

CHAOS IN CONGO: A primer.; Many Armies Ravage Rich Land In the 'First World War' of Africa

By Ian Fisher, Norimitsu Onishi, Rachel L. Swarns, Blaine Harden and Alan Cowell, and written by Mr. Fisher and Mr. Onishi.

KINSHASA, Congo— Congo and the nine nations around it sit on what may be the richest patch of this planet: there are diamonds, oil, uranium, gold, plentiful water, fertile land and exquisite wildlife.

It is now also one of the biggest battlefields in Africa's history, the object of a conflict that has been dubbed "Africa's first world war."

Six outside states are fighting inside Congo alone, with at least 35,000 soldiers, men and boys, battling for a bewildering number of reasons. Some armies are allied with rebel groups to oust President Laurent Kabila of Congo. Others are protecting him. Nine rebel groups in Congo are fighting to overthrow governments in neighboring countries. Nearly everyone carts off Congo's riches.

These conflicts are a series of related wars, fueled by ethnic conflict, by a scramble for power and riches among people with very little of either, and by leaders with little idea of responsibility for those people. Rooted in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the fighting has smoldered inconclusively for 18 months; in that time rebels and invading armies have expanded their reach to half of Congo's vast expanse, but the war remains largely a stalemate.

Neither Mr. Kabila nor the rebels have strong support in the population. The foreign armies on both sides have been reluctant to commit their men to all-out battles that could explode into even greater warfare, perhaps beyond Congo.

Now, into this chaos, the United Nations is considering the deployment of the oddly precise number of 5,537 troops to monitor a cease-fire signed last summer, but violated with impunity by all sides ever since.

In late January, seven African presidents met at the United Nations in New York for a special Security Council session, convened by Richard C. Holbrooke, the American representative, in an attempt to make the cease-fire stick. They did little beyond reasserting the goals of the agreement, and continuing negotiations at a lower level hold out only minimal hope.

The worries are clear, the solutions elusive. Experts say Africa has not been so consumed by conflict since colonial days. Tens of thousands have died. Hundreds of thousands have been uprooted from their homes. Elephants and gorillas are poached for food. Economies, already as diseased and undernourished as their people, are dying.

Many experts argue that the force contemplated by the United Nations is far too small, considering the sheer size and terrain of Congo -- a decomposed nation of thick jungle, poor communications and ghost tracks that once were roads. But for some of the nations that would pay for the peacekeeping force -- the United States first among them -- any number of soldiers is too many unless the warring nations and factions in Congo show that they are serious about peace. The peacekeepers, they argue, would simply not be safe.

Practically, the proposed deployment would probably mean battalions of soldiers placed in three strategic spots around an area roughly as big as Western Europe.

"It's totally inadequate," said Jakkie Potgieter, senior researcher at the Institute for Strategic Studies in South Africa. After all, this is a conflict of unprecedented scale in Africa. On the eastern borders, two nations that had helped to install Mr. Kabila only three years ago, Rwanda and Uganda, are now fighting just as fiercely to overthrow him. They are allied with three Congolese rebel groups, which have also skirmished with one another.

On the other side, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia saved Mr. Kabila from almost certain defeat when the war started in August 1998, and Mr. Kabila has also allied himself with tens of thousands of Hutu militiamen responsible for the Rwandan genocide, as well as indigenous warriors known as the Mayi-Mayi, who believe that water has magical qualities that protect them from bullets.

The motives are as tangled as the conflicts. For those arrayed against Mr. Kabila, the keystone is the devastating Hutu-Tutsi rivalry that has kept Rwanda and Burundi in convulsions for years. The Tutsi-led government of Rwanda is there to curb the Hutu militia; Uganda joined in the fray to support Rwanda and to curb its own rebels based in Congo. Burundi has also sent forces into Congo to fight Hutu rebels of its own.

From the south, Angola needs Mr. Kabila to fight its own Unita rebels, based in southern Congo. Namibia is there to help Angola. Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe, has come to Mr. Kabila's support out of personal ambition to be a force in the region, and because his generals are growing rich exploiting Congolese resources of timber, gold, diamonds and metals.

The participation of those nations, in turn, has sent shock waves further afield, in the form of fleeing refugees or opportunistic rebellions, to Zambia, Burundi, Tanzania, Sudan. What further confuses matters is the rivalry for regional authority between Mr. Mugabe and Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni -- and, on all sides, the lure of Congo's riches.

All this raises the question: Is now a time for a return of pessimism about Africa? Will its unending problems merely give rich nations yet another excuse to write off Africa, already largely forgotten without the cold war to keep the continent strategically relevant?

Just two years ago, President Clinton traveled here proclaiming a "renaissance" of vital new leaders, vibrant economies and great hopes. And optimists say there is still plenty of good: South Africa and many southern nations are thriving, and Nigeria, where one in six Africans lives, returned to democracy

last May after nearly 16 years of military rule. In 1975, only three heads of state were chosen through elections. Last year, 32 of 54 leaders were elected.

Still, many of the leaders singled out as models by Mr. Clinton are at war. Fighting burns in an unbroken line from the South Atlantic to the Red Sea: Angola, Namibia, Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea (not to mention a military coup in Ivory Coast, a West African nation that was once the model of stability).

It is virtually impossible for outsiders to witness the fighting around Central Africa, often because it takes place far inside jungles so dense that United Nations logisticians have debated whether peacekeepers should bother to carry binoculars.

It is a war both modern and primitive, fought in helicopter gunships and aerial bombings, but more often by bands of men armed with rifles and machetes darting in and out of forest that has become as inaccessible as when King Leopold II of Belgium first commissioned Henry Stanley to explore it in 1878.

Nobody knows the toll; the estimate most often cited is 100,000 combatants, refugees and civilians killed since fighting in Congo began.

But it is easy enough to assemble a collage of the devastation. Recently a newspaper in Kinshasa carried a front-page photograph of a decapitated body from fighting in eastern Congo. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other groups have documented scores of cases of civilians being killed by combatants, for food or money, or because they were merely in the way.

At the main hospital in Kinshasa, the largest in Congo, a wounded soldier, Sipriant Ndaki, 27, hobbled from his bed to the street, to beg for food. He managed to come up with a quarter of a corncob, which he clutched in his hand as he described how he was shot in the left leg in a battle in Boende in December.

He said his battalion of 300 men had been attacked by Ugandan soldiers. Many died, some drowning when they tried to flee in the river. "I am prepared to die so that the people can be saved," he insisted. Still, he said he was lying in a bed with no sheets or mattress and had not been treated properly. He lifted up his pant leg showing open sores that still bled every day.

Despite its fabulous potential wealth, Congo itself was nearly bled dry by the time this latest war broke out. Three decades of pillage by Mobutu Sese Seko, the dictator who was propped up by the country's riches and the cold war patronage of the United States, had ravaged the land that Mr. Mobutu had renamed Zaire.

But nearly three years after Mr. Mobutu was overthrown by Mr. Kabila -- with widespread hopes among locals, Congo's neighbors and more distant foreign powers -- life here remains surreally broken down.

What state hospitals there are must survive on their own. Only a handful of private airlines connect the vast expanse; phones are scarce in Kinshasa and nonexistent in many parts of the country; the roads are terrible.

On the outskirts of Kinshasa -- Congo's capital and westernmost major city, which has grown to six million people from only 400,000 at independence from Belgium in 1960 -- one in 10 children and mothers are malnourished. Rituals as basic as family meals have broken down, as the prices of certain staples like yams have tripled since November.

The outside world shares much of the blame for the plight of Congo and its neighbors: European colonists divided the continent up into nations that rarely bore a relation to geographic or ethnic boundaries. During the cold war, the superpowers picked their proxies, overlooking corruption and abuse of ordinary people.

Today, at a minimum, the West is often accused of lacking the imagination to find solutions in Africa. At worst, the United States in particular is accused of keeping the Congo war going by failing to strongly condemn its allies, Rwanda and Uganda, who entered Congo in August 1998, hiding behind rebel forces that they financed. "Since President Kabila came to power, we have received no assistance from the United States, while Rwanda and Uganda have continued to receive aid," said Uba Thassinda, the Congo vice president for international cooperation. "How can the United States keep helping those countries?"

American officials say they have privately urged Rwanda and Uganda to pull out of Congo. But there are obstacles to pressing too hard: Uganda stands as a bulwark against an Islamic extremist government in Sudan that has harbored anti-American terrorists; and Mr. Clinton has acknowledged a moral debt to Rwanda because the United States did not do enough to stop the genocide.

And all the while, the wars rage on. In Kinshasa, the government has erected billboards in recent months seemingly preparing the Congolese for a long war: "Peace has a price. Be prepared for any sacrifice."

Some experts argue that the war in Congo is actually three wars:

The first is the battle between Mr. Kabila and the Congolese rebels fighting to overthrow him. The second war is an ethnic war in the eastern provinces of Congo, primarily against ethnic Congolese Tutsi. The third war -- really a series of conflicts -- involves all the outside countries: Rwanda and Uganda on the side of the rebels; Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia on the side of Mr. Kabila.

Following, country by country, is a look at these wars:

Congo

After pursuing a somewhat quixotic rebellion against Mr. Mobutu for decades from eastern Congo (then Zaire), Mr. Kabila came to power in 1997, largely through the patronage of Rwanda and Uganda, which needed someone Congolese to head an anti-Mobutu movement.

Once in power, Mr. Kabila was joined in the Kinshasa government by many advisers from Rwanda. Their presence angered the Congolese, and Mr. Kabila cut his ties with the Rwandans. They started a new war, now against Mr. Kabila, in August 1998. Rebels now occupy about half of Congo, roughly the east and northeast. What that usually means is that they nominally hold pivotal towns, airstrips and roads, but remain highly unpopular.

Mr. Kabila inherited an army of about 70,000 when he seized power. He has been joined by several thousand soldiers from the southern province of Katanga, and the government has begun a major recruitment drive. Although Mr. Kabila's own army has improved in the last year, his forces remain poorly trained, and poorly paid. Many are simply boys.

But in many areas nominally under Mr. Kabila's control, it is Angola and Zimbabwe, and not the Congo Army, that are the real power.

Although Western diplomats generally acknowledge that Rwanda and Uganda have invaded Congo, almost no one has publicly supported the Kabila government.

First, Mr. Kabila himself came to power in what could be described as Rwanda and Uganda's first invasion of Congo in 1997; after that war, he allowed his Rwanda-Tutsi allies to seek out and sometimes slaughter Hutu responsible for the Rwanda genocide.

Second, Mr. Kabila's government, after promising reforms, openness and elections, has turned into a repressive rule that has tolerated little or no political opposition, jailed journalists and failed to respect basic human rights.

Third, Mr. Kabila, in his struggle to survive, has made dubious alliances, most notably with the genocidal Hutu, who were largely responsible for the Rwandan genocide and who have taken refuge in Congo.

In July, Mr. Kabila signed the Lusaka accord, calling for a cease-fire and peace talks, but his commitment has been in doubt. Still, he is under increasing pressure to negotiate; of his allies, Angola has reduced its participation in the war, and Zimbabwe's efforts are proving increasingly costly for the government of President Mugabe.

Rebels

Nearly half of Congo is occupied by three rebel groups. With some exceptions, the rebels hold all areas of northern and eastern Congo bordering the Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and most of Lake Tanganyika.

Despite the peace accord last summer, fighting has been intense in several areas -- in the northwest corner of Congo around Gemena and south across the Congo River, southwest of Kisangani, and in the North and South Kivu provinces in the far east of Congo. Mbuji-Mayi, the major diamond mining town, is held by the government but surrounded on the north and east by rebels.

Since late in 1999, the rebel groups have tried to work together, with limited success. The major groups are:

The Movement for the Liberation of Congo, headed by Jean-Pierre Bemba, a cell-phone entrepreneur and son of an influential Congolese businessman. Mr. Bemba is backed by Uganda, whose soldiers occupy all the territory he holds. The group is believed to have something fewer than 10,000 guerrillas.

The Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma, the main branch of a rebel group that later split into two. Based in Goma, it is headed by a medical doctor, Emile Ilunga. This group has a fighting force estimated at 10,000 to 15,000 men, headed by many disaffected Congolese officers, many of them Congolese Tutsi. It is backed by Rwanda, which has many thousands of troops in Congo.

The Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement, headed by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, a university professor once jailed by Mr. Mobutu who was kicked out as president of the main movement last summer. Its soldiers number fewer than 3,500. Ugandan troops occupy most of the territory the movement vaguely claims.

The presence of groups sometimes termed "nonstate actors" further complicates the situation in Congo. These are mostly aligned with Mr. Kabila. They include:

Hutu militias, which carried out much of the killing in Rwanda in 1994, and then escaped to Congo. Rwanda and Uganda claim that Mr. Kabila and Zimbabwe have trained thousands of them, some in Zimbabwe itself. They are said to be at the front around the Mbuji-Mayi diamond mines in the thousands. They are also active in the Kivus, crossing occasionally into Rwanda. Many of the Hutu militias have also crossed into Burundi, linking up with other Hutu rebels fighting against the Tutsi-led government there. Rwanda has said it will not leave the Congo until it is convinced that the Hutu militias are under control.

Estimates of the number of Hutu militiamen vary widely; Rwanda has cited figures between 5,000 and 25,000.

The Mayi-Mayi warriors: These are groups of indigenous fighters with shifting loyalties in the eastern Congo, North and South Kivu. Most of them work for Mr. Kabila and alongside the Hutu. The Mayi-Mayi believe that water protects them from bullets, and some of them go into battle wearing things like rubber tub stoppers.

Many experts believe that eastern Congo has become ungovernable, and that the Mayi-Mayi have emerged as the warlords of a disintegrated land. Their numbers are unknown.

Rwanda

The problems facing Rwanda are in many ways the driving force of the Congo war. If Rwanda's security could be resolved, diplomats believe that it is at least possible that the conflict in Congo could be settled.

The problem began in 1994, when hundreds of thousands of Hutu fled into what was then Zaire, fearing retribution after Hutu extremists massacred at least 500,000 Tutsi in Rwanda.

Those extremists, allied with Mr. Mobutu, in turn began attacking Rwanda from Zaire. In 1996, the new Tutsi-led government in Rwanda and its ally and neighbor, Uganda, decided to put an end to those attacks by putting their power behind Mr. Kabila. After Mr. Kabila came to power, he began to distance himself from Rwanda, and Rwanda accused him, like Mr. Mobutu, of allying himself with Hutu fighters.

So in August 1998, Rwanda and Uganda teamed up again, behind another rebel group, the Congolese Rally for Democracy, to start another rebellion. Rwanda reportedly has about a quarter of its 40,000 members.

The Rwanda government has not disclosed what the war is costing in terms of money, but there is no doubt it has been effective in terms of security. Northwestern Rwanda -- a Hutu extremist stronghold -- has been largely quiet since Rwanda invaded Congo. Rwanda says it will leave Congo only if the safety of its borders is guaranteed and the Hutu fighters are disarmed -- a task that most experts believe is far too dangerous for the United Nations to take on.

The Tutsi now make up only 15 percent of Rwanda's population. But they argue that it will take time to recover from the genocide sufficiently to share power.

Uganda

Uganda is often accused of being involved in Congo largely for opportunistic reasons, and it may be eager to get out now that the war no longer serves the interests of Mr. Museveni, the Ugandan president -- a man with a reputation as one of Africa's brightest and most progressive leaders. But withdrawal might make Ugandans question the worthiness of the adventure in the first place.

Uganda reportedly has between 8,000 and 10,000 soldiers in Congo, some as deep as 750 miles from the Ugandan border, at Basankusu. Uganda backs two rebel groups, the Movement for the Liberation of Congo, in the northwest, and the splinter group of the Rally for Democracy headed by Mr. Wamba dia Wamba.

What is most contentious is that Ugandan soldiers are reported to be the most vigorous in cashing in on Congo's wealth, taking out diamonds, gold, timber and ivory. Despite the looting, the war has been a drain on the Ugandan economy and is thus increasingly unpopular at home.

Like Rwanda, Uganda backed both the 1996 and 1998 rebellions in Congo by arguing that it needed to protect its border from rebels in eastern Congo. Uganda also said it was siding with Rwanda, a longtime ally, to prevent another genocide.

Other factors behind Uganda's involvement are Mr. Museveni's ambition to be perceived as a major leader on the continent, and his close personal ties with Paul Kagame, the vice president of Rwanda who is considered the real power there. Mr. Kagame fled to Uganda during anti-Tutsi riots in 1959 and became a star in the Ugandan Army, helping Mr. Museveni come to power.

Yet the war has also strained relations between Rwanda and Uganda to the point that the nations fought a bloody battle in Kisangani in the summer of 1999.

The Uganda government faces two major rebel groups. One, the Allied Democratic Forces, is fighting from bases in eastern Congo. The second, the Lord's Resistance Army, is supported by Sudan and attacks Uganda from the north. Uganda in turn, has supported the Sudan People's Liberation Army.

Burundi

Burundi has also admitted to having soldiers in Congo. It says it is not allied with either side, but is fighting Hutu rebels. Burundi has the same ethnic division as Rwanda between Hutu and Tutsi, who have been locked in civil war since 1983.

The war has sharply escalated in recent months, and the Burundi government has herded 300,000 people, mostly poor Hutu farmers, into "regroupment camps" in the hills surrounding the capital, Bujumbura. The government has partly lost control over the nation's southeast, where fighting is pushing some 1,000 refugees a day into neighboring Tanzania.

Tanzania

Tanzania's role in the war has been mostly that of a haven for hundreds of thousands of Hutu who have fled there since 1994. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 320,000 Burundians in camps in western Tanzania. Since October, when the fighting in Burundi began to escalate, 50,000 more have arrived. Refugees from Congo are also arriving at a steady, though lower, rate.

Sudan

Sudan has reportedly helped Mr. Kabila several times, providing aircraft to bomb towns in rebel zones in northern Congo last year. Sudan denies it, but Mr. Kabila is clearly on friendly terms with the Sudanese government, apparently on the theory that the enemy of an enemy -- in this case Uganda -- is a friend.

Though Uganda and Sudan agreed late last year to end hostilities, the Ugandan government supports the Sudan People's Liberation Army, which has been fighting the Islamist Sudanese government for 16 years. Fighting, disease and famine generated by the conflict in Sudan have reportedly taken an estimated two million lives since 1983.

Angola

After the fall of Mr. Mobutu in 1997, the Angolan government led by Jose Eduardo dos Santos plunged into Congo, largely for its own strategic reasons -- to attack the Congo bases of Unita, the Angolan insurgent movement led by Jonas Savimbi. The Mobutu government had been helping Unita for decades.

Unita, the Portuguese acronym for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, is believed to command about 35,000 troops, and the Angolan government, about 90,000.

In the last six months, the government has pulled off its most successful offensive in a civil war that dates to Angola's independence from Portugal in 1975. After spending nearly \$900 million in oil revenues on new military equipment, the government has routed Unita from nearly every major population center.

Unita's military losses are closely tied to its loss of Congo as an ally. The rebels, experts at financing war by mining Angolan diamonds, no longer have a conduit for selling diamonds on the international market or for military supply. Unita's access to fuel and spare parts has been seriously reduced.

Although routed in the cities and much less capable of waging conventional war, Unita remains a formidable guerrilla force. In the last month, in part to steal food and fuel, it has begun striking at civilian targets in rural areas.

Government soldiers are also overextended and undersupplied. They, too, have been attacking civilians and stealing. All this has caused a humanitarian mess. The World Food Program says more than 4 million people have been internally displaced out of a population of about 12 million.

Unita, meanwhile, still has a few bases in Congo, near the Angolan border. The Kinshasa government, focused on rebels in eastern Congo, has been unwilling to flush Unita out. Unita uses its bases to stage attacks against Angolan government forces. Angolan troops, in response, give chase as if the border were not there.

Namibia

Namibia joined the fighting in Congo almost a year and a half ago, and in December began allowing the Angolans to fight from Namibian soil. Namibia, which has often accused Unita of helping a Namibian insurgency, and apparently believed that Angola was finally in a position to crush Unita, reportedly has 2,000 soldiers in Congo -- anywhere from a third to half its army.

Military experts say Namibia was persuaded to enter the fighting in Congo by Zimbabwe. The two presidents, Sam Nujoma and Robert Mugabe, are quite close and had supported each other during the years when South Africa's apartheid government was busy trying to stamp out their black liberation movements. Last year, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola and Congo even formalized a mutual defense pact.

Unita has threatened retaliation against Namibia's involvement, and has already carried out several attacks. Namibia announced last month that it would spend about \$120 million on the military this fiscal year, a 65 percent increase over the previous year.

Local newspapers, meanwhile, have questioned Namibia's involvement in both wars. The Namibian, in an editorial that ran on Jan. 28, raised concerns about the growing cost of the wars, at a time when the country needs money for social spending.

"While one would not argue with spending on the need to protect our country's borders, one could certainly argue with the fact that wars a long way from our borders are continuing to be a drain on our state coffers," the editorial read.

Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe government of Mr. Mugabe has sent between 7,000 and 11,000 troops to Congo to support Mr. Kabila, according to varying reports. The intervention is motivated in part by Mr. Mugabe's

longing to be a major force in southern Africa and his rivalry with the leaders of Uganda and Rwanda. Zimbabwe has taken advantage of access to diamond mines under the control of Mr. Kabila.

But Zimbabwe's military involvement in Congo is deeply unpopular at home. The full cost of the deployment has been concealed from international donors and, a Zimbabwean banker said, is seen by many Zimbabweans as contributing to the country's economic crisis.

Indeed, the International Monetary Fund suspended aid to Zimbabwe last year because of suspicion that Mr. Mugabe misled it about the cost of supporting Mr. Kabila. That suspension of aid, among other things, has left Zimbabwe struggling to pay for fuel and facing inflation as high as 60 percent. So low are Zimbabwe's reserves of dollars and other foreign currencies that the country can no longer afford to import diesel fuel, which is in scarce supply.

Zambia

Landlocked and abutted by several troubled lands, Zambia has long sought to cast itself as an island of stability in Central Africa's turbulence. Like former President Kenneth D. Kaunda, President Frederick Chiluba, in power since 1991, has acted as a broker in the wars that have consumed the region from the independence struggles of the 1970's to the present-day conflagrations in Angola and Congo. That has led to peace deals in Angola and Congo, though these have been undermined by the combatants' refusal to lay down their arms.

Despite the statesmanlike stance of its first two leaders, Zambia has invariably suffered from the wars around it. Little of its potential -- in tourism, agriculture and mining -- has been realized. In the 1970's, Mr. Kaunda supported liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia and the former Rhodesia. In exchange, the white minority governments of the time in southern Africa strangled Zambia's trade routes and attacked nationalist guerrillas based in Zambia.

In the current Angolan war, the effect is more insidious. Over the years, some 200,000 refugees -- 160,000 of them from Angola -- have flowed into Zambia. According to the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, some 20,000 have crossed into the country in recent weeks as the war in Angola has broadened. And Zambia has sent troops to its border to prevent Angolan troops from entering in pursuit of fleeing Unita rebels. The easy availability of weapons in Angola has fostered arms trade and a surge of violent crime.

Angola last year accused Zambia of supplying Unita with arms and other logistical supports. President Chiluba vigorously denied it, but South African military experts suspect that some officials in Zambia are still helping Mr. Savimbi.

Mission Would Be Area's First Since 60's

If it is approved by the Security Council, the new peacekeeping mission to Congo will be the second the United Nations has dispatched to the area. The first, called the United Nations Operation in Congo and

known by its French acronym ONUC, lasted from July 1960 to June 1964, and represents a particularly bitter interlude in the organization's history.

Within weeks of Congo's independence from Belgium in June 1960, the country was on the verge of collapse. The government declared martial law and asked the United Nations to help ensure the withdrawal of Belgian forces and assist the government in maintaining law and order. When the copper-rich province of Katanga then seceded, the United Nations found itself trying to maintain Congo's territorial integrity and independence, get all foreigners not under United Nations command out of the country and prevent civil war.

For the first time, United Nations personnel had to assume responsibilities beyond normal peacekeeping duties. At its peak in July 1961, ONUC, originally 4,000 troops, had almost 20,000 military personnel and 2,000 civilians.

As envisioned, the new peacekeeping operation in Congo will be about one-quarter that size.

On September 17, 1961, while trying to secure a cease-fire between Congolese and Katangan forces, Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld and seven other United Nations staff members were killed when their plane crashed en route to Ndola, in what was then Northern Rhodesia.

The United Nations force suffered 250 fatalities during the Congo operation. By comparison, during its three-year deployment in the Balkans, the United Nations Protection Force lost 167 people.

The secession of Katanga ended in January 1963. ONUC helped consolidate the government and retrain Congolese soldiers and security forces before withdrawing in 1964.

Photos: REBELS -- A number of rebel groups are fighting in Congo, some with the help of neighboring governments. (Brennan Linsley/Associated Press); YOUNG VICTIMS -- Children in Bukavu, Congo, wait under a tent for shares of food to be distributed by the World Food Program. (Agence France-Presse)(pg. 11) Map/Chart When Laurent Kabila led a successful coup three years ago against the decades-long regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, hopes for a fledgling democracy and stability in the region were high. Today, however, Congo is a bloody chessboard, crisscrossed with troops from neighboring countries and violent rebel groups from within, all with varying interests in the political and economic future of this resource-rich nation. A look at the players: Forces Loyal to Kabila ANGOLA: 2,000 TROOPS Locked into a 25-year-old war against its own rebel group, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (known by its Portuguese acronym, Unita), Angola quickly came to the aid of Mr. Kabila in order to prevent Unita attacks from inside southern Congo. NAMIBIA: 2,000 TROOPS Although it is located far from the southern border of Congo, the country is closely allied with Angola and so became the third nation to come to the aid of Mr. Kabila. It also extended military cooperation to Angola by allowing it to launch an attack on Unita bases from Namibian soil in December. ZIMBABWE: 10,000 TROOPS Under President Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe came to Mr. Kabila's rescue almost immediately and has remained his strongest supporter since hostilities first arose in 1998. But that support has come at a price for both countries, as Zimbabwe's economy sags with the costly war and Congo is forced to grant sweetheart deals to Zimbabwean businesses interested in tapping its rich

diamond and agricultural resources. REBEL MILITIAS LOYAL TO KABILA THE HUTU Enlisted by Mr. Kabila, these are the hard-core Hutu fighters who were largely responsible for the massacres in Rwanda in 1994 -- and who ultimately fled into neighboring Congo. THE MAYI-MAYI Local Congolese fighters who have allied themselves with the Hutu rebels because of their shared hatred for Tutsi Forces Allied Against Kabila UGANDA: 9,000 TROOPS Uganda is accused of being largely opportunistic. It claims to support both the rebellion that installed Mr. Kabila and the current one in order to protect its border. But its soldiers are also reported to be cashing in on Congo's wealth, taking out diamonds, gold, timber and ivory. RWANDA: 10,000 TROOPS Rwanda is in many ways the driving force behind the battle in Congo. In 1996, it was subject to attacks on its border by Hutu extremists living in Congo. It hoped to end these attacks by supporting Mr. Kabila's rebellion against Mr. Mobutu in 1997. But Mr. Kabila quickly distanced himself from Rwanda, ultimately allying with the Hutu extremists and prompting Rwanda to support a new rebellion in Congo, this time against Mr. Kabila. BURUNDI: NUMBER OF TROOPS UNKNOWN Although Burundi claims to have no stake in the current conflict, it is battling the pro-Kabila Hutu inside Congo. The country is also facing a Hutu rebellion of its own. REBEL MILITIAS FIGHTING AGAINST KABILA M.L.C. Movement for the Liberation of Congo Located largely in the north-central region of Congo, this group is headed by Jean Pierre Bemba, son of an influential Congolese businessman. The M.L.C. receives much of its support from Uganda. R.C.D.-GOMA Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma Main branch of a now splintered rebel group with a large contingent of disaffected Congolese officers. Headed by medical doctor Emile Ilunga. R.C.D.-M.L. Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement Headed by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, a university professor from western Congo who was kicked out as president of the original RCD last summer. Backed by Uganda. Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement Headed by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, a university professor from western Congo who was kicked out as president of the original RCD last summer. Backed by Uganda. (pg. 10)

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