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From Dictatorship and War to Democracy

Alternative Future for the DRC

Claude Kambuya Kabemba

With a transitional government in place, peace is now a possibility in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Policy options are being considered to sustain the peace and start the work of building a Congolese state that would not repeat the failings of the past. There is hope that the transitional period will produce democratic elections and subsequently a legitimate government, which would start to shake the view of the DRC as the “heart of darkness.” There are two main obstacles to state-building in the DRC: lack of consensus on governance and illegal exploitation of resources. The two are interlinked. Unless consensus is reached on governance, it will be difficult to stop the looting of resources and the cycle of violence that goes with it.

At independence it was known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Soon after independence, President Joseph Désiré Mobutu Sese Seko named it Zaire. Following the overthrow of President Mobutu in May 1997 by the forces of the Alliance of Democratic Forces of the Congo (Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération — ADFL) led by Laurent Désiré Kabila and backed by the forces of Rwanda and Uganda, it regained its name, Democratic Republic of Congo. This ex-Belgian colony has undergone exceptionally tragic experiences in recent times. Vast (roughly the size of non-Russian Europe) and rich (it can produce 80 percent of the world’s industrial diamonds, plus tin, copper, and cobalt), it has been the scene of barbarism and brutality for five years. At stake are not only the government in Kinshasa, but also the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the country, and the stability of the entire African Great Lakes region. The DRC is in the grip of a civil war, with Uganda and Rwanda supporting the rebel movements that occupy much of the eastern portion of the state. Tutsi, Hutu, Lendu, Hema and other conflicting ethnic groups, political rebels, and various government forces continue fighting in the Great Lakes region, transcending the boundaries of Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda. Heads of the Great Lakes states pledge to end conflict, but localized violence continues despite UN peacekeeping efforts.

On January 16, 2001, President Laurent Kabila was assassinated. The assassination came as a surprise to many external and internal observers, since President Kabila gave the impression of being in control of affairs at least in the zone held by his government. During his short stay in power many people went so far as to compare him to President Mobutu. Many feared a return to a kind of

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Mobutuism without Mobutu.¹ But few people saw Kabila's antagonistic attitude toward the West, his inability to create minimum democratic conditions for the people within his area of control, and his reluctance to implement the July 1999 Lusaka Accord as reasons to predict his eventual downfall. Who was behind the assassination remains unknown, but whatever the reason, there is wide recognition that President Kabila contributed to the uncertainty of the future of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Kabila came to power in a country destroyed by thirty-two years of President Mobutu's kleptocratic and authoritarian regime, and was seen as a savior who would take the country out of its political, economic, and social difficulties. This hope faded quickly when Kabila, despite promising democracy, named himself president and ruled by decree. He monopolized all executive, legislative, and judicial powers. Nevertheless, the fact that the DRC has been subjected to two major armed rebellions in less than a year — the first against President Mobutu, the second against his successor — should drive home the conclusion that "the malaise driving forward the Congo crisis was generated by more than just the failure of Kabila (Sr.)'s government to keep promises."²

The civil war in Congo reflects the country's colonial past. First opened up to Western exploitation by the explorer Henry Stanley, when the great imperial grab for Africa started in the 1880s, there was a general unwillingness to see the Congo fall into the hands of any major power. Instead, it was handed over to King Leopold II of Belgium as a gift, making him sole lawmaker and owner of a territory the size of Europe. King Leopold has gone down in history as perhaps one of the most despicable of all colonialists. Successive governments, from the Belgian administration to the regimes of Mobutu Sese Seko and Laurent Kabila did nothing to seriously restore the dignity of the Congolese people. "Mobutu was put in place, and kept there, by Western interests, led by the United States. Laurent Kabila was put in power by distinctly African interests, though with United States backing."³

The second rebellion, which started on August 2, 1998, only seven months after the successful first one, was supposed to be quick and narrowly focused. But Rwanda's and Uganda's intervention was blocked by Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia, with lesser involvement from Chad, all of whom sent in troops to help Kabila's government and to advance their narrow strategic interests. Besides the presence of these national armies, at least twelve irregular armed groups, including rebel groups and militias, were active.⁴ The West Nile Bank Front, Uganda National Rescue Front II, the former Ugandan National Army, the Burundian Defence Forces for Democracy, the former Rwandan Army (Ex-FAR), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Allied Democratic Front (ADF), both of Uganda, as well as the Angolan rebel movement UNITA are some of the insurgent groups operating in the DRC. It is probably the most complex war that Africa has had to grapple with since its post-colonial battles. Because of the multitude of countries and rebel groups involved, the war has been termed Africa's "First World War."

Efforts to bring peace to the DRC culminated in the signing of the July 10, 1999, Lusaka Accord by all parties. But the Accord remained just a piece of paper as belligerents continuously violated it. Kabila's reluctance to implement the Lusaka Accord was considered by many to be the main obstacle to peace. His death on January 16, 2001, eliminated the main cause for the continuation of hostilities. This war, which has lasted three years, has sent many Congolese citizens to neighboring countries as refugees. It has also displaced many more internally, and it has

increased the suffering of the population throughout the territory.

The present crisis has its roots in the way Europeans operated in the DRC. Considering the society left behind by the Belgians, it was obvious that chaos and uncertainty would characterize the immediate post-independence period with serious effects on the economy. Indeed, few Africans were prepared to take over the reins of government in ways other than through imitation of their former colonizers. The Congo colonial government was authoritarian in nature and brooked no opposition. The machinery of the state was viewed as the sole access to wealth. The authorities relied upon police force to maintain their hold. President Mobutu used the same methods to perpetuate his dominance over the Congolese people. There were signs that President Laurent Kabala was following the same route.

In order to exploit the Congo territory's vast resources, especially the Katanga mining industry, Belgium looked to the wider region for labor. "It naturally turned to the large population of Kivu, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, and Kasai province,"⁵ with Rwanda constituting the main source. But these immigrants from Rwanda, because of the colonial system that organized people according to their origin and tribe, did not become integrated with the indigenous Congolese even after living peacefully together for many decades. Indeed, Belgian policy did not favor integration of different ethnic groups.

Additionally, colonial legislation was not clear on the status of the population of Rwandan origin in Congo, and at independence, legislation failed to make clear who, among this diverse population would gain citizenship. One must bear in mind that the citizenship of this population is one of the causes of the current conflict in the DRC. In 1960, Congo hastily gained independence while major issues remained unresolved, issues that would sooner or later generate serious conflict among the populations of the Great Lakes region. The Belgian colonizer succeeded in establishing three countries, Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi, without clearly envisioning a nation. The more than two hundred Congolese ethnic groups and the three ethnic groups that are found in both Rwanda and Burundi moved toward separation not integration. The unique common denominator between them was their servitude to the same administration. Colonial prescriptions gave rise to the distinction between settlers and natives among those living in the colony. This prescription continues in post-independence Congo.

Mobutu's Rule: Carbon Copy of his Former Masters

Considering the fragmentation in which the Belgian government left the Congo, it was unrealistic to assume that the Congolese would be able to recreate the state. Few Congolese were prepared to take over the reins of government. Despite strong calls for a federal state in the early days of independence, Mobutu, like the Belgians before him, created a centralized state with an oppressive administration. The West, especially the United States, supported Mobutu in keeping a weak state that he could not control beyond the major centers. Indeed, the state was deliberately kept weak to serve the economic and ideological interests of the West.

Mobutu took advantage of the chaotic political situation at independence to introduce dictatorship. With policy advice from the United States, he dismantled the institutions of the first Republic, abolished the democratic constitution and replaced it with a one party system, which fused together the *Movement Populaire de la*

Revolution (MPR), and nationalized industries and mining companies. It might as well have been the MPR that President Museveni describes in his book “Sowing the Mustard Seed” rather than the UPC leadership in the Uganda:

An uncouth breed, anxious to get rich as quickly as possible using state apparatus and regarding their own made style of operation . . . as the virtue of “political shrewdness.” Ideologically they were bankrupt and they were certainly unequal to the task of national emancipation.

Almost 40 percent of Congo/Zaire national revenues accrued to Mobutu and his cronies, while the average Zairian made \$190 a year. During the Cold War, especially in the mid 1970s as Africa became more important as an arena of international rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States sustained the Mobutu regime as proxy. Zaire continued to weaken until its ultimate demise. The erosion of the Zairian state, as Richard Joseph argues, “resulted from the combined effects of external manipulation over an extended period and internal misrule and mismanagement,”⁶ all with the support of the Western governments and multinationals. In the process, Mobutu neglected to build state institutions including the army. Rwanda and Uganda will use the weakness of the state to overthrow him. The so-called National Army in Congo was not even a proper army. It fitted well the description President Yoweri Museveni gives to the army in the post-colonial Uganda, “just a colonial levy of riflemen with a low level of education and literacy.” Mobutu viewed the machinery of the state as his property and relied upon the armed forces to maintain his hold. The system Mobutu constructed was partly a throwback to Leopold’s era of rapacious extraction, and partly a product of his shrewd ability to enrich himself through opportunities created by modern political and economic conditions. Mobutu, in the effort to quell opposition did not, as some African leaders, use food subsidies and services. He created a sea of poverty around each Congolese to force the population to submit to his authority. As Reno argues,

In fragmented states, the impoverishment of the population and decline caused by elites’ neglect of economic sectors they did not dominate, is a deliberate strategy on the part of shadow authorities to make the population dependent on patron-client ties. In order to deepen clients’ dependence, these authorities deliberately choose not to provide public goods.⁷

President Mobutu was among the latest of Africa’s long-ruling leaders to give in to the pressure for political reforms on the continent. When he announced the end of the one party state on April 24, 1990, his twenty-six-year grip on power was severely weakened. The National Conference was organized in 1991 to find new prescriptions for the state. More than 4,000 delegates attended, and Mobutu, despite having agreed that the National Conference was to take place, did everything to undermine its credibility. He rejected the notion that it could claim sovereignty over the country’s affairs. When this strategy failed, he created as many political parties as possible so as to undermine the reforms. In three months the government registered 381 political parties,⁸ most of which never advanced beyond an embryonic stage of development. They made very few attempts to extend their presence to other provinces and rural areas or to open their membership to other ethnic groups.⁹ Indeed, most of these political parties played the role of the opposition in the daytime while supporting Mobutu at night. Poverty, abject poverty, is one of the key factors to consider in explaining that behavior.¹⁰

But it was President Mobutu's ability to procure resources from the international community that was critical to the maintenance of an increasingly dysfunctional political entity¹¹ called Zaire. During the Mobutu era, Zaire was known for its corruption. This unfortunately led the entire society into a unique patron-client network. Corruption was institutionalized in all structures of the state from the office of President to government ministries, departments, and other institutions. The political economy of the DRC under Mobutu, kleptocratic, was viewed by some observers as a pyramidal system based on patrimonial redistribution. The process began on top with the relatively small presidential clan linked to Mobutu through family or personal ties.¹² These rulers and officials aimed at maximizing their personal wealth and that of their clan and disregarded national social welfare. Recruitment and appointment to governmental positions, allocation of land, scholarships, and public service accommodation no longer depended on objective criteria. Rather, everything depended increasingly on family and ethnic relations.¹³ This political economy was carefully redefined as the public resources of Congo were transformed into private wealth. Bribery and violence suppressed any movement for change. This kleptocratic system came to be termed *le mal Zairois*, a term used by President Mobutu himself to describe the system he helped put in place.

Four types of financial flows helped to enrich President Mobutu, his family, and associates. There were the cover-up payments by foreign governments, including the United States; second, the use of the Congolese treasury as a personal account; third, export revenues from Congolese mineral and natural resources, and last, foreign aid and investment funds. The President, his family, and associates misdirected, over the years, up to 40 percent of the government's operating budget, up to 50 percent of mineral export revenues, and up to 50 percent of the government's capital budget.¹⁴

Attempts to reform the financial system in Congo ended in utter failure. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) sent senior banker Erwin Blumenthal, partly at the behest of a close friend of President Mobutu, under the Carter Administration, to monitor the Congolese central bank and promote financial integrity. Blumenthal left Congo frustrated, declaring that the corrupt system in Zaire, with all its wicked and ugly manifestations, its chronic mismanagement and fraud, would destroy all endeavors for change.¹⁵

The regime went to the extent of counterfeiting Congolese currency to buy foreign currencies on the black market. Lebanese interests printed some of these counterfeit notes abroad, especially in Argentina, while Congolese and Lebanese businesses printed others locally under the protection of the big man.¹⁶ If the full history of Congo's foreign borrowing is ever reconstructed, it would be likely to show that most of the very heavy national foreign debt was stolen or squandered after it was borrowed. This reality is known not only to Congolese, but also to lenders themselves who continued to give the government more money. One issue that created tension between President Laurent Kabila and the foreign governments and international financial institutions was his refusal to pay back the Congolese debt on the basis that it never benefitted the Congolese people. Obviously, it is no secret that the Mobutu regime was sustained and protected by Western powers especially the United States and France. To illustrate the level of confidence the United States had in Mobutu, this is what President George H. W. Bush had to say, "Zaire is among America's oldest friends and its President Mobutu one of our most valued friends, and so I was honored to invite President Mobutu to be the first African head of state

to come to the United States of America for an official visit during my presidency.”¹⁷ France and the United States based their foreign policy toward the country on the premise that Zaire without Mobutu is chaos.

Internally, President Mobutu was a master at pitting one leader, tribe, or ethnic group against another in order to get what he wanted. Two examples will serve to illustrate the damage this caused in the area of human rights. The first example took place during the ethnic conflict between Kasaians and Katangese of 1991. In this conflict, President Mobutu used Gabriel Kyungu Wa Kumwanza, one of the three leaders of the National Federation of Convinced Democrats and Governor of Katanga Province, to politically weaken Etienne Tshisekedi Wa Mulumba, who had been named by the National Sovereign Conference as Prime Minister-elect responsible for leading the transition. It was impossible for Kyungu to accept a non-Katangese in this role, since the Kinshasa government had sufficiently exploited and impoverished the Katanga province over the years. It was time for this part of the country to put its future into the hands of its own sons, the real Katangese. The message was clear enough and so powerful as to threaten non-natives in Katanga. In the process, national unity in Zaire was also threatened. The message was even more strongly felt by Katangese who considered that their contribution to the national budget, at times amounting to 70 percent, should have counted toward special treatment from the government. In June 1993, nearly 75,000 persons of Kasai origin were displaced from Likasi. They lived in extremely precarious conditions in improvised camps, awaiting return to their province of origin. Many deaths were reported in camps and in trains during the repatriation process. This process was only halted when President Mobutu was sufficiently convinced that Tshisekedi's power was seriously weakened.

Another case in which ethnic conflict was exploited concerns the Banyamulenge who are Congolese of Rwandan origin mostly located in the East of the country. Stripped of their citizenship, the Banyamulenge peasants were also denied land rights, as the indigenous groups claim the land they occupy and use as their own ancestral land. The land question is at the heart of the conflicts that have shaken both South and North Kivu. Before the genocide in Rwanda, thousands of people died in inter-ethnic violence in 1992–93 in North Kivu. Instead of finding ways of resolving the crisis in a responsible manner, the Zairean authorities added fuel to fire with xenophobic appeals, while soldiers and military officers sold arms to both sides. In September 1996, the South Kivu Deputy Governor stated in a radio broadcast that if the Tutsi Banyamulenge did not leave Zaire within a week, they would be interned in camps and exterminated.¹⁸

Today there is open conflict between the Banyamulenge and the other tribes and the East. The first big confrontations involved 80 percent of the population of Rutshuru, Masisi, and Goma during the period 1961–64.¹⁹ The issue of the nationality of this group of Rwandan origin was badly handled during the Second Republic. There are serious contradictions within the many legal texts that tried to deal with the problem. While the claim that ethnicity is the be-all and end-all of African politics is overstated, it is certainly a key factor in political allegiances in the DRC. The challenge is how to manage it. This is not to say that ethnic grievances are the only cause of conflict. The conflict in the DRC, and elsewhere on the continent, is the product of the unsatisfactory relationship between government and society, and any lasting solution requires the former to become more attuned and responsive to the latter. This task requires a thorough knowledge of grassroots

social dynamics and this knowledge is only acquired by involving people in the affairs of the state.

Since 1997 the institutional structures of Congo have been the structures of a post-colonial state in crisis, a state that, in effect, ceased to exist as soon as it was recognized as a modern state. Once America achieved its objective of dismantling communism in East Europe, Mobutu became irrelevant. But the least the U.S. administration could do was to push for a peaceful transition in Zaire/Congo following a rebellion that many suspect had United States moral and logistical support. The end of Mobutu's rule found Congolese once again unprepared to take over the control of the state.²⁰

Before Mobutu Equals After Mobutu: The Short Reign of Laurent Kabila

The victory over Mobutu was epochal — a great victory. Yet it is not clear who won and who benefited from that victory. Laurent Kabila, backed by Rwanda and Uganda, was victorious, but his victory did not generate debates among the Congolese population about what sort of society, state, and institutions to build and how to safeguard future generations from falling under another dictatorship. Instead, another dictatorship was emerging. Under Laurent Kabila, the conditions that gave rise to the Mobutu type of leadership did not disappear, but there was no good reason for Rwanda and Uganda to initiate another war. In fact, as we celebrate the end of the war that some have termed “Africa's First World War,” the assumed causes of the war have still not been addressed.

The second war created inter-state as well as intra-state conflict, in which foreign intervention has played a part. Kabila was insecure, with the country totally in the hands of foreign armies. His downfall resulted from his inexperience in governing coupled with his self-destructive tendencies. Kabila made the same mistake Lumumba had made trying to take on the West soon after independence.²¹ Instead of strengthening the foundation of his power and that of the state, he weakened them. Kabila failed to understand that the international landscape was entirely transformed while he was in the mountains, with the end of the Cold War, the balkanization of the Soviet Union, and the modernization of Mao's Cultural Revolution. Kabila, like Lumumba before him, found his demagoguery, intransigence, and arrogance alienated everyone who sought to help him. Instead of building an inclusive government in partnership with the democratic forces, he crushed them. The seizure of power is one thing and its effective use is another. Having won the war, President Kabila could not accept any opposition to his power. In placing people he could trust around him he disregarded merit, experience, and expertise. Any president of Congo has a pool of eminent people across the world he can call upon to help redesign the state. Kabila found himself at the head of important political institutions. He treated the country as if it were his private patrimony. He controlled all revenue from customs to mining. Nothing was possible without his decision. Like Mobutu, he created an administration whose agents were either loyal to him or totally dependent upon him, and were dedicated to self-enrichment.²²

In an effort to maximize state power, President Kabila expelled troops from Rwanda and Uganda after coup attempts commanded by the two countries. Kabila's move was also calculated to deny those countries unrestricted access to Congolese resources. Kabila did not have the capacity to assure even a minimum degree of

physical security within the country. What followed was not surprising. Rwanda and Uganda forces refused to withdraw and launched an attack to overthrow his regime. It is important to state that the 1998 war was not a rebellion but a foreign invasion that transformed itself with time into a rebellion.²³ Since the war failed to unseat President Kabila, the Lusaka Accord was introduced to force him to negotiate with the Congolese rebels.

Although Kabila signed the Lusaka Accord, he blocked every move to see it implemented. When President Kabila was assassinated by his own bodyguard, he left the country under foreign occupation despite the presence of forces from his Southern Africa Development Community's (SADC) allies — Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola. During his short stay in power, many feared a return to a kind of Mobutuism without Mobutu.²⁴ But few people saw Kabila's antagonistic attitude towards the West, his inability to create minimum democratic conditions for the people within his area of control, and his reluctance to implement the July 1999 Lusaka Accord as strong enough reasons to predict his eventual downfall.²⁵ But it was his antagonistic behavior to the West that would cost him his life. President Kabila, as Lumumba before him, was not ready to expose the DRC resources to a continual exploitation by external forces. His refusal to recognize the Congolese debt, rejection of IMF and World Bank, his request to continue with their adjustment programme and the refusal to give mining contracts to American companies were not acceptable to the Anglo-Saxons.

From Mobutu to Kabila, the real source of instability in the DRC was the weakness of the state. The war in Congo was preceded by a break up of the state. In weak states where sovereignty and territoriality are difficult to uphold, pressure increases from internal and external actors to take the opportunity of the absence of the state to advance their particular positions or interests.²⁶ This is especially true in states with large natural resources in demand in the international market. In the DRC, the lack of a strong national army, the permeability of borders, the bad functioning of the administration, and chaotic state of public affairs run by successive governments and regimes, have emphasized the weakness of the state in the face of internal and external pressures and ambitions. Can Congo rid itself of external, especially regional, involvement in its internal affairs, as one of the central factors of political instability in the country?

Like Father Like Son: Joseph Kabala, an Exception to the Rule

In the Great Lakes region, killing the head of state brings bad memories of the Rwanda genocide. It was the mysterious plane crash that killed President Habyarimana of Rwanda, that led to the genocide of 1994. The transition from father to son was exceptionally smooth. The question, however, that many observers of Congolese politics still ask themselves is how Kabala, Jr. was chosen to replace the father. The answer can be found in President Mugabe's statement on the DRC at a meeting of Zimbabwean, Angolan, and Namibian leaders in Luanda in January 2001, when he said that the alliance wanted Joseph Kabila to be more flexible than his father in seeking a settlement for the DRC conflict.²⁷ There is no doubt that the alliance that backed his father against the Rwanda and Uganda invasion of Congo had a strong hand in his appointment.

When Joseph Kabila was sworn in he was optimistic that peace would soon be

found. "I see peace on the horizon," he said in Lusaka during the first DRC peace summit after the father's death. But hope faded when Rwanda and Uganda refused to attend the meeting, which went ahead under the leadership of President Chiluba, the Southern Africa Development Community's (SADC) chief mediator. A plan for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the DRC was adopted. This meeting was an important platform for the new Congolese President. It enabled him to put into practice what he had preached to the West during his first visit to France, the United States, Belgium, and the UN soon after his inauguration as President of DRC. Joseph Kabila promised to cooperate with the UN and implement the Lusaka Accord. This was a major departure from his father's policy, which was based on unfriendly relations with the UN. Not only did he agree to implement the Lusaka Accord, allow the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, and allow an inter-Congolese dialogue to take place, he went further in accepting the former President of Botswana, Sir Ketimire Masire, as the facilitator of the inter-Congolese dialogue.

President Kabila seems to follow well the advice from Rioberta Menchu, Nobel Peace Prize-winner, who stated during a seminar on peace in Columbia on September 6, 1999, that in order to make viable proposals, it is fundamental to listen to all the participants in the peace process. If you do not have access to all the parties, it is necessary to establish ties; it is in this way that you will manage to foster that harmony, which will give results later on. Joseph Kabila has been successful in engaging everyone including militias who are out of the peace deal with the intention of bringing them into the peace process.

While countries might have had genuine security concerns in the case of Rwanda and genuine concern to protect the sovereignty of the DRC in the case of Zimbabwe for example, their motive for being in the DRC changed over time with the exploitation of resources. Each force was seeking, as Rene Lemarchand puts it, "to draw maximum advantage from the near collapse of the Congo state, and this with the direct or tacit complicity of local actors."²⁸ It is this easy penetration of the state and exploitation of its resource in connivance with local people that demonstrates the level of state collapse in the DRC. It is this situation that pushed Hottelet to describe the DRC as "a carcass being chewed at by its elite and its neighbors."²⁹

From the time of Leopold II to the present, the problem of the Congo has remained the same. African countries targeted not primary commodities, but rather those that required little investment and were easy to extract, transport, and tax, and those whose illegal or undesirable provenance was easy to disguise. In state-controlled areas this meant diamonds and in rebel areas this meant coffee, gold, and columbite-tantalum. The question is: who benefits?³⁰ This question suggests another one. How could impoverished Rwanda and Uganda orchestrate, arm, and finance such operations on their own? The questions that many have asked themselves are: who is using Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda? Whose agenda is being served? What are the political, social and economic objectives of such an agenda? These questions need to be answered to apprehend the dimensions of the DRC position in international politics and the level of state collapse.

There are allegations that Western powers, principal financiers of financial institutions such as World Bank and the International Monetary Fund whose economic interests in Congo were at risk, sponsored Rwanda and Uganda military operations indirectly through commercial channels. Such allegations are based on double standards of Western-controlled international institutions. The ministry of health budget included a provision for military drugs. Linda de Hoyos asserts that

Rwanda and Uganda finance their military operations and interventions in the DRC through donor monies. She writes, "Ugandan-Rwandan war against the Congolese people continues to be financed by the western donor community. In May 2000, the IMF and World Bank approved Uganda as the first African nation to win immediate debt relief in a package that gave the country \$ 1.3 billion in debt forgiveness. At the same time the Italian government announced another \$ 99 million in debt forgiveness for Kampala. Two weeks before those announcements, President Museveni was reported by the Nairobi newspaper the *Monitor* to be shopping for multi-rocket launchers, tanks, and anti-aircraft. Most of these assertions can be justified on one premise: Rwanda and Uganda are naturally very poor countries with limited resources, lower levels of GDP and HDI. They do not have domestic resources to sustain internal and external wars for decades.

Zimbabwe had an estimated 11,000 soldiers in the DRC and spent millions of dollars each month on the war.³¹ But Zimbabwe received rewards by exploiting minerals including diamonds and gold. It appears that the revenue of these ventures profited only a small group of Zimbabwean elite. This is why it was difficult for Zimbabwe African Nation Party-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) to convince the Zimbabweans of the merit of the intervention. On the other hand, the Kagame government is prized to take advantage of this opportunity to invest in improving the quality of public service delivery system and the level of infrastructural development. Money, machinery, minerals, and other loot from Congo are channelled into investment activities in the country. In spite of militarism, Kagame's government seems to overcome some critical political and economic difficulties.

Unlike in Sudan, where foreign companies exploit the oil reserves, the war in the DRC is not sustained by external commercial enterprises physically present in the country. Here, it is regional military forces that transformed themselves into multinational corporations. Their local surrogates (rebels and government) exploit the resource that feeds into lucrative foreign trading networks. In this way the Congolese state fits Ajit Roy's definition: "The state is not an independent social force but a coordinate of private business."³² As Nzongola Ntalaja puts it, the strategic resources exploited by the external forces were sent to Western markets for consumption as a response to their obligation to their American ally.³³ He further argues, "Great powers are more interested in pursuing their interests." Even in this time of globalization, the imperialist continues to search for regional networks to secure their economic and strategic interests including access to indispensable resource for the maintenance of its hegemony.³⁴ Richard Joseph echoing Ntalaja's position says: "The search for resource externally to secure or maintain dominance internally is the thread which connects the international politics of African juridical state to those of warlord insurgencies." The United States military has been covertly involved in the war in the DRC, Wayne Madsen, intelligence specialist told the U.S. congressional subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights. He also told the committee that American companies, including one linked to former President George Bush, Sr., are stocking the Congo conflict for monetary gains."

There is no doubt that with automatic weapons cheaply available on the continent, the DRC's porous long borders and its large uncontrolled space rich in easily exploitable resource has made the country vulnerable to violent insurgencies of all kinds. Foreign incursions and internal armed groups should not be ruled out. Most arms come from the international system. Since these arms are not given by western countries for political reasons and have to be bought in cash, the

continuation of the war economy remains real in the Great Lakes region, especially for the DRC. The continual absence of a central government that is in control of all the territory is a threat to the stability of the DRC. The Congolese state has been unable to be present everywhere on the territory. This has affected the state's ability to equally distribute services to citizens. Since independence, the state has always been highly present in poles of relative prosperity and less present in areas farthest removed from the centre. As the recent war has shown, neighboring states take advantage of the absence of authority in a country to further their own strategic, economic, and political ends.

Alternative Future for the DRC

The DRC, before it imploded in October 1996, was at an advanced stage of decay due to more than thirty years of Mobutu misrule. There is no doubt that concrete results have been achieved in an effort to bring peace to DRC. The efforts culminated in the all inclusive peace agreement signed in Pretoria, South Africa, in December 2002 through the inter-Congolese dialogue facilitated by former President of Botswana, sir Ketumire Masire, and successfully mediated by South Africa. But in reality, enormous challenges for the nurturing and consolidation of peace, uniting the territory and finding a workable political system for the DRC remain. The Congolese state's inability to be present everywhere on the territory affected also the state's ability to equally distribute services to citizens. Since independence the state has always been present in poles of relative prosperity and less present in areas farthest removed from the center.

The adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)³⁵ could not come at a better time for the DRC. Today, the critical challenge for both economic development and political stability on the continent is democratic governance. The phenomenal development toward democratic governance, which political scientist, Samuel Huntington prefers to term the Third Wave, has, in the recent past, expressed itself in commitments by African governments to embrace democratic rule through various continental and regional initiatives.

At the continental level, the newly established African Union (AU) has openly committed member-states to democratic governance which will be monitored from time to time, through the African Peer Review Mechanism.³⁶ The NEPAD initiative states that the prerequisites for sustainable development in Africa revolve around four initiatives as follows:

- Peace and security initiative;
- Democracy and political governance initiative;
- Economic management and corporate governance initiative; and
- Sub-regional and regional development initiatives.

The peer review mechanism is intended to create an external source of pressure on a weak state.³⁷ The principle of non-interference in internal affairs has already been shaken. This continental pressure is important to keep countries like the DRC on the correct track for transformation. External pressure on the state will not work unless that pressure is reinforced by pressure "from below" reflecting the demand for improving governance³⁸ by the citizens. This simply suggests that the real work for the reconstruction of the state in the DRC must come from within. Many factors

would have to be considered in the stabilization of the state. But one key factor would be the institutional design. The challenge in the DRC is to find a suitable political system, especially the design of the new constitution. This is why, beyond the conclusions of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue which started in Lusaka in 1999 and concluded in Pretoria, South Africa, in 2003, Congolese would need another round of political discussion that would include all the people. Those held in South Africa, although very important, cannot be considered an inclusive process. It was a gathering of elite fighting to secure political positions. There must be a Congolese solution to the Congo political problems. But the search for that solution should not usurp the Congo's right to enjoy the sovereignty. There are many possibilities within an African context for finding a constructive and satisfactory solution to the Congo's difficulties. The debate over reconstruction of the state would include the issues below.

Federalism

The DRC has not moved an inch from where it was at independence. The debate about adopting a federalist state or a unitary state is important for the future DRC. Centralism versus federalism has bedeviled politics in the old world for centuries. It may do the same in Africa. So far, experience shows that it is easier for the unitarists to win in small states like Ghana than in larger states like the DRC, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. The past also shows that the unilateralists won in the DRC. But on the continent countries are increasingly trying to find consensus by including citizens in the debate of how states should be run, and federalism might be given a chance in the future DRC. In fact, the best constitution to come out of the DRC since independence, the Constitution of Luluabourg in 1964, proposed a federal system for the Congo.

But while it makes sense to devolve political power to provinces, the unity of the state should not be undermined by centrifugal forces. A highly decentralised state within a unitary state might be the way forward. Most internal problems in the DRC were due to excessively centralized power that left provinces with no decision-making ability and few services.

Some people have advocated the balkanization of the DRC. But is there a formal or legal process that could be used to divide the country? The argument is that the DRC is too big and that it would be in the interest of its people if it were divided. This position has met serious opposition from the Congolese, who are nationalistic and believe their country is indivisible. A successful national educational system and administration, enhanced by Congo's national music and culture, contribute to this unity. None of the current Congolese forces in the DRC is fighting for secession. This contrasts with the crisis in the Balkans, where the constituent parts of the former Yugoslavia have separated. The political crisis in Congo is the crisis of the Congolese state. The decision of rebel groups from the neighboring states — Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda to invade the DRC territory to find refuge there has been facilitated by the inability of the Congolese State to protect its sovereignty and the integrity of its territory. It is the absence of the state that is the root of the problem. If the territorial integrity of the DRC is not secured, call for the division of the country will continue.

An inclusive political system

A question here is whether Congo can become a functioning democracy? Although there is no single form of democratic government in the world, there appears to be a growing agreement on the basic elements of democratic government in the DRC as entrenched in the transitional constitution. To the extent that the DRC has entered a “new era” it is because its major political groups have accepted the idea of power-sharing, democratic government, economic “prosperity,” and social justice. This does not imply “common ground” has been reached between all parties, but that a correspondence of interests makes the possibility of working together during the transition feasible. The problem in the DRC today is not arguments about the political ends but the confusion about means to reach those ends. In other words, even though belligerents, non-armed opposition, and civil society all took part in the negotiations, it is not clear that they will be able to create a climate within which their efforts toward democracy will be sustained.

An approach to politics that transcends a style of governance that is largely informal, private and highly centralized is a starting place. Congolese, all of them, must first accept that democracy must be above all. This presupposes a notion of justice that centers on the principle of impartiality. Dealing with ethnicity, is an important aspect of an inclusive system in the DRC.

While the claim that ethnicity is the be-all and end-all of African politics is overstated, it is a key factor in political allegiances in the DRC. The challenge is how to manage it. Ethnic grievances are, of course, not the only cause of conflict, but the conflict in the DRC, as many others on the continent, is the product of the unsatisfactory relationship between government and society, and any lasting solution requires the former to become more attuned and responsive to the latter. This task requires a thorough knowledge of grassroots social dynamics, and this knowledge is only acquired by involving people in the rebuilding of the state. As Clapham has argued, ethnicity, regardless of arcane debates over its “primordial” or “constructed” character, has likewise developed into an enduring feature of African life, and provides a ready basis for consolidation of political identities.”³⁹

Careful decisions need to be made on constitutional and institutional arrangements to ensure meaningful political representation, consolidation of peace and political stability, and the legitimacy of the political process. As the case of Lesotho clearly demonstrates, the existence of a common ethnic identity by no means assures an effective state when institutions and structure are not correctly constructed. It is increasingly emerging on the continent that best constitutional and institutional arrangements in any society must include: power sharing formulas, state structures that give autonomy to regions (federalism) and move away from presidentialism to parliamentarism or semi-presidentialism, and the adoption of electoral systems that ensure representation, inclusiveness, and reconciliation (that is, proportional representation and mix member proportional).

Further, in a country divided by war and previous political manipulations some form of social partnership among the main political stakeholders needs to be established in order to ensure commitment to the process of state building. There is, however, no guarantee that a society undergoing transition from war will become a democracy. Indications from around the world are that the chances are small. DRC would be an exception. A successful transition to democracy would require a total paradigm shift. Many constitutional arrangements that have been made in the DRC ever since independence have been “tactical retreats” rather than commitments to

principles of justice that transcend political self-interest. But this culture seems to have been broken by a new constitution that insists on democratic values such as respect for human rights and the enforcement of the freedom of expression.

Visionary leadership

The challenge for the new Congolese leadership is how to turn the opportunity they have into a success story. Politically speaking, if the new transitional government continues to protect selfish interest, we must be prepared for many more bad transitions. Put differently, if the new political leadership in the DRC continues to underestimate the complexity of the transition process that it has subjected the country to, we should expect a major crisis ahead.

The only way to maintain this process, as we have come to learn from other similar transitions on the continent — South Africa and small states such as Mozambique, Namibia and very recently Lesotho — is to avoid politics of exclusion. The process of building the DRC has to involve all Congolese from the peasant to the elite and allow them to contribute to the creation of a new society where universal democratic values are respected. For this to happen the new leadership must first take an honest decision to abandon hidden agenda politics that would tend to perpetuate the status quo where only a few benefit from control of political power.

Equally important, those in leadership positions cannot negotiate transition without accepting responsibility for managing its outcome. All the parties taking part in the transitional structures must work together for the common good and not simply to control power, leaving responsibility to others. Whether the current leadership has the will to make a democracy is debatable, but if it chooses to do so, it would find within the citizenry plenty of democrats to help.

Economic Benefits of Peace Needed

Perhaps the most important lesson learned from transitions such as those in South Africa and Mozambique, is that economic well being is pivotal. The economy is not something that can be put on ice until the transition is over. Its well-being is dependent on how the transition occurs. Here the intervention of the international community is most needed. Everything that has been achieved in the Great Lakes would need strong financial and technical support. There is no doubt that the United States and Britain together with France and Belgium expected to contribute to building a sustainable peace in the DRC. With the attention of the Western governments focused on Iraq, African problems are not a priority. The United States has already made it clear that there are only a few countries on the American list — Israel, Egypt and Jordan — for substantial financial aid. The question then becomes, does the continent have what it takes to help the DRC on its road to recovery? This is one New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) challenges.

National Interest Versus External interests

Most scholars have ignored the vulnerability of African political systems. Colonization has been, until recently, regarded as a special case of modernization whose destructive effects are offset by such positive gains as the introduction of schools, economic corporations, cities, churches, and hospitals.⁴⁰ Similarly, newly independent states are generally considered autonomous units within the international order, though continual outside intervention, both political and

economic, has already invalidated this assumption in regard to the Congo. The recognition that the Congolese state has never been autonomous allows us a clearer understanding that the weak Congolese state has been caused by internal factors but equally so by external influence.⁴¹ But other political experiences suggest that the key to genuine national development lies in isolation from the outside influences. Thus the Enclosure Movement in eighteenth century England, the iron curtain of Stalinist Russia, and Japan's relative isolation during the Meiji era all exemplify national consolidation following a period of closure and self-reliance. The Congo, by contrast, has been continuously open to outside influences since the beginning of her colonial era. It is this fact, perhaps, that makes Western analytical concepts germane to the study of Congolese politics.

The only solution to the perennial crisis of the state in the DRC lies in the reinvention of the political economy of the country: It lies, in other words, in the creation of institutional use of resources which would ensure equitable distribution across provinces and populations. This would mean Congolese would have to put the national interest before external interests, which has never been the case since independence. This would mean Congolese taking control of their resources together. This would require a visionary and committed leadership. How this would happen in the presence of powerful forces of globalization remains to be seen. While external input is necessary to sustain peace and foster democratic transition. But what would maintain peace in the DRC is a different approach to politics — one that transcends the limits inherent in a style of governance that is largely informal, private, and highly centralized. Congolese must first accept that democracy is above all. This presupposes a notion of justice that is centered on the principle of impartiality. Rules must become ends in themselves in the DRC. They cannot be bent or ignored without penalties. This is a call for the creation of a Congolese society with strong values and strong procedures.

A Strong and Vibrant Civil Society Needed

A civil society needs to be built very quickly. Unless a broader-based constituency, which includes civil society, to continue with the spirit of the Inter-Congolese dialogue, is constructed in the DRC, the current process will fail. Civil society must develop a policing review role, focussing on monitoring policy and assessing how politicians are working.

Today civil society in the DRC is politicised and focussed on accessing power. As Lemarchant correctly puts it: "A key problem confronting almost every civil society organization, including those that are most conspicuously lacking in civility, is that they rarely define their interests in relation to the state, but rather in relation to the conflict raging among different fragments of the Congolese state."⁴²

Linked to a weak civil society is the weakness of political parties. Most political parties are ethnic-based. None of the Congolese political parties can claim an organized following. They have no plan for the reconstruction of the Congolese state and economy. Their discussion usually revolves around the advantages of their sharing or taking power.

Generally, Congo has a problem with its leadership. Congolese politicians seek power through whatever means are deemed expedient. In general, personalities tend to dominate parties which do not cooperate. The danger is that in an effort to secure their own political survival these personalities, which have no political base, might prefer to scarify the interests of the Congolese people by retreating from democracy

and instead maintain the status quo.

The colonial experience, Mobutu legacy, the destruction caused by five years of war, ethnicity, regional and international imperatives, the vast territory of the DRC, the lack of infrastructure, and the country's abundant resources could only contribute to the weakening of the state if citizens fail to find consensus on governance issues.

The Regional Dimension of the DRC Crisis Needs to be Addressed

The war in the DRC is not only about security, it is also about economic interests. There is a need to find a system of regional security and cooperation that includes economic cooperation between the countries of the region. In the wake of violence in the region the Heads of States of the then Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi decided to create the Economic Community of the Great Lakes States (Communauté Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs [CEPGL]) in September 1976. Under this accord, the Heads of States agreed to consult each other regularly on security matters in the region. This approach helped significantly to minimize conflict in the region for some time. It would be necessary to revive such an organization, taking into account the new dynamics. Such an organization would alleviate the political, security and economic fears of the vulnerable populations of the region. Revival of the CEPGL should be accompanied by the resuscitation of the Inter-State Security Commission for the Great Lakes. In fact, the Joint Military Commission could become the catalyst for this dimension which would institutionalize the safeguarding of everyone's security interests. Otherwise, in order to comprehensively address the challenges of inter- and intra-state conflicts within and surrounding the DRC, thoughts may be given to establishing an ad hoc AU Commission on Peace and Security in Greater Central Africa to work closely with UN institutions in stabilizing this vast region. In this same context a quick solution must be found to the problem of refugees and the internally displaced. ❀

Notes

1. M. G. Schatzberg, "Beyond Mobutu: Kabila and the Congo," *Journal of Democracy*, 8, no. 4, 1997: 71
2. M. Mamdani, South African Initiative in the Congo Crisis, Special Bulletin, Association of Concerned African Scholars [Harare], .no. 53/54 (October 1998): 20.
3. Ibid.
4. C. Kabemba, Central Africa: Mediating Peace Where There Is None, *Conflict Trends*, 3 (September 1999): 23.
5. N. K.A. Baleme, Bantu Ethnic and Traditional Realities in Focus of Central Africa, (Libreville: CICIBA, 1999), 28, 101.
6. The seven leading recipients of U.S. foreign aid in Sub Saharan Africa between 1961 and 1990 are, in descending order: Sudan, Zaire, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia, and Senegal.
7. William Reno, "Shadow States and Political Economy of Civil Wars" in *Green and Grievance: Economic agendas in Civil Wars*, Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds.43-68. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
8. Kabangulu Ngoy-Kangoy, *La Transition Democratique au Zaire. Kinshasa* (Zaire: CIODOS, 1995) 27-54.
9. Lemarchand Rene, *Political Awakening in the Belgium Congo*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1964), 251.

10. Congolese called these parties "vegetarian parties" since they were financially fed by the Power. Most of these parties were composed only of, for instances, a man, his wife or wives, and children, as well as some of his cousins and in-laws.
11. C. Kabemba., "Whither the DRC? Causes of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Way Forward," *Policy: Issues and Actors*, 12, no. 1 (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1999): 9.
12. Claude Kabemba, *Whither the DRC?* 35.
13. Baleme, *Bantu Ethnic*, 82.
14. M.M. Mokoli, M.M., *The Transition Towards Democracy in Post-1990 Zaire: Contradictions and Dilemma* (London: International Scholars Publications, 1997) 123.
15. See Burns, J. and M. Huband, How Mobutu Built Up His \$4bn Fortune, *The Financial Times*, May 12, 1997.
16. M.M. Mokoli, *The Transition*, 124.
17. S. Kelly, *America's Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire: How the United States Discovered Mobutu, Put him in Power, Protected Him from His Enemies, and Helped Him Become One of the Richest Men in the World and Lived to Regret It* (Lanham Md: American University Press, 1993).
18. Ntalaja Nzongola, Crisis in the Great Lakes Region, *SAPEM* [Harare], November 1996, 5.
19. C. André et al., Conflits au Kivu, antécédents et enjeux, *Aspects historiques et dimensions juridiques* 1 (December 1996): 12.
20. Claude Kabemba; Mediating Peace Where There is None. Policy Brief, Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg, 1999.
21. Kabila was part of the Simba rebellion in the 1960s, which professed to be Maoists. Playing to a rural anti-colonial sentiment, which equated modernity with Belgian rule and favored a return to traditional tribal forms of governance, the Simba mixed traditional African animist beliefs with the concept of an agrarian utopia. All these tendencies could be depicted in President Laurent Kabila's approach to governance during the little time he spent in power. Kabila was a total opposite to Mobutu. Mobutu made sure that he had enough leverage within most Western governments that he used to oppose one against the other when necessary. Throughout his career Mobutu was a consummate realist who could be pragmatic. He used Congo's immense mineral wealth and strategic position in the heart of Africa to play his cards.
22. On April 20, 1999, Kabila announced dissolution of AFDL, which swept him to power in 1997, accusing some members of opportunism and self-enrichment.
23. Rwanda and Uganda intervention in the DRC, which propelled SADC involvement, was made possible by the prospect for success that the weak DRC state offered. To hide their intervention, they created piece-by-piece groups of Congolese armed groups as rebel movements fighting for democracy and justice.
24. M.G. Schatzberg, "Beyond Mobutu: Kabila and the Congo," *Journal of Democracy*, 8, no. 4, 1997, 71.
25. Claude Kabemba; The Democratic Republic of Congo: from Independence to Africa's First World War. See <http://write.net>.
26. R. Väyrynen, Regional Conflict Formations: An Intractable Problem of International Relations, *Journal of Peace Research*, 21, no. 4, 1984: 337-59.
27. *The Star*, Johannesburg, January 23, 2001.
28. Lemarchand. 'The tunnel at the end of the Light.'
29. Richard Hottelet, "The Plundering of the Congo" *Christian Science Monitor*, May 16, 2001.
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33. Zongola Ntalaja, paper presented at a conference on Democratic and Electoral Perspectives in then DRC. Organized by the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, Kinshasa, 2002.

34. Ibid.
35. Mahamood Mandani argues in *Current Affairs* of October 11, 2004, that the architects of both the African Union (AU) and Nepad seem not to have taken into consideration the failing state in Africa . . . the heart of Africa's development.
36. Khabele Matlosa, 2003a, "Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Focus on the Southern Africa Region" Paper Presented at the EISA Conference on "Strengthening Democracy Through NEPAD: The Role of African Civil Society," Johannesburg, May 25-27, 2004.
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39. Christopher Clapham, "Rethinking African States" *African Security Review* 10(3), 2001, 13-14.
40. David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 50.
41. On the significance of this type of explanation, see the perspective critique by Paul Baran, *Economie Politique de Croissance*, Paris:Maspero, 1967, 186-99.
42. Rene Lemarchand, The tunnel at the End of the Light. Review in *African Political Economy*, no. 93/94, 2002, 396.