RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Congo Trap: MONUSCO Islands of Stability in the Sea of Instability

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2014 was a hopeful year for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The M23 movement had been defeated in military operations in which one of the last peacekeeping experiments, the UN Force Intervention Brigade, had played a decisive role. A third UN stabilization plan, the 'islands of stability' was proposed to continue the stabilization of a country considered in a post-conflict phase. However, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has almost tripled in the country since 2007. This article will argue that DRC is still immersed into an old social conflict that existed before the Congo Wars and the roots of which are not being addressed. It will argue that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the 'islands of stability' strategy can address some of the secondary causes of the Congo conflict, such as its internationalization, the presence in DRC of foreign armed groups or the 'blood minerals', but cannot address its primary causes: land struggles, an old cycle of violence and the fragmentation of the Congolese society and political elite that is jeopardizing the restoration of the state authority. The huge dimensions of each of these factors make the Congo conflict 'one of the most complex and intricate environments ever faced by a peacekeeping mission', for which MONUSCO's mandate, resources and stabilization strategy do not seem powerful enough. When the UN organized the 2006 elections legitimized a 'spoiler state', the bottleneck of all the reforms needed to stabilize the country. The UN fell thus into a trap and became part of the conflict. Lessons learned should be taken for future UN operations.

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been, during the last decade, a vast laboratory of humanitarian relief, protection of civilians and statebuilding strategies. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the largest UN peace operation and one of the first to receive a Chapter VII mandate, has deployed, for the first time in UN history, unarmed surveillance drones and a UN intervention brigade, tasked to carry out offensive operations to neutralize armed groups. The decisive role played by the brigade in the defeat of the M23 rebellion has raised new hopes about the stabilization of the

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country, for which the UN has prepared, after the UN Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (UNSSSS) and the later version, ISSSS, a third strategy: the 'islands of stability'. This optimistic perspective bases its hopes in the defeat of the most recent Tutsi rebellion, the weakening of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the decreasing involvement of armed groups in the mines of eastern DRC. According to this vision, DRC is progressively moving toward stabilization, finding, step by step, answers to the alleged root causes of the Congo wars: foreign intervention, proliferation of armed groups and 'blood minerals'. This perspective, however, does not take into consideration a reliable barometer of the crisis: the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The number of IDPs almost tripled from the start of the M23 rebellion to 2014.

The point of departure of this article is the idea that DRC has been destabilizing since 2007, when there were around one million IDPs in the country, to 2015, when the IDPs are almost three million. According to this perspective, DRC is not in a post-conflict situation, but in the middle of a social conflict whose roots could be traced back to the colonial times. To argue this, this article will review the dynamics of the Congo conflict, trying to differentiate its secondary factors, which are fuelling the Congo conflict but were not at its origins, from the primary factors, which existed before and have not yet been addressed. The article will review the material factors of the conflict: the struggle for minerals and land in a country so huge and wild that it deters unity. It will further analyze the cycle of violence at the center of the historical dynamics of the country since its colonization. Finally, it will explore the political dimensions of the crisis: the absence of security due to the lack of reforms, which are jeopardized by Government officials in competition for the State resources. The article will argue that neither MONUSCO nor its stabilization strategy have the resources needed to face most of the secondary factors

fuelling the Congo conflict and any of its primary causes. The article will try to contribute to the debates about UN peacebuilding and stabilization strategies in complex environments having transformed into a 'No War, No Peace' situation (Swart 2011).

From the Congo Wars to MONUC

At the end of the Cold War, the African Great Lakes were destabilizing: Zaire was a failing state which had suffered a decrease in its GDP of about 65 per cent since its independence in 1960. Museveni's Popular Resistance Army (PRA) had taken the power in Uganda in 1986. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), composed of Tutsi refugees in Southern Uganda, was rearming and preparing to invade Rwanda, controlled by a Hutu elite since the independence of the country. The Rwandan Civil War triggered the genocide of about 800,000 Tutsi and displaced about one million and a half Hutu Rwandese to Eastern Zaire. Many of the *génocidaires* Interahamwe fled to Zaire and took control of the Hutu refugee camps, launching attacks against Congolese Tutsi in Zaire and the new Tutsi regime in Rwanda. The arrival of the Hutu refugees in Eastern Zaire aggravated the fragile situation in the area, where ethnic tensions existed between dozens of communities. These facts, combined with Zaire's collapse, triggered the invasion of Zaire in 1996 by the troops of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, backed by Rwandese and Ugandan troops, who wanted to dismantle the Interahamwe military bases in the country. This invasion is considered the beginning of the First Congo Qar. Once in power, Kabila turned on his former Rwandese allies, firing his Rwandan advisers. The Second Congo War began in 1997, when Kabila dismissed his Rwandan Chief of Staff, James Kabarebe, triggering the invasion of DRC by the rebel group Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), controlled again by Rwanda and Uganda (Ndayewl 2008; Braeckman 1999; Van Reybrouck 2008).

The Congolese wars were the most destructive and deadliest wars since the end of

World War II. They killed between three and five million persons and destabilized most of Central Africa, involving more than ten African countries in the conflict. In 1999, the United Nations deployed to the country what was to become its largest peacekeeping mission: MONUC. The mission arrived in a country divided into three areas: two controlled, respectively, by the Ugandan proxy Mouvement de libération du Congo (MLC) and the Rwandan proxy RCD, and the third one by the Government and its allies Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe (Braeckman 1999). Thanks to the international pressure over the conflict parties a peace settlement was finally reached in 2003. However, even with the presence of MONUC, wars continued in the country, such as the ethnic war in the Ituri district, which killed more than 50,000 Iturians (Oga 2009).

MONUC

The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), initially deployed for the observation of the ceasefire and disengagement of forces, grew in number and in assigned tasks at every UN Security Council resolution. In late 1999 MONUC had 500 observers and a protection force of 5,037 soldiers to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Six years later, in 2005, MONUC, under Chapter VII mandate, had 16,000 troops engaged in military operations of peace enforcement. The mission's mandate had been enlarged at every Security Council resolution including the support to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of combatants, the protection of civilians, the strengthening of the State Authority and the organization, in 2006, of the first democratic elections in the country since its independence (Zeebroeck 2009; Tull 2009).

The 2006 elections, the organization of which faced important logistical challenges, were successfully held and were won by Joseph Kabila, son of Laurent Desiré.

One year later, the last three armed groups in Ituri disarmed. The number of IDPs in DRC had decreased from more than 3 million IDPs in 2002 to around a million at the beginning of 2007 (IDMC n.d.). Since it seemed that, finally, peace was arriving to Congo, the UN designed its first stabilization strategy, known as the UN Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (UNSSSS) in late 2006. However, it was not implemented due to the deterioration of the security in Eastern DRC and the re-emergence of the CNDP war in North Kivu in 2008 (Paddon and Lacaille 2011: 11).

Indeed, dozens of Congolese armed groups still remained active in the Kivus; the Interahamwe, now *Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), continued to cause instability in the region and the Congolese Tutsi community defended their grievances through the parallel Army *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP) (Andrew 2008). In 2008, despite the support of MONUC troops to the national army, the CNDP surrounded the city of Goma, forcing peace talks. The clashes between the CNDP and the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) had increased the number of IDPs in North and South Kivu, but a peace agreement formalized on 23 March 2009 between the Congolese Government and the CNDP seemed to launch a new era of hopes and stability.

MONUSCO

In 2009, the UNSSSS was transformed into the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS) (n.d.) 'to reinforce political progress' and stabilize the country following the 2006 elections and the 2009 peace agreements between the government and armed groups. In 2010, 'to reflect the new phase reached in the country' MONUC was renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and given a stronger mandate in stabilization (UN, n.d.).

However, in Eastern Congo, the FDLR continued committing massacres and dozens of national armed groups continued to create instability, financing themselves with the control of mining areas. At the end of 2011, the numbers of IDPs had increased to 1.7 million and, in early 2012, had further increased to around 2 million (IDMC, n.d.). These numbers were a clear indicator that the situation in Eastern DRC was again destabilizing, even where the ISSSS activities were focused (Paddon and Lacaille 2011: 14). The irregular and chaotic Presidential and Parliamentary elections of November 2011, won amidst claims of vote-rigging by Joseph Kabila, inflamed the existing tensions in DRC. In January 2012 the Government foiled an attempted rebellion called *Conseil Supérieur pour la Paix* and three months later erupted the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebellion composed of former CNDP elements deploring the lack of respect by the Government of the March 2009 agreement (Stearns 2012).

The M23 rebellion, backed again by Rwanda (UN 2012) launched a series of attacks against the FARDC, managing to capture the city of Goma in November 2012. Again, the involvement of UN troops in the fight did not impede the rebel advance. In February 2013, the UN Security Council was obliged to add robustness to a yet Chapter VII-mandated multidimensional peacekeeping operation, deploying a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to 'neutralize all negative forces' (Cammaert 2013). After months of joint FARDC and MONUSCO military operations, in which the FIB played a decisive part (Vogel 2014), in November 2013 the M23 surrendered. The number of IDPs in DRC had grown again to almost three million (IDMC n.d.), as in 2002, at the end of the Second Congo War. But the UN presented a new stabilization strategy: the 'islands of stability'.

The Islands of Stability

The 'islands of stability' concept has never been clearly articulated (Brown and Boyce 2014), but it seems to be built upon a 'shape-clear-hold-build' military logic, in which

'MONUSCO wants to regain authority–with and for the DRC government – over increasing parts of the Kivu provinces '(Vogel 2014: 5). Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for the DRC, explained that the idea was to liberate and secure some geographic areas, where state authority would further be restored, education and health provided and economic prosperity promoted (UN 2014).

The islands of stability concept, thus, seems to continue the ISSSS strategy, which was implemented in six small areas in of North Kivu, South Kivu and Oriental Province, chosen according to the following criteria: i) areas having suffered from the armed conflict; ii) areas where the Government would have regained their control from armed groups; iii) areas around important economic axes; iv) areas accessible; and v) areas whose stabilization could have a 'ripple effect' over the geographical zone surrounding these areas (ISSSS n.d.). The objectives of the ISSSS in these areas were to a) improve the security, b) reinforce the State authority, c) support the return, reintegration and recovery process, d) combat sexual violence and e) help national and provincial governments to advance peace processes through political dialogue (UN n.d.).

Since the SRSG informs that the goal of the 'islands of stability' is to create a 'continent of stability' it seems that the ISSSS aim of 'ripple effect' is maintained. However, new concepts have been introduced in the 'islands', as the deployment to them of UN staff 'to advise and assist the Government in building up State functions', as well as the will to progressively increase the number of 'islands'. It is obviously too early to examine the results of this new strategy. But it is possible to analyze whether this strategy gives an answer to the root causes of the Congo conflict.

The Material Dimensions of the Sea of Instability

When analyzing the UN stabilization strategy in Congo, (Oxfam 2014), one of the most important actors working in development and

stabilization in that country, expresses fears about the fate of the 'sea' surrounding the 'islands of stability' (Cooper 2014). This 'sea', mostly covered by jungles, mountains and rivers, has dimensions close to the surface of Western Europe. Without roads and with the highest rates of aircraft related fatalities in the world, many of the Congolese cities are almost inaccessible, which is an important limit to the restoration of state authority. MONUSCO is unable to provide security to this huge territory. Indeed, even if the UN mission is one of the biggest missions ever deployed, it is one of the smallest relative to the size of the DRC and its population (Tull 2009).

Congo's 'sea of instability' has low population densities (of about 33 inhabitants per square kilometer) and huge natural resources, but it borders small countries with strong demographic pressures due to the lack of important natural resources and high population densities, as Rwanda or Burundi (with densities close to 400 inhabitants per square kilometer). MONUSCO has neither the mandate nor the capability to control the 10,730 kilometers of Congolese borders, and it is through these borders that the armed groups move and that the minerals fuelling the conflict are exported. Almost all of the mineral resources of the Kivus is illegally trafficked to the neighboring countries (GW 2009: 7). The Congolese Government has the primary responsibility to control these borders and assure the security in the Congolese territory (UNSC 2012) but it does not have the resources to assume this huge task.

In fact, even if more than a third of the Congolese State budget has to be funded by international donors (Zeebroeck 2009: 139) the country has an important part of the natural resources reserves in the world (SB 2010). Congo has also one of the three biggest forests and some of the largest water reserves on Earth. And, since the last oil prospections in the Great Lakes, it is considered that DRC may possess the biggest oil reserves south of the Sahara, about two-thirds of the coltan world reserves, half of the

cobalt world reserves, a third of the cassiterite world reserves, one of the fourth biggest reserves of diamonds and the biggest quantity of copper on Earth (Yawidi 2008). Congo also has gold, uranium, titanium and germanium. In all, DRC holds more than 1,100 minerals and precious metals according to the World Bank (2014). Indeed, the vast number of mining sites has impeded mapping for a single province (IA 2010: 7). Since most of the armed groups in DRC finance their activities through the exploitation of minerals (UNSC 2003) Congo seems a very good example of Paul Collier's theory of the Natural Resource Trap (Collier 2007).

To change the dynamics of this mining trap in DRC is a difficult task. During the Congo wars, the mining sector became artisanal in DRC: according to some reports, sixteen percent of Congo's population would rely today on mining in some way (SB 2010). The last example of the difficulties to change mining dynamics is the US 2010 Dodd-Frank law on conflict minerals, which requires US-listed companies to publish information about their purchases of minerals from Congo and its adjoining countries to determine whether their purchases have benefited armed groups in eastern DRC. This law has helped to reduce the involvement of armed groups in the mines of eastern DRC (Bafilemba, Mueller and Lezhnev 2014), but their void has been filled by FARDC elements, who have increased their involvement in mining minerals, taxing diggers and facilitating mineral smuggling (Global Witness 2014). Since this law has provoked a sharp decline in the prize of Congolese minerals, it has propelled millions of miners and their families deeper into poverty (Wolfe 2015).

Extreme poverty and unsatisfied basic needs are among the main grievances of the Congolese population, who have seen a regular decline in their living standards since the independence of the country. At the end of the Belgian control over Congo, the country had 140,000 kilometers of roads and streets, 300 hospitals, 40 airports, factories and refineries. Three decades later, at

the end of Mobutu's rule, only 20,000 kilometers of routes remained, and the health and education systems had almost collapsed (Van Reybrouck 2008: 408) while the purchasing power of the Congolese had been reduced to four per cent of what it was in 1960 (Van Reybrouck 2008: 402). The Congolese Wars destroyed most of the remaining infrastructure and services once provided by the State. The country's GDP has decreased about 65 per cent since the independence of the country, and in 2011, DRC had the lowest Human Development Index in the world, the highest indexes of malnutrition and some of the worst indexes in life expectancy, poverty and gender inequality (UNDP 2011).

The contrast between this extreme poverty and the country's richness in natural resources is still the object of most of the grievances of the communities, accusing their antagonists of monopolizing important positions in the Congolese State to benefit from these resources. These economic tensions associated with mineral resources will thus prevail in the 'sea of instability' but may be countered by the ripple effect of economic recovery in the 'islands of stability'. In that sense, economic recovery can be one of the most effective components of the UN stabilization strategy.

Tensions in the sea: '*le sol et le sous-sol*'

Mineral resources and extreme poverty are not the only causes of tensions in the 'sea of instability': many Congolese opine that the country's problems are due to Congo's '*sol et sous-sol*'. Aside from minerals (the '*sous-sol*'), there is another natural resource at the core of intercommunity conflicts: land (the '*sol*'). Despite the international focus on 'blood minerals' to explain the Congo conflict (UN 2014), land is probably a more important factor to explain the conflict (IA 2010), since the intercommunity conflicts existing in Congo before the colonization were due to land problems (Chretien 2000; Djugudjugu 1979: 159; Weiss 1958: 148) and not to minerals. Indeed, most of the intercommunity

conflicts in DRC are linked to identity and to an unfair access to local and provincial administrations and resources (Autesserre 2010). Among the natural resources, land, and not minerals, is the primary factor of the Congo conflict.

Most of Eastern DRC's ethnic conflicts are between agriculturalist and cattle raiser groups, whose economies use land in opposite ways. This is the case, for example, of the old antagonisms between the Hema and the Lendu in Ituri (Oga 2009), the Tutsi and the Hunde in Masisi or the Banyamulenge and Babembe in Fizi (Willame 1997), among many others. As land is associated with identity and power in Congo, the land is considered one of the key causes of the past wars, as well as a factor in the perpetuation of the Congo conflict (Huggins 2010). In that sense, we could consider the presence of foreign armed groups, such as the M23 or the FDLR, as resulting from the evolution of old tensions over land resources. These old tensions are still alive, and have increased due to the important displacement movements since the Congo wars (Paddon and Lacaille 2011: 6). The quantity of registered land conflicts in DRC is huge: in 2012 alone, the Pooled Fund managed by UNOCHA identified 355 conflicts in the small district of Ituri (covering around two per cent of the DRC area). The reason behind the number of land conflicts is the fact that in the DRC, customary, informal and statutory land-tenure systems overlap geographically. Therefore, a certain parcel of land can be claimed by different actors under different systems (RCN 2009).

The problem, thus, is not confined to a particular area of the sea of instability. To solve this peacebuilding challenge, it would be necessary to implement a land reform or, at least, to enact legislation to clarify when legal or traditional ownership rights apply (Autesserre 2010). The UN 'islands of stability', thus, cannot have a ripple effect over this factor of instability, which is also beyond MONUSCO's mandate. On the contrary, this source of tensions over the 'sea of instability' can jeopardize the UN stabilization strategy. Only the

Congolese State can solve the land problem. In the meantime, the micro-level conflicts of land, identity and power will continue to be transferred to the 'inter-community' level (Huggins 2010) and, from this, to the national level (Autesserre 2010), enflaming the Congo conflict.

Something similar could be said about the internationalization of the conflict: the tensions at the intercommunity and national levels in Congo will continue to be transferred to the international level, nourishing the tensions in Central Africa, which are secondary and not primary conflict drivers. The historic tensions between Hema, Tutsi and Banyamulenge cattle raisers against agriculturalist communities were among the main causes of the Congo wars and are still today an important factor to explain the involvement of Rwanda in the Congo conflict. These intercommunity tensions are not new: when Henry Morton Stanley, the first European to cross the Congo basin, arrived in Ituri in 1888, the Hema and the Lendu were at war (Stanley 1993). Since that time, clashes between the Hema and the Lendu have been reported on more than ten occasions before the more recent Ituri war. This is only one example of the dozens of protracted intercommunity conflicts existing in Eastern DRC which contribute to conflict at a higher level, covering the 'sea of instability', where violence has become common practice (Beaudoin 2013; Ramsbotham 2005).

A Story of Violence

Since Stanley wrote of his expeditions to Central Africa in his books *Through the Dark Continent* and *In Darkest Africa*, many other authors have presented central Africa as a place of darkness, evil and extreme suffering. Joseph Conrad novelized the horror of the colonization in the *Heart of Darkness* and Hélène Tournaire described a chaotic Congo Crisis during the sixties in her *Le Livre Noir du Congo*. For many Westerners, the narratives of extreme and irrational violence presented by Western media about the Rwandan Genocide and the Congo Wars reinforced the impression that Central Africa was a place of violence and darkness. But these narratives rarely presented the causes of the conflict and its historic evolution. Conversely, authors willing to demystify these narratives have often focused their analyses on material conflict drivers, omitting behavioral dynamics that perpetuate intergenerational cycles of violence.

In Congo, as in other colonized areas, violence increased exponentially during the European colonization. Indeed, Congo´s colonization was the most painful in Africa: the journalist Adam Hochschild (1998) calculated that the regime set up by the Belgian King killed between six and ten million Congolese. While it is difficult to know how many people were assassinated and how many died because of the diseases brought by the Europeans, it has been estimated that the Congolese population halved between 1880 and 1925 (Ndaywel 2008: 318). When King Leopold II transferred his personal African kingdom to the Belgian State before his death, this installed a type of apartheid system in the Belgian Congo, continuing through other means the tradition of structural violence (Ndayewl 2008). The colony became further independent through 'the Congolese crisis', when about 100,000 people died in a chaotic civil war that included ethnic conflicts, military mutinies, secessionist movements, a Cold War proxy war between the United States and the Soviet Union, the assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, the deployment of ONUC (the first UN mission to the country) and the death of the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld (Tournaire and Bouteaud 1963). Mobutu managed to reunify the country, but he did it through violent means and brought Congo to bankruptcy and collapse (Wrong 2001). After Mobutu's rule, the deadliest wars since World War II left the country with more than thirty armed groups, which continue harassing, killing and raping civilians today (UN 2014).

Jason Sterns (2012) estimates that between 300,000 and 400,000 people (around five per cent of the Congolese population) have

passed through the ranks of an armed group, the national army or the police. This culture of soldiering has reinforced the historic dynamics of violence in DRC, which has been happening in most of the 'sea of instability'. It would be wrong, thus, to focus conflict analysis on interethnic tensions in mineral-rich areas of the Great Lakes. The Congolese dynamics of violence, which today seem concentrated in Eastern Congo, have erupted in other parts of the country in different historic moments: after the independence there were clashes between the Balua and the Luluba in the southern region of Kasai and between the Bakongo and the Bangala in Western Congo (Tournaire 1963). During the Congo Wars there were massacres involving Tutsi, Hutu, Hema and dozens of Bantu communities from Eastern DRC (UN 2010). Today new clashes have erupted in southern Congo between Pygmy and Balubakat communities (UN 2014).

It would be also a mistake to consider that this violence is only interethnic, since it is committed in many other different ways and contexts in all the 'sea of instability'. The last example of intraethnic tensions was the struggle within the M23 between its Kifuafua (Sultani Makenga) and Kimbelembele (Bosco Ntaganda) factions (Vogel 2014: 3). An important part of the recent violence has been gender-based: with thousands of reported rapes per year, DRC was labeled by the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict as the 'rape capital of the world' (BBC 2010). Physical violence is also closely linked to the political sphere, as political leaders maintain armed groups in order to assure their political or economic survival (Hoebeke, Boshoff and Vlassenroot 2009: 119). Violence is a common dynamic in the day-to-day Congolese life: between neighbors, within the families, in a society plunged into a cycle of violence. The Congolese Professor Jean Paul Yawidi considers that destruction and refusal of the Other are common features of the present Congolese mentality (Yawidi 2008).

To stop, or at least attenuate, these dynamics of violence, a bottom up process of conflict resolution from the local level (Autesserre 2010: 263) and a process of national reforms to decrease structural violence would be necessary. However, the UN 'islands of stability' strategy neither contributes to the national reforms nor includes local conflict resolution approaches. MONUSCO, as the rest of UN peacekeeping missions, does not have the mandate or the capability to address most of the local conflicts in the countries where it is deployed. There is only one way in which MONUSCO can contribute to reduce this violence: by decreasing structural violence at the national level through its support to the restoration of state authority. However, as it will be analyzed in the following points, MONUSCO can only support this work, as the Congolese state has the primary responsibility to implement these reforms.

The Lack of Monopoly on Violence

According to Max Weber's definition of the State as a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory, there would be no state in DRC. Since the end of the Congo wars, the number of existing active armed groups in DRC has never been under thirty. Although some armed groups existed in Congo since independence, as Laurent-Désiré Kabila's *Parti de la Révolution Populaire* (PRP), most of the Congolese militias were created during the Second Congo War (Vlassenroot and Van Acker 2001). The first Mai Mai groups emerged as local defense groups to defend their communities from the external aggression of the RCD movement, but their targets moved progressively to other armed groups from historical antagonist communities. This was the case of the Lendu *Front des Nationalistes et Intégrationnistes* (FNI), which fought the Hema *Union des Patriotes Congolais* (UPC) in Ituri or the Congolese Hutu *Coalition des patriotes résistants congolais* (PARECO), antagonist of the Tutsi CNDP in North Kivu, among many others. The national and foreign armed groups resulted from the Congo Wars soon began to control mining sites

to finance their activities (GB 2009) and often became the only representatives of any authority structure in their controlled areas (Vlassenroot and Van Acker 2001). The armed groups remaining in DRC are thus a consequence of the Congo Wars as well as one of the secondary causes of the perpetuation of the present Congo conflict.

The problem of proliferating armed groups could have been solved through the national program of DDR. However, the weak position of the Government during the negotiations with the armed groups accepted their integration in the national army, which finally provided incentives for the proliferation of new militias (Stearns, Verweijen and Eriksson 2013). Because of this, today it is commonly accepted that military pressure is needed to strengthen the position of the Government in the disarmament of these groups.

Now, as insecurity is one of the most important grievances of the communities, the existence of armed groups in the 'sea of instability' facilitates the continuing mushrooming of new armed groups, which counters any ripple effect coming from the islands of stability. Unfortunately, MONUSCO, until the deployment of the FIB, has not had the strength needed to successfully tackle armed groups, and the FIB does not have the military capacity to tackle all of them at the same time (Vogel 2014). This task should be ensured by the security forces of the state, which has the primary responsibility for ensuring security in its territory (UN 2014).

Nevertheless, despite this responsibility, the national army, the FARDC, is not only incapable of ensuring this security but, paradoxically, is also responsible for an important part of the insecurity reigning in the 'sea of instability'. In fact, after the 2002 peace agreements, it was decided that the new national army would be made up from the different factions involved in the Second Congo War. Today, this army of former rebels suffers from lack of equipment and training, ill-discipline, weak command structures and diversion of the soldiers' salaries (ECI 2012). As these soldiers often find themselves without food or salaries

during the military operations, it is not surprising that the FARDC 'continue posing a considerable threat to the civilian population rather than protecting them'(ECI 2012: 4). The FARDC is responsible for a substantial part of the lootings and rapes committed in DRC. In areas not controlled by militias, 'the FARDC is often the single greatest threat to the Congolese' (Paddon and Lacaille 2011: 6).

The Spoiler State

Assuring the salaries of the soldiers would be a first step to end the insecurity created by the FARDC. To systematically pay these soldiers, they must first be identified and registered, but there are not clear figures about the number of soldiers in the National Army or about the budget dedicated to defense in Congo, as was the case during Mobutu's rule (Wrong 2001: 220), which facilitates diversions of military funds. The European Union Security Sector Reform Mission and the UN attempted to register all the Congolese soldiers in order to assure their salaries, but these efforts have been undermined on several occasions by state representatives. According to several organizations working in the field, the Security System Reform (SSR) in Congo, has been jeopardized by army commanders and government officials (Oxfam 2012: 35; IA 2012: 32; ECI 2012: 9; Trefon 2010). It seems, thus, 'that the systematic organization of insecurity is preferred to the organization of security' (Hoebeke, Boshoff, Vlassenroot 2009).

The problem of soldiers without salaries, again, is not new in Congo. At the end of Mobutu's rule over Zaire, when the economy began its collapse, Mobutu had asked his soldiers 'to live from the land', to earn a living by using their weapons (Wrong 2005: 45). This idea was significantly very similar to King Leopold's set up of his *Force Publique*, which mutilated the locals and burnt entire villages to enforce the rubber quotas of the colonial administrators (Ndaywel 2008: 314).

Since the national army is incapable of ensuring security in Congo. its reform is, for stabilization purposes, probably the most important. But there are also other important

reforms aimed at stabilizing the country that have never been seriously undertaken by the State. One example is the reform of the judiciary. The reform of the justice system is key for the restoration of the state authority. However, 'despite widespread impunity and a weak justice system, less than 0.1 per cent of the state budget in 2011 was allocated to the justice ministry' (IA 2012: 35). Another example is the decentralization process, intended to appease local tensions and to help restore state authority (Liegois 2009: 70). Nevertheless, even if the decentralization process was foreseen in the Constitution of 2005, it has not yet been implemented. A similar problem is the holding of local elections, expected in the country since 2006. The Government has also failed to fulfill most of its electoral promises, such as the important *5 Chantiers* plan. Finally, international NGOs and think tanks have also expressed their concerns about the Government's will to support the ISSSS. In 2011, after three years of preparation with international partners, not one of the planned 305 judicial and corrections officers had been deployed to the ISSSS areas (Paddon and Lacaille 2011: 16), and fifty five percent of police elements deployed along these areas were not on the government payroll (Oxfam 2012: 3).

Unfortunately, MONUSCO, which has been mandated to support the reforms and the restoration of the state authority, does not have the mandate to manage these processes. Nevertheless, the contrast between MONUSCO's lack of capacity to manage these reforms and the strategic importance of their implementation is vast. The obstacles to these reforms are important factors of perpetuation of insecurity, human rights abuses and impunity in the 'sea of instability'. Since these unaccomplished reforms are fuelling the Congo conflict, they will continue to counter any ripple effect emanating from the 'islands of stability'.

One question remaining is why MONUSCO continues following a stabilization strategy that has been unsuccessful in the past and that seems not to answer the most important factors perpetuating instability in DRC. According to Severine Autesserre (2009) this is due to the 'dominant international peacebuilding culture' framing international interveners' analyses of the causes of the Congolese conflict. Other analyses from studies centers and organizations working in the field agree on the international community's misconceptions about the Congo conflict. For International Alert, these wrong perceptions could be based on the incorrect 'assumption that the Congolese state is weak and must be strengthened', underestimating that the Congolese state, since its creation, has been patrimonial, clientelistic and predatory (IA 2012: 48; Trefon 2010), maintaining the 'patrimonial and predatory method of governance employed in the Congo since it was first created by King Leopold II . . . The primary structural factor of instability in DRC is the prevailing method of governance employed by state institutions and Congolese politicians' which could be due to two factors: corruption and ethnically driven political competition (IA 2012: 7).

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, DRC is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. The origins of this practice could be seen in the violent system of exploitation of natural resources organized by King Leopold, which transformed the Congo basin into one of the most productive colonies in the world (Hochschild 2007). The dynamics of corruption continued with Mobutu, who fled the country with a personal fortune surpassing the amount of Zaire´s enormous debt (Wrong 2005), and persist today: Global Witness (2015) investigations have recently shown how vast oil blocks have been sold to companies linked to friends of the Congolese President, whose fortune has been estimated at fifteen billion dollars (Miniter 2014). However, corruption alone does not seem enough to explain the boycotts of Government officials to statebuilding, since a stronger control over the state could facilitate corruption. The remaining factor is, for International Alert, the 'ethnically driven political competition'.

Fragmentation Dynamics

Ethnicity is an undeniably important dynamic in Congolese politics: in the 2012 National Elections there were 19,000 candidates from 450 parties (Kavanagh 2012), which were mostly ethnic. In DRC there are between 300 and 500 ethnic groups, divided in clans, 'hills' and families, originated from the division of previous ethnic groups as, for example, the Gegere (or northern Hema) or the Ngiti (or southern Lendu) in Ituri (Thiry 2004). This phenomenon is known in DRC as '*collinisme*', a kind of tribalism at the scale of the hill. Humanitarian workers in the field, for example, are used to deal with Congolese communities that have never visited the top of their hills, where another ethnic group lives. The historical tensions between communities (IA 2009), which existed before the colonization, were aggravated by the practice of dividing and conquering exerted by the Belgian administrators and Mobutu, who controlled large territories by supporting minoritarian ethnic groups, such as the Tutsi in North Kivu (Willame 1997: 53) or the Hema in Ituri (Asadho 1999). Mobutu also applied this practice to the army, impeding a unified military command that he perceived as a threat to his power (Wrong 2005: 218). This practice of divide and rule is still a common practice today, and would be, according to Paddon and Lacaille (2011), one of the reasons behind the state resistance to reform.

The practice of divide and rule seems to have broken the Congolese society beyond ethnic lines, creating a country in a continuous process of fragmentation. Territorially, for example, there have been four provincial secessionist movements since the independence: in the Kivus and Ituri during the Congo Wars and in Katanga and South Kasai during the 'Congolese Crisis' after the independence. But fragmentation goes far beyond the provincial level. In the North Kivu province, for example, the Hunde have a conflict with the Banyarwanda, but the Banyarwanda are also divided into Hutu and Tutsi, fighting each other. The former province of Kivu was divided, under Mobutu's rule, into the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema. But the people of South Kivu consider their southern part as *Sud Sud Kivu*. Something similar occurs in North Kivu, where its people talk about the *Grand Nord* and the *Petit Nord*. And in the *Petit Nord* we find the Baindru and the Nande, these being divided into Southern Nande and Northern Nande, which are also divided into Baswagha, Bahira, Bapakombe and Batangi.

Similar fragmentation dynamics happened with the rebel movements of the Congo wars. Tensions in the rebel army RCD created two branches: the RCD-G, based in the city of Goma and the RCD-K, based in the city of Kisangani. New tensions in the RCD-K created the *RCD National* and later the *RCD-Original*, the *RCD Authentique*, the *RCD-Movement de Liberation* and the *RCD-Congo* (UN 2010). In Ituri, a branch of the RCD-K split into the *Union des Patriotes Congolaises* (UPC), a Hema Gegere militia. The Lendu created their own armed group, the *Front Nationalise et Intégratif* (FNI). But new tensions erupted within these groups. The Southern Lendu (Ngiti) created the *Force de Résistance Patriotique en Ituri* (FRPI) and the Southern Hema, who disagreed with the Hema Gegere's UPC, created the *Parti pour l'Unité et la Sauvegarde de l'Intégrité du Congo* (PUSIC) (Oga 2009).

However, even if the practice of divide and rule has reinforced the dynamics of fragmentation in the country, we should not think that it is the only origin of this fragmentation. The primary cause of this dynamic seems to be the lack of cultural and political unity in DRC, a country of sheer dimensions 'encouraging division over unity' (Paddon and Lacaille 2011: 5). Historically, the country's borders were delineated by Leopold II, who never visited his private colony, created only for economic interests. Moreover, the subsequent Belgian administration of the colony, where racial restrictions were commonplace, did not create a sense of unity. A Congolese intellectual community would have been useful to promote this idea but, at the end of the Belgian rule, only sixteen

Congolese were university graduates (Van Reybrouck 2008: 288). Finally, Mobutu, who considered himself the 'pilgrim of national unity' (Michel 1989: 94), maintained he was creating a sense of unity through his politics of *Zaïrisation*, intended to 'reconquer the Zairien soul'. However, considering himself an 'uncontested and not replaceable leader', built his 'zairisation' on the cult of his personality, even changing his name into 'Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga', which means 'Mobutu, the all powerful warrior who because of endurance and will to win, will go from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake'. Instead of creating a sense of unity, Mobutu divided communities and Government officials to maintain his power. As a result, when Zaire collapsed and the 'warrior' fled Zaire, the politics of 'zairisation' and unity were seen as a masquerade sustaining a kleptocracy.

In conclusion, due to the lack of unity and the historical phenomenon of fragmentation, it is difficult to talk about a unified state in DRC. Existing parallel administrations and chains of command in the army continue in Congo, resulting from political, economical or customary elites fighting for their self-preservation at the national, provincial, local and community level (Paddon and Lacaille 2011: 6). It is thus difficult to imagine how MONUSCO's mandate of restoration of state authority can be implemented when the state, corrupted and fragmented, is the main spoiler of its reform. Nor can the islands of stability have a ripple effect of stabilization over this issue. On the contrary, the lack of state reforms will probably impede the survival, or even the creation, of these 'islands'.

The Congo Trap

It is difficult to imagine a stabilisation strategy for DRC. The Congo conflict is a deadlock composed of many processes nourishing each other. A violent history has perpetuated old intercommunity antagonisms, dating from before the colonization, to which new intercommunity tensions have been added,

internationalizing the conflict. The old struggle for land has escalated due to the overlapping of several land-tenure systems and the pressures originated from malnutrition and hunger. Minerals have incentivized fighting and violence among the self-defense groups, originally aimed at defending their communities from their antagonists or the predatory national army. The deadlock is cemented by the fragmentation of the entity that could provide security and reforms: the state, in which different elites compete in a sort of prisoner's dilemma, impeding statebuilding. The huge dimensions of each of these factors make the Congo conflict 'one of the most complex and intricate environments ever faced by a peacekeeping mission', as a delegation of the UN Security Council stated (Neethling 2011). It is also possibly one of the oldest present conflicts, as we could consider its beginning in the Congo Crisis during the sixties or, since most of the its root causes were present at the colonial times, in the establishment of King Leopold's Congo Free State.

MONUSCO is, undoubtedly, doing important work to alleviate human suffering and contain the Congo conflict. However, MONUSCO's mandate, resources and stabilization strategy are not enough to break the deadlock of the conflict and stabilize the country. The last stabilization strategy, the 'islands of stability', may bring some security and economic recovery to the chosen areas, but these improvements will be counterbalanced by the turbulent 'sea of instability'. The huge dimensions of most of the dynamics in this 'sea' would be enough to defend the likely failure of the UN strategy. However, the bottleneck of the 'Spoiler State', beyond UN control, transforms this likely failure into a certain one.

When the UN organized the 2006 elections, it legitimized the 'Spoiler State', falling into a trap and becoming a part of the conflict. The Congo Trap is the result of a wrong peacebuilding strategy, in which some of the mechanisms set up, such as a democratically

elected Government, jeopardizes the subsequent phases of the peacebuilding process. In that context, alternatives existed: an Interim Administration Mission, for example, as in Kosovo or Timor Leste (Lemay-Hebert 2011), may have facilitated some state reforms in DRC before the organization of elections, avoiding the Congo Trap. The Congo Trap is a situation in which the UN can neither leave, because of the threat it would pose to the international peace and security, nor solve, as it has been argued in this article. As a result, it may be too late to find a solution for DRC with the present UN peacekeeping framework and tools. But, at least, lessons learned should be taken for future UN peace operations.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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