

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Academy for Genocide Prevention

**Monitoring Roundtable:
Democratic Republic of Congo**

27 June 2006

In a meeting at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, officials from the U.S. government (State Department, National Security Council, USAID, and CIA), French Foreign Ministry, European Commission, World Bank, and NGOs discussed potential security challenges in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on the eve of the July 30 national elections. Participants in the session identified four key tasks that require immediate attention:

- *Optimizing the deployment of MONUC peacekeepers and the European Union Standby Force (EUFOR) in the pre- and post-election period, and clarifying the relationship between MONUC and EUFOR as well as between EUFOR and African regional organizations;*
- *Implementing an effective communication and civic education program to disseminate accurate political information and to counter the effects of divisive rhetoric incites violence;*
- *Supporting regional stability in the post-election period through the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission and other mechanisms*
- *Advancing work on security sector reform and demobilization of militias in order to enhance political stability and reduce threats to civilian populations.*

This report summarizes opinions expressed by participants in the roundtable and does not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Post-Election Predictions

Participants in the session noted a significant easing of international tensions in the Great Lakes region over the past two years, attributing much of the improvement in relations to the work of the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission convened by the U.S. government. Participants agreed that the Commission has contributed to confidence building among foreign ministers and other top government officials of Rwanda, Uganda, DRC, and (since 2005) Burundi. The recent establishment of a fusion cell for

intelligence sharing among the four countries has extended this cooperative model to working-level intelligence officials, and a regional defense commission is also planned. Participants agreed that a return to full-scale civil war in DRC is unlikely in the near future, in large part because of more restrained conduct by Rwanda and Uganda, which have refrained recently from launching cross-border incursions into Eastern DRC and from supporting militias.

Various scenarios for eruptions of lower intensity post-election violence were identified in the meeting. The presence of 33 candidates on the presidential ballot creates the likelihood of an interim period between the first round of the elections and a run-off election, which is unlikely to be completed before December 2006. One participant in the meeting noted that the 31 candidates who are excluded from the run-off ballot may seek to capitalize on the absence of a legitimate government between August and December 2006 in order to maximize their position, which may lead to outbreaks of localized or regional violence. Others pointed out that the redeployment of MONUC forces in order to provide security for the elections may tempt militias, including the FDLR and the LRA, to initiate new offensives. (Some participants in the meeting questioned the gravity of this threat, pointing out that the FDLR has not disrupted voter registration or voting in the constitutional referendum in eastern DRC, and that the LRA has only about 100 members present on Congolese soil.) The threat of resurgent violence by Mai Mai militias in Katanga Province, where MONUC currently has only 1000 troops, was also discussed. Finally, participants noted the threats to civilian populations posed by members of the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC), many of whom have not been receiving salary payments. According to one estimate, 80 percent of the current violence against civilians in Eastern DRC is committed by FARDC soldiers.

Priorities for Engagement

Participants in the session stressed the need for continued support for peacebuilding efforts in the DRC and a unified approach by international donors. They also emphasized the importance of coordinating diplomatic and peacekeeping initiatives with financial assistance programs. For the immediate pre- and post-election period, participants identified two key priorities: first, coordinating and optimizing the deployments of MONUC, EUFOR, and African peacekeeping forces; and second, implementing effective communication and civic education programs in order to counteract threats of violence. Also discussed were two critical medium- and long-term priorities: maintaining and strengthening mechanisms for regional security such as the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission, and advancing work on security sector reform and on the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants.

MONUC and EUFOR Deployment

Some participants expressed concerns that MONUC's peace enforcement capacity over the next two months might be diminished due to its decision to commit significant resources to providing election security (although others supported this measure in light of the long-term importance for the DRC of holding legitimate elections). Another issue

discussed was that—given the critical importance of MONUC’s efforts for the demobilization and repatriation of members of FDLR and other militias—it was surprising that member states had not asked for an independent assessment of current strategies and how they might be strengthened. In light of the need to isolate FDLR’s leadership from its membership base, one participant suggested that MONUC’s recent military offensives against the FDLR may have been counterproductive.

Questions were also raised about the deployment of EUFOR and its coordination with MONUC, as well as with African governments and regional organizations. One participant expressed concern about the “optics” associated with the deployment in the DRC of a force composed largely of troops from former European colonial powers, suggesting that a coalition force composed both of European and African soldiers would be more legitimate and effective. This participant asserted that the European Union had not consulted sufficiently with the African Union (AU), African regional organizations, and key national governments such as South Africa and Nigeria. Another speaker pointed out that the AU is currently overstretched by the demands of its deployment to Sudan, so that African governments were unable to provide troops for this mission. This speaker noted that the European Union has consulted with regional organizations including the Communauté des Etats d’Afrique Centrale (CEAAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), both of which will send observers to the EUFOR operational headquarters in Potsdam, Germany, as well as with the governments of Angola and other nations in the region.

EUFOR is currently deploying 2,000 soldiers to Kinshasa and Gabon with a four-month mandate beginning July 30. France and Germany are each deploying one-third of the troops, with the remainder provided by 18 other European nations. Although the French contingent may be authorized to deploy anywhere in the DRC, conditional on MONUC approval, most of the other national contingents have no authorization to move outside Kinshasa. Some participants expressed concern that EUFOR may be unable to deploy sufficient troops to trouble spots in eastern DRC in the event of violence surrounding the election, particularly in light of MONUC’s focus on election security.

Communication and Civic Education

Speakers stressed the importance of publicizing accurate information about the elections and counteracting rhetoric that may incite communal violence. The World Bank has just completed an analysis of information and communication issues relating to foreign armed groups in eastern Congo, which can be shared with the Tripartite Commission. The study includes recommendations on encouraging interethnic contacts and conflict resolution through Voice of America radio programming and civil society outreach programs. These programs, however, are not yet coordinated with other organizations’ diplomatic and military initiatives to enhance security in the DRC. It would be helpful to “saturate the airwaves” in eastern DRC before and after the elections in order to publicize accurate information and counteract hate speech. One speaker noted that radio broadcasts could also be used for the purpose of civic education in support of

election monitoring efforts, by providing instructions for how citizens could report any electoral irregularities that they observed.

One participant also recommended that embassies in DRC should stay in close contact with all 33 presidential candidates before and after the July elections. Through such ongoing communication, diplomats could encourage the candidates to accept the election results. Moreover, these contacts would enable the embassies to assess which losing candidates might be most likely to cause trouble after the elections.

Mechanisms for Regional Stability

All participants in the meeting agreed that the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission has played a critically important role in diffusing international tensions in the Great Lakes region, and they encouraged the U.S. government to continue its support for this confidence-building mechanism. Maintaining close contact with the member governments during the election period, encouraging them to support a peaceful political transition, will be important. Some speakers suggested the need for further conversation about how the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission might more effectively support key security objectives in eastern DRC such as the interdiction of cross-border arms shipments and the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, as well as how analysis of technical issues can be fed into high level political discussions.

Security Sector Reform and DDR

Participants acknowledged flaws in existing DDR programs, including the World Bank's Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) and MONUC's program in eastern DRC. Shortcomings include perverse incentives that reward militia members for past acts of violence, institutional obstacles, and fears on the part of FDLR members that they will be prosecuted for war crimes if they return to Rwanda. Closer oversight and more systematic evaluation of program outcomes were recommended in order to address these problems.

The slow pace of security sector reform was also identified as a cause for concern. Only a minority of the proposed 18 FARDC brigades have been integrated. According to one speaker, "Even the integrated brigades are not truly integrated," because they consist largely of former militia members with little training and limited command and control. Participants noted that civilians in eastern DRC fear FARDC soldiers more than anyone else, and that the challenge of keeping the brigades "on the right side of the law" will be especially critical over the next few months, when losers in the national elections might seek to recruit soldiers in order to contest the electoral outcomes. Because many FARDC soldiers are not currently receiving their monthly salary payments of \$10 per month, they are forced to steal in order to survive. Speakers suggested that ensuring salary payments to FARDC soldiers (both by allocating sufficient funds and by ensuring that the UN assists in transporting the money to the brigades) would be an important step toward enhancing security for civilian populations.