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THE CONTINUATION OF VIOLENCE IN THE EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO A Consequence of Low State Capacity

By McKenzie Stevens '20

ABSTRACT

The enduring conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo is rooted in the state's colonial legacy, the predatory rule of its past leaders, and the outbreak of the African World War which has rendered the DRC's eastern regions extremely unstable. The conflict has persisted due to the low state capacity of the DRC government which has failed to mitigate the devastation faced by its people and has even been a perpetrator of violence directed towards civilians. The DRC's ineffective military, rampant poverty, and repression of civil liberties have left the Congolese people in a state of desperation, with some joining rebel groups to gain relief. For a conclusive cessation of the violence in eastern DRC to occur, comprehensive democratic reforms that increase the accountability of the government and enable the people to directly influence politics must be established within the state's political systems.



INTRODUCTION

Within the last few decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced the most devastating humanitarian crisis since World War II. While most of the country has been able to return to a state of relative stability since the end of what is referred to as the “African World War,” ongoing violence in eastern regions of the country continue to threaten national peace and security efforts. This conflict is a result of a weak state apparatus caused by ruling elites who have historically used their positions as a means of personal gain rather than investing in the necessary expansion of state capacity. The primary cause of the violence, the DRC’s failure to act with empirical statehood, is further exacerbated by the citizens’ inability to exert influence over their own government and obtain economic relief from the state. Unrest among the Congolese people has been fueled by feelings of neglect towards the state, which has been unable to provide protection for its people who have been subject to years of severe brutality. An end to the violence in the DRC can only be achieved when significant democratic reforms are enacted. These reforms must

address problems of political representation, participation in the economy, and, most importantly, a substantial increase in the government’s ability to alleviate the suffering of its people.

BACKGROUND

In order to understand the conflict holistically, it is important to first consider the historical context in which the DRC became a sovereign state. Prior to its independence, the DRC was governed by the Belgian colonial authority, known for its especially oppressive treatment of the Congolese people. The colonial government employed the Congolese people as forced laborers in the extraction of the DRC’s vast supply of natural resources.¹ Belgium’s sole purpose in its rule over the DRC was to maximize profits through the extraction of these resources with little interest in enhancing the capacity of the State. As a result, effective, formal institutions, such as a strong judiciary, army, and educational system, did not exist prior to the country’s independence.² To maintain its control over the territory, Belgium violently responded to all potential uprisings against the colonial state and actively sought to destroy

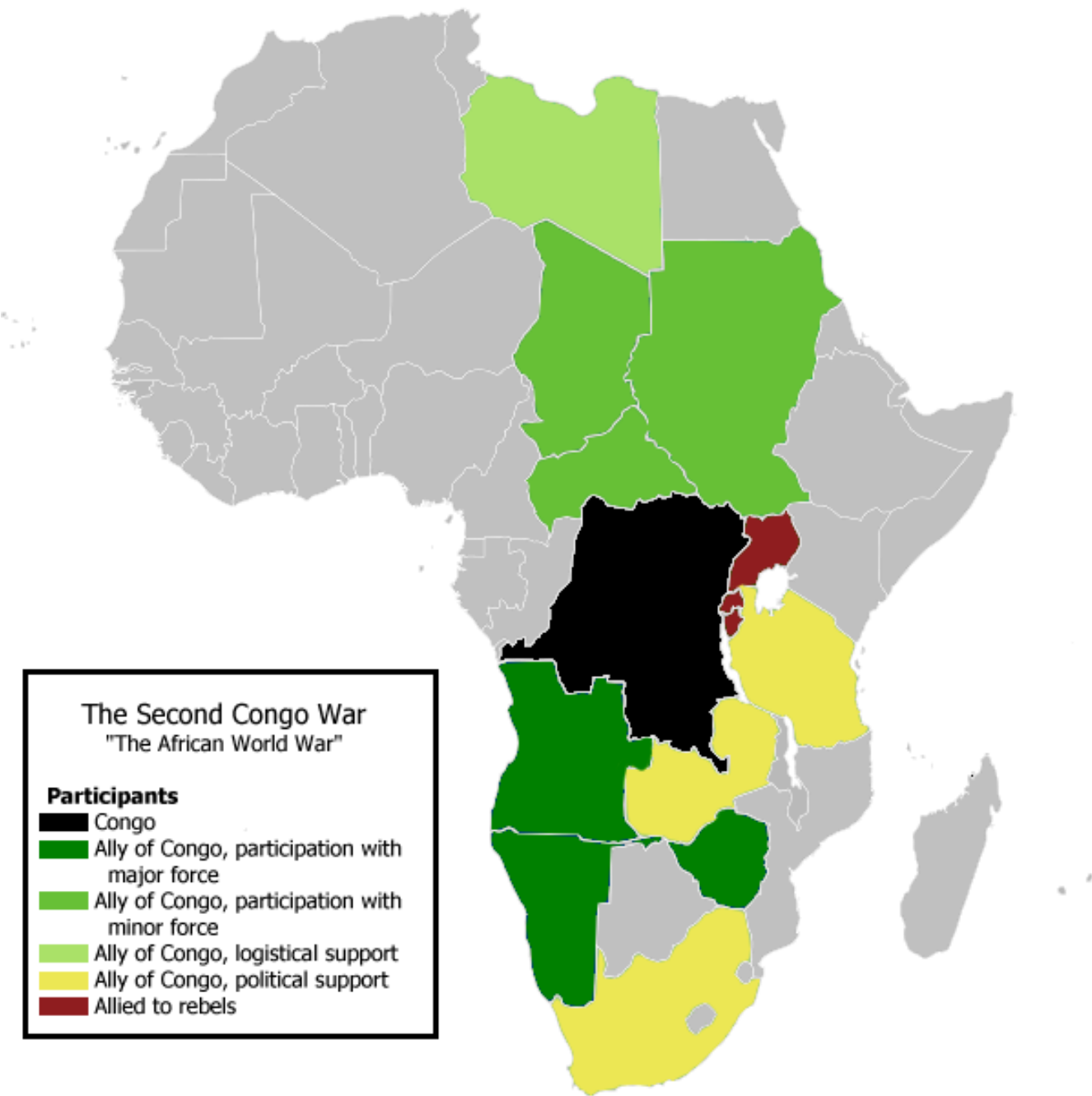
the indigenous ties of the Congolese to prevent any potential opposition from forming.³ Thus Belgium’s relationship with its colonial subjects was paternalistic in nature, and the Congolese people had little to no opportunity to participate in society in a meaningful way. A clear example of this lack of integration of the Congolese people in civil society is evident in that “of 5,000 government jobs pre-independence, just three were held by Congolese.”⁴ Furthermore, “not a single Congolese lawyer, doctor, economist, or engineer existed.”⁵ When the DRC achieved independence in 1960, Belgium quickly withdrew its colonial administration, leaving the DRC with no clear political authority and a severely underdeveloped state system. The DRC inherited a state seemingly destined for failure and has since been unable to overcome these challenges and work towards creating an effective government.

Since achieving independence, the two most prominent leaders of the DRC have been Joseph Mobutu and Joseph Kabila, who both heralded an oppressive and rapacious leadership structure at the expense of improving the state and, consequently, the welfare of the Congolese

people. Mobutu’s reign fundamentally undermined what little legitimacy formal institutions in the DRC had been able to gain in the years before his presidency. His use of patronage networks to legitimize his rule excluded the general population from most economic opportunities, and the subsequent economic crisis he caused through his utilization of national banks to sustain these patronage obligations left the people in a state of financial instability. The transition of the presidency to Joseph Kabila several years after Mobutu left office did little to alleviate the hardships of the DRC citizens. Kabila was extremely insecure while in power and lived in constant fear of a coup by other elites in the government.⁶ He chose to avoid offending these elites by proposing reforms for institutions that contained “deeply entrenched interests” while simultaneously focusing on strengthening his business and security ties.⁷ Kabila’s rule was arguably more oppressive and corrupt than Mobutu’s regime in the eyes of the people. One citizen explained that while Mobutu “stole from the people with a fork - crumbs trickling down. Kabila steals with a spoon leaving nothing

for the people.”⁸ While the security situation of the DRC constantly changed throughout the early years of Kabila’s presidency due to the African World War coming to an end, the

people’s feelings of discontentment with the state remained. The corruptness of the DRC government since its inception has been a major factor in the continuation of conflict in the



country’s eastern regions.

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 and the resulting African World War laid the foundation for the chaos and violence that has persisted in eastern Congo ever since. During this time, 5.4 million people have died due to this conflict, the majority of this number being civilians.⁹ In addition, 4.5 million people remain internally displaced, unable to return to their homes that have been rampaged by armed forces.¹⁰ It is estimated that over one-hundred armed groups are present in the region.¹¹ In recent years, the size of these groups has been greatly diminished but, despite this, many are still able to operate relatively autonomously, establishing control over villages to terrorize its inhabitants and exploit any resources available.¹² Their ambitions are difficult to ascertain because of the variability in their structure and interests. Theories have been put forth that some groups’ operations are entirely centered around the acquisition of natural resources while others contend that ethnic tensions are the main culprit. While these factors certainly play a role in shaping the rebel group’s pursued objectives, they are secondary to “long-running grievances against the central

government.”¹³ The responsibility then lies with the State to better understand the underlying motives of the rebel’s attacks to more effectively negotiate with them in future peace talks.

WEAK MILITARY

Yet the greatest consequence of the DRC’s abysmally low state capacity has been its ineffective military apparatus. The government has made little progress in combating rebel groups, perhaps because they are unmotivated to do so as most of the group’s actions have been localized and none of them possess the capacity to challenge the State as a whole.¹⁴ The State has not invested the necessary amount of resources into training and funding its soldiers, which has created a dysfunctional conglomeration of security forces lacking a coherent combat strategy to guide them and with waning allegiance to the country they serve.¹⁵ The lack of professionalism within the DRC’s military, the FARDC, has been an issue since the time of Mobutu and is a clear example of the undermining of a key institution of the state.¹⁶ The central government lacks authority and legitimacy in the eyes of soldiers who

have been grossly underpaid and not been held accountable for their often misdirected violent conduct. Members of the official military of the DRC have targeted civilians just as brutally as rebel groups. They too are responsible for the murder, rape, and theft of countless villagers whose regions they have passed through. They attribute their actions to their frustration with their own economic situation and corresponding lack of support from the central government.¹⁷ The illegal acts they commit towards non-combatants often are a result of striving to gain material resources for their own financial well-being, but, in some cases, are merely an outlet for their anger.¹⁸ The pervasive disorder of the entire security system has heightened the chaos in eastern Congo as military forces actively contribute to the exploitation of civilians.¹⁹ The government's credibility among its people has been greatly weakened by the misconduct of its soldiers and its inability to displace rebel groups. Adequate internal leadership and provisioning for military service members has been lacking and has prevented the DRC from being able to re-establish sovereignty over its eastern region.

ECONOMIC ISSUES AND INCENTIVES

DRC's state failure can be further attributed to the ongoing crisis because of the lack of economic opportunities it provides for its people. With 72.5% of its people living in "multidimensional poverty," a more comprehensive measure of poverty that includes malnutrition and lack of access to clean water, and with one of the lowest GNI per capita rates at \$870, it is clear that a vast majority of DRC citizens lack basic, essential provisions.²⁰ Without a reliable government to ensure a minimal level of well-being for its citizens, the Congolese people are faced with a choice of either enduring abject poverty or seeking an alternative means of sustenance. As has been discussed previously, even those who obtain employment in the military are left without a livable wage and often resort to illegal activities to improve their situation.²¹ The impoverished economy of the DRC and lack of adequate earning opportunity makes the expansion of rebel groups and the heightening of the conflict almost inevitable. With such high levels of poverty present in the east, the economic

opportunity costs of the rebellion remain low so those who feel abandoned by the central government are more likely to be drawn to the rebellion.²²

However, the DRC's approach to its citizens in the east is not always hands-off. In some cases, its actions have even taken away financial stability that some have been able to procure for themselves. In an attempt to cut-off financing for rebel groups, Kabila ordered the shutdown of mining in eastern Congo which adversely affected many Congolese citizens reliant on legal mining activities for their livelihood.²³ As one of the miners explains, while some of these people moved to other provinces

to find work or reverted back to subsistence farming for survival, many ultimately joined the local rebel groups.²⁴ The government's incompetence in fulfilling the role of an empirical state has left its people vulnerable to the recruitment of rebel groups, who advertise a comparably higher quality of life than the state. By working to improve the quality of life of their citizens, the DRC has the potential to lessen the appeal of these rebel groups and prevent its citizens from defecting to them.

Although the aggression of insurgent groups in the east can be primarily explained by their resentment towards their ineffective central government, insurgent control over



mineral resources has been a major contributor to the prolongment of the conflict. To gain access to mining sites, rebel groups assert control over nearby villages, often using deadly force and committing unnecessary crimes such as rape and theft in the process. Mineral resources are used by the rebels to finance their activities and for individuals of the group to gain wealth not possible through legal means. Ownership of mining sites has become an integral part of rebel groups' agendas and has evolved into something they are willing to fight for.²⁵ The DRC government has allowed numerous mining sites to fall under the dominion of rebel groups, thus making the payoffs of the conflict more lucrative than peace in the region. Rebels have been given no assurance that by relinquishing their authority over these areas, they will not be forced back into the system of poverty that so many Congolese people are a victim of.²⁶ As long as the payoffs of insurgency outweigh the costs of fighting and recruiting, "combatants will prolong the war to enrich themselves."²⁷

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The Congolese people's inability to

actively influence their own government has become a more critical issue in a time when effective government action is needed most. Citizens lack the ability to hold the government accountable through democratic institutions for their inaction on issues of poverty and violence. Elections held in the DRC are known to be greatly flawed, with their results often not reflecting the majority vote.²⁸ Additionally, elections are often delayed for months or years without adequate justification, as evidenced by the most recent presidential and legislative elections that took place more than two years late.²⁹ As a result, formal institutions of the DRC are subverted through the actions of ruling elites vying to maintain their power base. Outside national elections, the civil liberties of civilians and opposition parties are also severely limited by the state.³⁰ Access to free and independent media is sufficiently lacking.³¹ To further isolate the people from events happening in their own country the government suspended internet access in 2017 during times of protest.³² This worked to incite confusion surrounding the extent and location of protests and prevented photos of the protests from being shared.³³

Through its active repression of political freedoms prior to the recent elections, Kabila's government managed to hold onto its unconstitutional rule. However, Kabila's flouting of democratic institutions built up resentment within the public. In a survey of 1154 Congolese adults, 45% said they would not honor the result of the presidential election if the winner was a member of Kabila's party.³⁴ Additionally, around half of the respondents said that they would participate in demonstrations if the elections were thought to be rigged or were further delayed.³⁵ Impatience with Kabila's presidency certainly stems from his role as the president of a state that has failed to provide a basic level of security and well-being for its people. The political crisis caused by Kabila's suspension of the Constitution, "revived and galvanized armed groups" who directly called on the President to step down.³⁶ Without reliable democratic institutions by which to ensure elected officials perform their duties, citizens of the DRC often have no choice but to voice their grievances through protest. While it cannot be said that all members of rebel groups in eastern DRC use their illegal activities and violence as a means of

protest against the State, some have certainly been motivated to resort to insurgency because the government has not allowed them to enact change through democratic means.

EXTERNAL ACTORS

Although the crisis in eastern Congo resides primarily between the central government and the various rebel groups operating in this region, foreign nations and multinational corporate entities have played a role in both mitigating and exacerbating the conflict.³⁷ Many foreign nations, including the United States, have provided aid to the DRC government and the UN mission for counterinsurgency measures. Some members of the international community have also sought to cripple the rebel's source of funding by reducing their purchasing of "conflict minerals," many of which are sourced from mines controlled by rebel groups.³⁸ Multinational corporations who produce products with minerals found in the DRC have had to find alternative supply sources in order to keep operating in countries with legislation limiting the importation of products containing "conflict minerals."³⁹ However, these

well-intentioned efforts to combat the persistent conflict have in reality resulted in the mass unemployment of miners and, similar to many of Kabila's other measures, have driven some to join armed groups as a source of livelihood.⁴⁰

The present UN mission in the DRC, known as MONUSCO, has been vital to peace and stabilization efforts that have been achieved in the DRC so far but has been unsuccessful in ending the violence and instituting democratic governance conclusively. The express mandate of the mission is to protect civilians under imminent threats of violence and to support the DRC government in its stabilization efforts.⁴¹

With over 16,000 military forces working in the country, it is the most extensive peacekeeping mission the UN has ever undergone.⁴² The presence of UN forces has strengthened the FARDC's missions in the east and has also worked to institute some accountability among soldiers. Prior to the UN's involvement, the FARDC was the main perpetrator of the humanitarian crisis that is still occurring. Of the many human rights violations in the DRC, 61% are committed by state agents.⁴³ With UN peacekeepers in the mix, structure and

professionalism have become integrated into the FARDC's missions and work to mitigate the state's contribution to the violence aimed at civilians. MONUSCO has also been instrumental in peace consolidation efforts including justice reforms and electoral support. Some of the most impactful efforts include the conviction of almost 1000 people for war crimes, a majority of who were state security forces, as well as MONUSCO's work in improving the electoral system by registering millions of voters.⁴⁴ MONUSCO has laid the foundation for significant democratic reform in the DRC and made the idea of permanent peace possible. However, without government support and adherence to MONUSCO's initiatives, the conflict will likely continue for some time.

LOOKING FORWARD

With the recent election of Felix Tshisekedi as President of the DRC and subsequent peaceful transfer of power, many people hope that this presents an opportunity for democratic reform and peace. It remains to be seen, however, how Tshisekedi will decide to use his newfound position of power.

Tshisekedi's leadership has not been vastly different from Kabila's. His election was wrought with allegations of corruption and the general public does not see him as the rightful candidate but has thus far tolerated the result, hoping that he will be able to improve their situation.⁴⁵ The international community has also chosen to recognize Tshisekedi as the new president, likely due to the belief that anyone will be better than Kabila.⁴⁶ However, even if Tshisekedi aims to reform the country, the Senate will most likely prevent him from doing so. Out of the 100 seats in the Senate, 91 are filled by members of the FCC, the coalition Kabila is a part of.⁴⁷ Proposed policies contrary to the agenda of the FCC, including most government reform, will therefore not likely pass and the DRC will remain unable to act effectively. It seems nearly impossible that Tshisekedi will be able to bring about meaningful change in a government still controlled by Kabila's allies. If the legislative makeup were to drastically change so that a party more responsive to the grievances of the people was to gain a majority, only then would change be likely. Reform must be preceded with a change of incentive in government so that the creation of

strong institutions is seen as beneficial and not as a threat to those in power.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The multifaceted nature of the conflict in eastern Congo makes it difficult to identify its root cause. Although factors such as control over natural resources can add complex layers to an already expansive issue, the DRC's failure to achieve the standard of empirical statehood is the underlying enabler of the continued fighting. Not only have the State's security forces been unable to retake regions under the authority of insurgent groups, but they have also actively contributed to the violence against civilians that has made this crisis so devastating. The government has been unable to provide basic levels of well-being and security to its citizens which is why many have turned to rebel groups who offer things the state is unable to. The government's unreliability is made worse when people are unable to participate in and hold their own government accountable. Without democratic channels in which people can effect change, frustration grows and incites further conflict. A government made up of the people,

serving the interests of the public is what the DRC desperately needs but has so far been unable to obtain. Without the integration of the people into the political systems of the DRC, lasting peace is unlikely to be achieved and may even heighten as the population's impatience with their government grows.



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LIBERALISM AND EMPIRE

Conflicting Perspectives on Late 19th

Century American Imperialism

By Jaehun Lee '21

ABSTRACT

In an effort to undermine Lockean liberalism, some have argued that it is highly conducive to imperialism, the pursuit of empire, while others have argued that Lockean liberalism delegitimizes imperialistic impulses in response. This paper will examine two important thinkers who represent opposing viewpoints on American imperialism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While Indiana Senator Albert Beveridge ardently supported America's imperialistic endeavors in the name of Lockean liberalism, Yale sociology professor William Graham Sumner appealed to the same principles to oppose American imperialism. By analyzing their arguments and assessing the compatibility of their ideas to the tenets of Lockean liberalism, the paper demonstrates that Lockean liberalism neither promotes nor opposes imperialism by default. By advancing this viewpoint, the paper offers a critical evaluation of the relationship between imperialism and liberalism and seeks to animate a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between ideology and policy.