Sometimes touted as the pivotal event on the road to peace in eastern Congo, the ephemeral success of the Goma Conference—ostensibly designed to hammer out a peace accord among an alphabet soup of warring factions—quickly disappeared after the resumption of hostilities later in 2008. What follows is a retrospective look at the most critical issues beneath the complexities of the Congo crisis: the aim is to highlight the principal forces and actors behind the ever-shifting balance of power among armed factions, and the consequences for those caught in the cross-fire.

During a three-week safari through eastern Congo, I started in Uvira, at the northern tip of Lake Tanganyika and continued northwards to Bukavu and Goma, the capitals of the South and North Kivu provinces respectively, each on the border with Rwanda, and then returned to Uvira. Looking back on this journey, several factors stand out as metaphors for the deepening conflict in the region. In a nutshell, after suffering untold casualties since the fall of the Mobutu regime in 1997 the people of the Kivu are going through a major crisis of identity, compounded by a glaring institutional void and a humanitarian crisis of unparalleled proportions. Each of these factors helps explain the Goma Conference’s failure to fulfill its stated objectives—and the subsequent collapse of what became known as the Amani peace process, a UN-inspired initiative and the basis of the 2007 Nairobi conference between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

At the root of the confrontations that have ravaged the region lies the destructive legacy of the Rwanda genocide. The spillover of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict into eastern Congo remains a key element in the shifting parameters of factional strife, and the biggest challenge facing the government of President Joseph Kabila. Nonetheless, to
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see every form of conflict through the prism of Hutu-Tutsi enmities is to oversimplify the contours of the political arena; just as there are divisions within each community, a number of groups other than the two major protagonists have been drawn into the fray. Again, as anyone familiar with the “resource war” dimension of the conflict must surely realize, ethnicity is by no means the only frame of reference for making sense of the senseless brutality sweeping across the Congo’s eastern provinces. Perhaps a more useful perspective is to underscore the continuing role of Rwanda as the central actor in any attempt to bring peace (or war) to the region.

The Collapse of Amani

On 25 September 2008, President Joseph Kabila’s minister of the interior succinctly described the essence of the Amani peace process: “on désengage, on sépare, on regroupe et on démobilise ou on réintègre!” 2 Although peace would be difficult, he assured that the results of Amani would be overwhelmingly positive. Even as he spoke, however, it had become painfully evident that Amani was desperate.

Amani—“peace” in Swahili—refers to the machinery put in place to implement the commitments made at the Goma conference (6 to 26 January 2008), officially known as the Conference on Peace, Security and Development in the Provinces of North and South Kivu. Through this so-called acte d’engagement, the participants agreed to work towards: (a) a cease-fire through the whole of North Kivu; (b) the disengagement of the combatants and the creation of demilitarized zones as a first step towards the disarmament and reintegration of the troops; (c) the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees; and (d) an amnesty law for acts of violence other than genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

The conference began with 600 participants, but as news circulated that each participant would receive $135 per diem, attendance rose to 1,500, including delegates from roughly 30 “grassroots communities” and as many armed groups. 3 The listing of such groups in the opening sentence of the acte d’engagement lent a touch of the surreal to the Goma proceedings: “We, Republican Federalist Forces, Groupe Yakutumba, Groupe Zabuloni, Mai-Mai Kirichiko, Pareco SK, Raia Mutomboki, Mai-Mai Nyikiriba, Mai-Mai Kapopo, Mai-Mai Mahoro, Mai-Mai Shikito, Mudundu 40, Simba Mai-Mai, Mai-Mai Shabunda, make the following commitments…” Such commitments appeared tenuous from the start, for many of the groups appeared to have materialized spontaneously. Furthermore, when considering its large number of participants, it is understandable why procedural matters consumed the conference’s agenda and why the most critical issues, in the end, were handled by a small group of movers and shakers. Among them Laurent Nkunda, then a general in the Armed Forces of the DRC; Malu-Malu, Head of the Electoral Commission; Alan Doss, Special Representative of
the UN Secretary General; Tim Shortly, representing the United States; and Roland Van Der Geer, on behalf of the European Union.

Responsibility for the implementation of Goma’s noble objectives was embedded in a complex network of committees and sub-committees forming the mainstay of the Amani program. To assist the key decision-making body (Commission Technique Mixte Paix et Sécurité), two sub-committees were formed in both North and South Kivu (Sous-Commission Militaire Mixte, and the Sous-Commission Humanitaire et Sociale). Each sub-committee gave birth to two additional committees—Comité Provincial Militaire, and Comité Provincial Humanitaire et Social—which in turn spawned a number of smaller bodies, known as cells. Overseeing the work of this top-heavy bureaucracy was the Comité de Pilotage, a group comprised of representatives from relevant government ministries and operating in partnership with Facilitation Internationale, a joint EU-U.S. advisory organization. Thus, hundreds of participants were involved in the implementation process.

When reflecting on Amani, it is difficult to imagine that anything constructive could have emerged from its bureaucratic machinery. Furthermore, the fluidity of the situation on the ground bears only a distant relationship to the neat, phased scenarios envisaged in the peace process: disengagement, separation, regroupment, and demobilization. It is not always clear who violated the cease-fire. Many of the major military engagements, as happened on 28 August 2008, have been preceded by countless mutual provocations. Although the Conseil National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP), Rwanda’s proxy in North Kivu, which, until recently, was led by Nkunda, bears much of the responsibility for the violence that has ravaged North Kivu, the Congolese army is just as accountable. Moreover, the Amani process failed to consider the gap between its blueprint for peace and the reality of the ongoing civil war. Where there are no front lines, where the fighting almost never stops, where troops and their commanders evade the control of a central authority, where plunder and rape are part of the combatants’ behavioral code, and where hundreds of thousands of civilians are running for their lives, this intention from above does little to affect the conflict unfolding below.

Just as the peace process seemed to have reached an impasse, a major breakthrough occurred in December 2008, when, under considerable pressure from the international community, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda suddenly dismissed his warlord client, Laurent Nkunda, as head of the CNDP; and, even more importantly, agreed to join hands with President Kabila in rooting out the remnants of Rwanda’s Hutu génocidaires, Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR). Thus was born Umoja Wetu (“Our Unity” in Swahili).
Umoja Wetu was an attempt to resurrect the failed 2007 Nairobi accord between the governments of Rwanda and the Congo. The key objective was to organize joint military operations against FDLR and the reintegration of Nkunda’s forces into the Congolese army, officially known as the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC). The situation one year later left few doubts, however, about the military superiority of the CNDP. Similarly, the ignominious routing of the FARDC and the resultant threat posed to the region by Nkunda’s army became clear. As 2008 drew to a close, the failure of Amani made one point unequivocally clear: unless President Kagame agreed to take an active role in the negotiation process, there would be no peace. Here, U.S. pressure and the UN Security Council report denouncing Rwanda’s involvement in the conflict both played a significant role in persuading Kagame to redraw the parameters of the conflict. Equally significant has been the role played by the State Department. Deputy Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Fraser persuaded Kagame and Kabila to come to an agreement: in return for removing Nkunda from the scene, Kabila would agree to an alliance with the Rwanda Defense Forces (RDF) to disarm the FDLR.

Lasting through January and February 2009 Umoja Wetu involved the participation of RDF units alongside the FARDC in joint operations limited to parts of North Kivu (principally the territories of Masisi and Rutshuru). Since then, the anti-FDLR maneuvers have been expanded to the whole of North and South Kivu under the code names Kimia I and Kimia II (kimia meaning “calm” in Swahili), but without the RDF’s operational assistance. Although the Kimia plan relies heavily on the participation of the Congolese army there is growing evidence that the FARDC, so far from offering a solution, is very much part of the problem. This fact is confirmed by the recently published UN special report on the horrendous human rights violations committed by the FARDC in Goma and Kanyabayonga, in North Kivu, in October and November 2008. Thus if Kabila deserves considerable credit for pushing through the Rwanda-Congo deal, he sorely lacks the military capabilities to pick up where Umoja Wetu left off. The rabble quality of his army is part of the legacy inherited from his assassinated father, Laurent Kabila. Whereas Laurent Kabila tried to make up for this handicap by arming the génocidaires against Rwanda and its local allies, his son is now using Rwanda’s assistance to disarm the génocidaires.

The least that can be said is that the RDF-FARDC alliance has yielded mixed results. Some would not hesitate to say that it has been thoroughly counterproductive, unleashing countless revenge killings by Hutu génocidaires against innocent civilians unless President Kagame agreed to take an active role in the negotiation process, there would be no peace.
along with a recrudescence of rapes, in turn triggering huge flows of IDPs.\(^6\) Retrospectively, the assessment offered by the *Economist* in March 2009 has a prophetic ring: “the fear is that the FDLR, far from being smashed, will emerge from the jungle more vengeful and desperate than ever. Without their mineral revenues, the remaining guerillas will have to survive by attacking civilians for food and money. The Congolese army is too weak and the UN force too small to protect the villagers properly. At its worst, the FDLR could mutate into another lethal force like Uganda’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a fanatical rebel group that terrorizes people along the Congo’s northern border.”\(^7\) Hopes that the FDLR would follow in the footsteps of the 1,500 returnees and be exonerated from their past misdeeds have quickly faded.

**Contested Identities**

One of the most striking aspects of the political realignments in North and South Kivu is the contagiousness of ethnic feelings. Though consisting of a majority of Hutu from Rwanda, the FDLR in recent times have attracted a fair number of Hutu elements indigenous to the Congo, and there is a growing fear in some quarters that those Hutu who once fought alongside Nkunda in the CNDP could switch sides and join the FDLR. The same phenomenon can be seen between Tutsi on both sides of the border with Rwanda—the Tutsi indigenous to North Kivu welcome the support of their ethnic kinsmen in Rwanda. But perhaps the most troubling portent for the peace of the region is the near universal distrust of Tutsi elements on the part of the self-styled “authentic” Congolese (as if the Tutsi living in the Congo for generations were unworthy of the status of Congolese citizens!). Ironically, this sense of distrust applies even to those Tutsi elements (mainly from South Kivu) who, for a variety of reasons are extremely suspicious of Kagame’s motives, including their strong conviction that they have been manipulated by Rwanda to serve Kagame’s interest in the DRC.

Thus at the time Amani got under way four major groups of armed factions occupied the political scene: (a) the FDLR, largely made of Rwandan Hutu, (b) the Pareco, consisting largely of Congolese Hutu, (c) the Mai-Mai, an assemblage of ethnically diverse local militias whose loyalties frequently shift between sides, and (d) the pro-Tutsi CNDP, whose rank-and-file was mixed, but with a hard-core of Congolese Tutsi supporters. Today the CNDP hasmorphed into a political party, and its military wing has been incorporated into the FARDC. But this does not mean that the Tutsi minority is no longer at risk.

Behind the widespread resentment of “native” Congolese towards ethnic Tutsi in general lies the suspicion that most of them have split loyalties and that, once the chips are down, most would identify with Rwanda.\(^8\) In support of this argument many
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Congolese would point to Nkunda, the man who until his demise not only sowed violence and desolation through much of North Kivu before threatening to march on Kinshasa, but did so with the blessings and military and financial support of Rwanda. Seen by his enemies as Rwanda’s proxy in North Kivu, the CNDP leader enjoyed an enormous popularity among Tutsi for his unambiguous stance on minority rights, his ability to attract international media attention, and his effective use of force against his enemies.9

The results of the 2006 provincial elections only served to reinforce his iconic status among Tutsi. Excluded from all positions of authority at the provincial level, the Tutsi minority ended up being effectively denied access to political representation.10 Accordingly, they readily turned to Nkunda and the CNDP for protection. The appeal of the CNDP was further enhanced by the post-electoral decline of the Rassemblement Démocratique Congolais (RDC) and Serufuli’s Tous Pour le Développement (TPD), the two major vehicles through which ethnic Tutsi pressed their claims in the years preceding the elections.

Nkunda’s immediate goal as long as he held sway over the CNDP was to protect the rights of the Tutsi minority and to give them access to rich pasturelands in Masisi and Rutshuru. His long-term ambition, however, was to establish a substantial sphere of influence for himself in North Kivu—and thus help rebuild the traditional homeland for the 50,000 ethnic Tutsi currently living in Rwanda, the principal recruiting grounds for his combatants.

The common thread running through the history of the Kivu region brings into sharp focus the question of language: are Rwandophones—i.e. speakers of Kinyarwanda—legitimate members of the Congolese nation? And since Hutu and Tutsi both speak Kinyarwanda, how does ethnicity affect one’s claim to citizenship?

Until the Rwanda genocide, language was central to the distinction between Banyarwanda (Hutu and Tutsi) and “native” Congolese; Rwandophonie—the use of Kinyarwanda as a vernacular—again emerged as a major source of Hutu-Tutsi solidarity during the tenure of North Kivu governor Eugène Serufuli (2004–2006), himself a Hutu. As elsewhere on the continent, representations of “the other” in the Congo have been subject to constant redefinitions and re-ordering, but nowhere with such astonishing fluidity as in the Kivu region, where language, body maps, regional ties, and migration patterns compete as criteria for “belonging.”

Interestingly, while ethnic Tutsi are frequently ostracized by “native” Congolese, this is seldom true of those Hutu, both former genocidaires (interahamwe) as well as civilians, who arrived as refugees after the Rwanda genocide. As allies of former president Laurent Kabila during the Second Congo War (1998–2003), their strong stance against Rwanda’s incursions exonerates them of foreign status.
For many Congolese, intra-Tutsi differences—as between the so-called Tutsi-Banyamulenge of South Kivu and the Tutsi of North Kivu—are irrelevant; they are all “Rwandans,” no matter how divergent their historical trajectories. Although they are sometimes homogenously categorized as “ethnic Tutsi,” the groups are distinctive aggregates. Nonetheless, irrespective of their differences, both Banyamulenge and Tutsi of Kivu were targets of systematic violence during the dying days of the Mobutu regime. Generally seen as foreign intruders operating in cahoots with Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), they were largely excluded from provincial institutions. Many lost their property, and sometimes their lives at the hands of local Mai-Mai militias. Little wonder that both have emerged as Rwanda’s most trustworthy allies in the years following the genocide, spearheading the anti-Mobutist rebellion in 1996, and again in 1998 when many Banyamulenge joined the RDC during the Rwanda-backed anti-Kabila crusade. Along with Kagame’s role in sponsoring the birth of the pro-Banyamulenge RDC in 1998, their involvement in the FPR-led military operations against Hutu refugees in eastern Congo from 1996 to 1997, and against the Kinshasa authorities in 1998 were key elements behind the rise of anti-Tutsi sentiment among self-styled “autochtons.”

THE COSTS OF INSTITUTIONAL DEFICIT

The state in the DRC is effectively non-existent—it lacks the capacity to resolve conflict. Without an efficient and neutral constabulary, a reliable police force, a functioning judiciary, a legislative assembly that actually legislates, and an executive that enforces the law, conflict resolution is left to the whims of the same groups perpetrating the conflict.

The absence of a functional state creates a gaping institutional void, enabling warring factions to carve out their own fiefdoms. Though expected to serve as neutral instruments at the service of the state, the army and police evade its control and are themselves so rife with factional rivalries, that entire units—more often than not former Mai-Mai—break from the chain of command and establish themselves as armed militias.

At the heart of the Congo’s extreme institutional weakness are mineral wealth and the exploitation of this resource by warring factions. Once a new faction emerges, its survival is dependent on access to the country’s mines. This is true not only of army units that refused to disband after their incorporation into the FARDC, but also of the ubiquitous Mai-Mai, and the Hutu-led FDLR. Much of their recalcitrance to accept disarmament and incorporation into the regular army stems for their long-standing vested interests in the Congo’s mineral wealth.
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As journalist Lydia Polgreen observed, “the unfinished battles over the Rwandan genocide play out on Congolese soil among armed groups fueled by lucrative mines like the one in Bisie and by other mines controlled by the Hutu militias that carried out the genocide.” The proliferation of factions speaks not only to the limited reach of the state beyond the provincial capitals, but also to the loss of revenue that otherwise could be generated by selling mining rights to foreign companies. As long as mining activities remain in the hands of local militias, there is little the state can do to capitalize on its mineral resources. Now, as before, access to the state means access to wealth. The consequences of the broken state are glaring: the highest levels of government are characterized by widespread corruption; the training and backgrounds of provincial ministers rarely align with their official responsibilities; Kinshasa authorities often attempt to bribe opponents, including warlords, renegade generals, and notorious human rights offenders, with mixed results.

One of the most egregious cases of corruption in South Kivu is that of Célestin Chibalonza, elected as governor in 2006. Remembered as much for the brevity of his tenure as for his corrupt behavior, Chibalonza was held responsible for diverting tens of thousands of dollars to reward his supporters, and he resigned after only eight months in office. Sheer incompetence is a critical source of the Congo’s institutional paralysis. The illiterate president of the Provincial Assembly of South Kivu is unable to even deliver a speech in public. When asked how a confirmed illiterate could be elected to such high office, one respondent replied: “As a wealthy trader from Uvira he was able to bribe his way to the top, while at the same time meeting the requirements of ethnic balance (dosage ethnique).”

Opportunism is a prevailing characteristic of Kabila’s modus operandi. Many rebels have been richly rewarded with promotions, causing one observer to remark that the FARDC is an army of colonels and generals. General Gabriel Amisi, the Chief of Staff of Kabila’s army, was once a key figure of the pro-Rwanda rebel movement Rassemblement Démocratique Congolais (RDC) and was known to have taken an active part in massive human rights violations in Kisangani in 2002.

Reflecting on the dangerously fissured Kivu arena, one anonymous Congolese observer lamented “the resurgence of intra-ethnic conflicts, the birth of new armed factions, rivalries among traditional chefferies or groupements, rising tensions between pastoralists and agriculturalists, the imposition by warlords of new administrative structures.” All these developments, he said, contribute to a “regression” to the period preceding the elections.
A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS OF HUGE PROPORTIONS

Despite claiming a death toll far greater than that of Darfur, the crisis in eastern Congo receives only a fraction of the media attention devoted to the conflict in western Sudan. According to a survey conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), between August 1998, (when the second Congo war began), and January 2008, an estimated 5.4 million died of war-related causes, including hunger and disease. Approximately half of the dead were children under the age of five. On average 45,000 people die each month in the Congo because of the crisis.

In North Kivu alone, 1.2 million IDPs have been forced out of their homes by the war. Since the resumption of hostilities in early October 2008, an additional 100,000 IDPs are said to have fled their traditional homelands in and around Masisi and Rutshuru, the two “territories” in North Kivu that have been the scene of the most vicious fighting between Nkunda’s CNDP and the FARDC. Many of the displaced are beyond the reach of humanitarian NGOs and are facing starvation.

In both North and South Kivu, rape has become the weapon of choice for militias. In South Kivu a total of 44,000 women have been raped since 2004, including 27,000 in 2006; in North Kivu 28,000 cases were reported in 2006 alone. According to one UN official, the extent and intensity of sexual abuses in that part of the Congo is “worse than anywhere else in the world.” Kivu alone is said to account for 75 percent of all the cases treated by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) worldwide.

The main culprits for these horrendous sexual crimes are FARDC, FDLR, CNDP, and the Mai-Mai. According to doctors interviewed by International Crisis Group (ICG), the most brutal rapes have been committed by the FDLR. FARDC soldiers are said to have perpetrated 40 percent of all human rights violations during the second half of 2006, including summary executions, beatings and rape.

Victims of rape include girls in their early teens as well as infants, such as a three-year old girl admitted to the Heal Africa hospital in Goma, her body horribly mutilated. “Many of these rapes,” writes Jeffrey Gettelman of the New York Times, “have been marked by a level of brutality that is shocking even by the twisted standards of a place riven with civil war and haunted by warlords and drug-crazed child soldiers.”

Considering the physical, psychological, and societal effects of such brutality—and the limited progress in bringing justice to the perpetrators—the prospects for lasting reconciliation appear extremely dim. Furthermore, it is clear that combating rape, however urgently needed, is insufficient to bring peace to eastern Congo: sexual violence is only the most shocking indicator of problems deeply embedded within the crisis.
What role has the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) played in responding to the crisis in Congo? So often criticized for its inaction, yet seldom given credit for what it does, commentary on the mission lies in a gray area between praise and condemnation. Although this is an issue too complex to be addressed adequately in this paper, one should note that the MONUC record is far from unblemished. On several occasions MONUC troops have intervened to repulse Nkunda’s troops, and the troops have proven instrumental in providing transport and protection to local humanitarian NGOs. Nonetheless, when considering the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis in eastern Congo, one must ask why MONUC has failed so egregiously in protecting human lives. The mission’s performance was nowhere more shameful than in Kiwanja: with a 120-strong peace-keeping force only half a mile away, it did nothing to prevent the killing of 150 people by the CNDP between 4 and 5 November 2008. In a blistering indictment of the failings of the UN peacekeeping force, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) Report noted that although MONUC placed one of its largest field bases, staffed with 120 peacekeepers, at Kiwanja to protect civilians the force failed to keep the CNDP from taking Kiwanja and Rutshuru on October 29 and failed to prevent the killings and other abuses by CNDP and Mai-Mai combatants in early November.”

Whether additional troops can prevent the recurrence of such tragedies is highly debatable. Analysts propose that MONUC, caught in a dual process of “congolization” and “bureaucratization,” must be observed in a broader context. Thierry Viroulon, a French expert on the Great Lakes region and research associate at the Institut Francais des Relations Internationales (IFRI), supports this argument in a hard-hitting assessment: the MONUC, he writes, has been “contaminated by the corruption and impunity inherent in its environment, while at the same time suffering from the heavy bureaucracy being projected in the war zone.”

The credibility of MONUC suffers from an image problem: for many observers, including Congolese, MONUC is everywhere except where it should be—at the front lines. MONUC is most visible in its shiny fleet of 4x4 vehicles, resplendently white against Goma’s black volcanic landscape, driven by neatly dressed officials with one hand on the wheel and the other on their cell phones. For the poverty-stricken residents of Goma’s slums, there is something offensive about this spectacle, especially when seen against the backdrop of immense civilian suffering.

To restore MONUC’s reputation, what is most urgently needed, in addition to a sustained effort to improve the performance of its peace-keepers, is a keener appreciation of the significance of local disputes in generating wider conflicts. Its tendency to ignore or misunderstand local problems goes far in explaining MONUC’s inability to deal effectively with the roots of violence. As Séverine Autesserre, a leading authority on eastern Congo, has argued, “distinctively local agendas motivate a large part of the
ongoing violence in the Congo, yet diplomats, UN officials, and journalists have focused almost exclusively on the regional and national problems.” In other words, considerably more attention should be given to the many complex local issues that lie beneath rural unrest. What has evaded the grasp of MONUC officials is “the critical fact that today local conflicts are driving the broader conflicts, not the other way around.”

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The crisis in eastern Congo brings into sharp focus the many shortcomings of the 2006 elections. The electoral process, as some have argued, did not resolve conflicts, but rather only froze them momentarily. The real crises behind the Congo conflict, however, run much deeper. Closer scrutiny of the post-electoral chessboard illustrates how elections have generated new conflicts while simultaneously exacerbating corruption and raising the costs of a growing institutional vacuum.

The conflict over minority rights is far from a new trend in the Kivu region. What is unprecedented is the depth of the *allochtones-autochtones* conflict—that is, the divide between “natives” and “immigrants”—in the wake of an election that precipitated the political exclusion of the Banyamulenge/Tutsi minority. The phenomenon, as noted earlier, is directly traceable to the vitriolic campaign of the ruling party and its regional allies, thus giving the CNDP a popularity it had never before experienced.

In addition to the racist overtones (i.e. anti-Tutsi) of some of the government-controlled media, rampant corruption also distorted the outcome of the legislative and gubernatorial races. This was true not only of the Kivu but also of other provinces, notably in the Bas Congo region. It is estimated that the average cost of a vote for the election of a provincial governor ranged between $1,000 and $10,000.

Protesting corruption and electoral manipulation, some opposition movements quickly resorted to violence; the indiscriminate use of counter-violence by the police and the army only increased this popular frustration and anger, especially in places like Matadi, Luozi, and other localities in Bas Congo. As noted earlier, it was principally in North Kivu that the performance of Kabila’s army proved most counterproductive in checking the military challenge posed by armed militias. The “rabble” quality of the army also highlights the fragility of democratic transitions where state institutions are weak or inexistent.

State debility is a chief impediment to peace in the Congo, and beyond. The very limited penetration of the state into the interior of the country allows factions and militias to serve as surrogate state institutions alongside civil society organizations, churches, and international humanitarian NGOs. In such conditions the peace process becomes a never-ending exercise in mediation among armed groups. Mediation is one
thing, while conflict resolution is an altogether different matter. Rather than penetrating the sources of conflict, peacekeeping efforts have been largely concentrated on addressing the surface manifestations of conflict, typically through maximally inclusive peace conferences.

The time has come to reckon with the actual roots of violence. Such answers will not be found in a top-down Amani-like process but rather through examination of the DRC’s many grassroots problems—access to land, mineral resources, dispensaries, and schools, the resettlement of IDPs, chieftaincy issues, ethnic and clan disputes, to name a few. A radical shift of the peace-process agenda is thus required if the international community is to live up to its mandate and bring peace to eastern Congo. At the operational level this means a sustained effort by MONUC to review its “responsibility to protect” (R2P) mandate and improve its performance under Chapter 7. Even more urgent is the need to take seriously the task of Security Sector Reform along with a drastic re-examination of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion, yet neither can be dealt with effectively until the FDLR have been brought under control. This is where the European Union and the United States could play a useful role by providing specialized training to the Congolese army—more specifically the integrated brigades, including the former CNDP combatants—and police. EU and U.S. governments could also help in the review and reform of the police and military accounting systems and disbursement procedures, while at the diplomatic level applying effective sanctions against the FDLR leadership in exile in France and Germany. More broadly, there must be better coordination between donors, Congolese institutions, and policy-makers. But ultimately for a genuine turnaround to emerge on the horizon, the Congolese must reassess their share of responsibility and rid themselves of their all-too-frequent reflex to blame others for their misfortunes—however justified their stance may have been in the past.

Notes

1. This is a much revised and updated version of the article bearing the same title published in L’Afrique des Grands Lacs, Annuaire 2008-2009, S. Marysse, F. Reyntjens and S. Vadeginste (L’Harmattan: Paris, 2009), pp. 105-122.
6. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs tens of thousands of IDPs are returning to their homes in the wake of reverses suffered by the FDLR; although 780,000 IDPs are
reported to have gone back to their home communities in South Kivu, some 419,000 have yet to return.


8. I became unpleasantly aware of the depth of the anti-Tutsi sentiment among “native” Congolese during a lecture I gave in Bukavu at the Institut Supérieur de Développement Rural (ISDR) in June 2009 on the theme of “The lack of stateness” (“Le manque d’État”). In response to my argument that the quality of a democracy can best be assessed by its treatment of minorities, such as by giving the Tutsi a chance to gain adequate representation in the provincial institutions, the audience nearly virtually booed me out of the room. My friend and colleague at the ISDR, who had taken the initiative in organizing the lecture, promptly whisked me away after the question period and kindly suggested that I pick a different topic next time around, to which I replied that there probably will not be a next time.


10. By contrast, Tutsi are well represented in the FARDC, with a total of nine generals, and some hold senior positions in the central government and parastatals. Furthermore, in Goma business interests are largely in Tutsi hands, and the wealthiest property owner, Victor Ngazaio, is a Tutsi.

11. Unlike the majority of ethnic Tutsi in North Kivu, the Banyamulenge lived in the Congo’s Itombwe plateau long before the advent of colonization. Furthermore, for geopolitical and historical reasons, the Banyamulenge have shown a far greater propensity to fragment than the ethnic Tutsi of North Kivu. Nor do North Kivu’s Tutsi share the strong distrust for Rwanda characteristic of the Banyamulenge, who still claim to have been consistently “instrumentalized” by the Kigali authorities in pursuit of selfish short-term strategic objectives. For a fuller discussion see René Lemarchand, The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009): 10–11 and 236–238.


13. This catch-22 situation is nicely captured in the story told by Lydia Polgreen: “A company called Mining and Processing Congo bought the rights to search for tin ore at the [Bisie] mine in 2006. But the militia has effectively barred the company, which is owned by a consortium of South African and British investors, shooting at its helicopter and chasing its representatives from the premises. When the company started working on a road to link the mine to the main road, local officials blocked the route. When it began working on a campsite for its geologists to begin prospecting, soldiers opened fire on the workers, injuring several, company officials said,” Ibid, 20.

14. For further details see Human Rights Watch (HRW), War Crimes in Kisangani: The Response of Rwanda-Backed Rebels to the May 2002 Mutiny 14, no. 6 (2002).

15. Interview with S.M., Bukavu, 17 September 2008.


19. Ibid.


23. Gettleman reports that European aid agencies “are spending tens of millions of dollars building
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new court houses and prisons…mobile courts are holding rape trials in villages deep in the forest;” in Bukavu “the American Bar Association opened a legal clinic in January, specifically to help rape victims bring their cases to court.” Ibid.


