head of State on 26 January 2001 and proved more amenable to negotiations. Foreign forces gradually departed, and a protracted Inter-Congolese Dialogue led to an agreement between the belligerents and members of the political opposition on the formation of a transitional national government (TNG). This was agreed by the parties on 2 April 2003 in Sun City (South Africa). The TNG was promulgated on 30 June 2003, formally ending a war that had cost an estimated four million lives. The Transitional National Government (TNG) was made up of three major belligerent groups, a number of smaller ex-rebel movements, civil society and political opposition representatives. The TNG had a '1 + 4' leadership, with a President (Joseph Kabila Kabange) and Vice Presidents (Jean-Pierre Bemba, Azarias Ruberwa, Arthur Z’Ahidi Ngoma and Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndombasi). The TNG was hindered by continuing violence in the east of the country, massive humanitarian needs, widespread corruption and periods of high tension between former belligerent groups who were making up the government.
In 2006 Joseph Kabila Kabange Jr. was elected President in DRC’s first elections for over 40 years.

Mr. Patrice Lumumba, was a trade unionist, a Congolese independence leader and nationalist figure, before founding the Congolese National Movement (MNC), the first nationwide political party in 1958, Mr. Patrice Emery Lumumba imprisoned for embezzlement by the Belgian colonial masters. When Lumumba was finally released from prison, and pre-independence political negotiations with Belgian masters underway, then he was asked to form the first independent Congolese government. A courage and steadfastness as a nationalist figure, earned him active in the movement for independence while teaching in schools and working for the colonial administration.

On 30th June, 1960 Congo Leopoldville gained independence as Patrice Emery Lumumba, then 37 years old it's Prime Minister. He appointed Joseph Desire Mobutu his personal secretary, a position that was made official in July, 1960 after Lumumba became PM. Not long after that Mobutu was appointed army chief of staff with the rank of Colonel.

Patrice Lumumba led a poor Congo, where nearly half the population was undernourished. He had high hopes for enacting the agrarian reform necessary to feed his people, and that was just the beginning of his ambitious plans. Then, just three months into his term, Lumumba was deposed, in a move orchestrated by a cadre of great powers: the U.S. via the CIA, which had planned to poison his toothpaste on orders from President Eisenhower; England with the connivance of MI6; and Belgium, the Congo’s former landlord.

Within months of becoming prime minister, the chaotic “Congolese internal political crises” occurs following Lumumba’s assassination and the power struggle between the country was torn by three political groups known to be between the conservative head of state Joseph Casavubu, the successor prime minister Antoine Gizenga, and the secessionist regional prime minister Moise Tshombe Kapenda who had been backed by outsiders claiming legal power over the country in an immediately announced secession of Katanga, a region which provides an estimated 60 % of the Congo’s national income came from the mines in Katanga (Shaba), on the 11th of July, 1960 especially with support from the Belgians and the United States, when the same time Belgian troops were arrived in Katanga to sustain it's secession, but this did little to prevent the mutiny from spreading to Elisabethville, capital of the mineral-rich Katanga (Shaba) province. The secessionist Moise Tshombe, arch political rival of Patrice Lumumba declares Katanga (now Shaba) an independent region from the rest of the Congo. This move was said to be backed by
Belgium and the US. Belgium colonial policies engaged with cares only for natural resources exploitation and save no thought to good governance in the Congo as many Congolese citizens were still hope for some semblance of order to be returned to the streets once again.

After Lumumba helped win the country's independence from Belgium on 30th of June, 1960, soon became legitimately premier of the "Republic of Congo Leopoldville", a position which he holds through an election that was held a week before the national independence day, his close rival Mr. Joseph Kasavubu becomes president of the Congo's national assembly, and soon to assume office as president of Congo Leopoldville at independence in June, 1960, with an endorsement of the premier.

The Shaba formerly Katanga chaotic crisis
When: 1961
Who: Katanga (now Shaba) secession bid under Moise Tshombe
Why: Power crisis in Kinshasa and involvement of Belgium and the USA
Outcome: The capture and execution of Prime minister Patrice Emery Lumumba by the state security of the Congo.

Joseph Mobutu’s Coup
When: 1965
Who : Coup d’etat
Why: to resolve power crisis of the Congo government
Outcome: Colonel Mobutu Se-se-Seko took power

Joseph Desire Mobutu - The founding father of independent Congo, Patrice Emery Lumumba was killed on 17th January, 1961, hardly 7 months after coming into office in assassination operation backed by Belgium and tacitly supported by the USA. In the wings was Colonel Joseph Desire Mobutu who would soon assume office and rule Congo (renamed Zaire) further for thirty two years.

Mobutu Sese Seko proclaimed himself “Father of the Nation” of Zaire (The Democratic Republic of the Congo), and became dictator for life. He declared, “In our African tradition there are never two chiefs….That is why we Congolese, in the desire to conform to the traditions of our continent, have resolved to group all the energies of the citizens of our country under the banner of a single national party.” Mobutuism consisted of the delusional thoughts of Mobutu and his program of “Zairianization”. He promoted a cult of personality describing himself as “the all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest leaving fire in his wake”. Mobutu built the Inga
Dams over the Congo River hoping to create the largest hydroelectric facility in the world. He left a legacy of kleptocracy and inherited the wind of dictatorship.

Background: he was born in Lisala, in Congo’s northern Equateur province on 14th October, 1930. His name locally meaning “Soil” or “Sand”, a reference to his mother’s social and economic status at the time. They were said to be dirt poors. Although, he was christened Joseph Desire, in 1972 he acquired the nom de-guere Se-se-Seko Ngbendu wa Zabanga, literally translated as “hot pepper”, “green” and “it stings. Kuku Ngbendu wa Zagamba is a Ngbendu proverb whose translation could mean: “Even if it is not ripe, hot pepper stings”. Joseph Desire Mobutu was all but 19 years old when he donned the uniform of the “Force Publique”, the national army. After successfully completing his studies, Mobutu was first sent to the army headquarters in then Leopoldville, the capital (now Kinshasa) where he was assigned to the provincial secretary of G2, the unit dealing with military intelligence, resource mobilization and operations. And he was promoted to Sergeant in April, 1954. Sergeant Desire Mobutu had been appointed Chief-of-Staff of the Congolese army with the rank of Colonel at the latter to the Force Publique would now be called the “Armee Nationale Congolaise”.

In 1971: The country officially renamed "Zaire".

First Rwandan Invasion

When: 1996

Who: First Rwanda invasion, backed by Uganda

Why: To close down Hutu camps in eastern DRC

Outcome: Mobutu Sese Seko was overthrown

On the 7th of October, 1996, claiming they are destabilising the region, former ex-Zairean government officials tells the 300,000 Banyamulenge community of ethnic-Tutsis settled in the region for generations, to leave Zaire, now the Congo within a week or be hunted down as rebels, then the warning sparks a rebellion that later forced the ailing president Mobutu Sese-Seko flee exile, on the 17th of May, 1997 to Morocco, which that ended his 32 years rule.

Mr. Laurent-Desire Kabilla, the man behind the eight-months armed resistance with support from neighbouring Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, pushed his forces into a full scale rebellion against president Mobutu Sese-Seko’s rule, comes to power suspended all political parties except his own and promised elections that were never held, sworn into office as president on the 29th of May, 1997, restored the country’s name, "Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)", he ruled the Congo (which he
renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from 17 May, 1997 to 16 January 2001 when he too was assassinated. It’s to be recalled that Mr. Patrice Emery Lumumba was killed on 17 January, 1961 – a coincidence?

President Laurent Desire Kabila was succeeded by his 29 years old son called, Joseph Kabilla Kabange took over 8 days later and has been in charge ever since, at the state house in the capital, Kinshasa by his personal bodyguard namely, Lt. Rashidi Kasereka, had been killed on the spot on the 16th of January, 2001, thought the assassination was part of a failed coup attempt. The alleged ringleader, Colonel Eddy Kappend, a cousin to the assassinated president, and others were sentenced to death in absentia by a Special Military Tribunal in January, 2003.

Internal conflicts in the eastern Congo, which has claimed some six million lives in a little more than a decade, has long revolved over access to its mineral wealth, the Congo, is a country whose mineral resources are frequently looted by not just by multi-national companies also by its neighbours the proxy forces. The UN estimates that the country has the worst rape and sexual violence statistics in the world.

Second Rwandan Invasion
When: 1998
Who: Second Rwandan invasion
Why: To overthrow Laurent-Desire Kabila
Outcome: The intervention of Angola, Zimbabwe, Chad, Libya and Sudan to save Kabila.

The country named Congo Leopoldville; and renamed Congo Kinshasa, Zaire in various times.

And Now called Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

BRIEF DIARY ANALYSIS: The Congo

The colonization of what is now the Congo began in the late-19th century, with Belgium and its leaders exploiting its lands. The nation gained independence from the Europeans on this day in 1960, ending an occupation that lasted more than 50 years.

The Congo’s colonization happened under the rule of King Leopold II who was able to dupe the European community in to believing that his efforts of exploration in the region were humanitarian. Using clandestine methods, the king was able to claim much of the Congo Basin for himself and renamed the area the “Congo Free State.” Under Leopold’s rule,
natives were brutally mistreated and kidnapped to be slaves by Arab-Swahili traders.

Rubber was a chief export of the nation, and the Belgians ran workers in to the ground to increase production of the plants and ensuing product.

The Public Force (or Force Publique) was called in to enforce the production of rubber, cutting the limbs off workers to incite fear and harder work.

On top of the Public Force’s tactics, millions of natives died due to disease and exploitation. British reporter Edmund Morel and Irish rebel Roger Casement led international protests against Belgium for its practices in the Congo. After mounting bad press and pressure from other world leaders, Belgium reluctantly stripped Leopold of his powers in the Free State in 1908. It was then renamed the “Belgian Congo.”

By May 1960, the nation begun feeling resistance from a burgeoning nationalist movement. The Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), led by Patrice Lumumba, won the parliamentary elections, with Lumumba becoming the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s first Prime Minister. The parliament elected Joseph Kasavubu, who represented the Alliance des Bakongo (ABAKO) party, as president, with other rising political parties also springing up, such as the Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA).

The Belgian Congo was declared independent on this day in 1960, leading other groups in the nation to resist the new leadership in secessionist attempts. Moise Tshombe, the president of the Katanga province, fought strongly to secede from the new nation, preferring the ties to Belgium and promoting Western ideology.

Within months, Lumumba’s government was overthrown in a coup during the Congo Crisis. Lumumba did not support Katanga’s secessionist views, which was backed by Belgium officials. Lumumba was later imprisoned by authorities and executed under the command of Joseph-Desiré Mobutu (better known as Mobutu Sese Soko). Lumumba’s request for help in the growing resistance went ignored by the United Nations. The United States’ CIA agency, the United Kingdom’s MI6 agency, and Belgium have all been accused of conspiring to overthrow and assassinate Lumumba. (Text ends)

A Republic in the centre of Africa

It is widely known that the Belgians have ruled over the Congo, the vast country in the heart of Africa for about hundred years before it’s independence in 1960. The Belgians wanted to re-impose colonialism on his country only days after it had proclaimed it’s independence. To achieve their objective, the Belgians had wittingly and unwittingly provoked a
mutiny within the Congolese Army, namely the "Force Publique" to comfort their intervention, then the Belgians had flown-in paratroopers into the Congo to quell the mutiny, first the Belgians were bent on preventing the Congolese government from functioning, aimed at the elected premier Patrice Lumumba preventing from fulfilling the promises he has to his people. During this time the newly elected Congolese prime minister, Patrice Lumumba believing in the neutrality of the UN to settle an intra-Congolese political dispute. Mr. Patrice Lumumba has appealed to the US to sent troops to expel the Belgians from the Congo, but his appeal to the US rejected, as believed the USA, as leader of NATO, of which Belgium was a member, could not stab it's ally, Belgium in the back and rejected Lumumba's appeal out of hand, it advised Mr. Lumumba instead to turn the U.N for assistance, but the United Nation never moves fast in any situation. The United Nations in the early 1960s believed allowed itself to be used as tool of western policies to uphold their wealth in the Congo crisis under the suzerainty of Belgium to cruelly achieve at the expense of then Congolese prime minister. Yet, in the meantime, the Belgian paratroopers who had been flown into the Congo were controlling the country and threatening the physical safety of Mr. patrice Lumumba and members of his government. The newly elected Congolese prime minister turned his face, believing in the neutrality of the UN to settle an intra-Congolese political dispute. But the United Nations in the early 1960s allowed itself to be used as tool of western policies to uphold their wealth in the Congo under the suzerainty of Belgium to cruelly achieve at the expence of then Congolese prime minister who was brutally dismembered by the State security agents.

Thus it was that Mr. Lumumba turned to the ex-Soviet Union to seek for assistance, not to fight the Belgians or expel them, as he had asked the western countries, but merely to give him planes for transportation to ferry troops from those Congolese provinces sympathetic to him, to the capital, Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) where his political opponents were strong. The the ex-Soviet Union agreed and sent him a handful of transport-planes, but the then CIA station chief in Leopoldville, sent alarming reports, claiming that PM Patrice Lumumba had placed the Congo in a situation that indicated a "classic Communist takeover". At the height of the cold war, such a report was incendiary and then president Dwight Eisenhower, ordered then Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles to remove Patrice Lumumba from the Congolese scene. This was, of course, done in such a way of colonial-style cold blooded political assassination as to ensure what the CIA calls "plausible deniability", as the order for Lumumba's elimination had come from president Dweght Eisenhower himself.

Congolese political crises in between the rivals going-tough, Mr. Lumumba who appealed first on 5th September, 1960 to the United Nations and to
the ex-Soviet Union, then on the 14th September, 1960, to sack by the head of state from government, a coup which was organized by a fraction of Congolese army led by Colonel Joseph Mobutu took control of the situation, this was of course endorsed by the western intelligence agencies, the government under Patrice Lumumba was viewed as pro ex-Soviet Union following the incapacitation of his government, he soon to be arrested on the spot and to be transported first with two of his ministers, namely, Joseph Okito and Maurice Mpolo, the move coordinated by the State security of Congo first to Stanleyville (now Kissangani) on the 1st of December, 1960, and flown to Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) there were media-speculations, there had been previous US & Belgium intelligence plots to poison Lumumba in a form of toilet kits such as toothpaste through a CIA agent namely, Larry Devline. He fell at last in the hands of his political rival the Congolese rebel leader Moise Tchombe, later to brutally murder him on the 17th of January, 1961 in Katanga (now Shaba), his corpse were buried nearby and exhumated later to dismember and dissolve it in concentrated sulphuric acid as perceived a threat to western interests. None of the murderers or the men behind them have never been indicted and his body was never recovered. Such a tragic event in the Congo resulted to a suspiciously death of aircrah of the UN Secretary-general Mr. Dag Hammarskjold. Mr. Dag Hammarskjold and his entourage were on a mission to resolve the crisis that convulsed the Congo in the first months of it's independence. The second UN Secretary-general, whose death in a plane crash in the 18th September, 1961 has long aroused suspicions. Many amplified it in the strongest term, this act of murder was highly inspired by the weste intelligence units agencies in circumstances suggesting the support and complicity of the governments of Belgium and the United States. The Swede who became Secretary-general of the United Nation in 1953, had said in an occasion only a year before the tragic crash "the hardest thing of all is to die rightly", a year later he died in a mysterious plane crash near the airport of Ndola, a Zambian town in the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) not far from the Congo border at moonlit night, Patrice Lumumba ended-up being politically consumed by the UN and it's western allies. The wreckage of Hammarskjold's plane, officially nicknamed "Albertina" was found on the 18th September, 1961, the plane had flown from Leopoldville (now Kinshasa).

Post-independence period of the Congo was marked by unrest culminating in a military coup d'etat that brought Colonel Joseph Dezeri Mobutu to power for the second time on the 24th of November, 1965, by forcing the head of state to resign, and retire him from public life (he died on the 24th of March, 1969, at age of fifty nine), dismissed all civilian politicians and established an army rule, subsequently declaring himself head of state of the newly Congo Kinshasa, while in office as president, Army
sergeant Joseph Dezeri-Mobutu formed an authoritarian rule, early in his rule, promoted himself to Colonel, consolidated his power by publicly executing political rivals, secessionists and coup plotters, and other threats to his rule, he officially detached it's former name, and in 1971 renamed the country "Zaire" named himself president for life in 1972, he promoted himself to the rank of Field Marshal in 1983, while the nation's roads rotted and many of his people starved, infrastructure virtually collapsed, and many public service workers went months without being paid, most government money believed siphoned-off to Joseph Mobutu Sese-Seko, his family, and top political & military elites, only the special presidential guard whom his physical safety depended on, was paid adequately or regularly. However, Years of misrule, and increasing violence under Mobutu Sese Seko has left the country ethnically and regionally very divided, and devastated the infrastructure and the economy of ex-Zaire.

Indeed, on the 7th of October, 1996, claiming they are destabilising the region, former ex-Zairean government officials tells the 300,000 Banyamulenge community of ethnic-Tutsis settled in the region for generations, to leave Zaire, now the Congo within a week or be hunted down as rebels, then the warning sparks a rebellion that later forced the ailing president Mobutu Sese-Seko flee exile, on the 17th of May, 1997 to Morocco, which that ended his 32 years rule, Mr. Laurant-Desire Kabilla, the man behind the eight-months armed resistance with support from neighbouring Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, pushed his forces into a full scale rebellion against president Mobutu Sese-Seko, comes to power suspended all political parties except his own and promised elections that were never held, sworn into office as president on the 29th of May, 1997, restored the country's name, "Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)"., he was succeeded by his 29 years old son called, Joseph Kabilla Kabange, a week after the assassination at the state house in the capital, Kinshasa by his personal bodyguard namely, Lt. Rashidi Kasereka, who was then killed on the spot on the 16th of January, 2001, thought the assassination was part of a failed coup attempt. The alleged ringleader, Colonel Eddy Kappend, a cousin to the assassinated president, and others were sentenced to death in absentia by a Special Military Tribunal in January, 2003. Internal conflicts in the eastern Congo, which has claimed some six million lives in a little more than a decade, has long revolved overaccess to it's mineral wealth, the Congo, is a country whose mineral resources are frequently looted by not just by multi-national companies also by it's neighbours the proxy forces.

Democratic Republic of the Congo is so huge and administratively incoherent that it has no control of parts of its territory. Neighbours like Rwanda and Angola can march in at will. Its mineral wealth is legendary but has yet to improve the people’s standards of living. It’s one of the
countries in Africa where the US dollar is more prized for local commerce than the country’s almost valueless currency. Factional violence in eastern DRC has resulted in high numbers of internally displaced people and evils such as widespread rape. High incidence of infectious diseases like malaria, diarrhoea and occasionally ebola as a result of poor health coverage. Stupendous natural wealth of DRC has not improved the poverty index. There is also an environmental threat to the Congo rainforest due to overlogging, often by foreign interests doing so illegally. Saving the Congo and creating an African Great Lakes region at peace with itself by help solve the Congo’s four major problems nowadays: Impunity, insecurity, institutional failure and illicit trade extractions and trade of minerals that gave the warlords room to manoeuvre remains a mystery to all sides.

In the second democratic general elections since independence in 1960, the Congolese people will vote for a new president and parliament on 28th November, 2011. There were 11 candidates vying for the highest office of the land, and among them is the incumbent President Joseph Kabila Kabange who is running for re-election. He is identified as candidate number three. In addition, an incredible more than 18,500 candidates are competing for 500 seats in the national assembly; approximately 37 candidates are competing for each parliamentary seat. The Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) has been mandated by the Congolese government to organise the presidential and legislative elections. In a country as big as Western Europe where infrastructures such as roads and bridges are non-existent in many regions, the CENI is faced with the herculean task of successfully organising this very important event. The international community and neighbouring states would like to see the DRC succeed in organising peaceful elections as part of the on-going democratisation process of the country. Hence the UN, the EU, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community have offered financial, logistical and human resource assistance to the country. Without a doubt the success of these elections is good for the country, the Great Lakes region and the African continent in general.

Election fever has been high in the Congo, while the candidates are all on the campaign trail, some have more financial and logistical resources whereas others have little to none. A good number of candidates for the national assembly campaign door-to-door in their respective districts, while a select few get a lot of national TV and radio coverage. As one Radio commentator said, "while others are already almost at the finish line, some seem to be sluggish in starting their campaigns". Like many politicians, they are full of campaign promises to make the DRC a modern, economically progressive country. Scepticism abounds as to whether these promises will ever be fulfilled once they are elected. "All politicians seem to have one sickness-they become amnesiacs immediately after
having been elected", said one education inspector in Goma. It seems for many that being elected is the quickest way to get rich. It's unclear whether the 11 presidential candidates and those 18,000 candidates all over the Congo running for 500 legislative seats in the national assembly are aware there are two million internally displaced persons in the country, and hundreds of thousands of Congolese refugees exiled abroad. Surprisingly, hardly anyone has discussed on this issue. In these elections, money counts much more than the impeccable presentation by candidates of their socio-political and economic plans for the Congolese people or their country. Even good candidates with excellent plans stand to perform poorly in these elections if they don't give out money.

In a country where everyone seems confident that they will win, it is difficult for candidates accept defeat. Instead, defeated candidates are quick to cry foul. In these elections there will be no losers, only victims of electoral fraud and sabotage. Nobody knows what will happen in the Congo, usually known as "heart of Africa" after the election results are announced on December 6. It is likely there will be various forms of protest, some peacefully through the courts, others may resort to violence. Despite calls for restraint and respect for the voice of the people, there are serious risks that disenfranchised groups will try to manipulate opposition supporters to create havoc. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) president Joseph Kabilla Kabange, 40 has rejected any claims that he won election through widespread rigging. President Joseph Kabilla denied that the results lacked legitimacy, but admitted that "mistakes" had been made during the election. The opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi claimed victory for himself. Several people were killed in protests. After days of delays, official results which gave the ruling-party 49% of the vote against 32% for the 78 year old veteran politician Mr. Etienne Tshisesedi. The Supreme Court of the DRC has confirmed the incumbent Joseph Kabilla as winner of presidential elections, despite opposition calls to cancel the vote. Mr. Joseph Kabilla had won 48.95% and was elected with simple majority.

President Joseph Kabilla Kabange was sworn-in for a second term after being declared the official winner with 49% of the vote composed to opposition candidate Mr. Etienne Tshisekedi’s 32%. Mr. Etienne Tshisekedi’s Union for Democracy and Progress (UDPS) party have recently sent out what appeared to be official invitations on presidential letterheads, urging journalists and diplomats in the country to attend the swearing-in ceremony at the Martyr’s Stadium in the capital, Kinshasa, but supporters were refused entry to the Martyr's Stadium and all the roads around Mr. Tshisekedi’s residence had been cordoned off. Troops from the Police, military and elite presidential guard have all been deployed around the Stadium in Kinshasa, which’s an opposition stronghold. President Joseph Kabilla Kabange, who has been succeeded
his late father, is on power since the murder of ex-president Laurent-Desire Kabilla in January, 2001. The Congo has been engaged with internal political confusion & security crisis since the fled of the late ex-president Mobutu Sese-Seko in May, 1997 to the kingdom of Morocco.

Side note: In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the mineral dense country, several bilateral agreements were made that still exist between China and the DRC are steeped in secrecy. It's well known that the 2009 infrastructural and mining development agreement said to be worth between USD 6billion and USD 13 billion, commits DRC to supplying Chinese state firms with nearly 10 million tonnes of Copper and several hundred thousands tonnes of Cobalt. In return China has pledged to embark on several infrastructural projects, including roads, rail-roads, hydro-electric power stations, Universities, and health centres. From all indications, the DRC president Joseph Kabilla Kabang is following the Zimbabwean president Robert Gabriel Mugabe's statement, "we have turned East where the Sun rises, and given our back to the West, where the Sun sets". The Democratic Republic of Congo's main opposition leader has condemned the results of parliamentary elections. Mr. Etienne Tshisekedi said his party members who had won seats should boycott the parliament as November's general elections were rigged. He also called for a general strike in protest at his house arrest. President Joseph Kabila's PPRD and their allies say they will be able to muster a parliamentary majority, with 432 of the 500 seats declared.

New inquiry into ex-UN chief Dag Hammarskjold's death'

A new inquiry is to be launched into the death of United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold when his plane crashed in Zambia in 1961. A UN investigation in 1962 failed to find a cause for the Swedish-born diplomat's mysterious demise. New evidence will be examined by an international commission of lawyers. Mr Hammarskjold's plane was travelling to Congo on a peace mission when it crashed in a forest near Ndola in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. The crash occurred shortly before landing just after midnight on 18 September. All but one of the passengers and crew on the flight were killed. The committee's chairman David Lea said that the time was right to set up the new inquiry. "We believe that the whole of the truth, in significant respects, has yet to be told," he said. Three investigations have failed to determine the cause of the crash, and many conspiracy theories have swirled around Mr. Hammarskjold's death. Two investigations held in the British-run Central African Federation, which included Northern Rhodesia, were followed by an official UN inquiry, which concluded that foul play could not be ruled out. Though the inquiry has no official standing, it will be carried out by several high-profile jurists, including South African judge Richard Goldstone, retired British judge Stephen Sedley, former Swedish diplomat
Hans Correll and Dutch Supreme Court judge Wilhelmina Thomassen. They hope to to review the evidence, complete their report within a year and submit the findings to the UN. Mr Lea said a book published last year by British academic Susan Williams entitled Who Killed Hammarskjold? - which concluded that it was likely that the plane was brought down - provided fresh evidence that needed to be examined. The plane crashed as he was trying to negotiate a ceasefire in Congo's mineral-rich Katanga province, where Moise Tshombe led Western-backed separatist rebels against the Soviet Union-allied Congolese government. After his death, Mr Hammarskjold was described by US President John F Kennedy as the "greatest statesman of our century". The only person to be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize after his death, he established the first armed UN peacekeeping mission following the crisis in Suez.

Updates: Internal fighting worsens 'deteriorating' situation in eastern Congo. Army troops and rebels clashed on Wednesday in the violence-ridden eastern part of Congo, threatening to undermine an already fragile stability. Hundreds of people in North Kivu fled toward the city of Goma by road trying to escape the fighting. The sound of heavy artillery echoed through the hills. The Congolese army continued a second day offensive to recover the cities of Rugari and Rumangavo, and to takeover these positions held by the insurgency. "The situation is deteriorating because of the fighting between various groups," said Ronald Paul Veilleux, the International Rescue Committee's provincial director for North and South Kivu. As of January 2009, an estimated 1.5 million people in North and South Kivu provinces have been internally displaced, and the number continues to rise, according to the United Nations. "People are losing their homes, their livelihoods and their hope," Veilleux said. The massive displacement has also led to an increase in gender-based violence. According to Veilleux, reported cases have gone up by 75% nationwide since April, and many go unreported in a nation that is already known as the rape capital of the world. In addition, this past week the World Health Organization reported a sharp increase in the number of cholera cases in North Kivu. "There is potential for this to turn into an epidemic if the situation continues to deteriorate," said Veilleux. The eastern part of Congo has been embroiled in violence since 1994, when Hutu forces crossed the border fearing reprisals following the genocide in neighboring Rwanda. In 1998 the vast nation -- previously known as Zaire -- became a battleground for eight African countries. More than 5 million people died in the war and its aftermath, making it the deadliest conflict since World War II. Despite the signing of peace accords in 2003, fighting continues in the eastern part of Congo between various rebel groups and the Congolese army, which is back by U.N. peacekeepers. There are many different forces on the ground, all of whom are armed. "The fighting is like a view through a kaleidoscope," said John Campbell, an Africa expert with
the Council on Foreign Relations. Amid growing concerns of an escalating conflict, the U.S. government announced last week that it will cut military aid to Rwanda. The United States has accused Rwanda of supporting rebels in Congo. "The United States government is deeply concerned about the evidence that Rwanda is implicated in the provision of support to Congolese rebel groups, including M23," said Hilary Fuller Renner, a State Department spokeswoman. The M23 -- named after a failed peace agreement signed on March 23 three years ago -- is a rebel group that split from the Congolese army earlier this year. It has been accused of killing hundreds of people. One of the M23 commanders, Bosco Ntaganda, is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes. In a report to the U.N. Security Council in June, a U.N. expert panel on Congo found "substantial evidence" attesting to support from Rwandan officials to armed groups operating in the eastern region. It documents a "systematic pattern of military and political support provided to the M23 rebellion by Rwandan authorities" in the form of recruits, weapons and military equipment. Rwanda has denied allegations that the M23 are backed by their country's Tutsi leadership. "As we have made clear from the outset, Rwanda is neither the cause nor the enabler of instability in the eastern Congo," said Louise Mushikiwabo, Rwanda's foreign minister.

East DR Congo faces 'catastrophic humanitarian crisis'

The east of the Democratic Republic of Congo faces a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, an aid agency has warned ahead of a regional summit in Uganda. The Oxfam charity said millions of people were now at the mercy of militias, with a sharp increase in killings, rapes and looting. It said the focus on dealing with rebels had diverted the security forces from other vulnerable areas. The UN says the conflict has forced about 250,000 people from their homes. The UN and the DR Congo government are accusing neighbouring Rwanda of backing the M23 rebel group - a charge denied by Kigali. DR Congo President Joseph Kabila, and his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame are meeting to discuss the conflict at the regional summit near Uganda's capital Kampala. They have already agreed to set up a "neutral force" along the border to deal with the M23 and the Rwandan FDLR rebel group which also operates in the area. Oxfam UK warned that there was a "terrifying absence" of state authority and security in vast swathes of eastern DR Congo. The British-based charity described the situation as chaotic, saying that its local partners in the area reported a steep rise in forced recruitment of children, killing, rape and extortion which were going "virtually unnoticed". It stressed that the humanitarian consequences were huge - with cholera a real risk and the insecurity making it extremely difficult to deliver aid. The charity called for protection of civilians to be put at the top of the agenda of the summit in Uganda. The rebellion in eastern DR Congo is led by renegade general Bosco Ntaganda, who is accused by the UN of receiving military
backing from Rwanda. He belongs to the Tutsi ethnic group like the top leadership in Rwanda, which fears the presence of rival Hutu militias in eastern DR Congo. Eastern DR Congo has been plagued by fighting since 1994, when more than a million ethnic Hutus crossed the border into DR Congo following the Rwandan genocide. Rwanda has since twice invaded its much larger neighbour, saying it was trying to take action against Hutu rebels based in DR Congo, such as the FDLR. DR Congo conflict: Kagame and Kabila fail to agree on force.

Summit on the Congo crisis end in Uganda'

Leaders of the Great Lakes region have proposed forming a joint force to maintain peace in the region following an outbreak of violence in the Congo. The joint force was mooted at the close of a two day summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and a sub-committee has been put in place to study the feasibility of such a force. "We have mandated a subcommittee to propose urgent actionable steps to ensure that fighting stops completely to allow for consolidation of peace, security and stability." The sub-committee is to also provide details on the operationalisation of the neutral international force," a communiqué after the summit reads. The leaders agreed to support the efforts of the government of the Congo in restoring peace and security in eastern Congo, particularly in North Kivu Province. The sub-committee has been requested to submit its interim report to the chairperson of the ICGLR in two weeks, and its final report to the summit of the ICGLR heads of state and government in four weeks. Leaders of Uganda, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania attended the summit. Meantime, regional leaders have failed to agree at a summit in Uganda on deploying a new force to tackle militia groups in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. "We will meet again in four weeks," Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said, the AFP news agency reports. Last month, the African Union called for a force to be established within weeks, as conflict escalated. Meanwhile, gunmen have attacked the airport in the southern Congolese mining city of Lubumbashi. At least one soldier was killed in a shoot-out that lasted several hours. The government blamed a similar attack on the airport last year on armed men linked to secessionists in the south-east.

Outbreak of Ebola virus strikes DR Congo town of Isiro'

At least one person has died after an outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, officials say. The death is one of two cases of the virus discovered in the town of Isiro. Medical charity workers say they are attempting to find and isolate anyone who has been in contact with those infected by the virus. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) says the strain is not the same as the kind found recently in neighbouring Uganda. At least 16 people died during an outbreak there last month. The DR Congo outbreak occurred in Oriental
province, which shares a border with Uganda. "There is no link between both epidemics at this moment," Anja de Weggheleire, of MSF, told the BBC. She added that there may be more cases that have yet to be detected. "Not every person who develops the disease will develop clear symptoms that are recognised as Ebola. For the moment it seems that there are not that many cases but the exact number of cases is unknown."

Experts fear that the town's position as a transit point could make an outbreak more challenging to control. The virus, which is transmitted to humans from both monkeys and birds, causes massive internal bleeding and has a very high mortality rate. It is one of the most virulent diseases in the world and is spread by close personal contact. There is no vaccine for the virus and symptoms of infection include a sudden onset of fever, weakness, headache, vomiting and kidney problems.

Fake borders create real conflicts'

Views: Africa continues to suffer the consequences of the Berlin Conference, 1884-1885, when the colonial powers carved the continent up by artificial borders. The notion of citizenship in Africa is only 50 years old and it is cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity that remains more important to most of the population. Being a question associated with national boundaries and state sovereignty, this became politically manipulated by the post-colonial leaders, and has often been interpreted simplistically by external intervention. Conveying the complexity of the real situation has remained unrecognised or undermined by the UN Panel of 'experts' or other interventionists. In DR-Congo and Côte d'Ivoire, the question of cross-border identities has been the underlying cause of conflict and political violence. The political and ethnic identities of Rwandophone groups in Eastern DRC have often been contested and confused due to regional trans-border cultural and linguistic links. Yet, objectively, in a multilingual state like DRC, culture, physical features and linguistic affiliation should not be the basis to determine whether or not someone is a 'foreigner.' In Côte d'Ivoire, the ongoing conflictual situation is about what constitutes an Ivorian. Where someone lives, and their links beyond the borders, may define one as 'the son of migrants' or an 'autochthon.' Africa's economic development and sustainable peace-building largely depends on the cohesiveness of its diverse and rich identities within and beyond borders. Policy makers need to acknowledge the human consequences of not adequately recognising and addressing the question of identity and sense of belonging. Alex Ntung, Member of UK Expert Witness Institute, Hastings, UK, is a researcher and expert adviser on Central Africa. The Africa Report October 19, 2012

Accession to power of president Joseph Kabilla Kabange - 22nd January, 2001 by succession.

Tentative election calendar - November
Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire): It may be currently unfashionable to assign African troubles to colonial and external powers, but in the case of the continent’s second largest country, DR Congo, it would be difficult to come to any other conclusion. After over fifty years of independence, Africa is now more mature and able to take it’s own responsibility for it’s own short-comings without blaming external forces. But history teaches that the people of DR Congo have truly been brutalized and exploited for the last 100 years – sometimes with the connivance, if not active participation, of some Western powers and corporations. What about the assassination of Congo’s elected prime minister, Patrice Emery Lumumba? And the suffering still continues. There is a thread running through the serious harm done to the country by the killing it’s first prime minister Patrice Lumumba on the 17 of January, 1961 – 52 long years ago this January, 2013 – to the troubles in Congo today. The United Nations estimates that the country has the worst rape and sexual violence statistics in the world. Editor

1200s – The rise of Kongo empire, centred in modern northern Angola and including extreme western Congo and territories round lakes Kisale and Upemba in central Katanga (now Shaba).

1482 - Portuguese navigator Diogo Cao becomes the first European to visit the Congo; Portuguese set up ties with the king of Kongo.

16th-17th centuries - British, Dutch, Portuguese and French merchants engage in slave trade through Kongo intermediaries.

1870s - Belgian King Leopold II sets up a private venture to colonise Congo.

1874-77 - British explorer Henry Stanley navigates Congo river to the Atlantic Ocean.

1879-87 - Leopold commissions Stanley to establish the king’s authority in the Congo basin.

1884-85 - European powers at the Conference of Berlin recognise Leopold’s claim to the Congo basin.

1885 - Leopold II announces the establishment of the Congo Free State, headed by himself.

1891-92 - Belgians conquer Katanga.

1892-94 - Eastern Congo wrested from the control of East African Arab and Swahili-speaking traders.
1908 - Belgian state annexes Congo amid protests over killings and atrocities carried out on a mass scale by Leopold's agents. Millions of Congolese are said to have been killed or worked to death during Leopold's control of the territory.

1955 - Belgian Professor Antoin van Bilsen publishes a "30-Year Plan" for granting the Congo increased self-government.

1959 - Belgium begins to lose control over events in the Congo following serious nationalist riots in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa).

June 30, 1960 - Congo becomes independent with Patrice Emery Lumumba as prime minister and Joseph Kasavubu as president.

July 1960 - Congolese army mutinies; Moise Tshombe declares Katanga independent; Belgian troops sent in ostensibly to protect Belgian citizens and mining interests; UN Security Council votes to send in troops to help establish order, but the troops are not allowed to intervene in internal affairs.

September 1960 – President Joseph Kasavubu dismisses Lumumba as prime minister.

December 1960 – PM Patrice Lumumba arrested.


August 1961 - UN troops begin disarming Katangese soldiers.

In 1963 – Moise Tshombe agrees to end Katanga's secession.

In 1964 - President Joseph Kasavubu appoints Tshombe prime minister.

In 1965 – President Joseph Kasavubu and Moise Tshombe ousted in a coup led by Colonel Joseph Mobutu.

In 1971 – Colonel Joseph Mobutu renames the country Zaire and himself to Mobutu Sese Seko; also Katanga becomes Shaba and the river Congo becomes the river Zaire.

In 1973-74 – Mobutu Sese Seko nationalises many foreign-owned firms and forces European investors out of the country.

In 1977 – Mobutu Sese Seko invites foreign investors back, without much success; French, Belgian and Moroccan troops help repulse attack on Katanga by Angolan-based rebels.

In 1989 - Zaire defaults on loans from Belgium, resulting in a cancellation of development programmes and increased deterioration of the economy.
In 1990 – Mobutu Se-se-seko agrees to end the ban on multiparty politics and appoints a transitional government, but retains substantial powers.

In 1991 - Following riots in Kinshasa by unpaid soldiers, President Mobutu Sese Seko agrees to a coalition government with opposition leaders, but retains control of the security apparatus and important ministries.

In 1993 - Rival pro- and anti-Mobutu governments created.

In 1994 – President Mobutu Sese Seko agrees to the appointment of Kengo Wa Dondo, an advocate of austerity and free-market reforms, as prime minister.

In 1996-97 - Tutsi rebels capture much of eastern Zaire while Mobutu is abroad for medical treatment.

In 1997 May – Baniamulenge Tutsies and other anti-Mobutu rebels, aided principally by Rwanda, capture the capital, Kinshasa; Zaire is renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo; Laurent-Desire Kabila installed as president.

August 1998 - Rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda rise up against Laurant Desire Kabila and advance on to Kinshasa. Zimbabwe, Namibia send troops to repel them. Angolan troops also side with Laurant Kabila. The rebels take control of much of the east of DR Congo.

In 1999 - Rifts emerge between Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) rebels supported by Uganda and Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) rebels backed by Rwanda.

July 1999 - The six African countries involved in the war sign a ceasefire accord in Lusaka. The following month the MLC and RCD rebel groups sign the accord.

In 2000 - UN Security Council authorises a 5,500-strong UN force to monitor the ceasefire but fighting continues between rebels and government forces, and between Rwandan and Ugandan forces.

January 2001 - President Laurent Kabila is shot dead by his bodyguard. Joseph Kabila Kabange succeeds his father.

February 2001 – Joseph Kabila Kabange meets Rwandan President Paul Kagame in Washington. Rwanda, Uganda and the rebels agree to a UN pull-out plan. Uganda, Rwanda begin pulling troops back from the frontline.

May 2001 - US refugee agency says the war has killed 2.5 million people, directly or indirectly, since August 1998. Later, a UN panel says the warring parties are deliberately prolonging the conflict to plunder gold, diamonds, timber and coltan, used in the making of mobile phones.
January 2002 - Eruption of Mount Nyiragongo devastates much of the city of Goma.

April 2002 - Peace talks in South Africa: Kinshasa signs a power-sharing deal with Ugandan-backed rebels, under which the MLC leader would be premier. Rwandan-backed RCD rebels reject the deal.

July 2002 - Presidents of DR Congo and Rwanda sign a peace deal under which Rwanda will withdraw troops from the east and DR Congo will disarm and arrest Rwandan Hutu gunmen blamed for the killing of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

September 2002 - Presidents of DR Congo and Uganda sign peace accord under which Ugandan troops will leave DR Congo.

September/October 2002 - Uganda, Rwanda say they have withdrawn most of their forces from the east. UN-sponsored power-sharing talks begin in South Africa.

December 2002 - Peace deal signed in South Africa between Kinshasa government and main rebel groups. Under the deal rebels and opposition members are to be given portfolios in an interim government.

April 2003 - President Kabila signs a transitional constitution, under which an interim government will rule pending elections.

May 2003 - Last Ugandan troops leave eastern DR Congo.

June 2003 - French soldiers arrive in Bunia, spearheading a UN-mandated rapid-reaction force.

President Joseph Desire Kabila names a transitional government to lead until elections in two years time. Leaders of main former rebel groups are sworn in as vice-presidents in July.

August 2003 - Interim parliament inaugurated.

March 2004 - Gunmen attack military bases in Kinshasa in an apparent coup attempt.

June 2004 - Reported coup attempt by rebel guards is said to have been neutralised.

December 2004 - Fighting in the east between the Congolese army and renegade soldiers from a former pro-Rwanda rebel group. Rwanda denies being behind the mutiny.

January 5, 2005 Eleven of 36 ministers were dismissed for corruption. A major cause of this was the reluctance of foreign nations to send aid, when so much of it is stolen by government officials. Commanders of the UN peacekeeper force also insisted that corrupt Congolese military officers
and troops be fired as well. Congolese police and soldiers are notorious for their looting, often in front of foreign relief workers and journalists. All this clean government activity is not expected to eliminate corruption, but its a move in the right direction. Congolese officials who complained, that more aid was going to tidal wave victims in the Indian Ocean, than to the Congo, were told that local officials in the countries in the Indian Ocean might steal 5-10 percent of the aid, while in Congo, over half would disappear.

January 10, 2005 The government announced that national elections, set for June, would be delayed until the Fall. Inability of government officials to get ready in time was the reason. As a result, riots broke out in major cities, leaving at least three dead. Most Congolese want to elect their leaders, and maybe get a more honest and efficient bunch than the current lot of former rebels.

January 14, 2005 Donor nations were again in an uproar, as five warlords, all accused of war crimes, were appointed to high army ranks, as part of the peace deals with the rebel groups the men led. It is believed, however, that the new army officers, including four generals, will not be given important commands.

January 17, 2005 All soldiers and police must have their existence, and ability to do their job, verified, so that new identification cards can be issued in March. Commanders have long padded their units with phantom soldiers, and pocketed their pay. Unqualified friends and relatives have also been given jobs in the police and army, and the government wants to stop this. Or at least try.

January 19, 2005 The Rwandan government and NGO sources are reporting a new wave of refugees from the Congo. The refugees report new fighting in the Masisi area of the eastern Congo. A Rwandan government spokesman said that Mai-Mai militia were participating in the fighting. Uganda reports that 15,000 Congolese refugees have entered Ugandan territory. Many of them are camped on the shores of Lake Albert. The UN reported on January 17 that Mai-Mai militiamen were fighting with Rwandan-backed Congolese rebel units in the Ituri area. These reports are further evidence that the UN forces deployed in the eastern Congo lack the mobility and intelligence assets to be effective. Yes, the UN forces were originally deployed as "peace monitors," but the continual fighting forced the UN to intervene in the tribal and political disputes.

January 28, 2005 UN peacekeepers had seized four militia camps near Bunia (northeast Congo) and "demolished" the camps. Two of the camps were run by a splinter faction of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC-L). The UPC-L has emerged as a major troublemaker in the area. UN troops killed a UPC-L officer in a shootout north of Bunia and arrested two other
militiamen. The rogue militias and "rebel" Congolese military units are preying on unprotected villages and have threatened relief workers. The rebel Congolese units are a particularly dicey problem. On January 20 representatives of the NGO Doctors Without Borders (DWB) said that had suspended aid operations in North Kivu province. For months NGOs and the UN have been continually reporting looting and violence in North Kivu. Doctors Without Borders is regarded as one of the "toughest" NGO organizations --meaning that DWB will keep its staff deployed in dangerous situations where other NGOs would pull out. However, DWB said that on January 18 "men in army uniforms" attacked their medical facility in the village of Kabati. The attackers took communications gear and one vehicle. The DWB report said that the Kabati facility was positioned to help people in the Masisi and Rutshuru districts. There are many refugees in this area --some of whom fled last months fighting in the town of Kanyabayonga. DWB still has what is described as a "mobile medical facility" in the town of Kayna. The fighting in Kanyabayonga was initially described as a "fight between regular Congolese army units." It later turned out that the units are former guerrilla forces and militia units that have (obviously) not been integrated into a national military force. It looks like the DWB medical team was pulled out because local "Congolese army units" are now little more than rogue forces. As we've noted before, there simply aren't enough UN peacekeepers and monitoring teams in the eastern Congo.

February 16, 2005 The dam has finally broken on coverage of UN sex crimes in the Congo. On February 11, the UN secretary-generals office issued an unusual order. The order bans sex between UN peacekeepers and Congolese locals. For months the international press has run stories of child sex, gang rapes, and sexual exploitation by UN troops in the Congo. This has led to investigations and charges against at least 50 troops. The sex scandals are another embarrassment for the UN. Lack of accountability and oversight are the big issues. The UN command, such as it is, has limited authority over national contingents. To their credit, France and South Africa have prosecuted soldiers charged with crimes in the Congo. However, continued media exposure put the UN leadership on the spot and seems to have brought pressure on some national governments to discipline soldiers. By February 14, Morocco was promising to prosecute offenders. But so much for sex-- the usual Congo violence continues. On February 10 the UN and western media reported renewed fighting in the eastern Congo. The fighting began February 6 and the Kyoma and Kasenyi village areas were once again hotspots. On February 11 the UN and South African sources said that a South African contingent of 1200 troops will move to the town of Beni (Ituri province, northeast Congo). The troops were assigned to security duty in the Kindu area. The South African forces are slated to act as a rapid-reaction force.
in the area (to handle missions like rescuing threatened civilians). A second and very difficult mission is called interpositionie, placing the peacekeeping force between the warring militias and rebel factions that are savaging the region. This is a very dicey task, but one the highly-trained South Africans can handle. Superior training is why the South Africans have been assigned this operation. Its possible the South African unit could also be used as a strike force to free hostages though this would be pushing the edge of the UNs peace monitoring mission.

February 21, 2005 The World Health Organization is reporting a serious outbreak in the Congo of pneumonic plague. WHO says at least 60 people have died from the disease and several hundred are ill. This is the more easily spread version of the infamous Black Death that killed over a third of Europe's population in the 14th century. Pneumonic plague is spread via tiny particles people expel when they breathe out (instead of via infected fleas). While plague is a bacterial infection, that can be cured by antibiotics, but in vast, lawless areas of Congo, there are no antibiotics, and there is pneumonic plague. The center of the outbreak is a diamond mine at Zobia in the northeastern Congo--yup, right in the middle of the violence, chaos, and factional wars. Around 7,000 people work at the mine or in the immediate area, so if 400 to 500 people have been infected, the danger of a virulent "breakout" is very real. A subsequent report said the mine was re-opened in early December 2004 and the first case of pneumonic plague was discovered December 20. WHO and the CDC have sent health teams and disease investigation teams. UN peacekeepers in the area ought to detail troops to protect the these teams. Thousands of people are fleeing the plague area, some of them taking the plague with them. Meanwhile, in the northeast, renewed fighting between peacekeepers, army units and various rebel militias, has caused some 50,000 civilians to flee the area.

March 2, 2005 UN combat operations against the FNI militia has killed at least fifty of the gunmen. The FNI denies it had anything to do with the deaths of nine Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers, but no one besides the FNI believes that. FNI officials have been arrested in other parts of Congo, and the UN and the government seems determined to crush the FNI, if only to discourage further attacks on peacekeepers. Following the February 25 murders of nine Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers, the Congo reported that UN and NGO aid organizations have suspended operations in the Congo's northeastern Ituri region. One UN agency has been assisting over 50,000 refugees in the vicinity of the towns of Kakwa, Tche and Gina. UN sources cited the "poor security situation" for the suspension of aid operations. The security situation has been going from bad to worse, with a decline that began in December 2004. The Congo government now blames rogue militias operating in Ituri for the murder of the Bangladeshi soldiers. On February 28 the government said that it had arrested Floribert Ndjabu,
the commander of the Nationalist and Integrationist Front (FNI). The FNI is one of a half-dozen tribal defense groups or militias in the area where the Bangladeshi troops were slain. MONUC issued an official statement on the murders. MONUC said the peacekeepers were on a security mission around the refugee camp at Kafe (sometimes designated as the IDP camp, Kafe, or internally displaced persons camp). The Bangladeshi UN contingent had assigned 20 troops to the task as well as a UN civilian interpreter. The unit was ambushed five kilometers west of Kafe. The UN commander (of what is now called the Ituri Brigade) responded by sending two additional infantry platoons (by helicopter) and two Mi-25 attack helicopters. The reinforcements engaged the militias in a firefight while dead and wounded were evacuated. MONUC said that the arrest of 30 militiamen on February 24 may have precipitated the incident. The ambush was characterized as a "premeditated" attack. On February 28 the government said that it would send an additional brigade (3,000 troops) to Ituri to help police the troubled region. The UN's Ituri Brigade deploys approximately 4,500 troops and support personnel. In addition to the Bangladeshis, the unit is manned by troop contingents from Morocco, Pakistan, and Nepal. The security situation in North Kivu province is also terrible. On February 28 the European Union suspended developmental aid projects in North Kivu due to what a UN press release described as "massive looting of supplies." The UN said "systematic looting" occurred between December 20, 2004 and the end of January. Looters took material intended for schools and hospitals. Neither the government or MONUC are able to provide basic security for these aid programs. The decision to pullback is a wise one. The Congo and UN are left with several tough decisions. If the government and UN are serious about improving the security situation, the leaders of the rogue militias and tribal organizations committing these crimes will have to be arrested. Disbanding these organizations is an even tougher proposition. The Congo is flush with light automatic weapons and a "disbanded militia" can easily reorganize. The best policy is to arrest incorrigible militia leaders and convince the remaining leaders to cooperate with government and UN authorities. -- Austin Bay

March 10, 2005 The UN announced that it will investigate the counter-militia operation launched on March 1 by Pakistani and South African peacekeepers in the Congo's Ituri province. The UN said the investigation was routine, though press sources report that villagers in the area where the combat action occurred said that peacekeepers also killed civilians. UN commanders denied this accusation. The UN commanders did say the militiamen tried to use hostages as "shields" but UN soldiers held fire until they could initiate combat without civilian losses. The counter-militia operation (which has all the markings of a carefully planned counter-bandit operation) was conducted in response to a rogue militia's ambush
of Bangladeshi peacekeepers on February 25 that left 9 Bangaldeshis dead. The Pakistanis and South Africans estimated they killed around 60 militiamen in the operation which took place near the Congo town of Loga. The UN (MONUC) force had two wounded. The Pakistanis are part of the UN's "Ituri Brigade" and the South African contingent had been moved into the area to act as a rapid response force. The rogue militia belongs to the Nationalist Integrationist Front (FNI). UN peacekeepers (presumably in the Ituri Brigade) reported that the Pakistani and South African troops had "precise intelligence." March 1 was a market day in Lago and a UN source said on market days "the militia gather taxes" (translation: rob or take protection money from the locals). The situation in the Congo appears to be getting worse-- if that sound possible. The civilian death rate in the region among refugees seems to be running at 1,000 a day in the area. Most of these people die from malnutrition and various diseases. Sexual abuse of women and girls continues in rebel controlled areas-- if you thought UN peacekeepers were bad, the militiamen are worse. There are also new reports of militias "recruiting" child soldiers. The possibility of any solution is dim, given the complex interrelationships of social unrest, criminal gangs, traditional tribal conflicts, and the presence of defeated Rwandan Hutu rebels. The increasing aggressiveness of the UN peacekeeping forces may suggest that Congo -- or at least the war -- is about to (and we quote) "fall into UN receivership." This is a UN Charter Chapter 7 operation, which empowers the peacekeepers to act aggressively (the only prior Chapter 7 ops have been Korea, Congo 1960, Iraq '90-'91, and Somalia), but from 1999 until recently the chief UN official overseeing the operation has been reluctant to act decisively. That seems to have changed as of March 1. MONUC is the world's largest on-going peacekeeping operation. UN security strength -- currently around 13,206 troops, 569 military observers, and 175 civilian police -- is scheduled to rise to 17,000 troops and right at 500 civilian police officers. Counting the 9 Bangladeshis killed February 25, the current UN death toll in the Congo MONUC operation (KIA or died of wounds) is 45. The breakdown is as follows: 34 military troops, eight military observers, two international civilian UN staffers and one local civilian hired by the UN.

March 12, 2005 The UN announced a new operation in the region. Described as a "cordon and search security operation," the UN said 800 troops (deployed as four companies) were participating in the operation. The area of operation is east of Bunia. The troops used transport helicopters backed by attack helicopters (so apparently there is an airmobile component to the operation). Meanwhile, there are reports of the return of "tribal slave raids." Lendu tribal militias are raiding Hema villages and taking prisoners. Those who are not needed for work or sex are killed. Some of the female prisoners, used as "sex slaves," have escaped to report the presence of the slave camps, where the captives are
roped together in work gangs and forced to grow food. The slaves are kept in line by malnutrition, and the threat of death or amputation of a hand, if they resist or try to escape. All of this is right out of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," and are reminiscent of similar atrocities committed a century ago when the king of Belgium ran the Congo as a feudal fiefdom.

March 14, 2005 It looks like the UN's Ituri Brigade is continuing to pursue its "aggressive strategy" to deal with rogue militias. UN peacekeepers say they have killed more than 50 militia members in an offensive, days after nine Bangladeshi soldiers serving with the UN are killed in the north-east.

March 18, 2005 The Ituri Brigade's "cordon and search" operation outside of Bunia is continuing. The "Zumbe area" near Bunia had been the center of the operation. UN troops reported they seized weapons from militiamen identified as belonging to the FNI (National Integration Front), the militia accused of killing nine UN peacekeepers on February 25. A UN officer said that peacekeepers had seen a "flow of arms coming from Uganda" into the Congo.

March 19, 2005 Tribal militia leader Thomas Lubanga was arrested in the capital. Lubanga was the head of the Union of Congolese Patriots, a group representing armed Hema tribesmen in northeastern Congo.

March 23, 2005 The UN reported on March 18 that Meanwhile, the African Union (AU) is calling for another 7000 peacekeepers to be sent to the eastern Congo. This comes at a time the AU is still looking for troops to help monitor the war in Sudan's Darfur. The AU issued a statement March 17 saying that an additional 7,000 troops were needed in the eastern Congo in order to "disarm" the rogue militias. The AU's call for new troops indicates the UN's new "aggressive policing" of Congo militias is receiving wide political support.

April 5, 2005 Add a cholera epidemic to the problems in the northeastern Congo. Approximately 500 people in refugee camps in Ituri province have contracted cholera. The latest reports give the death toll at 20, but that could rise sharply within days. UN sources say the first case appeared March 26. By April first the number of cases hit 110. April 4 the number approached 500. The epicenter of the outbreak is the Kafe Refugee Camp (near Lake Albert). Poor hygiene and bad water are typical conditions in refugee camps-- and they are the conditions that make for a cholera outbreak. Poor nutrition contributes to the spread of disease, and UN sources have documented an increase in food shortages throughout Ituri. Meanwhile, combat continues. The UN reported that peacekeepers in the UN's Ituri Brigade killed 38 militiamen in a series of battles that took place April 2 and April 3. The major April 2 battle started when peacekeepers were searching a refugee camp and located a large weapons cache.
Militiamen fired on the peacekeepers. The UN soldiers responded with heavy fire and attack helicopters. 18 militiamen died in that action. UN peacekeepers are expected to become even more aggressive. The UN command set an April 1 deadline for militias in Ituri to hand in their weapons. Interestingly enough, the UN reports that 8,200 militiamen have surrendered themselves and their weapons to the UN-- but that leaves another estimated 6000 to 7000 militiamen in Ituri.

April 28, 2005 The UN and the government have been trying to rapidly improve the Congo's military forces. On April 24 a government spokesman said the country hopes to have "at least" ten brigades trained for peacekeeping duties prior to the June 30 election and to protect voters during the election. But international observers doubt the elections will be held on time. Voter registration is going slowly and security remains an issue, particularly in the eastern Congo. South Africa has taken the lead in training the Congo troops, with support from France and Belgium. Disarming militias is one of the missions the Congo brigades will undertake. Another is trying to stop weapons smugglers. On April 18 the UN passed Security Council Resolution 1596, which extends and expands a weapons shipment and sales ban in the Congo. (The ban --UNSCR 1493- - was imposed in July 2003.) The original ban provided for sanctions against any groups and states who "directly or indirectly" supply or sell weapons in the eastern Congo. UNSCR 1596 says that only Congo "national army" police and troops are exempt from the ban. The new resolution is designed to give UN peacekeepers another legal tool to disarm rogue militias. Throughout April, UN peacekeepers have conducted a number of "cordon and search" operations to disarm the militias. The latest big operation began on April 19 northeast of Bunia. 1,000 Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Moroccan troops participated in the operation. The UN now says at least 20 fighters belonging to the UPC (Union des patriotes congolais) militia were killed in the operation. The UN reports 1,300 UPC militiamen have turned in their weapons. The UPC may have another armed 2,000 militiamen in the field.

April 30, 2005 Five African reporters who had been taken hostage by a militia in the eastern Congo had been released. The militiamen took the hostages after their leader was arrested by peacekeepers. After the hostages were released, a UN spokesman said the militia was allowed to keep 270 bicycles its men had stolen--- a belated "ransom" of sorts. The bicycles are part of an weapons exchange program. Militiamen who turn in weapons can receive a bicycle in exchange. The program makes sense since bicycles and weapons are both high-value items.

May 1, 2005 Peacekeeper efforts to disarm militias have been unsuccessful when the gunmen refuse to cooperate. Peacekeeper
attempts to chase down and forcibly disarm these holdouts has, so far, proved ineffective.

May 4, 2005 The UN confirmed that 11,500 militiamen had disarmed in the eastern Congo. That still leave 1500 to 2000 armed fighters.

May 7, 2005 The South African government said that South African reservists would deploy to the Congo for peacekeeping duties. While the government report wasn't specific, the South African troops the 156 reservists will replace is a regular army infantry unit. The reservists will serve with the 7th South African Infantry Battalion Congo and be deployed for six months. The South African government said this is the first deployment of reservists but more will serve in the Congo as regulars rotate home.

May 10, 2005 In the southeast, police arrested dozens of politicians and soldiers and accused them of plotting to make the area (the province of Katanga) into a separate country. Katanga, which is rich in natural resources, has a long history of separatism.

May 23, 2005 UN investigators have concluded that 1,500 civilians in south Kivu province (eastern Congo) have been attacked by rebels in the past 12 months.

May 24, 2005 In eastern Congo, rogue militiamen killed 18 civilians and kidnapped another fifty. Government and UN troops are in pursuit. The killers identified themselves as "Rastas," a group associated with Rwandan Hutu militias. The UN has ordered its peacekeepers to use more "robust" (violent) methods to suppress armed rebel groups.

May 25, 2005 The curious Congo town of Mbuji-Mayi is back in the news. The town has a reputation as an "outlaw town." At the height of the Congo's war Mbuji-Mayi was a meeting place for rebels, rogue military officers, unscrupulous mineral traders, and spies. The town is located in a diamond-producing area. The UN reported on May 23 that violent demonstrations broke out May 17-18 in Mbuji-Mayi. At least 12 people were wounded and two killed. The violence involved members of the Democracy and Social Progress Party (UPDS), the national People's Party for Reconstruction and Development (Congo president Joseph Kabila heads this party), and the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC). The UN said that it was "mediating" among the three parties but that security would be increased in the area. Several analysts have suggested the violence is connected to the upcoming Congo election.

May 26, 2005 A group of Rwandan rebels, known as "The Rastas," killed 18 people in the eastern Congo and took over 50 hostages. This militia group has been accused of committing numerous crimes in South Kivu province. The Rastas are allied with the FDLR Rwandan Hutu rebel
organization. One source said the UN and Congolese army are planning an operation in South Kivu with the aim of disarming militias operating in the area. Meanwhile, the South African government extended its troop commitment in the Congo. South African troops will continue to serve with UN forces at least through March 2007. The South Africans have manned the UN's quick reaction force in the eastern Congo and are considered to be critical to UN counter-militia operations in the region.

May 31, 2005 Over 6,000 civilians have fled eastern Congo to escape attacks by "The Rastas," a murderous group connected to Rwandan Hutu militias. The Hutu militias want to negotiate a peace deal with Rwanda, to allow disarmament and return to Rwanda. But many of the Hutu rebel leader are wanted for participation in the 1994 mass murder of Tutsi people in Rwanda.

June 1, 2005 Rich gold fields in northeastern Congo are a major reason for the continued violence there. The gold produces millions of dollars a month in wealth that must be protected. Miners pay armed groups to protect them from bandits, and other groups of "rebels." All that money buys plenty of guns and ammo. Without that, the fighting would be using spears and bows, inflicting far fewer casualties.

June 2, 2005 Unknown parties in the Ituri region fired on a UN helicopter patrol and, in a separate incident, kidnapped two employees of Doctors-without-Borders, and is apparently holding them for ransom.

June 3, 2005 Four Nepalese peacekeepers were wounded in a firefight with eastern Congolese militiamen. One of the wounded Nepalese later died. The Nepalese were part of a unit which was escorting a human rights investigating team in the area. The investigators were looking into allegations that rogue militiamen had committed several rapes in the village in April 2005. The investigating team's helicopter took ground fire from the village and the Nepalese troops fired back. A UN quick reaction force responded to the attack. The Nepalese soldier was the 18th UN peacekeeper to die in the Congo. The UN later reported that the three wounded Nepalese troops who survived were flown to South Africa for further medical treatment. South Africa is, of course, a "first world" outpost of sorts in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya and Nigeria both have some quality medical facilities, but South Africa is tops. The UN is making use of South Africa's military and medical capabilities.

June 6, 2005 Armed militias continue to rape and plunder with impunity throughout the northeast. Each month, thousands of additional refugees are created.

June 7, 2005 With elections scheduled for later this year, MONUC, the UN mission in Congo, is anticipating increased activity by rebels, separatists,
bandits, and foreign fighter hiding out in the country's northeastern and eastern regions. MONUC has requested additional personnel, including 2,800 more troops, to bring the total to some 19,500, and nearly 900 more police officers, to bring the total to 1,200, to supplement the Congo's 93,000 strong security forces.

June 8, 2005 As part of the U.N. brokered peace settlement, the Congo agreed to integrate elements of the former rebel movements into its armed forces. Under South African and Belgian military guidance, three brigades (about 3,250 troops each) have completed an intensive light infantry training program. The results have been satisfactory. The first two brigades are already operating as part of the national military forces. The third has just completed training, and is to be assigned to work with MONUC, the UN peacemaking force, in the eastern Ituri region.

June 10, 2005 The UN is going after the illegal money that is paying for a lot of the guns, and gunmen, running around the Congo. Neighboring countries have long looked the other way as illegal mining and logging operations took place just across the border in Congo. Bribes and threats inside Congo have allowed an illegal economy to evolve, guarded by private armies. UN inspectors now have legal authority, and troops to back them up, to investigate businesses in these lawless border areas.

June 13, 2005 Three Indian soldiers, part of the UN peacekeeping force, were wounded in eastern Congo. One of the soldiers died, and the attackers got away before they could be identified. There are several rebel militias in the area, plus lots of bandits.

June 17, 2005 Congo continues to be the deadliest war zone on the planet, with over 30,000 people dying each month from the combined effects of combat, starvation and disease. Civilian populations are constantly fleeing the fighting, which often leads to starvation and disease as people try to survive in the bush. Several million people have died in a decade of civil war and rebellion in Congo.

July 1, 2005 The UN reports new major clashes between UN peacekeeping troops and rogue militias in the eastern Congo. On June 27 at least 300 UN peacekeepers tangled with 150 militia fighters in Ituri Province. The UN troops involved in the operation were Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Moroccan. The UN force was in the village of Medu (north of Bunia) conducting a search operation (presumably a weapons search operation) when 150 militiamen attacked with mortars and RPGs. The firefight lasted eight hours, before the militia fighters withdrew. Two Indian Mi-25 attack helicopters supported the UN ground troops in the engagement. The militiamen apparently belonged to the Ituri Patriotic Resistance Front (FRPI). The government now estimates that 8000 to 10,000 militiamen remain in the eastern Congo, and 1,000 of these militiamen are armed.
Rwandan sources say the total number of militiamen is closer to 15,000—but it is the armed component that is of course the determinative figure. Until late May, the government and the UN were reporting some success in their disarmament program. The disarmament program includes "persuasive" programs (like trading bicycles for automatic rifles) as well as the active military operations.

July 3, 2005 Arms dealers, mainly in Eastern Europe, continue to ship in Cold War surplus weapons to eastern Congo. The gunrunning networks have been in place for over a decade, and UN arms embargoes have no impact on them.

July 4, 2005 About a thousand UN peacekeepers, aided by helicopter gunships, began attacking Rwandan rebels in eastern Congo. The peacekeepers are trying to either disarm the rebels, drive them back into Rwanda, or kill them. Most of the rebels, about 8,000 men, are Rwandan Hutus who fled to Congo ten years ago after they tried to kill all the Tutsi people in Rwanda. There are also several thousand armed men from eastern Congo, who have basically turned to banditry. Also in the northeast, some 3,000 soldiers mutinied, and attacked local civilians. The soldiers were former rebels belonging to the People's Armed Forces of Congo (FAPC). Such rebels were poorly disciplined, and had a hard time adapting to army discipline. The immediate cause of the rebellion was the murder of a soldier, but the main reason was poor leadership and training.

July 7, 2005 The UN is demanding that the government impose better discipline on the army. Too often, peacekeepers come across soldiers who are looting, or otherwise abusing civilians.

July 12, 2005 UN efforts to put military pressure on lawless militias in eastern Congo has caused the rebels to turn on local civilians. Some Rwandan gunmen forced villagers into huts, and then set the huts on fire, killing at least three dozen civilians (mostly women and children.) UN peacekeepers have flushed thousands of rebels out of their camps, but as these thugs move away from the peacekeepers, any civilians encountered are at great risk.

July 25, 2005 UN peacekeeping forces in eastern Congo began a new offensive operation against rebel militias. Dubbed "Operation Thunder Storm," the offensive began on July 21. A UN statement said "Thunder Storm" was aimed at driving Rwandan rebel militiamen in the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) away from Congolese villages the militias had been threatening. (The FDLR and other "Rwandan militias" are primarily Hutu militias, but they often conduct raids with other tribal allies and bandits.) A 1200 troop "quick strike force" led the initial sweep. The force consisted of Pakistani infantry and some Guatemalan special forces troops. The UN said 200 Congolese ground
troops were also involved in the operation. "Thunder Storm: targeted a 70 by 30 kilometer "box" in south Kivu province (what the UN report described as "the Kabare and Walungu territories"). The FDLR has said it would disarm but -- as always -- the devil is in the details. The UN is also using a new military abbreviation to describe its military and political goals in the eastern Congo: DDRRR. That stands for disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, re-settlement and re-integration.

August 2, 2005 MSF (Doctors Without Borders) is halting aid work in Ituri province, outside the town of Bunia, because of continued violence by rebel groups. This has included attacks on MSF personnel. MSF was providing aid to about 100,000 refugees.

August 3, 2005 In southeastern Katanga (Shaba) province, fighting there was between the regular army and local Mayi-Mayi militiamen has caused some 15,000 civilians to flee their homes in the last three months. The UN does not have enough peacekeepers to deal with the Katanga violence, and the Congolese army is not strong enough to stop the militiamen.

August 11, 2005 Approximately 40 militiamen belonging to the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma (RCD-Goma) entered Uganda from the Congo on August 6. Approximately 100 civilians accompanied the militiamen. The RCD fighters and the civilians were "returned" to the Congo on August 9. The RCD fighters reported they had been "overrun" by a "big group" of Mayi-Mayi militiamen in the Congo's North Kivu Province. This left at least 21 of the RCD militiamen dead. There are continuing "ethnic clashes" in North Kivu. The RCD-Goma faction joined the Congo's peace process. Though offensive sweeps by UN peacekeepers have been effective against hold-out militias in the eastern Congo, there are simply too few peacekeepers to provide police-type protection in the border areas.

August 21, 2005 Officials in the eastern region of Walungu report that in the first six months of 2005, 2,500 people were killed, and at least 1,500 women raped by various rebels.

August 22, 2005 Gunmen attacked voter registration centers in eastern Congo, killing one official, and wounding others.

August 24, 2005 Uganda has expelled six Congolese men, who are accused of plotting to overthrow the government of Congo.

August 25, 2005 Congo, Rwanda and Uganda have given armed Rwandan Hutu groups 30 days to disarm. Those who do not surrender their weapons, will be hunted down and killed or arrested by the armed forces of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda after that. These Hutus participated in the mass killings of minority Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994, and fled the country when Tutsi counterattacked and took control of Rwanda. Ever since, these
Hutu groups have lived by plunder and banditry, sometimes making raids into Rwanda.

August 26, 2005 UN peacekeepers began operations in North and South Kivu provinces. Five company-sized units were involved. A South African company is deployed in South Kivu's Shabunda area. One aim of the operations is to disarm the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a rebel militia.

August 30, 2005 A former Congo general has said that he may lead a force to "invade" the eastern Congo in order to "bring peace." The threat may be linked to defections from the Congo Army (Congo Armed Forces) and new trouble among the Banyamulenge (a Tutsi ethnic group in eastern Congo).

August 31, 2005 There are unverified reports that the 53rd Army Battalion and four companies of the 2nd Mixed Battalion were "missing" (ie, possibly deserted). The units are located in the eastern Congo. The 53rd Battalion is based in Burungu, which is north of Goma (in North Kivu province). The companies in the 2nd Mixed Battalion were located in Kanyabayonga (which is north of Burungu). Most of the deserters appear to be Congolese Tutsis, which reinforced the earlier reports that the dissident group were Banyamulenge.

September 1, 2005 An army battalion, and the families of the soldiers, in North Kivu province, have been disabled by an outbreak of cholera. The 3,000 people involved were moving via truck when the cholera hit. The convoy was halted so that the outbreak could be treated. So far, about two dozen have died, and a quarter of the people involved have been hospitalized.

September 7, 2005: The government has ordered foreign gunmen to leave the Congo by the end of September, or face attack from government troops and UN peacekeepers.

September 10, 2005: General Laurent Nkunda, a Congolese Tutsi warlord, is assembling a force of gunmen in northern Congo, and has announced his plans for overthrowing the government. Nkunda believes the government has it in for the Tutsi (who were the last group to settle the area over a century ago, and are still considered "outsiders"), and vows to strike first. Most of Nkunda's guys are little more than bandits. But they are armed, and do not hesitate when it comes to killing, looting and raping.

September 15, 2005: The 16,700 U.N. peacekeepers in Congo are costing over a billion dollars a year to maintain, and it isn't enough. Right now, most of the UN troops are concentrated in the north, to try and deal with Tutsi and Hutu militias. But in the south, local tribal gangs (the Mai-Mai, a
traditional hunting society) are raiding at will. Government troops cannot deal with the Mai Mai, and UN troops are not available. When the situation in the north is taken care of, the Mai Mai will become a priority.

September 15, 2005: The army rebellion in the eastern Congo continues to sputter along. The Congo's military commander in North Kivu (8th Military Region) said another 350 Congo soldiers had "defected" to general Laurent Nkunda's "rebel force." The defecting troops primarily came from the 124th Battalion of the Congo army, stationed in the town of Katale. Most of the soldiers were ethnic Tutsis. The defections took place last week. Since the 124th bolted, a new Congo army battalion has moved into Katale. Nkunda may have established a headquarters in the town of Kichanga (which isn't far from the Rwandan border).

September 20, 2005: Rwandan Hutu militias show no sign of obeying the government order to get out of the country. The Hutu gunmen appear ready to fight. There appear to be 400 LRA fighters inside the Congo. This is far higher than the Ugandan government suggested last week. Meanwhile, the UN wants to extend the Congo peacekeeping operation for another year. MONUC says Congo forces are still too weak to counter rebel fighters and militias in the eastern Congo.

September 29, 2005: The more aggressive peacekeeping by UN troops is having the desired effect. Rebels are backing off, and behaving more often. The introduction of thousands of better trained and led Pakistani troops has had an impact as well. Often, poorly trained and equipped peacekeepers were overawed by more aggressive rebels. But the Pakistanis are a tough bunch, and usually get the other guys to blink first. The Pakistanis are also better disciplined than many of the African peacekeepers that operated in eastern Congo before. That means more cooperation from the locals.

September 29, 2005: The Congo government claimed that members of Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) had fled into the Congo. The government statement said that the LRA fighters had attacked Congo civilians. The fighters also killed wildlife (including elephants) in a park inside the Congo. The Congo identified the LRA group's leader as Vincent Otti. The Congo reports follow Ugandan government statements that LRA fighters had fled into the Congo.

September 30, 2005: Over 10,000 foreign gunmen appear to have ignored government demands that they leave. Most of these gunmen are extremist Rwandan Hutu militiamen (guilty of Rwanda's 1994 genocide) and a smaller number of Ugandans and Burundians.

October 4, 2005: The UN airlifted (by helicopter) 300 Congolese troops into the northeastern Congo. The Congolese troops went to a site near the
town of Aba. Meanwhile, 200 other Congo troops arrived by road convoy. Other Congolese forces are also moving into Aba. A UN spokesman said at least a thousand Congolese troops will deploy in the area. The UN command said the troop movement is in response to the presence of the Ugandan rebels belonging to the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA group is reportedly inside the Garamba National Park (near the Ugandan border). On September 29, Uganda said that if the Congo did not stop the LRA infiltrators it would consider sending its own troops into the Congo. Uganda has deployed troops in the Congo before. Ugandan forces operated near the Congo town of Bunia for over two years.

October 6, 2005: The UN faces a major problem because the thousands of foreign rebels living along the eastern borders refuse to go home, and are moving out of the way of troops sent to chase them out. Getting these guys out of the region will be time consuming, and will be more of a police, than a military, operation. The gunmen have been living off banditry and foreign food aid. Being chased around the border area will induce hunger and fatigue, which may cause many of the gunmen to head across the border and become someone else's problem.

October 8, 2005: Prompt action by the army has forced some 400 Ugandan LRA rebels to move out of Congo, and back into Uganda.

October 11, 2005: In eastern Congo, Rwandan rebels crossed the border and murdered 15 villagers. The rebels were apparently raiding for supplies.

October 14, 2005: Troops had discovered at least two mass graves in North Kivu province. The graves may contain the bodies of Congolese Hutus killed in 1996 by Tutsi militias. The alleged massacres took place in October and November 1996. The Tutsi militias may have been part of a Rwandan operation intended to root out Rwandan Hutus who fled Rwanda after the genocide they committed against Tutsis in 1994.

October 16, 2005: Rwandan Hutu militias in the eastern Congo have turned several thousand civilians into refugees. The Rwandan Hutu group is identified as the "Rastas."

October 17, 2005: Over the weekend, fighting between troops and Hutu rebels in eastern Congo, left over a dozen people dead, including a Chinese technical advisor, who was caught in the middle of one firefight. Thousands of civilians fled the fighting.

October 18, 2005: A rogue Mai-Mai militia group, in a camp near the town of Bukavu in the eastern Congo, took 43 Congo government officers hostage. The government officers were working with the Congo's national disarmament commission, which is running a militia disarmament program. The militia unit, which numbers at least 500 men, threatened to
burn the officials alive -- a massacre by incineration. The militiamen said they will kill the officers unless they commission paid them $110 for each weapon they turned in. The UN said this particular militia unit had in fact turned in its weapons, but the promised payment for turned in weapons was not made on time.

October 19, 2005: After negotiations, and a promise from the Congolese government that the bounties would be paid, the Mai-Mai militia unit released the officers being held near Bukava.

October 21, 2005: Fighting with Hutu and Mai-Mai rebels in eastern Congo appears unlikely to end any time soon. Peacekeeper morale is falling, because of the constant fighting, and poor living conditions. Eastern Congo is a hard place to get to, and peacekeepers are increasingly short of supplies.

October 23, 2005: UN peacekeepers went searching for illegal weapons and gunmen in the northeast. One Nepalese peacekeeper was wounded, but generally there was not much resistance. The militiamen often hid their weapons at the approach of peacekeepers. Illegal arms markets were also sought out, as cheap AK-47s, an aftereffect of the end of the Cold War in 1991, make much of the violence possible.

October 25, 2005: About a thousand of the estimated 15,000 armed militiamen in the northeast have been forced to give up their weapons. The army and peacekeeper patrols are supported by aircraft, providing the kind of military force the militiamen cannot handle. But most of these guys are just fleeing into the bush, to wait until the soldiers leave.

October 28, 2005: The UN extended the peacekeeping mandate in the Congo through September 30, 2006. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also requested that the MONUC peacekeeping force be authorized another 2,580 troops. At the moment the MONUC force has 18,630 people. 15,191 are peacekeeping troops and 324 are civilian policemen. The Security Council agreed to deploy another 300 troops in the Congo Katanga province. The unit combine light infantry and medical personnel.

October 30, 2005: As soldiers and peacekeepers clear gunmen out of areas in the northeast, they find a lawless society where death comes easy and just getting by is very hard. The country as a whole is short on law (few judges) and order (few police, lots of cheap weapons). While technically a wealthy country, many of the natural resources are being, literally, stolen by criminal gangs and corrupt officials. The Congo is a major mess, and no one has any idea what it would cost, or how long it would take to fix all the problems.

November 2, 2005: Soldiers freed four election workers who were being held captive by Mai-Mai militiamen. A gun battle left several dozen of the
militiamen dead. UN observers deployed in the northeastern Congo (near the Garamba National Park), and found "no tangible evidence" that Ugandan LRA rebels are inside the Congo. One of the main UN military units in the area is a 144-man Nepalese infantry unit deployed near the town of Aba. The UN believes the LRA group moved into Sudan around November 1, but its troops will continue to monitor the area. The Nepalese unit has sent patrols north to the Congo villages of Mamuru and Banga, which are near the Congo-Sudan border.

November 10, 2005: UN peacekeepers and Congo troops announced that they were completing a large anti-militia operation in North Kivu province against Rwandan Hutu rebels and a Congolese militia. 2000 Congolese troops and 500 UN troops participated in the operation. The operation was supported by helicopter gunships and light armored vehicles. Part of the operation went through the Viruga National Park area. The UN reported its troops destroyed several rebel camps inside the park. The operation captured 359 Mai-Mai militia men and 17 Rwandan Hutu rebels. The Rwandan's belonged to the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a militia organization which has refused to turn in its weapons.

November 12, 2005: Uganda still believes some LRA are hiding in the Congo. In late September Uganda said it would send troops into the Congo to fight the LRA rebels if the Congo did not take action against them. The UN patrols serve a "political buffer" to keep Ugandan troops on their own side of the border.

November 13, 2005: The UN reported that judicial proceedings against militia leaders is starting to pay off. In the last several months UN peacekeepers and Congolese soldiers have arrested many militia members for criminal activity and failure to turn in weapons. Trials of senior militia leaders began in October and several have been convicted. The UN estimates that fighting in Ituri province has killed at least 60,000 people. Militias and tribal fighting were responsible for the deaths. Jailing leaders alone won't end the militia threat. The UN is using a multi-million dollar development grant to build and improve roads in Ituri. Militiamen who turned in their weapons to peacekeepers (as part of the "weapons exchange" program) and continue to cooperate with the Congolese government are being offered jobs on the roads. The Congo government also reported that the Mongbwalu gold mine, which was controlled by the "Kung Fu and Dragon" militia, is now under government control.

November 16, 2005: In the northeast, a thousand soldiers and 300 peacekeepers attacked the Revolutionary Movement of Congo, a militia that has refused to disarm. At least 19 militiamen, and one soldier, were killed in the fighting. The government believes that it has reduced the
number of rebel militiamen in the northeast from 5,000 to 1,000 in the past six months.

November 23, 2005: New fighting broke out in Katanga province, as the army continued pursuing Mai-Mai militia fighters there. Between 50,000 and 60,000 civilians have fled the fighting. Katanga is a particularly sensitive area in the Congo. Katangan separatists launched rebellions in the 1960s and 1970s.

November 26, 2005: Over the last week, a MONUC operation in Itrui province (northeast Congo), has killed 57 rebels. UN troops from Pakistan, Morocco, and Bangladesh supported 700 Congo troops in the operation. The operation began November 21. The UN is trying to let Congolese troops take the lead in military operations when possible. Call it "Congolization."

November 28, 2005: Near the Ugandan border, Ugandan LRA rebels have been making vicious attacks on Congolese villages, causing several thousand villagers to flee their homes.

November 30, 2005: The parliament approved a law granting amnesty to those who killed and injured people during 1998-2002 civil war. For those who continued to fight after 2002, troops and police are being used to deal with them.

December 3, 2005: The UN believes that approximately 12,000 to 15,000 armed militiamen remain in the eastern Congo. From 10,000 to 12,000 of the militiamen are believed to be Hutu rebels from Rwanda. Another 1500 may be Ugandan rebels from various organizations and rebel factions. Over the last two years, the UN's military operations have attempted to protect vulnerable civilians and disarm the rebels. The UN forces conduct offensive military operations, often with the goal of arresting senior rebel leaders. The UN has a diplomatic-political strategy to support these goals, and returning Hutu rebels to Rwanda is part of it. The UN claims that so far 12,000 "foreign militia members" have been sent back to their home countries (primarily Rwanda and Uganda, a few may have gone back to Burundi). The UN estimates that "two-thirds" of the returnees have gone to Rwanda and --yes-- the UN administrators believe that "many" of those who went back to Rwanda were either Hutu rebels or former Rwandan Army troops who were involved in the 1994 genocide. The UN "repatriation program" has been a voluntary program. But the program looks like it may become far-less "voluntary." UN officials are openly discussing (which is one way diplomats deliver threats) economic sanctions, legal pressure, and military options that will encourage rogue militias to leave the Congo and encourage "regional governments" (like Uganda and Rwanda) to accept them. Uganda and Rwanda would then assume some of the burden of disarming the militias. Of course, many
militiamen know that returning to Rwanda means facing criminal trials. The militia leaders also know that abandoning their Congo base camps will weaken their forces, and in some cases shatter them. However, if the militiamen stay inside the Congo and refuse to disarm they risk attack by the UN's Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and South African peacekeepers. The threat of sanctions may nudge Ugandan and Rwandan government officials to negotiate with their various rebel organizations. Rebel leaders guilty of genocide won't get any deals, but some of their fighters might. That would reduce the number of troublemakers prowling the eastern Congo-- and diplomacy would reinforce military action. --Austin Bay

December 7, 2005: The UN said that the Congo government had Justin Ngole Dalo (nom de guerre "Koliba") the militia leader believed responsible for killing nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers in February 2005. The ambush Dalo led occurred in the eastern Congo's Itrui district. Dalo is also accused of murdering over one hundred civilians in Ituri. Dalo had been on the UN's "most wanted" list since the attacks in February.

December 10, 2005: Because of new militia attacks in the eastern Congo, 13,000 people have sought refuge in the town of Dubie (eastern Congo). The biggest problem was getting food into the area. The World Food Program said that is was in the process of airlifting 70 tons of food to the town of Mpiana (north of Dubie). The refugees fled fighting between Congo troops and rebel militiamen.

December 16, 2005: The UN reported that Congo police fired weapons into the air to break-up anti-constitution demonstrations in Kinshasha. There were also anti-constitution protests in the eastern Congo.

December 17, 2005: The UN and Congo government reported three poll stations in the capital of Kinshasha were attacked. One was attacked with explosives, the other two were hit with Molotov cocktails (fire bombs). Some factions in the current government have opposed the "power sharing" arrangements and are urging voters to reject the constitution, which will be voted on December 18. Rebel groups in the eastern Congo also oppose the constitution. Many people also think President Joseph Kabila has "manipulated" the constitution writing committee. The draft constitution lowers the minimum age for being president from 35 to 30. Kabila is 33. There are, however, some aspects of the constitution that demonstrate thought went into it, as well as knowledge of the Congo's divisions. The constitution would divide the country into 25 provinces. The provinces would have a great deal of autonomy. An attempt was made to create provinces that unite groups with common tribal and linguistic heritages.
December 19, 2005: Polls closed in the Congo in the constitutional referendum. The Independent Electoral Commission estimated voter turnout at 60 percent.

December 19, 2005: For the first time in 40 years, a democratic vote took place, to select a new constitution. Turnout was low, and there was some violence. More than 24 million voters were registered for the December 18 and 19 constitutional vote. Approval of the constitution means national elections sometime before June 30, 2006, and an end to President Joseph Kabila's current "transitional government." This will be the first vote in the Congo since 1970, when former dictator Mobutu Sese Seko ran unopposed from president in a rigged vote.

December 21, 2005: The UN believes there are 15,000 Hutu militia fighters still inside the eastern Congo. The Hutus are primarily from Rwanda, though some are from Burundi. Approximately 1,000 Ugandan rebels remain in the Congo. The UN Security Council passed another resolution threatening sanctions against rebel groups and rebel leaders (ie, militia leaders) who do not disarm. In the east, peacekeepers and army troops have begun moving against rebel militias.

December 22, 2005: The government said that with approximately 60 percent of the votes counted in the constitutional referendum, the "yes' vote was well ahead. 80 percent of the votes counter had approved the constitution.

December 24, 2005: A major military operation is taking place in the eastern Congo. A series of firefights took place near the town of Fataki. Nine UN peacekeepers and Congo troops died in the clash. Another report said one report said one UN peacekeeper and seven Congo troops. An estimated 30 Lendu tribal militiamen died in the firefights. UN peacekeepers from Nepal and 1500 Congo troops were involved the counter-militia operation. Getting accurate news out of these areas is difficult, because few journalists are willing to operate in such a lawless and dangerous environment.

December 25, 2005: Nepalese peacekeepers and Congolese troops continued fighting in Ituri. The UN and government forces took control of the town of Nioka on December 24. That operation is being conducted against a Lendu tribal militia which has refused to meet UN disarmament demands.

December 26, 2005: There was another upsurge of fighting in the eastern Congo. UN peacekeepers fought Ugandan ADF rebels in the northeast near the town of Beni on December 23 and 24. At least 35 militiamen were killed in the battle. One Indian peacekeeper was killed and four were wounded. Government forces had three dead and 16 wounded.
January 3, 2006: Some 11,000 people have fled fighting between Ugandan rebels and Congolese troops. The UN-backed offensive in northeastern Congo (Ituri) now involves 3,500 Congolese soldiers and 600 UN peacekeepers. The rebels belong to the Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). All ADF camps in the area appear to have been destroyed.

January 7, 2006: The UN reported that fighting between Congolese military forces and the Mai-Mai militia in north Katanga province had forced between 100,000 and 120,000 people to flee their homes. The fighting began in mid-November when the Congo military began an operation to disarm various militias operating in Katanga. On December 1, 2005 one Mai-Mai militia force launched an attack on a refugee camp in Katanga's Bukhama region, further complicated the job of relief agencies. NGOs operating in the area said that Katanga is on the verge of a humanitarian crisis. The International Crisis Group believes that the crisis already exists. The UN also reported that a Mai-Mai "militia group" (an alliance?) appears to be forming in Katanga, under the leadership of Kyungu Mutanga (his nom de guerre is "Gedeon") Mutanga may be hiding out in Congo's Upemba National Park (a huge jungle preserve).

January 10, 2006: The UN is asking the European Union to provide an additional 800 peacekeepers for MONUC (the Congo peacekeeping force). The UN wants the soldiers available for presidential, parliamentary and local elections, that are supposed to be held by June 2006. It is hoped France or Germany would contribute the battalion. It will be used as a "reserve force." Also, the UN is considering a proposal to shift some peacekeepers from Burundi to the Congo. The proposal would move the peacekeepers currently in Burundi into the Congo's province of Katanga. At present the UN has 100 troops in Katanga (up to 300 have been deployed there). The UN wants to deploy at least 2500 troops in the province.

January 11, 2006: As horrific as the eight years of civil war has been, even more Congolese have died from bad government during, and before that period. The fighting is being reduced faster than the government administration is being improved. Long after the fighting has stopped, massive numbers of people will still be dying from the corruption and incompetence of government officials.

January 23, 2006: Eight UN troops were killed. They were from a Guatemalan special operations contingent operating near the Ugandan border. Guatemala's special ops unit is a Ranger-like, commando organization called the Kaibil, named after a Mayan warrior who waged war against the Spanish. The troops are called "Kaibiles." The soldiers were believed to have been part of a UN operation intended to arrest LRA rebel leader Vincent Otti. UN forces were conducting operations and recon missions in the area. Some 80 Guatemalans were involved in the "recon."
Some 15 LRA guerrillas may have died in the firefight with the Guatemalans. The Ugandan government still claims that Otti is hiding out in the northeastern Congo, in or near the Garamba National Park. The UN and Congo government have assured Uganda that every effort will be made to either arrest Otti and deny the LRA base areas in the Congo. The UN also reported that an insurgent militia launched attacks in North Kivu province (eastern Congo). The UN said militia attacks in the area began to increase in mid-January. Several NGOs have been forced to suspend operations in the area. The militias launching the attacks may be aligned with General Nkunda.

February 2, 2006: The Congolese government said that its forces and UN peacekeepers intended to arrest General Laurent Nkunda (for allegedly leading attacks on government and UN forces). In 2004 troops under his command took control of the town of Bukavu. Nkunda has also said he would resist the Kinshasha government. Nkunda is supposed to be operating in the eastern Congo near the Rwandan border.

February 6, 2006; Rogue militia attacks in North Kivu province have once again disrupted efforts to aid refugees. Fighting which raged from mid-January to early February left 37,000 refugees without aid and support. This is why the "secondary effects" of fighting in less-developed countries often kills more people than the fighting. Hunger may not lead to starvation but poor diet leaves refugees susceptible to diseases, which kill more quickly than starvation. Exposure to the weather also kills refugees.

February 7, 2006: Uganda claimed that LRA leader Joseph Kony had left Sudan and is now hiding out in the northeastern Congo. The Ugandan military said Kony "fled a base" in Sudan near Juba (in south Sudan). Kony left the base on February 5. Ugandan troops were operating in the area of the base camp. Kony may be in the Congo, in the Garamba National Park area. Garamaba is where eight Guatemalan peacekeepers died in an ambush on January 23. The Guatemalan commandos were believed to be trying to arrest another LRA leader. The Congo government and the UN have assured Uganda that it will stop LRA infiltrators and arrest LRA members in the Congo.

February 8, 2006; The UN warned the government that UN troops operating in the DRC will not work with Congolese troops who commit human rights violations. The UN force in the Congo (MONUC) reported that it has received detailed complaints accusing the Congolese military of crimes including rape and murder. A senior officer with the peacekeeping force said, "We can't continue to support these forces if they commit human rights violations. Otherwise we become party to these actions." That quote states the situation clearly and succinctly. The UN is trying to defeat and disarm rogue militias in the eastern Congo and build a capable, responsible Congolese military force-- shades of the US situation
in Iraq. The truth is, the Congolese Army is a collection of former militias, national units, and some tribal contingents. Tribal issues divide the military. Sometimes tribal squabbles erupt and members of the military -- who are supposed to provide security instead of stopping the fighting, join it because kin are involved.

February 13, 2006: The UN is evaluating peacekeeping efforts in the Congo. A summary of the report is available at which is the MONUC website. The UN mission in the Congo has been plagued by allegations of crime and malfeasance. To their credit, the UN and member nations involved in the peacekeeping operations have investigated, tried and convicted a number of soldiers for sex crimes, theft, and other violent crimes. MONUC's experience in the Congo has confirmed that a "two tier" system definitely exists in UN combat operations. There are the forces that can handle "presence and security operations" (ie, these forces can guard installations, conduct basic patrols, protect NGO operations, etc) and then there are units which can actually conduct combat operations (strike and rapid reaction operations) against rogue militias and rebels. The South Africans and Pakistanis have been particularly effective in the "strike and rapid reaction" operations. The Guatemalan special forces troops have also shown their mettle. These three nations are not the only ones providing superior troops. Almost every nation can field a small elite force, and for many nations UN duty is not only a chance to demonstrate military skills, but to demonstrate those skills and get a pay check in hard currency. That being said, South Africa and Pakistan have done yeoman's duty in the Congo. Bangladeshi soldiers have also earned kudos. What's the common denominator? British training methods is one. South African was a British colony. Pakistan and Bangladesh were once part of India. As for Guatemala's special forces contingent? Guatemala fought a civil war for thirty years. The Guatemalan special forces know how to "do jungles."

February 19, 2006: The government officially ratified the new constitution. Approximately 85 percent of voters approved the constitution in the plebiscite held in December 2005.

February 21, 2006: Congolese and Ugandan sources both report that it is "highly likely" Lords Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony is now inside the Congo. Kony's second in command, Vincent Otti, has been allegedly hiding out in the northeastern Congo, in or near the Garamba National Park. A Congolese source reported that the LRA rebels inside the Congo number approximately 100 fighters. In January 2006, eight UN peacekeepers from Guatemala died in an operation in the Garamba National Park area. The Guatemalan special forces soldiers may have been on a mission to capture Otti.

February 22, 2006: The European Union is under UN pressure to supply a rapid deployment force for the Congo. The unit would be available to
support the Congolese armed forces during the critical national elections in June 2006. The UN doesn't care who supplies the force, as long as the troops can fight. An effective rapid deployment (or rapid reaction) force would have to be airmobile (be liftable by helicopters) or air-transportable (able to be carried by transport aircraft). This means the force would be light infantry with some light armor support (ie, light wheeled armored vehicles like the US Marines' LAV).

February 27, 2006: Belgium and Sweden said they would contribute troops to an enhanced UN peacekeeping operation in the Congo. The enhanced force would deploy in time to help protect and facilitate the elections scheduled for June. France and Germany have already agreed to provide additional troops. The Congo was once a Belgian colony and was known as the Belgian Congo. UN troops and the Congolese Army began an offensive operation against the MRC, with some 2,500 army, and 500 UN, troops participating in the operation.

March 1, 2006: Fifty government soldiers mutinied, looting a UN camp in the village of Aveba (south of Bunia in Ituri province). So far, six militiamen had been killed in operations against the MRC. One Pakistani troop serving with the UN force has been wounded in the operation. Because of superior training and experience, Pakistani and South African troops usually man UN "rapid reaction" units in the eastern Congo.

March 2, 2006: Fighting broke out between the Congolese Army (FARDC) and the Congo Resistance Movement (MRC) militia. The fighting occurred around the town of Tchei (northeastern DRC, south of Bunia). The situation became even more complicated when the militia rebels took 8000 civilians as hostages. The militia used the people as "human shields." Congolese Army mutineers in Aveba attacked a UN helicopter that was trying to land near the village.

March 4, 2006: The newly organized army units are being withdrawn from action, and given more training. The troops have proven unreliable, and too prone to act like the militiamen and bandits many of them had been previously. Army troops tend to have had years of experience as irregular fighters, and only a few months formal, and quite recent, military training. The weakest link is the low level leadership (NCOs and junior officers what command platoons and companies.) Creating these junior leaders can take years.

March 7, 2006: In the east, UN and army troops continue fighting rebels.

March 8, 2006: In the east, the UN declared South Kivu province free of rebel units, although small groups of bandits are still wandering around. The fighting had been going on since February 22nd, and mainly targeted the Rwandan FDLR militia.
March 10, 2006: In the capital, political demonstrations clashed with riot police.

March 13, 2006: In eastern Congo, the FNI militia clashed with the army, leaving 13 rebels dead, and several soldiers wounded. Some 10,000 local civilians fled the fighting. The FNI retreated, killing civilians they encountered as they went. Along the Ugandan border, troops coordinated their operations with Ugandan army units across the border, to prevent rebel units from escaping.

March 14, 2006: The army is performing not much differently from the warlord militias they fight, because the army is poorly paid, and led. Often former warlord fighters, the soldiers have not had much training, and are often commanded by officers and sergeants who are also former irregulars. Just renaming poorly trained gunmen as "soldiers" doesn't make it so. And in the field, the "soldiers" behave as they used to, raping and looting more than fighting the bandits and warlord gunmen.

March 16, 2006: A Congolese general, Widi Mbuilu Diviola, was accused of corruption after twenty of his soldiers starved to death. This happened because the general had taken the trucks meant to move military supplies to military bases in the south, and used the vehicles to operate a commercial trucking operation. The soldiers were left to fend for themselves, and many simply starved. UN aid workers found out about it, and got after the government to do something about it.

March 18, 2006: The first Congolese warlord, Thomas Lubanga, has been extradited to the Netherlands to stand trial for war crimes. He was arrested a year ago, for crimes committed in the late 1990s, and up until a few years ago. There are still people like Lubanga out there, but they still have their private armies, and have successfully resisted arrest.

March 22, 2006: UN peacekeepers captured a senior Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leader inside the Congo's Garamba National Park. The LRA officer was identified as a captain. The UN said a number of Ugandan LRA rebels have entered the Congo posing as refugees from Sudan.

March 24, 2006: The UN will increase the number of peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers deployed in the Congo's Katanga province. Mai Mai militiamen had taken control of parts of Katanga and committed numerous atrocities. The Congolese Army (FARDC) hasn't been able to stop the rogue militias operating in Katanga. Refugees in Katanga have accused the FARDC of stealing from refugees.

March 24, 2006: The fighting in the eastern Congo has caused more than the usual disruption, and closed roads more frequently (because of shooting and the presence of angry men with guns). This is kept food
from reaching refugee camps, or towns that are still functioning. The result has been an increase in deaths from starvation and disease.

March 25, 2006: The June elections may not work, not because of corruption, or inability to vote, but because of a lack of candidates. As of yesterday, only a hundred people had paid the $250 fee to run for one of the 500 parliament seats. The deadline for applying has been extended for ten days.

April 3, 2006: Congolese rebels (The Congolese Revolution Movement, or CRM, also called the Congolese Revolutionary Movement) were contacted by the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The Ugandan rebels wanted to establish an alliance with the CRM. The CRM refused the offer. The LRA offered to provide arms and ammunition if the CRM agreed to "merge." There was no independent confirmation of this story but there's no doubt the LRA is hard up for allies. The LRA is being driven out of its camps in south Sudan. The UN believes its operations in the northeastern DRC have damaged the LRA.

April 4, 2006: The UN will redeploy peacekeeping troops currently serving in Burundi to the Congo. By the end of 2006, one infantry battalion and 50 military observers will be transferred from Burundi to the Congo. The European Union said that 1500 EU troops will deploy to the Congo by the end of May to help provide security for June's elections. Germany is leading the operation. Nine other European nations will contribute troops. The EU said approximately 400 of the troops will deploy in and around the Congolese capital of Kinshasha.

April 6, 2006: There are 73 candidates running for president in the upcoming elections, and 8,650 candidates for the 500 seat parliament. But the largest party in the country, the UDPS, is boycotting the elections, because they believe the vote is rigged in favor of the existing president Kabila and his cronies. The vote will be the first free election since the 1960s, and is expected to show how split, into regional and tribal factions, the country is.

April 13, 2006: Some 750 Congolese Army and 100 U.N. soldiers were involved in an offensive operation against Rwandan rebels in the eastern Congo. The UN report said that "small groups" of Rwandan Hutu rebels had been identified in North Kivu province. The rebels had been looting villages in the area. The Congo and UN are trying to repatriate foreign rebel groups (i.e. Burundian, Rwandan, and Ugandan groups). In the case of Rwanda, many of the rebels in the Congo face charges of mass murder and genocide if they are arrested by UN troops or are returned to Rwanda.

April 14, 2006: The government said that seven soldiers were convicted of crimes against humanity. The soldiers received sentences of life in prison.
Their crimes included theft, mutiny, and participation in mass rape. The crimes were committed in December 2003. Five other soldiers were acquitted of similar charges. The twelve accused troops were originally members of the rebel Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC). Their guerrilla unit was made part of the Congolese Army.

April 16, 2006: Two more peacekeeping battalions will be deployed to Katanga later this year: a Pakistani battalion (750 troops) and a battalion from Benin (600 to 650 troops). The Pakistani unit is currently deployed in Burundi. A Jordanian hospital will also deploy from Burundi to Katanga. The combat troops will be used to control rogue Mayi-Mayi militia units which (according to the UN and NGOs) have committed crimes and atrocities throughout Katanga. The UN reported that Mayi-Mayi depredations have forced nearly 200,000 people to flee their homes.

May 1, 2006: Rwandan Hutu rebels attacked a village north of Goma (Congo-Rwanda border), killing seven civilians. Rwandan Hutu rebels struck a Congolese military camp. The Rwandan rebels operate as a militia force. Troops killed six Hutu rebels, losing two soldiers. It's estimated that there are 10,000 Hutu rebels in the Congo. most are Rwandan Hutus who were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The remainder are Burundian Hutus.

May 2, 2006: The Congo government changed the date of this summer's scheduled presidential elections. The new election date is July 30. The planned election date was June 18. The big concern remains security. 1500 European Union troops are scheduled to deploy to the Congo to help UN peacekeepers and the Congolese military protect the elections.

May 4, 2006: Army units forced 4,500 civilian refugees in a camp near the town of Tchomia to leave the camp. The Army told the civilians that militiamen were hiding in the camp. Tchomia is in Ituri province. The 4,5000 civilians left the camp. It was reported that soldiers told the civilians they would be shot if they remained in the camp.

May 6, 2006: Some 356,000 people in the Congo are "internally displaced" by fighting or the threat of violence. Most of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are in the eastern and southern portions of the Congo. Approximately 200,000 of the IDPs are in Ituri province (eastern Congo).

May 8, 2006: Over the weekend, nearly 200 Mayi-Mayi rebels, and their families, surrendered to troops in the southeast. About fifty of the rebels were armed, and apparently belonged to one of the many Mayi-Mayi factions that refused to join an earlier deal with the government.

May 9, 2006: The government will try to form and deploy 18 security brigades in time for the July 30 elections. There are 9,630 candidates
running for 500 seats in the parliament, while 33 are competing for the presidency.

May 12, 2006: Mai-Mai militia leader Kyungu Mutanga (nom de guerre "Gedeon"), surrendered to UN forces in Katanga province. Gedeon was accompanied by approximately 150 fighters (some of them described as "child soldiers" in press reports). This is a victory for the UN's political program which offers a limited amnesty to militia fighters if they turn in themselves and their weapons. The program is called the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program. (The acronym is DDR.)

May 17, 2006: An army operation captured Innocent Kaina, a rogue Congolese militia leader. Kaina was wounded when he was captured. UN peacekeepers took Kaina to Bunia (Ituri province in the Congo). Kaina was a member of the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC).

May 18, 2006: The UN's electoral effort in the Congo as the UN's "largest electoral operation." 26 million voters have registered. That is an "unexpectedly" high figure. The Congo's size, lack of transportation infrastructure, and continuing civil war make this the UN's biggest electoral challenge.

May 19, 2006: Uganda said that the Congo government and the UN would be "responsible" for any murders and abductions by the LRA if they allowed the LRA to "reorganize" inside the Congo. Uganda continues to press the UN to attack the LRA which it believes is "refitting" in the northeastern DRC near the Sudan border.

May 20, 2006: UN peacekeeping forces launched another anti-militia offensive earlier this week in the northeastern Congo. The offensive is in support of upcoming national elections (presidential and legislative) scheduled for July 30. One goal of the offensive is to secure the town of Tchei (Ituri area, northeastern Congo). Congolese troops (from the Congolese Armed Forces, or FARDC) and UN troops are participating in the offensive. The UN troops are from Bangladesh, Pakistan and South Africa. These three countries have been supplying the bulk of the UN's "strike force" in the eastern Congo. The action around Tchei is being supported by attack helicopters and armored vehicles. A Congo government spokesman said that approximately 2000 militiamen were in the Tchei area. The Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC, also called the Revolutionary Movement of the Congo) has used Tchei as a base. MRC leader Innocent Kaina was captured on May 17 in the first phases of this offensive.

May 22, 2006: Some 3,000 troops, and a thousand UN peacekeepers, battled rebel militias in the eastern Congo, leaving over three dozen dead in the last few days.
May 28, 2006: A rogue militia (the Front for National Integration, or FNI) has captured seven Nepalese peacekeepers. The soldiers were part of an operation in Ituri province near the town of Tsupu. The operation was described as one intended to support the upcoming July national elections (which in Ituri means it was going after militias that have not turned in their arms). One Nepalese soldier was killed in a firefight (on the same operation) and three were wounded. The militia was identified as a group loyal to Peter Karim. The Nepalese soldier killed in action was the first UN loss since eight Guatemalans were killed in January 2006. The Guatemalans were part of an operation against elements of the Ugandan rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army. Seventy-four UN peacekeepers have been killed in the Congo since peacekeeping operations began in 1999.

May 31, 2006: The UN said that the militia holding UN troops as hostages must release them or "face the consequences." At least 73 militiamen have died in fighting in Ituri province over the last week, along with 13 soldiers. The militiamen were killed in UN and Congolese Army (FARDC) operations. Two operations took place near the towns of Joo and Tchei (southwest Ituri). The other operation was in northern Ituri (Tsupu area). The UN still lists the seven Nepalese peacekeepers captured by a militia in Ituri as "missing." Apparently the militia is demanding $20,000 ransom for each of the soldiers. The UN refuses to pay, and threatens dire consequences if the peacekeepers are not freed.

June 3, 2006: The seven Nepalese peacekeepers captured by rebels in Ituri have been freed. The UN says it did not pay ransom, but that the rebels gave into threats that rebel leaders would be held personally responsible if the peacekeepers were not released quickly.

June 21, 2006: The first contingent of EUFOR DRCongo, 179 French troops, arrived in the Congo. MONUC reported the situation in South Kivu remained calm, though the FDLR militia remained a threat. The UN’s South Kivu Brigade has established four Mobile Operating Bases in South Kivu. One base is located at Bunyakiri. Militias in Ituri district (northeast Congo) have until June 30 to complete disarmament. The UN has two disarmament sites in Ituri, one at Aveba (south of the capital of Bunia), and one at Kpandroma. Militiamen who turn in their arms prior to June 30 will receive amnesty from the Congolese government. Those who fail to do so will be forcibly disarmed by the UN and Congolese forces. The UN is trying to convince as many militiamen as possible to turn in their arms peaceably. However, look for a new counter-militia offensive in Ituri beginning in early July as part of the UN’s election security operations. The UN estimates 4000 armed militiamen remain in Ituri. This is down from the 16,000 armed militiamen believed to be operating in Ituri at the
beginning of 2006. Most of the 4000 still under arms are part of the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC).

June 26, 2006: Lead elements of the European Unions Force for the DRC (EUFOR DR Congo) have been arriving in the Congo. EUFOR DR Congo will deploy 2000 troops in Congo to protect the national elections (scheduled for July 30). Some 800 European peacekeepers will deploy in Kinshasha. The EU force has a mandate to remain in Congo up to four months after the election. South Africa will send 300 election monitors and technicians to support the election.

June 27, 2006: A militia group in eastern Congo released two Nepalese peacekeepers. The two men were taken captive May 28 in Ituri. Five other Nepalese peacekeepers remain missing.

June 28, 2006: Turkey is sending 17 troops to serve with the European election protection forces in Congo. Turkey will also contribute one C-130 transport aircraft. Transport aircraft and helicopters are critical equipment. The Congo is a huge country. The UN and the Congolese government have decided to deploy as many Congolese police as possible to provide security to voters, then back up the police with international peacekeepers and elite Congolese police deploying as "rapid reaction forces" should trouble occur. C-130s and other tactical transports will deliver the RRFs to the hotspots.

June 29, 2006: UN and Japanese trainers have helped raise two companies of special Congolese police. The companies comprise the Mobile Intervention Group (Congo use the French acronym GMI). The GMI are part of the National Congolese Police. The GMI will be used as a mobile security unit during the upcoming elections. The UN has trained 14,000 new Congolese police officers. 32,000 new police officers have been trained by other nations and international agencies.

June 30, 2006: The UN said Congolese security forces (a military police unit) killed 12 civilians in the town of Matadi. The people killed were participating in an "anti-government protest." Many of the protestors in Matadi belong to the Bundi Dia Kongo movement. The group is a separatist group which wants to re-establish "the Kongo Kingdom." The kingdom would include parts of Congo, Gabon, and Angola. Matadi is Congo's main port (near the mouth of the Congo River). Earlier in June a number of labor strikes occurred in Matadi.

July 4, 2006: Some 670 of 1200 European soldiers (European Union Force for the DRC) have already deployed in Kinshasha. A rogue militia has once again taken control of the town of Tchei in eastern Congo (Ituri province). UN peacekeepers took Tchei in a major offensive at the end of May. In late June (June 26 in one account) UN peacekeepers withdrew from Tchei
and were replaced by Congolese Army troops. The militia forces started a counter-attack on either June 30 or July 1. The Congolese Army troops withdrew after "several deaths" and 18 wounded. No question--this is a huge setback for the Congolese government. The Congolese Army defeat once again demonstrates the army's ineffectiveness. Without UN troops as a back up (usually South Africans, Bangladeshis or Pakistanis in a "reaction force") the Congolese Army at best offers token resistance.

July 6, 2006: A Russian An-12 cargo plane in eastern Congo crashed. Three Russian airman and one Congolese civilian died. The plane was flying from Goma to Kisangani and was operated by Mango Airlines.

The UN extended the deadline for militia disarmament to July 15. The UN reported a recent surge in militiamen turning in weapons. The UN issued a "forced disarmament" order that said militiamen who fail to meet the disarmament deadline will be arrested. Apparently a number of militiamen have had second thoughts about keeping their weapons. India announced that it will send another infantry battalion to Congo. The 2nd Battalion Rajputana Rifles will be fully deployed in Katanga province before the end of July. The unit will begin deploying to Congo on July 15. India already has a brigade committed to UN operations in Congo.

July 7, 2006: The Congo government and the UN said that another 2600 militiamen had turned in their weapons in Ituri province.

July 10, 2006: Five Nepalese peacekeepers had been released by a militia group in northeast Congo. The Nepalese had been held since May 27. Two men captured Nepalese peacekeepers were released on June 27. At one time it was believed that the militiamen demanded ransom. The UN said no ransom was paid to the FNI (Front des Nationalistes et des Integrationistes).

July 14, 2006: Uganda claimed that the rebel Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) is recruiting child soldiers inside Congo. The successful amnesty program has reduced the number of rogue militiamen operating in eastern Congo. That means there are fewer counter-militia operations by UN peacekeepers. Uganda claimed that the ADF is "using the break in operations" to rebuild and regroup. Uganda fears the ADF will use the eastern Congo as a base area.

July 17, 2006: Pre-election violence is increasing and in a country the size of Congo, there just aren't enough peacekeepers and trained police to go around. Unidentified gunmen shot and killed seven people who were participating in an election rally in the town Rutshuru in Kivo province (eastern Congo). The rally was being held for independent candidate Jean-Luc Mutokambale. On July 17 four people died when a gunfight erupted at a political meeting in Kinshasha.
July 18, 2006: The German troop contingent, for the Congo election, is now deployed. Germany has 780 soldiers serving with the EU election-protection force in Congo.

July 19, 2006: CIAT (International committee to Support the Transition, ie, transition to democracy) issued a statement that said the Congolese Army and the presidential guard should be confined to their bases on election day, July 30. Many NGOs and observers have concluded the Congolese Army is "too politicized" to be trusted to keep the peace on election day. The presidential guard has 15,000 troops -- so it is a sizeable force. CIAT recommended that international peacekeepers and Congolese police handle the security duties. As it is, there are too few real security troops available to fully protect voters on election day. The July 30 election is a huge political event. The ballot in the capital city of Kinshasha is also big--literally. Western press sources reported that the ballot will be six pages long with the names and photos of 800 candidates. That's right, 800 candidates for 17 seats. 500 seats in parliament are up for grabs nation-wide.

July 20, 2006: The FNI militia organization, in Ituri, decided to turn in its arms and apply for amnesty. The FNI (Front des Nationalistes et Integrationnistes) had earlier gained some notoriety when it abducted several UN peacekeepers. The FNI leadership requested that their gunmen be integrated into the Congolese Army. The FNI fielded 1000 militia fighters. The FNI surrender means over 4000 militiamen have turned in their arms since mid-June.

July 28, 2006: An Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operated by Belgian troops serving with EUFOR (European Forces peacekeeping mission in the Congo) crashed in Kinshasha. Five people were reportedly injured. EUFOR has 2200 troops deployed in and near the Congo (1200 EU troops are in Gabon serving as a rapid reaction force). On July 27 French jets supporting EUFOR reportedly over flew a compound where opposition candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba was located. Riots broke out in the neighborhood around the compound and six people died.

July 30, 2006: Congo conducted its first multi-arty election in over forty years. There were 33 candidates for president in the election. However, the MRC may be ready to make a deal with the government. The government attributed the MRC "deal" to the successful July 30 elections. The "deal" maybe both old news and slow news, since reported appeared in mid-July that the MRC would agree to "demobilize." The MRC said that "free and fair" elections were an MRC goal and the July 30 elections were a promising sign. The UN gave militias until July 15 to demobilize or face another UN "counter militia" offensive. The best bet is that the UN will prepare for counter-militia offensive operations but wait to see if the fact the elections were held without significant violence will help "coax"
recalcitrant rebel groups in from the bush. Two renegade militias operating in Congo are still recruiting members. The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC) have not disarmed or disbanded. Both the FDLR and the MRC are accused of "recruiting" child soldiers in ways reminiscent of Uganda's LRA. The children are kidnapped and used as arms and food carriers, though some are occasionally given weapons.

August 1, 2006: International journalists reported meeting with Ugandan LRA rebel leader Joseph Kony in the Garamba Forest (northeast DRC, near Sudan border). Kony told the journalists that his offer of peace talks with Uganda was "genuine." The journalists said that some people attending the meeting were escorted by Sudanese SPLA fighters (Sudan Peoples Liberation Army). Several sources reported that the meeting definitely occurred inside Congolese territory. Uganda has repeatedly accused Congo of failing to arrest LRA rebels in Congo and of allowing the LRA to have base camps on Congolese territory. In January UN peacekeepers launched a series of raids into the Garamba forest area, allegedly against LRA base camps.

August 2, 2006: The UN warned against "premature" announcements of election victory. The UN statement said that the results of the July 30 election would take time. Voter turnout was estimated as being "high" but no official figures were available. A UN spokesman pointed out that Congo is the size of western Europe and that collecting the ballots in a nation with few roads (i.e., poor transportation infrastructure) complicated the ballot collecting process. A European Union spokesman said that initial reports from European election observers were positive. The election appeared to have been "free and peaceful."

August 4, 2006: Call it more than typical Congolese chaos. Congo vote-counters are examining warehouses of paper ballots from the July 30 national elections. Ballots from 50,000 voting places are being counter in 62 centers. The UN initially said the election results could be announced.

August 9, 2006: The European Union said that it would keep its 1100 troop peacekeeping force in Kinshasha, the Congo's capital. However, only 200 of the troops are combat troops. The EU force will stay in Kinshasha to help maintain stability when the Congolese national election results are finalized. 1300 EU peacekeepers are also on-call in Gabon. The 1300 troops in Gabon provide a rapid reaction force to reinforce the peacekeepers in Kinshasha and UN troops throughout the Congo.

August 14, 2006: Two Army units fought a battle against one another on August 5 in the eastern Congo. The units were from the 9th Brigade and the 83rd Brigade. The fight took place in the town of Sake. Many Congolese Army units are "national army" in name only. The 83rd Brigade
reportedly has many former rebels who belonged to the Congolese Rally for Democracy (specifically the RCD-Goma, a primarily Congolese Tutsi organization). The RCD-Goma was regarded as an ally of the Rwandan government. Many RCD-Goma backers now support Laurent Nkunda, a former RCD rebel leader. The August 5 firefight was big enough to attract some press coverage, but tensions between former rebels and troops loyal to the Congolese government have provoked other skirmishes or near skirmishes. The big worry among international peacekeepers is that these tensions could break out into renewed fighting after the national election results are finalized.

August 15, 2006: The FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) are once again conducting "forced conscription" of child soldiers in North and South Kivu provinces. Bolivia deployed 230 troops in the eastern Congo. The troops replace a contingent of Bolivians that have been serving with UN forces.

August 16, 2006: Over half of the election ballots have been processed. The current Congolese president, Joseph Kabila remains in the lead.

August 17, 2006: Angola has beefed up its troop contingents along its border with Congo. The Angolan troops began moving on August 13 and the buildup has continued. Angola expects the impending announcement of the winner of the Congolese presidential election will lead to trouble inside the Congo. The announcement is scheduled for August 20 (but could still be delayed). The troop movement was described as a "defensive" precaution. The Angolan government supported the Congolese government during the Congo War (1998-2003). In the eyes of many Congolese that makes Angola a "quiet ally" of the Kabila government. (Laurent Kabila was president of the Congo until he was assassinated in 2001. Joseph Kabila Kabange, Laurent's son, succeeded his father.) There are apparently at least four Angolan battalions on the border. The Angolan deployment includes helicopters and armored vehicles. That means between 3000 and 4000 troops have been deployed. It is very doubtful that Angola would act on Kabila's behalf in the event of trouble in the Congo, though that cannot be ruled out. Four battalions looks like more of a "political message" signaling Congolese rebels that Angola has an interest in a peaceful acceptance of the election results. The Angolans also fear unrest in the Congo could send a wave of refugees across the border. Refugees create political and social problems and taking care of them is expensive, even if the UN and aid NGOs ultimately share the costs of refugee relief.

August 18, 2006: The UN announced an investigation into accusations that its peacekeepers were running, or using, a child prostitution ring. Prostitution is common in Congo, and big business around bases where UN troops, or civilian officials, live. Because of the risk of AIDS, the pimps
and brothel owners have been using younger and younger girls. This quickly becomes, by Western definitions, child prostitution. Until about two years ago, the UN ignored the use of prostitutes by its peacekeeper staff. No longer, and the continued use of prostitutes by peacekeepers has become a major headache for the UN.

August 20, 2006: The latest estimate is it will take three weeks to count the votes (pushing the date to at least August 25), and that may be optimistic. There are already charges of fraud because of the slow-pace of the counting and the lack of control over the ballots. Challenger (and former rebel leader) Jean-Pierre Bemba has declared himself winner. Current President Joseph Kabila's supporters claim Kabila won the election (shades of Mexico's current electoral standoff). Still, there are some reasons for optimism. The election came off with comparatively little violence. The presence of UN and European peacekeepers is credited with minimizing the violence? at least minimizing violence so far.

August 20, 2006: The Congo's Independent Electoral Commission announced the results of the July 30 election. President Joseph Kabila got 44 percent of the vote and Jean-Pierre Bemba 20 percent. A run-off is scheduled for October. 31 other presidential candidates split the remainder. Election officials said 16.9 million ballots were cast.

On August 21, elements of the presidential guard (loyal to Kabila) attacked Bemba's supporters and positions near Bemba's Kinshasha compound. The presidential guard had tank support in their attack. The presidential guard (which is essentially Kabila's militia) has approximately 15,000 soldiers. A UN source said that 150 UN troops in armored vehicles drove into Bemba's neighborhood and helped extract "foreign envoys" in the area.

August 22, 2006: Uganda warned that it would send its forces into the eastern Congo to "root out" the LRA is the current round of peace talks with the LRA falters. Uganda said that it would not allow the LRA to "regroup and recruit" new members. Uganda maintains that the LRA is now operating out of the Congo's Garamba National Park area.

As of August 22, 15 people had died in the fighting. President Joseph Kabila's supporters claimed that opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba's armed supporters (his political party's militia) tried to "shut down Kinshasha" on August 20 in order to prevent the announcement of the July 30 presidential election results. Bemba supporters said one of their headquarters was attacked by "Kabila loyalists" and two people were killed.

August 23, 2006: In what could be called an "all parties agreement," forces loyal to Congo's President Joseph Kabila and key opposition leader
Jean-Pierre Bemba signed a ceasefire agreement. Representatives from the UN Mission in Congo (MONUC), the Congolese Army, EUFOR (European peacekeeping forces) and EUPOL (European police mission) also signed the agreement. Kabila's and Bemba's forces both agreed to pull back from the center of Kinshasha. Gunfire (including artillery duels) broke out on August 20 in Kinshasha.

August 28, 2006: The International Criminal Court (ICC), in the Hague, Netherlands, charged a former Congolese militia leader with war crimes. Thomas Lubanga was a key commander in the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC). Lubanga is charged with crimes committed between July 2002 and December 2003. Lubanga is charged with the "forced enlistment" of child soldiers. Lubanga also directed attacks on the Lendu tribe. The Indian Air Force began deploying a new aviation contingent to the Congo for duty with UN forces. The Indian force (Indian Aviation Contingent-1) has 243 airmen. The unit has four Mi-25 (also known as the Mi-24D) attack helicopters and five Mi-17 helicopters for transport work.

September 1, 2006: Gunmen robbed a refugee camp in the town of Gety (northeast Congo). The gunmen also attacked the headquarters of a medical NGO in the area and forced the medical group to leave. There are approximately 45,000 refugees in the camp at Gety.

September 4, 2006: The Ugandan Lords Resistance army (LRA) rebels are leaving a base area in the eastern Congo (the Garamba National Park area), and were seen heading for the Congo-Sudan border. The LRA rebels will assemble in south Sudan, per the recent peace deal with the Ugandan government. On August 30 Congolese government security forces clashed with an LRA contingent. The Congo government said that the LRA rebels had until mid-September to leave the Congo.

September 6, 2006: The presidential run-off election is now scheduled for October 29. Current president Joseph Kabila will face Jean-Pierre Bemba in the run-off. The European peacekeeping force (EUFOR) remains deployed in Kinshasha, with supporting force in Gabon. Bemba's supporters are still accusing EUFOR and other UN forces of favoring Kabila. That's a bit of a stretch. Peacekeepers came to Bemba's rescue during the battle of Kinshasha that raged in the immediate aftermath of the fighting that broke out in mid-August. 31 people died in the fighting.

September 15, 2006: EUFOR (European Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo) will continue to keep its troops in Congo at least through the October run-off election. EUFOR's senior officers described the situation in Congo as "militarily stable" but "politically sensitive"? meaning that where peacekeepers are violence is minimized but the divisions between the supporters of current president Joseph Kabila and opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba remain real and deep.
September 17, 2006: Congolese, Ugandan, and UN military representatives met to discuss how best to handle movements by remaining LRA (Lords Resistance Army) rebel forces. Uganda has repeatedly complained that Congo and the UN have let the LRA operate out of forest areas near the Ugandan border. At the moment the ceasefire between Uganda and the LRA continues to hold. LRA rebels are moving to assembly areas in south Sudan. Uganda wants Congo and UN peacekeepers to help insure that LRA rebels do not move into Uganda.

September 18, 2006: Why fight over the Congo? On reason is geography: Congo is the center of Africa. The Congo is also a vast treasure of mineral resources. Katanga region has large copper deposits and also cobalt, Ituri province (northeast Congo), scene of intense fighting, has commercial gold deposits. So does South Kivu (where a mining company is currently exploring a new deposit). What would a "sustainable" peace in Congo mean to the mining industry? The World Bank projects a jump from $20 million in loans for mining operations in Congo (2006) to $500 million by 2009. Corporations that abandoned the Congo because of the war are interested in returning.

September 19, 2006: A major fire erupted in the Kinshasha headquarters of Congolese opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba. The building also is headquarters for two television stations owned by Bemba. One person was hurt in the blaze. The government was not sure what started the blaze, but remember, the government is headed by Bemba's rival, current president Joseph Kabila. After the fire, Kabila supporters demonstrated in Kinshasha and some threw stones at UN peacekeeping vehicles which were deployed to help protect firefighters. An arsonist attacking Bemba's headquarters would get a twofer: the opposition candidate loses his political headquarters and his media operation is also hindered.

September 29, 2006: The UN Security Council voted to maintain its current troop commitment to the Congo through February 2007. Approximately 18,000 troops currently serve with MONUC. The European Union said that it would consider extending its peacekeeping mission in the Congo past the October 29 presidential run-off election date. Germany, however, opposes an extension of the EUFOR mission.

October 2, 2006: The UN and the Congolese government reported that a heavy firefight erupted in Ituri Province (eastern Congo). Twelve militiamen and two Congolese soldiers were killed in the battle. The Congo government claimed that militiamen belonging to the Ituri Patriotic Resistance Front (FRPI) attacked the Congolese force.

October 3, 2006: Another reconnaissance drone flown by EUFOR peacekeepers has crashed in the Kinshasha area. This time the cause of the crash was an accident, not ground fire. Belgian troops serving with
EUFOR reported on October 3 they "lost contact" with their recon drone and the unmanned plane crashed. One woman was killed when the drone struck the ground.

October 6, 2006: Militia groups in eastern Congo appear to be rearming. Ituri province (northeastern Congo) is the focus of UN concern over this. Militias are reportedly seeking new recruits in the area. The UN had been touting the success of its disarmament program in the eastern Congo. UN peacekeepers are also concerned that the militias are trying to buy new weapons. The UN has received promises from the governments of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda that they will help stop the flow of arms into the eastern Congo. As part of the militia-integration program, the Congolese government gave two former militia commanders the rank of colonel in the Congolese Army. One commander served with the FPRI (Front for Nationalists and Integrationists) and the other was with the MRC (Congolese Revolutionary Movement). At one time both militias had approximately 3,000 fighters under arms. The organizations turned in their weapons and demobilized as part of a UN-sponsored program.

October 11, 2006: It's estimated that some 11,000 children are either still serving with militia groups in the Congo or are "unaccounted for" after being kidnapped by militias. Some children (teenagers) do serve as militia fighters. Others are used to carry supplies.

October 17, 2006: The UN designated Kinshasha as a "safe area" for the upcoming presidential run-off election. Both EUFOR and the UN have significant peacekeeping forces in and around Kinshasha. UN peacekeepers have been collecting and confiscating weapons in the Kinshasha area. "Combined patrols" is one reason Kinshasha is comparatively peaceful. The UN has sponsored police patrols that includes elements of the Congolese National Police (PNC), military police drawn from the Congolese Army (FARDC), police from the European Union peacekeeping force (EU Police) and UN military police (from MONUC peacekeeping troops).

October 20, 2006: As the runoff election approaches (October 29), fighting between supporters of president Joseph Kabila and opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba has increased. Kinshasha remains quiet, though two TV stations were attacked on October 14. Riots have occurred in Equateur Province. On October 18, riot police deployed in Katanga to stop street-fighting between supporters of Congolese president Joseph Kabila and supporters of his political rival, Jean-Pierre Bemba. Members of the pro-Kabila Union of Nationalists and Federalists of Congo (UNAFEC) threw rocks at a motorcade carrying Bemba supporters.
October 29, 2006: Congo conducted its presidential run-off election. The UN said that the elections and election-related expenses cost nearly $500 million. Election monitors reported little violence throughout the country.

November 1, 2006: The US froze the assets of seven men accused of illegally shipping weapons and ammunition to the Congo. The seven include Russian businessman Viktor Bout and former Congolese general Laurent Nkunda. Nkunda is also charged with committing war crimes in the eastern Congo, which allegedly occurred when he led a short-lived tribal rebellion. Bout (in Moscow) denied the charges. Both the UN and US have urged the Congo and neighboring countries to rein in arms dealers and gunrunners. Enforcing the international arms embargo has proven to be difficult. The "kingpin" strategy (ie, arresting those who direct the trade) doesn't necessarily produce immediate results. It does, however, discourage other gunrunners.

November 11, 2006: The Rwandan government denied reports that it had sent forces into the eastern Congo. The scattered reports claimed Rwandan soldiers were chasing Hutu extremists. UN and EUFOR peacekeepers once again deployed in Bemba's neighborhood. Pro-Kabila demonstrators have repeatedly marched through the streets near Bemba's compound.

November 12, 2006: Two people died in Kinshasha as the results of a series of violent confrontations between groups loyal to opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba and Congolese president Joseph Kabila. Some 67 percent of the presidential run-off vote has been counted and Kabila leads Bemba 61 to 39 percent.

November 15, 2006: The European Union (EU) said that it will withdraw its 1200-troop peacekeeping force from the Congo "on schedule." The schedule calls for the troops to depart at the end of November. However, UN and EUFOR patrols (backed by armored personnel carriers) continue throughout Kinshasha, which is regarded as the "center of gravity." During the first week of November, UN and EUFOR peacekeepers began manning a number of fixed positions in Kinshasha. The peacekeepers are immediately tasked with separating factions loyal to Kabila and Bemba. They are also manning key areas in the capital should violence break out when the final election results are announced. The run-off election took place on October 29. The final results will be available on November 19.

November 18, 2006: The Congo reported tribal fighting in Bandundu province (north of Kinshasha). Fighting broke out between Tende and Nunu tribesmen in and near the town of Bolobo. The fighting was described as "severe"; the likely cause was a land dispute. Medical teams reported eight people died of "arrow and machete wounds" and 27 people were wounded.
November 19, 2006: Congo's electoral commission declared President Joseph Kabila the winner of the run-off election. Kabila got 58 percent of the vote. Runner-up Jean-Pierre Bemba received 42 percent. Kabila faces several immediate problems. The first is working with UN and European peacekeepers to keep the inevitable post-election violence to a minimum. Kinshasa is a potential battleground and if the violence gets out of hand, the result could be civil war. If Kabila manages to keep Kinshasha from exploding, he then faces a series of long term problems. His own army is deeply split by tribal and political factions. In Congo's eastern Ituri province, elements of the Congolese Army (FARDC) fought with at least 50 members of the Ugandan LRA rebels. The firefight took place near Mount Zeu on the Congo-Uganda border. The Congo government has promised Uganda that it will act to stop rebel infiltration into Uganda. The fighting follows a report that two Ugandan soldiers were arrested in the Congo. Uganda conducts "aggressive" patrols along the Congo border - which sometimes means Ugandan recon patrols enter Congolese territory in order to monitor the LRA.

November 22, 2006: Supporters of defeated presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba rioted in Kinshasha. The rioters burned down the Congo Supreme Court building in the capital, while the court was deliberating Bemba's appeal. This action is not likely to help Bemba. UN peacekeepers, operating in armored vehicles, fired "warning shots" at the rioters. There was sniper fire at both firefighters and policemen. Bemba accused Kabila of conducting "systematic cheating" to win the election. However, South Africa's election observer team issued a report that said the election was fair and "remarkably transparent." Election observers are urging Bemba's supporters to accept the results.

November 28, 2006: A firefight broke out in the eastern Congo town of Sake (near the Rwandan border, in North Kivu province). Congolese Army units (FARDC) exchanged gunfire with a "dissident" army faction led by rebel general Laurent Nkunda. At least two soldiers were killed and 15 people wounded in the fighting on November 28. Nkunda's militia (elements of what was the Army 83rd Brigade) attacked the town on November 26. A UN force manned by Indian soldiers and the 11th and 14th Brigades of the Congolese Army counter-attacked and drove the militia from the town. The UN unit was supported by armored personnel carriers and an attack helicopter. In the November 26 fighting, 75 Congolese soldiers were reported wounded. The Indian troops have been operating in and around the Congolese town of Goma. The border area remains extremely sensitive. The UN is concerned that militias operating in North Kivu and South Kivu are still receiving logistics support (including new weapons) from outside the Congo.
November 29, 2006: The Ituri Patriotic Resistance Front (FRPI) militia agreed to disarm. During disarmament negotiations the FRPI and two other militia groups admitted they had approximately 700 "child soldiers" serving in their forces.

December 1, 2006: Germany withdrew 100 troops from the Congo, out of a force of had 760 peacekeepers serving as part of the reinforced EUFOR peacekeeping contingent sent to protect the Congolese elections. The German government said it plans to pull all of its troops out by this Christmas.

December 4, 2006: The 632 members of the new parliament have been announced, which apparently will cause many armed groups to quiet down, until they see what the new legislators will do for, or against, them. The various rebel groups are also cowed by the recent vigorous (violent) actions by UN peacekeepers. The UN troops have switched from passively observing, to meeting violence with violence. Since the UN soldiers are better trained and equipped than the rebels, they are nearly always successful. The word gets around, and the rebels are trying to come up with new tactics to deal with this.

December 9, 2006: There was another firefight near the town of Sake (near Goma, on the Congo-Rwanda border). A militia loyal to dissident Congolese general Laurent Nkunda launched a new attack on an army unit entering the area. The militia withdrew after the firefight with the troops. The were no casualty reports. Nkunda's militia is now often referred to as the 81st and 83rd Brigades of the army. It's a six to one, half a dozen to the other situation. The men in these "brigades" were mostly drawn from tribal militias before they were nominally integrated into the Congolese Army. The integration often does not take.

December 14, 2006: There is a major outbreak of cholera among refugees in the eastern Congo. There is concern that that the disease will spread among 20,000 refugees (IDPs -internally displaced persons) in the Goma-Sake area. The area has witnessed a great deal of fighting between the Congolese Army and various militias. But the 20,000 new refugees in the Goma-Sake area are the tip of the iceberg. There are over 500,000 IDPs in North Kivu province. The IDPs lack clean water and food. Cholera isn't the only epidemic that threatens the malnourished and exposed refugees. The South African government reaffirmed that its 1400 peacekeepers in the Congo will remain committed to the MONUC peacekeeping force EUFOR still intends to withdraw its peacekeepers by the end of 2006.

December 15, 2006: The Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Burundi, Rwanda. Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Angola, Sudan, and the Central African Republic signed a treaty that promised the nations would never go to war with one another. If that doesn't sound suspicious
enough, the treaty committed the nations to "mandatory disarmament" of rebel groups and militias in their respective territories and "extradition" of rebel groups within their territories (i.e., rebel groups rebelling against a neighbor or nation signing the treaty). Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan are already shadowboxing with rebels in western Sudan and along the CAR-Sudan border. Congo has promised Uganda that it will deal with Uganda rebels, but the LRA, and at least one other rebel group still have bases in the Congo. This is a treaty that sounds good on paper, but it isn't likely it will be enforced.

December 18, 2006: The Ituri province militia force led by Cobra Matata finally surrendered earlier this week. Matata turned himself in along with approximately 110 of his fighters. Matata had agreed to a disarmament deal in July 2006 but never fulfilled the disarmament commitment. In November 2006, there was another demobilization and disarmament deal, but Matata failed to show up. Matata's militia had respected the ceasefire agreement. However, not all of Matata's men were willing to surrender. Matata's militia was once believed to have about a thousand men under arms. With 100 demobilizing, that means a substantial number have either already gone home (good) or joined other militia forces (bad). The government announced that Matata himself would be allowed to join the Congolese Army and have the rank of colonel. Despite the problems with Laurent Nkunda, turning a senior militia commander into a colonel isn't necessarily bad. The Congolese government is seeking ways to politically integrate the rebel tribes in the eastern Congo. The rank of colonel or general is an attractive political plum for rebel leaders. Of course, there is also the lingering issue is war crimes. It often takes months (and occasionally years) for hard evidence to be collected connecting militia leaders to reported crimes.

December 22, 2006: Bolivia announced it will continue to provide a troop contingent for UN forces in the Congo. At the moment Bolivia has 210 soldiers serving with MONUC. Another 210-man contingent will replace the current unit. The "relief in place" is scheduled for December 28.

December 26, 2006: The European peacekeeping force (EUFOR) has completed its planned withdrawal from the Congo, with the departure of 250 French troops and a seven Belgian observers. EUFOR provided extra troops to help secure the Congo's elections. The EUFOR withdrawal began at the end of November 2006. 17,500 UN troops remain on duty in the Congo.

Nkunda now claims he is waging war on behalf of Tutsi living in the eastern Congo.

December 31, 2006: The UN and the government are once again fighting militia forces in Ituri province (northeastern Congo). During the last week of December, Congolese forces fought with militiamen belonging to the Front of Nationalists and Integrationists (FNI). The government reported the 19 Congolese soldiers died in the series of engagements. In a firefight in the town of Fataki (north of Bunia) the militiamen took 14 government soldiers as hostages. The government and UN forces in the area have ordered the militiamen to return the captured soldiers. The fighting is definitely a setback. In November the FNI agreed to disarm. On December 28 a 300-man contingent of the FNI turned in their weapons. However, these militias have factions within factions. When one charismatic leader decides he doesn't like the disarmament deal he can usually cobble together a force of disgruntled fellow tribesmen to follow him back into the bush.

December 27, 2007: The Congolese Army killed 16 rebel fighters in a firefight in North Kivu province.

December 29, 2007: The Congolese Army opened a new operations center in Goma (North Kivu province). The ops center was built by UN peacekeepers. The new ops center is intended to help the Congolese Army improve its command and control capabilities in the eastern Congo. No doubt the new facility will help, but improving command and control is as much a function of training and discipline as it is communications gear -- and the Congolese Army remains poorly trained and largely undisciplined.

January 4, 2008: The Indian Army's 6th Battalion of the Sikh Regiment deployed for peacekeeping duty in the Congo. Five people died in political violence in the western Congo (Bas-Congo province). Fighting erupted in the city of Vanga between police and members of the Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) movement. One of the people killed allegedly worked for the Congolese government. Four were members of the BDK. The BDK is a Kongo ethnic organization (as in the Kongo ethnic group).

January 6, 2008: The government, at the urging of Uganda, has agreed to expel rebel leader Joseph Kony and other members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), from a remote nature park in Eastern Congo. That won't be so easy. The LRA fighters are experienced at not being found.

January 6, 2008: The FDLR confirmed it will send representatives to peace talks in Goma (North Kivu province).

January 8, 2008: The UN currently has 18,407 peacekeepers in the Congo
January 9, 2008: Last year, nearly 800,000 people were forced to flee from their villages due to fighting between the Congolese Army, Rwandan Hutu rebel organizations, and General Laurent Nkunda's Tutsi militia forces. The number may seem staggering, but believable, given the population density in North and South Kivu, and the brutal treatment of civilians exhibited by all of the warring groups.

January 13, 2008: They were in then they were out and then...they came back. On January 11 representatives of Laurent Nkunda's rebel group said they were "suspending participation" in peace negotiations scheduled to begin in Goma (North Kivu province, eastern Congo). However, on January 12 Nkunda issued a statement that said he would send a negotiating team.

January 15, 2008: President Joseph Kabila briefly attended the Goma peace conference. The peace conference opened on January 14. The government expects at least a thousand participants (perhaps as many as 1,300). The participants come from various rebel, ethnic, and political groups in the eastern Congo. Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) is also participating. Nkunda insists that the government has not done enough to stop depredations by Rwandan Hutus in the FDLR militia.

January 16, 2008: It is believed that ten mountain gorillas were killed in the Virunga National Park, by marauders, during 2007. The wildlife preserve covers an area along the Congo-Rwanda-Uganda border zone and is often used as a supply route for rebel groups fighting in the eastern Congo. Some skirmishing between militias and government forces has also occurred inside the park boundaries.

January 19, 2008: The government accused Laurent Nkunda's forces of killing at least 20 civilians in North Kivu Province fighting. Nkunda denied the allegation and said that Mai-Mai militia men had killed the civilians.

January 21, 2008: Several opposition groups have accused the government of "capitulating to the rebels" by agreeing to continue negotiations with Laurent Nkunda's militia.

January 22, 2008: The Congolese government signed a ceasefire agreement with General Laurent Nkunda. In the first phase of the ceasefire, Congolese Army units and Nkunda's forces will disengage and UN forces will establish a buffer zone. The ceasefire is also supposed to apply to other militia forces in eastern Congo. Nkunda and other rebels, who are currently charged with insurrection (treason), will receive amnesty. The issue of where Nkunda will go, however, has not been addressed. He refuses to go into exile.
January 22, 2008: Rebel leader Laurent Nkunda has agreed to a ceasefire and a peace deal with the government. This one also involves the Mai Mai militias. This is the second attempt at making this kind of ceasefire work. Nkunda and his followers have been fighting for four years, and the picking are getting slim for an "army" that lives off plunder. Several million people have died from that marauding along the Rwandan border, as the armed groups fought each other, and killed, or drove into the bush, any civilians that got in the way. Disease and starvation was the most common cause of death.

February 1, 2008: The UN has agreed to help "neutralize" Rwandan forces operating in Congo. This is code language for striking at Rwandan Hutu rebel organizations like the FDLR. In order to emphasize the importance of this new mission, MONUC will move its eastern command from Kisangani to Goma (capital of North Kivu). Goma is on the Rwanda-Congo border. In 2007 the Congolese and Rwandan governments signed an agreement that Congo would help disarm and repatriate Rwandan Hutu militias. However, many of the Hutus in the militias (like the FDLR) participated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. If they are repatriated they face charges of mass murder. That's a big incentive for these guys to fight to remain in Congo.

February 4, 2008 The ceasefire is definitely not working. Laurent Nkunda's Tutsi militia (National Congress for the Defense of the People, CNDP) is now skirmishing with a Mai-Mai militia in North Kivu province (eastern Congo). Fighting broke out between Nkunda's troops and the Pareco faction of the Mai-Mai on January 28 in the town of Lusirandak and Kasake (North Kivu).

February 20, 2008: In Fall 2007 China reached a major government to government deal with the Congo. China has agreed to finance the building of transportation infrastructure in Congo. China will also help construct an electrical grid and build electrical generating capacity. Improving water supplies is also part of the arrangement. The financing, however, is "resource-backed." The Congo's copper and cobalt reserves are the resources "backing" the financing. Several developmental aid experts have said the China-Congo deal could benefit Congo. The deal, however, is just now drawing the careful scrutiny of the Congolese. The "C" word is being invoked? Congo? China? No, Colonialism. That may not be quite fair. Congo desperately needs infrastructure. Trading natural resources for roads and clean water would be a better deal for the Congolese than Belgian colonialism.

February 21, 2008: The UN has established 30 "peacekeeping bases" (monitoring camps) in North Kivu province. The camps are the key components of a buffer zone designed to separate warring militia factions. The camps were set up as part of the January 2008 Goma ceasefire agreement. The latest UN reports, however, are not too promising. Small-
scale clashes between Laurent Nkunda's CNDP and various other militia forces (including Mai-Mai) are occurring on a daily basis.

February 26, 2008: Congo-K - Mining Code Revision in View ' 

After the meeting of government officials and experts in the mining sector in Kinshasa from March 10 to 17, a consensus emerged in favour of revising the mining code of 2002.

February 27, 2008: MONUC (UN Mission in the Congo) has found more evidence of massacres in North Kivu, allegedly perpetrated in January by the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). The CNDP is rogue general Laurent Nkunda's militia force. Most of the CNDP fighters are Congolese Tutsis. The massacres definitely occurred (there are bodies). At least 30 Hutu tribespeople were killed. The investigation could lead Nkunda to completely reject the January Goma ceasefire agreement (Engagement Act). As it is, Nkunda has already "suspended participation" in the ceasefire process because of the investigation.

March 4, 2008: Congolese police fought with BDK separatists in Bas-Congo province. The trouble began in late February. According to UN sources, over a five day period (February 29-March 4) 22 people have died in riots and battles with police. The capital of Bas-Congo province, Matadi, has been the scene of several disturbances, but the deadliest clashes have occurred in the town of Sekebanza (north of Matadi).

March 10, 2008: The UN reported that the Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) is trying to gain control of Bas-Congo province (western Congo). Most of the UN's peacekeeping efforts have either centered on the capital, Kinshasa, or have focused on eastern Congo (eg North and South Kivu provinces). In January the UN beefed up its peacekeeping contingent in Bas-Congo, but it was a relatively small increase (140 soldiers). The UN began sending more reinforcements to Bas-Congo on March 3. The BDK is a strange outfit even for Congo. The BDK draws its strength from the Kongo ethnic group. It says its ultimate goal is to re-create a "pre-colonial" Kongo kingdom. In addition to a substantial slice of the Congo, the BDK's "kingdom" includes land within the countries of Angola, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and Gabon

March 14, 2008: The International Criminal Court (ICC) continues to investigate charges of murder, rape, and looting in eastern Congo. The ICC has been conducting "town meetings" in North Kivu province (eastern Congo) and in Equateur province (northeastern Congo). Equatuer's Ituria region was the scene of some of the worst ethnic fighting during the Great Congo War.

March 15, 2008: The UN admits that 6,000 Rwandan Hutu gunmen are responsible for the violence that has kept the provinces of North and
South Kivu a mess. The Hutus are largely those who tried to kill all Rwandan Tutsi in 1994. When that failed, despite killing nearly a million people, hundreds of thousands of Hutu, fearing retribution, fled to Congo. Many of these Hutu were armed, organized into the Interahamwe militia, and they planned to wage a guerilla war with the new, Tutsi dominated government in Rwanda. But the Rwandan Tutsis invaded Congo to destroy the Tutsi rebels, and this triggered a revolution in Congo ten years ago. After over a decade of fighting, many of the Hutu rebels have been killed, or returned to Rwanda to face justice. But 6,000 Hutu gunmen survive, and refuse to surrender. The UN has told these Hutu that surrender and disarmament is the only option. The Hutu are the hardcore, and most refuse. Many of the fighters are organized into the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) are willing to negotiate. But in the past, FDLR offers to negotiate have gone nowhere. Until these Hutu holdouts are taken down, there will be no peace in eastern Congo.

April 10, 2008: Congo's main opposition leader, Jean-Pierre Bemba of the Movement for Liberation of Congo (MLC), remains in exile in Portugal. Recently Bemba claimed that his life would be in danger if he returned to Congo. Bemba faces removal from parliament because members of parliament must attend at least one-fourth of parliamentary meetings. Bemba is a rebel warlord who made peace with the government, but expected to succeed in getting himself elected president of the country. Failing at this, he came to believe Laurent Kabila, who was re-elected president, would not tolerate such an ambitious rival, and would seek to kill him. So Bemba fled the country.

March 31, 2008: Several riots broke out in copper mines located near the town of Kolwezi. Police claimed "several hundred" miners rioted. The death of a child during an eviction was the ostensible cause of the riots. However, "illegal miners" are a political problem in Congo. "Illegals" are miners who have moved on to shut-down mining properties and set up their own freelance operations.

April 8, 2008: According to a recent UN Security Council study, the UN decision to reinforce operations in eastern Congo has left other regions less secure. The specific concern is Bas-Congo province (western Congo) where the BDK has become increasingly militant. In 2007 the UN deployed more troops to South and North Kivu provinces in an attempt to defeat and disarm militias operating in the areas.

April 10, 2008: Congo's main opposition leader, Jean-Pierre Bemba of the Movement for Liberation of Congo (MLC), remains in exile in Portugal. Recently Bemba claimed that his life would be in danger if he returned to Congo. Bemba faces removal from parliament because members of parliament must attend at least one-fourth of parliamentary meetings. Bemba is a rebel warlord who made peace with the government, but
expected to succeed in getting himself elected president of the country. Failing at this, he came to believe Laurent Kabila, who was re-elected president, would not tolerate such an ambitious rival, and would seek to kill him. So Bemba fled the country.

April 25, 2008: Congolese troops fought with rebel Rwandan Hutu militia forces in North Kivu province. The UN said that at least 12,000 people fled the immediate battlefield. Most of the fighting took place in an area 50 miles northeast of Goma. There were no casualty reports.

April 29, 2008: What is the biggest killer in the Congo? Probably malaria. Congo has around five million malaria cases a year. The actual number of people who die annually from malaria is not known, but the UN study estimates the figure is somewhere between 500,000 and one million people. There are more deaths in areas where rebel groups are active, because it is more difficult to distribute anti-mosquito sleeping nets (a major preventive measure) or go after the mosquitoes that spread the disease.

May 2, 2008: The UN vigorously denied allegations that UN peacekeepers in the eastern Congo had provided a Ugandan rebel organization with weapons. The rumors first appeared last month in Ugandan publications. Allegedly, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF, also called Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for Liberation of Uganda) received weapons from UN peacekeepers or that UN peacekeepers sold the ADF weapons.

May 3, 2008: The latest UN assessment of the eastern Congo is good because it isn't so bad. The UN described the situation as "stabilizing but fragile" – meaning a new offensive by rogue militias or Rwandan Hutus, or anyone else for that matter, could create another violent mess. MONUC in eastern Congo is once again focusing its efforts on disarmament and demobilization operations.

May 6, 2008: There are about 22 armed groups in eastern Congo, and a major part of the problem is not just the number of armed irregulars, but the many rebel organizations and their very different goals and motivations.

May 10, 2008: What does it take to create a "sustainable peace" in the eastern Congo? A recent UN-directed study focused on the Ituri region of Equateur province (northeast Congo). Among the "peace tasks" identified were:

Disarmament of militias and collection of weapons
Restoration of state authority
Resolving "land-related tensions"
Return of refugees to their homes

Distribution of "a fair share" of revenues from the sale of natural resources

(6) Resumption of economic activity: The "land tensions" item is particularly critical.

Land disputes between ethnic groups fueled a lot of the fighting in Ituri (e.g., between Hema and Lendu tribes).

May 17, 2008: The major "resources for infrastructure" mining deal between the Congo and China is once again raising questions. A group of Congolese critics contend that the deal is simply not fair to the Congo. It is being called "economic imperialism." The revenue split between Congo and one of China's main mining concerns is 32 percent for the Congo, 68 percent for China. The Congolese government disputes the critics and says the overall deal is very good for the Congo. Congo will receive royalties as well as revenues, and China is committed to building roads. Which the Congo desperately needs. The Chinese are unpopular with many Congolese, because Chinese run many of the illegal mining operations.

May 23, 2008: While fighting in North and South Kivu has diminished over the last few weeks, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) has not disappeared. The FDLR still effectively controls a chunk of South Kivu province west of Bukavu. The FDLR also controls an area west of Masisi in North Kivu. The town of Sange (South Kivu, not far from Burundi) is also in an FDLR "area of influence." The FDLR is a Rwandan Hutu militia. Many of its members were part of the Rwandan Interahamwe Hutu movement, the key organization involved in the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda.

May 26, 2008: The arrest in Belgium of former Congolese vice-president and presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba has caused a ruckus in the Congo. The UN reported that major demonstrations occurred in Equateur province, especially in the city of Mbandaka. Bemba fled the Congo to escape harassment by the Congolese government. On May 24 Belgium arrested Bemba on an International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant for war crimes committed in the Central African Republic from October 2002 through March 2003. Bemba is head of the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), which is the Congo's major opposition party.

June 5, 2008: A series of attacks north of the eastern Congolese town of Goma (North Kivu province) forced 5,000 people to flee their villages. Rwandan Hutu rebels (FDLR) launched two attacks on June 4, killing six people and injuring 14. The rebels struck a relief camp in Kinyando. Many
of these attacks are raids mounted to steal food and supplies, but this attack may have had a clear political motive. Two small Rwandan Hutu factions have been negotiating with the Congolese government. The negotiations have included demobilization and disarmament. The FDLR is trying to discourage Rwandan Hutus from joining the Congolese peace process.

June 9, 2008: UN peacekeepers issued another call to "militia chiefs" in the eastern Congo to fulfill their commitments to disarm. At the moment the UN is primarily focused on Rwandan Hutu militias like the FDLR. At least 6,000 Rwandan Hutu rebels remain in the eastern Congo. J

June 11, 2008: The Congo's lack of infrastructure hinders economic development. Infrastructure development is key to a huge recent Chinese mining contract. Congo needs roads, electricity grid, electricity generation, and airfields. Congo has extensive deposits of cobalt and copper. Power shortages (lack of electrical grid and unreliable electricity) have plagued efforts by both the government and major investors to upgrade the cobalt and copper mines. Katanga's big deposits and working mines are attracting the most attention. As usual, security is another issue. War is a big reason the Congo's electrical grid is damaged or non-existent. Infrastructure protection is obviously a major mission for Congolese police.

June 13, 2008: A firefight broke out between units in an "integrated" Congolese Army brigade, the 14th Brigade in South Kivu province. Many of these "integrated" units contain former enemies who still don't care for each other. Three men died in the incident.

June 19, 2008: A relative calm had returned to the western Congo, but ceasefire violations by militias in the eastern Congo continued to be a dangerous problem. The UN report focused on troubles in North Kivu. The Congolese Army and the Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) engaged in a series of firefights than began on June 10 when a company of the FARDC's 64th Battalion attacked an FDLR base. On June 14 the FDLR ambushed a Congolese Army unit north of the town of Nyamilima.

June 21, 2008: The Congolese Army (FARDC) fought a series of battles with a Mai Mai militia in Orientale province. The government claimed that 29 Mai Mai fighters were killed and the Congolese Army lost four soldiers. The Congolese Army has been conducting a limited offensive in Orientale since late May against militias that have refused to disarm. Some of the operations have taken place in the border region between Orientale and North Kivu province.

June 27, 2008: On June 26, the UN suspended relief supply shipments to the city of Rutshuru (North Kivu province) because of "insecurity". Riots
broke out in the town on June 24 and 25. Supply shipments resumed on June 27. Rutshuru has been the scene of clashes between the Congolese Army (FARDC, Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo) and militias loyal to General Laurent Nkunda.

July 1, 2008: The International Criminal Court (ICC) has charged two Congolese militia commanders (Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui and Germain Katanga) with war crimes. The crimes (the murder of 200 people) the men are charged with occurred in 2003 in Equateur province's Ituri region (near the Uganda border). The ICC warrants are a double-edged sword. In the case of Uganda, warrants for LRA leader Joseph Kony have proved to be an obstacle to getting a peace settlement.

July 10, 2008: General Laurent Nkunda is sending mixed signals about rejoining the peace process. He has done this before, claiming he supports the January 2008 Goma accord then engaging in a firefight with the FDLR or Mai-Mai militias. The explanation may be very simple: Nkunda sees no real benefit from making a deal with the Congolese government. He does not trust the government to keep any deal it makes. Of course, the government does not trust Nkunda, who basically controls the western Rutshuru region of North Kivu province. One of the big questions about Nkunda is "where does he get his money?" Usually Rwanda is fingered, but no one is certain.

July 18, 2008: The government said that it would offer amnesty to rebels who had committed crimes in North and South Kivu provinces after 2003 but had signed the January 2008 peace agreement. The Congo's war was supposed to be over in 2003, but militias have continued to operate in the region since then. The amnesty was passed by parliament. The amnesty, however, excludes "genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity." This is a big loophole since a number of militias have attacked unprotected villages, looted them, and committed rape and murder in the process.

July 21, 2008: The government accused General Laurent Nkunda's CNDP of "summary executions of civilians" and undermining the January 2008 ceasefire agreement.

July 23, 2008: Investigators in Kinshasha claim that $1.3 billion was either embezzled or "lost" (yes, that's the word, "lost") by the government in 2006-7. Understand this is an internal Congo government investigation, which could actually be a positive signal, though a rather timid one. At the moment the investigators say they will ask suspect government officials to "reimburse" the missing money. The suspect officials are in customs and tax departments. Most of the money probably comes from mining concessions – that's what generates big cash in the Congo.
July 24, 2008: Using an International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant, Portuguese security has seized the property of former Congolese Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba. The seizure was made after a request by an ICC prosecutor. The seizure included Bemba's house, a yacht, and an airplane. He also had his bank account frozen. Bemba enjoys a great deal of support among many Congolese. He finished second to Congolese President Joseph Kabila in the last election. The ICC warrant has not pleased his supporters. Many believe that Kabila could be indicted for crimes as well.

July 27, 2008: Despite the January 2008 ceasefire agreement (Goma Acts) the situation in North and South Kivu provinces remains perilous. UN observers are conducting yet another assessment of the ceasefire and the overall "security and stabilization plan." That plan includes new roads but the projects are already behind schedule. The UN reported three major firefight erupted in South Kivu province. Militias are reportedly once again "recruiting" – which often takes place at gunpoint. Many of the recruits are turned into "bearers" who carry supplies. The official statements are one thing, the unofficial buzz another, and that buzz is that there will be a new flare-up of violence pitting General Laurent Nkunda's Congolese Tutsi CNDP (National Council for the Defense of the People) against the predominantly Hutu FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda). One NGO has called the peace agreement "meaningless" given the violent crimes that continue to be committed against unprotected civilians.

July 31, 2008: Some 67 members of the FDLR turned themselves in to UN forces in the town of Kasiki (North Kivu province). They also turned in 45 weapons.

August 1, 2008: The government is airlifting emergency loads of weapons and ammunition to Goma. This began in mid-July – possibly July 19, right after the Kinshasha government's amnesty offer. Apparently General Laurent Nkunda has been seeking recruits in Rwanda and Burundi. These would be (presumably, but not necessarily) Tutsi recruits. Given July's string of political accusations against Nkunda, his forces are the likely target of the Congolese build-up.

August 4, 2008: The latest death toll estimates in the Congo, since 1998 when conflict gripped virtually the entire country, is over 5.4 million people. Remember, starvation and disease have been the biggest killers, often starvation and disease brought on by "exposure" – that is, people fleeing their homes and seeking refuge. The refugee camps (displaced persons camps) are an iffy proposition, since they were major targets during the height of the war and continue to be targets for the armed militias still operating in eastern Congo. The Congolese Army has also been involved in some of the raids on the camps.
August 13, 2008: War continually threatens Africa's exotic game species. The Great Congo War forced many policemen and park rangers to flee. Rebels had superior firepower. Many gorillas (as in the species, not guerrillas) in eastern Congo were killed. Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Congo witnessed a reduction in elephant herds as poachers (many armed with automatic weapons) attacked the herds in order to sell the elephant meat and obtain ivory. Stories continue to crop up that the Rwandan FDLR (in North Kivu) regularly kills elephants for ivory. Ivory is an internationally controlled commodity. Underground demand, however, persists.

August 17, 2008: A Mai-Mai militia struck an army position in North Kivu province. One Congolese soldier was killed and two wounded. The attack occurred near the town of Nyabiondo (Masisi region). There have been several small-scale clashes in the area since the beginning of August.

August 20, 2008: The UN began redeployment of peacekeepers in the eastern Congo to provide additional protection to civilians in Orientale and Ituri provinces. The Ituri Patriot Front (a militia) has reportedly launched several attacks in the Irumu area.

August 21, 2008: The UN reported that the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA) had raided a Congolese village in northeastern Congo near the Sudan border. The LRA subsequently denied the accusation.

August 28, 2008: The UN peacekeeping forces continue to establish "buffer zones" in eastern Congo—that's always been part of the mission but it appears the re-deployment announced August 20 includes the establishment of more buffer zones. The buffer zones serve several purposes—one (which is not mentioned too often in public) is to watch the Congolese Army as well as rebel factions. The MONUC troops are there to protect Congolese civilians who say they are subject to intimidation and theft from army units. These are often the same units the UN forces are attempting to train.

August 30, 2008: Congo closed its border with Uganda, claiming the move would help cut supplies to General Laurent Nkunda's militia. Congo has accused "outsiders" (in this case, Uganda, but sometimes Rwanda) of supporting Nkunda. Nkunda says his militia protects Congolese Tutsi tribes.

September 1, 2008: General Laurent Nkunda's militia was once again fighting with the FDLR in North Kivu province.

September 3, 2008: Angry Congolese living in the Rutshuru area (eastern Congo) threw stones at and surrounded a UN convoy passing through the area. Two UN troops (both Indians) were hurt in the incident. The
Congolese were angry because the UN was pulling Congolese troops out of their village in order to create a "buffer" between a militia group and the Congolese Army. The area around Rutshuru has experienced several firefights since late August.

September 4, 2008: Congo agreed to withdraw 1000 Congolese Army soldiers and their families from a cantonment in the Virunga National Park. Environmentalists argued that the troops and their families (all told about 6000 people) were degrading the park and threatening mountain gorillas who live in the region. A gorilla victory?

September 9, 2008: The army has moved troops into northeastern Congo to try to stop the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army from attacking civilians. This is considered a "containment operation," using at least 2000 soldiers. Uganda has been demanding for at least two years that the UN and Congo close LRA bases in the Congo.

September 10, 2008: One of the biggest problems during the Great Congo War was looting of natural resources. Uganda was accused to looting in Equateur Province and that remains a diplomatic issue dividing Congo and Uganda. For the last two years, the looting continues. The Congolese Army and the FDLR are running mining operations - meaning that the leaders of the units are selling the minerals. At least one gold mine is being run by a militia group.

September 11, 2008: UN peacekeeping forces in eastern Congo were moved to block movements by General Laurent Nkunda's CNDP militia. Nkunda is moving to attack an FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) militia unit.

September 15, 2008: European Union diplomats, African Union and United Nations representatives, and US diplomats have asked that all Congolese and militia forces in the eastern Congo withdraw to positions which they held in August 2008. A new bout of fighting broke out in late August, with North Kivu province taking the brunt of the fighting.

September 25, 2008: UN and international observers are saying the Congo peace accord is falling apart. The spasm of fighting in late August between Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of People (CNDP) militia and other militias in the Rutshuru, North Kivu area, began a round of hit and run battles that have displaced an estimated 100,000 people in North Kivu alone. The fighting has continued on and off for the first three weeks of September, with a spate of violence in South Kivu's Kalehe region.

September 28, 2008: The Congolese Army and the CNDP fought a series of firefights in North Kivu province. The largest engagement occurred near
the town of Rugari (north of Goma) in the heavily disputed Rutshuru region. Goma lies on the Rwanda-Congo border.

September 30, 2008: The UN and Sudan reported that over 1200 Congolese civilians fled into south Sudan to avoid attacks by the Ugandan LRA (Lord's Resistance Army). The villagers said LRA fighters attacked their homes and abducted several children. The LRA uses kidnap victims to carry weapons and supplies. Congo has moved more forces into the border region in response to demands by Uganda that Congo crackdown on LRA fighters operating within its borders and eliminate bases.

October 2, 2008: UN attack helicopters fired on militia forces near the village of Kagaba (Ituri province). Two gunships fired rockets and strafed militiamen belonging to the Ituri Patriotic Resistance Front (IPRF?sometimes the militia is called the FRPI, for Front de Resistance Patriotique en Ituri). MONUC estimates that the IPRF has around 2,000 armed militiamen. This is an increase in size since the beginning of 2008. UN forces have been fighting with the IRRF in the area since an IRRF unit ambushed a UN convoy on September 30.

October 3, 2008: The Congolese Army sent reinforcements into Ituri province in order to quell attacks by the IPRF.October 5, 2008: Rebel militia leader General Laurent Nkunda may be expanding his political goals in the Congo. Nkunda and his CNDP militia have claimed their aim is to protect Congolese Tutsis. Now Nkunda says he wants to "liberate" the entire Congo. Here's the specific quote: "We are going to liberate the people of Congo." MONUC (UN Mission in Congo) has condemned Nkunda's statement. This may be political rhetoric and bombast by a leader known for both. However, thanks to Nkunda, the January 2008 peace deal is in tatters. Why? Nkunda entered the peace process in part because he thought the Congolese government would help destroy the Democratic Forces for Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia and that the CNDP would enter into some type of power sharing arrangement with the Kabila government. The FDLR is still around. The Congolese government doesn't trust Nkunda and he doesn't trust them.

October 8, 2008: The UN reported that civilians in North Kivu province have accused UN peacekeepers of "failing to stop militia violence." That's a way of saying that locals in North Kivu believe that no one is protecting them from the on-going fighting. The UN peacekeepers are the good guys, but there are only so many of them and the UN is looking for a political settlement in the area. Who are the bad guys? The various militias and even the Congolese Army. The accusations of crime and abuse by Congolese soldiers are numerous and frequent. Many of the Congolese soldiers once served with militia forces. Loyalty to the Congolese government and respect for Congolese Army officers remains an iffy proposition.
October 11, 2008: The African Union has sent a delegation to Kinshasha with the goal of arranging a new ceasefire in eastern Congo, specifically North Kivu province.

October 13, 2008: The latest violence involving the Congolese Army and General Laurent Nkunda’s CNDP militia is looking less like the usual spasm and more like a protracted war. The typical cycle in the eastern Congo has been two to four weeks of fighting and then a semi-official ceasefire or a local agreement to quit fighting and let a peacekeeping force create a buffer zone. But this round of fighting has been going on, without pause, since late August. Nkunda is playing the "Tutsi card" more openly, in what appears to be a political bid to directly involve Rwanda. Nkunda says his primary opposition in the FDLR, which is led by many former Rwandan Hutus who were connected to the Rwandan government in 1994 – and were involved in the Tutsi genocide. Rwanda, like Congo’s other neighbors, has been involved in the Congo War at many levels. However, Rwanda has made efforts to focus on its own economic development. That said, Rwanda, which is led by a predominantly Tutsi government, regards the FDLR as a sworn enemy. The Rwandan government has said that it will accept ("repatriate") members of the FDLR, but the FDLR members suspect that means going to jail – and it probably does.

October 14, 2008: A Congolese Army force, backed by armored vehicles, fought a two-day long battle in North Kivu province in and around the town of Tongo (the site of a large refugee camp.)

October 17, 2008: Since August fighting in eastern Congo among militia forces and the Congolese Army has displaced another 100,000 people.

October 18, 2008: General Laurent Nkunda has followed up on some of his recent rhetoric. In areas his troops control in North Kivu province, Nkunda has imposed taxes and established a radio station. It looks like Nkunda’s National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) is establishing a political base for waging a long term war with the Congolese government.

October 22, 2008: Since the UN began its MONUC operation in Congo, the diplomats and peacekeepers have said that the Congolese are ultimately going to have to solve their problems themselves. That means a political solution. However, despite elections and a security training program, peace has not come to eastern Congo. Militia forces still battle the Congolese Army (FARDC), battle one another, and battle UN forces. The latest UN initiative repeats many of its predecessors. Creating peace in North Kivu province, according to the head of UN peacekeeping troops in Congo, requires (1) an "immediate ceasefire"; (2) a separation of combatant groups; and (3) the reintegration of the militia fighters, rebels, and guerrillas into civilian life. So far no ceasefire has held for long and
enforcing an "immediate ceasefire" or even an intermittent ceasefire has proved impossible. The new UN political plan does emphasize "disengagement operations." In fact, Congo, with the help of the UN, has put together a provincial committee in South Kivu province that is trying to give various political, militia, and tribal groups a forum for developing their own disengagement procedures.

October 26, 2008: The UN accused CNDP militia fighters fired "several rockets" at two UN armored cars. "Several" peacekeepers were wounded in the attack. A CNDP spokesman denied the charge. CNDP forces took control of a Congolese Army base at Rumangabo (north of Goma). The Congolese Army reportedly counter-attacked with tanks and artillery but the CNDP stopped the counter-attack. MONUC's commanding officer, Lieutenant-General Vicente Diaz, has resigned from the UN mission. Diaz said his resignation was due to "personal reasons." A group of CNDP fighters took control of the headquarters of Virunga National Park (north of Goma).

October 27, 2008: General Laurent Nkunda's CNDP militia reportedly defeated Congolese Army forces in the town of Rutshuru (70 kilometers north of Goma). Another major firefight occurred in the town of Kiwanja. The Rwandan government accused Congolese government soldiers of firing unguided rockets rockets into Rwanda territory. The Rwandan government said that its diplomats were in communication with the Congolese government about the incident. Meanwhile, the Congolese government accused the Rwandan government of sending troops into North Kivu. The UN said that there was no evidence (at the moment) to support to the Congolese charge.

October 28, 2008 CNDP militia fighters advanced to the town of Kibumba, 25 kilometers north of Goma. The government and a Congolese Army spokesman said that Rwanda soldiers had crossed the border into Congo. The Rwandan government immediately denied the accusation. The government reportedly asked Angola for help to "defend the territorial integrity" of Congo. The UN said its peacekeeping forces in Congo are now "stretched to the limit." The chief of MONUC said that a "temporary troop increase" was needed. The Congo government also requested peacekeeping reinforcements. Making the request is one thing, deploying troops is something else. The UN's capacity to surge forces is virtually non-existent. France and Great Britain could provide a "mini-surge" by sending paratroop and light infantry units. Who would insure their supply? It would take the United States Air Force and its C-17s to support a "mini-surge." The UN Security Council condemned the attack on Goma by General Laurent Nkunda and his militia forces.

October 29, 2008: General Laurent Nkunda's militia forces reached the outskirts of Goma (North Kivu province). A brief artillery bombardment
(likely mortars and rockets) was reported to have hit part of Goma in the early morning hours. Goma is the capital of North Kivu. It is also the center of Congo's tin-mining and exporting industry. The UN reported that "several" Congolese Army troops killed nine people and robbed businesses and homes in Goma. No doubt these are soldiers from the Congolese Army units that ran from Nkunda's forces. This is a sign of a completely broken military. This follows other stories that Congolese troops stole vehicles from civilians in order to flee Nkunda's advance.

October 30, 2008: Rebel leader Laurent Nkunda demanded "direct talks" with the government in Kinshasha. By direct talks he means "talks between equals." Nkunda is in the process of expanding his war on Kinshasha, from that of a Tutsi tribe-based action to a general rebellion against the Kabila government.

October 31, 2008: The UN said that the ceasefire declared by Laurent Nkunda's forces in the area around Goma should continue. Otherwise "humanitarian problems" (ie, assisting refugees) would increase and a "humanitarian catastrophe" would result. The toughest choice is how to deal with General Laurent Nkunda and his National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) militia force. Nkunda's offensive in North Kivu has been very successful at the operational level. Nkunda began with a series of skirmishes on August 28, followed by several local attacks that continued through September and early October. Nkunda has now moved his forces to the edge of the city of Goma (on the Rwanda border) and declared "a unilateral ceasefire" (on October 29). Nkunda is now in the process of trying to turn the operational success into a strategic political success. UN observers and Congolese sources reported that Nkunda has made a deft political move and is requesting a "neutral mediator" to facilitate negotiations between his forces and the Congo government. He is already playing to Congolese political uncertainties by demanding a renegotiation of the "infrastructure for mineral resources" agreement between China and Congo. Many Congolese fear that agreement is a new form of imperialism. Negotiations make a lot of sense, at least from Nkunda's and the UN peacekeepers' points of view. The UN has peacekeeping forces in Goma, backed by armored vehicles. Nkunda does not want to tangle with international forces. Nkunda has also made his statement about the Congolese Army – it has fled as his militia advanced (though there are Congolese forces still in Goma, according to several sources). The UN peacekeepers, however, are in a difficult position. They are having to manage several refugee camps, protect refugees who have left their homes and cannot get to camps, and also watch Nkunda. The UN forces have air support and air supply links, and the UN armor can open roads.. A UN truck convoy arrived in Goma on October 31 with food, demonstrating that Nkunda does not have Goma surrounded, though there are press reports that Nkunda has Goma "encircled." Feeding the
refugees is a huge logistical problem. It's also a problem Nkunda does not want to take off.

November 1, 2008: The government now faces several tough choices in North Kivu province. The eastern half of the Congo ignited into war when the former dictator Mobutu Sese Seko fell in 1997. When a series of peace agreements ended the Great Congo War in 2003 the fighting didn't stop in the east. Trouble continued along the Uganda border and North and South Kivu provinces remained in turmoil. Some European nations have expressed a willingness to send troops to the Eastern Congo, for the express purpose of putting the hurt on Nkunda's force of poorly trained and armed gunmen. Nkundas forces are, however, superior to the motley force that passes for the Congolese Army. The UN peacekeeping force is stretched thin with the collapse of so many Congolese army units, and doesn't really want to get involved fighting Nkunda's forces.

November 3, 2008: Are the allegations of cross-border incursions by allies of Laurent Nkunda true? The government claims Nkunda is receiving aid from Rwanda, or at least from Rwandans. What this means is the government believes Nkunda and his predominantly-Tutsi militia are getting help from fellow Tutsis in Rwanda. And that is very likely. At least one faction in the government claims the Rwandan government wants to absorb Congo's North Kivu province and that Nkunda is a "front man" for Rwanda. That would create a lot of problems for Rwanda. But what the Rwandan Tutsis do want is the destruction of the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), the Rwandan Hutu militia operating in Congo.

November 5, 2008: Angolan military forces are apparently in North Kivu province. It is more likely that Angolan military advisers are operating with Congolese Army units. Angola has provided training assistance to the Congolese Army.

November 12, 2008: The UN is trying to find money and permission from the UN membership for more peacekeepers for the Congo force (MONUC).

November 13, 2008: Congolese are telling European reporters that they have seen Zimbabwean and Angolan soldiers in eastern Congo. One unconfirmed report had Angolan troops in the town of Kanyabayonga. The Kabila government regards Angola as a close ally. A week ago one of the "print rumors" mentioned a meeting between the Congolese government and Angola. There was also a report on November 8 of Angolans operating with the Congolese Army near Goma. Again, it was an unconfirmed report, but Angola has provided training assistance to Congolese forces. Sending Angolan advisers to assist Congolese Army commanders isn't unthinkable, it's likely. Zimbabwe supplied the Congolese government with troops during the Great Congo War. In exchange, senior officials in Zimbabwe...
got to sell trainloads of Congolese minerals. The Zimbabweans were "mineral mercenaries." There are also rumors of Zimbabweans serving with Kabila's presidential guard unit. That could be the case. Like a lot of Third World potentates, Kabila may be "balancing out" his guard unit with a few well-paid foreigners. Locals always have tribal sympathies.

November 14, 2008: The UN has approximately 6,000 peacekeepers in North Kivu province. Approximately 900 are in and around the city of Goma, the capital of North Kivu. General Laurent Nkunda has let the UN create "a humanitarian corridor" in order to supply and (eventually) move refugees caught in eastern North Kivu province. Nkunda met with a UN negotiating team in the village of Jomba (near the Uganda border).

November 16, 2008: Forces loyal to General Laurent Nkunda attacked Congolese Army units in western North Kivu province. Nkunda's forces reportedly took control of the town of Rwindi (130 kilometers north of Goma). A UN observer in Rwindi said that Nkunda's forces had "continued to advance" in the area. The Congolese Army has abandoned a lot of equipment in the area, including light infantry weapons and ammunition. Heavy fighting was reported in the town of Ndeko (100 kilometers north of Goma).

November 17, 2008: Congo President Joseph Kabila appointed a new commander of the Congolese Army (FARDC). General Didier Etumba is now army chief of staff. "Low army morale" following defeats by the CNDP in eastern Congo is one reason the former commander was replaced. General Laurent Nkunda said that he will consider a withdrawal from some positions in North Kivu as a demonstration that he is "committed to peace initiatives."

November 18, 2008: November 20, 2008: The UN is considering increasing troop strength in Congo (in the MONUC force) by 3,085 peacekeepers.

November 19, 2008: Laurent Nkunda's rebel forces claim they have withdrawn from forward positions near Kanyabayonga and Kiwanja (north of Goma). This is supposed to set the stage for a new round of negotiations. The term "rebel forces" is more accurate than simply saying CNDP fighters. Observers have identified at least one Congolese Tutsi militia that is cooperating with the CNDP but isn't part of the CNDP.

November 20, 2008: The situation in eastern Congo remains chaotic – and so do the various reports. Now a Mai-Mai militia officer alleges that UN soldiers are allied with Laurent Nkunda's CNDP. The Mai-Mai said that MONUC forces and fighters from the CNDP fought them in the villages of Katoro and Nyongera (North Kivu province). There is no independent confirmation of the claim and quite a claim it is. The UN peacekeepers
usually treat the Mai-Mai as gangs – which they are. Nkunda claims the Mai-Mai in his area are "pro-Congolese government." A subsequent UN report did say that UN soldiers fired at a Mai-Mai militia group in the area after the militiamen fired on a UN patrol. Shooting at Mai-Mai who are shooting at peacekeepers is well within MONUC’s rules of engagement in eastern Congo. In fact, MONUC allows its forces to take offensive action against rogue militias.

November 22, 2008: Rebel general Laurent Nkunda has 6,000 fighters under arms. This is a strength increase of at least 1000 over figures available earlier this year. Eighteen months ago Nkunda's militia (now called the National Congress for the Defense of the People, or CNDP) had an estimated 4,000 fighters. Figures for the Rwandan Hutu-led FDLR are even murkier, though 3,000 crops up and one source reports 3,500. As for other militias – make a guess. Mai-Mai organizations are little more than bandit gangs. They had a "hard core" cadre. Other fighters come and go. This is why "several thousand" is likely the best estimate for the strength of Mai-Mai militias operating in eastern Congo. Evidence is piling up that the CNDP offensive has scattered the Mai-Mai, which is what usually happens when Mai-Mai militias engage in serious fighting. The FDLR and CNDP have political and tribal agendas. The Mai-Mai have tribal connections and some no doubt have political affiliations, but the comment "they are in it for the banana beer" isn't far from the truth. The Mai-Mai type militias are in it for the pay and the plunder.

November 23, 2008: Some army troops looted a large refugee camp outside Goma, after a confrontation with UN peacekeepers. As a result of this, refugees threw stones at UN vehicles, protesting the inability of the UN to protect them.

November 25, 2008: Rebel general Laurent Nkunda now proposes that his forces be merged into the Congolese army.

November 25, 2008: Pro-government fighters reportedly looted a refugee camp near the town of Kibati (about ten kilometers from Goma). MONUC reported that up to 10,000 Congolese civilians fled to Uganda to escape fighting along the Congo-Uganda border between forces loyal to Laurent Nkunda and Congolese government forces. France has asked the UN Security Council to allow UN peacekeeping troops to "more easily use force" in order to protect Congolese civilians in eastern Congo.

November 27, 2008: The UN reported that Congolese civilians "surrounded" a UN convoy in the town of Kibati and arrested 20 men the civilians claimed were rebels loyal to Laurent Nkunda. The UN forces said the men the crowd pulled from the convoy were in fact pro-government militiamen who were being taken to a UN-run demobilization camp. The government told the UN that it does not want the UN to send more Indian
peacekeepers to the eastern Congo. The government did not expand on the request, but Indian troops have confronted charges of dealing in precious minerals, trading with rebel militias, and of sexually abusing Congolese women.

November 28, 2008: Uganda reported that forces loyal to Laurent Nkunda took the town of Ishasha on the Uganda-Congo border. Nkunda's fighters also took control of a boat landing site on Lake Edward.

December 1, 2008: Laurent Nkunda's forces have withdrawn from the town of Ishasha. On November 29, while meeting with UN officials, Nkunda agreed to withdraw from the town. Ishasha is on the Congo-Uganda border, approximately 35 kilometers northeast of Nkunda's headquarters in Rutshuru. The UN agreed to arrange talks between Congo president Joseph Kabila and Nkunda (who has demanded negotiations with the government). Direct talks with Kabila would be a diplomatic victory of Nkunda, since he has been portraying his movement as a nation-wide rebellion against the Kabila government.

December 2, 2008: General Laurent Nkunda (and his National Congress for the Defense of the People, or CNDP), believes that eastern Congo continues to provide sanctuary for FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) Hutu militiamen who were responsible for the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

December 4, 2008: Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, has about 70,000 refugees in its immediate vicinity. Feeding and providing medical services for these refugees is a tremendous burden. Numerous cases of cholera and measles are appearing among refugees fleeing the fighting in eastern Congo. During the Great Congo War exposure, starvation, and disease caused most of the deaths, not gunfire and high explosives.

December 10, 2008: Talks between the government and General Laurent Nkunda's representatives were suspended in Nairobi, Kenya. They are scheduled to resume December 17. Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) now portrays itself as a nation-wide rebel movement, meaning it does not want the talks with the government to be "confined to eastern Congo." This has become a political stumbling block in the negotiations. The government wants to deal with Nkunda and the eastern Congo. As it is, the government has already given Nkunda part of what he wants. Nkunda demanded that other rebel groups be excluded from the direct talks and he got that. The government then said it would deal with "all (other) armed groups" separately. Nkunda intends to make the CNDP a national coalition. Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo is serving as the U.N.'s chief mediator in talks between the Congolese government and the CNDP. The African Union also has representatives at the negotiations.
December 12, 2008: France believes that no European Union soldiers should be sent to Congo to reinforce UN peacekeeping forces, and that African soldiers should be sent instead. France believes that Angola has troops it could commit. However, General Laurent Nkunda regards Angola as an ally of the Congolese government (which it is). France is willing to allow the EU to provide logistical support.

December 16, 2008: The UN accuses the Congolese government and government of Rwanda of supporting "armed groups" in eastern Congo. The UN believes the current Rwandan government exchanges intelligence information with General Laurent Nkunda and that the Congolese government has links to several militias. The Mai-Mai militias in several areas openly call themselves Congolese government allies. The trick is moving past sharing information and establishing alliances to financing operations and supplying arms. That becomes murkier. The UN asserts that some militias have cooperated with the Congolese government in exchange for ammunition supplies. The UN appears unable to get more African or European peacekeepers to serve in the Congo. The peacekeeping effort in eastern Congo has gone on for years, and seems no closer to a resolution. This is discouraging nations that usually contribute to peacekeeping operations. There is also anger at the UN for not allowing peacekeepers to act more aggressively against those pro and anti-government forces that break the peace in the area.

December 19, 2008: More Ugandan troops, apparently another infantry battalion, has crossed the border and joined several other battalions that are seeking out the remnants of the Ugandan LRA rebels. The LRA rebel has been declared a war criminal by the international court, and Congo is tolerating the Ugandan troops on their territory. There are some Congolese troops in the area (the Garamba forest), but the Ugandan troops are doing most of the work.

December 22, 2008: The UN Security Council renewed the mandate for the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUC). The mandate was renewed for one year. In some ways this was a formality but an important formality. MONUC has around 17,000 soldiers on duty in the Congo.

December 24, 2008: The government said that it believes the European Union will provide extra equipment and supplies to MONUC peacekeepers. The EU has (at least for the time being) decided it will not send additional troops to the Congo. Despite the EU's decision, the UN continues to look for troops to serve in what is now called a "bridging force" to help boost peacekeeping troop strength in eastern Congo.

December 25, 2008: Several sources reported a series of attacks by the LRA on villages in northeastern Congo. At least 400 Congolese civilians may have been killed in Haut-Uele district. "LRA elements" appear to be
pulling out of southern Sudan and Congo in response to the Ugandan Army-led attacks on LRA base camps in Congo.

December 26, 2008: General Laurent Nkunda alleged that Congolese Army troops and militias loyal to the government had violated ceasefire terms in eastern Congo. Nkunda sent his complaint directly to the UN. His statement included the allegation that his forces had received "harassing fire" around Goma’a airport (North Kivu province). This follows earlier ceasefire violation accusations from Nkunda. Nkunda accused the Congolese Army of "redeploying" units around the town of Kibati (north of Goma).

December 31, 2008: The government said that it would continue to cooperate with the UN and Uganda to destroy the LRA.

January 1, 2009: Small groups of the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army have left some of the Uganda-Congo border areas and are moving wards the Central African Republic (CAR). The LRA cadres burned several villages as they moved along the Congo-Sudan border area. The village of Faradje lost 150 killed, the village of Duru 75 killed and Doruma lost 215. These figures are in line with the press reports that 400 people were killed by the LRA in several raids in northern Congo. An LRA spokesman has denied that the LRA attacked the villages.

January 2, 2009: MONUC observers are disputing allegations made over the last week by General Laurent Nkunda, that the Congolese Army was reinforcing its positions north of Goma. The government and Nkunda's National Congress for Defense of the People (CNDP) are scheduled to reconvene peace talks on January 7.

January 5, 2009: The remaining members of the Ugandan LRA rebels are crossing into the Central African Republic (CAR), pursued by Congolese and Ugandan troops. The CAR, which is itself in the midst of a civil war, has said it will try to send troops to the border to intercept the LRA before they can, as they did last year, raid villages for captives and supplies. If the CAR cannot destroy the LRA, the rebels will live off the locals for as long as they can, then return to Congo. Then again, Congo or Ugandan forces may pursue the LRA across the border, especially if it appears that the CAR government has been unable to muster any troops to deal with the matter.

January 6, 2009: General Laurent Nkunda issued a statement denying media reports that he is no longer in charge of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). One of Nkunda's senior subordinates, Colonel Mavinga Sultani also said Nkunda remains in charge.

January 7, 2009: Negotiations between the government and CNDP have resumed in Nairobi, Kenya. The government reported an LRA band
attacked the town of Negero (northeastern Congo). As many as 20 people may have died in the attack. The main park ranger station for Garamba National Park is located in Negero. The LRa has bases inside Garamba, though the government issued a statement in late December 2008 that "at least 70 percent" of the LRA's camps within Garamba have been destroyed.

January 9, 2009: Despite earlier denials of trouble in the CNDP, more rumors circulate that General Laurent Nkunda faces a serious challenge to his leadership. The key figure appears to be Brigadier General Jean Bosco Ntaganda, who currently has the title of "Chief of Staff" for the CNDP and its militia forces. One report stated that Ntaganda now faces "a disciplinary hearing" within the CNDP. Ntaganda is a member of a Congolese Tutsi tribe. Like Nkunda, he has a long record for fighting for Tutsi tribal rights and fought with Rwandan Tutsis against the Hutu government in Rwanda. He is (or at least was) regarded as a key Nkunda ally. It turns out that Ntaganda issued a statement on January 5 accusing Nkunda of "bad leadership", and he also declared himself the CNDP's leader. This was read as an attempt to oust Nkunda. Ntaganda has a nickname?"The Terminator." He is also under indictment by the ICC for war crimes.

January 12, 2009: Former Congolese opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba is on trial in the International Criminal Court (located in The Hague, Netherlands). He faces five counts of war crimes and three counts of crimes against humanity. Bemba ran the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC). The MLC operated in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2002 and 2003 as an ally of former CAR president Ange-Felix Patasse. Recent testimony in the trial alleged that Bemba's militiamen used rape as a terror tactic in the CAR. Meanwhile, a spokesman for Nkunda's negotiating team in Nairobi, Kenya said that peace negotiations with the government were progressing and that an agreement may be reached "very soon" that will end the fighting between the government and CNDP in eastern Congo. There is no doubt the Ntaganda rebellion has put political pressure on Nkunda.

January 14, 2009: The power struggle within Laurent Nkunda's CNDP isn't over. In fact, the break is rather open. Brigadier General Jean Bosco Ntaganda now has his own faction which claims it has appointed a "12-member executive committee." The Ntaganda faction has a headquarters in Kabati (North Kivu province). It appears to favor some type of reconciliation with the Congolese government. From the rumor mill: the CNDP?at least Nkunda's faction?is considering turning Brigadier General Jean Bosco Ntaganda over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for prosecution as a war criminal (as the court has long demanded). Whether Ntaganda's arrest would end the split in the CNDP is another matter.
January 15, 2009: The government's anti-LRA drive in northeastern Congo continues, though reports on actual Congolese operations are sporadic. The government continues to stress that it is operating a "joint offensive" with the Government of South Sudan (GOSS) and Uganda to defeat the Ugandan rebels (Lords Resistance Army). LRA attacks since September 2008 killed at least 547 Congolese civilians and 408 have been kidnapped. Between the LRA attacks and the government military operation, an estimated 100,000 people have had to flee their homes. There are likely good reasons for the sporadic reports; it's because the operations are likely sporadic. Outside of the capital of Kinshasha, any military operations in the Congo are a logistical challenge. The northeastern border area is particularly primitive; few roads and very few airfields.

January 16, 2009: Members of the Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) loyal to Brigadier General Bosco Ntganda issued a statement that said "hostilities" between the CNDP and the Congolese Army (FARDC) had ceased. Additionally, the rebel CNDP leaderships intended to place "all CNDP combat forces" under Congolese Army command. The rebel CNDP leaders want to make their units part of the Congo’s national army. A major Mai-Mai militia force in eastern Congo, Pareco, said that it would quit fighting against the CNDP.

January 17, 2009: Villagers in northeast Congo have begun organizing self-defense groups to defend their villages against the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army. Civilians in northeastern Congo reported that the Congolese Army “ran away” when LRA guerrillas attacked in December.

January 20, 2009: In a surprise move, Rwandan Army soldiers have crossed the Congo-Rwanda border. Initial reports said the Rwandan force had at least 3000 Rwandan soldiers. The Rwandan Army will conduct a “joint operation” with the Congolese Army to destroy the FDLR militia. The Congo-Rwanda agreement comes in the wake of a “stand down” by rebels in the pro-Rwandan CNDP.

January 21, 2009: UN sources reported that a battalion of Rwandan troops is heading toward the CNDP headquarters in Rutshuru. The UN reported that the Rwandan Army force operating in Congo’s North Kivu province Congo has 4000 soldiers. A "large" Rwandan force is moving west to the towns of Masisi and Mushaki. The force is a light infantry force. UN observers reported the Rwandan soldiers were armed with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

January 22, 2009: Rwanda and Congo claimed that Rwandan forces have arrested General Laurent Nkunda. The Congo has had a warrant for Nkunda’s arrest since 2005. This represents a huge shift by the Rwandan government, since Nkunda has long been regarded as a Rwandan ally. The Congolese government said that the Rwandan government "has
failed” to extradite General Laurent Nkunda to Congo. Nkunda’s arrest by Rwanda is clearly part of the political dealing that led to the joint Congo-Rwanda operation against the FDLR.

January 24, 2009: Congolese and Rwandan forces claimed they killed nine FDLR fighters. Congo’s commander of “eastern operations” said that contact had been made with the FDLR “in five villages.” The FDLR denied the claim and said that no FDLR units had engaged either Congolese or Rwandan forces.

January 26, 2009: FDLR forces are reportedly preparing to fight the Congolese Army and Rwandan Army FDLR spokesmen are concentrating their rhetorical fire on Rwanda, though their statements also mentions the high probability of Congolese civilian casualties. This looks a bit like an attempt to leverage Hezbollah and Hamas-style “human shield” tactics. The FDLR will try to keep Congolese civilians between their militiamen and the Rwandan Army, and blame the Rwandan Army for any civilian casualties. Congo’s and Rwanda’s “joint operation” against the FDLR continues. It appears that Rwanda has added some reinforcements, with perhaps 5000 Rwandan soldiers are in the Congo. The Rwandan Army (Rwandan Patriotic Defense Force) units operating in Congo are experienced and motivated and the FDLR is filled with “old enemies” – its leadership cadre includes men who helped perpetrate the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. The Congolese Army, however, is a hodge podge, and most of its units are completely incompetent. If the FDLR can avoid the Rwandan force it will likely survive. Congo has demanded that Rwanda send General Laurent Nkunda to Congo for trial. However, Nkunda remains “detained” in Rwanda (likely in Kigali)

January 29, 2009: The UN will provide logistical support to Congolese and Rwandan troops who are attacking the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) Rwandan Hutu militia in eastern Congo. UN (MONUC) peacekeepers would not participate in “direct operations” (ie, combat operations) with the Congolese Army or Rwandan Army. MONUC peacekeepers will assist CNDP fighters who wish to join the Congolese Army (“integration” of CNDP militiamen is the term). Up to 6000 CNDP fighters may eventually join the Congolese Army. That would mean all of General Laurent Nkunda’s CNDP forces would join the Congolese Army.

February 10, 2009: Villagers in northeastern Congo have started forming their own local defense organizations. LRA rebels have killed between 600 and 900 civilians in the Congo since December 2008. Reports indicate that some of the defense forces have rifles, but that others are armed with machetes and spears. You use what you’ve got when you have to. One village, Bangadi, which organized its militia prior to December 2008, claims it has already stopped two raids. The Bangadi force fought a pitched battle with LRA attackers on October 19, 2008. They fought a
second battle on January 22, 2009, and rescued six kidnapped civilians. The Congolese government's failure to provide security has spurred the rise of local defense forces. Several NGOs have complained that the UN peacekeepers in MONUC have not protected civilians in northeastern Congo from the LRA, either. The UN says that MONUC is performing support and logistical operations in that area.

February 11, 2009: China’s deal to provide infrastructure in exchange for access to Congolese natural resources remains controversial. Now the global recession has reduced demand for the resources. Thus the Chinese deal looks a little better. The government announced that it would continue improving transportation and mining infrastructure despite the recession. The recession has hit Congo’s copper mining industry particularly hard.

February 13, 2009: Meanwhile back in eastern Congo: The government said that an air raid on Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebels in Kashebere killed 40 of the Hutu militiamen. The joint Congo-Rwandan offensive against the FDLR continues in the area. A Rwandan military statement claimed that several FDLR commanders had surrendered to Rwandan and Congolese forces.

February 16, 2009: The government claimed that members of the Ugandan rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have been caught “in a trap” in Garamba National Park (northeast Congo). The park (which is a huge area) was the location of several initial attacks on LRA bases by the joint Congo-Uganda force in mid-December 2008. The LRA fighters broke down into small groups and many withdrew toward the Central African Republic, attacking Congolese villages along the way. The Congolese government report now says an LRA force of approximately 250 people remains inside Garamba in a “swampy” area. It's possible that LRA commander Joseph Kony could be with the stay-behind group. But no one is sure.

February 18, 2009: The LRA rebels have forced some 15,000 Congolese civilians to flee into southern Sudan, to escape the raids. The refugees report that nearly all the 100,000 people living in the town of Lau, fled when it was reported that the LRA were in the area. The LRA threat has made it difficult to get aid to the nearly 200,000 refugees in the area, and many of the refugees are going hungry. What terrifies many people about the LRA is not the robbery, which is common enough in a country with not much police presence, but the slaving. The LRA maintain their strength by seizing children and, in effect, enslaving them, and brainwashing them into becoming LRA warriors. This is actually an ancient technique, revived by the LRA and many other armed groups in Africa and elsewhere.

February 19, 2009: The UN estimates that the FDLR have killed at least 100 Congolese civilians since they began retreating in the face of a
combined Congo-Rwanda offensive in late January. UN peacekeepers reported that FDLR militiamen "razed villages."

February 24, 2009: The government said it had reached a "preliminary agreement" (as in political agreement) with the current leaders of the National Congress for Defense of the People (CNDP). Laurent Nkunda had been the senior leader and military commander of the CNDP (and chief obstacle to peace), until Rwandan forces arrested him in January.

February 25, 2009: The Rwandan government announced that its troops had begun to withdraw from the Congo. Though the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR, a Rwandan Hutu militia) still exists. Congo claimed that the FDLR had been severely damaged, and that 153 Hutu militiamen were killed in Operation Umoja Wetu and 37 captured. Several hundred people have been “returned to Rwanda” (repatriated). These people may be abductees, family members, or “camp followers” of the militia. However, FDLR Major- General Sylvester Mudacumura, the senior commander of the FDLR’s "military wing," the Forces Combatants Abacunguzi (FOCA), has not been captured. Still, the government asserts that the Congo-Rwanda joint force has accomplished "95 percent of its mission."

February 27, 2009: Rwandan soldiers continue to withdraw from eastern Congo, with Rwandan Army truck convoys moving across the border from Congo into Rwanda. A substantial number of Rwandan troops have crossed on foot as well. Some 1500 Rwandan soldiers moved by foot from North Kivu province through the town of Goma and into Rwanda. Will any Rwandan soldiers remain? An unknown number of Rwandan soldiers are still in the Congo. Given the new alliance between Rwanda and Congo, it is likely some will remains as an observer force. Or a liaison detachment. Or...the diplomats can be creative. In any event, most of the groups involved with the eastern Congo violence are worn down and worn out. Peace deals are easier to craft and implement under those conditions.

March 11, 2009: The Congolese Army has begun reinforcing its units in eastern Congo and occupying areas vacated by the Rwandan Army. The Rwandans completed their pullout from Congo at the end of February. Observers from MONUC have confirmed that the unit replacement operation is occurring in South Kivu province.

March 12, 2009: Congolese Army has moved more units into South Kivu province. The troops are entering an area where observers believe FDLR militias fled after attack by Rwandan and Congolese troops in late January and early February. The UN Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reinstallation and Reintegration (DDRRR) program for FDLR fighters and supporters will continue. Around 350 FDLR members and supporters were repatriated to Rwanda between February 15 and March 6. This is in line
with a request made by the UN Secretary-General’s office in late February that MONUC and the Congolese government “coordinate more closely” on resolving conflicts inside Congo.

March 16, 2009: Ugandan troops operating in northeast Congo have begun pulling back toward the Ugandan border. The Congo and Ugandan estimate the joint operation against the Lords Resistance Army has killed 150 LRA fighters. The Congolese Army has said that it will continue to conduct operations against the LRA. Congolese civilians in the area have accused the government of leaving them defenseless. NGOs have estimated that between 600 and 1000 Congolese have been killed by the LRA since mid-December 2008 when Uganda launched an attack on LRA sanctuaries in Congo. This is another signal that the government thinks the joint military operation with Rwanda against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) was a political success, even though bands of FDLR fighters remain in eastern Congo.

March 19, 2009: The government said that the UN mediation team sent to resolve disputes with the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) is no longer necessary. A “coup” within the CNDP brought new leaders to the fore and with the arrest General Laurent Nkunda by Rwandan forces in late January, the new CNDP leadership has pursued political reconciliation with the government.

March 20, 2009: The big problem in eastern Congo are the militias. Thousands of gunmen have become rampaging bandits. Some 250,000 civilians have fled from these gunmen in the last few months, and over a million in the last year or so. Disarming all these men is very difficult, because the militias were never all that well organized, and the members were not noted for the discipline or reliability either. These gunmen will remain a problem in the area for another 5-10 years.

March 28, 2009: Despite the mounting criticism from opposition politicians, and the dismay of international lenders and donors (including the International Monetary Fund), the government insists it will go ahead with "the Chinese deal." China has agreed to build infrastructure in the Congo in exchange for mining concessions. The agreement, reached in 2007, is valued at nine billion dollars.

March 30, 2009: The government has sent an additional 3000 Congolese Army troops to the Garamba National Park area. Around 100 UN soldiers are also part of the new deployment. The reinforcements are tasked with providing security to villages in and around Garamba threatened by Ugandan LRA fighters.

April 2, 2009: Fighting began breaking out on March 30 in the Ituri district (northeastern Congo). a militia calling itself the Popular Front for Justice in
the Congo (FPJC) attacked two villages southeast of the city of Bunia. The FPJC is a splinter faction of a larger force, the Revolutionary Front for Peace in Ituri (FPRI). A UN refugee coordinator said that the FPJC and FPRI have been fighting with one another and that the FPRI had launched what was described as a "counter attack" south of Bunia. If the situation sounds confused that's because it is. Most of the reports come from frightened refugees fleeing the militia violence.

April 3, 2009: The UN said that MONUC is focusing on protecting civilian populations in the Congo. The UN said that in the wake of successful government and UN operations against them, militias and rebel forces were threatening reprisals against civilians. The UN is emphasizing training of local police. UN peacekeepers will take an active role in stopping attempts by the FDLR to resupply its remaining fighters in eastern Congo. A Congolese Army unit fought with a Mai-Mai militia near the town of Bukavu (South Kivu province, eastern Congo). The government believes that some Burundian rebels belonging to the Forces for National Liberation (FNL) were also involved in the firefight. The Mai-Mai force attacked a jailhouse and freed several prisoners. A running gunbattle developed. Two Congolese soldiers were killed and eight militia died in the gunbattles. An attack was also made on a Congolese Army supply depot-- suggesting that the militia and perhaps the Burundians were after weapons. Over in Burundi the FNL has a very uneasy relationship with the Burundian government. The Burundian Army recently found a large FNL arms cache and the FNL may be asking its "friends" for assistance in acquiring new weapons.

April 9, 2009: UN peacekeepers have complained to the Security Council that they do not have enough helicopters to do the job in the Congo. For example, MONUC does not have the helicopters it needs to send troops quickly to areas threatened by LRA rebels. MONUC commanders argue they need 18 additional troop-carrying helicopters in order to provide a minimum of "rapid reaction" protection in eastern and northeastern Congo. UNAMID (UN peacekeeping effort in Sudan) has a similar problem and has been asking for helicopters for almost two years. MONUC also wants member nations to contribute more special operations soldiers. The SOF troops would deploy in the eastern Congo and conduct surveillance missions as well as liaison missions with local defense and security forces.

April 14, 2009: The UN reports that the FDLR has put together a "hit list" which targets civilians who helped the Congolese government and Rwanda attack earlier this year. The "reprisal list" is a typical tactic for gangster militias as well as terrorist organizations. For that matter, more than a few genuine guerrilla groups and authoritarian governments fighting them use the tactic as well. The Rwandan Army seemed to have pretty good
intelligence during its operations inside Congo and that suggests they had good intel from locals tired of FDLR depredations.

April 16, 2009: The UN believes that the situation North Kivu province is improving, albeit slowly. The arrest of General Laurent Nkunda by Rwanda and his removal from power in the CNDP is one reason, but other armed groups have also indicated that they are now willing to negotiate with the government. As a result, armed incidents have decreased. That said, the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) still have scattered groups in North and South Kivu -- and may have as many as 800 fighters still at large. Northeastern Congo, however, still has significant security problems and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) is responsible for many of them. An LRA band struck a village in the Ituri region. The government and UN both report that small groups of LRA fighters have dispersed from Garamba National Park in a violent arc stretching west into the Central African Republic (CAR). Congolese in the region fear that the LRA is regrouping and could try to move back into the national park. The UN now says that the LRA has killed 1,100 Congolese civilians since mid-December 2008 when Uganda and Congo (with the aid of South Sudan) launched a joint offensive against the LRA.

April 17, 2009: FDLR militiamen attacked several villages near the town of Lubero (North Kivu province, north of the capital, Goma). The FDLR struck the towns of Kirumba, Kanyabonga, and Kayna. The UN mission in Congo, or MONUC, early Saturday sent peacekeeping troops to Luofo and the Red Cross dispatched a team to bury the victims.

April 18, 2009: FDLR militiamen attacked the town Luofo (North Kivu province). They burned down 250 homes and killed seven people. Five of the dead were children. Luofo is fairly large, with a population of 14,000. The UN responded to the attack by sending a detachment of peacekeepers.

April 27, 2009: FDLR militiamen have attacked several commercial vehicles on roads leading to the city of Goma (North Kivu province). Likely the militiamen are after supplies, but in the aftermath of the Congo-Rwanda offensive they also want to send the political message that they have not been defeated.

April 28, 2009: UN commanders are once again asking the Security Council to provide MONUC (UN operation in Congo) another 3,000 troops, in addition to the current force of 17,000 soldiers in the Congo. Operations in North Kivu aren't the only reason. MONUC has promised to position more peacekeepers in northeastern Congo, where Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) cadres are still active. Meanwhile, an FDLR faction appears to be in the vicinity of Kirumba (North Kivu province), intending to attack the town.
May 1, 2009: The UN continues to conduct “follow operations” in North Kivu province to prevent the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) from reassembling. Congolese Army units are participating in the sweeps. Results are decidedly mixed. Aid workers in the area have called the UN-Congolese operation a failure. Refugee agencies report that at least 100,000 people have been forced to temporarily flee the fighting. There are also reports of FDLR militiamen murdering civilians. This echoes reports of reprisal attacks by the FDLR in early April. FDLR militiamen blamed Congolese civilians for giving away their hiding places when the Rwandan Army and the Congolese Army were conducting their joint offensive in January and February 2009 against the FDLR (which are the remnants of the Hutu mass murderers who fled Rwanda in 1994).

May 12, 2009: Nearly 20,000 refugees have returned to their homes near Goma in eastern Congo.

May 14, 2009: FDLR rebels in the east massacred 90 villagers.

May 19, 2009: The UN has asked the government to arrest five senior army officers for war crimes. The five are former rebel leaders that, as part of the amnesty deal, joined the army. But the former rebels did not give up their warlord ways, and continued to abuse civilians (rape, murder, looting). In addition, general Bosco Ntaganda, commanding many of the government forces (FARDC) fighting the FDLR in the eastern Congo, is wanted by the UN for war crimes. But the government refuses to give up Ntaganda.

May 28, 2009: The army and UN peacekeepers have again pushed into territory in the east (280 kilometers north of Goma) that has long been controlled by the FDLR.

June 1, 2009: Multiple tribal and political militias, plus an increasing number of bandits, continue to roam the countryside, perpetuating the bloodiest (and least reported) war of the post Cold War era (over five million dead, and counting). Peacekeepers and army action have reduced the size of these violent groups, but not eliminated them. There are now fewer places that the bad guys can roam freely. Attempts to merge rebels into the army has not worked well. The last major problem, a Tutsi militia in the east that will not disarm until the government destroys Hutu militias built around Hutu mass murderers who fled neighboring Rwanda in the 1990s, is being disbanded. But the bandits and warlords are not going to disappear completely. The reason is money, the millions of dollars available each year to whoever has gunmen controlling the mines that extract valuable ores and allow the stuff out of the country. UN peacekeepers are criticized for not fighting more, but that’s not their job. Congolese army not up to it yet either, so there it simmers.
June 5, 2009: LRA rebels kidnapped 135 villagers in northern Congo. The LRA has killed at least a thousand Congolese civilians since last December. The continuing violence is forcing local army forces to at least try to catch and kill the LRA gunmen. Several hundred Ugandan LRA rebels have established themselves in northern Congo, where they live by looting from local villages. Operations against them by government and Ugandan troops earlier this year failed, as the LRA fighters simply evaded the attackers. The government has no plans to go after the LRA again, unless the Ugandan rebels become more of a problem. After a decline in violence last year, casualties and violence against civilians is up over 20 percent this year. The military operations against the FDLR earlier this year were hobbled by theft (of money provided to maintain the troops), rape and looting. It was hard to tell the difference between the government forces and the rebels they were attempting to defeat.

June 11, 2009: The chaos in the east is the result of corruption and undisciplined leadership. Soldiers are not paid, because the money is stolen by senior officials and officers. Too many of the military commanders are untrained, or uninterested in being professional soldiers. Many were formerly warlords and bandits, and are not keen to change. The thousands of FDLR Hutu rebels from Rwanda remain the most dangerous, because they are the most undisciplined and out-of-control fighters in the region. The Rwandan Hutus live off the locals, looting, raping and killing on a regular basis, extorting food and other goods via the threat of murder. From time to time, the Hutu rebels continue to kill dozens of villagers, to maintain the climate of terror. Despite several years of government and UN peacekeeper operations against them, the FDLR continues to hold its bases in the east. Over the last 15 years, the FDLR have caused hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee their homes. Other fighting in eastern Congo in this period has caused over 1.3 million people from their homes.

June 15, 2009: The International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that former Congo vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba will face five counts of war crimes charges. In 2006 Bemba lost the presidential election run-off to current Congolese president, Joseph Kabila.

June 17, 2009: Soldiers opened fire on a UN base camp located northwest of Goma (in eastern Congo). The soldiers were involved in a pay dispute, which some describe as a mutiny. Under any circumstances, this is another indication of just how weak an organization the army is.

June 19, 2009: A government believes that the "integration" of former Congolese Tutsi fighters from the National Congress for Defense of the People (CNDP) was tentative. The CNDP was led by General Laurent Nkunda. Nkunda remains in Rwanda, under arrest.
June 20, 2009: Some 32 people died in fighting between the Army and FDLR militiamen from June 17 to June 19. The biggest clash occurred when an FDLR detachment attacked a government garrison in the town of Nyabiondo (northwest of Goma, North Kivu province).

June 22, 2009: UN forces in Congo (MONUC) are continuing to conduct joint operations with the Congolese Army (FARDC) against the FDLR in North and South Kivu provinces. The UN says the operations have three objectives: (1) protect the Congolese civilian populace; (2) end the FDLR threat; (3) return the Kivus to Congo government control. MONUC estimates that the FDLR has reorganized and now has several thousand fighters (estimates vary, from 3000 to 6000). Congolese fighters now provide around a third of the reconstituted FDLR force.

June 24, 2008: The UN peacekeeping operation Congo (MONUC) costs one billion dollars a year. This is about one-quarter of the UN's annual peacekeeping budget.

June 26, 2009: The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militiamen continue to carry out reprisal attacks against civilians in North Kivu province. The FDLR militiamen are angry that Congolese civilians provided intelligence to the Congolese Army and Rwandan Army during their joint offensive earlier this year. An estimated 300,000 civilians have fled from FDLR attacks. There is an ebb and flow to the civilian displacements. FDLR militias attack and the civilians flee. The militias move on and the people return.

July 1, 2009: Can the Congolese Army (FARDC) be reformed? This has become a critical question for the UN Security Council, MONUC (UN peacekeeping operation in Congo), and international donor nations. Reports of fragmentation, desertion and "occasional" mutiny continue to mount. There are always reports of FARDC attacks on civilians, looting, and plundering. One reason is that FARDC isn't really an army, especially in eastern Congo. FARDC is a "collection." There are some regular forces, but in eastern Congo many FARDC units were not so long ago rebel militias. MONUC is largely stuck with its "Congolese military restructuring" strategy. MONUC's intent has been to create, train, and equip an army that can take over security operations. However, the strategy has been sidetracked by using the military as a way to pay militiamen to quit being rebels. That decision vastly complicates the problem of creating a well-trained, disciplined, and loyal national military force.

July 1, 2009: The UN estimates that the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) has killed 1,200 Congolese in the six months following the joint Uganda-South Sudan-Congo joint offensive against the Ugandan rebel organization. The LRA cadres have abducted at least 1,500 Congolese.
July 2, 2009: China is deploying another peacekeeping team to the Congo to serve with MONUC. This is China's tenth team to serve in the Congo (i.e., it has deployed, as part of a military rotation policy, nine other teams since 2003). The first contingent of the new rotation is a 100 troops unit with engineers and medical staff. Another 118 troops will deploy later in July.

July 7, 2009: The government and the military command said that it will punish Congolese soldiers who abuse civilians. The government and military have been the targets of NGO complaints on several issues, but accusations of rape by Congolese soldiers (verified by media, military observers, and aid groups, among others) has hurt the government politically. A recent human rights group study contended that the Congolese Army (FARDC) is responsible for most of the rapes committed in eastern Congo. It also accused the army of looting and "forced labor" (i.e., rounding up civilians at gunpoint and ordering them to carry supplies and do manual work).

July 11, 2009: The UN said it still needs an additional 3000 peacekeeping troops in Congo, but it will be at least three months (or more) before the reinforcements arrive. The reinforcements were requested in late 2008. Tanzania, Jordan, Bangladesh, and Egypt promised to send troop contingents. The UN peacekeeping directorate is still seeking more.

July 13, 2009: FDLR militiamen struck a UN peacekeeping position near the town of Mwenga, in South Kivu. One Pakistani soldier was injured in the attack. UN soldiers drove off the attackers with machine gun-fire and "heavy weapons" (apparently mortars). The FDLR assault appears to have been coordinated and quite large. The militiamen attacked with small arms, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades.

July 14, 2009: The UN estimates that the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army now has around 500 fighters operating in northeastern Congo, south Sudan, and as far west as the Congo-Central African Republic border. The estimate is very guesstimate and is based on fragmentary reports from Congolese civilians, NGOs operating in the region, and limited military recon. The UN has added some new air assets to its operations in northeastern Congo (four Russian-made MI-17 helicopters and a Russian-made MI-25 reconnaissance helicopter). This is an incremental deployment but likely the best the UN can do at the moment. The helicopters will provide some additional recon, airlift, and air strike capability. The MI-17 is a derivative of the Russian MI-8 helicopter. It can carry a couple of dozen soldiers as passengers. We may hear about UN peacekeepers launching small-scale airmobile forays against the LRA.

July 17, 2009: There is increasing pressure for the government to indict and prosecute senior military officers who have commanded units that
engaged in rape or permitted the rape of Congolese women and girls (and, increasingly of late, men). Sex crimes have been an ugly (and all too frequent) element in the crime and chaos of the eastern Congo.

July 23, 2009: A key Congolese Army base in the eastern Congo (in the town of Mandje, North Kivu province) was attacked by FDLR militiamen, which left 24 dead, 16 of them civilians.

July 31, 2009: Nearly 60,000 people have been displaced by fighting in South Kivu province since late June. The refugees fled fighting between FDLR militiamen and government forces assisted by UN forces. (The operation is a continuation of Operation Kimia II.)

August 1, 2009: The FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, a Rwandan Hutu militia) has 6,000 militia members in the Congo and is attempting to retake some of the villages they controlled in January and February 2009.

August 5, 2009: Allegations of "mineral laundering" (also called "mineral pillaging") are cropping up once again. Various rebel militias operating in the eastern Congo are receiving money from organizations seeking access to gold mines and deposits of coltan (which is used in producing many electronic devices). Third-party "mineral traders" appear with cash and payoff militia leaders. The minerals are then shipped out of the Congo. Shipping requires more bribes. Some government army units have received payments from these illegal mineral traders, but then some of the Congolese Army units in the eastern Congo were once militia forces.

August 13, 2009: Suspected Mai Mai militiamen allied with the FDLR attacked the town of Mpama (North Kivu province). At least 16 people died in the incident and several dozen were injured, though a UN estimate said "up to 40" people were killed. Mpama is near the big Bisie tin mine (cassiterite). According to a government report the militia force did not attack the mine. Actually attacking mines in the Congo is considered to be stupid, even by the militias. It is something akin to the "don't attack oil facilities" rule that operates in the Middle East, at least among Middle Eastern governments (though that rule is frequently broken). Militias still manage to extortion money from the mines by threatening to launch attacks on mineral shipments (attacks on convoys) or threatening to mine the roads.

August 19, 2009: The UN Mission in Congo (MONUC) headquarters announced that it expects substantial reinforcements to arrive by October 31, 2009, with 2,785 soldiers and 300 more police officers selected for duty in the Congo. Most of the military contingent will come from Egypt (an infantry battalion with attached special forces), Bangladesh (an infantry battalion with additional engineers), and Jordan (a special forces
unit). MONUC requested additional troops for service in eastern Congo and in the north-east (the area where the LRA is active). The UN reported that a number of former Burundian National Liberation Forces (FLN) fighters appear to be joining the FDLR in the Congo. The men are ethnic Hutus and the FDLR is a predominantly Hutu organization. FDLR leaders played major roles in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, where Hutu extremists killed Tutsi tribesmen and moderate Rwandan Hutus. The FDLR allegedly promises to pay former Burundian guerrillas $500 to join up. That is big money.

August 25, 2009: FDLR militiamen attacked the village of Nyakabere (South Kivu). The UN reported two Congolese soldiers were wounded and three FDLR fighters killed in the attack. The FDLR burned 50 houses. This was mainly about stealing cattle and goats, a looting expedition intended to get food for militia fighters as well as intimidate tribesmen.

August 28, 2009: A Congolese Army unit in eastern Congo reportedly rioted over a pay issue. The unit was in the town of Uvira (South Kivu province) and had been involved in an operations against the FDLR. A Congolese government official described the trouble as “mutiny.” At least fifty soldiers were demanding four months back pay. The trouble began August 26 when the soldiers put up roadblocks around the town.

August 29, 2009: The UN reported that during the month of August, attacks by Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA) fighters in Orientale province (north-east Congo) have forced 125,000 people to flee. The most intense assaults occurred in Haut Uele district, where the town of Dungu is located. The Dungu area has been the scene of several LRA attacks on homes and schools. The UN command estimates the LRA has killed 1,270 people in Orientale since December 2008, when Uganda and the Congo attacked LRA sanctuaries in north-eastern Congo. The UN estimates that 500 LRA fighters are still out there.

August 31, 2009: A group of armed men attacked homes belonging to two government officials. Investigators said the attacks were direct attempts to intimidate the ministers and the attackers left messages warning them that they would die if they testified against former vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba, who is on trial in the International Criminal Court for war crimes. Both government ministers had been members of Bemba’s Congo Liberation Movement (MLC) political party. Bemba is regarded as current president Joseph Kabila’s key opponent.

September 3, 2009: The UN and Congolese government are trying to forge a common strategy in the eastern Congo. The UN refers to the program as the “integrated joint strategy” for combating the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) and other militias. If it sounds like a riff on counter-insurgency operations (COIN), that’s because
it is. The joint Rwanda-Congo offensive against the FDLR destroyed several FDLR units and scattered the rest, but the FDLR has reconstituted, and may have between 5-6,000 fighters (roughly the force it had in January 2009). The FDLR has used intimidation tactics and conducted reprisals against tribesmen who provided the government and UN with intelligence during the joint offensive. However, the fact the FDLR continues to operate in the areas indicates they have a support network. While some tribes are sympathetic, the logical support network for financing FDLR operations is “third party mineral buyers.” That's a bureaucrat term for traders illegally dealing in rare minerals found in eastern Congo (the term “trading in conflict minerals” is used to describe the illegal business). A genuine integrated strategy would use police, financial institution, and international agencies to seize the mineral buyers assets and eventually prosecute them.

September 14, 2011: The government said that the UN Mission on Congo (MONUC) would be able to withdraw from the Congo in 2011. The statement was greeted with real skepticism by many analysts and Congolese. The government statement indicated that the Congolese Army (FARDC) and the National Congolese Police (PNC) would have to be able to handle security issues. Few people believe these organizations will be capable of handling security in 2011.

September 16, 2009: There has been a new series of militia attacks in northeastern Congo. The attacks have displaced around 100,000 people in Ituri District. The worst attacks appear to have taken place about 70 kilometers south of the town of Bunia. A Congolese Army (FARDC) attack had also created refugees. The army launched a reprisal attack on a village (Gety) after a local militia (FRPI/FPJC, Patriotic Resistance Front in Ituri/Popular Front for Justice in the Congo) had ambushed a Congolese Army unit and killed a soldier. An army statement accused villagers of “collaborating” with the rebels. This looks like the kind of action by the army that leads observers to say it is often as dangerous to Congolese civilians as the rebel militias.

September 24, 2009: An ad hoc coalition, the government described as rebel militias operating in eastern Congo (primarily in North Kivu province), announced it was suspending cooperation with the government and would no longer participate in the 2008 ceasefire deal. Arrests of militia leaders for war crimes was cited as a main reason for the political withdrawal. The government dismissed the militia group’s statement. However, this is the “flip side” of war crimes prosecutions. In the Congo the UN and the government want to make political deals to end the fighting. The leaders they negotiate with could well be charged with war crimes (and for that matter, so could members of the Congolese government). The militia leaders don't want to disarm, face prosecution,
and then a lengthy stay in jail – so why make a political deal? The “ICC problem” (named after the International Criminal Court, which issues war crimes warrants) has certainly played a role in Uganda's peace negotiations with the Lords Resistance Army. The problem has now shown up in the Congo.

September 27, 2009: A “migrant war” has begun pitting Congo-Brazzaville and Angola against the Democratic Republic of Congo. Over the last several weeks Angola has expelled around 9,000 illegal migrants from the Congo (800 were living in the Angolan enclave of Cabinda). Congo-Brazzaville has also recently expelled Congolese (ie, citizens of the DRC) who were living in its territory illegally. The Congolese government is now retaliating against Angola. It isn't clear how many Angolans have been sent back to Angola. The government indicated it intends to retaliate against Congo-Brazzaville.

September 29, 2009: The rebel groups in Eastern Congo are facing a cash crises. Many of these groups keep their gunmen paid and armed via the sale of raw materials. Much like diamonds financed West African rebels for years, various valuable ores have sustained warlords in Eastern Congo. But now the foreign companies that ultimately obtain the illegally exported ores are being pressured to halt those purchases. Without the cash, the Congolese warlords won't be able to maintain a large enough force to resist the army and UN peacekeepers. Even now, some rebel groups are forcibly conscripting teenagers, and forcing the kids to fight for them. These fighters are not as reliable as paid gunmen, and are much more difficult to supervise.

September 29, 2009: The Congolese Army is investigating a senior officer who has been accused of fraternizing with Mai-Mai militiamen – getting drunk with them, specifically. The officer (who is now officially “suspended”) was with the Mai-Mai just before the militia attacked his own forces and killed six Congolese soldiers. The attack occurred in Nyamilima (near the Congo-Uganda border). One Mai-Mai militiaman died in the attack.

September 30, 2009: UN peacekeeping forces firing rockets from helicopter killed seven Mai-Mai militiamen. The Mai-Mai were trying to attack a Congolese Army camp in North Kivu province. The UN reported the Congolese force in the camp requested the airstrike.

October 6, 2009: It often takes a long time to hear about firefights and massacres in distant regions. Typically medical relief organizations get the word from survivors. Then peacekeepers or government police investigate. Modern communications helped speed up the reporting process. However, the government is just now confirming an attack by the Ugandan rebel LRA on the town of Digba (Orientale province, northeast
Congo. The attack took place September 25, leaving 22 Congolese civilians dead. Survivors said the LRA group had around 40 men. The LRA rebels attacked the civilians with machetes.

October 9, 2009: The UN disarmament program in North and South Kivu provinces has been a mixed bag. Recently UN peacekeepers reached an agreement with the Republican Federal Forces (FRF) militia and a Mai-Mai militia (Mai Mai Yakutumba). The militias agreed to allow 450 militia members participate in the disarmament program. Some of the militiamen may be allowed to participate in a reintegration program (ie, learn civilian skills as they demobilize).

October 13, 2009: The Congo continues to expel Angolan refugees. Diplomats describe the Angola-Congo tiff as “tit for tat expulsions” but it really has aspects of a “refugee war” with refugees used as economic and political ammunition. Angola has expelled undocumented Congolese working in Angola. Angolan sources claim the Congo has forced 23,000 Angolans to return to Angola since August 2009. The Angolan government has protested. Many of the Angolans inside the Congo have been there for at least two decades. They fled from Angola’s long, bitter civil war.

October 15, 2009: The UN and several non-governmental organizations estimate that 900,000 Congolese citizens have been displaced by fighting in eastern Congo since the Congolese government began an offensive against the FDLR in January 2009. The offensive was reinvigorated: this past summer. The NGO criticism has been particularly stinging, since the NGOs accuse the UN forces of failing to protect the civilians. The NGOs harshest criticism focuses on the government and the Congolese Army.

October 16, 2009: A UN investigation concluded that the Congolese Army (FARDC) unit shot and killed, hacked, or beat to death 50 Rwandan refugees in a massacre that occurred in North Kivu province in late April 2009. The refugees were Rwandan Hutu tribesmen. The army unit was pursuing Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militiamen. The Congolese unit was one of the “reintegrated” units, largely composed of former Congolese Tutsi militiamen. The FDLR retaliated by attacking a nearby village and murdering 96 Congolese civilians. The eastern Congo has native Tutsi tribesmen.

October 17, 2009: The announced withdrawal of MONUC peacekeepers was met with a great deal of skepticism. Foreign diplomats and UN peacekeepers do not believe the Congo (particularly eastern Congo) will be sufficiently stabilized by the end of 2011. In fact, some UN military advisers see a troop commitment of at least another five years. 2011 will be the 50th anniversary of Congolese independence. Major national elections are also scheduled. The celebrations and the elections will be viewed by rebels (and would-be rebels) as an opportunity for trouble.
October 19, 2009: Government soldiers (often former rebels who accepted amnesty, and a job in the army) have been causing most of the civilian deaths in the eastern Congo. UN peacekeepers are appalled at the savagery of their "allies", but have a difficult time stopping the atrocities (the wayward troops have no problem shooting at peacekeepers.) The big problem is with the Congolese officers, who are often former rebel leaders. These guys have changed uniforms, but not attitudes, and the government is finding it very difficult getting rebels to quit being rebels.

October 20, 2009: Humanitarian relief organizations are describing the plight of refugees forced to return to Angola from the Congo as “an unfolding tragedy.” The tit for tat expulsions began in August. The UN estimates that as of mid-October 32,000 Angolan refugees had been expelled by the Congolese government. Angola has expelled around 18,000 Congolese refugees. The situation in Angola is particularly precarious. The relief groups say that the refugees lack the basics: food, shelter, and medicine.

October 28, 2009: FDLR militiamen killed ten civilians in a series of attacks in North Kivu province. The UN reported that UN peacekeepers engaged FDLR fighters who had ambushed a convoy in the area and killed three militiamen.

November 2, 2009: The government claimed that the Congolese Army is making progress against the FDLR in North and South Kivu provinces. The statement came in the face of accusations of Congolese Army assaults on innocent civilians.

November 6, 2009: In the last several days two tribes in Equateur province (north Congo) have fought a series of battles, leaving over 60 people dead. A disagreement over fishing rights sparked the battle between the Munzaya and Enyele. The tribes are also involved in a dispute over village farming rights. The most serious incident apparently took place in the village of Dongo, but the government indicated that several smaller villages were burned in the fighting. Many tribesmen have fled the fighting, some crossing the border (the Ubangui River) into the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville). At least 15,000 tribals have fled the area. The government reported that the Munzaya and Enyele fought in March 2009 and the trouble has continued. A serious incident took place on October 30 with over 40 government police were caught in a clash between the tribes. In that incident tribals fought with machete and hunting rifles over control of a pond.

November 8, 2009: The UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo (MONUC) has stopped providing liaison and support to units in the Congolese Army (FARDC) that killed civilians during operations against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (FDLR). One of the units the UN will no
longer support, was involved in an incident that left 62 Congolese civilians dead. The question to ask is where is the Congolese government in this tangle. Well, that isn't clear. The government has little control over many army units. The government has focused on defeating the FDLR, in part to fulfill commitments to the Rwandan government.

November 9, 2009: A medical aid organization has charged the Congolese Army with “targeting” Hutu tribesmen who were using a medical clinic in North Kivu. The tribals came to the clinic to receive vaccinations. A Congolese Army unit allegedly attacked the Hutus and killed 62 civilians. The rebel FDLR militia is a predominantly Rwandan Hutu force and the Congolese Army has been attacking the FDLR.

November 17, 2009: The UN estimates that approximately 40 tons of gold are smuggled out of the Congo every year. The smuggled gold has a value of around $1.3 billion. A UN report alleges the gold moves from the Congo to Uganda and “front companies” ship it from Uganda to Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Militia groups operating in the eastern Congo (including the FDLR, Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) take a cut from the smuggling operation & S232;

November 19, 2009: A recent poll in the Congo showed that the vast majority of Congolese want the UN peacekeepers to remain in the country. MONUC leaders are responding to demands from some Congolese that the peacekeepers should leave the country. Interestingly enough, the most common complaint from Congolese is that MONUC has failed to adequately protect Congolese civilians.

November 20, 2009: At least 100 people were killed in a new series of battles involving the Lobala and Boba tribes in Equateur province. The fighting has occurred on the Congo-Congo (Brazzaville) border. Apparently, 50,000 people have fled the fighting. This is a continuation of fighting over fishing rights and water resources which occurred in late October. The new round of fighting began in mid-November.

November 24, 2009: The International Criminal Court (ICC) is proceeding with the trial of two militia commanders who are charged with killing 200 civilians in an attack in 2003. The militia leader, Germain Katanga and Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui are also charged with sex slavery, rape, and enlisting child soldiers. Katanga was a senior commander of the Patriotic Resistance Force of Ituri (FRPI). Chui led another Ituri faction, the National Integrationist Front (FNI). The attack on the village of Bogoro was one of many in the Hema tribe versus Lendu tribe battles in northeastern Congo. Katanga and Chui led a predominantly Lendu militia into Bogoro, drove off the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) militia force in the town, and began killing its inhabitants. Reports filtering out of the
area after the incident indicated that the Hema saw the attack as an act of “ethnic cleansing.” The UPC was a predominantly Hema organization.

November 25, 2009: A report for the UN Security Council claimed that the Congolese Army and MONUC have failed to cut-off the FDLR’s supply lines in North and South Kivu provinces (eastern Congo). The FDLR has also increased in strength. The latest public estimates are that the FDLR has between 6000 and 8000 militiamen under arms.

November 26, 2009: Militiamen near the town of Dongo (Equateur province) fired on a UN helicopter. The helicopter was on a supply mission. A contingent of 20 Ghanian troops serving with MONUC is deployed in the area where Lobala and Boba tribesmen have been fighting.

November 27, 2009: The European Union has made improving and reforming the Congolese Army (FARDC) a priority. The EU believes that an effective Congolese Army is key to stabilizing the Congo. That's right, but UN peacekeepers and EU trainers involved in Congolese Army training programs say on the record and off the record that progress is very slow. Putting former militia units in the national army does give the government a slight degree of control (the government is paying the troops) but former militia commanders who are suddenly Congolese Army officers balk at taking orders. So far around 50 militia groups (56 by one count) have been incorporated into the Congolese Army. The foreign peacekeepers are seen as the best hope of taming the undisciplined and savage militiamen.

December 10, 2009: There are more reports of fighting near the town of Dongo. A group called the “Resistance Patriots of Dongo” (PRD) claims it is recruiting Congolese to fight “foreign forces” who are deployed against them. The UN did deploy a small force from Ghana in the area and it reportedly sending more troops. The PRD claimed that its fighters had engaged soldiers from the Rwandan Army. This is propaganda.

December 11, 2009: The Congo government has rejected a UN report on the failure of the Kimia II peacekeeping operation. The government claims that the FDLR has been substantially damaged by the operation. Specifically, the government said that as of December 4th 1,279 FDLR have been killed in the offensive and 1,247 militia fighters and supporters have been repatriated to Rwanda. The government also denied reports that the Congolese Army had massacred civilians in eastern Congo. The UN committee that put together the report said that the FDLR has recruited more militiamen.

December 14, 2009: Government forces have retaken the town of Dongo (Equateur province). A “large Congolese Army force” entered Dongo on
December 13 and engaged a militia force. Several rebel fighters died in the battle.

December 15, 2009: The Congolese Army is “intensifying” operations against the FDLR in the Walikale, Masisi and Rutshuru regions of North Kivu province. One Congolese soldier was killed in an operation in the province.

December 17, 2009: MONUC is participating in the Kimia II “joint operation” with the Congolese Army (FARDC), which will conclude by the end of 2009. The operation has drawn criticism, mainly because Congolese soldiers have killed hundreds of civilians during the operation. Kimia II is an operation against the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), a predominantly Rwandan Hutu militia but one that over the years has attracted some support in eastern Congo. Why? The FDLR has money, allegedly from selling and smuggling valuable minerals. For example, smuggled Congolese gold moves through Burundi and Rwanda to the United Arab Emirates.

December 18, 2009: A major battle between the Congolese Army and an “insurgent force” near the town of Dongo (Equateur province) took place earlier this week. The army claimed 47 rebels dead, and 32 soldiers were wounded. The UN has beefed up its own troop presence in the region. MONUC said it has around 500 soldiers deployed to help the Congolese Army with logistics (both supply and transportation). The UN force in Dongo draws on Ghanaian, Tunisian and Egyptian contingents. It also has a small contingent of Guatemalan Special Forces. The UN force will be supported by armored personnel carriers. Part of the force will deploy to Dongo, part to the town of Bozene, and part near the Ubangui River.

December 19, 2009: The rumors continue, but this time there appears to be action behind the rumors. The government has once again asked the UN to come up with a plan to end MONUC, the UN’s Congo peacekeeping mission. The date is hazy but next year is the 50th anniversary of Congo’s independence from Belgium. To many Congolese, the UN peacekeeping force looks a lot like an imperial force – albeit one employing a lot of soldiers from developing nations. So MONUC is putting together some sort of “exit strategy.” Don’t bet that MONUC will go, however. The plan will likely have “phases” and “benchmarks.” One of the benchmarks has to be an effective Congolese Army. Achieving that goal, unfortunately, is many years away. There is also the simple logistical problem of withdrawing soldiers and civilian support personnel. That could take up to two years.

December 20, 2009: The UN is reacting to reports of new Lords Resistance Army (LRA) Christmas attacks in the northern Congo by increasing its troops alert level. The UN believes the threats of attacks on civilians are serious threats. Letters, written by LRA rebels, have been
found which imply that a new round of attacks was coming. In 2008 the LRA killed over 700 people in attacks around Christmas. Moroccan, Bangladeshi, and Indonesian peacekeeping contingents are deployed around the town of Dungu. Dungu was one of the towns attacked in 2008.

December 21, 2009: The UN has sent peacekeepers, and promises of protection, to thousands of villagers in the northeast. There is great fear that LRA (Lords Resistance Army) raiders will stage raids similar to those they carried out a year ago (and killed nearly a thousand civilians). The LRA are rebels and slavers from Uganda, who are being chased by the military from several countries. This has been going on for years, and the LRA keeps escaping, and marauding.

December 23, 2009: The UN Security Council extended the mandate for MONUC's peacekeeping operation. However, the new mandate only runs through May 2010. In the past MONUC mandates ran for a year.

December 24, 2009: The government has said it will honor agreements to provide former supporters of General Laurent Nkunda with civil service and other government jobs. Talks between the government and ex-rebels have been going on for quite some time. The government said this is part of a “political reintegration” program to end the fighting in eastern Congo. Nkunda led the National Congress for Defense of the People (CNDP).

December 29, 2009: More news from Dongo (area in Equateur province). The UN estimates Over 160,000 people have fled from Dongo, an area in Equateur province (northern Congo). Many of the refugees (an estimated 90,000) have crossed the border into the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and into the Central African Republic (CAR). Refugees report seeing 15 Congolese policemen killed in October 2009, by Enyele tribesmen. The killers were led by a man named Udjani, who claims to possess a magic sword which can poison his victims (as well as cut them, presumably). Another story states that Udjani could “jam” guns so they would not fire (ie, using his magic). Udjani is following a familiar path, where a religious cult leader (eg, animist “medicine man” or a “Christian mystic” like the LRA) starts a tribal war or a war against the government. What throws an interesting twist of reality into this particular “mystic uprising” is that the UN and other sources believe several of Udjani’s followers were formerly in militias loyal to ex-Congolese vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba.

January 1, 2010: The controversial Kimia 2 operation against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) is over. Now the Congolese Army has officially launched Operation Amani Leo (which in Swahili translates as “peace today). The government still maintains that Kimia 2 was successful and “degraded” the FDLR.
January 2, 2010: NGOs with personnel in the Dongo area have reported that Eneyel tribesmen loyal to Udjani have ambushed barges carrying refugees across the Ubangi River from the Congo into the Central African Republic (CAR).

January 7, 2010: Responding to insistent criticism from diplomats regarding the government's endemic corruption, the government fired 119 senior civil servants in the last week. At least another 2,500 lower ranking civil servants (according to one source from customs and tax offices) will be forced to take early retirement. Many of the senior officials were in budgeting and financial offices.

January 20, 2010: Researchers have questioned the validity of a widely-published estimate for the number of dead killed in the Congo's various wars since 1995. One analysis said the figure of 5.4 million (generally attributed to the International Rescue Committee) is much too high and suggested 2.8 million deaths is more accurate. The truth is no one really knows. Many press reports rely on refugee statements made days (or even weeks) after a village has been attacked. Estimates of the death toll from exposure, disease, and starvation also vary widely. Many people die “in transit” as they flee attacks. More reasonable estimates run from three to five million, with 1998 used as the “baseline” year.

January 26, 2010: At least 15,000 people have fled renewed fighting in North Kivu province (eastern Congo). This estimate is based on the number of refugees fleeing to refugee camps in North Kivu. Most of the new refugees come from an area northwest of Goma, North Kivu's capital. The Congolese Army has been conducting operations in the area against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

January 27, 2010: The Russian government announced that its military will be training 30 more Congolese soldiers as part of a bilateral training agreement.

January 28, 2010: The Mai Mai Kifuafua militia is complaining that the government has not come through on its peace deal commitments. The Mai Mai are miffed that the government has not provided the militiamen with the political jobs (including ministerial positions) they were promised over a year ago when the Kifuafua signed on the the Goma peace agreement. The Kifuafua militiamen have their critics. Recently a government spokesman said the militia had not done what many other former guerrilla groups have done, which is form a political party and engage the political process. However, politics does not seem to interest the Kifuafua and other Mai Mai militias. One disgruntled Kifuafua leader has threatened to go back into the bush and renew the rebellion.
February 5, 2010: The Chinese government recently indicated that it is willing to provide more diplomatic and economic assistance in order to bring stability to the eastern Congo. China has informed both the Congolese and Rwandan governments of this aim. China holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and supports the continuing MONUC peacekeeping effort. The promise of more direct involvement is no surprise, since China has significant investments in sub-Saharan Africa and in the Congo in particular.

February 7, 2010: Taking advantage of the fact that most of the gunmen in the Hutu militias were too young to have committed any crimes during the 1994 genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda, the government has been dropping leaflets offering them amnesty, and explaining that rebel leaders were lying about all Hutu being subject to punishment. This campaign cost the rebels about 500 men last year, and the desertion rate is more than doubling this year.

February 11, 2010: It has taken seven weeks but international observers are confirming six militia attacks in the Ituri region of Orientale Province (northeastern Congo, near the Uganda border). The fighting took place two months ago, when the Popular Front for Justice in the Congo (FPJC) and the Ituri Patriotic Resistance Front (FRPI) clashed. One of these militias is suspected of launching an attack on several villages south of the town of Bunia on January 12, 2010, leaving six people dead.

February 12, 2010: The UN Mission in the Congo (MONUC) denied that it had issued an ultimatum that rebel militias only had 45 days to disarm. That was an order of the Congolese government. Rebel groups were to disarm, and some would be allowed to join the Congolese Army (FARDC).

February 13, 2010: The Ugandan rebel Lords resistance Army still presents a threat to northeastern Congo. Some 30,000 Congolese are still refugees inside neighboring Sudan. The LRA has regrouped in the region and is operating in small, mobile units. This typically means from four to 12 people.

February 16, 2010: FDLR rebels killed seven women in South Kivu province, after being kidnapped. This is likely another case of gang rape.

February 18, 2010: The government and the government of Rwanda have reached an agreement to exchange refugees. This has been in the works for some time. However, simply reaching an agreement is not going to solve what has become a major ethnic and political issue in eastern Congo. Around 50,000 Congolese Tutsis fled the Congo for Rwanda and have been there for several years. Approximately 90,000 Rwandans (mostly Hutus) went the other way, fleeing Rwanda for the Congo. Some reports put the number of Rwandans at 100,000. The basic agreement
calls for voluntary repatriation. It remains to see how many refugees agree to move voluntarily. The Hutu rebel Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (FDLR) specifically targeted Congolese Tutsis. That noted, the UN recently reported some Congolese Tutsis have returned to the Congo.

February 22, 2010: Is the government setting the stage for renewed civil war? President Joseph Kabila recently fired some cabinet ministers and moved appointees from one job to another. He also eliminated 11 cabinet positions (shrinking from 54 to 43). The moves were expected. However, no former rebels were appointed to positions. The various peace agreements promised that members of rebel organizations that turned in their weapons and became political parties would be rewarded with government jobs. Rebel commanders were led to believe they would get major positions. But that did not occur. As it is, several former rebels have been complaining about the lack of lower-level government jobs.

February 24, 2010: North Korea tried to break the UN weapons embargo on Congo, and was caught. South Africa revealed that, three months ago, it seized several containers of spare parts for T-55 tanks. The crew of the French ship transporting the containers were suspicious of the contents, and asked port authorities in South Africa to investigate. The containers had been put on the French ship in Malaysia (a growing center for arms trafficking), and were marked "bulldozer parts." The containers had earlier been shipped from North Korea to China, changed ships, and carried to Malaysia.

February 25, 2010: A U.S. Marine Corps task force (assigned to AFRICOM) has begun training Congolese Army soldiers, with 30 Marine trainers in the town of Kisangani. For the next eight months the Marines will instruct a battalion of 1,000 Congolese soldiers. The AFRICOM statement said that the Marines will focus on military skills but also emphasize human rights standards. The Congolese Army desperately needs reliable units. It appears that AFRICOM intends to help create a skilled battalion, a “building block” unit that can be used as an example for other Congolese military units.

March 3, 2010: Eighteen army battalions began a new operation against the FDLR in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces. UN peacekeepers are supporting this very large Congolese operation.

March 4, 2010: The UN is once again talking about withdrawing its peacekeeping contingent. Withdrawals from MONUC (UN Mission in the Congo) could begin as early as this June. The withdrawal discussion has taken several interesting political twists and the June date is completely political. The government plans to celebrate the Congo's 50th anniversary of independence from Belgium in June. The Congo, however, is not stable.
and war continues to plague the eastern Congo. MONUC has indicated the June withdrawals (if they actually occur) will involve troops deployed in the western Congo.

March 8, 2010: The government has begun another weapons turn in program. This one is nicknamed “a firearm for 50 dollars.” The program is designed to reduce the number of firearms in the eastern Congo. The government expects between 20,000 and 30,000 weapons will be traded for the cash. The program is being implemented in North Kivu province.

March 10, 2010: Former rebel officers in the National Congress for Defense of the People (CNDP) of running crime rackets. The former rebel officers (several of them now serving as officers in the Congolese Army) are extorting money from civilian miners who work in the region's numerous mines. The military force charged with protecting the mines charges the miners a fee to work at the mine. This is the same racket the militias ran. Now the militiamen are part of the army and they run the same scam. The CNDP was run by General Laurent Nkunda (who is now under arrest in Rwanda.)

March 16, 2010: Attacks on civilians by the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA) and the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) receive condemnation from the UN and a fair amount of press coverage. However, aid workers and UN monitors frequently criticize the Congolese Army (FARDC) for committing the same kind of atrocities on civilians (kidnapping, rape, and other sexual violence). The record is abysmal. It's estimated that half of the rapes committed in North Kivu province in the first seven months of 2009 were committed by Congolese Army troops. That's right, crimes and in some cases war crimes committed against the very people they are supposed to be protecting. The government calls it criminal behavior by individuals and says the soldiers will be punished, but this rarely happens. The documented cases of gang rape by soldiers indicates that it's an organized crime. UN trainers working with the Congolese Army talk about command problems in the FARDC. One of the major problems is the number of militia groups that have been integrated into the military in terms of pay, but still operate as if they were rebel militias. The justice system in the Congo is ineffective, to say the least, and the military justice system weak and often corrupt.

March 28, 2010: MONUC is considering reinforcing its peacekeeping contingent in the northeastern Congo. International rights organizations and a number of Congolese tribes are complaining that the Congolese Army is incapable of protecting civilians threatened by the LRA. At the moment the UN has around 1000 troops stationed in the region –which is very few, given the size of the region and the tough terrain.
April 4, 2010: A group of Enyele rebels landed by boat in the town of Mbandaka (Equateur province) and launched a series of attacks. The rebel force attacked the governor's home and took control of the airfield. The rebels also attacked a church.

April 5, 2010: The government and UN reported that the Congolese Army and MONUC troops had regained control of the Mbandaka airfield, after a battling Enyele rebels who launched a surprise attack on April 4. The reported casualties indicate a fairly vigorous firefight in the city and particularly around the airfield: seven Congolese soldiers killed, three Congolese policemen, and 21 Enyele rebels. The UN reported that two UN workers were slain in the city and one peacekeeping soldier (from a Ghanian detachment) was killed. The UN estimated the attacking Eneyele force had an estimated 100 to 150 fighters. With 21 dead, that means 15 to 20 percent were killed in action.

April 9, 2010: The government claimed that a UN force in the town of Mbandaka failed to adequately protect threatened Congolese civilians when they were attacked by a rebel force on April 4.

April 10, 2010: The government claimed that the Congolese Army killed 12 Enyele tribesmen and arrested 35 during counter-insurgency operations in Equateur province in early March. The Enyele (described as rebels) were killed in operations around the town of Mbandaka (capital of Equateur province).

April 11, 2010: The UN has released a sketch of what could become MONUC's withdrawal plan from the Congo. This would take place over a three year period. This conflict's with the Congolese government's stated desire that MONUC withdraw by the end of 2011. The government wants to demonstrate that it does not depend on UN forces. Unfortunately, the government does depend on UN forces. Most Congolese Army units are poorly trained and equipped. The handful with decent equipment are essentially presidential guard units. Though fighting has tapered off in the east, North and South Kivu provinces remain unstable. The northern Congo has a raging inter-tribal conflict, between the Enyele and the Manzaya. Tribal rivalries have simmered for years in the area (Equateur province), but a disagreement over fishing rights turned into a tribal bloodletting which has become a war. The Lords Resistance Army (LRA), still terrorizes the northeastern corner of the Congo. UN units serve as rapid reaction forces. The Congolese military is also distrusted by many Congolese.

April 12, 2010: Canada has offered to send more troops to MONUC (UN Mission in the Congo). Canada is withdrawing its forces in Afghanistan.
April 13, 2010: Congolese opposition groups are forming a new coalition called the Alliance for Maintaining the Peace Agreement of Goma (also CALELD the Goma Alliance). CALELD will include at least 17 rebel organizations, most of them in the eastern Congo. However, the idea is to coordinate opposition to the government and president Kabila. One of the key rebel groups is the Mai Mai Kifuafua (MMK) militia. The MMK objected to the fact its leaders were denied government jobs that it argued were promised in previous peace agreements. Former members of General Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for Defense of the People (CNDP) are also prominent in the new coalition.

April 30, 2010: The government announced that it expects to double cobalt and copper production by 2012. For example, mining companies estimate that the Congo will produce around 40,000 tons of cobalt in 2010. One projection has the Congo mining and exporting 90,000 tons in 2012. There is a big problem with all of the optimistic projections, of course. They assume increasing stability (ie, decent security) and improved transportation infrastructure.

May 1, 2010: The UN is warning that an early withdrawal of peacekeepers from the Congo will erase all the progress made in stabilizing the huge country. At the moment UN peacekeepers are providing the only reliable protection for the numerous UN and NGO aid organizations operating throughout the Congo. The big issue remains creating a truly capable Congolese Army and supporting national police forces. That is an incremental process. As it is, numerous former rebels are expressing increasing aggravation with the Kabila government over what they claim is a failure to provide jobs promised as part of peace agreements.

May 2, 2010: Trouble continues with the Enyele rebels in Equateur province. The spectacular rebel attack on Mbandaka, the provincial capital, brought an influx of peacekeepers. The Enyele have been fighting with the Manzaya over fishing rights. The Enyele and Manzaya are both members of the Lobala tribe. However, the government is worried about an attempt to nationalize the trouble in Equateur. A group calling itself the Independent Liberation Movement of the Allies is claiming to be an umbrella organization for all rebels in the region. The Enyele rebels are part of this group.

May 5, 2010: The leader of the Enyele rebels in Equateur province had been captured. The man, a self-proclaimed mystic called Odjani, claims to have magical powers. He was captured near the town of Dongo by several young men his fighters tried to force to join their group. Apparently his magic didn't work very well.
May 6, 2010: A militia group calling itself the Mai Mai Mayangose attacked a group of nine park rangers in the Virunga National Park (eastern Congo). One ranger was killed in the attack.

May 10, 2010: U.S. AFRICOM trainers are helping train a Congolese Army (FARDC) battalion of 700 soldiers. The training is taking place in the mining town of Kisangani. About 25 U.S. military personnel are involved in the mission. Emergency medical aid, communications, and small-unit tactics are included in the instruction. It appears the goal is to create at least one reliable Congolese Army unit that is assigned to the eastern Congo. The various presidential guards units for the most part only operate in Kinshasha, the capital. The presidential guard units are paid on a regular basis; the rest of the army gets paid haphazardly.

May 11, 2010: The UN reiterated that it intends to reduce its peacekeeping force in the Congo by 2000 soldiers by the end of next month. MONUC currently has around 20,500 peacekeeping personnel deployed.

May 14, 2010: The U.S. government is considering ways to stop American businesses from using illegally mined or sold minerals (so-called conflict minerals) from the eastern Congo. At the moment the State Department is holding what the diplomats call fact-finding discussions with U.S. executives. Some of the minerals (like tantalum and tungsten) play a major role in high tech industries. The Congo has significant deposits of many strategically important minerals, including cobalt.

May 18, 2010: The UN and the Congo government are definitely at odds over conditions governing a MONUC (UN Mission in the Congo) withdrawal. The UN insists that overall security conditions (i.e., an estimate of stability) should determine whether or not the peacekeeping mission stays. The government insists on a December 2011 withdrawal date. MONUC's mandate comes up for renewal at the end of this month. It is clear that the biggest concern on the part of the UN, aid NGOs operating in the Congo, and Congolese civilians, is that the Great Congo War (1998-2003) will return with its full fury. As it is, various militia wars, tribal wars, and rebellions continue unabated.

June 3, 2010: The government reported a force of 150 FDLR fighters attacked a military post in Burungu (North Kivu province). The FDLR killed five soldiers and eight civilians in the attack. The Congolese Army claimed it killed six rebels in the firefight.

June 4, 2010: A militia group in South Kivu province ambushed an army patrol near the southeastern town of Matili, killing four soldiers. The town was reportedly under siege by a militia, and the army was advancing to the rescue.
June 5, 2010: A militia group formerly operating in Uganda has shown up in the Congo. The Front for the Liberation of Congo (FPLC) now has a cadre in North Kivu province. According to sources in the eastern Congo, the FPLC has a few hundred militia fighters under its control.

June 12, 2010: Some 500 Mai-Mai fighters who were supposed to be integrated into the Congolese Army say they will no longer recognize the government with the government. The Kifufua Mai-Mai contend that the government has been too slow in fulfilling its promises, which include giving Mai Mai commanders leadership positions.

June 20, 2010: Reports from North Kivu province indicate that the Congo’s attempts to integrate the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) into the Congolese Army (FARDC) are failing. That said, accusations that Congolese Tutsis (the base group supporting the CNDP) have created a Tutsi statelet in North Kivu are not accurate. The CNDP is not strong enough to pull that off and Congo is increasingly cooperating with the Rwandan government. More likely are the allegations that CNDP militiamen, who have been integrated into the Congolese Army, still recognize the authority of their militia commanders. In other words, their loyalty is to their CNDP chain of command, not the government's. This type of hidden loyalty has been a major concern for UN peacekeepers involved in the integration program, and not just with the CNDP.

June 30, 2010: The Congo celebrated its 50th year of independence from Belgium. The army held a parade in Kinshasha that included 15,000 soldiers.

July 3, 2010: The UN is once again criticizing the government for failing to bring armed groups under control. These armed groups (which usually means militias, but can mean gangs) are recruiting new members, including under-age children (child soldiers) to fill out their ranks. Their victims are usually civilians. The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) militias have groups operating in both North and South Kivu. The FDLR’s FOCA faction operates in South Kivu; its RUD-Urunana faction is based in North Kivu. The Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA) is still active in Orientale province. The LRA has killed at least 300 people this year (January to June 2010) in the Congo.

July 6, 2010: The army has killed 80 rebel fighters who were connected to rebel organizations in Uganda and Rwanda. The rebels were killed in operations that began in June.

July 14, 2010: Its believed that the ADF has around 800 fighters in the Ruwenzori Mountains.
July 15, 2010: There are a large number of refugees in the Ruwenzori Mountains displaced by fighting between the Congolese Army and the ADF. Army units killed 30 ADF fighters and captured nine in various operations, losing six soldiers in the process.

July 16, 2010: The U.S. government has passed a series of laws intended to help stop the trading and sale of so-called conflict minerals originating in the eastern Congo. The new legislation is aimed at stopping illegal trading in tin ore (cassiterite), gold, and coltan (columbite-tantalite). Rebel organizations like the FDLR reportedly get 70 to 75 percent of their money from selling illegal minerals. The idea behind the legislation is that if governments can penalize the buyers of conflict minerals then that will put a crimp in the finances of Congolese militias. This is not necessarily so. Some of the groups (like the various Mai-Mai militias in the eastern Congo) do quite well by crime. These outfits steal and extort from Congolese villagers. Several militias also tax (a euphemism) the locals. Laurent Nkunda (the Congolese Tutsi general now in custody in Rwanda) worked this hustle with the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). The tax scheme was little more than extortion and theft. The biggest problem may be Congolese Army units. A couple of Congolese brigades are allegedly involved in trading in conflict minerals, or at least providing protection to dealers and smugglers.

July 24, 2010: A group of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebels attacked an airfield in the Walikale area of North Kivu province (eastern Congo, Rwanda border). This is a tin mining area. The FDLR group reportedly took an Indian pilot hostage after the attack.

July 27, 2010: Approximately 60,000 people have fled the Uganda-Congo border area. The Congolese Army and the UN have been conducting operations against the Ugandan rebel group the ADF in the area. The Congolese Army began to move against the ADF in late June. ADF fighters have been accused of being involved in illegal gold and diamonds trading in eastern Congo.

August 2, 2010: Material captured in Congolese bases of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel group, indicates the ADF has operational contact with the Somali Al Shabaab Islamic terrorist organization. The ADF is sometimes referred to as the ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda). Al Shabaab claimed it launched the terrorist attacks in Kampala, Uganda, earlier this month. The Ugandan government has accused the ADF of having links to Sudan's Islamist regime. These reports have increased since the Congolese Army (FARDC) and UN peacekeepers in the Congo launched a series of attacks in the Ruwenzori Mountains on June 26. The attacks targeted ADF base camps and smuggling routes. In the past the ADF has claimed that it is fighting for the rights of Ugandan Moslems.
August 7, 2010: Goodbye MONUC. The UN Mission in the Congo (MONUC) has changed its name. It is now the UN Organization and Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO). That became official in July. Why the name change? The Congolese government wants the UN peacekeepers to leave. So the peacekeepers are now a stabilization force, stabilizing the country so they can withdraw. The eastern Congo has no peace and very little stability. It does not make a lot of sense, does it?

August 9, 2010: Non-governmental aid organizations operating in South and North Kivu province claim that the CNDP is once again acting like a rebel militia. CNDP officers and militiamen were supposed to be integrated into the Congolese Army. Some were, but a number of the officers claimed they were not given appropriate positions. A few officers claimed they had been promised government jobs. One aid group claims that the CNDP is still in the illegal minerals business and has connections to a coltan mining operation. This may be tough to prove in court, but the illegal mineral trade in east Africa continues to boom. Someone is making money.

August 10, 2010: The UN now has 150 Guatemalan special forces troops deployed in Equateur province.

August 12, 2010: The UN promised to combat a resurgence of Lord's Resistance Army activity in Orientale province (northeastern Congo). Civilians in the province have been complaining for almost three years of LRA depredations. The LRA is reportedly building a new base camp in the Bas Uele region in the northeast. MONUSCO has one peacekeeping installation in the area, in the town of Dingila. However, that installation is scheduled for closure as the UN begins withdrawing troops from the region.

August 20, 2010: The Congolese military reported that it had arrested two men suspected of killing three Indian soldiers serving with UN peacekeeping forces. On August 18 the Indian soldiers were hacked to death with machetes by a force of some 60 militiamen. A Mai-Mai militia had attacked the Indian soldiers' base camp near the town of Kirumba (North Kivu province) the day before. One of the killers allegedly said he had received orders to go back to the base camp and kill Indian soldiers. The charge of murder may stick because the peacekeepers thought they were assisting a small group of men who claimed they were in trouble. The 60 militiamen then surrounded the soldiers and hacked them to death. They were not given a chance to surrender. A UN spokesman called the killings a criminal act.

August 21, 2010: The government demanded earlier this year that UN peacekeepers prepare to withdraw the peacekeeping force by sometime next year. In June the UN withdrew about 1,700 troops. Right now about
20,000 peacekeepers serve with UN Organization and Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO). The government, however, wants the UN to keep it supplied with aid money for humanitarian and relief work. This year the UN budgeted over $800 million for relief work in the Congo. A recent UN report, however, said that so far donors have only supplied $400 million. The global recession may be one reason, but aid organizations say the instability in the eastern Congo makes relief operations necessary but also very risky.

September 2, 2010: UN investigators have accused a group of rebels of gang rape. Members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) committed the crime in late July in a small village in North Kivu province (eastern Congo). At least 200 FDLR rebels participated in a series of night-long assaults on women in the village. The same group is suspected of attacking and plundering other villages in the area. An investigator with a non-governmental organization operating in the province called it a systematic rape of the population. Gang rape is, unfortunately, common in the eastern Congo. Congolese Army forces and some UN peacekeepers serving in eastern Congo have also been accused of rape.

September 10, 2010: MONUSCO now deploys around 17,700 peacekeeping troops. The peacekeepers are supported by another 700 military observers and 1,220 policemen.

September 14, 2010: The government claimed that it will enforce its new ban on mining minerals in the eastern provinces plagued by rebel activity (particularly North and South Kivu provinces). The government also said that it would crack down on smuggling operations which move the minerals out of the Congo. The big question is how the government will enforce the ban. Rebel militias control many key mineral producing areas. Government troops go in, the rebels hide, the government forces occupy the region. So far so good, except many government forces then cut deals with the rebels share the profits from the illegal export of the minerals. As it is, many of the mines in the east are small and scattered throughout the jungle. Some militias have their own miners. The militias arrange to have the minerals (coltan, for example) taken to brokers operating in other east African countries. The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan Hutu militia force, has been accused of running a full spectrum mining operation, that includes mining, transportation, and export of gold and coltan.

September 15, 2010: The Congolese Army (FARDC) announced that it intended to launch an offensive in North Kivu province. The offensive is aimed at gaining control of illegal mining operations in the region. The offensive will focus on the Walikale area, a mineral-rich, jungle-covered
Many of the rebel militias are financed by profits from illegal mining operations.

September 17, 2010: The government of Uganda has offered to provide training for Congolese soldiers. Uganda has also expressed a desire to increase cooperation with the Congo to battle Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) guerrillas. The ADF is a Ugandan rebel organization and has maintained bases in the eastern Congo. Uganda believes the ADF has connections with Al Shabaab, the Somali Islamist organization which launched the World Cup terror attacks in Uganda in July 2010.

September 25, 2010: Congolese sources, citing the MONUSCO (UN Congo peacekeeping operation) claim that Rwanda has sent troops into North Kivu province. The Rwanda soldiers are aiding Congolese Army operations in the province. A UN spokesman denied the claims. However, in the past Rwandan Army and Congolese forces have conducted joint operations against the FDLR.

October 4, 2010: The UN released a 550 page study on violence and human rights violations in the Congo. The study confined itself to analyzing the worst violations in the last ten years. There are plenty to choose from and the UN chose over 600. The study utilized on-the-ground research teams that interviewed witnesses and survivors. The list of crimes includes murders (tens of thousands), rapes, and kidnappings. Critics have already accused the UN of softening some of the accusations that implicate Rwandan and Ugandan troops. Rwanda reacted to leaked versions of the study by threatening to pull its troops out of the UNAMID operation in Sudan's Darfur region.

October 14, 2010: The Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group now appears to have around 600 fighters in base camps in the eastern Congo (Uganda-Congo border area). The ADF has connections with the Somali Islamist extremist organization Al Shabaab.

October 15, 2010: There is growing opposition, in several European nations, to the UN Congo peacekeeping effort. Critics (many of them former supporters) point to reports of continual mass rapes occurring in both the eastern Congo and along the Angola-Congo border. Despite a series of peace agreements signed in the last two years, rebel militias continue to operate. Militias that were incorporated into the Congolese Army (FARDC) respond selectively (at best) to orders issued by the national government. Rogue elements in the military are also involved in illegal mining operations. The government, led by President Joseph Kabila, is increasingly suppressing its political opponents. In fact, the government has reneged on promises to give the provinces more authority. Political instability continues, particularly in the eastern provinces. What the critics fail to realize is that all this is pretty normal for Africa, and is not going to
be changed quickly, even by a large peacekeeping force. The UN condemned an attack on a peacekeeping base in eastern Congo. Around 50 members of a Mai-Mai militia attacked the base camp of an Indian Army peacekeeping contingent located near the town of Rwindi. Rwindi is in North Kivu province. The Indian Army peacekeepers (in company strength, approximately 100 soldiers) killed eight militamen and wounded two. A MONUSCO military report described the firefight as fierce.

October 24, 2010: The Angolan government announced that it intends to deport another 200 Congolese nationals who entered Angola illegally. Aid groups in central Africa claimed that the Angolan announcement indicates that Angola is considering another round of mass expulsions similar to those conducted in 2009. The expulsions are an indication of increasingly poor relations between Angola and the Congo.

October 25, 2010: The government and UN peacekeepers are being urged to arrest Bosco Ntaganda, who is under indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The government, has so far refused. Ntaganda is allegedly helping Congolese security forces run anti-militia operations in the eastern Congo. Ntaganda was a senior leader in the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) militia. Ntaganda replaced rebel general General Laurent Nkunda as head of the CNDP.

October 28, 2010: The U.S. military has deployed a training team to the Congo to help train Congolese Army medical personnel. The operation is code-named “Medflag 10.”

November 6, 2010: Congolese authorities believe faction of the Burundi rebel National Liberation Forces (FNL, a Hutu group) murdered two civilians on the Congo-Burundi border. The Congolese Army claimed that the rebel group were trying to free two captured FNL fighters. When the rebels attacked the Congolese civilians were killed in the crossfire.

November 7, 2010: The UN claims that its observers have documented over 650 case of sexual violence (rape) committed against women who were expelled from Angola to the Congo during the months of September and October. Angola expelled 6621 Congolese (men and women) during the time period. Earlier this year Angola expelled over 10,000 Congolese who had taken refuge in the country. In 2009 Angola expelled over 150,000 Congolese nationals.

November 11, 2010: The UN believes that Congolese Army soldiers assigned to protect civilian villages in the eastern Congo are now protecting illegal mining operations. Moreover, it appears that until late September or early October of this year Congolese Army general Gabriel Amisi Kumba had provided protection to a mining company named Geminaco that was operating the huge Omate gold mine in North Kivu
province. Allegedly Kumba got 25 percent of the production from the mine. Germanico lost control of the mine in October, following a government ban on illegal mining in the eastern Congo.

November 11, 2010: The Congo is huge. Helicopters give peacekeepers an edge in mobility over rogue militias, gangs, and tribal war parties. The slow but sure withdrawal of UN peacekeeping forces means there will be fewer helicopters available for transport and logistics. One UN office estimates that by mid-2011 remaining peacekeeping units will only have 14 helicopters available. India recently withdrew eight helicopters. Not all of the cuts in available helos are due to withdrawal of units; some of it is due to withdrawal of funds. Several countries have cut their peacekeeping budgets and helicopter are expensive to operate. MONUSCO, the new name of the UN peacekeeping force, recently had a $73 million budget cut, and it has already affected aircraft availability. Currently MONUSCO provides helicopter lift for the Congolese Army. MONUSCO still has around 17,600 peacekeepers in the country.

November 18, 2010: The escape of 169 prisoners from a jail in Gemena (Equateur province) was apparently made possible because of a mutiny by guards. A judge was conducting hearings in an overcrowded room when the prisoners bolted and got away.

November 30, 2010: The government and the Congolese Army denied a UN report that rebel militias had reorganized in South Kivu province and intended to renew the civil war. The UN alleged that the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP, Laurent Nkunda's old Congolese Tutsi group) and the Burundi Hutu National Liberation Force (FNL) had assembled new recruits in North and South Kivu provinces and were receiving arms shipments. The UN report stated that the FNL has around 700 fighters in South Kivu. The CNDP is now supposed to be part of the Congolese Army, but that is a political fiction. At least three battalions of the CNDP operate on their own.

December 1, 2010: The government reacted angrily to a UN report that the Congolese Army is involved in criminal enterprises. The evidence is convincing. The allegations have been out there for several years that senior army officers get protection money from illegal mining operations and they also extort illegal taxes from tribes living in their operational areas. For these rogue officers, clamping down on rogue militias takes a backseat to stealing and making money. There is even evidence that the army officers make deals with the militias, particularly when mining valuable minerals is involved. To add to the Congo government's displeasure, the UN Security Council has blacklisted Lieutenant Colonel Innocent Zimurinda for ordering his troops to commit mass murder and mass rape. Zimurinda is now a Congolese Army officer, but a couple of years ago he commanded a militia in the eastern Congo.
December 6, 2010: In the last three weeks, special operations troops serving with peacekeeping forces in the Congo (MONUSCO) had succeeded in cutting the supply lines of Burundian FNL rebels operating in South Kivu province. This entire operation involved 900 UN soldiers. No figure was given for the number of special operations troops that were involved. This followed news that FNL commander Agathon Rwasa had left Burundi and was in the Congo rebuilding the FNL and recruiting new fighters. The Burundi government has issued a warrant for Rwasa's arrest.

December 7, 2010: Two Congolese Army soldiers were arrested for the murder of a Catholic priest last month in North Kivu province. The two soldiers were former members of the CNDP militia. Civilians in the area had been complaining of threats and intimidation by former militiamen.

December 8, 2010: The government's failure to decentralize power to the provinces is turning out to be a very bad political decision. The government promised to give the provinces more power (and hence, more tax revenue) beginning May 15, 2010. The day came and went with no action. Now the provincial governments increasingly distrust the capital. Oh, the distrust was already there, but it is worse now. Some critics are once again making the case for a break-up of the Congo. That would mean more war, which is the last thing the country needs. As it is, several politicians intend to use the government's broken promise as a campaign issue in the 2011 elections.

December 18, 2010: Police broke up a riot by soccer fans in the town of Lubumbashi (Katanga province). The fans were angry when their team lost a close match. What's truly interesting about this is that the crowd thought the Japanese referee was Chinese and yelled that the Chinese referee should go home. The rioters subsequently attacked several Chinese owned stores in Lubumbashi. China has signed agreements with the government to provide infrastructure (roads, power lines, etc) in exchange for Congolese natural resources. Many Congolese believe the agreement is a return to colonialism. The rioters may be an ominous warning to the Chinese.

December 31, 2010: A Wikileaks cable from 2007 indicates that a Maltese company has been illegally mining uranium in the Congo. The company extracts uranium ore along with copper and cobalt deposits from mines in Katanga province. The copper and cobalt are shipped out of the country and the uranium is subsequently extracted. The cable alleges Congolese government officials are paid off to the look the other way.

January 13, 2011: Several soldiers had been arrested on charges of rape (in eastern Congo in early January).
January 21, 2011: The government, with UN help, are prosecuting a Congolese Army lieutenant colonel with leading a mass rape in early January, of over 50 women in the village of Fizi in South Kivu province.

January 22, 2011: The government has been insisting that UN peacekeepers leave sometime this year, but UN observers and diplomats (most from the European Union) insist the Congo is not ready for a complete UN pullout. The government simply cannot handle the multiple security problems in the huge, demographically complex country. Moreover, the Congolese Army is a mess. The militias which were supposed to be incorporated into the army have become factions within the army. The National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) militia is proving to be a particularly tough militia for the army to absorb. The CNDP is rogue General Laurent Nkunda's old outfit. Nkunda remains in custody in Rwanda, though the Congolese government insists it wants to try him. Militiamen from the CNDP and several of their officers have made their gripes about the Congolese Army quite public. Over the last six months former CNDP officers have lodged complaints about the army's failure to give them equivalent ranks. They contend this is a breach of the various peace agreements which led them to lay down their arms. UN observers report that some elements of the CNDP—which claim they have integrated into the army—are really acting as separate militias and use the peace agreement as political camouflage. Recently, a former CNDP leader (still in the Congo) said that he is very concerned about Tutsi refugees in Uganda and Rwanda. He says that his troops expect the Congolese Tutsis to be repatriated to the Congo. The CNDP originally organized as a Congolese Tutsi militia. It is possible the CNDP is on the verge of officially resurrecting itself.

February 8, 2011: MONUSCO reported that 1,881 FDLR rebels (64 senior officers or political officials) voluntarily surrendered to UN forces during 2010. MONUSCO will not make the mistake of saying that the FDLR is defeated, but MONUSCO officers believe the surrender statistics speak for themselves. Despite the FDLR’s involvement in the illegal mining business and various (lucrative) smuggling enterprises, constant attacks by the UN and Congolese Army have made life difficult.

February 17, 2011: A senior Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) commander surrendered to UN forces (MONUSCO). The official report said the commander was in charge of recruitment for the FDLR. A MONUSACO spokesman said the commander (identified as a lieutenant-colonel) was also in charge of mobilizing civilian support for the FDLR in the eastern Congo. That means he was a senior political officer.

February 27, 2011: The government claimed armed gunmen attacked the official residence, in the capital, of Congolese president Joseph Kabila. Kabila was not at home. The half hour attack was repulsed and seven
gunmen were killed by presidential guards. Later that day, a group of presidential guardsmen went to the Kokolo military barracks in Kinshasha and arrested several people suspected of being involved in the attack. The presidential guards are an elite unit composed of the best soldiers and policemen in the country. They are also personally loyal to Kabila. By the end of the day the government referred to the attack as a coup attempt.

March 2, 2011: The commander of the rebel militia the Patriotic Front for the Liberation of Congo (FPLC) was killed during a joint combat operation involving UN forces and the Congolese Army. The commander, Colonel Emmaneul Nsengiyuma, was slain in North Kivu province. The UN regards the FPLC as an ally of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the militia with links to Hutu extremists involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The official name of the joint UN-Congo offensive operation in the eastern province is Operation Amani Leo.

March 5, 2011: Congo’s presidential elections are scheduled for March 27. In the wake of the February 27 attack in Kinshasha, the government expects violence to escalate.

March 11, 2011: Following reports of new Lord’s Resistance Army attacks in northeastern Congo (Orientale province), the UN is urging the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) to increase its security presence in the region. The UN estimates that in the last 40 months the LRA (Ugandan rebels) have killed 2,000 people and abducted 3,000 in the Congo.

March 15, 2011: The Congo government arrested two men from Nigeria in connection with a gold smuggling operation. The international ring involved a French businessman and an American businessman from Texas. Allegedly, the big break in the case occurred in early February. The syndicate was attempting to fly a half-ton of gold from the Congo to somewhere in the US. The arrests and the story demonstrate just how confident mineral smugglers are. They have a sense of impunity because they have gotten away with it for so long. Estimates vary, but the RUMINT (rumor intelligence) says from 60 to 80 percent of Congolese gold gets smuggled out of the country. A lot of the gold moves by air freight.

March 16, 2011: The government has partially lifted a ban on mining and exporting valuable minerals in the eastern Congo. The ban had affected North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema provinces. The ban was designed to stop the illegal mining and trading of minerals by rogue military units and the rebel militias that operate in eastern Congo. Three minerals were specifically targeted: cassiterite, tantalum and coltan. There were also attempts to stop the illegal mining and selling of gold.
March 21, 2011: Could the Congo’s very divided political opposition decide to back a single candidate to oppose President Joseph Kabila in the November elections? The odds of this occurring are very slim. The tribal divisions are one reason, but Kabila has also been very astute in gaining support from key opposition parties. Kabila’s worst critics say he buys support literally. They mean he bribes opposition politicians.

March 25, 2011: Soldiers have arrested two members of the Ugandan rebel Allied Democratic Front in North Kivu province and transferred them to Ugandan custody. Congo has promised Uganda that it will cooperate in stopping Ugandan rebel organizations like the LRA and ADF. Congo has made a similar promise to Rwanda. Most Congolese Army operations in North and South Kivu provinces are directed at the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

March 29, 2011: Lord’s Resistance Army commander Joseph Kony may be back in the Congo. Raids in the Congo by the Ugandan rebel organization have increased in the last four months. Both the Congo and Uganda governments have issued statements that they have intelligence indicating that Kony has moved from the Central African Republic (CAR) back into the Congo. The LRA used to have several large base camps in Congo’s Garamba National Park (northeastern Congo near Uganda). The possible return of Kony helps explain rumors that Congo, Uganda, and UN peacekeepers have been considering launching a new joint anti-LRA offensive in the Congo. The UN has also been stressing civilian protection as a major goal in the Congo. The UN’s focus has been on the eastern Congo (where the FDLR and several Mai Mai militias operate) and northeastern Congo (LRA depredation territory).

April 5, 2011: The UN is arguing that counter-militia offensives in the eastern Congo have reduced the number of militiamen fighting with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Current FDLR strength is around 2,500 fighters. Two years ago the UN estimated FDLR strength at around 6,000 fighters.

April 6, 2011: The UN confirmed that 32 UN workers were killed in a plane crash on April 4. The plane was on a flight from Kisangani to the capital, Kinshasa.

April 9, 2011: Foreign diplomats are very concerned about security for Congo’s elections later this year. The Congolese Army (FARDC) is supposed to take the lead in providing security, and most of the army is rated by observers as being unreliable. Highly unreliable is likely a better description. At the moment the vote is set for November, but there is already talk that the date may move to a later date. Lack of funds to support the election process is one reason. Donors were supposed to cough up money for the election and that cash has been slow in coming.
April 10, 2011: Recent international actions to limit the smuggling of Congolese minerals and to force companies to trace the origin of minerals they buy (traceability requirements) have sparked some interesting debate among human rights groups, NGOs, and developmental aid agencies. Everyone seems to agree that trading in illegal minerals (conflict minerals) is not a good thing to do, but stopping smuggling and illegal mining won’t solve the Congo’s real problems. The country’s biggest problem remains security, and just about every other MONUSCO press release emphasizes that. The embedded and endless corruption is another problem of immense significance. The corruption charge of course implicates the elites who rule (misrule, actually) the country. People with a lot of experience throughout central Africa know that militias like the Mai-Mai don’t need guns and ammo to commit crimes. In fact, several Mai-Mai militias started out being primarily armed with spears and machetes, with a few AK-47s in the mix. A phrase has cropped up in discussion among aid groups and NGOs that is blunt, poignant, and unfortunately accurate: stopping the trade in Congolese conflict minerals will not stop the conflict in the Congo.

April 15, 2011: Mineralogists and mining companies have estimated that the Congo has over $24 trillion worth of precious minerals, including gold, tin, tantalum, tungsten, and cobalt.

April 20, 2011: MONUSCO is trying to provide some structure to the Congo’s mining industry. One initiative involves creating trading centers (centres de negoce). MONUSCO plans to build five trading centers in North and South Kivu provinces. One will be located near the Bisie mining area. The idea is to slowly establish civilian control over the mines and ore shipment business, and remove the militias, gangs, and yes, Congolese Army soldiers who now control the mines. Eventually the civilian government would get control of all ore shipments, at least that’s the concept. Actually doing it is something else entirely. The Kivus are only one part of the problem. Ituria region (north of North Kivu) and the city of Bunia are notorious world-wide for their wildcat gold operations and gold smuggling.

April 27, 2011: Burundi and Rwanda have agreed to increase intelligence sharing with the Congo. Burundi and Rwanda have a common interest in destroying the FDLR, which is a radical Hutu tribal organization. For the past two years Rwanda and the Congo have cooperated against the FDLR and have discussed running a joint intelligence center. The FDLR and other radical Hutu organizations often use Burundi as a transit corridor when moving from the Congo to Rwanda or Rwanda to the Congo.

May 1, 2011: The UN reported that the FDLR and some of its allied Mai-Mai militias have increased their offensive activity in North Kivu province
(eastern Congo). The FDLT and Mai Mai attacked and looted the town of Kanyabayonga (Lubero area, north of the city of Goma).

May 4, 2011: Germany is trying two Rwandan Hutu rebel militia leaders for war crimes. Both men, Ignace Murwanashyaka and Straton Musoni, were senior leaders in the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia. Both men were living in exile in Germany and were finally arrested in 2009.

May 10, 2011: Congolese opposition parties are complaining that the government’s national election plans are inadequate. The parties are extremely critical of the Congo’s National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) decision to hold elections on November 28, arguing that is way too soon. Some opposition politicians already maintain that the way president Joseph Kabila intends to run the elections is unconstitutional and the elections will be riddled with fraud. What’s unconstitutional? For starters, Kabila’s term ends December 6. The new president (assuming Kabila is not re-elected) would not be sworn in until December 20. As for fraud? Voter registration has been very slow. Opposition politicians claim their supporters have faced intimidation tactics from Congolese security forces (police and military). The presidential election will not have a run-off, so all Kabila has to do is finish first in the first round, which means he could be elected president with a bare plurality of the votes.

May 12, 2011: A court in Kenya has charged three men with stealing and smuggling 2.5 tons of Congolese gold. The three individuals were arrested in Nairobi with over 400 kilograms (880 pounds, worth $19 million) of gold in their possession. Kenya security officials claimed that the three men began smuggling the tons of gold out of the Congo in July 2010. The Congo government identified one of the men as Jean-Claude Mudeke Kabamba (nom de guerre General Kabamba). Kabamba is linked to a Mai-Mai militia group that operates in the eastern Congo. The government reported that Kabamba is also involved in acquiring weapons for the Mai-Mai militia and shipping the weapons into the Congo.

May 18, 2011: China is shrugging off accusations of neo-colonialism and is plowing ahead with its infrastructure-for-resources deal in the Congo. China and the World Bank are putting around $600 million into the Congo’s railroad system. The Congo has around 3,000 kilometers of railroad track, but much of it is unusable. The project begins with a four-year plan to repair and then upgrade track and equipment.

May 26, 2011: The Congo government, several economic NGOs, and representatives of the mineral mining industry are discussing how to best create an international certification system that would certify that minerals from the Congo are not illegal, smuggled minerals (so called conflict
minerals). The idea is to create a certification process similar to the one which traces the origins of gem stones (usually diamonds). This is a tough process. The gem stones certification system is not perfect – blood diamonds still turn up for sale around the world. Geologists and chemists can study an ore and know with reasonable certainty where the ore was mined, so there are ways to link ore to a specific mine. In concept, the idea is a good one, since it might help pinch the finances of gangs and rogue militias. However, the bogey man here is governmental corruption. If the people running the mine can pay the government inspectors to blame someone else, the effort to police the mining industry collapses.

June 8, 2011: MONUSCO has launched a new offensive (Operation Restore Hope) in the eastern Congo. The objective is to attack and disarm militias operating in the Rutshuru district of North Kivu province. The key target is the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia. The offensive will continue for at least ten days. Since early April attacks by militias on unarmed civilians have increased in the Rutshuru area.

June 9, 2011: Nearly fifty human rights and aid organizations have asked the UN to beef up its peacekeeping capabilities in the eastern Congo. The non-governmental organizations said that UN forces are not properly equipped and lack the ability to protect civilians in the region, particularly in North and South Kivu provinces. The NGOs argue (correctly) that violence will increase as elections approach.

June 16, 2011: India has told the UN that it still intends to withdraw (in July) four Mi-35 helicopters it has committed to the UN’s MONUSCO operation in the Congo. The Indian withdrawal makes peacekeeping tougher for MONUSCO, which is already short of helicopters (both transport and attack). The Indian statement cited maintenance difficulties and operational requirements back in India.

June 23, 2011: Investigators in South Kivu have confirmed that a mass rape occurred earlier this month in the town of Fizi. Some 60 women were raped by deserters from the Congolese Army (FARDC). Deserters is not quite accurate, since the rapists were formerly members of PARECO, a rebel militia. Refugee sources also confirmed that the gang stole cattle and looted a local medical aid station.

June 28, 2011: The UN Security Council reauthorized the Congo peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO). The Security Council extended MONUSCO’s mandate until June 30, 2012. MONUSCO currently has around 17,000 soldiers assigned, with 1,000 police and 1,000 in the organization’s support staff. MONUSCO’s primary mission in the next year will be to help the Congolese government run the national elections. MONUSCO will provide security, logistical, and technical support.
June 29, 2011: Police engaged a group of attackers in an hour-long firefight in the mining town of Lubumbashi (Katanga province, a major copper-producing region). The attackers may have been trying to seize a Congolese Army weapons depot in the city. A mining company headquarters and storage facility, located near the weapons depot, might also have been the target. Police killed two gunmen. Several civilians died in the battle, including two civilian security guards.

June 30, 2011: UN peacekeepers with MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) have launched another offensive operation in North Kivu province (eastern Congo). This offensive is centered on the Grand Nord area in the province and is the second offensive operation in North Kivu within the last three weeks. The primary target of the UN attacks is the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia.

July 4, 2011: Why fight in the Congo? Tribes fight one another for territory, but natural resources attract outsiders, and this vast country has a lot of resources. The Congo may have over $24 trillion in minerals—and that is recoverable minerals. The $24 trillion estimate is made by mining companies and mineral analysts. That is more than enough money to bankroll paved roads and schools for the entire country. However, the Congo’s old plagues of tribal rivalries and corruption mean that recovering the minerals is difficult (the chaos) and just distribution and use of the royalties is even more difficult (thanks to the pilferage). At the moment 70 to 80 percent of the working mines are controlled by militias. Some of the militias are bandit groups. Some are tribal war parties masquerading as a political party. Some are nominally Congolese Army units. Controlling a mine is a source of revenue for the militia, tribe, or army unit. There is a gray area here that receives little attention in the international media. Many legitimate Congolese Army units gripe that their pay is stolen or is in arrears. A commander controlling a mine can pay his troops.

July 5, 2011: A demonstration (against cheating during voting registration) in the capital turned violent. Many voters see the November elections as being manipulated, so the current (very corrupt) politicians can stay in power and keep stealing. This is not popular with most Congolese.

July 6, 2011: Criticism of Dodd-Frank conflict minerals bill continues to increase. Small, independent miners (artisanal miners) in the eastern Congo have been hit very hard. What little local economy existed has been severely damaged. There are also reports that corrupt soldiers have used the government directive to stop illegal mining as a reason to kick the independent miners out of the mining districts. The corrupt soldiers then take control of the mines and begin smuggling operations.
July 15, 2011: The UN estimates that the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) now has around 3,000 fighters operating in North and South Kivu provinces and in Katanga province. This makes the FDLR the largest rebel militia still operating in the country.

July 18, 2011: The government reported that over 30 million people are now registered to vote in the November 2011 presidential election.

July 23, 2011: The UN Security Council condemned the Lord’s Resistance Army for launching more attacks in the Congo. The UN reported that the LRA launched 53 attacks in June 2011, killed 26 people, and kidnapped another two-dozen.

July 25, 2011: Over 100 people fled the Congo and sought shelter in Uganda after what was described as a joint attack by the Congolese Army and the Ugandan Army on a rebel force operating along the Uganda-Congo border.

July 27, 2011: Several aid NGOs operating in the Congo’s northeastern provinces have complained that the area remains unprotected. The Ugandan rebel Lord’s Resistance Army continues to launch raids in the area. The NGOs point out that the UN only has 850 peacekeeping troops in the region (out of over 17,000 in country).

July 31, 2011: The Angolan government announced that it intends to improve its surveillance of the Angola-Congo border. For several years Angola has tried to stop a constant flow of illegal immigrants from the Congo. In 2009 Angola expelled almost 70,000 illegal Congolese immigrants.

August 1, 2011: Government security forces arrested a Congolese Army colonel on charges of smuggling. The colonel was nabbed red-handed. He was leading a convoy carrying around ten tons of cassiterite. The convoy was in South Kivu province and was on its way to North Kivu province. Presumably the convoy was heading to Rwanda.

August 5, 2011: UN investigators believe that they have sufficient evidence to prove that about a hundred Congolese Army soldiers participated in a mass rape of 47 women in January 2011. The rapes occurred in the villages of Kalambahiro and Bushani (North Kivu province, eastern Congo).

August 15, 2011: Debt is a global worry. However, Congo’s debt burden is particularly high. The country has a GDP of around $13 billion and international debt of $13 billion. Several international donors are trying to get the debt burden reduced. Congo can handle a debt of about four billion dollars. That will mean refinancing or cancelling from eight to nine billion dollars of debt.
August 16, 2011: Complaints from the Congo are growing about the U.S. legislation intended to stop illegal mineral sales. The Dodd-Frank bill (also called the Obama Law) has a clause that prohibits the sale of so-called conflict minerals may have been well-intentioned but it was not well-thought out. Rather than run the risk of buying any minerals that might have been smuggled from the Congo, many major mining companies are simply refusing to buy minerals from central Africa. The result is a de facto embargo. There are few buyers for Congo’s valuable minerals, especially tantalum and tungsten which have many hi-tech uses. This has damaged the Congo’s economy, because the nation relies on mineral exports. According to some sources, China, which does not have to meet Dodd-Frank standards, is snapping up many minerals at very cheap prices.

August 22, 2011: No big surprise. The Peoples Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD) has nominated current president Joseph Kabila as its candidate in the upcoming November election. The PPRD is the ruling party.

August 25, 2011: A man who worked as an official vehicle driver for the UN’s Congo mission has been convicted of smuggling illegal minerals. He was sentenced to three years in jail. He tried to smuggle 1,200 kilos of cassiterite from Congo’s North Kivu province into Rwanda.

August 29, 2011: MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) has a current strength of 18,997 uniformed personnel. The figure breaks down as follows: 17,010 military troops, 746 military observers, and 1,241 police. The uniformed personnel are supported by around 4,000 civilians (mostly UN staff and local staff).

September 30, 2011: International advisers, several working with MONUSCO (UN stabilization and advisory mission that replaced MONUC) say Congo is not ready for elections and poorly run elections or another disputed ballot could lead to another round of country-wide instability. That is a euphemism for more anarchic war. Election teams note that the country has 62,000 polling stations and basic balloting equipment (including boxes) has not been distributed. Sure, the election is November 28, two months away, but the Congo has few good roads. It is a huge logistical task to distribute ballot boxes and ballots. Opposition candidates are already complaining that the election is rigged. The government is not letting them audit voter registration rolls.

October 8, 2011: A European Union security study estimated that some 70 percent of the mass rapes in the eastern Congo are committed by uniformed personnel. The implication is that Congolese Army units are involved. That is very likely, since many Congolese Army units are simply
former rebel militias that have been integrated into the army. The result is obvious. Congolese citizens in the eastern Congo fear their own military forces. The distrust of the military is one reason the EU is trying to improve Congolese police forces. However, few expect improvement any time soon. The EU police adviser mission believes it will take 15 years to build and reform the police forces.

November 4, 2011: The Rwandan government sent the Congo a shipment of 82 tons of smuggled minerals that Rwandan police have seized in the last several months. The smuggled minerals include coltan and caasiterite.

November 6, 2011: A Congolese Army unit attacked an Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) guerrilla base near the Congo-Uganda border. Uganda has been urging the Congo and UN forces in the Congo to crackdown on the ADF. The ADF allegedly has ties to the Somalia Islamist Al Shabaab organization which claims it will launch more terror attacks in Uganda. The Congolese Army claimed it killed at least ten ADF fighters.

November 7, 2011: Tanzania arrested at least 20 Congolese Army (FARDC) soldiers who entered the country illegally on a boat. A Congolese Army spokesman said the soldiers were pursuing guerrillas. At the moment there are 11 official presidential candidates. The current president, Joseph Kabila, is the overwhelming favorite. It is a given he will be accused of vote buying and vote fraud. The main opposition party is the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDSP). Its candidate is 79 year old Etienne Tshisekedf.

November 21, 2011: The big story in Congo is preparation for the elections, or the lack of it. The huge nation is short on police and many of the policemen it does have are either poorly trained or corrupt, or both. The Congo has a total of 110,000 policemen, at least according to the government who pays their salaries. Two months ago several international observer teams noted that police units do not have anti-riot gear, in other words, if it comes to trouble their options are limited. They can use clubs or guns. The international advisers also said there were good reasons to believe people would take to the streets and the police should be prepared for crowd control operations. After the 2006 elections (the first in 40 years), which were disputed, angry members of losing political parties came out in large numbers. So did the party militias, except the militias showed up in public with lots of weapons. Not every political party has a militia but the big ones do. The militias look and act a lot like tribal militias. There is a reason. Congolese parties align fairly well with tribes or tribal groups. This is why keeping crowds from getting too boisterous is important. If fighting erupts and bloodletting starts, a tribal war could be a brick bashing or knife wound away. A tribal clash that can be kept low key and local is business as usual in the Congo. If it spreads, however, everyone fears a renewed civil war.
November 29, 2011: Several Congolese opposition political candidates for president of the Congo urged the government to completely cancel the election. Voting began on November 28 and continues but the opposition leaders said that the vote is rigged. There were also reports of violence marring the election, including the murder of four people in the city of Lubumbashi (Katanga province, southern Congo). There were also reports of seriously voting delays caused by threats of violence (numerous places around the nation). As 2012 began, UN peacekeeping officials with MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) returned to the theme of creating stability in the Congo. Indeed, Congo needs stability. UN peacekeeping forces have been fighting and disbanding rogue militias with the aim of promoting stability. UN and other international groups have been training Congolese police, with the same aim in mind. However, the allegations levied by Kabila’s opponents, of vote fraud and misuse of national security forces, has heightened tensions. The fact that most Congolese political parties reflect tribal affiliations (some more so than others) adds another dicey dimension. Political squabbles become tribal battles. Arab Spring 2011 also had effects in sub-Saharan Africa. There have been demands in neighboring Uganda and Rwanda that long-serving presidents and officials step down. Some Congolese are making those demands, especially about corrupt officials, and they point to Arab Spring as a guiding example.

December 4, 2011: Several militias in the eastern Congo have acquired new weapons and are recruiting new members. That means the militias have new (or renewed) financial support, likely linked to sales of illegal minerals mined in the Congo. Corruption in the Congolese Army is also a contributing factor as poorly paid soldiers take bribes from mineral smugglers or engage in smuggling themselves. This is another indication that attempts to stop the trade of conflict minerals are not working as planned. Activists who advocated the legislation and sanctions to stop the illegal trading remind everyone that some of the stiffest laws do not take effect until 2012.

December 18, 2011: The government has deployed 20,000 Congolese Army soldiers in and around Kinshasha. The government is worried that violence may erupt because of the disputed November 2011 election.

December 19, 2011: Congolese opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi disputed official election results which claimed that President Joseph Kabila won 49 percent of the November vote total and Tshisekedi got 32 percent. Since Election Day Tshisekedi has accused the Kabila government of stealing the election. Tshisekedi has called on Congolese security forces (police and army) to quit following Kabila’s orders. Tshisekedi is reportedly considering forming a rival government and has issued a statement that he is the only legitimate authority in the Congo. The 79 year old
Tshisekedi has been part of the Congo’s political scene for a long time. At one time he served as a minister in the government of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko.

December 21, 2011: Congolese police have killed 24 people since November’s highly disputed presidential election with 20 of those killed in the capital.

January 1, 2012: Eight people were killed in an attempted mass escape from a prison in Bukavu (eastern Congo). Four of those killed were Congolese soldiers while 44 were injured. A jailed Congolese army officer had acquired a hand grenade. An accomplice was supposed to throw the grenade toward a prison door as the escape attempt began. The grenade blew up in the accomplice’s hands.

January 4, 2012: An FDLR faction had murdered 26 people in several attacks in South Kivu province. The FDLR group attacked and burned several villages in the Shabunda region (jungle area) on January 2 and January 3.

January 20, 2012: Militia attacks in North and South Kivu provinces, from early December 2011 to mid-January 2012, have displaced 100,000 civilians. The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) has continued to commit atrocities in the provinces (rape and murder). The core cadre of the FDLR consists of Rwandan Hutus who were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. As 2012 began, UN peacekeeping officials with MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) returned to the theme of creating stability in the Congo. Indeed, Congo needs stability. UN peacekeeping forces have been fighting and disbanding rogue militias with the aim of promoting stability. UN and other international groups have been training Congolese police, with the same aim in mind. However, the allegations levied by Kabila’s opponents, of vote fraud and misuse of national security forces, has heightened tensions. The fact that most Congolese political parties reflect tribal affiliations (some more so than others) adds another dicey dimension. Political squabbles become tribal battles. Arab Spring 2011 also had effects in sub-Saharan Africa. There have been demands in neighboring Uganda and Rwanda that long-serving presidents and officials step down. Some Congolese are making those demands, especially about corrupt officials, and they point to Arab Spring as a guiding example.

January 31, 2012: Poverty, corruption, and several low-level battles (which still result in thousands of refugees) continue to plague the Congo. The re-election of President Joseph Kabila proved to be another source of instability as his opponents claimed the vote tally was rigged and that Kabila’s supporters intimidated opposition supporters in order to reduce opposition turn-out. When Kabila was sworn in on December 20, 2011 the
army had to deploy tanks through the capital in order to stop protests from becoming violent. The capital is a political strong-hold of chief opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi (who claims he actually won the November 2011 election). Tshisekedi heads the Union for Democracy and Social Progress Party (UDSP).

February 8, 2012: The UN’s peacekeeping office has issued a request for reinforcement of MONUSCO stability operations.

February 14, 2012: Democratic Republic of Congo: call for a genuine peace process¹

Goma– Representatives of 11 African countries sign an accord in Ethiopia pledging to help end the conflict in DR Congo. The M23 rebel group declared a ceasefire ahead of the talks, but showed signs of a violent power struggle between leader Jean-Marie Runiga and military chief Sultani Makenga in the immediate aftermath.

For years the international community has attempted to help stabilise eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), at the expense of billions of US dollars, yet sustainable peace remains elusive. Elections in November 2011 were widely seen as lacking credibility¹ and provincial and local elections have been delayed indefinitely. There has been scant progress on critical reforms in justice, security, land and governance. Successive military campaigns have failed to remove foreign and domestic armed groups and have increased the population’s suffering causing large scale displacement. A mix of armed groups continues to control various areas of eastern DRC, of which the M23 proved to be strong enough to seize Goma town, the provincial capital of North Kivu province, in November 2012. Since April 2012 in North Kivu and December 2011 in South Kivu the security situation has significantly deteriorated as military and armed group activity and ethnic tensions have increased. The unravelling of the Ihusi accords in early 2012 resulted in fighting between the FARDC and the M23 as well as the resurgence and expansion of other armed groups.

This has created the most recent in a long series of crises, following failed attempts at peace, which have ignored key causes of violence. Its impact on the population of the Kivu provinces has been devastating; it is ordinary people who suffer the most. As control over their communities constantly shifts hands between armed actors, people caught in the middle are most vulnerable to human rights violations.² Between January and September 2012, 767,000 people have fled their homes within North and South Kivu and an additional 60,000 people have fled to Uganda and Rwanda.³ By the end of 2012 over 2.7 million people were estimated displaced in DRC, up from 1.7 million in 2011. Research has shown that the roots of conflict in eastern DRC relate to the distribution of power and economic resources, and are inextricably linked to the way in which the
country's social and political structures operate. They combine local, national and regional dynamics; creating a particularly complex climate of conflict, which tends to have a paralyzing impact on policy makers. Achieving peace in eastern DRC, and stability in the DRC as a whole, requires a context-specific response based on a frank analysis of the real causes and dynamics of conflict. This analysis needs to be collectively owned by relevant stakeholders and lead to a comprehensive strategy focused on taking action. Above all, achieving peace requires an inclusive and locally owned peace process with strong backing at national and regional levels. This should provide a framework for coherent and long-term actions to be undertaken by civil societies and governments in the region, with support of international donors.

To this end, we recommend the Government of DRC to: Prioritise non-military solutions to conflict in the east, based on the failure so far of military action to fully address the presence of non-state armed groups and the negative impact of such action on the civilian population. Initiate broad-based and inclusive dialogue with provincial and local actors in the east, aiming to establish a coherent and shared vision for peace and a detailed peace implementation plan. In line with this plan, revise the Stabilisation and Reconstruction Programme for eastern DRC (STAREC), in coordination and discussion with international partners and Congolese civil society actors working in conflict-affected communities and DRC institutions. Formulate concrete step-by-step Action Plans to implement key reforms necessary for sustainable peace in eastern DRC. These must include elections, decentralisation, reinforcing the country’s security sector, establishing a strong justice sector, land and natural resources ownership and management, and the disarmament and demobilisation of ex combatants. Take concrete steps to address ethnic tensions and put in place a process to protect the right of minorities, including supporting inter-ethnic dialogue initiatives and holding to account those engaging in ethnic hate-speech. We recommend governments in the region to: Strengthen their role as positive actors for peace in eastern DRC by supporting non-military strategies and political dialogue, as outlined in international commitments relating to peace in the region such as the 2006 "Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region". Actively support attempts to achieve peace, as it relates to regional dynamics of conflict, such as the illegal arms trade, the movement of refugees, the cross-border movement/support of non-state armed groups, and the illegal trade in natural resources.

We recommend International multilateral and bilateral actors to: Engage the Government of DRC in political dialogue on peacebuilding and the necessary governance reforms mentioned above. Monitor and support the engagement of the DRC government and the regional actors in establishing and implementing a meaningful peace process. Urgently
appoint and deploy the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, whose mandate should focus on supporting specific national dialogues - including the current M23 negotiations – but also have a broader mandate to support peace-building dialogue at the regional level. Recognising the failures of past military initiatives to resolve conflict, critically review any plans for a proposed Neutral International Force (NIF) where the mission concept involves neutralising non-state armed groups through armed intervention. Any proposed military initiative can only work if there is a political solution as well, in particular to prevent new armed groups emerging. Fully support the revision of the International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy, critically analysing its capacity to support a peace process, and ensure that Congolese civil society actors as well as Congolese institutions participate in its formulation. If the revised strategy remains a technical programme, divorced from a genuine peace process and efforts to obtain clear, and realistic and long term commitments from the Congolese state, then it cannot achieve real impact. Take urgent steps to improve donor coordination and shared analysis in order to strengthen the coherence of donor programmes and enhance their impact. Continue to provide support for community-level peace processes and peace initiatives at other levels undertaken by Congolese actors. Signatories: Jesuit Refugee Service Great Lakes, Cafod, Care, Christian Aid, Combattons L’Injustice, Dynamique Synergie des Femmes, Uvira and Fizi, Innovation et Formation pour le Développement et la Paix, International Alert, Kvinna till Kvinna, Mercy Corps, Norwegian Church, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, SAIPED, Dungu, Reconciliation Resources, Search for Common Ground, Trócaire, War Child, World Vision

February 15, 2012: The Congolese Army took control of two mines in North Kivu province (eastern Congo), the tin mine at Bisie and the gold mine at Omate. The army announced that it will protect the mines from armed rebel groups. The Mai-Mai Sheka (also called the Cheka) and the FDLR had been in control of the mines. Around 70 percent of North Kivu province’s tin is produced at Bisie. The UN is currently training some 500 Congolese mining police to help protect the eastern Congo’s mineral resources.

February 16, 2012: The UN reported that MONUSCO peacekeeping force currently has a strength of 18,997 uniformed personnel. The uniformed force consists of 17,010 soldiers, 1,241 police, and 746 uniformed military observers. Approximately 4,000 UN civilian staffers support MONUSCO.

February 17, 2012: The UN cited China’s MONUSCO peacekeeping contingent (2010-2011) for its service. The Chinese engineer contingent (approximately 220 troops) renovated over 100 kilometers of roads and built 14 bridges. The unit also had a medical detachment.
February 27, 2012: The UN has asked Angola to provide helicopters for UN operations in the Congo. UN forces do not have enough helicopters to conduct supply, liaison, and observation missions.

February 29, 2012: Uganda intends to open another refugee camp to house Congolese refugees. Most of the refugees have fled attacks by the FDLR. Some 3,000 Congolese have fled into Uganda since November 2011. Several hundred more are reportedly collecting in the border region. This will be the third refugee camp erected to take care of Congolese refugees.

March 14, 2012: The International Criminal Court (ICC) found Congolese militia commander and warlord, Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, guilty of war crimes, to include recruiting and using child soldiers (under the age of 15) and rape. Lubanga committed the crimes in the Ituri region (eastern Congo, near the Uganda border).

March 20, 2012: There were numerous atrocities committed by soldiers and police in the capital during and after the November 2011 election. At least 33 people were killed and 83 wounded in election and post-election violence. Presidential guard units were involved. There were also allegations of torture. President Joseph Kabila claimed he won 48.95 percent of the national vote. Opponents claimed massive election fraud. International election observers (primarily from the European Union) concluded the election was flawed and it was not possible to determine with any accuracy who had really won. One opposition group asserted that over 1.3 million ballots were unaccounted for.

April 1, 2012: The UN is concerned that North Kivu province could regress. After the January 2009 arrest (by Rwandan forces) of Laurent Nkunda, leader of the CNDP (National Congress for the Defense of the People, a primarily Tutsi group), North Kivu began to stabilize. After Nkunda’s arrest, the CNDP fractured into several groups. (One faction has become the CNDP political party.) However, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR, a radical Hutu organization) has not been eradicated, despite the efforts of the Congolese Army (FARDC), UN peacekeepers, and Rwandan forces. Former CNDP militiamen, who were integrated into the Congolese Army, are increasingly operating as freelancers; the worry is that CNDP-dominated FARDC units are on their way to becoming rebels in uniform. The contested reelection of President Joseph Kabila is one reason. Many tribes do not trust Kabila and his backers and they have good reasons. Interestingly enough some former CNDP soldiers reportedly backed Kabila. Backing him in the election, however, doesn’t necessarily translate into real support for his government. The theory is that the former CNDP fighters are, like the FDLR, more interested in controlling mineral resources in the eastern Congo. The CNDP militiamen and their commanders will verbally support
Kabila but run North Kivu (at least the mines and border area) as a satrapy. Meanwhile, the UN Organization and Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) is supposedly preparing to reduce forces in the country, despite appeals earlier this year for new sources of support for the mission. The stage is being set for a round-robin struggle between and among other eastern factions (to include Mai-Mai militias), the FDLR, CNDP-dominated army units, and other FARDC units.

April 3, 2012: MONUSCO has now authorized 19,229 total uniformed personnel, 17,129 are military soldiers assigned to units while 733 are military observers and 1,367 are uniformed paramilitary police.

April 3, 2012: General Bosco Ntaganda commands 50,000 Congolese troops in the east. The problem is that Ntaganda is a wanted (by the International Criminal Court) war criminal. Ntaganda still acts that way, but as long as he remains in the good graces of the Congolese government he can't be touched by war crimes prosecutors. That pretty much sums up the situation in Congo, where rebel leaders can make a deal with the government and remain in control of many armed and unruly men.

April 9, 2012: The UN reported that the special light infantry battalion funded and trained by the United States is now operating in the northeastern Congo. The unit is assigned to fight the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) Ugandan rebel group. The light infantry battalion is coordinating its operations with MONUSCO peacekeepers. MONUSCO has established a base in the town of Dungu to coordinate regional efforts against the LRA, to include anti-LRA operations in South Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR).

April 13, 2012: UN investigators alleged that former CNDP commander Jean Bosco Ntaganda is operating a criminal network in North Kivu province. Ntaganda’s group allegedly smuggles various mineral from the Congo for export through other east African nations.

April 14, 2012: Congolese president Joseph Kabila has reportedly told the army that former CNDP commander Jean Bosco Ntaganda should be turned over to the ICC for prosecution. Ntaganda, however, currently holds the rank of general in the army. Kabila's decision is something of a surprise. The ICC warrants are not new, they were issued in 2006. Arresting Ntaganda might lead many Congolese Tutsis to rebel. The ICC indicted Ntaganda for employing child soldiers. He is also wanted on murder and rape charges. Ntaganda denies the charges and contends that he remains loyal to the central government.

April 23, 2012: Two Congolese Army colonels were ambushed and killed by a militia force in North Kivu province, near the town of Walikale.
April 29, 2012: Five people died in a firefight in North Kivu province between the Congolese Army and a group of militiamen. The battle took place near Goma (city on the Rwanda-Congo border). UN peacekeepers operating with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo (MONUSCO) have deployed near Goma to protect civilians.

April 30, 2012: A major mining company reported that it intends to re-open a gold mine concession in the eastern Congo’s Ituri region. The Mongbwalu mine (near the town of Mongbwalu) is really a mining area, covering some six thousand square kilometers. Several security officials, however, believe attempts to take control of the concession could spark renewed warfare. Individual or small-scale teams of miners have occupied the huge concession. Many of these miners are former rebels and militiamen, so they can readily pick up arms and fight the Congolese Army for control of the area. The miners have something to fight for. Gold miners can earn up to $80 a day, which is high pay in the Congo. How many are there? Good question. Estimates vary, though 50,000 artisanal miners working in and near the concession is one figure. Some sources say there could be well over 100,000 who work part-time.

May 3, 2012: The army has engaged some 500 well-armed militiamen in several firefights in North Kivu province. As a result, some 5,000 villagers have fled the battle area in Masisi territory. Approximately half of the displaced have crossed the border into Rwanda to escape the fighting. The militiamen are former Congolese soldiers. Some of the rebels are former Mai Mai militiamen but many of them belonged to the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). Thus is Laurent Nkunda’s old group, which was originally a Congolese Tutsi organization. Nkunda was arrested in January 2009, by Rwandan forces operating in the Congo. According to Rwandan sources he remains under house arrest in Rwanda. The revived CNDP militia leaders began defecting from the Congolese Army earlier this year. The defectors claim they remain loyal to former CNDP leader Jean Bosco Ntaganda, who denies any ties to the rogue militiamen. Ntaganda has been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes. The Congolese government has resisted arresting him, though in April President Joseph Kabila indicated that Ntaganda should be turned over to the ICC. On May 2nd the government once again called for Ntaganda’s detention after senior government officials in North Kivu province claimed that Ntaganda has links to the notorious Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The FDLR’s original cadres were Rwandan Hutus, connected to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The FDLR allegations are new, since Ntaganda is regarded as a hero by many Congolese Tutsis.
May 7, 2012: The Congolese Army claims that it has retaken the Masisi area (eastern Congo) from M23 rebels. The M23 rebellion began after the Congolese government claimed it intended to arrest Bosco Ntanganda.

May 11, 2012: Rwanda reported that 10,000 refugees have fled from the Congo into Rwanda and Uganda. The refugees are trying to escape fighting instigated by the M23 rebel faction. About 55,000 Congolese refugees, many of them Congolese Tutsis, are now living in Rwanda.

May 12, 2012: The UN reported that government forces are fighting M23 rebels near the town of Bunagana (North Kivu province, near the Rwanda and Uganda borders).

May 15, 2012: The UN Security Council condemned the May 14th, attacks that seriously injured 11 Pakistani soldiers assigned to peacekeeping duty with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in the Congo. About a thousand people in the town of Bunvakiri (South Kivu province) attacked a base camp manned by the peacekeepers. At least seven of the Pakistanis were wounded by gunfire. Members of a Mai-Mai militia, the Raia Mutomboki, may have been in the crowd. The name Raia Mutomboki supposedly translates as The Angry or The Angry Citizens.

May 28, 2012: Some UN officials believe that Rwanda is helping support the M23 mutiny in North Kivu province. Some mutineers, who defected to the government, claimed they were recruited and trained in Rwanda, then were sent across the border to join the rebellion. Rwanda continues to deny any involvement. General Bosco Ntaganda was born in Rwanda and the CNDP was originally a defense force of Congolese Tutsis. June 18, 2012: The March 23rd Movement (acronym is M23) rebels have seized a strip of territory along the Congo-Rwanda border. Both the UN and the government claim that M23 now controls an important border area, despite heavy attacks by government forces, including attack helicopters. M23 insists that they are not acting on behalf of former Congolese Army (FARDC) general, Bosco Ntaganda, but the government insists it has evidence that Ntaganda is M23’s leader. Ntaganda took over the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) after Laurent Nkunda was arrested in early 2009. The CNDP was largely manned by Congolese Tutsis. Ntaganda’s force was integrated into the Congolese Army in 2009, as part of the peace process. This is why the M23 rebels are sometimes referred to as mutineers. The seizure of territory near Rwanda boosts those in the Congolese government who have been insisting since early May that Rwanda is involved with the M23 conspirators. Over the past six weeks the Rwandan government has repeatedly denied it is supporting the M23 faction. That may be true but it does appear that the M23 rebels are receiving supplies that are moving through Rwandan territory. International mediators are trying to encourage negotiations between M23
and the government, but at the moment the government says it is not interested. The government intends to defeat M23 on the battlefield.

June 7, 2012: Ugandan Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels attacked a park ranger guard position in the Congo’s Garamba National Park. A group of park rangers discovered a large group of LRA fighters (possibly 50) in the park after investigating gunshots fired near an elephant herd. An hour-long firefight ensued and the park ranger patrol retreated. The park rangers believe they wounded several LRA rebels.

June 11, 2012: Several international agencies are saying that there is credible evidence that M23 rebel group, which is largely composed of former CNDP rebel fighters, is receiving aid from groups outside of the Congo. These new claims are in line with a UN report leaked in late May. Today the government claimed that 200 to 300 of the M23 rebels were recruited and trained in Rwanda. The government does not want to antagonize the Rwandan government. It does want Rwanda to help convince the mutineers to end their rebellion. The Rwandan government, however, denies any involvement in the M23 revolt. The CNDP was for the most part an organization run by Congolese Tutsis and the leadership of the Rwandan government is predominantly ethnic Tutsi.

June 12, 2012: Over 120 people have been killed in ethnic massacres (tribal fighting) during the last 30 days. The most serious massacre occurred between May 17, and May 22, in the Masisi region (North Kivu province). Two Mai-Mai militias (Raia Mutomboki and Kifuafua) are believed to be responsible for the Masisi murder spree. The Mai-Mai allegedly targeted natives of Rwanda. Most of the M23 rebels are from Rwanda, so the implication is the Mai-Mai militias moved into the Masisi region after M23 fighters left the area around May 7. Both rogue militias began as tribal defense organizations. The Kifuafua Mai-Mai militia was originally a Tembo tribal militia which formed in the mid-1990s. It fought against the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia. In 2010, the Kifuafua became angry with the central government because they felt they were being cheated out of political jobs some of their members were promised during peace negotiations. The Raia Mutomboki was another local militia in South Kivu province. Its militiamen clashed with the FDLR in 2011, in the Shabunda area. The Raia Mutomboki also participated in an attack on alleged FDLR supporters in March 2012. There are several other Mai-Mai militias that from time to time crop up in North and South Kivu provinces. The Mai-Mai tend to appear then disappear. Often times a new militia is just an old one with a new leader and the militia takes the new leader’s name. These include the Yakutumba Mai-Mai militia which was once run by a former army officer named Yakutumba. Other Mai-Mai that have operated in the Kivus include the Aochi, the Nyakiliba, the Mulumba, and the Kirikicho. The remnant
National Congolese Resistance (RNC) militia is also considered to be a Mai-Mai militia.

June 15, 2012: The UN Security Council condemned the army mutiny by the M23 rebel faction. The Security Council asked countries in the region to help stop the flow of supplies to the mutineers and urged other nations in the region to assist in demobilizing all armed militias in the region. The UN also reported that an estimated 200,000 refugees have fled fighting between the M23 rebels and the army. Other militias in North and South Kivu have been involved in chaotic fighting as well. Since mid-May, the mutiny in North Kivu province has had effects in other parts of the eastern Congo and could re-ignite a new regional war.

June 17, 2012: M23’s senior commander in the border region, Colonel Vianney Kazarama, said that his forces had seized a large quantity of weapons from the Congolese Army after a June 14 battle. Fighting continues around the towns of Mbuzi and Runyoni (Rwandan border area).

June 18, 2012: The March 23rd Movement (acronym is M23) rebels have seized a strip of territory along the Congo-Rwanda border. Both the UN and the government claim that M23 now controls an important border area, despite heavy attacks by government forces, including attack helicopters. M23 insists that they are not acting on behalf of former Congolese Army (FARDC) general, Bosco Ntaganda, but the government insists it has evidence that Ntaganda is M23’s leader. Ntaganda took over the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) after Laurent Nkunda was arrested in early 2009. The CNDP was largely manned by Congolese Tutsis. Ntaganda’s force was integrated into the Congolese Army in 2009, as part of the peace process. This is why the M23 rebels are sometimes referred to as mutineers. The seizure of territory near Rwanda boosts those in the Congolese government who have been insisting since early May that Rwanda is involved with the M23 conspirators. Over the past six weeks the Rwandan government has repeatedly denied it is supporting the M23 faction. That may be true but it does appear that the M23 rebels are receiving supplies that are moving through Rwandan territory. International mediators are trying to encourage negotiations between M23 and the government, but at the moment the government says it is not interested. The government intends to defeat M23 on the battlefield.
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June 21, 2012: Since the mid-1990s, when the great Congo War erupted, over five million people have died due to the conflict. That is the right way to word it – due to the conflict. Most of the dead died from exposure, starvation, and disease. Earlier this month, the UN reported that 204 peacekeepers have died in the conflict. The UN deployed armed soldiers in 2000.

June 24, 2012: Another seven Congolese army officers and some 170 soldiers have reportedly deserted and joined the M23 militia.

June 26, 2012: Despite new laws, illegal gold (conflict gold) is still being sold. Several reports have documented active trading in the town of Mongbwalu. Significant amounts of smuggled tantalum and tungsten are also reaching international markets.

June 29, 2012: The UN released a report on how Congolese rebel militias finance themselves. Crime is a favorite method. Rebel militias have robbed banks. The International Bank for Africa, in Goma, has been robbed twice. They also run extortion rackets, though they like to say they are collecting taxes. The rebels take cows from defenseless civilians. They set up illegal roadblocks, then take a percentage of a vehicle’s load as a transit fee. The biggest racket is smuggling precious metals, especially gold.

July 2, 2012: A new UN report has confirmed that Rwanda is supporting rebel militias in the eastern Congo. Officials indicated that the U.S. had temporarily blocked release of the UN investigation. However, the U.S. claimed that it had asked Rwanda to help prevent supplies from reaching the M23 rebels. The UN report said that Rwanda has provided weapons and recruits. Some Rwandan soldiers have also aided M23. Rwanda has denied the allegations.
July 6, 2012: M23 rebels attacked and seized the town of Bunagana (Uganda-Congo border). Some 600 Congolese soldiers fled into Uganda, where security forces disarmed them and gave them refugee status. Over 2,000 Congolese civilians also fled into Uganda. One UN peacekeeper died fighting in the area on July 5.

July 9, 2012: M23 rebels pulled out of the town of Rutshuru, which they seized July 8. M23 claimed that its fighters withdrew in order to prevent civilian casualties if a battle erupted in the town. A senior rebel officer said that M23 would continue to hold the town of Bunagana (Uganda-Congo border).

July 10, 2012: The army is sending a U.S.-trained infantry battalion to Goma. The battalion is currently in northern Congo, conducting operations against the Ugandan rebel Lord’s Resistance Army. The UN is also repositioning troops near the town of Goma, sending in a Ghanaian infantry unit. A special forces contingent with Egyptian, Jordanian, and Guatemalan special forces troops is also heading toward the town. The UN indicated that it is preparing to defend Goma from attack by M23 rebels. UN briefers said that M23 fighters have good equipment and are well-supplied.

July 12, 2012: UN and Congolese Army helicopter gunships attacked a M23 rebel position near Bukima village, 35 kilometers north of Goma (near the Rwandan border).

July 13, 2012: The UN reported that it has reinforced peacekeeping units in North Kivu province. Another contingent of UN forces has moved into Goma. The army reported that it had recaptured the towns of Rutshuru and Kiwanja. Both towns had been under the control of M23 fighters. M23 claimed that its fighters withdrew from the town and would retake them if M23 supporters in the towns are threatened by government security forces.

July 14, 2012: Uganda has beefed up military and police units along the Congo-Uganda border, in order to stop spill-over violence from battles between the Congolese Army and the M23 rebel militia. Special police security units have increased patrols in and near the town of Nteko.

July 15, 2012: The Congo and Rwanda have signed an agreement to eliminate armed rebel groups in the eastern Congo. Key leaders of both countries put their personal stamp of approval on the deal, face to face. The agreement is designed to insure that the Rwandan government is not supplying the M23 rebels. The African Union said that it is willing to send peacekeeping troops to the eastern Congo in order to stop armed rebel groups.
July 16, 2012: The M23 rebel military, led by General Bosco Ntaganda, continues to hold the town of Bunagana, on the Congo-Uganda border. M23’s rebel fighters now face a reinforced UN peacekeeping contingent. However, M23 has demonstrated that it is able to defeat the Congolese Army (FARDC) any time it decides to make a concerted effort. The rebels appeared to be driving toward Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. However, the UN has reinforced the town. Still, the rebels have positioned their main force to threaten Goma, which is a major transit point for Congolese mineral shipments (tin and tantalum, mainly). M23 can also control other trade routes (like Bunagana) north of Goma, or at least close them. M23 maintains that it is willing to negotiate with the government and will turn over the towns they control to UN forces if the government agrees to talks. M23 has around 1,500 to 2,000 fighters in the area most of them ethnic Tutsis. Many of them once served in the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) militia and were subsequently integrated into the Congolese Army after the 2009 peace agreement. In March and April of this year they began defecting from the Congolese Army. M23 takes its name from the date the Congolese peace agreement was signed, March 23, 2009.

July 18, 2012: Congo-K - Aid as prelude to code revision'

The Promines program co-financed by the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA) to the tune of $90 million and by Britain’s Department for International Development, which is throwing in $40 million, was inaugurated in Kinshasa on July 5 by minister of mines Martin Kabwelulu.
July 20, 2012: M23 is solidifying its control of the town of Bunagana (Uganda-Congo border) and a strip of territory west of the town (Congolese side). M23 also controls the Runyonyi and Jomba areas. The Congolese government stated that it believes M23 intends to attack North Kivu’s capital, Goma.

July 22, 2012: The Rwandan government denied accusations that it is supporting the M23 rebel movement in the Congo.

July, 2012 - Warlord Thomas Lubanga becomes first person convicted by the International Criminal Court since it was set up 10 years ago. He is sentenced to 14 years in jail for using child soldiers in his rebel army in 2002 and 2003.

July 24, 2012: The army fought with M23 rebel forces in and around the town of Kibumba and Rugari (North Kivu province, eastern Congo). The two towns are north of the provincial capital, Goma. UN forces employed helicopter gunships in the battle. The UN also estimated that at least 260,000 Congolese have fled their homes since April in order to escape M23 fighters. Rebels and government forces traded heavy weapons fire around two eastern villages on Friday, forcing thousands of civilians to flee towards the provincial capital days ahead of a regional summit due to tackle the rebellion.

July 25, 2012: The UN is seeking more support for the Congolese Army. Congolese soldiers report that they are not receiving their pay, that they are under-paid when they do, and that their living conditions are poor. All of that is true. The request may help have a political angle. Improving Congolese Army conditions would make it less likely that Congolese soldiers would rebel and join various rebel militia groups still operating in the eastern Congo.

August 1, 2012: M23 is getting the headlines but the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) is still operating in the eastern Congo. The FDLR is primarily a Rwandan Hutu tribal force and has ties to the Hutu radicals who instigated the 1994 genocide. In many ways the Hutu-Tutsi struggle in Rwanda is continuing in the eastern Congo. Though Rwanda now stands accused of supporting the M23 rebels, the Congolese government has let Rwandan Army units track and pursue FDLR rebels in the eastern Congo. Rwanda and Congo have coordinated military operations against the FDLR.

August 2, 2012: The UN Security Council stated that foreign nations must end their support for Congolese rebels, specifically the M23 rebel group. Essentially the UN condemned Rwanda without naming Rwanda.

August 9, 2012: The government rejected calls for negotiations with the M23 rebel group and said that it will not negotiate with the rebels. It still
The government of the eastern Congo also said that it would not support any peacekeeping force in the eastern Congo that included Rwandan troops. The government prefers UN peacekeepers and it wants UN forces to take a more active role in confronting M23.

August 15, 2012: The Rwandan government said that the UN Group of Experts on the Congo is acting in bad faith. Rwanda contended the UN report was filled with inaccuracies. Rwanda contended that it has not supplied M23 with weapons and that M23 has access to weapons (including heavy weapons, like multiple rocket launchers) that were seized in 2008, by the CNDP militia and then hidden. The government accused one member of the UN study group of having a benign view of radical Hutu organizations like the FDLR and had published an article that described the FDLR as victims of the Rwandan Tutsi government. Essentially, Rwanda claimed that the UN study exhibited an anti-Tutsi tribal bias. Welcome to African politics and political interpretation.

August 18, 2012: The Congo is a topic at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) annual summit. The South African government told the summit that Rwanda must end its support for Congolese rebels in the eastern Congo. South Africa was referring to UN and Congolese accusations that Rwanda supports the M23 rebel movement.

August 19, 2012: The stand-off with the M23 rebel group continues in the Bunagana area. Since the beginning of the month, a tentative ceasefire has been arranged between the Congolese Army and the M23 fighters but the government believes that the M23 militia is reorganizing and preparing for another round of fighting.

August 21, 2012: The government responded to critics who argue that Zimbabwe should not be allowed to deploy peacekeeping troops in the Congo. The government said that Zimbabwean troops contributed to stability when they deployed into the Congo during the Great Congo War. Others remember Zimbabwean participation quite differently. The Zimbabwean forces reportedly committed many atrocities and plundered Congolese mineral resources. Zimbabwe sent troops to the Congo in 1998, and only withdrew them in 2001. A UN study found evidence that Zimbabwean Army officers and senior members of Zimbabwe’s governing ZANU-PF party made money by selling and smuggling Congolese resources. It is also argued that Angola should not be allowed to participate in an AU sponsored peacekeeping force that may deploy into the eastern Congo. Angolan and Namibian forces also intervened in 1998. The Zimbabwean, Angolan, and Namibian forces are sometimes referred to as the SADC (Southern African Development Community) contingent in the Great Congo War, or the SADC Alliance. At the time Zimbabwe’s
dictator, Robert Mugabe, justified sending troops because he contended the Uganda and Rwanda had invaded the Congo. In 2009, the Angolan government stated that SADC’s Standby Brigade was ready to intervine in the Congo, if asked. SADC has 15 members, Malawi, Angola, Congo, Republic of Congo, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Mauritius, Lesotho, Mozambique, Madagascar, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the Seychelles. (Austin Bay)

August 24, 2012: MONUSCO now has around 4,000 peacekeeping troops deployed in the northeastern Congo. The last thing Congo needs is more ethnic strife, but Congo’s northeastern Ituri district is once again experiencing ethnic tensions that include echoes of tribal separatism. The FRPI (Patriotic Resistance Front in Ituri) militia group now controls an area around Lake Albert (about 100 kilometers south of Ituri’s capital, Bunia). The FRPI claims that it has formed an alliance with the PFDDI (Popular Front for Durable Development in Ituri), the RAF (Revolutionary Armed Forces) militia, and the IAFI (Integrated Armed Forces of Ituri). Allegedly the alliance wants the Congolese government to make Ituri a province. Ituri, as Kibali-Ituri, was a Congolese province from 1962 to 1966. It is now governed by the Ituri Interim Administration as part of Congo’s Orientale province. However, Rwanda and also Uganda have been accused of supporting various rebel groups in the eastern Congo, including the M23 Movement which still controls a large chunk of territory in the Congo’s North Kivu province, including a strip near the Ugandan border. The UN’s Group of Experts on the Congo (GoE Congo) has accused Rwanda of providing M23 with material and financial support. Rwanda denies the accusation. However, many of the M23 rebels were associated with Laurent Nkunda’s CNDP (National Congress for the Defense of the People) militia. Rwanda supported the CNDP until January 2009. The CNDP was regarded as a Congolese Tutsi militia. The M23 Movement takes its name from March 23, 2009, the date M23 the 2009 peace agreement that was signed. The agreement was supposed to end the war and chaos in the eastern Congo. It promised rebel groups that they would have political rights and various economic opportunities. M23 rebels contend that the government has violated the peace agreement. M23 began operations in April 2012. (Austin Bay)

August 31, 2012: Several international organizations have suggested that a peacekeeping force composed of African Union (AU) nations deploy into the eastern Congo. UN officials in Africa began discussing it publicly late last year but the idea has circulated in the diplomatic community for several years. The concept of an African peacekeeping brigade of some sort has bounced around at least since the 1970s. The code phrase for the Congo is deploying a neutral regional force, or some variation. The AU would likely sponsor the force, if it is organized, and the UN might sponsor it as well. Critics point out that the UN peacekeeping force is an
international force. They point that out not to criticize the AU but to note that the UN is losing interest in the Congo and its intractable problems. That is the dirty little public secret about the UN Stabilization Force in the Congo (MONUSCO) operation. MONUSCO still deploys around 20,000 personnel (soldiers, police, administrators, etc.) in the Congo but UN members are frustrated and are tired of paying the bill. The diplomats reply that a regional force would bring a regional political commitment to stopping the chaos and bloodletting in the eastern Congo. That political commitment ought to translate into regional efforts to stop the smuggling of minerals and weapons that help finance the various militias and gangs operating in the eastern Congo. In early August the defense ministers of Burundi, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Rwanda, Angola, Tanzania, and Uganda met with the Congolese defense minister and discussed the idea of creating an African regional force for policing the eastern Congo, and there was interest in creating the force.

September 14, 2012: Democratic Republic of Congo: one kick can promote tolerance'

Masisi – Few activities in the world are as effective as sports in bridging differences, building community, or educating young people about peace. The JRS inter-school football tournament, 'Pamoja Tutashinda', or 'together we'll win' in Kiswahili, allowed for students, referees and spectators to forget about divisions between the local and displaced populations, about ethnic differences, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The football competition sent a clear message to the population: a united community is a stronger community.

The tournament: Over a period of four months, from March to July, 54 teams from as many secondary schools weathered muddy pitches throughout the Masisi district giving life to intense games. Despite a few inevitable objections from one team or another, the motto of the competition was fair play and honesty among students on the field. In the weeks prior to the tournament, JRS staff offered training to coaches, referees and linesmen not only on tactics and offside rules but also on enforcing discipline and promoting fairness among players.

September 15, 2012: South Korea recently put another "Sejong The Great" class destroyer into service after nine months of sea trials. This is the third, and possibly last, of these Aegis equipped warships. The first one entered service four years ago. These ships are also called KDX-III (Korean Destroyer Experimental) class guided missile destroyers, and were designed to operate far from South Korea. This was part of a plan to give South Korea an international (or at least regional) naval capability. That plan changed two years ago after North Korea sank a South Korean corvette with a torpedo and shelled a South Korean island off the west coast. Now South Korea is scrambling to build more coast protection
vessels and enhance anti-submarine capabilities. The KDX III was preceded by the 3,900 ton KDX-I in 1998, and the 5,500 ton KDX-II in 2002. The 9,900 ton KDX-IIIIs are approximately the same size as the U.S. Navy's Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyers. Actually, the KDX III is a little larger than the Burkes, and have 128 VLS cells for missiles, compared to 96 on the Burkes. The VLS tubes usually carry 80 SM-2 anti-aircraft missiles, 32 cruise missiles and 16 rocket launched anti-submarine torpedoes. There are also six anti-submarine torpedo tubes. There is also a 6 inch (127mm) gun, two 30mm auto-cannon and a multiple cell launcher of Rolling Airframe Missiles for anti-missile defense. The KDX can also carry two helicopters. The KDX-III is the first Korean ship large enough to carry the AEGIS system, and may get anti-missile upgrade (which some Japanese Aegis ships have). Built in South Korea, the KDX IIIIs cost about $930 million each. Instead of building more KDX IIIIs, there is more interest in having more KDX IIs, and modernizing the ones already in service. Six KDX IIs are already in service, and they are adequate for dealing with North Korea and China. Meanwhile, the third KDX III had an additional hundred tons of torpedo protection added to its hull. South Korea is also seriously considering upgrading the Aegis air defense systems on the KDX III so that it can use the anti-missile version of the SM-2 anti-aircraft missile, or the even more capable SM-3 anti-missile missile. South Korea says that its KDX-III Aegis radar can currently spot any ballistic missile launch in North Korea.

September 25, 2012: Congolese living near the Congo-Uganda border told media that the unofficial ceasefire between M23 rebels and the Congolese Army continues to hold. The local Congolese apparently reported on the situation using cell phones. Phoned-in reports from locals are a bit like refugee reports. They are not always accurate and some times they are just rumors. However, the eastern Congo is huge and reporters cannot move around easily due to bad roads, bandits, and warfare. A reliable local source with a cell phone is often (if not always) more trustworthy than any government source or a rebel spokesman.

September 28, 2012: Democratic Republic of Congo: victims of sexual violence find the courage to share their experiences' Updates: Goma – It was a day like any other in one of the literacy centres for displaced women, managed by the Jesuit Refugee Service in North Kivu in eastern Congo. But here the students were not just learning to read and write, they were exploring delicate issues of sexual and other violence, as part of a healing process. The course brings a sense to structure to the lives of these displaced women. It not only offers them a place where they can improve their survival skills, it is a private and safe space where they can share experiences of violence in this war-torn region. When the JRS training officer touched the argument of sexual violence, the women, one by one, raised their hands and spoke about their experiences. Opening up
and speaking about their experiences, they shared their memories of feeling vulnerable, their desire for protection by authorities and their right to justice for the crimes committed against them. It was the first time these women had spoken among themselves about their traumatic experiences of sexual violence at the hands of armed men groups and civilians. The issue is taboo and when made public typically leads to the stigmatisation of women survivors of sexual violence by their communities.

Witness: JRS spoke to two women who courageously decided to speak out, run the risk of social stigmatisation. The first, Diane*, was ambushed by Congolese military while looking for firewood. After desperately trying to defend herself, the men finally overpowered her. Thrown against a tree, hit repeatedly on the back and head, they tore off Diane's clothes and raped her. Although she courageously reported the attack to the police, the soldiers, Diane said, were just transferred to another district. Diane revealed that from that day on she has felt terrible and lost all ability to concentrate.

The second woman, Divine*, was a widow forced to flee her home village to seek safety in a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) during the war. Here, a man broke into Divine's home in the middle of the night and raped her. Consequently, she became pregnant and gave birth to twins in the camp. Divine's family disowned her, refused to help her or the children and accused her of being responsible for the rape. Since then the young woman has been afraid of cultivating crops on her land. Divine asks that the perpetrator be brought to justice and that she be guaranteed some form of financial reparation.

Sexual-and gender-based violence plagues communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to a 2011 study published in the American Journal of Public Health, 48 women every hour are subjected to sexual-and gender-based violence throughout Congo. The consequences of these crimes on the physical and mental health of victims are devastating. Due to the inadequacy of the Congolese judicial system and the widespread climate of impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence (frequently members of armed group and the military), the survivors are rarely guaranteed the justice.

Protection: In North Kivu, the dignity of women and their right to physical, mental and moral integrity is constantly violated. Women urgently need protection against rape and all other forms of violence, the responsibility, in primis, of the Congolese authorities. In line with their respective mandates, the UN peacekeeping force, MONUSCO, and the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) should also play a fundamental role in the protection of the rights of the displaced.
October 1, 2012: UN observers reported that the M23 rebel has begun to act like a government in the border area it controls. The M23 enclave borders on Rwanda and Uganda. Local sources claimed that M23 officials are collecting taxes in the area. One reported that M23 is imposing a transit tax on individuals passing through the enclave.

October 3, 2012: The Congolese military acknowledged that earlier this year it planned to transfer General Bosco Ntaganda from his Congolese Army post in the eastern Congo. Ntaganda is the leader of the M23 rebel group. Corruption was the reason the government was going to transfer him to another part of the Congo. The government is basically arguing that the real reason for the rebellion is that Ntaganda was not going to give up his control of various mining and smuggling operations.

October, 2012 - The UN Security Council announces its intention to impose sanctions against leaders of the M23 rebel movement and violators of the DRC arms embargo. A UN panel says Rwanda and Uganda are supplying M23 with weapons and support, which both countries deny.

October 16, 2012: A new UN investigation has alleged that Rwanda’s defense minister is directly involved with the M23 rebel movement. According to the investigators, there is also evidence that the Ugandan government has ties to the M23 rebels. The contention that Rwanda’s defense minister is somehow in M23’s chain of command, however, is explosive. Both Rwanda and Uganda vehemently reject accusations that their governments support M23. Rwandan General James Kabarebe is the Minister of Defense. He allegedly helped create the M23 group.

October 19, 2012: M23 rebels attacked a Congolese Army (FARDC) position near the town of Kirolirwe (North Kivu province, eastern Congo). There were also reports of firefights near the town of Sake. M23 said that its fighters launched the attack in order to seize weapons from the Congolese Army. M23 claimed that another ethnic Congolese Tutsi rebel group also collaborated in the attack and said the group consisted of former members of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). This is the first reported engagement since early September.

October 20, 2012: The UN Security Council said that it will impose direct sanctions on the M23 rebel movement leaders and will stiffen penalties imposed on countries and organizations supplying M23 with money and weapons. The announcement is not without irony. Rwanda became a member of the Security Council (rotating membership) on October 18 and will serve on the Council for two years. The Security Council also passed a non-binding resolution condemning M23 for its attacks on civilians, humanitarian aid groups, and UN peacekeepers.
October 26, 2012: The Congo’s vast Virunga National Park continues to serve as a haven for rebels. A Mai Mai militia group attacked a park facility and killed two park rangers and a Congolese soldier. Five of the Mai Mai militiamen died in the attack. M23 allegedly has a base camp inside the park.

In late October, 2012: The UN Group of Experts Released Report not for the first time, recommends tough sanctions against Uganda and Rwanda for supporting rebels DR Congo’s M23 rebel group. The latest report has accuses Uganda and Rwanda of supporting DR Congo’s M23 rebel group. But why do Uganda and Rwanda continue to get away with such activities? The reasons are both economic and geo-strategic. Although there are doubts that such sanctions will ever be implemented, this nevertheless represents a moral victory for the Congolese people who have long told the world that external players are partly responsible for the turmoil in Eastern Congo.

October 31, 2012: Congo-K - Mining code reforms: state wants bigger share'

Kinshasa is revising its 2002 mining code in the hope of getting a fatter share of profits from the sector. This forms part of a wider trend in Africa that worries mining operators. According to information gleaned on the sidelines of a conference staged by the Chambre de Commerce Belgique-Luxembourg-ACP in Brussels on Oct

November 1, 2012: The Congo’s M23 (March 23rd) rebel group has given itself a new name. M23 now wants to be called the Congolese Revolutionary Army (CRA). The rebel group claimed it has around 2,000 fighters and is seeking more recruits. Several observers have estimated that M23 fields 1,000 fighters. Whatever its strength and whatever its name, M23’s leaders have gained confidence since their rebellion began in Spring 2012. On October 23 an M23 spokesman said that the rebel group would take control of more Congolese territory if the national government continued to refuse to conduct direct peace negotiations. The spokesman said that M23’s territorial aims could extend well beyond the enclave it currently controls and beyond North Kivu province.

November 5, 2012: Rwanda accused a group of Congolese Army soldiers of intentionally violating the Congo-Rwanda border. The incident occurred near the town of Kibumba (13 kilometers north of the Congolese border city of Goma). Rwanda claimed that the Congolese soldiers crossed the border on a reconnaissance mission. A Rwandan military spokesman called the border crossing a provocation. The term provocation indicates the Rwandans believe the incident was intentional. After the Congolese crossed the border, a firefight erupted between the Congolese soldiers and a detachment of Rwandan soldiers leaving one Congolese soldier dead and
a Rwandan soldier wounded. Both the Rwandan and Congolese governments regard the incident as serious. It is the first confirmed firefight between Congolese and Rwandan military units since 2001.

November 9, 2012: M23 rebels accused the Congolese Army of attacking its position near Kitagoma (Uganda-Congo border). The alleged attack left ten civilians dead. The rebels claimed that government forces had broken the ceasefire in the area and called the attack a provocation. The Congolese government denied that its forces had attacked Kitagoma and said that the town is under the complete control of the rebel movement. The government said that Kitagoma is deep in rebel territory and that its troops could not possibly have launched an attack on the town.

November 14, 2012: The UN has been investigating a series of massacres in the eastern Congo, allegedly committed by the Raia Mutomboki and Nyatura Mai-Mai militia groups. Both groups have used the Congolese Army’s focus on M23 to expand their areas of control. UN investigators have found evidence that since late April 2012, the militias have murdered 264 in the eastern Congo.

November 14, 2012: Congo-K: State to acquire 35% of shares in new companies'

The Federation des Entreprises Congolaises (FEC) is deeply concerned about a clause in the mining code that’s currently being drafted.

November 14, 2012: Democratic Republic of Congo: stop the forgotten conflict in Masisi'

Updates: Masisi (North Kivu), Rome – Since last August, communities living in Masisi district in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have been displaced on a daily basis and at least 18 have been murdered, caught between tit-for-tat attacks by opposing rebel groups. Unless the peacekeeping forces (MONUSCO) and the Congolese army urgently intervene to protect the civilian population, more innocent lives will be lost. Over the last six months, MONUSCO forces have been supporting the Congolese army in putting down the rebellion by the March 23 Movement (M23) in the nearby district of Rutshuru. Focused on responding to the security threat caused by M23 rebels, the Congolese army left several parts of Masisi district unprotected, conceding freedom of movement to rebel groups – some in formal alliances with M23.

During this period, more than 320,000 people have been forcibly displaced in North Kivu. Although most of this is the result of the conflict between government and M23 forces in Rutshuru, many have been displaced by the violence in Masisi. "This has caused an unjustifiable lack of protection for the population in Masisi district. While it is clearly necessary that civilians attacked by M23 be protected, this should not happen at the cost
of innocent lives – mainly women and children – elsewhere in the region. The population feels abandoned by MONUSCO forces which has failed in its mandate", said a JRS staff member in Masisi. The Jesuit Refugee Service in Masisi has witnessed first-hand the consequences of the alarming escalation of violence between rebel groups from the Hunde and Hutu communities, as well as between other armed groups active in the area. In addition to the immediate consequences of the violence, the attacks leave many groups – women, children, older people, those with disabilities and health problems – in particularly vulnerable circumstances, without assistance from aid agencies and support from other community members.

A climate of fear currently reigns in the Hutu and Hunde communities in Masisi. Increased attention needs to be urgently provided by the international community, one which answers the pleas for security and humanitarian aid and pushes Congolese political, civil and military authorities to guarantee the protection of these populations. Otherwise free reign will continue to be given to militias responsible for the killing of innocent children, women and men.

Recent events: Between 27 and 29 September 2012, a number of Hunde villages near Loashi and Shoa districts were burned down by members of Nyatura, a Hutu militia group.

On 30 September, Hunde motorcyclist was murdered in Loashi, allegedly by a Hutu militia.

On 30 September, despite heavy rains and the presence of a MONUSCO base less than a kilometre away, members of the Hunde community burned several huts in the Kilimani camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), forcing many residents, mostly Hutus, to seek safety in other camps or with family members. Even though most people in Masisi were aware of the high risk of an attack, MONUSCO made no plans to prevent the violence and protect the IDPs.

After a few days of relative calm, following the intervention of the local authorities, the massacres recommenced. On 3 November, four Hunde women and two children were murdered by machete at the hands of the Nyatura militia. The women had been gathering food a few kilometres from Masisi town and were said to have been raped before being killed.

On 4 November, members of the Hunde community carried the bodies of the victims to the building of the local Masisi authorities, demanding their community be provided with security.

On 11 November, a Hutu man was killed by members of the Hunde militia FDC (Forces de Défense du Congo) in Ngote village. FDC members subsequently burned down several villages around Buhabo, causing
further forced displacement. Hutu community members later carried the body to the Masisi town council, demanding their community be protected, as was done a week earlier by the Hunde community.

On 12 November, a Hutu armed group responded by burning down several Hunde villages around Masisi town. Thousands of people have reached Masisi town in seeking safety from the violence. In Mashaki village five dead bodies have been found; a woman and six children are still missing. Later that day, several Hutu villages were burned down. Most IDPs in Kilimani have yet to return to the camp for fear of further violence and due to cuts in food delivery since 30 September. They continue to live in extremely precarious conditions without any assistance.

JRS in North Kivu: JRS started to work in North Kivu in 2008, in the camps for displaced populations around Goma. After the sudden closure of the camps in September 2009, JRS followed the people to their areas of origin and to places of new displacement. JRS currently works in two areas of North Kivu: Masisi and Mweso districts.

Masisi: Established in 2010, JRS has since expanded its services to five official and other makeshift IDP camps, offering formal and informal education and emergency assistance. In addition to the construction and renovation of secondary schools, JRS teams provide education materials and teacher training in 84 secondary schools. Special attention is paid to the needs of women. As such, literacy courses and skills training are provided for women, many of whom are victims of sexual violence. The third component of the project is to provide one-to-one assistance to older people and persons with disabilities. Where necessary, staff refer these individuals to other agencies. More recently, with the establishment of five unofficial camps, JRS has begun providing food and plastic sheeting in three of the camps where people are living in extreme poverty.

November 2012 - M23 troops briefly enter Goma, the main city in the resources-rich east, then withdraw on promise government will release some of their supporters.

November 15, 2012: Some 700 M23 rebels engaged a Congolese Army unit near Rugari (30 kilometers north of Goma) at around 5 in the morning. Army commanders claimed to have killed 44 M23 fighters. The Rugari battle definitely breaks what had been a tentative ceasefire in the area. M23 claimed that Congolese Army units attacked its position at Kitagoma on November 9, a charge the government vehemently denied.

November 17, 2012: M23 rebels took the town of Kibumba. The town is 30 kilometers north of Goma. A rebel column continued moving south towards Goma.
UN peacekeepers were informed that M23 rebels have access to very good military equipment. M23 fighters have night vision devices and know how to use them in night time combat operations.

November 18, 2012: M23 rebels struck a village on the outskirts of Goma. The rebel force hit the village with mortar and machine gun fire.

November 19, 2012: Several mortar rounds struck the city of Goma and killed four people. The mortar shells may have been fired from Rwandan territory. UN peacekeepers had engaged M23 rebel fighters on November 18 as the main rebel force advanced toward the city of Goma. Helicopter gunships and artillery supported the UN peacekeepers. The UN forces appear to be fighting a delaying action. The UN Security Council has condemned M23’s advance on Goma. Interestingly enough, the M23 advance on Goma is strikingly similar to the CNDP’s advance on Goma in 2008. However, the CNDP did not attack the city.

Meanwhile, M23 said that it had positioned a large force on the outskirts of Goma. M23 has a checkpoint about 100 meters from a Congolese Army checkpoint just outside of Goma. M23 issued an ultimatum to the effect that if the government refused to start negotiations it would continue its operations in the Goma rea. An M23 spokesman demanded that Congolese Army units withdraw from Goma. The government refused to begin face to face negotiations to discuss M23’s grievances and said that the Congolese Army would defend the city of Goma.

November 20, 2012: The rebel group M23 entered the city of Goma after scattering several Congolese Army units. M23 fighters controlled the airport and occupied the city’s central district. The Congolese government claimed that it still had forces in the city, but by the end of the day international observers confirmed that M23 had taken control of the city. Goma is the capital of North Kivu province.

November 21, 2012: A column of M23 rebels took the town of Sake, 27 kilometers west of Goma. Meanwhile, an M23 commander in Goma said M23 would advance on Kinshasha and overthrow the Congolese government. An advance on Kinshasha from the eastern Congo would be quite an undertaking, essentially marching through the heart of the Congolese jungle. The threat, however, serves a political purpose. It is another signal that M23 wants everyone to think it has national ambitions. Perhaps it does. The threat also establishes a negotiating position. The threats take on more meaning now that Vital Kamehre, the opposition politician who finished third in last year’s presidential election, has urged the government to negotiate with M23.

November 21, 2012: Democratic Republic of Congo: precarious lives of displaced persons in Masisi'
Updates: On the one hand displaced Congolese are living in constant fear of the imminent arrival of the March 23 Movement (M23) rebels, which have already taken control of Goma, the North Kivu capital in eastern Congo. On the other hand, day in, day out they are suffering the effects of the violent attacks of numerous rebel groups in the area. This is the precarious situation in which the inhabitants of Masisi district, approximately 100 kilometres from Goma, have been living for the past several days.

Flight in the forest: "We abandoned our homes unable to bring food with us. We fled into the forest with only one objective in mind, our safety. And we don't have any idea of when or how we will return home", said Paluku*, an inhabitant of Masisi, who fled his home on Sunday 25 November following the outbreak of fighting between the Congolese army and an ethnic Mai-Mai militia group. Severe fighting began on Sunday after the Mai-Mai militia, which is believed to be allied with the M23, attempted to take control of the weapons of the Congolese army. The rebels, many of whom defected from the ranks of the national army last April, were reported to have marched towards other areas of North Kivu, including Masisi, in the last seven days, in an attempt to defeat other armed groups active in the area. "When we heard gunfire, we witnessed the mass flight of the population of Masisi. In the beginning, many sought safety in the parish, then they began fleeing towards Nyabiondo. People had a look of fear in their eyes", said a staff member of Masisi.

A sense of insecurity: Many people, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), found refuge in the nearby Bukombo camp, where they crowded together in school buildings. "We don't have anything to eat or drink. Above all, the women and children are in a state of shock. And we don't have any idea of when we'll finally have peace. Today we fled from the Mai-Mai militias, tomorrow it may be from M23", Paluku told a JRS staff member. Notwithstanding the deterioration of the crisis in North Kivu following the fall of Goma to M23 rebels, JRS teams in Masisi district briefly re-established its formal and informal education activities, including the construction of a secondary school. Bora Mwazo, a 24-year-old displaced mother of four, is one of the students of the JRS literacy and vocational training courses. She decided to return to the school in Masisi where she is learning to be a tailor, despite the climate of insecurity and fear. "People say the M23 rebels will arrive shortly in Masisi, and when that happens I don't know how I will be able to flee with my children or where I'll be able to go. But today I wanted to come to school to find a little peace and forget about the war", the women said a few days ago.

The state of Bora Mwazo and her family is unknown at the moment. What is certain is that the young woman feared the arrival of M23 forces and eventually fled fighting between the army and the Mai-Mai militia. We do not know whether or not she managed to find refuge from the various
armed groups. Regardless of the armed groups responsible for the violence, Bora's situation is emblematic of the insecurity in the lives of those living in Masisi and North Kivu. Meanwhile, after an outbreak of recent violence, JRS has been forced to suspend all activities in Masisi. Danilo Giannese, Advocacy and Communications Officer, Jesuit Refugee Service Great Lakes Africa

November 21, 2012: Democratic Republic of Congo: clashes in Goma leave thousands in urgent need of assistance'

Updates: Bujumbura – Tens of thousands of women, children and men are currently fleeing areas around the North Kivu capital Goma, in eastern Congo, as a consequence of a violent armed advance conducted by the rebel group, March 23 Movement (M23) which took control of the city yesterday. According to Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and other humanitarian field staff, the civilian population, including thousands of families living in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in other areas of North Kivu, are reportedly in desperate need of food, shelter and other material assistance. However, most humanitarian and UN agencies have evacuated most of their field staff for security reasons. "We have evacuated nearly all our staff from Goma. Given the security situation, all our activities, including assistance programmes in the camps, have been suspended. However, our teams in nearby Masisi and Mweso are still in situ as the roads out of the country are too dangerous. We're particularly concerned about our local teams who are currently separated from their families in Goma. Fortunately, they've been in contact with their families and everyone is safe", said JRS Great Lakes Advocacy and Communications Officer, Danilo Giannese, who himself was forced to leave Goma a few days ago. "The situation is tragic. The consequences of the ongoing crisis in Goma are especially acute for individuals living in particularly vulnerable circumstances, such as children, older people, those with disabilities and health problems. They are often unable to flee the fighting, find safe haven or support themselves", continued Mr Giannese.

Abandoned to their fate: Since the evacuation of most JRS staff, teams are unable to answer questions regarding the fate of the women, men and children in the most vulnerable circumstances. "Did they survive the fighting yesterday? Did they find a temporary shelter from the tropical rains common to the region in this season? Did they find something to eat and medicines for their ailments? It's terrible, but we just don't know. Forced to evacuate from the most volatile areas, we don't have any information, for instance, on the fate of Hakizimana Uhwirire, a 25-year-old wheelchair-bound man" added Mr Giannese. Last month, after his temporary home in an IDP camp in North Kivu was burned down following an incursion of armed groups in Masisi, JRS transferred Hakizimana's
family to another camp on the outskirts of Goma. Hakizimana, his mother and younger brother, believed they had finally reached a safe haven far away from the violent conflicts in Masisi district, the consequences of which were documented by JRS in a press release published on 14 November. "Here we will be safe, we will not risk our lives and we can think of rebuilding our existences", he told a JRS staff member that very day. When humanitarian organisations operating in the camp built his new home, his eyes filled with hope that a new life was about to start for him and his family in improved conditions and peace. He expressed the desire to go back to school and work as a shoemaker in the camp to earn some money for his family. Hakizimana's hopes lasted less than thirty days: crumbling as M23 rebels advanced towards Goma. Engaged in violent clashes, both the Congolese army and the M23 rebels have committed a number of human rights violations, such as abduction of civilians, looting and destruction of properties. Danilo Giannese, Advocacy and Communications Officer, Jesuit Refugee Service, Great Lakes Africa and James Stapleton, International Communications Coordinator, Jesuit Refugee Service

November 22, 2012: The government suspended General Gabriel Amisi, chief of staff of the Congolese Army. A UN investigation accused Amisi of selling weapons to criminals (poachers) and several rebel groups, particularly the Mai Mai Raia Mutomboki militia.

M23 rebel commanders rejected requests made by several international leaders that they withdraw their forces from the Congolese city of Goma. A senior rebel commander said that, on the contrary, the rebel army would seize more territory. Another said that the group would continue to hold Goma, pending negotiations with the Congolese government. Among the leaders asking M23 to withdraw were the presidents of neighboring Rwanda and Uganda. Both nations have been accused of helping the rebel movement.

November 24, 2012: The leaders of Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania urged the M23 rebel group to accept a cease fire and to quit threatening to topple the Congolese government. The four leaders met in Uganda for a special summit. The leaders also told the rebel group to withdraw from Goma (North Kivu province, on the Rwanda-Congo border). The group also proposed deploying a regional peacekeeping force supplied by neutral nations. The force would deploy as a joint force to Goma’s airport. The leaders of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, however, also asked the president of the Congo, Joseph Kabila (who attended the summit) to listen to the rebels’ grievances.

November 25, 2012: In mid-summer 2012, media and UN observers in the eastern Congo estimated that the M23 rebel group fielded 1,000 fighters, with 2,000 fighters being the highest estimate. There were,
However, reports of new recruits showing up (perhaps from Rwanda) and a steady trickle of defectors from the Congolese Army (FARDC). Several of the defectors identified themselves as Congolese Tutsi tribesmen. Like the initial group of mutineers which formed M23, several defectors indicated that they had served in the CNDP (National Congress for Defense of the People) militia prior to joining the FARDC. The CNDP was a predominantly Congolese Tutsi militia. M23 never gave an official strength figure, but its leaders always claimed the organization had more manpower than the Congolese government and international observers said it had. When M23 changed its name to the Congolese Revolutionary Army (CRA) its leaders asserted that the new name reflected the movement’s increasing strength. It also demonstrated that it had a national mission. The name change has not stuck and most media continue to refer to the organization as M23. However, it does indeed represent a major challenge to the Congolese government in Kinshasha. Within the past two weeks, a UN analyst said M23 fielded between 2,500 and 3,000 fighters. Other international observers estimate that M23 may have as many as 6,000 fighters. The UN’s 3,000 figure and the 6,000 figure are best guesses, but the bottom line is that the movement has indeed attracted more volunteers. Based on recent M23 operations, 6,000 is a very reasonable figure. The rebels took the city of Goma on November 20. For M23, seizing Goma is a major military and political victory. Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, has over a million residents and is the most important city in Congo’s vast eastern region. Taking Goma from the army (which had some assistance from UN peacekeeping forces) certainly demonstrated that the rebel group can field a strong offensive striking force while simultaneously holding its base camps in the border area it took in July and August. The rebels also have smaller columns operating to the west of Goma. When considering the distances and the area, 6,000 fighters might be on the low-side.

Taking Goma is also an information warfare boon for M23. For reporters, Goma is much easier to reach than a jungle base camp. M23 commanders have been making public statements about political change in the Congo and international television crews have been recording the speeches and showing the crowds. Reporters in Goma have now had a chance to get a closer and longer look at the rebels and their weapons. The rebels have some first-rate equipment. For example, the UN claimed that peacekeepers have seen M23 fighters using night-vision equipment. It also appears that M23 fighters have a lot of weapons that once belonged to the Congolese Army, though when and precisely how the weapons were acquired depends on who tells the story. There are numerous allegations of corrupt Congolese Army officers selling weapons and supplies to M23 although rebel commanders claim they took the weapons in battle and that they have also seized several FARDC ammunition caches. No doubt M23 fighters have picked up weapons on the battlefield. Goma was a
FARDC supply base and a base for UN peacekeepers. However, this spoils of battle explanation also works as a cover story masking supply shipments from sources in Rwanda. The Congolese government and UN investigators have repeatedly accused Rwanda of supplying M23. (Austin Bay)

November 28, 2012: Congo-K - New mining code: associated minerals under scrutiny'

The mining industry is biting its fingernails about current changes in Congo-K’s mining legislation.

December 1, 2012: M23 rebels pull out of Goma, leaving the government and the UN to deal with the chaos inside the city of one million. M23 fighters still control the less populous areas around the city. M23 had captured Goma on November 20th but quickly found that it did not have enough manpower to police the city and control other parts of North Kivu.

December 5, 2012: Democratic Republic of Congo: further bloodshed and exhaustion facing internally displaced persons in Masisi' Bujumbura – Bloodshed, destruction and massive population displacement continues to terrorise the population of Masisi, a mineral rich area in North Kivu, eastern Congo. At least 28 people were killed in Masisi since 29 November, as a consequence of on-going fighting between rival armed groups. Violent clashes among various rebels, as well as fighting between these rebel groups and the Congolese army has been on the rise since last August. Consequently, thousands of women, children and men have been displaced from their homes in Masisi. In addition, a climate of fear and reciprocal mistrust reigns between the two major communities living in the area, the Hundes and the Hutus.

Updates: The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) believes that highlighting the forgotten conflict in Masisi and ensuring protection of the local population are urgent priorities for the international community, the Congolese authorities, the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) and the political actors of the Great Lakes Region. "We appreciate the ongoing diplomatic efforts to end the violence perpetrated by the rebels who took control of Goma on 20 November causing tens of thousands people to flee. However, equal determination should be used to restore peace and security to populations in Masisi, exhausted from the conflict", said JRS Great Lakes Africa Director, Isaac Kiyaka, SJ.

Night attacks: According to the information collected by JRS teams in Masisi, on the night of 29 November members of the Nyatura, a Hutu militia, attacked Kihuma village, around Buabo, burning down houses and firing gunshots at Hunde villagers. Five people were murdered, including one in a nearby medical centre. "They arrived at four in the morning and
the village looked like the hell. I took my six children and fled into the
forest without food or clothes. People ran where they could and I saw
children falling in the river", explains 60-year-old Loomo*.

Lives in flight: In less than two weeks, Loomo has fled three times,
walking a total distance of approximately 21 kilometres, in order to save
the lives of herself and her children. "We constantly feel threatened. I
know we will be forced to flee again because another conflict will certainly
erupt. We need our authorities to guarantee security. We cannot continue
to live in this way: people are tired and we are losing the desire to live",
continues Loomo who is now seeking refuge with her children in a primary
school.

Vengeance: During the same day of the attack in Kihuma on 29
November, young Hunde militiamen immediately reacted by killing 11
Hutu people in the surrounding area of Buabo, including five men who
supposedly belonged to the Nyatura militia. The day after, twelve more
people were killed during an armed incursion in various Hutu villages
around Lushebere. Several houses were burned down, and the population
fled the village en masse.

Moise*, a 30-year-old Hutu man, lives and works in Masisi town, which is
primarily populated by Hunde people. He has described an increased
climate of reciprocal fear based on ethnic tensions between the two
communities in the past few months. "When I walk in the city, people call
me 'Nyatura, Nyatura' (Hutu militiaman), but I'm not a member of an
armed group. I just want to live in peace with the rest of the population.
Unfortunately, I feel I'll be forced to flee Masisi forever, if not, they may
kill me", explains Moise.

Context: On 14 November, JRS released a press statement documenting
the murders of at least 18 people, including four women and two children
assassinated by machetes; a massive population displacement; and the
destruction of camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The
humanitarian situation in North Kivu further deteriorated throughout the
month as a result of violence by the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebel
group supported by the Rwandan and the Ugandan governments
according to a recent report of the UN Group of Experts on the DRC, but
denied by Kigali and Kampala. The M23 took control of Goma on 20
November causing the displacement of more than 140,000 additional
people and the interruption of most humanitarian relief throughout the
affected territory. Following discussions between government leaders of
the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the rebel
movement agreed to withdraw to 20 kilometres from Goma city, in return
for the opening of direct negotiations with the Congolese government.
December 6, 2012: In the northern city of Kano police arrested eight Boko Haram men who sought to attack a police patrol with a bomb. But the thrown bomb did not go off and the police went after the attackers.

December 8, 2012: Uganda proposed that a new peacekeeping force, composed of African troops, be organized (and paid for by the UN) for service in Congo. This force would be allowed to fight and maintain order.

December 9, 2012: The government began peace talks with M23. But after ten days little was accomplished except an agreement to resume negotiations in early January. The M23 wants an official ceasefire, signed by president Kabila. Congo is not willing to do that, believing that they might be able to muster enough military force to crush M23. The government also accuses M23 of not withdrawing 20 kilometers from the city limits, as they had agreed to.

December 9, 2012: In the northern city of Kano, several days of raids have led to the arrest of 28 Boko Haram members and the seizure of many weapons and other terrorist material.

In the south (Delta State) the 82 year old mother of the Finance Minister was kidnapped. The victim, who is an MD and college professor, was taken from her home by at least ten armed men. Two days later, in the west (Yobe State), the wife of a retired army general was also taken. These two cases got a lot of publicity but many other kidnappings did not. Taking people for ransom has become a big business in the south and the police are often involved. In the case of the Finance Ministers mother, two policemen were soon arrested and accused of being involved in the kidnapping. This did not lead to the release of the victim and the kidnappers are demanding $1.27 million in ransom (20 percent of their original demand).

December 10, 2012: In the northeast (Yobe state) Boko Haram attacked a police headquarters and were repulsed. A dozen (or more) Islamic terrorists and one policeman died. Yobe state has become one of the main battlegrounds in the campaign against Boko Haram.

The government has asked for American help in dealing with Boko Haram, and the commander of AFRICOM has made it clear that Boko Haram is not going to be defeated by military action alone. If the U.S. provides major assistance to Nigeria it will be via AFRICOM. “Africa Command” (AFRICOM) is similar in organization to other commands (Central, or CENTCOM, for the Middle East, and South, or SOUTHCOM, for Latin America, etc). AFRICOM coordinates all American military operations in Africa. Before 2007, those operations were coordinated between two commands (the one covering Europe and the one covering Latin America). The establishment of AFRICOM meant more money for counter-terror
operations in Africa and more long range projects. One thing most African nations wanted from AFRICOM was military and counter-terrorism trainers. The problem with this is that the people so trained are often then employed as enforcers for the local dictator. Even providing training for peacekeepers can backfire, for those peacekeeping skills can also be used to pacify your own people. This will be a problem in Nigeria as well, as long as there is so much corruption in the government and military. But at the same time the U.S. cannot ignore the growing cooperation between Boko Haram and al Qaeda type organizations (especially those in northern Mali, which has become a new sanctuary for al Qaeda). Boko Haram is becoming part of the terrorist threat to the U.S. and the West.

In the north local tribal and religious leaders, who still have some standing among the people, place the blame for Boko Haram on the northern politicians. This is especially true of the state governors, who use fraud and force to get elected and once in office steal as much as they can. Federal level anti-corruption efforts have concentrated on the governors and ex-governors (all of them much wealthier than they were before becoming governors). But these savvy and corrupt politicians have been difficult to prosecute, convict, and jail. The justice system favors those with a lot of cash and few scruples. And that’s why you have Boko Haram up north, who exist, by their own admission, mainly to reduce corruption and crime.

Boko Haram is particularly brutal with the national police. In part, this is because the police tend to be quick to kill Boko Haram members along with friends and family of the Islamic radicals. This is illegal but the police are notoriously corrupt and inclined to break the law themselves.

While the government proclaims the massive oil thefts in the Niger Delta and the growing Islamic terrorism of Boko Haram in the north as under control, the reality is quite different. In both cases the federal government sees sending in the military as the solution. But it isn’t. The Nigerian military is a blunt instrument. Although well trained and led, at least by African standards, the military relies too much on brute (and often excessive) force and can be bought off by oil thieves and Islamic radicals. In the Niger Delta the military, especially the navy, is being bribed to let the oil theft continue. The government does not want to discuss that problem openly. In the north Boko Haram has much less cash and is instead using terror tactics against the military leadership. Death squads seek out key military leaders and kill them. At the same time, all army commanders in the north are made aware of the fact that the Boko Haram assassins concentrate on the officers who are most energetic and effective against Islamic radicals.

December 10, 2012: Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui is acquitted by the International Criminal Court of war crimes and crimes against humanity.
Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui (born 8 October 1970) is a colonel in the Congolese army and a former senior commander of the National Integrationist Front (FNI) and the Patriotic Resistance Force in Ituri (FRPI). He was controversially acquitted AGAIN of war crimes at Hague by Judge Bruno Cotte on the grounds that the prosecution had not proven beyond reasonable doubt that he was responsible for the crimes committed, a decision which led to criticism of the ICC. He is also known as Mathieu Cui Ngudjolo or Cui Ngudjolo.

On 6 February 2008, he was arrested by the Congolese authorities and surrendered to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to stand trial on six counts of war crimes and three counts of crimes against humanity. The charges include murder, sexual slavery and using children under the age of fifteen to participate actively in hostilities.

December 13, 2012: Boko Haram members have killed nearly 800 people so far this year. The military and police have killed more in response, but about half the police victims were civilians, the rest were Boko Haram or criminals mistaken for Islamic radicals. As the military and police increase their operations in the north, so does Boko Haram. Northerners are growing tired of all this, even though Boko Haram tries (more so than the security forces) to avoid civilian casualties. This doesn’t always work and Boko Haram bombs and gunfire kill a growing number of innocent civilians. Support for Boko Haram is declining, despite all the efforts of the security forces.

December 14, 2012: The UN has agreed to review its rules of engagement in the Eastern Congo, where they have 20,000 peacekeepers. Congolese complain that the peacekeepers rarely do much. This was very obvious during the current M23 uprising. The UN had more armed men (peacekeepers) in North Kivu than the M23 had, yet the peacekeepers refused to intervene. The Congolese Army was no match of M23 and the UN force might have been. Peacekeeper commanders explained that they did not engage M23 because they wanted to avoid civilian casualties. In general, UN peacekeepers tend to be peaceful. The UN makes a distinction between peacekeeping (lots of guard duty and “show of force” operations) and peace making (actually fighting those who disturb the peace). The UN has a more difficult time getting nations to contribute troops to peacekeeping operations if too many of those troops are killed or wounded. That would be the case if the UN peacekeepers took on the Tutsi fighters of M23. It’s no secret that the Tutsi are, by African standards, very effective soldiers. Even when organized as militia forces (little training and few experienced leaders) the Tutsi are formidable. The UN knows that taking on the Tutsi would cause a lot of peacekeepers casualties, something that the UN cannot tolerate.
December 21, 2012: The UN has accused M23 and the Congo Army of war crimes during the fighting around Goma. Congolese soldiers are accused of looting and raping as they retreated from Goma. The soldiers and bandits have also been looting and raping in refugee camps. This is pretty standard practice with the army and most of the militias. M23 was accused of summarily executing people in Goma. M23 said it was punishing corrupt officials and other criminals. M23 was also accused of seizing vehicles and other goods inside Goma.

December 23, 2012: The UN has sent several hundred peacekeepers into Goma to try and deal with the crime situation (which is out of control in the absence of adequate policing).

December 28, 2012: The UN has warned M23 members that they will be prosecuted as war criminals if they continue firing on UN helicopters. This new hostility towards UN helicopters comes from the UN use of armed helicopters to try and stop the M23 advance on Goma last November. The helicopter machine-guns killed or wounded dozens of M23 men and M23 has not forgotten.

January 3, 2013: The U.S. has imposed more sanctions on the M23 (Tutsi) and FDLR (Rwandan Hutu) militias in eastern Congo.

January 6, 2013: The government and the M23 rebels resumed peace talks. Two weeks of such talks last month accomplished little. The M23 uprising was all about corruption, and the rebels are particularly angry about the rigged 2011 Congolese presidential elections. That was not supposed to happen. M23 had agreed to disband in 2009, as part of a peace deal in return for promises of clean government. The current unrest is taking place in North Kivu province, which is on the borders of Rwanda and Uganda. The population of six million is similar to that found in South Kivu (population five million) to the south. The M23 rebels have about 5,000 armed men and are faced by 9,000 army troops and 6,700 UN peacekeepers. The problem is that the Tutsi are much better fighters and the government/UN force is not strong enough to destroy M23. Corruption is a major problem in Congo and that is what M23 is so upset about. M23 is a small group representing a few hundred thousand Tutsi in a nation of over 71 million. But so debilitating is the corruption and ethnic disunity that the national government is unable to cope. Rwanda is accused of supporting M23 or even plotting to annex North and South Kivu. Rwanda, a nation of 5.7 million dominated by its Tutsi (about 800,000) minority, is interested in protecting the Tutsi minority in Congo but denies secret support of the Tutsi rebels or plans to annex Kivu. The problem here is that the Tutsi are, by most measures, the good guys. There are only about 2.5 million Tutsi (in Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, and Uganda) and they represent a distinct culture in the region. The Tutsi are more disciplined, better educated, wealthier, and less corrupt. The Tutsi also
dominate local governments, if only because they are better administrators and, when armed and organized, more effective fighters. Most other ethnic groups in the area are jealous, hostile, or just afraid of the Tutsi.

The Tutsi problem goes back over 600 years. In the 1500's the Tutsi (plural- Watutsi) nomads moved south from their ancient home in the semi-desert Sahel. With a different complexion (an important point for the Tutsi) and a foot taller than the local Hutu, it did not take long for the Tutsi to take over and install their own brand of Apartheid. The area eventually evolved into two Tutsi ruled empires, each roughly covering the territory of modern Burundi and Rwanda. In 1899, the Germans moved in and made both areas colonies. The British replaced the Germans in 1916 and passed the area over to the Belgians in the 1920's. It was assumed that, when the areas became independent nations, the Hutu (over 80 percent of the population) would run the place. The more aggressive and warlike Tutsi had other ideas and the Hutu knew it. In 1959, the Hutu of Rawanda rose up against the Tutsi (who held most positions of local power), slaughtered thousands of them, and drove several hundred thousand into exile (mainly in Uganda). Several thousand of these exiles formed an army and attempted a comeback in 1990. This comeback waxed and waned until the Hutu of Rawanda struck back in 1994, slaughtering nearly a million people (Tutsi and Hutu "sympathizers"). The Tutsi rebels, better organized and trained than the Hutu dominated Rwandan army, took control of the government as most of the Hutu killers and their families fled to refugee camps in Congo (then called Zaire) and other neighboring countries. In Kivu the Hutu killers organized militias and continued raiding into Rwanda, as well as attacking the Tutsi minority in eastern Congo. Rwanda sent troops across the border to shut down the Hutu militias. This caused a Tutsi led general inspired uprising there against the corrupt and inept Mobutu government of Congo. That led to the removal of Mobutu after 26 years in power. The newly elected government turned out to be as corrupt and inept as Mobutu. The UN was less concerned with this than the need to stop the fighting in eastern Congo. This was accomplished in 2009, but the peace deal assumed the corruption and misgovernment problem would be addressed. This would include disarming all the militias, especially the ones composed of Rwandan Hutu exiles. None of that happened and nine months ago the Congolese Tutsi began to rebel once more. Most of the Congolese Tutsi who had quite M23 to accept the amnesty and join the army deserted and rejoined M23.

What is often missed in all this is that the Tutsi, Hutu, and most other tribes in this part of Africa are variations on the ancient Bantu people (from West Africa). The Tutsi, like several other of the hundreds of different cultures in Africa, simply developed a superior skill set. That is a
common pattern throughout human history. Since the differences were cultural, not genetic, many of the non-Tutsi tribes the Tutsi came into contact adopted Tutsi ways and, in effect, became Tutsi. When European nations moved in and turned Central Africa into colonies in the 19th century, they noted the superior habits of the Tutsi (and the fact that they ran much of the area and dominated the economy) and used a lot of Tutsi to staff the colonial administration. Yet the Tutsi remained a minority and resented for their success. At the same time, the Tutsi will defend themselves and continue to fight corruption and bad government. Normally this would be considered commendable. But the world wants things to quiet down in Africa, especially in the Congo. As long as the Tutsi are around this won’t happen because the continuing chaos in eastern Congo is a direct result of Tutsis trying to defend themselves against genocide. A simple solution would be for the Congolese Tutsi to move back to Rwanda and Burundi. But those nations are already overcrowded, so the Tutsi continue to push for clean government in Eastern Congo.

Finally, there is the money issue. Eastern Congo is full of valuable natural resources (especially rare minerals essential to modern electronics). These are largely extracted illegally, under the protection of various militias and government officials. This is what finances M23 and many of the other militias as well. But most of the profits end up with government officials (especially president Kabila) and the foreign entrepreneurs who put up the money (billions of dollars) and expertise to build the mines in the middle of nowhere and arrange to get the minerals and diamonds out. The Tutsi would prefer to see all this done legally but there is no law in Kivu.

While the Tutsi have been in Eastern Congo for centuries, most arrived in the 20th century and are considered foreigners: aggressive and capable foreigners. The Congolese Tutsi are too capable to be eliminated but too few to take over. The U.S. goes along with condemning the violence in Eastern Congo but recognizes the good intentions of the Rwandan Tutsi and is reluctant to join in the UN consensus that the Tutsi are the cause of all the problems in Congo. The Tutsis have one ally in the region, Uganda. This is largely because Tutsi refugees in Uganda helped the present government overthrow former dictator Idi Amin and the Tanzania backed government that succeeded Amin.

In Goma there continues to be disorder because the city government was not fully reconstituted after M23 left on December 1st. In particular there’s a lot of popular unrest against the 1,100 criminals who escaped from the city prison after M23 entered the city. Many of these men are still at large and local vigilante groups have lynched at least nine of them. The vigilante groups try to provide local security in the absence of adequate police or soldiers to do that.
Over 25,000 people fled the fighting around Goma. At least 2,000 Tutsi civilians fled to nearby Rwanda. Over 400,000 people fled their homes since last April, when M23 began recruiting Tutsi who had joined the Congolese Army. These army deserters were often former M23 members dissatisfied with the corruption and inept leadership in the Congolese Army. Most of those who fled their homes later returned after M23 drove away the Congolese soldiers. This large movement of people led to massive looting of homes and public buildings. Over 250 schools were looted or damaged along with many more government buildings and businesses.

January 8, 2013: The M23 rebel group declared a unilateral ceasefire in North Kivu province. M23 commanders said they would support a new round of peace talks with the Congolese government. The commanders also said that one goal of M23 is to improve the living conditions of all Congolese living in the eastern Congo. M23 has accused the government of ignoring the eastern Congo.

January 14, 2013: The government of Rwanda continues to insist that the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia is rebuilding and regrouping in the Congo. The FDLR is run by former Hutu radicals who participated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The Rwandan government recently claimed that it has evidence that the FDLR has 4,000 new recruits and intends to train them in North Kivu province. Rawanda has also accused the Congolese Army of providing direct support for the FDLR. Rwanda has claimed that the Congolese Army knows the FDLR has elements in the town of Mudja, Rusayo, and Kanyati (North Kivu province). There are also reports of FDLR activity in the capital of North Kivu province, Goma. The M23 rebel group briefly took control of Goma but withdrew.

January 21, 2013: African diplomats (through the African Union and UN) have confirmed that several countries have been approached about providing troops for the proposed Neutral International Force (NIF) that would be deployed in the eastern Congo. There’s a hold-up, however, in creating the force. At least one country has said it want to retain direct command and control of its forces instead of committing them to a joint command.

January 26, 2013: The government claimed that the M23 rebel movement is once again threatening the capital of North Kivu province, Goma. The government said that M23 has failed to withdraw to a point 20 kilometers north of Goma, which it had agreed to do.

January 29, 2013: Diplomats reported another hold up in signing the UN-sponsored M23 peace agreement. The agreement includes the creation of the so-called Neutral International Force of around 2,500 soldiers which
would deploy in the eastern Congo. The force would not actually be neutral. Its mission is clearly intervention. It will be deployed to prevent rebel groups from seizing territory. The force would be added to the current UN peacekeeping force, MONUSCO. In early January several sources reported that the NIF would have 4,000 troops assigned.

February 2, 2013: The UN reported that the Union of Revolutionary Forces of the Congo (UFRC) rebel group presents a new threat to the government. In mid-January the newly-formed UFRC announced that it intended to overthrow the Congolese government and try President Joseph Kabila for treason. The UFRC also accused the Kabila government of reneging on the March 23, 2009 peace agreement. This is the chief complaint of the M23 rebel movement. The UFRC is headquarters in the capital of South Kivu province, Bukavu.

February 5, 2013: Uganda urged regional leaders to go ahead and sign the UN brokered M23 peace agreement. Eight countries are involved in the UN negotiations: Uganda, the Congo, Rwanda, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Burundi, South Africa, Tanzania, and Angola.

February 6, 2013: The on-going delay in signing the peace agreement with M23 involved disagreements over the process among several of the nations involved in the negotiations. The UN emphasized that there was no disagreement over the goals of the peace agreement. The peace agreement was supposed to have been signed on January 28. The deal reportedly gives South Africa a major role in insuring that the agreement is implemented.

February 7, 2013: The new peace agreement mediated by the UN remains unsigned. However, today the M23 rebel group and the Congolese government indicated that they are discussing reaching a final peace settlement by the end of February. In the meantime, M23 and government agreed to live by the March 23, 2009 peace agreement. That is where M23 takes its name, the March 23rd Movement. The government signed that agreement with the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) militia. Most of M23’s fighters belonged to the CNDP.

February 8, 2013: South African police arrested 19 Congolese rebel operatives who were trying to procure weapons and communications gear in South Africa. The rebels had also acquired a farm near the town of Modimolle and were preparing to turn it into a training facility. Government prosecutors said that police had infiltrated the group. According to investigators, the group wanted to buy rocket-propelled grenade launchers and 5,000 AK47s. It was also seeking surface to air missiles satellite telephones. The group had held several meetings in various cities in South Africa, including Johannesburg.
February 10, 2013: Police arrested the commander of the Union of Revolutionary Forces of the Congo (UFRC) rebel organization. Authorities identified the commander as Gustave Bagayamukwe Tadji. The UFRC announced in January that it intended to overthrow the government of President Joseph Kabila. Bagayamukwe was arrested in South Kivu province.

February 14, 2013: Over 8,500 Central Africa Republic (CAR) refugees have fled into the Congo in the last week. The refugees began arriving on February 7, as fighting broke out near the town of Mobaye. Pro-CAR government forces clashed with the Seleka coalition rebel group.

February 16, 2013: UN Says Delayed Congo Peace Deal Due To Be Signed February 24, In Addis Ababa’ A delayed UN-sponsored peace deal aimed at ending two decades of conflict in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is due to be signed in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on February 24, the United Nations said on Saturday. A delayed U.N.-mediated peace deal aimed at ending two decades of conflict in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is due to be signed in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on February 24, the United Nations said on Saturday. African leaders failed to sign the deal last month due to the concerns of some countries over who would command a new regional force that would deploy in eastern Congo and take on armed groups operating in the conflict-torn region. The so-called intervention brigade would be contained within the existing U.N. peacekeeping force in Congo, known as MONUSCO. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent out invitations on Friday for the February 24 signing ceremony and intended to travel to Ethiopia for the event, his spokesman, Martin Nesirky, said. "All the invited presidents have committed to either be there or delegate power to sign," Nesirky said.

Rwandan Deputy U.N. Ambassador Olivier Nduhungirehe posted on Twitter that the "African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Southern African Development Community Chairs, as well as 10 Heads of States of the region will attend the signing ceremony." Envoys have said that one of the main reasons the deal was not signed in January was that three countries in the 15-member Southern African Development Community regional bloc - South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique - felt they did not have enough information on the enforcement brigade. The creation of an enforcement brigade within a U.N. peacekeeping mission is new for the United Nations, according to officials in the world body. Peace enforcement missions allow the use of lethal force in serious combat situations, while peacekeeping operations are intended to support and monitor an already existing ceasefire, diplomats and U.N. officials say.
A new Security Council resolution would be needed to approve the intervention unit and is likely to be supported by the 15-member council, envoys have said. U.N. peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous has made clear that the brigade would fight under the banner of MONUSCO, which means it would be under the same command as regular MONUSCO troops, who conduct patrols and support the Congolese security forces. But diplomats had said South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique, which are the most likely candidates to supply the several thousand troops of the brigade, believed it should have its own command. The countries take the view that MONUSCO has not performed well under its current command, such as when it allowed M23 rebels to occupy the eastern city of Goma last year for 11 days before they withdrew.

REBELS IN MINERAL-RICH EAST: The M23 rebels began taking large swathes of the mineral-rich east early last year, accusing the government of failing to honor a 2009 peace deal. That peace deal ended a previous rebellion and led to the rebels’ integration into the national army. They have since deserted the army. The Congolese army has failed to quell the growing 10-month insurgency by M23, which has dragged Congo’s eastern region back toward war and, according to U.N. experts, has received cross-border support from Rwanda and Uganda. Rwanda and Uganda strongly deny the accusations of involvement. Ladsous said that if approved by the U.N. Security Council, the enforcement unit would be equipped with a three-pronged mandate to prevent the expansion of armed groups in eastern Congo as well as to "neutralize" and disarm them. It would have the aid of unmanned surveillance drones to hunt down armed militias difficult to spot in the vast territory of eastern Congo. Ladsous said the drones would provide an element of deterrence because the rebels would know they were being watched. The planned use of drones, is also new for the United Nations, U.N. officials say. Congo’s prime minister said that the drones could be deployed as early as June.

February 19, 2013: The UN again claimed that the M23 rebels were assisted by Rwanda and Uganda and because of that another M23 offensive is possible. Rwanda and Uganda deny the accusations.

February 20, 2013: How to keep peace in the Congo where there isn’t any peace? The UN has tried to deal with this question since the 1960s. The Congo’s enormous size, lack of infrastructure, ethnic complexity, and shortage of technically trained personnel has repeatedly frustrated international peacekeepers. For that matter, it has frustrated every Congolese government, including the old Belgian colonial government. The endemic destructive corruption exacerbates every other political, economic, social, and geographic challenge. The M23 rebel movement in the eastern province of North Kivu provides a case in point. The leaders of M23 claim they rebelled because the current government, led by President
Joseph Kabila, failed to comply with important elements in the agreement. For example, the government failed to provide the civil service and military jobs it promised. Why? Bureaucratic corruption and tribal rivalries (ethnic component) are the most fundamental reasons for the government’s failure. The lack of infrastructure and technically competent personnel also play a role. The Congolese Army is a hodge podge, consisting of a few brigades loyal to the Kabila government (these are deployed throughout the Congo, but special attention is given to the capital, Kinshasha), a couple of counter-insurgency battalions (being trained by either the UN, EU training teams, or US AFRICOM), and a poorly organized collection of ill-trained soldiers and former rebel militiamen. Some of the rebel militia units were not demobilized but were incorporated whole-cloth into the Congolese Army. On short notice an entire battalion can defect and become, once again, a rebel militia.

UN Security Council resolution 1925 tasked the current UN force in the Congo, MONUSCO (UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo), with concluding military operations in the eastern Congo, with particular emphasis on South and North Kivu provinces and Orientale province. Like the Kivus, Orientale confronts several rebel groups and is also subjected to Lord’s Resistance Army attacks on unprotected villages. The LRA threat was one reason the Security Council specified another task: improving the Congolese government’s ability to protect Congolese civilians. To accomplish that MONUSCO was also tasked with helping the Congolese government consolidate its control of Congolese territory. Now think about it. This task amounts to nation building in the broadest sense, the consolidation of state authority throughout the territory claimed by the state. MONUSCO still has a very large force in the Congo, 17,700 peacekeeping troops and 1,400 international police officers. However, to consolidate state control over the Congo would require a much larger force, on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers supported by several hundred thousand construction workers. The mission assigned is impossible. This broaches a discussion of what is possible. Several non-governmental organizations have long urged the UN to focus on resolving local issues. The NGOs mean local. Based on their own experience in sub-Saharan Africa the NGOs argue that settling village to village disputes and settling tribal and clan disputes is the best way to keep the peace – in other words, creating small zones of peace. This has been called the “mosaic” approach to peace-making. Kenya and several NGOs used this method in southern Sudan to settle disputes between Nuer and Dinka tribes. The peace theory crowd (yes, this group exists) call it local intervention or local level intervention. The UN has approached the Congo situation at the nation-state level (eg, dealing through whatever government is in Kinshasha) or by focusing on regions in the Congo (eg, the current MONUSCO mission in
the Kivus and Orientale). According to the “local peace first” crowd, the UN’s focus on holding national elections was a mistake and indicative of its focus on national peacekeeping. (Austin Bay)

Meanwhile, in the south Katanga (now Shaba) province tribal rebels and bandits are becoming more active. The rebels want an independent Kantanga, which possesses enormous mineral riches. The rebels believe, with some justification, that the national government steals most of the taxes levied on the mining companies.

February 24, 2013: Forty-six leading Congolese and international NGOs welcome Peace in DRCongo’ Security and Cooperation Framework, but call for further action to make peace a reality. Groups say agreement is not enough and outline concrete steps that need to be taken. Reiterate call for UN, US and EU to appoint Special Envoys and greater regional involvemen.

Goma/Kinshasa/ Rome/ Washington DC - A group of prominent Congolese and international NGOs today called on countries in the Great Lakes region, along with their international partners, to ensure that the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement signed in Addis Ababa is given the political backing necessary to bring an end to war in the eastern Congo. In a published policy response and letters to DRC President Kabila, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, African Union Chairperson Dlamini Zuma, US President Barack Obama and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, the groups welcomed the Framework Agreement as an opportunity for a new kind of decisive engagement in a conflict that has persisted for two decades and ravaged the lives of millions of Congolese.

However, they also suggest that the Agreement will be hollow without specific additional measures, including the appointment of a high-profile UN Special Envoy with the power to mediate on both a domestic and regional level; the inclusion of Congolese civil society and Kinshasa's main bilateral and multilateral donor partners in the proposed national oversight mechanism; and the tying of donor aid to clear and agreed benchmarks and genuine collaboration between government, donors, and civil society. The groups also called for the creation of a donor fund to support projects aimed at deepening regional economic integration to emphasize the benefits of regional stability; UN-mediated negotiations with armed groups that avoid the impunity characteristic of past deals; and substantial donor engagement to promote demobilization of rebel soldiers and regional economic integration. "We need a new approach, a peace process based on the principles of justice", says Raphael Wakenge, Coordinator of the Congolese Initiative for Justice and Peace (ICJP). "Past peace deals have often closed their eyes toward impunity, allowing war criminals to be integrated into the army, police and security services. This has
undermined the legitimacy of the peace process and the reputation of the security services, including the judiciary."

The Framework Agreement is based on two main points: bringing an end to foreign backing of Congolese rebellion movements, and fostering the comprehensive reform of state institutions such as the national army, police and judicial sectors. The groups today called on the facilitators and the eleven state signatories of the Framework to make sure that there are clear benchmarks in order to carry out these goals. They further suggested that donors should tie their aid to progress in the peace process. "The Framework Agreement is a strong promise to the Congolese people, but past peace processes have stumbled due to a lack of transparency, weak international engagement and the absence of a comprehensive process", says Federico Borello, Great Lakes Director for Humanity United. "This time, it is imperative to tackle once and for all the Congo's root problems of impunity, regional interference, and state weakness. Without them, our best chance for peace will fail." In addition, the groups also called on the international community, to show steadfast commitment that goes beyond the technocratic approach of recent years. In addition to calling for a UN Special Envoy, the groups called on the United States and the European Union to name special envoys to support the process, and on the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes (ICGLR) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to continue providing support to the process. They also called for a donor conference to commit the resources necessary to promote cross-border economic collaboration and deep-rooted reform of Congolese institutions. "There has not been a solid peace process in the Congo since 2006, despite the escalation of violence since then", says Jason Stearns, Usalama Project director for the Rift Valley Institute. "The Framework Agreement provides hope, but it will require substantial political and financial capital to overcome entrenched interests."

March 7, 2013: Democratic Republic of Congo - Education prevents violence and discrimination against women’ Goma – For women from eastern Congo, leaving the village or camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) to go harvest the fields or look for firewood frequently puts them at risk of sexual violence, including rape, by rebel groups, soldiers or unscrupulous civilians, as well as discrimination and social marginalisation daily. In the first six months of 2012, nearly 2,500 women and girls registered as rape victims in one hospital run by HEAL Africa in Goma. The NGO estimates that as many as two thirds of women and girls in North Kivu province have experienced sexual violence. On the African continent, women consist of half of the population, but represent 80 percent of the informal economy and produce more than 70 percent of the continent’s food. According to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, protecting these women from violence and fostering opportunities for self-sufficiency is crucial for the security of the continent at large. For the Jesuit Refugee Service, education is a fundamental instrument for protecting women from sexual violence and helping them to gain respect and consideration in their communities. Teaching women and girls to read and write, and to learn a trade with which they can earning a living, means offering them a protected environment in which to feel safe, share their problems, socialise together and acquire a new understanding of their role in society. "The best immediate solution is to offer women opportunities which allow them to take up activities in and around their villages and IDP camps. We need to offer women opportunities from which they can then earn a living to feed their children and send them to school", explained Angélique Chayeka, JRS Masisi Informal Education Project Director.

A better future: In 2012, JRS involved more than 600 women and girls in their informal education activities in Masisi and Mweso, areas of North Kivu province characterised by a significant presence of armed groups and on-going forced displacement of the population. These activities include vocational training such as bag and clothing production, hairstyling, and literacy courses. In addition, in JRS training centres, women participate in awareness raising exercises on sexual violence and, when necessary, receive support from JRS staff. "We believe we're helping women to build a better future and gain respect and consideration of their community, including of the men. Women who know how to read, write and take care of their own families become examples for others. Education can help women deal with issues of sexual violence", added Chayeka. Mariette Kahindo is a 45-year-old displaced woman who participated in JRS courses in Masisi. She fled her village in 2001 due to conflict, and is a widow and mother of four children. Mariette specialised in producing bags that in
Masisi are used, above all, by students for their pens and notebooks. She also learned how to read and write. "I'm really concentrated on the work I do and this allows me to take care of my family on my own, without having to beg for help from others wandering around from one place to the next. With the money I earn I have rented a house, and am able to pay my children's school fees. Since I began working, my relationships with the community have improved", said Mariette.

Finding self-confidence: According to JRS staff in North Kivu, education gives hope back to women and girls who take courses, many of whom live in marginalised conditions in IDP camps. Moreover, after spending time together in class, girl students learn to open up to each other and understand each other's problems, creating a sense of reciprocal solidarity and strength to face daily challenges. "Here I feel safe. Attending the bag production and literacy courses from 8am to 1pm I know I'm in a safe place. I learn a trade and this occupies my thoughts. With the other women and JRS staff, we speak about how to get on and overcome everyday problems in life", said Gentille Miramuhoro, 26-year-old mother of two. For Francisca Sendegeya, Informal Education Project Director for JRS in Mweso, education encourages women to take their lives into their own hands. "In this part of Congo, women face marginalisation and discrimination. But when they come into our centres we see that they gain a new sense of self-confidence. They feel involved in what they are learning and in the work they carry out. This gives a different meaning to their lives. For instance, they say they are ready to speak out against sexual violence and help their friends who may be victims".

February 19, 2013: The UN once again claimed that the M23 militia is receiving support from external sources. A recent UN investigatory report said that Uganda and Rwanda both provided M23 with material support.

February 20, 2013: The UN is continuing to investigate the source of a false report that claimed that the Rwandan FDLR Hutu extremist militia group had a battalion which was operating with the Congolese Army and MONU.S.CO peacekeepers. The claim was made in January and a fake email, attributed to a MONU.S.CO officer, appeared on the internet. MONU.S.CO denounced the email as a fraud and called it misinformation. Leaders of the FDLR were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

February 24, 2013: Representatives of 11 Central African countries announced that they have reached an agreement to support the UN’s Peace Security and Cooperation Framework. The framework provides security and economic mechanisms for building peace in the region. The countries include South Sudan, Angola, Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Africa, Central African Republic, Zambia, Congo and the Congo Republic (Brazzaville). The framework agreement is designed to help countries combat rebel organizations like the Congo’s M23 group.
February 25, 2013: Two rival factions of M23 reportedly fired on one another. The clash occurred in the town of Rutshuru (North Kivu province, Ugandan border). Eight people died in the incident. M23 has split into two main groups, one loyal to political leader Jean-Marie Runiga and the other to M23’s senior military commander, Sultani Makenga. M23 denied the incident occurred and said the firefight was with an FDLR militia group.

March 1, 2013: The UN estimated that in 2005 over 45,000 women were raped in the Congo’s South Kivu province.

March 2, 2013: The UN reported that Congolese Army units are now returning to the towns of Rutshuru and Kiwanha. M23 rebels have pulled out of the area following confirmation that the organization has indeed split into two factions. Apparently the faction controlled by M23 military commander Sultani Makenga has won the power struggle. The losing faction, led by Bosco Ntaganda (who organized M23) and political leader Jean-Marie Runiga has scattered. Ntaganda is reportedly hiding in the Congo’s Virunga National Park.

March 3, 2013: Relief agencies in Katanga Province report that separatist militia groups usually based in northern Katanga are now regularly seen in southern Katanga.

March 8, 2013: The Congolese Army reported that it has been fighting for over a week with a rebel militia in the Kitchanga area (North Kivu province). The rebel group is named the Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo. The UN has provided attack helicopter support to the Congolese Army. The fighting has killed at least 80 people.

March 11, 2013: The Congolese government has formally agreed to support the UN’s Peace Security and Cooperation Framework. A spokesman for M23 said that the rebel group would not support the agreement because it was not included in the negotiation process.

March 18, 2013: Bosco Ntaganda, the rebel Congolese general who formed the M23 rebel movement, has surrendered. Ntaganda went to the U.S. Embassy in Rwanda (in Kigali) and said he was turning himself in to the International Criminal Court.

March 18, 2013: General Bosco Ntaganda (born c. 1973), is also known as "the Terminator" the military chief of staff of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), an armed militia group operating in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) voluntarily handed himself into the U.S. Embassy in Rwanda asking to be transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague, Netherlands. His surname is sometimes given as Tanganda or Ntanganda, he is a former member of the Rwandan Patriotic Army and allegedly a former Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Patriotic Forces for the
Liberation of Congo (FPLC). As of early March 2013, he is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the war crimes of enlisting and conscripting children under the age of fifteen and using them to participate actively in hostilities. Until March 2013 he had been leading an armed mutiny in North Kivu as the head of the rebel group M23 Movement.

March 22, 2013: Bosco Ntaganda was taken into custody by the International Criminal Court. He is known for indicted by the ICC for war crimes.

March 23, 2013: 300 Kata Katanga militiamen have attacked Lubumbashi, the capital of Katanga province. Fighting is reported inside the city and near the UN compound.

March 25, 2013: The Congolese government reported that the March 22 attack on Lubumbashi had been defeated. The attack did not hinder mining operations in Katanga. Officials did concede that the attack was embarrassing.

March 27, 2013: More information is appearing regarding Bosco Ntaganda’s surrender. U.S. intelligence officers helped arrange Ntaganda’s surrender at the U.S. Embassy in Kigali, Rwanda. Some 700 fighters in Ntaganda’s M23 faction have also surrendered. However, the Congo’s war with M23 is not over. Sultani Makenga’s faction, however, remains in the field. Makenga’s faction (which is now the only existing M23 group active) is occupying a position just outside the capital of North Kivu province, Goma. However, Uganda has reportedly organized negotiations between Makenga and the Congolese government.

March 28, 2013: The UN Security Council approved the creation of an intervention brigade for deployment in Congo’s eastern provinces. The unit will be allowed to conduct independent offensive operations or offensive operations with the Congolese Army. The goal of these offensive operations is to neutralize and disarm militant groups. This is the first UN peacekeeping force to have such a specifically offensive mission and the Security Council said that its creation will not be regarded as a precedent. The unit will serve for one year.

March 31, 2013: Sultani Makenga, the surviving leader of M23, may be cutting a deal with the Congolese government. Uganda is facilitating peace talks between Makenga’s faction and the Kabila government. According to Ugandan sources, the Congo will allow 1,500 M23 fighters to join its security forces. However, M23 officers must be vetted and will only be allowed to join on an individual basis depending on their human rights. Makenga will not be allowed to join.
April 3, 2013: DR Congo: targeting secondary school education for displaced children

Bujumbura – "Going back to school, to study and be with my friends help me feel normal again. It helps me forget the war and the sorrow of no longer being at home in my village", said 17-year Samuel Shukuru, one of the thousands of displaced children who found refuge in camps around Goma, a strategic city in eastern Congo, following the armed advance, in November 2012, of rebels of the March 23 Movement (M23). For the last few weeks Samuel has frequented Nyabyunyu institute, one of the six secondary schools supported as part of the emergency education project of the Jesuit Refugee Service on the edge of Goma. "Following the arrival of M23 rebels into Goma in November, the schools and churches were the first places where displaced person found refuge. Classrooms were completely destroyed as people used the desks and doors as firewood for heating and cooking. The military and rebels also occupied the school buildings. Consequentially, both displaced and local children were denied the right to education for months", explained JRS Great Lakes Programme Officer, Mariana Morales Arce.

Integration, displaced pupils in class: As part of the new project, JRS has already renovated three schools and provided support to a total of six institutes, including the provision of scholastic materials and teacher training. "By allowing displaced children to return to school and encouraging their integration with their local peers, we hope to help bring a sense of normality back to their lives. This is why in exchange for JRS support, we ask headmasters to commit themselves to meet us halfway by covering the tuition fees of displaced children whose parents has lost their sources of income", said Ms Morales Arce. There are more than one thousand pupils living in the immediate proximity of five of the six JRS-supported schools. Approximately half of these pupils were displaced from their home villages as a result of the conflict and are currently living in nearby camps. "Normally the displaced children stay in the camps all day as their families do not have the means to send them to school. Now we have begun cooperating with JRS, raising awareness about the issue to convince families to send their children to school. Given the circumstances of the families, we won't ask them to pay tuition fees and our teachers will work to promote harmonious relations between all students", said a representative of the teachers in Nyabyunyu Institute, Célestin Munanira.

The choice of secondary education. The decision to provide secondary school education is derived from the fact that humanitarian intervention during emergencies like the one in Congo is limited to the provision of primary education. This is also the case in Masisi and Mweso, remote areas in North Kivu province where JRS has decided to build, renovate and provide support for secondary education to keep the hope of a better
future alive among adolescents. "When they told me I could enroll in school again, I went there in a hurry. Before, I stayed in the camp all day. With nothing to do, I was bored. Now I want to study and start living again", said Samuel.

April 5, 2013: The U.S. government has offered a reward of $5 million for information leading to the arrest of Sylvestre Mudacumura, commander of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The International Criminal Court (ICC) has charged Mudacumura with crimes against humanity and war crimes. He allegedly played a major role in carrying out the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

April 13, 2013: The UN announced that the intervention brigade which will fight armed groups in the eastern Congo will deploy 3,069 soldiers. The UN Security Council approved the unit on March 28 and gave it the mandate of conducting targeted offensive operations – which is diplomacy speak for offensive combat. Malawi, Tanzania and South Africa will each provide battalions with 850 soldiers (2,550 soldiers). The remaining authorized 519 troops will serve in three separate companies: an artillery battery, a special forces company and a recon company. A Tanzanian general will command the unit.

April 16, 2013: The UN reported that the men who have been accused of raping 126 women in the village of Minova (North Kivu province) in November 2012 were serving in a Congolese Army battalion trained by the U.S.. The battalion was a light infantry battalion of 750 soldiers who received training by U.S. AFRICOM as part of a Congolese Army reform program. According to UN investigators, 33 soldiers participated in the rapes.

April 18, 2013: The Congolese government and the provincial government of Katanga remain at loggerheads over a government ban on exporting copper and cobalt concentrates. Katanga is Congo’s only copper and cobalt exporter. The Congolese government contends the ban will force mining companies to process ores in Congo. This will increase the value of Congolese copper and cobalt exports. Several international mining companies have objected to the ban. However, the most important resistance is coming from Katanga where governor Moise Katumbi said he will not enforce the national ban. Katanga does not have sufficient electricity and processing capacity to process all of its ore into concentrate. At the moment companies have three months to sell unprocessed ore.

April 19, 2013: A spokesman for the Kata Katanga militia announced that the group is guerrilla movement fighting for Katangan autonomy. According to militia leaders, the people of Katanga province do not benefit
from their own mineral wealth. The spokesman accused the national
government of stealing Katangan mining royalty money.

After the March 23 attack the Kabila government and the Katanga
provincial government both assured international mining companies that
Katanga was safe. However, the attack into the heart of Lubumbashi has,
for good reason, produced many doubters. The Kata Katanga are now
claiming they are fighting for Katangan autonomy (April 19). The latest
rumor is that many Katangans believe Joseph Kabila will not be president
after the 2016 elections. That means they have concluded that a
Katangan will not be in charge in Kinshasha. Katangan secession might be
an old idea whose new time has almost come. (Austin Bay)

There is little overt public support for secession, at least in southern
Katanga. There are, however, two committed secessionist organizations,
Co-ordination for a Referendum on Self-Determination for Katanga
(CORAK) and the Katangese People’s Congress (CPK). The CPK has been
active for decades. In 1992 it sought official recognition from the
Organization of African Unity (OAU, the African Union’s predecessor) as a
Katangan liberation movement. The OAU denied recognition and said the
CPK could not show that the Katangan people were suffering mass human
rights violations by the government (then led by Mobutu).

On March 23, 2013 300 to 350 Kata Katanga fighters attacked
Lubumbashi. They tried to seize the provincial government and parliament
buildings but failed. They did manage to enter and take effective control of
the UN compound in the city. The Congolese Army, reinforced by
members of the elite Republican Guard (special presidential guards who
were protecting the airport), counter-attacked. 35 people died and
another 60 were wounded in the battles within the city. The militiamen
were not well armed. The entire force may have had only three dozen AK-
47s and a few rocket launchers. Most of the fighters carried knives, spears
or bows and arrows. A total of 245 militiamen in the UN compound
surrendered to the UN. MONU.S.CO later transferred the 245 fighters to
Congolese government control.

In January 2013 the governor of Katanga asked MONU.S.CO (UN
Stabilization Mission in Congo) to send peacekeeping troops to assist the
Congolese Army in protecting the Zambian border region. The concern
was that Mutanga would try to replicate what M23 had done in North Kivu
province – carve out a piece of border territory and hold it. In February,
authorities reported a militia killed 14 civilians near Manono.

In 2011, reports of rogue militia activity in northern Katanga (especially
along Katanga’s Zambian border) became more frequent. The Gedeon
militia figured prominently in the reports. The Kata Katanga showed up
and were reportedly allies of Mutanga. In fact, there were reports that the
Gedeon militia and Kata Katanga were now one in the same. Lubumbashi’s international airport suffered sporadic attacks attributed to separatist rebels.

On September 7, 2010 an armed group attacked Lubumbashi’s main prison. Over 900 inmates escaped, including the leader of what was arguably the most dangerous of the north Katangan Mai Mai militias, Kyungu Mutanga. Mutanga, better known by his nom de guerre, Gedeon, was imprisoned for war crimes (committed in Katanga) in 2006 and sentenced to death in 2009. The Gedeon militia was based in what was called Katanga’s Terror Triangle, 10,000 square kilometers of jungle within the triangle formed by three cities, Mitwaba, Pweto and Manono (the hometown of President Joseph Kabila.) Mutanga’s criminal force would attack, pillage and burn unprotected villages anywhere inside or within marching distance of the triangle.

In May 2010, a militia group calling itself the Kata Katanga raised its flag in one of Lubumbashi’s main squares. In KiSwahili, Kata Katanga means “carve out Katanga” (as in separate it from Congo).

The war and the continuing chaos damaged several Katangan mining operations. Mining output began to pick up in 2006 and 2007. It accelerated in 2010 and 2011. China has invested heavily in Katanga. One source claimed that Chinese companies own 60 of Katanga’s 75 processing plants and that China buys approximately 90 percent of Katanga’s mineral exports.

In KiSwahili, mai (mayi) means water. Supposedly, Mai Mai fighters could spray themselves with a magic potion to deflect bullets. The Mai Mai militias operating in the eastern Congo have proved to be a decidedly mixed bag. The term was supposed to indicate an autonomous militia organized to oppose imperialist or foreign (ie, non-Congolese) force invading Congolese territory. In fact, Laurent Kabila formed and supplied several Mai Mai militias in northern Katanga for the express purpose of opposing invading Rwandan forces. Well, magic water does not work as well as a bulletproof vest. The Mai Mai militia concept has not worked out well, either. As time passed, in the eastern Congo “Mai Mai militia” has come to mean an armed group which portrays itself (depending on the situation) as either a rebel guerrilla movement or a local para-military defense force but in reality operates as a paramilitary gang loyal to its own commander. In turn, eastern Congo Mai Mai militia commanders (gang leaders) are expected to provide loyal militiamen with access to money, women and banana beer.

During the war and in its aftermath, Mai-Mai militias savaged parts of northern Katanga. Katanga has a north-south split. The mining areas in southern Katanga are rich and comparatively well-developed. Northern
Katanga, however, is very poor and undeveloped. Its forests and jungles have few roads – so the area is ideal territory for a militia to carve out its own private duchy.

During The Great Congo War (1998-2003), pro-Kabila forces managed to keep Katanga’s key cities and mining areas under their control. Control is a loose term. Zimbabwe, which sent forces to help Kabila defend the area, was allegedly paid off with train-loads of Katangan copper and cobalt ore.

The Congo War of 1996-1997 led to the collapse of Mobutu’s regime. In late spring 1997, forces loyal to rebel leader Laurent Kabila (a Katangan and father of the current Congolese president, Joseph Kabila) seized Lubumbashi and threatened the Congo’s capital, Kinshasha. Lubumbashi is the Congo’s second largest city (after Kinshasha) and is the hub of the Congo’s lucrative mining business. In some respects (such as clout with the global economy), controlling Lubumbashi is more important than controlling Kinshasha. Thanks to the mines, the city has railroad links to both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Dictator Mobutu Sese Seko ran the Congolese government from 1965 to 1997. In 1972 Mobutu had Katanga renamed Shaba. The 1977 and 1978 invasions are usually referred to as the Shaba invasions. After Mobutu’s death in 1997, the province became Katanga again. The 1978 invasion (Shaba 2) was particularly violent. FNLC guerrillas plundered the mining complex at Kolwezi and committed atrocities against civilians (Congolese and foreign) who worked in the mines. Defeating both invasions required international military intervention. The 1978 international intervention included a spectacular combat parachute drop by a French Foreign Legion airborne infantry unit.

When the Congo became independent in 1960, Katanga secessionists, led by Moise Tshombe, tried to carve out their own separate country. Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi) was the center of the Katangan resistance. The Congolese government (led by Patrice Lumumba) regarded Tshombe as a Belgian proxy and claimed that Belgium wanted an independent Katanga so it could continue to control the province’s mineral deposits. The commercial deposits include cobalt, copper, zinc, cadmium, uranium, germanium, and manganese. America’s World War II atomic bombs used Congolese uranium. Katanga also has coal mines. The Katangan secessionist struggle and general chaos spreading throughout Congo sparked a UN intervention (ONUC, UN Operation in Congo). UN forces eventually clashed with the defense force Tshombe created with the help of Belgian advisers and the Katangan Gendarmerie. Tshombe’s Katanga government conceded defeat in January 1963. However, the hard-core Katangan separatists did not disappear. In 1977 and again in 1978, a group called the National Front for the Liberation of the Congo (FNLC) invaded Katanga from bases in Angola. Organized by a former
Katangan Gendarmerie officer in 1967, the FNLC styled itself as an anti-Mobutu political and military force. Many FNLC fighters were former Katangan gendarmes.

April 23, 2013: Trouble continues to plague the eastern Congo, but at the moment rising tensions in the Congo’s southern regions has the attention of the UN and several foreign governments. Troubles in mineral-rich Katanga province are anything but new. Reviewing the history will help put the present trouble in context.

April 24, 2013: Civilians living north of Goma have refused to comply with demands by M23 rebels that they participate in a protest demonstration against the UN decision to deploy an intervention brigade for offensive operations in the eastern Congo. A demonstration had been planned for April 15th in the town of Kibumba (north of Goma). According to local residents, M23 leaders had to call off the protest since they refused to participate.

April 25, 2013: The U.S. State Department warned American citizens traveling in the eastern Congo that armed militias, armed bandits, and rogue units in the Congolese Army are serious security threats.

April 30. 2013: M23 rebels declared that they are ready to fight the new UN Intervention Brigade when it deploys in the eastern Congo. M23 officers had previously threatened Tanzanian and South African leaders that they and their men will fight the brigade. Tanzania and South Africa are both providing troops.

May 1, 2013: A senior UN diplomat acknowledged that deploying the new Intervention Brigade to conduct UN-ordered offensive operations against rebel militias could hinder future UN humanitarian operations in Congo and central Africa. The official said that she hoped the brigade’s deployment would serve as a deterrent and that military operations would be limited.

May 2, 2013: M23 rebel fighters declared that they will not begin a new round of peace negotiations unless the government agrees to a ceasefire. M23 recently claimed that the Congolese Army is working with Rwandan Hutu rebels in the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia. Now M23 reports that an FDLR unit is advancing toward an important M23 position, and it appears that the FDLR move is coordinated with Congolese Army movements.

UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region (central Africa) Mary Robinson acknowledged that the UN’s Intervention Brigade could cause problems for future UN humanitarian aid operations in Africa. The brigade has a mandate to conduct “targeted offensive operations” which is diplo-speak for offensive combat operations. The brigade is the first UN
peacekeeping operation to be given an explicit offensive mandate. Critics of the Intervention Brigade concept have warned that it is a mistake for the UN to field an offensive force. The critics argue that it sets a terrible precedent. In a future humanitarian crisis, armed groups may forcibly oppose basic humanitarian aid operations like refugee relief in a combat zone because they believe the humanitarian operation will inevitably lead to the deployment of a combat brigade which will attack them. Some Intervention Brigade supporters are concerned that the nations supplying the troops for the brigade could suffer attacks on their citizens who are living or working in the Congo or nearby countries.

May 7, 2013: A rogue militia ambushed a UN convoy on the road between the towns of Walungu and Bukavu (South Kivu province). One Pakistani soldier serving with the MONUSCO peacekeeping force was killed in the attack.

May 8, 2013: The UN condemned the rogue militia attack on a UN Organization and Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) convoy in South Kivu province which killed a Pakistani peacekeeper. The UN called the attack a war crime. A preliminary report claimed that the militia was trying to take hostages.

May 11, 2013: A hundred Tanzanian troops committed to the UN’s new intervention brigade have deployed in the eastern Congo. The troops are the lead element in a 1,280 soldier Tanzanian contingent that will serve with the brigade. The core of the Tanzanian contingent will be an 850 man infantry battalion. The brigade will eventually deploy 3,069 international troops. Malawi and South Africa are also providing contingents.

May 14, 2013: The government acknowledged that former M23 rebel fighters have been allowed to join the Congolese Army through the army’s reintegration program. North Kivu provincial officials claim that over 500 former rebels (from various militias) have joined Congolese Army units since late 2012. The officials have complained to the national government that the reintegration program creates security risks for Congolese civilians. The North Kivu officials are particularly worried about M23 rebel fighters who have rejoined the Congolese Army. The most prominent former M23 fighter to be reintegrated is Colonel Nzala Ngomo, who at the time was commanding a Congolese Army battalion and defected to M23 in November 2012. As of May 1, he is now fully reinstated as an officer in the Congolese Army. The North Kivu officials see the unrestricted reintegration of M23 fighters as rebel infiltration.

May 14, 2013: CONGO-K Outcry over new mining legislation

Mining companies are engaged in an angry tug-of-war with Kinshasa as the government puts the final touches to revisions in a mining code that
came into force just 10 years ago. The government deems that the industry doesn’t contribute enough to Congo-K’s budget and thus wants to impose higher taxes.

May 15, 2013: Armed Mai-Mai militiamen attacked a Congolese Army camp and recruitment center outside the town of Beni (North Kivu province). The attack kicked off a two-hour long firefight between the gunmen and Congolese Army soldiers. 23 gunmen were killed, three soldiers and five army recruits.

May 16, 2013: South Africa reaffirmed its commitment to support the UN’s intervention brigade in Congo. However, South African defense officials said that many senior South African military officers believe the South African military is currently over-committed. South Africa is involved in several peacekeeping efforts in Africa. The new intervention brigade mission will require shifting scarce resources from other missions. South Africa’s participation in the intervention brigade is regarded as critical by the UN.

May 20, 2013: M23 rebels attacked a Congolese Army (FARDC) position ten kilometers north of Goma (capital of North Kivu province). This was the first armed battle between M23 fighters and the Congolese Army since late 2012. M23 acknowledged that a firefight occurred in the area but said that its fighters were attacked by Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militiamen. After the M23 fighters drove off the FDLR attack, Congolese Army artillery began shelling their position and M23 accused the government of over-reacting.

Terror attacks on nations manning the brigade may seem far-fetched but they cannot be completely discounted. The model here is Uganda, which has troops serving in the UN and African Union’s AMISOM Somali peacekeeping operation. Uganda has suffered several terror attacks which have been tied to Somali Islamist extremists who oppose AMISOM. Intervention Brigade advocates portray the brigade as the military field force component of the UN’s new Framework security and development agreement. The Framework is UN shorthand for the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for Eastern Democratic Republic Of the Congo and the Region (i.e. central African and Great Lakes region). Brigade advocates point out that there are at least 25 active, armed rebel militias in the eastern Congo. The militias seed violent chaos, making it all but impossible to conduct humanitarian relief operations, much less establish and run the long-term economic, training, and political stability operations the region needs. Brigade advocates contend the offensive mandate is an attempt to set conditions for sustainable economic and political development. (Austin Bay)
May 20, 2013: At least 19 soldiers and rebel fighters were killed when M23 rebels fought with a pro-government militia group north of Goma. The government said it lost four Congolese Army soldiers and that the rebels lost 15 killed. Observers described the fighting as the heaviest in the area since November 2012.

The World Bank has promised Central Africa $1 billion in aid. Congo will get money for medical services, education, and electrical generation projects.

May 22, 2013: UN observers reported more skirmishing around Goma (North Kivu). Two days of shellfire (probably mortar fire) has wounded 15 civilians in Goma. At least one child was killed by shellfire. The fire came from M23 rebel positions.

May 23, 2013: The UN Secretary visited Goma and delivered a speech. He declared that improving security and development must go forward simultaneously in Congo. Before his arrival M23 said that it would observe a ceasefire. The rebels demanded that the government sign a ceasefire agreement.

The UN announced that the deployment of the Intervention Brigade will be delayed. The UN and contributing nations are experiencing severe logistical difficulties. Diplomats are also saying that South Africa has told them that its military will need more time to fully deploy its troop contingent, in part because South Africa is already extensively involved in other peacekeeping operations. South Africa does have a lead contingent on the ground in Goma. Tanzania has a contingent in Goma as well, which is where the brigade headquarters will be. Malawi has committed troops to serve in the brigade. Since 13 South African peacekeepers were killed in the Central African Republic (CAR) earlier this year, a number of South Africans have questioned the Intervention Brigade deployment. The critics argue that South Africa is already doing more than its share of sub-Saharan peacekeeping.

The UN reported that a MONUSCO peacekeeping unit from the Indian Army is deployed on the north side of Goma. The unit is supported by armored vehicles.

May 28, 2013: A civilian group in north Kivu province has accused the Rwandan government of sending four battalions of soldiers into the Congo. The Rwandans allegedly fought a battle near the town of Mutaho (north of Goma, near the airport). Rwanda denied the accusation. Four battalions is a large body of troops and it is very unlikely that a large group of Rwandan soldiers entered the Congo. M23 rebels and Congolese forces have been skirmishing in the area.
May 29, 2013: M23 rebels said they are willing to agree to an extended ceasefire. Over the last ten days M23 and the Congolese Army have engaged in several firefights north of the city of Goma (capital of North Kivu province). An M23 spokesman said that the rebels are positioned near Goma’s airport and they can target the airport very easily because they have fighters on a hill overlooking the airport. M23 also accused allies of the government (likely a pro-government militia) of attacking its fighters while they were securing fresh water supplies. M23 takes its name from the March 23, 2009 peace agreement, which was supposed to end the chaotic fighting in North Kivu province. The M23 rebels contend the government broke its side of the agreement. One major M23 criticism is that the rebels did not receive their fair share of positions in the Congolese Army.

June 1, 2013: The South African government said that it supports deployment of the UN’s Intervention Brigade in the eastern Congo but it hopes that Congo and the M23 rebel group will restart peace negotiations. However, South African media is giving a lot of attention to the Intervention Brigade’s peace enforcement mandate – that is UN peacekeeping jargon for an offensive mission. Senior members of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) political party have also raised the issue of foreign support for some of the rebel militias the brigade will likely confront. A spokesman did not specifically mention Rwanda but Rwanda has been accused of providing M23 with money, weapons, and training. Rwanda denies the accusation.

June 3, 2013: The Tanzanian brigadier general who has been designated as commander of the Intervention Brigade, BG James Aloizi Mwakibolwa, said that the brigade will operate as part of the UN Monitoring and Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO). Some UN sources now refer to the brigade as MONUSCO’s Force Intervention Brigade. The brigade will be based in North Kivu province and have 3,069 soldiers. Mwakibolwa sees four essential tasks for the unit: neutralizing armed groups, reducing the threat posed to Congolese government authority, providing security for Congolese civilians, and creating space for stabilization activities (UN jargon for establishing secured areas). The brigade will carry out targeted offensive operations in order to neutralize the armed groups. The Congolese Army may or may not participate in the offensive operations conducted by the Intervention Brigade.

June 5, 2013: The UN believes that nations involved in the Framework initiative for stabilizing central Africa must be prepared to fight the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group. The FDLR was founded by Rwandan Interahamwe Hutu extremists who organized and participated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front invaded Rwanda from Uganda, stopped the
genocide, and defeated the Interahamwe. Surviving Interahamwe fled into the eastern Congo. The Interahamwe were radical members of the Hutu tribe-dominated National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND) which ruled Rwanda from 1975 to 1994. Rwanda has claimed that the FDLR receives support from sources in the Congo. The Rwandan government will not negotiate with the FDLR and that’s why the Intervention Brigade may include the FDLR on its list of targeted militias and rebel groups.

June 6, 2013: UN officials in Congo stated that Secretary General Ban Ki Moon’s visit to the country and his stop in Goma has had a positive diplomatic outcome. The M23 rebel movement is indicating that it will resume peace negotiations in Uganda after having been suspended since early May.

June 9, 2013: M23 said that it had sent a representative to Uganda’s capital, Kampala, to participate in a new round of peace talks with the Congolese government.

June 10, 2013: Logistic problems continue to delay the deployment of the UN’s Intervention Brigade. This comes as no surprise. Central Africa in general lacks transportation infrastructure. There are few paved roads. The intercontinental airports in the national capitals are adequate but airfields in the hinterland are a very mixed lot. Many airfields in eastern Congo are dirt fields that can only handle small planes (think Cessna) and helicopters. The UN currently uses Goma’s airport (North Kivu province) as a logistical “airhead” (airfield as a logistics terminal) but it is inadequate. Everyone knows it needs improvements. The airport and the city lack sufficient facilities for storing supplies. Experienced military commanders and planners know a combat operation should never rely on one key supply source, and the UN Intervention Brigade has an offensive combat mission. The Goma airport is vulnerable to rebel attack. During the last week of May, M23 rebels repeatedly hit the airport with mortar fire. M23 suspended the attacks so UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon could fly in to Goma for a speech. Media reported that UN personnel said the Secretary General’s very large travelling entourage encountered numerous transportation and logistic problems in eastern Congo. A second UN-sponsored group was also in the region. According to one official, supporting the two groups proved to be a logistical nightmare. Supporting the Intervention Brigade is far more complicated and there are problems here that may not be solved. This would limit the mobility and effectiveness of the Intervention Brigade. (Austin Bay)

June 14, 2013: M23 representatives in Kampala, Uganda accused the Congolese government of reneging on a promise to re-start peace negotiations. On June 9 both the Congolese government and M23 agreed to begin a new round of talks.
June 15, 2013: UN sources reported that approximately 25 percent of the personnel pledged to serve in the Intervention Brigade have arrived in the Congo. Logistical problems in Goma (North Kivu province) continue to plague force deployment. The brigade has an authorized end strength of 3,069 soldiers. Malawi, Tanzania, and South Africa are providing the combat troops.

June 16, 2013: M23’s senior field commander, general Sultani Makenga, said that his fighters are prepared to defend their land against the UN’s Intervention Brigade.

June 20, 2013: The Ugandan government said that both M23 and the Congo government now have negotiating teams in Kampala.

June 21, 2013: M23 continues to run government-like operations. UN officials in Congo were outraged when M23 told reporters that it had arrested several men for illegal weapons possession. M23 says it does not allow crime in its area and it operates its own courts. UN diplomats accused M23 of operating an illegal parallel governmental administration.

June 26, 2013: The UN accused M23 rebels of murdering Congolese civilians. UN security personnel reported that M23 claims it is conducting area search operations (patrols). However, M23 rebels arbitrarily arrest and harass civilians. UN personnel have evidence that M23 fighters executed 26 Congolese farmers between June 16 and 19. The farmers lived in the villages of Busanza and Jomba. M23 immediately denied the accusations and accused the UN of lying.

June 27, 2013: MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo) has begun deploying 100 Egyptian Army special operations troops to Congo’s Katanga province. The Egyptian special forces unit will likely conduct operations against the Bakata Katanga separatist militia. MONUSCO said that several peacekeeping battalions (conventional units) have already deployed to Katanga.

June 28, 2013: The government is considering selling tin ore stockpiled in the eastern Congo. Over 400 tons of tin ore mined before the ban on exporting conflict minerals went into effect is stored in Goma (North Kivu province). Reportedly, two Chinese export companies want to buy the tin ore.

June 30, 2013: The UN believes that sympathetic Rwandan officials and military officers continue to provide support for the M23 rebel movement. However, overall support for M23 from Rwanda is much less than it was in late 2012. UN investigators claim they have evidence that M23 still recruits inside Rwanda and certain Rwandan officials turn a blind eye to the operation. UN investigators also reported that there is evidence which supports Rwandan allegations that some Congolese Army units have
collaborated with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation for Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group. The FDLR was founded by Hutu extremists who were directly involved in the 1994 genocide.

A Mai Mai militia attacked a jail in the town of Beni (North Kivu province) and released 250 prisoners. One Congolese Army soldier was killed in the attack. Witnesses reported that the attacker used explosives to breach the prison walls and doors. Beni is a major gold producing area in North Kivu.

Sanctions have failed to curtail the trade in Congolese gold. Gold smuggling has “almost” no oversight. This should surprise no one. The Congolese government estimated in 2009 that smugglers export 40 metric tons (worth $1.6 billion) of Congo-produced gold every year. The Ituri district and North Kivu province (M23’s stomping ground) are the Congo’s primary gold-producing areas. Ituri was part of Congo’s Orientale province, and according to some Congolese, it still is a district. Ituri, however, is a special district. Since 2003, an interim administration runs Ituri (which borders Uganda).

July 1, 2013: Congolese civilians reported that M23 has expanded its enclave and taken control of several villages in the Masisi area (near Goma, North Kivu province). This could be the case, but often these occupations are short-lived. M23 often conducts probes to gauge Congolese Army and UN peacekeeping force strength in a particular area.

July 4, 2013: Since late March, when the UN officially created the Intervention Brigade, South African government officials have repeatedly expressed concern with the brigade’s explicit offensive mission in the Congo. South Africa participates in many UN peacekeeping operations and indicated that many South African citizens fear that the offensive mandate sets a bad precedent. Future peacekeeping missions could be more difficult and more dangerous because rebels will see the peacekeepers as a foreign invader. Other governments around the world have expressed similar concerns. South Africa is still dealing with the blowback from this year’s Central African Republic (CAR) peacekeeping fiasco. In January 2013, South Africa sent 400 soldiers to serve with an emergency peacekeeping force in the CAR. Before their unit was fully deployed, Seleka guerrillas (the main CAR rebel force) attacked the peacekeepers. The peacekeeping mission became a combat mission. South Africa suffered 13 killed in action and 27 wounded. The South African people were understandably shocked at the high number of casualties. Many South Africans thought the UN gave the South African soldiers an impossible mission. UN planning was inadequate and local intelligence was very poor. The South African government is assuring its citizens that there will never be another CAR disaster. The government and officers in the South African National Defense Force (SANDF, South African military) are insisting that the Intervention Brigade be completely ready to fight before
the operation begins. The South African contingent consists of an 850-
soldier infantry battalion. South Africa has a very professional military
which believes in realistic training (fight like you train, train like you fight).
The CAR operation was slapped together in haste. That is not the South
African style. Recently the South African military reported that personnel
assigned to the brigade have been conducting some very specific training
exercises. At a training area in South Africa, Intervention Brigade soldiers
attacked a simulated rebel-held enclave. The simulated enclave was built
to resemble the border enclave occupied by M23 rebels. South African
attack helicopters and jet fighter-bombers supported the attack. Why leak
the training details? M23 reads press reports. The South African
government wants M23 to know that if South African infantry assaults its
enclave, South Africa's high-quality infantrymen will have high quality air
support and fire support. M23 should consider surrender. That way
everyone stays alive. (Austin Bay)

July 14, 2013: The Congolese Army fought with M23 rebels near the town
of Mutaho, seven kilometers north of Goma.

July 18, 2013: There was heavy fighting between M23 rebels and the
Congolese Army 12 kilometers north of Goma (Kibati area).

July 19, 2013: The African Union (AU) announced that it will deploy a new
peacekeeping mission of 3,600 soldiers to the Central African Republic
(CAR).

July 23, 2013: The United States demanded that the Rwandan military
end its support of M23 rebels. The U.S. said that it was concerned that the
Rwandan Army was still supporting the M23 militia in the Congo. The U.S.,
however, indicated that it did not have evidence that Rwanda had
authorized support for M23.

Oil industry analysts reported that a new discovery in Uganda could add
500,000 barrels a day in output. The announcement boosts prospects for
building a pipeline from Uganda to the Kenyan seaport of Lamu.

July 31, 2013: Rwanda believes that the use of the UN IBDE to forcibly
disarm militias around Goma could undermine peace talks.

August 4, 2013: UN forces in the Congo are now using an Italian-made
unarmed surveillance drone.

August 10, 2013: The film KONY 2012 personalized the terror created by
the Ugandan rebel group, the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). Despite an
international force deployed to fight the LRA in the CAR and Congo, LRA
senior commander Joseph Kony is still in the field and LRA fighters still
attack civilians in the Congo and the CAR. Despite the failure to capture
Kony, many hail the film because it brought global attention to Central
African security issues. Moreover, they argue that the anti-Kony effort has had positive effects by forcing the UN to devote more soldiers to protecting civilians in the Congo. That is probably true but at the margins. Chaos in the CAR and parts of Congo (especially eastern Congo) and South Sudan is a bigger threat to lives and property than the LRA. Eliminating Kony won’t end political chaos or the threats posed by other armed groups, such as the rogue militias in eastern Congo. (Austin Bay)

August 15, 2013: The Lord’s Resistance Army continues to be a major security concern in the Central African Republic (CAR). There the Seleka coalition has formed a new government and is conducting arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings. Seleka fighters are also suspected of conducting gang rapes.

August 17, 2013: MONUSCO peacekeepers operating in the Congo province of Katanga have rescued 82 children who had been kidnapped by the Mai-Mai Bakata-Katanga militia. The operations against the militia took place between August 11 and August 15.

August 18, 2013: Seleka rebel leader Michel Djotodia was sworn in as president of the CAR.

Rwanda said the Congolese Army fired a rocket into Rwandan territory.

August 22, 2013: The UN IBDE saw its first military action when IBDE artillery fired on M23 rebels north of Goma. The IBDE is a special UN brigade of 3,000 soldiers, though only 2,000 are currently deployed (Tanzanian and South African infantry battalions plus artillery unit). The brigade will ultimately have three infantry battalions (the third battalion supplied by Malawi). Other UN forces from MONUSCO are also deployed in the area.

August 24, 2013: M23 militiamen fired two mortar rounds into Goma and sent some of their gunmen into the outskirts of Goma. In late July the UN declared Goma to be within a security zone and warned M23 to stay away.

August 26, 2013: The UN IBDE (intervention brigade) is now fighting M23 rebels near the city of Goma (North Kivu province). The IBDE was created to destroy armed rebel groups in the Congo. The IBDE is also supporting Congolese Army operations against M23. Most of the action is near the town of Kibati (ten kilometers north of Goma).

Rwanda claimed that on August 27th a Congolese Army unit near the town of Mutaho (north of Goma) fired mortar shells into Rwanda.

August 28, 2013: A UN peacekeeper from Tanzania was killed and three were wounded in action against the M23 rebel militia near the city of Goma. Tanzanian infantry serve with the UN’s Intervention Brigade (IBDE), which is operating outside Goma. The Congolese Army claimed
that “several dozen” M23 rebels were killed in combat between Kibati and the town of Kibumba and 12 were captured. This operation began when the Congolese Army, supported by attack helicopters and artillery, attacked the M23 fighters. Rwanda accused the Congolese Army of shelling Rwandan territory and killing a Rwandan civilian. UN observers in the Rwanda-Congo border area (near the city of Goma) claimed that M23 rebels fired mortar shells into Rwanda.

August 29, 2013: Tanzania has asked Uganda to act as a mediator between its government and Rwanda. The Tanzanian government acknowledged that its statement earlier this summer, that all Central African nations should talk with their respective rebel groups, deeply offended Rwanda. Rwanda completely rejects negotiations with the genocidaires in the FDLR. Interhamwe Hutu radicals (who now run the FDLR) orchestrated the 1994 genocide, which left over 800,000 Rwandans dead.

August 29, 2013: Congo-K: mines at the heart of ethnic allegiances’

AFRICA MINING: In this enormous country where central power is weak, ethnic allegiance counts above everything, particularly in the mineral resources sector where the political and economic stakes are high. Whoever controls the copper, cobalt, diamond and cassiterite mines of this vast land controls the manna which will finance the presidential and provincial elections of the future and the military operations needed to repel foreign forces. Since the end of the Second Congo War in 2003, the province of Katanga has succeeded in attracting back foreign investors into copper and cobalt extraction, even though Gécamines, the local producer of the red metal, is taking time to get back up to speed. As a result, the peoples of Katanga are currently dominating the sector through their different community associations – the Sempia for the Bembas in the rich south, the Divar for the Lundas, also in the south, and the Balubakat for the Lubas in the north.

The mining sector has not yet recovered from the sudden death in an aircraft accident on February 12 2012 of Augustin Katumba Mwanke, considered by the late Laurent Désiré Kabila as his son. Katangan like Kabila senior and a Bemba, Katumba had become Kabila’s indispensable financial adviser and right hand man. Also known as "AK 47", he helped many civil servants from the Congolese mining administration to promotion and has left behind him a huge vacuum which is proving difficult to fill.

Nothing suggests that the situation will stabilise in the near future. On the contrary, the sources of future turbulence are accumulating. Mines minister Martin Kabwelulu, an outsider who has nevertheless succeeded in establishing his authority in the sector, is in poor physical form to the
extent that his detractors consider that he will be unable to complete the
difficult reform of the mining code currently in progress. Who will succeed
him? Perhaps Simon Tuma-Waku, who has already held the post. As for
Moïse Katumbi Chapwe, the subtle but powerful governor of Katanga, who
is thought to have presidential ambitions, should, on the other hand, be
replaced before the end of next year by a north Katangan.

In this context of uncertainty, Dan Gertler, an Israeli entrepreneur who is
Congolese by adoption, has more political and financial power than
anyone. Having arrived in Congo-K at the age of 23, this inveterate
gambler found his way through the pitfalls of the regime of Laurent Kabila
to become the latter’s diamond king and has now adapted to that of his
son by establishing himself as the major force in the Katangan copper and
cobalt sectors. The foreign mining companies, if, like Gertler’s partner,
Glencore, they are not part of the inner circle, use the services of a local
mining expert with a solid contact network. They also call in influential
Congolese legal advisers to make their precious assets as secure as
possible in the uncertain environment which reigns in the country.

August 30, 2013: The Congolese Army has taken several strategic
positions in the Kibati hills overlooking the city of Goma by pushing M23
rebels off the ridges. Meanwhile, Rwandan Army units moved toward the
border. The Rwandan government claims that the Congolese Army has
repeatedly shelled Rwandan territory.

M23 rebels fought with Congolese Army units near the city of Goma. The
Congolese Army forces were backed by elements of the UN Intervention
Brigade (IBDE).

August 31, 2013: The UN confirmed that M23 rebels are responsible for
shelling Rwandan territory. Rwanda had claimed that the Congolese Army
had fired artillery into the Rwandan town of Gisenyi (Rwanda-North Kivu
province border).

September 1, 2013: Rwanda again called the radical Hutu militia the
Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) a “state within a
state” inside the Congo. The FDLR was founded by Hutus belonging to the
Interahamwe movement (which organized and carried out the 1994
Rwanda genocide). The main victims (the Tutsi minority) managed to
defeat the Hutu killers, and since then the FDLR has operated out of the
eastern Congo. Rwanda contends that that the Congolese Army
cooperates with the FDLR and lets the FDLR maintain base camps in the
Congo. Rwanda has very legitimate security concerns in the eastern
Congo and uses that to justify occasional military intervention in the
eastern Congo. The deal Rwanda intends to forge in Central Africa is one
that trades the M23 rebel movement for the end of the FDLR. Rwanda
denies allegations that it supports M23.
However, M23 is a predominantly Congolese Tutsi. The Rwandan government is dominated by Rwandan Tutsis.

September 5, 2013: Congolese and Rwandan leaders met in Uganda and agreed that the Congo and M23 need to begin a new round of peace negotiations.

September 6, 2013: The UN reported that investigators had found evidence supporting allegations that Seleka rebels in the Central African Republic (CAR) committed widespread atrocities. The worst violations occurred in the northern CAR. The Seleka rebels now control the government. What does it mean to be the government in the CAR? In this case Seleka controls the capital, Bangui, and their leader, Michel Djotodia, has declared himself the CAR president. Outside of Bangui the country is in chaos. The UN is considering funding a new African Union (AU) peacekeeping force in the CAR.

Tanzanian soldiers serving with the UN IBDE in the Congo denied rumors that they had captured four Rwandan commandos.

September 7, 2013: Uganda insists reports that the Allied Democratic Forces rebel group had launched an attack in western Uganda were false. The Ugandan Army investigated the incident and found that on September 6th, eleven Congolese army soldiers were fleeing attacks by rebels inside the Congo and had mistakenly crossed the Congo-Uganda border. This was misreported as a rebel attack.

September 8, 2013: A spokesman for M23 said the group will disband when the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) is disarmed. M23 made it clear that FDLR disarmament must precede the dissolution of M23.

In Congo M23 rebel militiamen blocked a road outside of the town of Rutshuru (60 kilometers north of Goma, in North Kivu province). The rebels also ambushed several vehicles traveling on roads leading to Rutshuru.

September 9, 2013: The Congolese government agreed to restart peace negotiations with the M23 rebel group. This came after two weeks of on and off combat with M23. Both the Congolese Army and the UN’s new Intervention Brigade (IBDE) have fought with M23 in and around the city of Goma (North Kivu province). The IBDE serves with other UN forces in MONUSCO (UN Stabilization Mission in the Congo).

September 9, 2013: Some 60 people in the CAR were killed when forces loyal to former president Francois Bozize fought with Seleka rebel militiamen in the town of Bossangoa (northwestern CAR). The town is
Bozize’s hometown. Bozize was toppled by the Seleka coalition in March 2013.

A court in the republic of Congo (Brazzaville) sentenced 6 soldiers to long prison terms for their role in a series of explosions at a military weapons depot in the capital during March 2012. Some 300 people were killed by the explosions and 2,300 were wounded, while some 17,000 people lost their homes. 1 of the soldiers was convicted of arson and sentenced to 15 years in prison. A former army colonel, who also served on the national security council, was sentenced to 5 years hard labor for his role in the incident.

September 10, 2013: Uganda is investigating reports that the M23 Congolese rebel group has recruited Ugandan nationals. In the past Ugandan officials dismissed similar allegations, but recently an M23 militiaman from Uganda crossed the border and defected to Ugandan authorities. He claimed that M23 recruiters approached him and told him they were recruiting people to work for the UN in the Congo. Instead he was taken to an M23 base in Lumangabo, Congo and given military training.

September 11, 2013: MONUSCO’s currently deploys 20,519 total uniformed personnel. That breaks down to 18,587 soldiers, 512 military observers, and 1,420 armed police.

September 12, 2013: The UN reported that its peacekeeping forces in the Congo will not receive the unarmed Italian reconnaissance drones until the first week of December 2013. In late August and early September, UN peacekeeping offices touted the imminent arrival of an unarmed recon aerial vehicle provided by the Italian company Finmeccanica.

September 15, 2013: The Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) has sent 200 more combat soldiers to serve with the international peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic (CAR). The Congo-Brazzaville government said that it was concerned about increasing violence in the CAR. Currently 150 Congo (Brazzaville) soldiers are deployed in the CAR. Meanwhile, the new president of the CAR, Michel Djotodia, has announced that his rebel coalition, the Seleka, has been disbanded. However, no one in the CAR and none of the peacekeepers serving in the international force know what Djotodia’s statement means. Seleka militiamen still control the CAR’s key towns.

UN officials complain that UN peacekeeper tactics for protecting vulnerable civilians in the Congo are inadequate. One problem is that the peacekeeper (MONUSCO) bases are poorly located. More of a problem is the standing orders which prevent peacekeepers from attacking rogue militias unless fired upon does not protect vulnerable communities. UN
officials are pushing for a reassessment of these tactics in the current meeting of national leaders at the UN headquarters. There is growing international enthusiasm for changing the rules of engagement for peacekeepers operating in the more dangerous places like Congo. The current commander of the UN forces in the Congo told his superiors that to be effective the UN must defeat “emerging threats.” This sounds a lot like the mandate for the Intervention Brigade.

September 19, 2013: The UN confirmed that since July 2013, Tanzania has expelled 28,000 illegal Burundian migrants. Many of the Burundians had been in Tanzania since the 1970s, when they fled the Burundi civil war.

September 21, 2013: Congolese Army forces retook four villages in north Kivu province from M23 militiamen. The fighting was in the Libero region near the Rwandan border.

September 23, 2013: Uganda announced that it is heightening security measures. The recent terror attack on the mall in Nairobi, Kenya are the main reason. Ugandan Army and Burundian Army troops serve in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeeping force along with Kenyan military forces. In July 2010, the Somali terrorist group Al Shabaab launched two terror attacks in Uganda’s capital, Nairobi, and killed seventy-seven people.

September 24, 2013: The UN has begun referring to the UN Intervention Brigade (IBDE) as the multi-national Force Intervention Brigade (or FIB). The UN has floated the acronym of FIB for the brigade but unfortunately a fib is an English word for a falsehood. After a month in action, however, the IBDE is for real. Though the Malawi infantry battalion still has not arrived, to no one’s surprise the Tanzanian and South African battalions have been quite successful. The brigade’s artillery unit has been extremely effective in providing fire support to both the brigade and Congolese forces engaging M23 fighters. Though the UN has not made any definitive statements about employing the IBDE against the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia, several observers in North Kivu have mentioned the FDLR as a potential next target. That makes a lot of sense. Rwanda wants the FDLR eliminated. Rwanda has apparently withdrawn its support for M23, so hitting the FDLR would be a quid pro quo. Uganda has acted as mediator between the Congolese government and M23 representatives. Another likely target for the IBDE is the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel group with bases in Congo’s North Kivu province. The ADF has ties to Somalia’s militant Islamist Al Shabaab terrorist organization. Smashing the ADF would be a reward for Uganda’s diplomatic efforts. (Austin Bay)
September 25, 2013: Central African leaders and the UN have asked the Congolese government to strike a deal with the M23 rebel group. The latest round of talks began on September 10th and the talks continue in Uganda.

September 27, 2013: Several dozen civilians were attacked and wounded in North Kivu province. Victims were unable to identify a particular militia. In CAR Islamic terrorists (probably from Sudan) kidnapped a Catholic priest from a mission station in the town of Bouar. The crime probably occurred on September 27th. The kidnappers also looted the mission. A local resident working at the mission was also kidnapped but was later released. Former Seleka rebels also attacked the village of Herba and killed 2 people.

September 28, 2013: Police and customs officials in North Kivu province seized almost 400 kg (880 pounds) of coltan (a mineral form of tantalum, which is used in the manufacturing of many high-technology electronics devices).

October 1, 2013: China’s aid-for-resources deal is once again stirring political controversy in the Congo. The deal is for at least $6.5 billion dollars (and possibly as much as $9 billion). In exchange for guaranteed access to copper, cobalt, and other minerals, Chinese construction companies will build roads, medical clinics, hospitals, and educational facilities. However, some funds China provided have already disappeared. Opposition leaders claim that $300 million is not accounted for.

October 2, 2013: The president of Uganda challenged dissident general David Sejusa to try and launch a revolution to overthrow him. Sejusa has been living in exile in Great Britain since May 2013. Prior to entering exile, Sejusa had been chief of Uganda’s intelligence services. Recently Sejusa called on the people of Uganda to remove president Museveni from power. Congo announced that talks with M23 negotiators in Uganda’s capital, Kampala, will continue for at least another week. The Congo commended Uganda for helping organize the talks.

October 3, 2013: Kenya asked Uganda to help track down individuals suspected of helping organize the recent Islamic terrorist attack on the Westgate mall in Nairobi. Kenyan police believe a German national with connections to Al Shabaab fled into Uganda after the attack.

October 4, 2013: The U.S. has formally sanctioned the government of Rwanda for its support of the M23 Congolese rebel organization. The U.S. has concluded that Rwandan officials have provided aid, despite the Rwandan government’s denials. The Rwandan government immediately objected to the U.S. sanctions, but opposition political leaders welcomed
the U.S. decision. The American sanctions deal with U.S. military
equipment sales and U.S. military education and training services.

At the UN in New York, the leaders of Rwanda and Uganda argued that
their countries are not responsible for the chaos in Congo’s eastern
provinces. The presidents of both countries said they cannot bring peace
to the eastern Congo. That is the job of the Congolese government and
the Congolese people. Both Rwanda and Uganda claim that the Congolese
government cannot control its own army and foreigners are not
responsible for that situation.

October 5, 2013: Rwanda criticizes US sanctions over Congolese M23 child
soldiers’

Rwadan President Paul Kagame has rebuked the U.S. State Department’s
decision to sanction his country over its alleged association with the M23
rebel group. President Kagame said the decision fits into the plan of exiled
Hutu rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere who,
according to him, seek to destroy what the Rwandan people are trying to
build. He also questioned why his country was being held accountable for
the faults of others. The U.S. State Department announced that under the
Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008, it is putting Rwanda, Sudan,
Myanmar, Central African Republic and Syria on sanction for their use of
or association with groups who use child soldiers. The sanctions
particularly concern military aid. The U.S. Government announced that
Rwanda would not receive U.S. International Military Education and
Training Funds as well as U.S. Foreign Military Financing in the 2014 fiscal
year. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for
African Affairs said the U.S. government’s goal is to work with these
countries it has sanctioned to ensure that “any involvement and
recruitment of child soldiers” are stopped.

The United Nations and the government of the Democratic Republic of
Congo had earlier accused the Rwandan government of supporting the
Tutsi-dominated M23 rebel group. But the Rwandan government has
insistently denied this charge. Spokesman for the Rwandan Armed Forces,
Brigadier General Joseph Nzabamwita said the U.S. has enough
information about his country’s activities to know it is not in any alliance
with the rebel group. He said “Rwanda’s commitment to a sustainable
solution that seeks to bring an end to the DRC conflict and its
consequences, including the use of child soldiers, remains unchanged.”
Many observers have questioned the sanctions, especially since three
countries – South Sudan, Chad and Yemen – who are suspected of using
child soldiers were exempted from the sanctions and two others – Somalia
and the Democratic Republic of Congo – received partial waivers. It is
unclear how deep the supposed alliance between the Rwandan
government and M23 rebel group goes. But the Tutsi-dominated
government has twice invaded the DRC to unsettle Hutu rebels. President Paul Kagame of Rwanda came to power after the 1994 genocide – one of the most bloody events in the history of the nation which left close to 800,000 people dead. The country still struggles to overcome the effects of that violent outbreak.

October 8, 2013: In the Central African Republic (CAR) at least 30 people have been killed in fighting in and around the town of Garga (200 kilometers north-west of Bangui, the capital). For 2 days fighters loyal to former president Bozize have been clashing with local defense groups there. Forces loyal to the Seleka group, which now controls the country, have also approached the town. Most of the townspeople have fled into the countryside to escape the chaos. Former rebels (in this case likely Seleka rebel fighters) looted a clinic in the area. Meanwhile, the UN and African Union are trying to organize a peacekeeping force of 3,500 troops for the CAR.

October 9, 2013: M23 rebels in Congo’s North Kivu province have been observed improving their positions near the Congo-Rwanda border. M23, however, said that the UN was merely observing normal troop movements and then accused the Congo of reinforcing its military positions in the area.

October 10, 2013: Armed militias thrive in Congo largely because of illegal mining. It’s estimated that rebel groups in the Congo stole around $500 million worth of minerals in 2012. That included an estimated 12 tons of gold smuggled out via Uganda or Burundi and sold to jewelers in the United Arab Emirates or brokers in the Persian Gulf. The rebels also smuggle large quantities of tantalum, tin, and tungsten.

October 12, 2013: The UN complained that M23 rebels had fired on one of their helicopters as it flew an M23 held area. M23 told the UN that they were warning shots, as they did not like UN helicopters to watch them.

October 13, 2013: The UN has indicated that the Intervention Brigade (IBDE) may target other rogue militias in the Congo after M23 is either defeated or disbands following negotiations. The FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) is certainly a potential target. Formed by many of the Rwandan Hutu leaders who engineered the 1994 genocide, the FDLR has already been damaged by attacks. Rwandan and Congolese troops have been moving against the FDLR and that has taken a toll. Several senior FDLR leaders have died in these operations. The FDLR has also suffered in a series of battles with a local militia (the Raia Mutomboki). Still, the FDLR’s main armed organization, FOCA (Forces Combattantes Abacunguzi), fields at least 2,500 armed men. 2 FDLR splinter factions continue to operate in the eastern Congo, the FDLR-RUD and the FDLR-Soki. The FDLR-RUD has a few hundred fighters (400 to
There are no figures for the FDLR-Soki, although its leader (Soki Sangano Musuhuke) was allegedly killed in July 2013. Many splinter factions simply fall apart when the leader dies, but for the moment the FDLR-Soki is recognized as an armed faction. The IBDE could also see action against the Ugandan rebel force the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which operates in North Kivu province. The ADF has links to Somalia’s Islamist Al Shabaab organization. 2 Katangan separatist militias have also been mentioned as possible targets, the Mai-Mai Gedeon and Mai-Mai Kata- Katanga (which has ties to older Katangan separatist movements). Finally, the IBDE could see action against remnant Lord’s Resistance Army cells operating in the Congo.

October 13, 2013: The UN condemned an M23 rebel attack on a UN helicopter. The incident occurred near Rumangabo in the eastern Congo.

October 14, 2013: The government again accused Rwanda of helping M23 and believes that M23 is preparing to launch a new series of attacks in the eastern Congo.

October 15, 2013: Army and M23 rebels fought near the rebel held town of Kanyahahoro and at least one rebel was killed.

October 19, 2013: A UN investigation found that some 200 former M23 combatants said they were recruited by M23 in either Rwanda or Uganda.

October 20, 2013: The government of Angola claimed that a contingent of Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) soldiers got lost and accidentally crossed the border into Angola’s Cabinda enclave. The Angolan explanation followed a Republic of Congo accusation that Angola had launched an invasion of Republic of Congo territory.

October 21, 2013: Peace negotiations between M23 and the government have been officially suspended. M23 has demanded that the Congolese government give senior M23 commanders amnesty. The government does not want to give amnesty to people it calls mutineers. UN mediators warned both sides that the breakdown in talks could lead to another round of fighting. Negotiators had reached agreement on several major issues, but neither side was willing to give on the amnesty demand. At the moment, UN observers estimate that M23 controls around 700 square kilometers of Congolese territory. That zone is divided into several enclaves. The largest enclaves are on the Rwandan and Ugandan borders.

The army forces attacked M23 near the town of Kanyamohoro (15 kilometers north of Goma). Troops around Goma were supported by heavy artillery fire.

October 25, 2013: Rwanda claimed that its territory was shelled by Congolese Army forces and that it will not tolerate attacks on its territory.
At the same time, some 5,000 Congolese civilians had fled into Rwanda to avoid fighting between the army and M23.

October 26, 2013: After two days of stiff fighting the army succeeded in driving M23 rebels from several key positions along the Ugandan and Rwandan borders. This included forcing M23 to abandon the town of Kibumba (20 kilometers north of Goma).

October 24, 2013: The government is blaming M23 for the breakdown in negotiations which has led to the latest round of fighting in North Kivu province.

The Rwandan government accused the UN of ignoring the threat posed to Rwanda and peace in central Africa by the FDLR.

Meanwhile, M23 rebels acknowledged that they have withdrawn from the town of Rumangabo. M23 had occupied the town since late 2012.

The Congolese Army reported that it is fighting an M23 force in the town of Kiguri (about 25 kilometers north of Goma). Soldiers took control of Kiwanja on October 27, after taking Kibumba (Rwandan border) the day before. Army units are consolidating their control over these towns.

October 28, 2013: A Tanzanian peacekeeper was killed during a firefight between Congolese forces and M23 rebels in the town of Kiwanja. The peacekeeper was part of a contingent assigned to protect civilians in the area. Kiwanja is north of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province.

October 29, 2013: The Seleka rebel group, which now controls the CAR (Central African Republic), is increasingly accused of bad behavior (crimes against humanity) that include random executions of innocent civilians, mass rape, and looting. The largely Moslem Seleka tends to target Christians.

October 30, 2013: The U.S. believes that the latest surge of fighting between Congolese forces and M23 rebels could ignite a larger regional war in central Africa and urged all parties in the conflict to re-open peace negotiations.

November 1, 2013: Uganda has told Kenya that it believes Jamil Mukulu, a key leader in the ADF (Allied Democratic Force) rebel group, may have assisted the Somalia Islamist militants who attacked a mall in Nairobi in September. The ADF always had militant Islamist connections. Mukulu calls himself the ADF’s Supreme Commander. According to the Ugandan government, the ADF has several bases in the Congo’s North Kivu province.

November 2, 2013: M23 and army units continued to fire on one another around Runyoni (North Kivu province). The situation in the area is chaotic,
though the army appears to control the area and has seized key positions near the town of Bungana.

November 3, 2013: M23 rebel leaders announced that they are declaring a ceasefire. The declaration follows a series of defeats by army units. Most of the fighting has occurred near the Congo-Uganda border.

November 4, 2013: Every person in the town of Bunagana is now a refugee. Many residents have fled into Uganda. Congolese Army units and M23 rebels have been fighting in and around the town for several days. Army units supported by tanks and rocket fire attacked an M23 position on a hill near Bungana and forced the defending rebels to retreat.

Elsewhere in the area army, troops are now in control of the town of Bunagana (North Kivu province).

November 5, 2013: The government claimed that it has scored a significant victory over the M23 rebel movement and repeated that it will not accept a ceasefire deal with M23. This followed a rebel announcement that it now intends to disarm and pursue political discussions. The rebels said that M23 commanders were preparing their troops for disarmament and demobilization. If that is not quite surrender, it is close. Observers in eastern Congo confirmed that M23 fighters withdrew from two bases (Tshanzu and Runyoni) and that a large contingent of rebels have surrendered with their weapons. Another group fled across the border into Uganda. A senior M23 commander reportedly fled to Rwanda. The army is now preparing to disarm the FDLR, which was organized by radical Hutus who helped organize and lead the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

However, South African losses in the CAR earlier this year embittered many South African citizens. The CAR may not be in the cards since a South African infantry battalion is the IBDE’s most professional component. The operational speculation inevitably leads to a strategic question: will we see more IBDEs in the future? Will “hard” peacekeeping or peacekeeping with teeth (meaning offensive war waged by the UN) become UN policy? (Austin Bay)

November 6, 2013: The UN Intervention Brigade (IBDE) was not directly involved in the recent series of battles between the Congolese Army and M23 rebels but was in the area. That meant a lot to the Congolese Army and the rebels. The battles began at the end of October and ended with M23 routed, retreating, and suing for peace. The IBDE gave the Congolese Army a lot of confidence when the brigade engaged M23 in late August. IBDE participation encouraged the army to press the rebels and the army won its first tactical victories over M23 in almost two years. Now the question is, will the IBDE’s relative success in the eastern Congo lead UN decision makers to use it against other rebel forces like the FDLR
Employing the brigade in the Congo’s south (Katanga province) has already been discussed. The UN could use the brigade to quell the chaos in the Central African Republic (CAR).

November 22, 2013: DR CONGO-Jesuit Refuge Service team member killed

Masisi: JRS staff member in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Yohana Bushu, was shot two weeks ago and died in hospital a few hours later. 'Papa Bushu', as he was known, had worked for JRS as a security guard since 2011. He died on his fortieth birthday following an attack by an armed group. He was returning home from a visit to his aunt 12 kilometres from Masisi in the eastern Congolese province of North Kivu. Bushu leaves eight children and a pregnant wife behind. "His widow, eight months pregnant, is still in hospital. I've been with her to talk and to console her a little. It is important to be with her now", said Regina Missanga OLG, a JRS team member in Masisi. Less than a year ago, Bushu’s sister was killed in the fighting around Masisi. Without a husband, her six-month-old baby was left to Bushu. "Today she is a strong baby girl", said Regina.

Insecurity: The death of a JRS team member is a stark reminder of the dangers of working in a humanitarian context. Despite this month’s military defeat of the rebel M23 Movement, violence and impunity continue in eastern DRC. Following the week of its thirty-third anniversary, JRS remembers all those who have given their lives in the service of others. "This tragic news underlines how the mission of JRS is being carried out in an environment of high risk to the lives of all team members and how important it is at the same time to be present to the suffering people", said the JRS International Director, Peter Balleis SJ, in his message of condolence to the teams. "The exact circumstances of Bushu's death are still unclear, but this situation of insecurity is a daily reality for our teams. We'll continue to accompany the family, and to give hope that all is not lost. God is still present", said Isaac Kiyaka SJ, JRS Great Lakes Africa Director.

Hopes for peace. "The team is sad. They're still sad. They don't understand, and they fear too", said Regina. On 15 November, JRS teams in Masisi held a ceremony in memorial of Bushu. A classroom of the JRS Pedro Arrupe Centre for literacy and livelihoods training has been named in his honour. "The entire team was there to commemorate and pay homage to Bushu", said Inés Oleaga ACI, Project Director in Masisi. "We shared a prayer, we named a classroom in his honour, and we shared lunch". Bushu was buried in a coffin made with materials from Felipe Berrios SJ, who runs a carpentry workshop for young people in Masisi. Bushu will be remembered as a man of compassion, whose advice was
deeply respected and sought by many. "Three days later, traditional mourning has finished and life continues in Masisi, a place where the dead are always present", said Inés. "Does that mean we have lost hope? Not at all, but for the moment our hope is not in the authorities' justice; rather in the experience of knowing that we've not been abandoned and peace will reign one day in Masisi".

November 27, 2013: Rebel Ugandan military officer general David Sejusa (also known as Tinyefuza) has called on Ugandans to peacefully remove current president Yoweri Museveni. Sejusa was head of Ugandan intelligence services until he defected and fled to Great Britain in April 2013. He has now allied with the Freedom and Unity Front (FUF), which is run by Ugandan exiles opposed to Museveni. Museveni, however, has stated that Sejusa wants to start an armed rebellion.

November 29, 2013: Congolese President Joseph Kabila visited the town of Rutshuru (North Kivu province). M23 rebels occupied Rutshuru for over a year. Kabila told residents that he intends to end the 20 years of war which have plagued the Congo.

November 30, 2013: The Sheka Mai-Mai militia has told the government and the head of MONUSCO that it will disarm. The Sheka Mai-Mai is is led by Sheka Ntabo Ntaberi, who refers to his group as a self-defense force. However, militiamen under his command have been accused of murder and mass rape.

December 1, 2013: The Ugandan military reported that its forces killed 14 LRA fighters in the CAR. The Ugandan Army used intelligence information provided by the U.S., which also has 100 special operations advisers assigned to help African military units fight the LRA and bring LRA senior commander Joseph Kony to justice. Among the LRA dead was Colonel Samuel Kangul, who has been identified as fourth in the LRA’s chain of command. Kangul was reportedly the LRA’s chief supply officer. The Ugandan military stopped anti-LRA operations after Seleka rebels took over the CAR in April of this year. Surveillance operations recommenced during the summer.

December 3, 2013: MONUSCO peacekeepers have now deployed drone recon aircraft in the Congo. Two Italian-made Falco surveillance drones are operating out of Goma (North Kivu province).

December 4, 2013: An estimated 1,000 M23 militia fighters are now interned in Uganda. Their final status is yet to be determined.

December 5, 2013: The Congo government and the UN continue to discuss the next target of MONUSCO’s (UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo) Intervention Brigade (IBDE). Several UN officials have mentioned the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
(FDLR), the Rwandan Hutu rebel group. The UN recently estimated the FDLR has 1,500 armed fighters and could well be a tougher opponent than the M23 rebel group the IBDE and Congolese forces defeated in early November. The FDLR is led by Hutus directly involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Rebellion is one thing, genocide another. The FDLR may have no choice but to fight to the last. Uganda would like the IBDE to go after the Islamist extremist rebel group the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Uganda has told the UN that ADF terrorists have kidnapped around 300 people in the last year. The ADF has ties to the Somali Islamist rebel group, Al Shabaab, which is an ally of Al Qaeda. The Ugandan military says it has evidence that the ADF has received ammunition, weapons, and other supplies from Islamist groups. The weapons include heavy recoilless rifles (107 millimeter, according to one source). Uganda has peacekeepers operating in Somalia with the AU’s AMISOM force. The ADF began in 1996, as a minor opposition group run by Moslem tribesmen. It was largely destroyed in 2004, but the fanatic survivors persisted, and now support from other Islamic terrorist groups have enabled ADF to grow and become more radical.

December 8, 2013: The UN estimated that 72,000 people have fled from their neighborhoods in Bangui, the capital of CAR. Many of them have collected near the city’s international airport. The airport is also the headquarters of French military forces and the African Union peacekeeping troops in the CAR.

December 9, 2013: French soldiers in the CAR engaged militia gunmen in a series of firefights in the capital, Bangui. On December 5, the UN authorized the French contingent to reinforce African Union peacekeepers in the CAR. The French military has an offensive mandate similar to that of the UN’s Intervention Brigade (IBDE) in the Congo. The French forces have orders to disarm rival Christian and Muslim tribal militias and the French forces are allowed to use lethal force against militia groups that refuse to disarm. The Seleka rebel movement, which toppled CAR president Francois Bozize in March 2013, drew its strength from Muslim tribes, many of them from the northern CAR. Since Bozize’s government fell, however, the country has descended into chaos. Observers in Bangui indicated that the Seleka rebel commander who became the interim president, Michel Djotodia, no longer has control of Seleka’s various militia factions. There are Seleka rebels fighting with the Muslim militias in Bangui. However, no one is quite sure if a particular militia is loyal to the rebel government. Some 450-500 people have been killed in Bangui since December 5, the day a Christian tribal militia loyal to Bozize entered the city. France now has around 1,600 soldiers in the CAR.

December 10, 2013: In late November reports cropped up in the Congo, Uganda, and Central African Republic (CAR) that Joseph Kony, the
notorious senior commander of the Ugandan rebel group, the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), was prepared to discuss surrender terms. The Ugandan military said it welcomed the news. Rumors regarding Kony’s impending surrender crop up every couple of years. The most serious appeared in 2006 and 2007. But he didn’t come in from the bush. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has indicted Kony on numerous charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. At one time the Ugandan government told an LRA mediator that if Kony surrendered he would be tried in Ugandan courts, not by the ICC. Kony apparently didn’t believe the offer was real. As it is, the official Ugandan government line is that it will not protect Kony from the ICC. Not surprisingly the November reports proved to be false. LRA cadres continue to launch occasional attacks in the Congo and the CAR, though said LRA attacks reported in the region during the January-June 2013 time frame were down by 50 percent compared to 2012. In November South Sudan dispatched an army battalion to provide security in an area residents claimed was threatened by the LRA.

December 11, 2013: Two French peacekeepers were killed in fighting in Bangui, the capital of the CAR.

Uganda reported that 19 Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) fighters have surrendered to Ugandan troops operating in the CAR. The Ugandan Army contingent operating in the CAR has an African Union (AU) mandate.

December 12, 2013: The Congo government has signed an agreement with representatives of the M23 rebel group which officially ends M23’s insurgency. Negotiators signed the deal in Nairobi. The agreement calls for an amnesty program. However, the government said that there will be no blanket amnesty.

UN officials reported that 2,300 rebel fighters in eastern Congo have surrendered since the end of October. Many of the surrendering rebels belonged to M23 but several hundred members of the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) have also surrendered.

UN peacekeepers in Congo’s North Kivu province have found a large M23 weapons and ammunition dump on a hill near the village of Chanzu (Congo-Uganda border). Officials said soldiers found heavy weapons at the dump and enough ammunition to supply M23 for up to a year.

December 13, 2013: Anicet Dologuele, a senior CAR political leader and a former chairman of the Central African Development Bank said that the French and African peacekeeping forces in the CAR have a very difficult job. French and MISCA soldiers are going to have to fight a war against the Seleka rebel movement and interim president Michel Djotodia has to
do more to try to stop the militia violence. At one time Djotodia was Seleka's senior commander.

December 14, 2013: Ugandan rebel general David Sejusa announced he has formed a political party dedicated to overthrowing Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni, the Freedom and Unity Front. Sejusa has been in exile in London since May 2013. Museveni has been in power 28 years. Sejusa alleges that Museveni intends to hand over power to his son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba.

Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) soldiers raided a compound belonging to Colonel Marcel Ntsourou, a former senior intelligence agency officer who is now on the outs with the government. The raid took place in Brazzaville. Ntsourou is charged with involved in the 2012 major explosion at a weapons depot which left 280 dead and injured 2,500. Ntsourou and his bodyguards returned fire and an extended firefight ensued that left over 40 dead, including two soldiers. Ntsourou was subsequently arrested. The Brazzaville rumor mill claimed that Republic of Congo president President Denis Sassou Nguesso believed Ntsourou intened to launch a coup and used the explosion as an excuse to arrest him.

The CAR’S interim president and one-time Seleka leader, Michel Djotodia, announced that he is willing to discuss amnesty for both Muslim and Christian militias now fighting one another. Djotodia has acknowledged that he no longer has effective control over many former Seleka rebel groups. When Djotodia made the announcement he said that he had been contacted by Christian and animist tribal militia leaders. The leaders told him they wanted representation in a transitional government.

UN peacekeepers reported an unidentified armed group killed at least 20 people in an attack on two villages in North Kivu province. Civilians in North Kivu accused a Ugandan Islamist rebel group (ADF-NALU, or Allied Democratic Forces-National Army Liberation of Uganda) of being responsible.

December 16, 2013: The UN says it has evidence that M23 rebels now in Rwanda are trying to recruit new members.

December 20, 2013: The Congo government said that some former M23 will be eligible for amnesty. Former rebels who are not guilty of committing serious crimes can apply for amnesty. The government agreed to an amnesty program in the December 12 agreement which officially ended M23’s insurgency. The amnesty program will cover “acts of insurrection” committed from May 8, 2009 to the date the Congolese parliament officially approves the peace settlement.

December 22, 2013: Muslim demonstrators in Bangui protested the presence of French troops in the CAR and the militia disarmament
campaign being directed by the French peacekeepers. The Muslims
demonstrators also alleged that the French had entered the CAR to protect
Christians and no one else. French officials said the Muslim demonstrators
were supporters of the Seleka rebel group. Central African Republic’s
former rebel group Seleka protested Sunday against French troops
conducting a disarmament operation.

December 23, 2013: In Kiwanja (north Kiu province) Congolese troops
arrested a rebel leader Kakule “Shetani” Muhima. who leads the Mai Mai
Shetani militia. Muhia’s nickname is Shetani, which translates as Satan. In
late November Muhima had indicated he wanted to sign a peace deal with
the government. However, Muhima is wanted on numerous charges,
including looting.

France has 1,600 soldiers in the CAR. African nations have deployed
around 3,000 peacekeepers to the CAR as part of the MISCA
peacekeeping operation. Burundi, Chad, Cameroon, Republic of Congo
(Brazzaville) and Gabon have contributed forces. Burundi has a contingent
in Bangui. Gabon has troops in Bouar (western CAR). The Congo
(Brazzaville) and Cameroon contingents are based in northwestern CAR
(towns of Paoua and Bossangoa). Chad has troops in Bangui, Bangassou
(southeast) and Ndele (north). The Chad contingent in Bangui is
withdrawing after officials accused the Chadian soldiers of siding with the
Muslim militias. Burundian soldiers accused Chadian soldiers of attacking
them while they were disarming a militia in Bangui. The Burundians
returned fire and wounded three Chad soldiers.

December 25, 2013: French peacekeepers in Bangui, capital of the Central
African Republic (CAR), deployed armored vehicles to defend the Bangui
airport. An estimated 70,000 civilians have collected near the airport to
escape the fighting between Muslim militias and Christian and animist
tribal militias. The situation in the CAR is chaotic. The hard core Muslim
militias are manned by Seleka rebels, though they are no longer loyal to
the Seleka interim government. The interim CAR government refers to
them as rogue militias. The Christian and animist militias now refer to
themselves as the anti-balaka, which means anti-machete in the Sango
language. Christian and animist tribal leaders accuse the Muslim militias of
attacking unarmed civilians and mutilating and killing them with
machetes.

December 27, 2013: The UN’s Force Intervention Brigade (IBDE) is back
in action in the eastern Congo. Elements of the IBD attacked rebels in the
Allied Democratic Forces ADF-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda
(ADF-NALU). The IBDE attack included fire from the brigade’s armed
helicopters which supported an attack by the Congolese Army (FARDC) on
the town of Kamango. ADF rebels seized the town earlier in the month and
then kidnapped and murdered several civilians. The ADF is an Islamist
organization and the Ugandan government contends that the ADF is allied with Somalia’s radical Al Shabaab Islamist militia. Earlier this month 200 IBDE soldiers and an armed helicopter aided the Congolese Army in an operation against the Rwandan rebel group, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The FDLR is an extremist Hutu group Senior FDLR commanders helped plan and execute the 1994 Rwandan genocide. UN officials now estimate that the FDLR has 1,500 to 1,800 fighters, but only 30 percent of the current fighters are Rwandan Hutus. The group has recruited the other 70 percent of its members from tribes in the eastern Congo.

December 27, 2013: The African Union reported that six Chadian peacekeepers were killed on December 25 in Bangui, capital of the CAR. Another 15 Chadian soldiers were wounded. The soldiers were ambushed in the capital’s Gobongo neighborhood. One Chadian vehicle was destroyed.

December 28, 2013: Between December 11 and December 20, two American C-17 transports moved 500 Burundian infantrymen from Burundi to the CAR. The C-17s also airlifted the units’ equipment, to include several light armored personnel carriers. Security at the Bangui airport was provided by French peacekeepers. Thousands of refugees could be seen at the airport, some huddled within 50 meters of the runway.

December 30, 2013: The Congolese Army drove off an attack on the airport in the capital city, Kinshasha. Rebels also fired on an army barrack and a television station in the city. The government claimed that around 70 followers of Katanga province religious leader Paul Joseph Mukungubila launched the raids. Some 40 of the attackers died in the firefights with the army. The government said the army did not suffer any casualties. The attackers were very poorly armed. Mukungubila’s followers accuse the government of launching an illegal attack on a church in Lubumbashi. Mukungubila fanatically opposes the government of president Joseph Kabila. The government said Mukungubila’s supporters conducted the attacks for the sole purpose of sowing panic in the capital.

Former CAR president Francois Bozize denied accusations that he is backing Christian anti-balaka (anti-machete) militia groups in the country. Bozize was overthrown by Seleka rebels. The Seleka movement drew its strength from predominantly Muslim tribes.

Patrick Karegeya, a former Rwandan Army colonel who once commanded the Rwandan government’s external intelligence service was found murdered in a hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa. Rwanda opposition politicians accused the Rwandan president of assassinating the
colonel. Karegeya became a political opponent of the president who fired him in 2006. Karegeya had been in exile since 2007.

January 2, 2014: A Congolese Army colonel leading an operation against Ugandan Alliance of Democratic Forces and National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) rebels was killed when his jeep was ambushed near the town of Matembo (North Kivu province). The rebels hit the jeep with a rocket-propelled grenade. The colonel commanded a special operations battalion.

January 3, 2013: The UN estimated that fighting in the CAR has displaced one million people. That is about 20 percent of the population. Around 500,000 displaced people have collected in makeshift refugee camps in the Bangui area.

January 5, 2014: A grenade attack in a Bangui, CAR market wounded four people. One of the wounded was a Burundian soldier serving with the streets of the MISCA African peacekeeping force.

January 7, 2014: In the south Congolese Army soldiers fought with Mai Mai Kata soldiers and rebel fighters were killed in a series of firefights which went on for eight hours. The Katanga rebels entered the city during the night. The government claimed its forces counter-attacked and the rebels retreated from the city. In March 2013 around 200 Kata Katanga rebels raided Lumbumbashi. During Fall 2013 the group threatened to launch another attack on the city. Kata Katanga is Swahili and translates as Secede Katanga. The group is sometimes referred to as the Mai Mai Gedeon (Gideon), after its leader and senior commander, Gedeon Kyungu Mutanga. Katanga has tried to secede from the Congo on several occasions. Mineral-rich Katanga is by far the country’s wealthiest province.

January 8, 2014: The EU (European Union) announced that defense ministers may send a joint military force to the CAR to aid peacekeeping efforts. The EU force would be structured as a rapid deployment force with 1,000 to 1,200 soldiers (reinforced battalion task force). The unit would have a fire support element (light artillery), a medical unit and a transport helicopter element. EU have agreed to make a decision on the force by the end of this month.

January 10, 2014: Michel Djotodia, former senior commander of the Seleka rebel movement, resigned as interim president of the CAR (Central African Republic). This caused celebrations in the streets of the capital.

January 12, 2014: Congolese national park rangers in Virunga National Park fought with a group of Rwandan FDLR (Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberations of Rwanda) rebels. One ranger and three rebels died in the engagement and two rangers were wounded. One rebel was captured after the firefight. Park authorities claimed that the rebels attacked the park
ranger force. The rangers have been trying to deny rebels bases in the park and also monitor rebel movements through the park.

January 13, 2014: Rwanda claims that political opponents and dissidents in Rwanda are attempting to start a new war in central Africa. This followed a South African police report which concluded that former Rwandan Army colonel Patrick Karegeya was murdered on January 2 by strangulation (a curtain cord around his neck). At one time Rwanda accused Karegeya of planning grenade attacks in Rwanda’s capital, Kigali.

January 14, 2014: The UN is urging the Congolese government to address land disputes in North and South Kivu provinces (eastern Congo). Outside groups have provided rebel groups in the eastern Congo with money and weapons in exchange for access to gold and other valuable minerals (coltan, for example). However, a recent study showed that land disputes between neighboring tribes remains a major cause of conflict in the region. Weak and corrupt government institutions exacerbate the situation. Disputes escalate into violent confrontations and then all out battles between tribal militias because no one trusts the justice system to be fair. The system is either regarded as being corrupt or, in many places, it does not exist. There is no centralized system for registering land ownership or recognizing land use rights. This is a common cause for unrest and poverty in many countries.

January 15, 2014: The UN peacekeeping mission announced that one of its surveillance drones was wrecked when it ran off the runway at the airfield in Goma (eastern Congo). The UN forces are using Falco unmanned aerial vehicles.

Tanzanian soldiers serving with the Intervention Brigade (IBDE) have deployed near the town of Beni (North Kivu province). The Congolese Army is currently conducting an offensive operation in the area against the Ugandan ADF-NALU rebels (Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda). The UN said that the IBDE could assist the Congolese Army in the operation.

January 17, 20134: The U.S. condemned the murder of a leading Rwandan exile and stated that it is disturbed by charges that Rwandan president Paul Kagame is involved in violent attacks on his political opponents.

The European Union plans to send an additional 1,000 soldiers to the CAR to reinforce the peacekeeping effort. Estonia is committed to sending troops with the new contingent. Six other countries, including Finland and Poland, are considering sending soldiers.
January 20, 2014: CAR legislators voted to make the mayor of Bangui interim president. Catherine Samba-Panza will replace former Seleka rebel leader Michel Djotodia. Djotodia agreed to resign in early January.

January 21, 2014: Gunmen in the CAR ambushed a convoy and killed 22 Moslem civilians. The gunmen fired rocket-propelled grenades at the convoy then attacked with small arms and machetes.

January 24, 2014: An explosion at a Congolese Army weapons dump near Mbuji Mayi (Kasai-Orientale province) killed at least ten people. Investigators claimed that the explosion was caused by a lightning strike.

January 28, 2014: It is believed that the ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda) force has grown in strength. The ADF-NALU rebels now deploy between 1,200 and 1,500 fighters. Previous estimates credited the ADF with 800 fighters. There is also evidence that Arabic speaking trainers have conducted combat training classes for the ADF-NALU at its bases in the Congo. The Congolese Army is currently conducting offensive operations against the ADF-NALU in North Kivu province (near the Ugandan border). The army has named the offensive operation “Sokola.” In Lingala that means “clean out.” The army has reportedly occupied Mwalika as well as Mumundioma (45 kilometers north-east of Beni). The Ugandan government has claimed that Mwalika serves as the ADF’s major training base and has referred to the town as an ADF sanctuary. An ADF contingent was also reportedly seen operating near the town of Ituri, capital of Congo’s Orientale Province.

January 31, 2014: The UN warned that M23 rebels could still regroup and reorganize. The warning was general but diplomats acknowledged it was directed at Rwanda. Rwanda has been accused of supporting M23. On its part, Rwanda accused Congo of supporting the FDLR. Rwanda’s UN ambassador also accused the Congolese government of being crybabies. Congo called Rwanda arrogant.

January 31, 2014: Burundian opposition leaders are warning that political situation in the country is once again deteriorating. The mandate for the UN office monitoring political reforms in Burundi comes up for renewal in March 2014.

February 1, 2014: People in North Kivu province are complaining that the government and MONUSCO have not done enough to stop illegal roadblocks. Various militia groups have used roadblocks as a source of income. Truck drivers and even pedestrians must pay the militia to pass. However, there are also reports that soldiers have run the same scam. The going rate for one person is around 100 Congolese francs (about ten cents).
February 4, 2014: The FDLR is accused of recruiting child soldiers. The charge came amid new rumors that the UN’s Intervention Brigade (IBDE) was preparing to conduct operations against the FDLR.

February 5, 2014: The Congolese government has officially approved an amnesty law for rebel groups. Though rebel commanders can still face charges, the law provides amnesty for many rebel militia fighters who surrendered and disarmed. UN mediators had been putting pressure on the government to pass the law. The law will apply to M23 rebels.

February 7, 2014: Peacekeepers from Chad escorted several thousand Moslems from Bangui (the capital of the CAR). The Moslems claim they are threatened by anti-Balaka militia groups. Meanwhile, the French government announced that it will continue to keep its peacekeeping contingent in the CAR.

February 9, 2014: Rwandan peacekeepers in Bangui, capital of the CAR, stopped a mob from lynching two Moslem civilians. The peacekeepers fired warning shots but the mob did not disperse. The peacekeepers then fired at the mob killed one person. The incident occurred in Miskine, a neighborhood on the north side of Bangui. Low-level sectarian violence between Christians and Moslems continues to occur in Bangui. France has 1,600 peacekeepers in the CAR. The African Union has deployed an additional 5,000 soldiers. The Rwandan contingent serves with the AU force.

The war crimes trial of former Congolese rebel leader Bosco Ntaganda continues in the Netherlands. Prosecutors presented evidence that Ntaganda had ordered his militiamen to murder civilians and to rape woman.

The government of the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) is accused of torturing dissidents and conducting violent attacks on opposition political leaders. But now there is evidence that that the human rights situation in the Congo Republic is deteriorating. Until recently, the UN regarded the Congo Republic as something of a success. But there have been several documented violent assaults on opposition leaders. The government is also accused of corrupting the judicial system and attacking trade unionists.

Gunmen in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), assassinated a member of the country’s new transitional government. The UN called the assassination of Jean-Emmanuel Ndjarioua a criminal act and an attack on attempts to stabilize the situation in the CAR.

February 10, 2014: The ICC trial of former Congolese M23 militia commander Bosco Ntaganda has begun. Ntaganda faces five counts of crimes against humanity and 13 counts of war crimes. The criminal
charges stem from investigations of Ntaganda’s operations in Ituri province in 2002-2003. At that time he was a senior commander in the Union of Congolese Patriots militia.

The Congolese government claimed that its forces have killed at least 230 members of the ADF-NALU in operations that began in January.

February 10, 2014: Soldiers operating near the Congo-Uganda border (North Kivu and Oriental provinces) overran a major ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda) rebel base. The Ugandan government thanked the Congolese government and claimed that the base was an ADF headquarters. The ADF reportedly had a headquarters at a base in the Congo’s Rwenzori Mountains. The ADF-NALU is an Islamist organization and has ties to Somalia’s Al Shabaab militant Islamist group. The army, supported by UN peacekeepers, began an offensive against the ADF-NALU on January 17.

February 13, 2014: The UN does not believe claims by the peacekeeping officials disputed recent claims by FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) that the Rwandan rebel group is disarming. FDLR commanders made the claim and added that the group is willing to begin negotiations with the Rwandan government. Though an estimated 50 FDLR rebels have surrendered since November 2013, there is no evidence the FDLR as a whole is disarming or intends to disarm. The FDLR still has an estimated 1,800 fighters. The UN has made it clear that the FDLR is a potential target for the Intervention Brigade (IBDE). Rwanda continues to reject negotiations with the FDLR. The Rwandan government argues that the FDLR is commanded by genocidaires involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide—and the Rwandan government is right. The UN peacekeeping mission in Congo does stand by its mid-January assessment that around 8,000 militiamen have surrendered or disarmed since the Congolese Army (assisted by the IBDE) attacked and routed M23 rebels in early November 2013.

February 14, 2014: The UN’s investigating claims that in North Kivu province a militia group burned down three villages and murdered 70 people in early February. The militia group has not been identified but local sources claim that the bodies are buried in a mass grave.

February 15, 2014: AU confirmed that its peacekeepers in CAR have begun arresting anti-Balaka militia leaders. The anti-Balaka are primarily Christian militias which were organized to combat attacks by Moslem Seleka rebel groups and tribal militias. However it appears that some anti-Balaka groups of launching indiscriminate attacks.

February 16, 2014: France will reinforce its 1,600 peacekeepers in the CAR with another 300 to 400 soldiers in the coming weeks.
February 17, 2014; Ugandan troops operating in the Central African Republic may have killed LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) deputy commander Okot Odhiambo in October 2013. An LRA defector told the Ugandan soldiersthat Odhiambo was wounded in an ambush on October 27 and subsequently died of his wounds. The ICC has indicted Odhiamabo on numerous charges of crimes against humanity.

February 19, 2014: The UN is deploying an additional special operations infantry company to Katanga province. At the moment the UN has 450 to 500 soldiers in Katanga. However, MONUSCO believes it must counter the attacks by the Kata-Katanga (Bakata Katanga) separatist rebel group. Kata-Katanga has launched several raids on the provincial capital, Lumumbashi. The reinforcing company is an Egyptian special forces unit with 120 troops. The UN may position the company north of Lubumbashi, in the Manono-Mitwaba-Pweto triangle area. The area is known as the Triangle of Death.

February 20, 2014: Congolese police in the town of Bukavu (South Kivu province) broke up a political rally for Vital Kamerhe, a critic of Congolese president Joseph Kabila who has emerged as one of Kabila’s main political rivals. Kamerhe heads the Union for the Congolese Nation party. He was at one time an ally of Kabila. Kamerhe has accused Kabila of wanting to change the constitution and electoral procedures so he can remain in power.

February 25, 2014: MONUSCO reported that it is using its surveillance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to monitor movements of the FDLR (Rwandan Hutu rebel militia). The surveillance drones are based in Goma (North Kivu province).


February 26, 2014: Democratic Republic of Congo: entrepreneurs cycle to make a living

JRS Newsroom – Goma - Many people in eastern Congo move from camp to camp in search of safety. This repeated displacement disrupts lives, support networks and family ties. Access to the land is hindered, as is their ability to earn a living. Trying to bring stability to people in these circumstances has become a major focus of the Jesuit Refugee Service in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). One step in this direction has been to help internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nzulo camp in the eastern city of Goma by providing microcredit to establish small business activities. Teams provide loans to IDPs to buy bikes that they can use to
transport coal, food and water to and from the camp. The activities began at the end of 2013, following the presentation of the first bicycles to participants in Nzulo camp. "Each bicycle is worth the equivalent of 80 US dollars. The participants selected for the programme will progressively pay back the cost", said Paulo Welter SJ, JRS DRC Director. The entrepreneurs will aim to maintain weekly payments of four US dollars. "In this way, these entrepreneurs will clear any debt after twenty weeks and gain ownership of the bicycle", added Fr Paulo.

North Kivu. In other areas of North Kivu, such as Masisi and Mweso, JRS livelihood activities include workshops in tailoring, baking, carpentry and weaving skills. "Life for IDPs is difficult because we live in land which is not ours. We left our fields so food is the most difficult thing to find. We also abandon school because we lack school fees. Here in Congo there is much hardship because we have all become displaced. I was a child soldier. I think this one reason why people become bandits because they lack work, so they take up arms", explained François*, one of the participants. "Goma is situated at the foot of Nyiragongo volcano. As such, the ground in the area is very rocky, making transportation of basic goods a tiresome task. Bicycles are a great help. It isn't easy work, but it is an income", said Joseph Mbabazi, JRS DRC Focal Point for Advocacy. With a population of 7,000, Nzulo camp has welcomed over 2,000 internally displaced persons in the last few months. The military defeat of the rebel M23 Movement in November 2013 has brought tentative stability to some districts, but many areas remain unstable due to the presence of numerous other armed groups. Moreover, local populations continue to fear the sporadic attacks by the M23. "Some people are returning to their home districts. Others choose to stay", said Mr Mbabazi.

Inspiration. The idea for the microcredit initiative around Goma came to Paulo after he won a bicycle in a competition. "It inspired me to reflect on the uses of a bicycle, especially for transportation and earning a little something. The aim is to help, in a small way at first, to reduce hunger by ensuring economic self-reliance. Some income can also bring hope. It is a way of restoring dignity", continued Fr Paulo. Sponsors from Paulo’s home in Brazil have secured the purchase of thirty more bicycles. As the number increases, the scheme will expand to other camps around Goma. The selection of participants was undertaken in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). "I invite all participants to ensure they use this opportunity to its full potential. IOM will be glad to assist JRS in the monitoring of the activity", said IOM Congo representative, Flora Camain in a speech in Nzulo. The entrepreneurs have now completed six weeks of the repayment schedule, and all the participants, according to Mr Mbabazi, are on track. "Such activities foster self-respect and autonomy. We hope to do more in this area to help displaced persons avoid apathy and create employment", said Mr Mbabazi.
François is optimistic that he can use his skills to benefit both himself and his new community. "Now I can begin to take care of myself", he said.* Name has been changed for security reasons. (Text ends)

February 28, 2014: Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and Angola are conducting a joint border inspection in the Pangui region. The countries intend to draw a definitive boundary in order to avoid future armed incidents between security forces.

March 2, 2014: Two UN attack helicopters (likely belonging to the IBDE’s helicopter element) attacked an ADF base camp near Saha Sitisa (northeast of Beni). The army began a series of anti-ADF operations in mid-January.

March 3, 2014: MONUSCO (UN Stabilization Mission in the Congo) peacekeepers and Congolese soldiers are pursuing a group of Ugandan rebels belonging to the ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda). The UN and Congolese troops attacked the ADF near the town of Beni (North Kivu province). Six UN peacekeepers from Nepal patrolling the town of Beni were wounded when two men on a motorcycle threw a hand grenade at the peacekeepers. The UN force involved in the operations includes elements of the Intervention Brigade (IBDE).

March 4, 2014: The Congolese Army said it intends to attack the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) militia positions in North Kivu province. South African police reported that armed gunmen attacked the Johannesburg home of exiled Rwandan general Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, who is a political opponent of Rwandan president Paul Kagame. Nyamwasa survived an alleged assassination attempt in 2010. South Africa has expelled three Rwandan diplomats it contends were involved in the March 4th raid on the home of exiled Rwandan general Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa. Rwanda immediately retaliated by expelling six South African diplomats. Rwanda accused South Africa of harboring individuals responsible for planning terrorist attacks in Rwanda.

March 7, 2014: The International Criminal Court (ICC) has convicted Congolese militia leader Germain Katanga of crimes against humanity and war crimes for his involvement in the February 2003 assault on Bogoro (Ituri province). Katanga commanded the Patriotic Resistance Forces (FRP) militia.

March 8, 2014: DR CONGO: the life of a displaced woman, finding the strength to carry on’

JRS Newsroom: Mweso – Fuelled by competition for rich minerals, war, violence and instability have ravaged the eastern Democratic Republic of
Congo for nearly two decades. With the devastation of the economy and infrastructure, impunity has reigned. Sexual and other forms of violence against women, particularly displaced women, are commonplace. Mapendo is just one of the survivors; this is her story. Mapendo (meaning love) comes from Mihara, a small village in the North Kivu province of eastern Congo. Having fled the violence of the FDLR rebels, she now lives in Mweso camp.

This is also the story of Sifa, Vumila, Maniriho, Dusabe. The names of the women change, as do their villages and their aggressors. Yet their suffering does not, nor does their desire to start again each day, their strength to survive, and especially their desire to provide a better future for their children. It was 2009 when Mapendo and her family fled for a few nights seeking safety in the rainforest. The FDLR rebel forces had reached her village and other nearby towns. They had begun pillaging property, killing men and raping women. Many families had already taken refuge in the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kashuga, Mweso or Ibuga. Hoping peace would return in a few days, Mapendo and her husband did not go far. One day they were found.

Mapendo had been repeatedly raped, and her husband killed, in front of her three children. She was 27 years old at the time. The next day, in October 2009, Mapendo left her village to go to Mweso camp. Life is not easy in the camps, especially for a woman alone. The homes – made of mud and straw – are certainly not comfortable. In fact, the roofs leak unless they are covered by plastic sheeting. The lucky ones have a mat on which the whole family can sleep, and maybe even a blanket to protect them against the cold and dampness of the night. Families have few household utensils: a plate on which everyone eats, a water container, and a bucket for washing. Few people have much else.

The most important thing Mapendo had to learn when she got to the camp was how to find food. It was easy in Mihara. She had land to cultivate. The land in North Kivu is very fertile. Food can be harvested four times a year. One could live well, if only there was peace. Life is much more difficult in the IDP camps. There is no land to cultivate and, therefore, no food. The UN World Food Programme distributes food, but there is never enough; and they haven’t distributed any food rations since last November. Ever since the Congolese army (FARDC) defeated the M23 rebel movement, it is assumed that IDPs can go back home in safety. But this is not true. The M23 was not responsible for the displacement of the population in this part of the world. It was other smaller or larger groups whose destructive presence continues as before.

In exchange for a couple of potatoes, some corn, or a handful of beans, Mapendo must start each day by asking locals to allow her to work in their fields. She travels ... for miles, on foot, of course, with her youngest son
strapped to her back and the other two jogging along beside her. There is no money to send them to school. After working all day, she must walk even further to get firewood; and of course return home before dark. On her way home, she will have to carry the firewood on her back and her child around her neck. When she is lucky, she may get enough food and firewood for two days, which allows her to take a much-needed rest the following day. Likewise, there are days when she receives very little food in exchange for her labour. There are also days when she finds little wood or when she comes across men from one of the armed rebel groups.

Almost all displaced women have been victims of sexual violence at some time in their lives. Most have been victims several times; many consider it a necessary evil, almost normal, especially for single women. In search of protection, some displaced women, who have been raped in the IDP camps, become the companion of a man who already has another woman. The next day begins in search of someone who can give her a job. (Text ends)

March 9, 2014: The UN now plans to have AU (African Union) peacekeeping forces in CAR (Central African Republic) switch to UN control in September 2014. The AU force currently has around 6,000 soldiers. The UN is seeking an additional 6,000 soldiers from African nations, to bring the force to 12,000. Between 1,600 and 2,000 French soldiers are also deployed in the CAR.

March 9, 2014: The UN claimed that anti-balaka militias have driven Moslem tribespeople out of the western half of the Central African Republic. The UN accused the militias of religious cleansing. There are between 650,000 and 700,000 internally displaced people (refugees) inside the CAR. 230,000 of the IDPs are now in the capital, Bangui.

March 10, 2014: Burundi’s troubles continue to mount. On March 8 members of the opposition Movement for Solidarity and Democracy held a rally in the capital, Bujumbura. Police broke up the demonstration and arrest over 20 opposition political activists. The government said it will charge the activists in insurrection (treason). Observers in Burundi claimed that this is the worst political crisis since the civil war ended.

March 12, 2014: Congolese Army and the UN’s Intervention Brigade (IBDE) attacked a Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebel contingent in North Kivu province. The UN reported that an offensive against the FDLR had begun earlier this month. One UN unit is currently operating inside Congo’s Virunga National Park. The UN force engaged an FDLR contingent on March 9 inside the park. Elements of the Malawi infantry battalion are now serving with the IBDE and are participating in the anti-FDLR offensive.
March 13, 2014: The Congolese government claimed that the Congolese Army and UN offensive against Ugandan rebels in the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) has been a major success. Congolese forces have seized the ADF’s last major base in Congo, near the village of Saasita. Some ADF guerrillas have fled into the Virunga National Park.

A judge in France sentenced a former Rwandan senior intelligence officer to 25 years in prison on the charge of genocide. The court found Pascal Simbikangwa guilty of complicity in crimes against humanity and genocide. Simbikangwa directed intelligence operations for Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana. Who was an ethnic Hutu. He died in a plane crash in April 1994.

March 14, 2014: France accused the EU of failing to support peacekeeping efforts in the CAR. The EU had initially agreed to send a battalion (800 to 1,000) additional peacekeepers to the CAR. However, the French government said that the EU had failed to commit soldiers and provide equipment. France has slightly over 2,000 troops in the CAR. Another 400 will arrive in the next month.

March 15, 2014: There is no hard figure for the number of people killed in the Congo since 1997 when the Mobutu dictatorship collapsed. A recent published estimate said four million. Another said six million. Both figures are very large, but one figure is 50 percent larger than the other. One reason for the disparity is determining what constitutes death due to armed conflict. In 2002 observers reported that several thousand internally displaced people died of exposure as they fled combat near the town of Bunia (Ituri region, eastern Congo). They were not shot and killed, but disease, weather and exhaustion killed them. These people are indeed casualties of war and if they are included the higher loss figures become more reasonable estimates.

March 20, 2014: The Congolese Army, supported by UN units, continues to conduct operations against Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) guerrillas in North Kivu province. FDLR fighters have fled into Virunga National Park.

March 22, 2014: Observers in the CAR reported that anti-balaka militia attacks on Moslem tribespeople continue in and around the capital of Bangui. Moslems have sought the protection of international peacekeeping forces in Bangui.

March 23, 2014: The U.S. is reinforcing its special operations contingent which is aiding the Uganda-led hunt for LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) senior commander Joseph Kony. The U.S. currently deploys around 100 special operations troops which advise and support the hunt for Kony. The
reinforcements include 150 U.S. Air Force special operations personnel and several CV-22 Osprey tilt rotor aircraft.

March 28, 2014: The UN Security Council extended MONU.S.CO’s mandate to March 31, 2015. The peacekeeping operation is authorized 19,815 soldiers, 760 military observers, 391 armed policemen and 1,050 paramilitary policemen (police in formed police units).

March 29, 2014: Anti-balaka (anti-Moslem) militias in the CAR reportedly control the major roads leading to the capital, Bangui. Peacekeeping forces can move through the areas but when the peacekeepers leave the militias return. The UN estimates that it needs at least another 6,000 peacekeeping soldiers in the CAR.

April 1, 2014: The EU (European Union) confirmed that it will deploy the EUFOR RCA peacekeeping contingent to the Central African Republic (CAR). The EU agreed in January to send the peacekeeping contingent and planned on deploying the force in late February. The EU failed to meet the February deployment date. The EUFOR RCA operation will be tasked with providing security in Bangui (CAR capital). The contingent will deploy 1,000 troops.

The Congolese government reported that the Kata Katanga (Bakata Katanga) guerrilla group is reorganizing in the Pweto-Mitwaba–Manono area of Katanga province. That region is known as the Triangle of Death. The guerrilla group wants Katanga to secede from the Congo.


April 3, 2014: Though the UN Security Council has extended MONU.S.CO’s peacekeeping mandate for another year, the latest resolution (UNSCR 2147) makes it clear the MONU.S.CO must begin preparing for withdrawal. That’s right, the seemingly endless Congo peacekeeping operation which began in 1999 has now been ordered to formulate an exit strategy. The UN peacekeeping office made it clear that the withdrawal will be very gradual. Redeployment may not begin until late 2014 or early 2015. Moreover, the Intervention Brigade (IBDE) will still be tasked with conducting offensive operations (neutralization operations) against armed groups which refuse to lay down their arms.

April 26, 2014: ALJAZEERA News - Many dead in DR Congo stampede’

At least 14 dead following power failure at stadium during tribute festival for singer King Kester Emeneya.

A stampede at a crowded tribute festival for a popular music star has killed at least 14 people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A power
failure at a stadium in the town of Kikwit, organised to commemorate the life of popular local singer King Kester Emeneya, plunged the venue into darkness causing a crush, officials and witnesses said.

"The provisional toll, which we deeply regret, stands at 14 dead, including two policemen, and eight wounded," Camille Sesep, a spokesman for the provincial government of Bandundu told the AFP news agency. The provincial government blamed the "enthusiasm of the audience" for the deaths. Crowds had amassed in Emenya's hometown of Kikwit, 500km from the capital Kinshasha, to celebrate the memory of the popular singer who died earlier this year in Paris.

Thousands of people attended Emeneya's funeral in Kinshasa last month after he died from heart problems in his adopted home of France at the age of 57. King Kester Emeneya, whose given name was Emeneya Mubiala Kwamumbu, enjoyed a long career in music, with hundreds of songs to his name. Following the stampede, authorities cancelled the festival which was scheduled to last through Sunday.

April 3, 2014: Chad announced it will withdraw its 850 peacekeepers from the CAR. Chadian soldiers have been accused by Christian tribes in the CAR of supporting Moslem militias and the Seleka rebel movement. Chad is a Moslem nation. Chad’s contingent served with the African Union’s MISCA operation.

April 5, 2014: UN peacekeeping officers have told investigators that they believe Rwanda sent around 900 soldiers into Congo in August 2013. The Rwanda force supplied March 23 Movement (M23) guerrillas with weapons and ammunition. The Rwandan government continues to deny it provided M23 with any support. UN officers contend that the support provided by Rwanda in August 2013 gave M23 the ability to stall a UN-led attack. In October-November 2013 a second UN-Congolese Army offensive shattered M23.

April 9, 2014: Mai-Mai Kata Katanga separatist guerrillas attacked the village of Katende (southwest of the town of Pweto in Katanga province).

April 14, 2014: The Rwandan government arrested three people on charges of planning terror attacks in Rwanda and conducting other subversive activities. One man was a musician, one a radio commentator, and the third was also a former Hutu guerrilla fighter who had gone through the demobilization program. Government officials claimed that police had seized a stash of hand grenades during one of the arrests.

April 17, 2014: Burundi expelled a senior UN official after the UN Mission in Burundi (BNUB) charged that the government was providing the youth wing (youth league) of its party with weapons. In the past the
government has used the youth wing as a street militia to threaten and attack political opponents.

April 21, 2014: The Ugandan military claimed that it has evidence that Jamil Mukulu, the senior commander of the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) has fled from his fortified headquarters camp in the eastern Congo. UN peacekeepers, including elements of the Intervention Brigade, supported a Congolese Army offensive against the ADF-NALU. The offensive began in March and continued through mid-April. The offensive destroyed seven ADF-NALU bases in Congo’s Virunga National Park. The ADF headquarters camp in Medina proved to be a five-square kilometer facility with bunkers, underground storage sites for weapons and supplies, and numerous observation posts. Fighting in the Medina area was particularly intense. Resistance was reported as late as April 16.

April 22, 2014: A coalition unit of African soldiers operating in the CAR captured a low-level Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) leader. The unit also rescued 10 people the LRA band had kidnapped. The captured LRA officer was identified as a lieutenant. He was captured after a firefight between his band and the anti-LRA troops. Uganda is the lead nation in the anti-LRA coalition. The U.S. military recently reinforced its anti-LRA contingent. Around 250 American personnel are currently engaged in the anti-LRA operation. The U.S. also committed four CV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, two C-130 transports and two KC-135 tankers to the anti-LRA effort.

April 23, 2014: MONUSCO announced that it will provide financial assistance, logistical support and technical assistance in Congo’s upcoming elections. The UN does not want a repeat of the violence which occurred during the November 2011 presidential election when 41 people were killed and over 700 were injured.

April 25, 2014: Former members of the Seleka rebel movement in the CAR demanded that the country be partitioned into Christian and Moslem areas. Hard-core guerrillas in Seleka were from predominantly Moslem tribes in the northern CAR. The Seleka group advocating partition is based in the town of Bambari (north central CAR). Bambari has become a sanctuary for Moslems displaced in the south. The group wants to call the new country the Republic of Northern Central Africa. However, several Christian tribes also live in the north. They oppose partition. These tribes also claim that Chad and Sudan are pushing partition because they would be able to control the new country. Partition would require mass population displacement. Several thousand Moslem tribals live in the capital, Bangui, particularly in an area known as PK-5. Moslems accused Christian militias of trying to drive them out of Bangui. The CAR has a population of 4.7 million people. Around 80 to 85 percent of the people are Christians or animists.
April 27, 2014: The CAR government reported that anti-balaka militia groups have trapped around 10,000 Moslems in the town of Boda (southern CAR).

April 28, 2014: Conflict between Christian and Moslem tribes in the Central African Republic (CAR) continues. A convoy of 18 trucks organized by the CAR government and protected by African soldiers serving with the MISCA peacekeeping operation moved an estimated 1,300 Moslems from a refugee camp near the capital, Bangui, to a safe-zone in northern CAR. The Moslems feared attacks by Christian anti-balaka (machete) militias.

April 29, 2014: The UN Security Council has directed MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in Congo) civilian administrators and staff to prepare to end the mission next year and transition into a much smaller support, training and governmental advisory operation. The number of military personnel and police committed to that future operation has yet to be determined.

May 3, 2014: The Rwandan Hutu rebel group, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (FDLR), continues to operate in the eastern Congo’s North Kivu province. Identifying FDLR fighters can be difficult. However, Congolese have given the UN a tip. The locals claim the FDLR fighters prefer to wear gum boots (gum rubber boots). FDLR fighters also tend to carry pangas (a long knife). The UN also noted that local officials in Katanga province believe that on April 5 FDLR fighters participated in an attack on a convoy near the town of Kabulo in Katanga’s Kalemie territory. FDLR men are adopting this stealthy demeanor to avoid retribution from the growing number of militias and regular troops looking for them.

May 4, 2014: The U.S. told Congo that it must respect constitutional term limits imposed on the president. The U.S. made that statement after supporters of Congolese president Joseph Kabila suggested he would run for a third term.

May 5, 2014: The medical NGO, Doctors Without Borders, has suspended major clinic operations for at least one week in the Central African Republic (CAR). The organization will continue to provide emergency care. Doctors Without Borders said it is taking the action because the CAR government has failed to condemn and take appropriate security measures after 16 people were killed at the clinic in the town of Boguila (northern CAR) on April 26. At the moment the government claims the attack was an armed robbery. Doctors Without Borders blames the attack on rebel Seleka fighters (ie, Muslim Seleka fighters) who have regrouped in northern CAR.

May 6, 2014: UN criticized the ruling of a Congolese court which only convicted two soldiers of rape while releasing 13 senior officers. During
November 2012 at least 97 women and 33 girls were raped in the town of Minova (eastern Congo).

May 7, 2014: The UN reported that the Ugandan rebel Lords resistance Army (LRA) conducted 65 attacks during the first three months of 2014. The attacks occurred in the Congo and Central African Republic. The UN also claimed that Joseph Kony, the LRA’s senior commander, is now hiding in the Kafia Kingi region of South Sudan. The Kafia Kingi enclave is disputed territory and is currently occupied by Sudanese security forces (Khartoum). Kafia Kingi is adjacent to Sudan’s South Darfur state. Sudan rejected the UN accusation. Meanwhile, the African Union Regional Task Force (AURTF) continues to conduct anti-LRA operations in South Sudan, the CAR and Congo. African nations have committed 5,000 soldiers to the task force. The Ugandan Army (supported by American Special Forces) continues to lead the overall operation. UN peacekeepers in the Congo also provide the AURTF with support and intelligence. AU and UN officials believe that several LRA regulars have moved into the CAR’s chaotic north-eastern area.

Seleka rebels in the Central African Republic (CAR) announced that they have a new senior commander, General Joseph Zindeko. Around 500 Seleka fighters met in the town of Ndele (northern CAR) and selected Zindeko. Seleka have also been seen reorganizing near the town of Bambari (central CAR area). Seleka has said that it intends to resist Christian anti-balaka militias.

May 10, 2014: The government of Sudan (Khartoum) accused Uganda to supporting Sudanese rebel organizations, particularly the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF). The SRF is an umbrella organization which includes the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Uganda denied the accusation. Uganda counter-claimed that Sudan has renewed its support for the Lords Resistance Army (LRA).

May 11, 2014: A wanted former Congo rebel leader was killed in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville). Udjani Mangbama at one time commanded a rebel Congolese militia in Equateur province. He had been convicted of crimes against humanity in absentia. Republic of Congo security police reported that a small force of rebels or bandits attacked a police checkpoint near the village of Owando (500 kilometers north of Brazzaville) after the men refused to identify themselves. Four policemen were killed along with Mangbama seven other attackers.

May 13, 2014: The Uganda-led African Union Regional Task Force (AURTF) is intensifying operations against Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) remnants in the Central African Republic (CAR). Despite numerous recent reports that LRA senior commander Joseph Kony is holed up in the Sudan-occupied Kafia Kingi region of South Sudan, the AURTF is concentrating on
the CAR because it believes a majority of the LRA’s fighters are there. The UN estimates that the LRA still has a force of 500 people. However, that figure likely includes abducted women and children who serve as slaves (food and weapons bearers).

May 14, 2014: There is another wave of reports of elephant poaching occurring in Congo’s Garamba National park. Park rangers estimate that 33 elephants have been killed in the park since late March 2014. The Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA) is on the short list of suspects. The LRA trades elephant ivory and meat for supplies.

May 14, 2014: Security in Congo’s mineral-rich Katanga province continues to deteriorate. Earlier this year UN observers warned that militia attacks in Katanga were increasing in number and intensity. Since January Katanga has endured at least 35 Mai-Mai militia attacks. Attackers pillaged and burned several villages. Most of the attacks took place in the Kalemie, Manono, Mitaba, Pweto, and Moba regions.

May 15, 2014: Earlier this month M23 rebels who fled to Uganda agreed to accept the Congolese government’s amnesty proposal. So far some 1,300 former M23 rebels have signed the amnesty documents. By accepting amnesty, the rebels agree to never again fight against the Congolese government. The former rebels are being held in a Ugandan military camp.

May 16, 2014: South Africa reported that its forces serving with the UN Intervention Brigade in eastern Congo are bivouacked on Triple Tower Mountain near the village of Kibati (North Kivu province). Army units are also in the area. South African and Tanzanian officers in the IBDE said that there is a lull in the fighting in the area.

May 20, 2014: A group of former Seleka rebels in the Central African Republic (CAR) declared that it has successfully reorganized. The group claimed that it has a new chain of command and that it is now taking control of rogue bands of former Seleka fighters.

May 21, 2014: The UN and the government have launched another rebel disarmament campaign. The campaign intends to either disband or eradicate some 54 militias which continue to operate in Congo. International donors have promised to provide around $200 million for the program. The program is the Congo’s third major disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program. The first two failed. On May 15 the U.S. announced that it will increase funding support for demobilization programs in Congo. Presumably the other funding will come from the European Union.

May 22, 2014: Responding to growing complaints of UN peacekeepers refusing to protect threatened (by bandits, rebels or terrorists) civilians
the UN did a study of the issue and found that in 80 percent of 507 situations where UN peacekeepers were authorized to use force to protect civilians from these attacks the peacekeepers refused to act. This was just for activity between 2010 and 2013 and the problem goes back much further than that. Pressure to change this falls on the nations responsible to contributing most of the $8 billion a year peacekeeping budget (United States, Japan, France, Germany, United Kingdom, China, Italy, Russia, Canada and Spain) and the nations contributing most of the peacekeepers (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Rwanda). The latter nations complain that they did not contribute troops to engage in the level of fighting (and casualties) that would be required to respond to every request to protect civilians. This would be considered peacemaking, not peacekeeping and the UN has recognized the problem by calling on nations to contribute troops expressly for fighting.

In Congo the UN recently formed a combat brigade for explicitly aggressive combat operations, but most nations that contribute peacekeeping troops expect their soldiers to carry out relatively low-risk duties. The UN is often at fault when it orders civilians to be protected and ignoring the fact that the UN member nations providing troops had ordered their commanders in the area to limit the danger their soldiers would be exposed to. There is now pressure on the UN to get nations contributing peacekeepers to allow their soldiers to more frequently use force to protect civilians. This will make it harder (or more expensive) to get peacekeepers. It is already difficult to recruit the number of peacekeepers that are needed.

May 23, 2014: The International Court of Justice convicted former Congolese militia leader Germain Katanga on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity and four war crimes. The war crimes charges included pillaging. He was not directly tied to a specific murder but he did procure weapons which his militia used to massacre villagers in northeastern Congo. He will serve twelve years in prison.

May 24, 2014: French peacekeepers in the CAR fought with a group of former Seleka militants near the town of Bambari (northeastern CAR).

In the Central African Republic (CAR) government leaders insist that illegal militias and armed groups are attempting to destabilize the government. Cited were two recent attacks, one in which two Burundian peacekeepers were shot and killed as they tried to stop a riot. The other incident was bloodier. On May 28 a group of Moslem gunmen attacked a Christian church in Bangui (the CAR capital) killing 17 people and kidnapped another 27.

May 29, 2014: The army announced that its forces had, over the last four days, driven a group of Ugandan Allied Democratic Force (ADF) rebels
from the villages Lesse and Abya (North Kivu province). The soldiers killed 64 ADF fighters and captured one while suffering five wounded. The army also seized several large caches of weapons and ammunition. Apparently elements of the UN Intervention Brigade (IBDE) were involved in the operation. One reason to believe this is the huge disparity in casualties (64 ADF dead, no Congolese dead). Someone is procuring very accurate tactical intelligence and someone is applying very effective firepower. That is more typical of the IBDE.

May 30, 2014: Over 100 guerrillas belonging to the FDLR agreed to surrender. The group met with UN and army personnel in North Kivu province and disarmed.

May 31, 2014: The army continues to pursue Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels in North Kivu province. ADF fighters have fled into Virunga National Park. Army units, with UN support, are also pursuing a Mai-Mai militia force operating in the area. The national park’s jungles and rugged terrain provide a refuge for several defeated militias. In early May, an army unit, supported by a Malawian detachment in the UN Intervention Brigade (IBDE) killed two FDLR fighters in Virunga National Park.

June 1, 2014: The UN has placed 105 Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebels who surrendered in late May in a camp in in the town of Kanyabayonga (North Kivu province). All of the men who surrendered are ethnic Hutus. A spokesman for the group has asked the Rwandan government to negotiate with them about terms for returning to Rwanda. The fighters now have families in Congo and they want to bring their families to Rwanda. The leaders who founded the FDLR were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The UN estimates that another 1,400 FDLR rebels remain in Congo.

June 2, 2014: The Congolese government is being accused of killing at least 300 people in retaliation for attacks by a sectarian Katangan opposition group (Ministry for Restoration of Black Africa or MRAN). In December 2013 supporters of MRAN’s leader, Joseph Mukungubila Mutombo (also known as The Eternal Prophet), launched several coordinated attacks in Congo’s capital, Kinshasha. The attackers struck the airport, a military barrack and seized a state TV station. The government denied that it has killed members of Mukungubila’s group. However, European investigators have evidence that between 200 and 250 Mukungubila supporters (mostly civilians) were killed by government forces in Katanga province. Another 70 have been killed in Kinshasha. The government has denied the charges and says they are completely false. Mukungubila was a candidate for president in the 2006 election.

Burundi and Georgia have both announced that they will send more peacekeepers to the CAR. This will include a Georgian infantry company
(140 soldiers) while Burundi said that it is prepared to deploy another battalion of 450 soldiers plus 280 additional police officers. The Burundian forces will serve with the MISCA peacekeeping contingent. The UN plans to take over the MISCA operation in September 2014.

The Congo government once again accused Rwanda of harboring M23 rebel commanders who are wanted for war crimes. Rwanda has denied the charge.

June 5, 2014: Uganda claims that the civil war in South Sudan is causing a decline in Uganda’s GDP growth rate by .1 (one-tenth) of a percent, dropping it from 5.8 percent (2013 growth rate) to 5.7 percent this year.

June 6, 2014: Over 250 prisoners escaped from a Congolese jail in Bukavu (capital, South Kivu province) after prisoners overpowered a guard. Three people were killed in the prison break.

June 8, 2014: The UN is reinforcing South Kivu province after group of men raided a village and killed 38 people and left another 15 wounded. On June 7 a group armed with guns and knives attacked the Bafuliru tribal village of Mutarule (50 kilometers south of the capital, Bukavu). The South Kivu provincial government said that it believes cattle rustling precipitated the assault on the village. Members of the Barundi-Banyamulenge tribe and the Bafuliru tribe in the area are involved in a violent dispute over cattle ownership.

June 9, 2014: Peacekeepers in CAR reported limited success in a voluntary disarmament operation in Bangui. In the capital’s PK-5 district (regarded as a Moslem neighborhood), peacekeepers collected 69 grenades, 15 guns and 200 assorted munitions. They also collected 13 bows and 62 arrows. In Boy-rabe (Christian area) the peacekeepers collected three mortars, three grenades, three rockets and “several dozen” assorted munitions.

Several days of on and off fighting in the CAR between Moslem militiamen and a group of Christian tribesmen left 23 dead. The fighting occurred around the town of Bambari and the village of Liwa. Bambari is in central CAR and Liwa is about ten kilometers away. Moslem militiamen claimed that Christians killed two Moslem men in Liwa. Militiamen responded by attacking Christians in Liwa and Bambari with grenades. The militiamen then burned over 100 homes.

June 11, 2014: Congolese and Rwandan government officials accused each other of ordering their militaries to launch cross-border attacks. The accusations were made after Congo claimed that a Rwandan Army unit crossed the border into North Kivu province and kidnapped a Congolese soldier. Both countries said that their militaries had fired across the border and the shooting escalated from light infantry weapons to heavy weapons.
The shooting began in the early morning hours and ended by 8 AM local time.

Central African Republic (CAR) wants the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate crimes committed since 2012 during outbreaks of inter-communal violence in her country. CAR wants the ICC to investigate crimes committed by Seleka rebels (who are predominantly Moslem) and Christian self-defense militias (anti-balaka militias).

June 12, 2014: Congolese Army and Rwandan Army units fired at one another across their border. The gunfire included mortar fire and an exchange of heavy artillery (this usually means tube artillery). The artillery exchange occurred in an area some 18 kilometers north of Goma (capital of Congo’s North Kivu province).

June 13, 2014: Congolese Army and Rwandan Army soldiers once again exchanged gunfire. This is the third straight day of reports of hostile fire. The exchanges included rockets. Observers claimed that they heard artillery and heavy machine guns. The Congolese government claimed that it has ordered Congolese units in the area to exercise restraint.

June 15, 2014: The Congolese government claimed that around 200 militiamen in the Democratic Forces for the Liberations of Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group have voluntarily disarmed. Based on current estimates, 200 fighters is around 15 percent of the FDLR’s total strength (1,400 to 1,500 militiamen). The disarmed militiamen are now in UN-run camps in eastern Congo. The main camp is located in Kanyabayonga (North Kivu province). UN observers reported that most of the fighters in the camp are less than 20 years old, which means they were born after the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The FDLR was founded by Rwandan Hutus who orchestrated and participated in the genocide.

June 17, 2014: Is the UN’s Congo Intervention Brigade (IBDE) going regional? Earlier this month the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) signed an agreement with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to create links between MONUSCO, the IBDE and various ICGLR security mechanisms. The ICGLR includes Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo), Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

June 18, 2014: Is this another attempt to become a “president for life?” Probably. Burundian opposition groups are objecting to government attempts to change the constitution before the upcoming national elections. The government wants to let President Pierre Nkurunziza run for a third term. Nkurunziza’s opponents are arguing that changing the constitution amounts to declaring a dictatorship.
June 19, 2014: The Bakata Katanga militia claimed that sometime in July 2014 it will proclaim the independence of Congo's Katanga province. A spokesman said that the militia will make the proclamation in the city of Lubumbashi (Katanga’s provincial capital).

June 20, 2014: Rwandan is accusing Congo of starting the series of border skirmishes that began on June 11 and continued until June 13. In turn, the Congolese government accused Rwanda of starting the firefights.

June 22, 2014: The UN is continuing to investigate the border skirmishes that occurred June 12 and June 13 along the Congo-Rwanda border. UN observers reported that the Rwanda-Congo border remains “tense.” Congolese troops remain on alert. Civilian observers reported seeing three Congolese Army armored vehicles in the area north of Goma where the border skirmishes occurred.

June 24, 2014: Between 50 and 60 people were killed in fighting between Christian and Muslim tribesmen near the town of Bambari (central CAR, 370 kilometers northwest of Bangui). At least 22 people were killed in the village of Liwa (seven kilometers from Bambari). Clashes continued for two days in and around Bambari.

Rwanda and Congo confirmed that in mid-June they both sent teams to participate with a UN-sponsored Joint Verification Mission (JVM). The JVM is tasked with conducting observation missions and investigating violent incidents in the region. JVM is investigating the June 12 and June 13 border skirmishes between Rwanda and Congo.

June 25, 2014: Opposition party leaders in Uganda warned Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni to stop using the Ugandan Army to intimidate his political opponents. The FDC (Forum for Democratic Change) opposes Museveni. It is currently led by a retired Ugandan Army general, Mugisha Muntu who has accused Museveni of misusing government security forces.

June 27, 2014: Seleka rebels and several Christian anti-balaka militias in the CAR have agreed to form a joint committee to conduct peace negotiations. The conflict resolution organization PARETO will sponsor the negotiations. The objective is to move from local agreement to national reconciliation.

June 28, 2014: Rwanda has accused UN peacekeepers in Congo of letting a senior FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) leader illegally travel to Italy. FDLR leader Rumuli Michel visited Italy on a travel permit issued in June 2014 by Herve Ladsous, a senior official in the UN’s peacekeeping operations office in New York. Rwanda asserted that this is a violation of UN sanctions.
June 30, 2014: Uganda announced that it is ready to commit a battalion of soldiers to a regional rapid intervention force. The official name of the intervention force would be the Eastern African Standby Force. The Ugandan military said the unit would have 736 soldiers. Rwanda indicated that it is considering committing a motorized infantry battalion to the force. The Rwandan unit would have 850 combat soldiers and 35 medical personnel.

July 2, 2014: Critics are describing the UN and African Union peacekeeping effort in the Central African Republic (CAR) as ineffective and too little too late. The numbers make the critics’ case. Over 600,000 people in the CAR are refugees (displaced people); 1.7 to 1.8 million people confront food shortages. However, the criticisms also sound very familiar. Almost every UN and international peacekeeping operation the central Africa (the region) draws the same complaints. Central Africa is a difficult place in which to operate. Military units and aid organizations confront numerous logistics problems. There are few all-weather roads. There are few all-weather airfields. Keeping several thousand soldiers in the field is also expensive.

July 3, 2014: Citing recent attacks on UN peacekeepers serving in the Congo, the UN Security Council has sanctioned the ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda) rebel militia. The sanctions include bans on travel by ADF leaders and supporters and denying the ADF access to its financial assets (asset freeze). Like other rebel groups in the eastern Congo, the ADF occasionally manages to sell valuable minerals (including gold) to illicit dealers. The ADF is a Ugandan rebel organization with Islamist links. It has base camps in the eastern Congo (North Kivu province). Within the last year the Congolese Army and UN Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) peacekeepers have attacked and over-run several ADF camps, including a training facility. The UN’s Intervention brigade (IBDE) has participated in at least one of these anti-ADF operations. MONUSCO estimates that the ADF still has 1,200 and 1,500 militia fighters.

July 4, 2014: Several central African governments have told the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) that they will suspend anti-FDLR military operations for six months if the rebels agree to surrender peacefully. MONUSCO is involved in the initiative. The Angolan government is playing a major role in the effort. Hutu radicals involved in the 1994 genocide founded the FDLR. The UN’s Intervention Brigade has conducted anti-FDLR operations in the Congo. The UN estimates that the FDLR still has 1,300 fighters in the bush. Some 200 FDLR fighters have surrendered since late 2013. A decade ago the FDLR claimed it had 25,000 fighters.
July 4, 2014: ION - Congo-K finally makes it back into EITI, DRC can at last breathe a sigh of relief. After long months of silence, the board of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative that was meeting in Mexico City on July 1-2 gave Kinshasa the green light to become a full member of the organization after standing outside the door since 2010.

July 5, 2014: An unidentified group armed with guns, machetes and spears attacked two police stations and a military garrison in the towns of Kasase, Ntoroko and Bundibugyo (western Uganda) killing at least 17 people. Ugandan security forces killed around 40 of the gunmen. The government said the attacks were coordinated.

July 8, 2014: Uganda said that a complicated dispute involving the Bakonzo tribe sparked the July 5 attacks in the Rwenzori region (western Uganda). The government first feared that Allied Democratic Forces (ADF-NALU) Islamist rebels launched the attack. The attackers belonged to the Obusinga bwa Rwenzururu, a radical Bakonzo movement. The Bakonzo radicals had been fighting with members of the neighboring Bamba tribe. Since July 5, the Ugandan Army and police have killed a total of 60 attackers. The military garrison is near one of Uganda’s oil fields. Uganda intends to begin daily oil production in 2017. The Ugandan Army has reinforced Rwenzori.

July 9, 2014: Opposition political groups in Burundi are opposing a constitutional change being pushed by President Pierre Nkurunziza, who is a Hutu. His opponents claim that the changes he proposes will permanently entrench Hutu power – with Nkurunziza as the entrenched leader. Nkurunziza intends to run for a third term in the 2015 national elections.

July 12, 2014: Michel Djotodia is once again head of the CAR’s Seleka rebel movement. Djotodia was reinstated as senior commander at a meeting held in the northern CAR town of Birao. Djotodia helped found the Seleka movement and was senior commander when Seleka seized power in 2013. He served as president then stepped down in January 2014 after his administration failed to stop the violent anarchy throughout the country. Christian tribes also accused him of favoring Muslim tribes. The anti-balaka militias formed to resist attacks by Seleka rebels. Djotodia claimed that he lost control of some of the most extreme Seleka groups. Djotodia has been in exile in Benin.

July 21, 2014: The CAR’s interim president asked Christian “anti-balaka” (anti-machete) militias and the Muslim Seleka rebel movement to agree to a new ceasefire. The Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) has agreed to mediate for this. The Republic of Congo has invited various Christian factions and Seleka (which is also highly factionalized) to meet in Brazzaville and discuss ways to halt hostilities. Currently, 8,000
international peacekeeping troops are deployed in the CAR. The French contingent has been reduced slightly, to around 2,000 soldiers.

July 22, 2014: A group of 20 armed men attacked the Congolese Army’s Colonel Tshatshi headquarters base in the national capital, Kinshasha. Though the Congolese military responded by sending several tanks, witnesses reported the firefight lasted 20 minutes. The military said that soldiers from the Presidential Guard killed eight of the attackers. One government report described the attackers as civilians. The Colonel Tshatshi Military Camp was attacked in December 2013 by followers of mystic political Gideon Mukungubila (Paul Joseph Mukungubila Mutumbo). Gideon Mukungubila’s movement is based in Katanga province.

July 25, 2014: The Ugandan government is investigating reports of mass graves found in western Uganda. Allegedly, the graves contain the bodies of people killed in a recent spate of tribal violence between Bakonzo tribal radicals and the Bamba tribe. Police found five bodies in a grave in the Bundibugyo district. Four more were discovered nearby.

July 28, 2014: MONUSCO peacekeepers and the Congolese Army are conducting a joint offensive in North Kivu province. Elements of the Intervention Brigade are involved. The operation is targeting two armed groups: the Cheka Mai Mai and the Alliance for the Sovereign and Patriotic Congo (APCLH) militias. Despite the fancy name, the APCLH is a Mai Mai militia. The Cheka operates in the Walikale area. The APCLH has bases in the Masisi area. Both areas have numerous mineral deposits and mines. MONUSCO peacekeepers are clearing the road from the village of Pofi to Kashebere. This road eventually leads to the provincial capital, Goma. That could indicate several things, obviously that MONUSCO intends to use the road. But it also suggests that MONUSCO is going after a Cheka finance operation. Militias frequently set up roadblocks and collect tolls (such extortion is popular with irregular forces) in the form of either money or goods. The UN reported that the Congolese forces participating in the operation had occupied Ango (another mining area).

July 29, 2014: The hunt for Ugandan Lords Resistance Army (LRA) senior commander Joseph Kony continues and the focus remains on the Central African Republic. However, the Ugandan military is complaining that Seleka rebels are hindering anti-LRA operations. Uganda is conducting two different operations in the CAR: the anti-LRA counter-insurgency sweeps and peacekeeping missions. The UN recently asked Uganda to provide soldiers for the expanded peacekeeping effort in the CAR the UN will deploy later this year. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA) is authorized 12,000 peacekeepers. 2,000 Ugandans already serve with the African Union peacekeeping force in the CAR. The UN requested Uganda deploy an additional 850-man battalion in
the northern CAR (likely the Chad border). The Ugandan government however, has objected to sending its soldiers north. Ugandan forces currently operating in the CAR focus on the south-east, east and central areas. The south-east is where the small LRA bands primarily operate. Uganda regularly sends “hunter patrols” into the area.

July 31, 2014: The UN continues to be pleased with the performance of the Intervention Brigade’s (IBDE) added to their peacekeeping force. In March 2013 the IBDE was given a controversial operational mandate: neutralize armed groups. To accomplish that mission the IBDE was authorized to conduct offensive operations. Three African nations supplied the troops: Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi. It took the UN longer than anticipated to build and deploy the brigade. The brigade began operations in July 2013, without the participation of its Malawi contingent. The Malawi battalion arrived in late October 2013. In October and early November 2013 the IBDE and Congolese Army Rapid Reaction Units (ie, better trained and equipped Congolese Army units) quickly defeated the M23 guerrilla group in eastern Congo. The IBDE is authorized 3,069 soldiers in its three infantry battalions, artillery battery, reconnaissance company and special forces company. The IBDE has also employed South African Rooivalk attack helicopters in its operations.

August 1, 2014: Today marks the eighth anniversary of the signing of Angola’s Memorandum of Understanding for Peace and National Reconciliation. The Memorandum dealt with the separatist movement in Angola’s northern Cabinda Province. The government signed the Memorandum with the Cabinda Forum for Dialogue (FCD). The agreement gave the Exclave of Cabinda a special status within Angola. It also called for the demobilization of FCD rebel fighters. The agreement did not end the insurgency. Angola kept the province under military control. The Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) has continued to wage a very low-level rebellion.

August 2, 2014: UN observers in the CAR report that civilians continue to get killed in fighting between armed militias. At least 26 civilians were killed in the crossfire when an armed group attacked the village of Batangafo (Ouham prefecture area).

August 4, 2014: The government announced that Congolese Army units and UN peacekeepers have freed over 300 Congolese civilians who had been abducted by the Ugandan rebels belonging to the ADF-NALU.

August 5, 2014: Congolese security forces and police arrested a senior opposition political leader after he took part in a demonstration opposing an extension of presidential term limits. Jean-Bertrand Ewanga is the general secretary of the Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC) political party. He serves in parliament. He was arrested in Kinshasha. Ewanga
contends that President Joseph Kabila intends to retain power in violation of the law.

August 6, 2014: A human rights organization and observers in the UN monitoring office in Burundi have accused the ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), of conducting a campaign of intimidation (i.e., violent intimidation) against opposition parties and government critics. The CNDD-FDD’s youth wing, the Imbonerakure, are largely responsible for the violence.

August 9, 2014: The Congolese Army (FARDC) and MONUSCO peacekeepers have launched the next phase of their Iron Shield offensive operation in Ituri province. The offensive is targeting the Ituri Patriotic Resistance Front militias (FRPI) and the Ugandan rebel Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF-NALU) rebels in Ituri province. ADF-NALU is a predominantly Muslim rebel movement. On August 8 Congolese soldiers captured four FRPI militiamen and freed a captured Congolese soldier.

August 10, 2014: Mahamat Kamoun has become the Central African Republic’s prime minister. He is the first Muslim to hold the office. The government is attempting to create a multi-sectarian front in order to end the Muslim versus Christian violence.

August 12, 2014: The UN estimated 527,000 people are internally displaced within the CAR. Around 100,000 of the displaced are in the capital, Bangui.

August 18, 2014: UN officials warned that offensive action by the Congolese Army and UN peacekeepers against the Rwandan rebel FDLR is increasingly likely. One UN officials said that certain FDLR factions have refused to disarm. These factions deploy around 1,500 fighters. When the UN offered a limited amnesty earlier this year, 186 FDLR fighters and 430 dependents accepted the deal.

August 19, 2014: UN observers in Congo reported that Pygmy tribe militiamen attacked and burned several Bantu villages in the Luba area of Katanga province between August 10 and 12. A Pygmy tribe militia led by Mubone Mbuyu claimed that the attacks were reprisals for atrocities committed against Pygmies. The Pygmies claimed that militiamen in a Bakata-Katanga militia (a separatist movement in Katanga) attacked their village at Kasinge on August 7. Three men were murdered and the village was burned. In the past the Bakata-Katanga have attacked Pygmy villages and refugee centers. The Katangan separatists and a Pygmy militia fought in May 2014. Pygmies, because of their short stature, have long been persecuted and tend to live by themselves deep in the jungle. There they acquired a reputation of being experts in getting around the bush and as
hunters. The wide availability of cheap firearms since the 1990s has evened the combat odds and the Pygmies are now able and inclined to shoot back when attacked. Pygmy’s short stature (150cm/under five feet for adult males) is believed to be an ancient genetic adaptation to life in the tropical rain forests of Central Africa. There are believed to be half a million Pygmies living in Congo, less than one percent of the Congo population.

August 20, 2014: The UN and Rwanda are arguing over the number of Rwandan refugees still in the Democratic Republic of Congo and what to do about them. Rwanda claims it has access to a secret MONUSCO report that says 153,000 Rwandans (overwhelmingly Hutu) are in the Congo and that 120,000 of these Rwandan Hutus are under the control of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia.

August 26, 2014: UN ordered MONUSCO peacekeepers to conduct a joint operation against the Rwandan Hutu rebel Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia. The FDLR was founded by members of the Hutu regime which conducted the 1994 genocide.

August 27, 2014: the UN Mission for the Stabilization of peace in the DRC (MONUSCO) estimated the over 500,000 displaced people have collected in Congo’s Katanga province. The displaced people are living in terrible conditions and are suffering from disease and malnutrition. The displaced have exacerbated tribal tensions and are one of the reasons Bantus and Pygmies have been fighting in northern Katanga.

August 30, 2014: Work has begun on a movie about a Congo peacekeeping operation in 1961. The movies focuses on an Irish unit (A Company, 35th Battalion) which experienced extensive combat. The UN’s current Intervention Brigade IBDE) may be the first UN peacekeeping unit to be given an offensive mandate but it is far from the first peacekeeping unit to engage in heavy give and take combat. “A Company” was involved in a major action in Jadotville (now Likasi, Katanga province) in September 1961. On September 13, around 3,000 Katangan separatist militiamen attacked the Irish and besieged the town. The 154 Irish peacekeepers held out for six days. When they ran out of ammo and supplies, they were forced to surrender. They were held as prisoners for a month, then repatriated. Irish peacekeepers were not always so fortunate. Baluba tribe warriors killed nine Irish peacekeepers in the Congo in November 1960 and were described as having been mutilated.

September 1, 2014: The government and UN both stated that the Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) is failing to disarm and demobilize. In mid-August the UN said that it is prepared to use the MONUSCO’s Intervention Brigade (IBDE) to neutralize (destroy) FDLR cadres operating inside Congo.
September 3, 2014: The government appointed Brigadier General Emmanuel Lombe to command Congolese Army (FARDC) operations against rebel groups in North Kivu province (eastern Congo). Lombe will command units involved in Operation Sokola which are focusing on the Ugandan rebel Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia. Lombe replaces General Lucien Ambamba Bahuma who died of a stroke August 30. UN military officers serving with MONUSCO peacekeeping units thought highly of Bahuma’s military skills. Bahuma had improved Congolese Army unit training in North Kivu.

September 9, 2014: In late August at least twelve individuals kidnapped by a Lords Resistance Army band operating in Congo managed to escape their captors. Reports like these tend to have a lag time of a week to a couple of months. The escapees have to flee and seek help. In this case the escapees said the LRA band got in a firefight with a Congolese security force and they escaped during the clash.

September 10, 2014: The number of cases of ebola virus in Congo are increasing. The World Health Organization reported that Congo had 62 confirmed cases in one area in the west, near Republic of Congo-Brazzaville. However, the figure is very tenuous. Confirmed means confirmed by knowledgeable medical personnel. No one knows many people may be infected.

September 11, 2014: A court in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) convicted a former senior intelligence officer of attempting a coup d’etat. His punishment will be hard labor for life. The case of Colonel Marcel Ntsourou has stirred a great deal of interest throughout central Africa. In 2012 a fire at an arms depot produced a huge explosion which destroyed several blocks of Brazzaville and killed over 100 people. The government later claimed that the fire and explosion were supposed to provide a distraction for a coup. The coup did not occur. However in 2013, when police arrived at Ntsourou’s fortified home to search the premises, Ntsourou and his supporters fired back. At least 35 people died in the firefight (some sources report up to 50).

September 13, 2014: Ugandan security forces claimed that they have stopped a terrorist attack by the Somali Islamist Al Shabaab terror group. Ugandan security officials said that Al Shabaab terror cell intended to attack the U.S. embassy in Kampala, Uganda.

September 16, 2014: The Mai Mai Kifuafua militia asked the government to commit to protecting civilians and villages in the territory the militia currently controls. A senior Mai Mai Kifuafua commander told the government and UN that some 2,800 militiamen are prepared to disarm if they are assured that the Congolese Army will protect the Walekale region from attacks by other rebel groups, specifically the Rwandan FDLR.
September 20, 2014: The government continues to replace senior Congolese Army leaders. This is criticized because the president is selecting generals who are personally loyal to him. The president recently appointed General Gabriel Amisi as a commander of one of three “national defense zones.” The zones are an attempt to reorganize the army. Amisi will be commander in the western zone, which includes the capital, Kinshasha. But all is not well with the appointment. In 2012 UN investigators claimed that when Amisi commanded army units in eastern Congo he sold weapons (possibly Congolese Army weapons) to various rogue militias and rebel groups in eastern Congo. The government suspended Amisi – essentially suspended his military commission. However, in August 2014 he was reinstated as a general in the Congolese Army.

September 22, 2014: Congolese sources reported that the commander of the “Tigers” faction of the FDLR has said his guerrillas are tired of fighting. They would prefer to disarm, leave Congo, return to Rwanda and turn their organization into a political party. However, they do not believe the Rwandan government will allow them to do this. Several members of the faction have been indicted for war crimes.

UN urged the Congolese government to rapidly disarm the Rwandan Hutu rebel Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) militia. The UN has issued several statements that look like political preparation for launching new attacks on the FDLR by MONUSCO’s Intervention Brigade (IBDE).

September 25, 2014: The Ugandan government said that it will not deploy peacekeepers in the Central African Republic (CAR). The UN had asked Uganda to supply at least two battalions of peacekeepers. Uganda initially agreed to send 400 peacekeepers (potentially 800, in other words one battalion) but insisted that the peacekeeping force be based in south-eastern CAR at facilities already used by the Ugandan military. The Ugandan Army uses these bases to conduct operations against the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). The UN, however, said that it wanted Ugandan forces to deploy to the CAR’s capital, Bangui. The UN and Uganda continued to negotiate, with Uganda insisting that its peacekeepers be allowed to conduct anti-LRA operations. Apparently the UN and Uganda could not reach a compromise.

September 27, 2014: The U.S. admitted that it cannot adequately monitor mineral mining and smelting operations in order to determine if rebel groups, criminal organizations and rogue militias are selling and profiting from the minerals. The U.S. and other developed countries have passed various laws to deter the mining, transport and selling of conflict minerals (in the U.S. case, the 2010 Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act). The term refers to valuable minerals that are...
illegally-mined or illegally-acquired in conflict-ridden regions. The Congo, particularly eastern and southern Congo, are the classic examples of mineral-rich, conflict-ridden areas. In concept, the laws would prevent the movement of these minerals from the region and, failing that, would penalize individuals and companies who refine or smelt the illegal ores and minerals. In early September the United States published a list of several hundred operations world-wide that are suspected of processing, using or transporting conflict minerals. But the U.S. could not be certain. Why? Call it guerrilla mining and guerrilla smelting. The report used Congo as an example. "Artisanal miners that process small amounts of materials and are known to be employed in eastern Congo. Because these producers of metals are “off the grid,” it is very difficult to trace exactly where these small amounts of materials are smelted. There is also evidence of guerilla smelting operations throughout Africa that create makeshift smelters which produce an intermediary product of tantalum, tungsten and tin, and then ship the product overseas to scrap yards and informal metal traders and exchanges. The materials are often transshipped to another country and then flaked or shaved prior to being sent to a smelter.” These laws were touted as essential legal tools for battling criminal organizations and rogue militias. The laws were also seen as a vehicle for curbing corruption in developing countries – the corruption that often feeds conflicts. (Austin Bay)

September 28, 2014: In the capital and other large cities thousands demonstrated their opposition to Joseph Kabila’s efforts to run for a third term (of five years) as president. The current constitution only allows two terms and that would mean Kabila would be out by the end of 2016.

October 2, 2014: The 940 FDLR militiamen who have surrendered and are in demobilization camps in the Congo are being neglected and starved by the Congo government. It is believed that at least 100 demobilized FDLR fighters and their family members have died of starvation or disease while in a demobilization camps. This is largely result of government corruption and as news of this sort of thing gets around other rebels are less likely to consider surrendering.

October 3, 2014: The UN warned the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) that it is subject to attack unless its remaining 1,500 fighters in eastern Congo surrender by January 2015 for disarming, surrendering and demobilizing.

October 8, 2014: In Bangui (capital of the CAR) a new round of clashes between rival militias broke out leaving at least five people dead. A hand grenade attack wounded several civilians in a Bangui street while elsewhere in Bangui a crowd murdered a Muslim man. The murder was described as a revenge slaying for the murder of a taxi driver by Muslims.
October 9, 2014: Gunmen in Bangui ambushed a UN (Pakistan-Bangladesh) convoy and killed one UN peacekeeper from Pakistan and wounded another.

October 10, 2014: Gunmen in Bangui (CAR) fired on a UN police patrol and wounded six UN policemen.

October 14, 2014: Eight gunmen from the CAR Peoples Democratic Assembly the Central African Republic town of Baboua kidnapped a Polish missionary. Rwandan and Burundi continue to argue over the discovery of 40 bodies on their border in Lake Rweru. Burundi claimed that the bodies were dead Rwandans but Rwanda denied this. Several of the bodies were found in mid-August on the Burundian side of the lake wrapped in plastic sheeting.

October 16, 2014: Uganda and South Sudan have signed a new joint military accord. Uganda will begin buying weapons for the government of South Sudan and insists that this will not violate the current ceasefire agreement between the South Sudan government and South Sudanese rebels.

October 18, 2014: A rebel group murdered at least 30 people in the town of Beni (North Kivu province, eastern Congo) and the chief suspect was ADF rebels. Villagers had reported a rebel group entering Congo from Uganda. Some soldiers were sent to the area from a base some 55 kilometers from Beni. This was the second attack in the area within a week.

October 21, 2014: UN attack helicopters and armored vehicles have arrived in the Beni region. The helicopters and armor will be used to protect civilians and UN facilities from further attacks by suspected ADF-NALU (Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces) rebels.

October 22, 2014: The Central African Republic (CAR) government announced that it will create a rapid intervention force to help protect vulnerable civilians. The force will also lead the effort to rebuild the CAR’s military.

October 24, 2014: In the east (North Kivu province) MONUSCO (UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Congo peacekeepers) facilities and personnel have suffered rock throwing attacks during the last week. The locals are angry over the inability of the peacekeepers to halt the violence from rebels and bandits. Locals are particularly angry about recent attacks by Ugandan rebels crossing the border to plunder and kill civilians. The UN will not pursue the Ugandan attackers across the border. To the locals, the UN appears to be less aggressive against the Ugandan raiders than the local rebels. The trigger for the current upsurge in anti-UN violence was the death of two protesters who attacked peacekeepers
on the 21st, seeking to lynch some of them for not protecting the people. The peacekeepers fought back, killing two of the attackers (who did not have firearms). This brought out more people to protest. For example UN officials at the airport in Beni had to flee a rock throwing crowd of young men. More worrisome for the peacekeepers is that many villages and town neighborhoods are forming self-defense militias. Armed mostly with clubs, knives, machetes and spears, these groups tend to carry out vigilante actions and some turn into bandits.

The UN reported that on October 23 Islamic militants murdered 30 people in a predominantly Christian village in the CAR. The village of Yamale is 400 kilometers north of the capital, Bangui. Muslim gunmen also attacked several other villages in the area.

October 26, 2014: Rwanda announced that it will not permit BBC broadcasts in the Kinyarwanda language. The Rwandan government objected to a BBC broadcast which questioned official Rwandan government accounts of the 1994 Tutsi genocide.

October 27, 2014: The UN announced that given renewed attacks on civilians in eastern Congo, UN peacekeepers will have to be more “proactive, not reactive” in responding to rebel militias. The UN statement followed more complaints from Congolese civilians in North Kivu province.

October 29, 2014: MINUSCA peacekeepers in the CAR have freed (during various military operations) 67 hostages who had been kidnapped by militia groups.

October 31, 2014: The MINUSCA peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic (CAR) now deploys 7,600 soldiers and policemen. MINUSCA assumed control of peacekeeping operations in mid-September. The operation will eventually deploy 10,000 soldiers and 1,820 police officers.

The Burundian government said it had evidence that Islamist terrorist groups (specifically the Somali al Shabaab) had cells within Burundi. The U.S. and Belgium have both issued travel warnings advising visitors to avoid Burundi.

November 3, 2014: Several hundred protestors demonstrated in Beni. People are angry because they believe the government and the UN are not doing enough to protect them from attacks by terrorists and rogue militias. One group of protestors attempted to destroy a statue of Congolese president Joseph Kabila.

November 4, 2014: Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) confirmed reports of a new off-shore oil and natural gas discovery. The new field has an estimated one billion barrels. According to one commercial source, that is
a conservative estimate. Republic of Congo and Gabon have an estimated four billion barrels of oil in other off-shore fields.

November 6, 2014: A group of senior UN officials is investigating UN security operations in eastern Congo. Since early October the Ugandan rebel Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia has killed at least 100 civilians in various attacks in North Kivu province (primarily in and around the town of Beni). Congolese civilians are complaining that the Congolese Army and UN peacekeepers have failed to provide adequate security visited eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to address the UN mission’s failure to contain rebel groups and instill security in the region. In late October civilian protestors attacked the UN headquarters at Beni’s airport. Scattered protests have continued in Beni. Currently, MONUSCO has 150 Tanzanian soldiers and 100 Malawian soldiers from the UN’s Intervention Brigade (IBDE) deployed in Beni.

November 7, 2014: A Congolese military court sentenced former Congolese general Jerome Kakwavu to ten years in jail. The court convicted him of war crimes. Kakwavu commanded the rebel Armed Forces of the Congolese People (FAPC) militia. The court sentenced the former rebel leader turned army general to ten years in jail for these war crimes. The FAPC operated in eastern Congo’s around Ituri. Kakwavu was made a general in the Congolese Army in December 2004 when the FAPC agreed to end its insurgency and integrate with the national army. He was arrested on war crimes charges in 2005.

November 8, 2014: Security officials in Burundi reported that late on the evening of November 7th a group of men armed with machetes wounded two men and began looting homes in Burundi’s capital, Bujumbura. Over the last two months violent attacks by armed groups have increased in Bujumbura and Somalis are suspected. The Somali terrorist organization, Al Shabaab, had threatened to launch more attacks as revenge for Burundi’s participation in the African Union peacekeeping operation in Somalia.

November 11, 2014: The commander of M23 Congolese rebels has threatened to renew combat operations. Around 1,300 M23 fighters are currently being held in demobilization camps in Uganda. However, Bertrand Bisimwa, senior M23 commander (sometimes identified as M23’s president) contends that the Congolese government has not fulfilled its commitments per the February 2014 amnesty declaration and May 2014 peace agreement. One of Bisimwa’s key complaints is that the Congolese government has failed to release imprisoned M23 fighters inside the Congo.
November 12, 2014: In the east (North Kivu province) ADF (Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces) rebels continue operating along the Uganda border, as they have for a month, leaving at least 120 dead (mostly civilians) recently. It is unclear why the rebels are going after civilians. The LRA fighters tend to use abductees as supply bearers (porters) or sex slaves.

November 14, 2014: Attacks by the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA) are increasing once again. The LRA has killed 22 people in 2014. It has abducted 432 people this year.

November 18, 2014: Congolese police in Kinshasha appear to have killed 51 young gang members and kidnapped another 33. Between November 2013 and February 2014 a police anti-gang program either killed or “disappeared” suspected gang members.

November 20, 2014: A Christian anti-balaka militia fought with a UN peacekeeping force in the town of Cantonnier (CAR, near Cameroon border). At least six people were killed and ten wounded in the skirmish. The fight began when UN peacekeepers tried to disarm the militia.

November 21, 2014: How do the CAR’s Seleka rebels fund their organization? Selling gold is one way. A Seleka militia unit has controlled the gold mine near the village of Ndassima since 2012. The militia receives monthly “protection payments” from mine workers and those who provide services to the miners.

November 23, 2014: Opposition political leaders from ten political parties in Burundi have asked the country’s national election commission to suspend voter registration. The opposition leaders say that the governing party is already engaged in massive electoral fraud. Many of the voter registrars belong to the governing CNDD-FDD party. The government is also trying to intimidate the opposition by threats of violence.

November 24, 2014: During November 20 - 22 ADF rebels killed 100 people in a series of attacks around the town of Beni (North Kivu province). ADF fighters using guns and machetes attacked several small villages near Beni. In one instance the ADF attackers wore Congolese Army uniforms. Survivors said that the ADF rebels sought out and murdered people who had given the government information about ADF whereabouts.

November 25, 2014: The U.S. government urged the Congolese Army to do more to protect vulnerable civilians in eastern Congo. The Americans believe the latest attacks and atrocities are the work of the Ugandan ADF terrorist group.
November 26, 2014: Congolese soldiers arrested six Ukrainian UN peacekeepers in Goma (North Kivu province). The peacekeepers were accused of stealing Congolese Army (FARDC) uniforms.

November 28, 2014: The Twa Pygmy tribe in Katanga province is once again accusing the Luba tribe of attacking and pillaging its villages. The Luba are Bantus. Currently there are around 77,000 refugees in northeastern Katanga and the majority of them are Twa. So far 1,737 violent incidents have occurred in central and northern Katanga, the majority in the Manono, Mitwaba and Pweto area (the “triangle of death”, or “Pweto triangle”). Violent incidents include torture, forced labor, theft (looting), extortion, rape and arson.

November 30, 2014: A Christian anti-balaka militia umbrella organization in the CAR has told the government that it is ending its role as a coordinator for armed groups and will become a political party. The new party name will be the Central African Party for Unity and Development.

December 3, 2014: UN and European diplomats are worried that President Joseph Kabila is intending to remain in office after 2016. According to the 2006 constitution, the president is term-limited. The idea is to prevent a return to a “strong man” dictatorship.

December 4, 2014: The government is ready to begin repatriating former M23 rebel fighters from neighboring countries where they are currently in demobilization camps. Around 1450 M23 fighters are in camps in Uganda. Several hundred more are in Rwanda. Congo wants the fighters to return without their weapons. The rebels have been promised amnesty in exchange for promises to forgo any future rebellion and anti-government action.

The CAR now has one of the world's largest refugee problems. Renewed sectarian violence has produced over 850,000 refugees and 187,000 have fled to neighboring countries. Most stayed in the CAR, many in camps around the capital, Bangui. In December 2013 CAR had an estimated 350,000 to 400,000 refugees (internally displaced people, IDPs).

December 5, 2014: The UN is prepared to reduce the size of its Congo operation if the government demonstrates that it is able to keep the peace. The UN statement, however, comes at an awkward moment. North and South Kivu provinces have witnessed an increase in attacks on civilians. Over 200 civilians were killed in October and November. Most of the attacks have been attributed to the Ugandan rebel Allied Democratic Forces (ADF-NALU) militia.

December 6, 2014: Fourteen people died and another ten were wounded in sectarian violence in the Central African Republic (CAR). Several hundred Christian tribesmen sought shelter in a church in the town of
December 7, 2014: The Rwandan Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group has failed to completely disarm. Once again UN peacekeepers are threatening to use the Intervention Brigade (IBDE) in an offensive operation to enforce UN orders. FDLR insists that the government has failed to follow-through on promises to house and feed demobilized FDLR fighters. There is recent evidence supporting the FDLR claim that Congolese-run demobilization camps were little more than prisons. The Congo wants to send the FDLR fighters back to Rwanda -- repatriation is the term. However, many FDLR fighters contend (with reason) that returning to Rwanda is a death sentence. The Rwandan government argues that they participated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide (and many original FDLR fighters did). An estimated 1,200 to 1,500 fighters remain in the field, most of them in eastern Congo. The Rwandan government insists that the UN and Congo end the FDLR insurgency. In late November, the Rwandan government claimed that the FDLR was re-grouping in eastern Congo.

President Kabila has formed a new government and included ministers from groups that he has had problems with. This is apparently part of an effort to gain support for his effort to run for president again despite the constitution forbidding it.

December 8, 2014: The Ugandan rebel Allied Democratic Forces (ADF-NALU) militia is believed responsible for killing nearly 40 civilians in North Kivu province in the last two days. ADF has killed over 250 people in this area in the last two months and the locals are desperate for some help from the government or peacekeepers to stop the violence.

December 8, 2014: Congo president Joseph Kabila announced that he has formed a new “unity” national government. In the new government a senior member of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo opposition political party will serve as vice-prime minister. Critics said that Kabila is attempting to divide his political opponents and accused him of preparing to change the constitution so he can remain in power after 2016.

December 9, 2014: Observers in the Central African Republic (CAR) warned that tensions are once again rising. A report from the UN’s peacekeeping office said that MINUSCA’s current operational objective is to stop violence between anti-Balaka militias and Seleka rebels in and around the CAR’s capital, Bangui. The anti-Balaka fighters come from
predominantly Christian tribes. The Seleka movement (or Seleka alliance) comes from Moslem tribes.

December 12, 2014: In a speech delivered in Kenya at a Kenya independence celebration, Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni declared that African nations need to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC) treaty. Museveni claimed that the ICC is now used as a tool for oppressing Africans. The African Union recently asked the ICC to refrain from prosecuting an African head of state or deputy head of state while the accused remains in power. The ICC recently decided to drop crimes against humanity charges against Kenya’s president, Uhuru Kenyatta. However, the ICC refused to drop charges against Kenyan vice-president William Ruto. Museveni’s declaration is ironic. Museveni sought help from the ICC in dealing with the Ugandan rebel Lords Resistance Army (LRA). The ICC (backed by ample evidence) charged LRA senior commander Kony with crimes against humanity.

December 14, 2014: Operations against the ADF-NALU continue in eastern Congo near the Uganda-Congo border. Elements of nineteen Congolese Army battalions are participating. The UN’s IBDE is involved. MONUSCO estimates that the ADF has about 150 fighters inside Congo.

December 15, 2014: Congolese president Joseph Kabila declared that foreign nations were violating Congo’s sovereignty by telling him to observe constitutional limits on presidential re-election. Congo’s president is limited to two five-year terms. Kabila’s second term ends in 2016.

December 16, 2014: A spokesman for the M23 rebel movement claimed that between 1,500 and 1,600 former M23 fighters have left their internment camp in Uganda. The fighters were afraid that if they were forced to return to Congo they would jailed or executed. According to a diplomatic deal negotiated between Uganda and Congo, M23 fighters are to return to the Congo to be demobilized. The M23 fighters retreated into Uganda in November 2013 after losing a series of battles to UN peacekeepers and the Congolese Army. The Ugandan military, however, said that the M23 fighters were in the hills near the internment camp and were not missing.

December 19, 2014: Whether criminal slaughter, tribal war or political terrorism, the result is mass murder. UN investigators announced that they have evidence that since October an armed group (or several armed groups) in the Beni area (North Kivu province) have murdered at least 256 people (many of them children). The weapons of choice were machetes and axes. UN officials said they have not been able to determine what group is responsible. Residents of Beni and some Congolese officials have accused the Ugandan rebel Allied Democratic Forces and National
Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) of committing the massacres.

December 21, 2014: Anti-Balaka militiamen fought with UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic (CAR) town of Berberati. One anti-Balaka fighter and one civilian were killed in the incident. UN peacekeepers recovered several weapons (types not identified). UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA) officials also reported a clash occurred on December 20 near the town of Bambari. Anti-Balaka militiamen fought with fighters loyal to a former Seleka commander, General Ali Darass. Seven people died in the incident.

December 28, 2014: Another 150 FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) fighters surrendered. UN officials had earlier hinted that the IBDE’s next target might be the FDLR Hutu extremist group. This threat from the UN’s peacekeeping office sounded more like an announcement. Before that only 200 FDLR fighters had surrendered and another 1,300 remained in the bush in eastern Congo. Now that is closer to 1,100.

December 29, 2014: Since the Great Congo War erupted in the mid-1990s, every Congolese province has experienced anarchic violence. In impoverished, corrupt Congo, all too often anarchic violence quickly expands into a small but deadly war. When anarchic violence erupts, unprotected civilians are uprooted or robbed, sometimes raped, often killed. If the violence persists, relief agencies evacuate their personnel. In these terrible circumstances, Congolese civilians, aid groups and human rights organizations have legitimate cause to demand protection. In Congo --with the possible exception of the Kinshasha-based Presidential Guard-- the best available armed defense is provided by UN peacekeepers.

UN peacekeepers serving with the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC) first deployed to Congo in 1960 when Belgium left and Katangan separatists rebelled. The current UN deployment, initially designated the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), was authorized in 2000. In 2001 MONUC deployed around 3,000 troops. Year by year the troop commitment increased. In 2005 MONUC deployed around 15,000 uniformed personnel (soldiers, observers and police). Since 2010 the UN has kept at least 20,000 uniformed personnel in Congo, the number occasionally approaching 22,000. In November 2014, the UN had 19,461 soldiers in Congo, 481 military observers and 1,091 uniformed police. Add another 4,000 UN civilians and volunteers. Cost estimates vary. For Congo peacekeeping and stabilization operations mid-2014 to mid-2015 the UN has budgeted $1.4 billion. From 2001 to 2014, Congo peacekeeping operations cost UN members over $8 billion. By some estimates, the figure exceeds $10 billion. That is a major, sustained effort over an extended period of time.
In 2010 MONUC became MONUSCO (UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo). The name changed because the UN Security Council’s policy emphasis had shifted from peacekeeping to political stabilization. MONUSCO was to shift from focusing on peacekeeping to nation building.

Cynics claimed the name change meant UN was declaring victory so it could leave. UN peacekeeping officials replied, no, changing from “Operation” to “Stabilization” signaled the UN would withdraw troops as Congo’s security forces became strong enough to defend Congolese civilians.

Every diplomat, military officer and development expert knew to achieve that goal Congo needed more than a few good infantry brigades; it needed reliable, honest and strong government institutions. MONUSCO, working with other international donors and agencies, would focus on strengthening and in some cases creating Congolese government institutions. Anti-corruption efforts would receive special emphasis. Security, of course, was essential. Peacekeeping troops would provide a reassuring security presence but increasingly focus on improving Congolese Army units and police units.

Five years after MONUC became MONUSCO, several Congolese provinces (especially the Kivus and Katanga) experience bouts of low-level war. However, the UN can make a case that the severity of internal warfare has decreased; concurrently, regional tensions related to internal Congolese warfare have been reduced. Anarchic violence, however, continues, and the fundamental problem seeding anarchy, weak and crooked government institutions, has not been resolved. Despite MONUSCO’s efforts, poor, untrustworthy, self-interested, morally-corrupt leadership undermines respect for governmental authority. President Kabila wants to change election laws and amend the constitution so he can continue as president beyond 2016. Graft and cronyism (usually with a tribal dimension) render incapable already weak government institutions. MONUSCO wants to improve the country’s tax collecting but some provinces thoroughly distrust the central government. Deep distrust spurs thoughts of separatism.

As 2014 ends, Congo is definitely not stabilized. Critics are declaring MONUSCO a failure. However, in 2004 critics had declared MONUC an abject disaster. But when compared to Congo 2004, Congo 2014 is more stable. Perhaps Congo 2016-2017 is the next appropriate measure. A successful 2016 national election, with Kabila respecting the constitution and peacefully transferring power to his elected successor, would be a major step toward more stability, less anarchy and measuring MONUSCO’s success. (Austin Bay)
COUNTRY FACT FILE

Location
At the centre of Africa.

Official title of the state
Democratic Republic of the Congo: commonly referred to as DR Congo, Congo-Kinshasa or the Congo, is a country located in central Africa. It is the second largest country in Africa by area next to Algeria and the tenth largest in the world.

Republique Democratique du Congo (French)

Flag description:
Sky blue field divided diagonally from the lower hoist corner to upper fly corner by a red stripe bordered by two narrow yellow stripes; a yellow, five-pointed star appears in the upper hoist corner; blue represents peace and hope, red the blood of the country's martyrs, and yellow the country's wealth and prosperity; the star symbolizes unity and the brilliant future for the country.

Neighbours
Congo on W., Central African Republic, Burundi, Tanzania on E., Zambia, Angola on S. Land boundaries; total 10, 730 km. Border countries; Angola 2,511 km, Burundi 233 km, Central African Republic 1,577 km, Congo 2,410 km, Rwanda 217 km, South Sudan 628 km, Tanzania 459 km, Uganda 765 km, Zambia 1,930 km.

Local division
26 provinces.

Government type
Republic – presidential

Legislation chamber
Bicameral Parliament

Form of State
Republic

President is both Chief of State and Head of Government. President is elected for a five-year term and is eligible for a second term. A unitary multi-party republic with two legislative bodies. The Senate 108 seats, members are appointed by provincial councils, and the National Assembly
500 seats, members are elected by popular vote to serve for five-year terms.

Executive branch

Executive President with a Prime Minister, Bicameral Parliament. Separated by chief of State and head of government. President elected by popular vote to serve for five-year terms without presidential term limits. Head of government is to be appointed by the president.

Former Rulers

1960-1965 Mr. Joseph Kasavubu, head of state
1960 to 1961 Patrice Emery Lumumba, head of government
1965-1997 Colonel Joseph Desire Mobutu (later known as Mobutu Se-se-seko)
1997-2001 Laurent-Desire Kabila Sr.

Judicial chamber

Constitutional court; Appeals court; Civil courts & tribunals; High Military Court.

Capital city Kinshasa Altitude 325 mtrs/1066 ft.

Geographic coordinates 4.19S, 15.18E. Located on the Congo river together with Brazaville, Congolese capital, making it the most populous transborder-metropolitan area. It was once named Leopoldville in honour of Leopold II of Belgium, the late ex-president Mobutu Sese-Seko in his coming to power initiated a policy of "Africanizing the names of people and places" in the country, and renamed it Kinshasa, in 1965, for a village named previously Kinchassa, that once stood near the site. It sometimes called Congo-Kinshasa (of the Congo), as usually opposed to Congo-Brazaville (of Congo Republic), while Kinshasa lies to the south of the Congo river, Brazaville lies to the north of the Congo river. Founded in 1881.

Names of main towns

Lubumbashi, Kissangani, Mbuji-Mayi, Kananga, Goma, Kolwezi, Likasi, Bukavu, Matadi, Mbandaka.

Date of independence

30th June, 1960

Religions (Major)
Roman Catholic 70%, Protestant 20%, Kimbanguist (form of Christianity) 10%, Muslim 10%, other (includes syncretic sects and indigenous beliefs) 10%.

Main spoken languages
French (official), Lingala, Kiswahilli, Tshiluba, Kikongo spoken.

Currency unit
Congolese Franc (CDF) = 100 centimes

Area in Km²
2,344,858.00

Country area comparison in Africa
2 out of 55 states.

Demographic terms
Average annual population growth rate 3.165 %
Birth rate 42.26 births per 1,000 population
Death rate 11.39 deaths per 1,000 population
Average life expectancy ; 54.73 years
Male 52.93 years ; Female 56.59 years;

Illiteracy rate (%)
Male: 16, Female: 48

Average per capita income
USD 300

Population density
7.2/km²

Urban population (%)
39

Contributor groups (%)
Farming, Fishing: 55, Industry: 11, Social service: 34

Main Export Items
Diamonds, Gold, Copper, Cobalt, Wood products, Coffee, Tea.

Economy is based on;
Minerals and Agriculture. Very poor infrastructure due to administrative mismanagement and neglect. Limited exploitation of agriculture potential due to over-reliance on mineral extraction. Challenge of managing international mineral prospecting companies so that they give a better deal to the Congolese. Recurrent hyperinflation.

Climate

Tropical

Extremes;

Lowest point; The Atlantic coast 0 mtr.

Highest point; Marguerita peak on Mt. Ngaliema 5,110 mtrs.

Weather of the Capital city (Kinshasa) average annual temperature 24.9oC.

Altitude 325 mtrs/1066 ft

Hottest Month March, April, 22-32oc.

Coldest Month July 18-27oc.

Driest Month July & August 3mm average Rf.

Wettest Month November 221 mm average Rf.

Measures

Metric system.

Time zone

Kinshasa & Mbandaka 1 hour ahead of GMT/UTC. Shaba & Kashikima 2 hours ahead of GMT/UTC.

Public holidays

1 January (New year), 4 January (Martyrs of Independence), 17 January (Heroe's day), 1 May (Labour day), 17 May (Liberation day), 30 June (Independence day), 1 August (Parent's day), 14 October (Youth day), 17 November (Army day), 25 December (X-mas), All Christian holidays.

Ethnic groups

Over 200 African ethnic-groups of which the majority are Bantus, Mongo, Luba, Kongo (all Bantus), Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic) make up about 45% of the population.

Topographic & Environmental concern

The Congo includes the bulk of the River Congo basin. The vast central low lying plateau covered by lands toward the N. and the high mountains
on the E. surrounded the central region a short strip of territory borders the Atlantic ocean. Dense tropical rainforest in central river basin and eastern highlands. The River Congo is 2,718 miles long & it's an outlet to the Atlantic ocean. Environment: poaching bush animals for dietary threatens wildlife populations; water pollution; deforestation; refugees responsible for significant deforestation, soil erosion, and wildlife poaching; mining of minerals (coltan - a mineral used in creating capacitors, diamonds, and gold) causing environmental damage.

Economic Overview

Industry

Mining, mineral processing, textiles, leather products, consumergoods products, food processing, cement, commercial ship-repair.

Chief crops

Coffee, cotton, rice, sugarcane, bananas, coconuts, manioc, mango, tea, cocoa, palm oil, cassava, root-crops, corn, fruits : wood products.

Natural resources


Land in use (%)

Arable land: 3
Grassland: 7
Forest woods: 77
Other: 13

Marine:

Coastline; 37 km, on the Congo River estuary (Muanda).

Commercial Sea port:-

The Main port is Matadi on the river Congo estuary (Muanda), it's the main outlet to the Atlantic Ocean. River transport services also used.

Development prospect;-:

Even though Chinese contractors have broken ground on several projects linked to the $6bn mines-for-infrastructure deal signed with the Congolese state in 2007, which was amended in 2009 under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, execution has been slow. The China Railways and Sinohydro consortium still plans to finance $6bn in
infrastructure projects and mining developments in exchange for access to 10m tn of copper and 600,000tn of cobalt through the Sicomines joint venture formed with parastatal mining company Gécamines. However, the largest mine managed by Sicomines, the one at Dikuluwe, is flooded, causing delays to all stages of its development. The government is working with the Chinese government and the World Bank to rehabilitate the country's dilapidated rail infrastructure. In May, the three partners launched a $600m effort to improve 700km of railway lines in Kasai and Katanga provinces. In October, the government invited mining companies to come up with the $200m that had been promised by its Chinese partners but which had been delayed, in order to jump-start exports of copper and cobalt. The government praised for creating economic growth of about 6.5 percent in 2011 thanks to higher prices for copper and cobalt. National copper production rose to 500,000tn and is set to reach 700,000tn in 2015, more than two times the total in 2009. Cobalt production nearly doubled between 2010 and 2011, reaching 100,000tn. In June, production of zinc for the first half of 2011 rose to 9,200tn, which was the equivalent of total production of the mineral in 2010. That growth is not spread equally across sectors. The sole industrial diamond mining concern, the parastatal Minière de Bakwanga, halted its operations towards the end of 2008 and only slowly began to restart its activities early in 2011. Current production only represents about half of the record level of 35m carats reached in 2005.

New oil exploration on permits awarded in the Albertine Graben and Cuvette Centrale could generate substantial revenue. Brazilian firm HRT is convinced that the Cuvette region presents similar geological formations to the Amazon, where companies have made sizeable discoveries in recent years. Business Monitor International predicts output growth of 13.7 percent across the country's principal mining sub-sectors, including copper, cobalt and gold over the next three years. Gold will lead the way with an average of 25.7 percent growth due to new projects from Anglo Gold Ashanti and Randgold in Orientale province. In March, Canada's Kilo Goldmines announced that it had discovered 2m oz of gold at the Adumbi deposit at its Somituri project.

GDP growth was equally strengthened by the performance of the construction sector, which grew 10.1 percent in 2010, and services. They were followed by strong growth in agriculture, coffee production and logging. Exports grew to about $11bn in 2011 from $8.3bn in 2010. They should rise to $15bn by 2015, but such numbers are dependent on minerals and oil, which account for 97.2 percent of the total. The central bank says that the government's foreign reserves rose from $1bn in 2009 to $1.3bn in 2010 and were set to hit $1.5bn at the end of 2011. The financial authorities hope inflation, which averaged around 13 percent in 2011, will drop below 10 percent in 2012. The country's weak electricity
supply is an obstacle to industrial and mining growth. The problems stem from the age of the Société Nationale d'Electricité's (SNEL) infrastructure and lack of maintenance at production facilities. An exceptionally dry year greatly reduced the capacity of the hydroelectric plants at Inga, aggravating other problems in the sector. President Kabila sacked SNEL's management for the company's poor performance in 2011. The mining industry may have no other choice but to install its own capacity of some 1,000MW by 2015, without which landmark projects like Tenke Fungurume, which plans to quadruple its current production to 100,000tn per year by that time, will not be possible. Contractors broke ground on four hydro-electric dams in 2011, the two most important being the 150MW project at Zongo II in Bas-Congo and the 64MW dam at Grande Katende in Kasai Occidental. According to the energy ministry, they will not be operational for at least another three years.