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Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes in Africa



MEDIA MONITORING

27 February 2015

Africa: Monusco - Kobbler's Likely Departure Signals Post-FIB Era for Peacekeeping in Congo

Source: AllAfrica.com

ANALYSIS

By Timo Mueller, freelance researcher in eastern Congo

25 February 2015 - As we enter another critical year for the DRC, the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO) is going to lose most of its political and military leadership, including its Special Representative (SRSG) Martin Kobler, its two Deputy SRSGs Abdallah Wafy and Moustapha Soumaré, and most likely its Force Commander Dos Santos Cruz.

As election-related tensions are rising and operations against the FDLR rebels looming, changing the leadership of MONUSCO is going to make it more difficult for it to play a positive role for peace and development in 2015, especially since the momentum of 2013 and early 2014 has been lost.

Last man standing

The first to leave the ship was Abdallah Wafy, Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law and Operations in eastern Congo. He will assume the position of Ambassador of Niger to the UN. During his two and a half year tenure, General Wafy was a well-respected official on relatively good terms with the government.

Charged with overseeing humanitarian affairs for MONUSCO, Moustapha Soumaré will leave for South Sudan this month to serve as the UN Deputy Special Representative for

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political affairs. Soumaré, who is Malian, has previously worked with missions in Liberia, Rwanda, Benin, Mali and at the UN secretariat in New York.

Chief of mission Martin Kobler has recently been nominated as a candidate to replace Valerie Amos as head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). While it is unlikely that he will get the position in light of unease from the humanitarian community about his role in 'militarizing' the MONUSCO mission, it is clear that he wants to get out in four or five months. Kobler is well respected inside the UN and having served in other hardship places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, may be eyeing a position in New York.

Lastly, we should expect General Carlos Alberto Dos Santos Cruz of Brazil to leave this summer. He became the Force Commander of MONUSCO in May 2013 and with more than 40 years of military experience, including as Deputy Commander for Land Operations of the Brazilian army and as Force Commander for the UN mission in Haiti, he strikes many as an ambitious and committed commander, but one that is increasingly frustrated.

Achievements and Shortcomings

In 2013, the Congolese government faced one of its most powerful adversaries, the rebel group M23. Allegedly supported by Rwanda and Uganda, the group had taken the bold step of occupying Goma in late 2012. Embarrassed that it had lost the provincial capital to the rebels, MONUSCO had to reassert its authority as the only 'sheriff in town.' After months of deliberations, the international community eventually agreed to send in a 3,000-men force - known as the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) - to accompany the Congolese army into battle against the M23 and other armed groups. Coinciding with the arrival of the force, MONUSCO's political and military leadership was reconfigured.

With the new head of mission Martin Kobler and his Force Commander Dos Santos Cruz, a refreshing wind of change blew through the corridors of MONUSCO. They got to work immediately, eager to turn things around. Together with Deputy Special Representative Abdallah Wafy, MONUSCO had committed personnel ready to take charge and lead Blue Helmets into uncharted terrain. Within a few months, the leadership scored a number of important wins. Following the crushing defeat over M23 in late 2013, more than 4,000 combatants from other armed groups came out of the bush and surrendered. After 14 years of trial-and-error interventions in the Congo, there was reason for hope. The UN was back. And never before had the Congolese army shown such discipline and fighting spirit in the face of a very powerful adversary. The Congolese population, army and MONUSCO alike were euphoric.

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Riding out the momentum in early 2014, the leadership supported the army in taking on other armed groups, including the ADF, APCLS, and NDC, and relocated most of the mission from the west to the east.

2014: the honeymoon sours

Following the defeat of M23, euphoria gradually gave way to reality. On the front line, problems began to emerge. While the international community hand-picked the FDLR as its next target, the army decided otherwise, drawing the mission into combat against the ADF while sidelining the mission in operational planning. While the operations were successful in dislodging the rebel bases, the group's leadership remains intact. A series of machete attacks killing more than 300 hundred late last year underscore the continuing volatility of the Grand Nord.

A month into fighting the ADF, the mission stumbled into yet another fight against the local defense group the APCLS. Unable to resist orders from the army and fully understand the context of the fighting, MONUSCO's relationship with the local communities soured in light of these confrontations, with many feeling betrayed and insecure. The mission, however, presents the fight as a successful demonstration of the FIB. "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail," a senior UN official admitted to me.

Throughout 2014, it became evident that the Congolese government had no interest in actually seizing the opportunity to initiate a credible disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program for the thousands of rebels that had surrendered following the demise of M23. Worse, it left more than a 100 men, women, and children to starve in make-shift camps later that year as reported by Human Rights Watch.

On the political front, Kobler slowly lost much of his hard-won capital. In the summer of 2014, the government publicly scolded him for initiating roundtables with the Congolese opposition and months later expelled his human rights Chief Scott Campbell for reporting on abuse by the Congolese security forces. All the while, progress stalled in implementing the regional peace agreement known as Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and is likely to lose further momentum in 2015 with the announced departure of the United States Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Russ Feingold.

Unable to deliver on its promise to focus on the FDLR, MONUSCO was then outmaneuvered by the very countries that contribute to the Force Intervention Brigade, particularly Tanzania and South Africa. It became increasingly clear that Africanizing a mission with soldiers from neighbouring countries might make for a better fighting force but comes with its own baggage of geopolitical interests. The Southern African

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Development Community - of which Tanzania and South Africa are part - was heavily involved in brokering a six-month reprise, a decision that didn't just anger MONUSCO, but bore no substantive results.

In stunning developments a few weeks later, the Congolese government announced it would launch an assault on the FDLR based on a new military plan (after spending months deliberating over joint planning with MONUSCO). Surprised and even clueless, the mission initially struggled to get its hands on the new plan and contemplate its next move. Complicating matters, the Congolese army handpicked Generals Fall Sikabwe and Bruno Mandevu to lead the battle against the rebels. Blacklisted by the UN for serious human rights abuses, MONUSCO cannot partake in the operations unless they are removed. For weeks, the mission tried, via back-channel negotiations and public pressure, to persuade the government to remove the Generals, a plea that fell on deaf ears. On 15th February, President Kabila summoned twenty foreign ambassadors as well as Martin Kobler to reprimand them for interfering in what he believes are sovereign matters. Subsequently, the Congolese government rejected any support from the peacekeepers. Some analysts believe the Congolese government - unwilling to confront the FDLR in earnest - deliberately appointed these Generals to prevent any cooperation with MONUSCO. Operations are yet to commence.

Looking Ahead

Despite the challenges of 2014 and 2015, Kobler, Cruz, and Wafy will be largely remembered for their positive track record. Much of what went wrong last year is out of their hands. MONUSCO does not have the political clout many might wish and without the buy-in of the Congolese government, there is only so much outsiders can achieve. And right now the Congolese government is consumed with politicking for a series of local, provincial and presidential elections.

In many ways, it might be best for Kobler to leave. As important a force for change he has been to the mission, in the eyes of the government he is an over-ambitious figure. While one should be careful what one wishes for, a new SRSG - some suggest Leila Zerrougui of Algeria - might have a better chance at pursuing good offices and exerting positive influence in a country with another crisis in the making.

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UN mission upbeat about resolving differences with DR Congo government

Source: Radio Okapi

25 February 2015

[Presenter] The United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo [Monusco] is said to have been in contact with the DR Congo government to request the DR Congo president to reverse his decision renouncing the UN mission's help and participation in the fight against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda in eastern DR Congo. Though it acknowledges the DR Congo's freedom to carry out any military operations on its territory, Monusco, however, regrets not taking part in the military operations which are an integral part of its mandate. This was expressed by Abdallah Wafy, the UN deputy special representative of the UN secretary general in the DR Congo, charged with operations in eastern DR Congo in today's weekly press conference simultaneously held in Goma and Kinshasa through video conference.

[Wafy] Regarding military operations against the FDLR, we are in contact with the DR Congo government authorities to create conditions for the resumption of the political dialogue and why not to request the president to reconsider his decision because once again, we are convinced that political authorities have the good will to launch the military operations.

We are somewhat frustrated; it is our mandate to support them. Due to some differences which we hope to quickly resolve, we are not associated with the military operations against the FDLR. We regret this; we are sorry. We are, however, not disheartened. In the days to come, thanks to political dialogue that we have initiated, we will not only be satisfied with the FARDC's [DRCONGO Armed Forces] progress, but that victory will also be with the Monusco's participation.

Why was the UN sidelined in "joint" DRC operation against rebels?

Humanitarian news and analysis

Source: IRIN

Goma, 26 February 2015 - This week, a long-awaited military offensive began against a Rwandan rebel group based in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. It had been planned as a joint operation between Congolese government forces and a unique

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combat unit of United Nations peacekeepers. But by the time the gunfire began on Tuesday, the partnership had broken down and the UN had been side-lined.

On Thursday, the UN mission in DRC, known as MONUSCO, tweeted: “The #FARDC [DRC army] is carrying out the operation alone after rejecting support from #MONUSCO.” How did it come to this?

Politics and human rights

Two UN Security Council resolutions as well as regional political groupings called for the DRC’s army (FARDC) and the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) of the MONUSCO peacekeeping force to take “decisive military action” against the rebel Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) if the group failed to surrender and disarm by 2 January, 2015. The FIB is the only UN force globally with a mandate to go on the offensive against rebel groups.

A week after that deadline expired with little sign of compliance, Martin Kobler, the head of MONUSCO and the UN secretary-general’s special representative in DRC, said he was “very impressed by the high level of preparedness and the team spirit that reigns between the FARDC and the MONUSCO. I am confident about the engagement of the troops in the upcoming operations against the FDLR.”

But no operations began.

Then on 26 January, DRC President Joseph Kabila announced a military reshuffle that saw General Fall Sikabwe take command of the 34th military region, which includes the areas where FDLR is active. Kabila also put General Bruno Mandevu in charge of the operation against the FDLR.

Because these two generals reportedly appear on a MONUSCO “red list” on account of human rights abuses allegedly committed by units under their command, the UN reconsidered its role. The nominations “presented a real problem for us,” the head of UN peacekeeping, Hervé Ladsous said on 2 February.

According to several media reports, the UN called for these nominations to be reversed, something the government flatly rejected.

The #FARDC is carrying out the operation alone after rejecting support from #MONUSCO. #DRC

Monusco claimed that the FARDC rejected their backing

No details of the two generals’ alleged involvement in human rights abuses have been released and several senior FARDC officers told IRIN they were puzzled by Mandevu’s

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inclusion on the red list. Some noted that MONUSCU had worked with Sikabwe before, albeit under a waiver of his red list status.

Neighbouring Rwanda, whose government the FDLR would like to oust, accused the UN of politically-motivated prevarication.

The collapse of the DRC-UN partnership became more evident on 29 January, when a new plan for the anti-FDLR operation presented by chief of staff Didier Etumba excluded the FIB entirely, with MONUSCO elements providing only logistical support.

There are at least three theories circulating about this breakdown in relations. The first is the FARDC is not really dedicated to neutralising FDLR, the second is it doesn't want to share credit for an eventual victory. The third is that the breakdown is part of DRC's simmering discontent with the UN mission and the wider international community.

This third theory was lent credence by a long and indignant government communiqué issued on 16 February, a day after Kabila upbraided foreign ambassadors for meddling in the sovereign affairs of the DRC.

There is a long history of collusion and alliances between the FARDC and the FDLR notably during the years of civil war between 1998 and 2003. Now, key players in Kinshasa are divided between doves who favour a negotiated settlement, hawks pushing for an all-out military assault and a third group who view the FDLR as a useful bulwark against regional threats and therefore worth keeping in place.

The FDLR itself, which has no more than 1,500 fighters, is also beset by internal ideological divisions, especially between leader Sylvestre Mudacumura, operational commander Pacifique Ntawuguka and Chairman Victor Byiringiro.

So far, the FARDC operation, in the Uvira territory of South Kivu province, appears to have met with little resistance. (Most of the FDLR are based in neighbouring North Kivu). As widely predicted, civilians have left some areas, notably the settlement of Kanyovu, to escape any clashes.

Since the start of the current offensive, MONUSCO has repeatedly tweeted about absence of any abuses such as looting or mistreatment of civilians by FARDC.

And in perhaps another sign of rapprochement, MONUSCO reported on a joint mission by its personnel and government officials to the combat zone to raise awareness about the needs of people displaced by the operation.

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Offensive contre les FDLR: l'ONU revient sur ses pas

Source: VOA

27 février 2015 - L'armée congolaise a repris un groupe de villages aux FDLR alors que les Nations Unies annoncent des contacts avec le gouvernement afin de reprendre leur soutien aux opérations contre les rebelles hutus rwandais au Sud-Kivu déclenchées mardi.

Dans le groupe de villages reconquis dans l'offensive des Forces armées de la RDC contre les rebelles hutus rwandais, il y a Mulenge, très connu à cause du nom lié à l'ethnie de tutsi congolais.

Des officiers de l'armée congolaise ont révélé à l'AFP qu'il n'y avait plus des combats des Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) dans ces centres mais que les combats se poursuivaient plutôt dans les grandes forêts où les éléments FDLR se sont retranchés, se concentrant dans la forêt de Kitavu-Kambegere.

Un député d'Uvira, Justin Bitkwira, contacté par la VOA, a confirmé la situation sur le terrain.

Pendant ce temps, les Nations unies qui conditionnait leur soutien à l'offensive par le retrait de deux officiers accusés de graves crimes au commandement de l'opération de l'armée congolaise, fait demi-tour.

Le représentant spécial-adjoint du secrétaire général de l'Onu chargé des opérations dans l'Est de la RDC, Abdallah Wafy, a annoncé que les Nations Unies étaient en contact avec les autorités congolaises pour créer les conditions d'une reprise du dialogue politique et pourquoi pas, pour solliciter auprès du président de la République qu'il puisse reconsidérer sa position.

Les troupes régulières ont déclenché mardi, sans l'appui des Casques bleus, une offensive au Sud-Kivu contre les FDLR, dont des chefs sont accusés d'avoir participé au génocide contre les Tutsi en 1994 au Rwanda, qui fit quelque 800.000 morts selon l'ONU.

La Monusco estime à 1.400, le nombre des combattants FDLR encore actifs en RDC.

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Vers une invasion « ouverte et autorisée » de la RDC par les armées du Rwanda et de l'Ouganda?

Source: Le Potentiel (DRC)

Par Emmanuel Neretse

26 février 2015 - Dans le cadre d'un plan de démanteler les FDRL à l'Est de la RDC, des manœuvres sont en cours pour remplacer la MONUSCO par l'EASF, une force armée sous la coupe de Kagame et Museveni.

Au cours, d'une conférence de presse tenue le 21 février 2015 à Kigali en marge de la visite du ministre allemand des Affaires étrangères, la ministre rwandaise des Affaires étrangères a fait une déclaration qui ne devrait pas passer inaperçue. En effet, Louise Mushikiwabo a affirmé que la MONUSCO, qui coûte des millions de dollars par an, reste inefficace notamment en étant incapable de démanteler la rébellion hutu des FDLR.

Pour elle, il serait temps de remplacer la MONUSCO par une autre force qui serait plus efficace dans l'éradication des FDLR.

On notera d'abord que cette déclaration a été faite à l'occasion de la toute première visite d'un ministre des Affaires étrangères allemand au Rwanda. Quand on sait que l'Allemagne est très impliquée (on ne sait pour quel intérêt) dans la chasse et la neutralisation des réfugiés hutu où qu'ils soient, on ne peut que prendre cet avertissement au sérieux.

L'on sait en effet que l'Allemagne a arrêté et garde en prison depuis des années les leaders politiques des FDLR pour soi-disant les crimes qu'ils auraient commis en RDC alors que certains n'y ont jamais mis les pieds. Leur seul crime aux yeux des autorités allemandes est de se déclarer ouvertement opposants au régime dictatorial installé au Rwanda en 1994.

L'on se rappellera ensuite que c'est un diplomate allemand, Martin Kobler, qui est le patron de la MONUSCO en RDC et que celui-ci ne jure que par l'anéantissement des réfugiés hutu vivant à l'Est de la RDC qu'il assimile tous aux FDLR, un mouvement politico-militaire étiqueté de « terroriste » par Kigali.

Il semble donc que L. Mushikiwabo, en tandem avec Kampala, confiante dans le feu vert des superpuissances pour envahir ouvertement la RDC, soit en train de préparer l'opinion et de baliser le chemin médiatique et diplomatique en attendant le jour « J ».

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Antécédents

Ce ne serait pas la première fois que ces bras armés des Superpuissances dans la région depuis plus de 25 ans sous un prétexte apparemment légitime et banal soient mis à contribution pour asseoir les objectifs stratégiques de leurs maîtres.

Ainsi : en 1996, sous prétexte de démanteler les camps de l'Est du Zaïre dont ils disaient être contrôlés par des « génocidaires », l'Armée Patriotique Rwandaise a servi d'exécutant pour chasser le maréchal Mobutu au pouvoir comme en avaient décidé ces superpuissances.

De même de 1998 à environ 2003, les armées rwandaise et ougandaise, sous prétexte de défendre les minorités ethniques apparentées à leurs populations, ont occupé et exploité l'Est de la RDC par le truchement des rébellions créées et soutenues par ces pays : RCD, RCD-Goma, CNCD, M23...

Prétextes en or

Pour le prochain coup, le prétexte est tout trouvé et est bien médiatisé que ce soit pour le Rwanda ou pour l'Ouganda. Le Rwanda de Paul Kagame est parvenu à faire admettre aux décideurs du monde qu'un mouvement dénommé « FDLR » est une organisation terroriste et qu'il serait à la base de l'insécurité à l'Est de la RDC et dans toute la région.

La force de conviction du régime rwandais est d'autant plus incompréhensible que même les personnes physiques ou morales qui côtoient ces FDLR tous les jours savent que ces combattants ne font que protéger les réfugiés hutu estimés par le HCR et la RDC à près de 250.000 âmes, qu'ils ne réclament rien d'autre que de rentrer dans leur pays en toute dignité et jouir de leurs droits politiques, et qu'ils vivent en bons termes avec les populations congolaises...

Non, même ces ONG, ces Groupes d'Experts de l'ONU, ces officiers de la MONUSCO, qui tous savent que les FDLR aujourd'hui estimés à moins de 1500 hommes, mal équipés, ne constitueraient en aucun cas une menace pour un quelconque pays et encore moins pour la région, n'osent pas démentir Kigali de peur de s'attirer les foudres de ses puissants protecteurs.

C'est ainsi que l'organisation FDLR continue à être agitée comme un épouvantail mais sans que personne ne se pose de questions sur sa nature, son objectif, sa vraie force et ses capacités.

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Une nouvelle donne qui a brouillé les cartes

En 2012, une nouvelle rébellion tutsi est créée par Kigali sur les cendres de l'ancienne dite CNCD dont le leader, le tutsi rwando-congolais Laurent Nkunda, avait trouvé refuge au Rwanda quelques mois auparavant.

Ils lui donneront le nom de M23 et en quelques semaines, il s'emparera de la grande partie de la province du Nord Kivu. La curieuse rébellion parviendra même à s'emparer de la capitale de cette province, la ville de Goma à la barbe des milliers de soldats surarmés de la MONUSCO. De Goma, les rebelles tutsi menaceront même de marcher sur Kinshasa sur les traces de leurs prédécesseurs de 1997.

C'est alors qu'un tournant diplomatique se produisit. La RDC parvint pour une fois à obtenir de l'ONU que ses forces l'aident à rétablir sa souveraineté sur l'étendue de la province du Nord Kivu. Il s'en suivit la création en 2013 de la Brigade d'Intervention intégrée dans la MONUSCO et forte de 3000 hommes. Cette Brigade, composée d'unités provenant de la Tanzanie, de l'Afrique du Sud et du Malawi, n'auront pas de peine à affronter la rébellion fantoche du M23 et, après quelques mois, soit en décembre 2013 à la défaire et à voir ses chefs et les combattants se replier en Ouganda et au Rwanda.

Comme le mandat de la Brigade d'Intervention était et est toujours de démanteler tous les groupes armés opérant à l'Est de la RDC, le Rwanda, profitant du siège non permanent au Conseil d Sécurité qu'il occupait depuis 2012, parvint à imposer que la prochaine priorité de la Brigade d'Intervention devait être l'anéantissement des FDLR.

Or, c'était sans compter sur la réalité du terrain et les intérêts géostratégiques des acteurs locaux. En effet, il n'est pas nécessaire d'être Breveté d'Etat-major pour se rendre compte qu'il est inutile de lancer une attaque classique avec une préparation à l'artillerie lourde, une attaque au sol avec des véhicules blindés, un appui aérien avec des hélicoptères armés... contre un ennemi qui n'occupe aucun objectif-terrain bien précis et identifiable, qui vit au milieu de la population civile que l'attaquant est censé protéger, qui refuse le contact par le feu...

Autant d'éléments d'appréciation que les officiers de la MONUSCO en général et de la Brigade d'Intervention en particulier ont analysé avant de se lancer tête baissée dans une « opération contre les FDLR » qui n'en serait pas une.

Autres éléments, en s'impliquant dans le dossier de l'Est de la RDC, la Tanzanie et l'Afrique du Sud, en tant que puissances régionales incontestables ont davantage appris et peut-être elles découvrent petit à petit que les vérités professées par le FPR de Paul Kagame depuis 1990 ne sont plus immuables.

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De même, ces deux puissances veulent aussi leur part du gâteau dans l'exploitation de l'Est de la RDC qui est en cours depuis 1997 et leur mot à dire sur le dépeçage de la RDC si jamais il advenait.

C'est donc cette nouvelle donne qui brouille les cartes du FPR de Paul Kagame (en réalité de ses commanditaires) qui est à la base de l'énervement de Kigali.

Changer le fusil d'épaule

Dès l'annonce des pays qui allaient fournir les troupes devant composer la Brigade d'Intervention de la MONUSCO, les conseillers de Paul Kagamé ont vu rouge et l'ont averti du risque de voir perdre le monopole de faire la pluie et le beau temps à l'Est de la RDC.

Des démarches diplomatiques ont alors été menées en catimini pour mettre sur pied une force pouvant suppléer celle de l'ONU dans la région si c'était nécessaire.

C'est ainsi que Kagame et Museveni ont mis sur pied une force dénommée : East African Stand-by Force (EASF) constituée de soldats rwandais et ougandais auxquels on a joint quelques soldats kenyans et burundais pour faire illusion du caractère est-africain de la force.

Depuis lors, les médias pro-Kagame ne cessent de vanter l'efficacité de cette force qui pourtant n'a pas encore été déployée nulle part. Cette publicité mensongère et intentionnée vient de franchir une nouvelle étape car le régime du FPR de Paul Kagame (ou plutôt ses parrains) sont parvenus à convaincre les instances de l'Union Africaine (dont on connaît le sérieux !) qu'elles seraient très bien inspirées en confiant le mandat de la MONUSCO à l'Est de la RDC à la fameuse Force de Kagame et Museveni dénommée : EASF.

Que peut la RDC ?

Encore une fois, la RDC va être prise à la gorge à un moment crucial de son histoire. En effet, avec la fin de mandat de Joseph Kabila, le pays est à la croisée des chemins.

Les prédateurs savent qu'une telle période de transition pendant laquelle les politiciens se positionnent à qui mieux mieux, n'est pas propice pour penser aux intérêts supérieurs de la nation.

La RDC n'est pas membre de la Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Est dont la fameuse force créée et qui est sensée y assurer la sécurité. Mais ses membres influents que sont le Rwanda de Paul Kagame et l'Ouganda de Yoweri Museveni

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clament que leur sécurité est menacée par les éléments se trouvant en RDC et donc qu'ils ont un droit légitime d'aller les démanteler.

Le pire est qu'ils sont soutenus (ou même encouragés) dans cette voie par les superpuissances qui régissent le monde. Maintenant le Rwanda dénonce officiellement l'inefficacité de la MONUSCO et son incapacité à anéantir les Hutu au Kivu. Il ne tardera pas à demander le remplacement de la Brigade d'Intervention par une Brigade de la EASF. L'Ouganda va lui emboîter le pas en évoquant la mystérieuse rébellion d'ADF-Nalu.

Les deux compères ont presque déjà l'aval de l'Union Africaine. La RDC, en pleine période de transition démocratique, ce qui ne peut avoir lieu chez ses agresseurs (Kagame 20 ans de pouvoir, Museveni 29 ans au pouvoir, et sans limitation de mandats...), saura-t-elle s'opposer à cette nième humiliation ? That is the question.

Rwanda: peu de retours de FDLR malgré l'offensive congolaise

Source: RFI

L'offensive de l'armée congolaise contre les rebelles hutus rwandais des FDLR dans le Sud-Kivu a commencé en début de semaine. Du côté rwandais, pays qui refuse tout dialogue avec les rebelles, mais les encourage à revenir volontairement dans le pays, aucun afflux particulier de combattant n'a été constaté dans le camp de démobilisation et de réintégration au nord du pays.

27 février 2015 - Ils ne sont qu'une poignée d'ex-FDLR à avoir rejoint le camp de Mutobo à Musanze, ces dernières semaines. Tous ceux interrogés assurent que l'offensive n'a pas influencé leur décision, surtout motivée par la fatigue de vivre dans la brousse en rançonnant les populations civiles.

Beaucoup songeaient à rejoindre le Rwanda depuis plusieurs mois, sans concrétiser leur projet de peur d'être exécutés pour désertion. Selon un ancien sergent, l'offensive n'inquiète pas les FDLR qui se fondent dans la population civile. Ils revêtent si besoin des uniformes de FARDC trouvés sur le champ de bataille ou « achetés directement à des commandants de l'armée régulière », assure-t-il. Malgré tout, pour ce dernier l'offensive pourrait permettre aux combattants voulant se rendre d'échapper à la surveillance de leurs chefs.

Selon Jean Sayinzoga, président de la commission de démobilisation et réintégration, la mesure de l'affluence prochaine dans le centre sera d'ailleurs un « bon test ». « S'il y a

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une vraie offensive, c'est sûr que nous aurons des redditions. Si c'est du bluff, personne ne se rendra », estime-t-il.

En attendant, les responsables du camp de Mutobo se préparent et assurent pouvoir accueillir environ 2 000 ex-combattants et leurs familles.

Villagers flee as DR Congo army pursues Rwandan rebels

Source: AFP World News

Bukavu, 26 February 2015 - Fearful villagers have been fleeing their homes in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo as the army pursues Rwandan Hutu rebels in a new offensive, a resident said on Thursday

Troops have captured all positions of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) around Mulenge since it launched the offensive two days ago in the Uvira territory of South Kivu province, an officer told AFP by phone on Wednesday.

A day later, "Mulenge and the surrounding villages have no more FDLR in them, so there is no more fighting in these centres, but we are taking the battle to the deep forests where the FDLR hold out," an officer said from the front.

"Many inhabitants have fled Mulenge 1 and 2 and taken shelter in Katala and Mushegereza. Some have been taken in by families and others are in the two primary schools and a Protestant church," a resident told AFP.

Troops of the national armed forces (FARDC) have killed three fighters in the FDLR, which is currently believed to number between 1,500 and 2,000, and captured eight rebels, according to military spokesman General Leon-Richard Kasonga and updated tolls.

"It's above all in the forest of Kitavu-Kambegere" to the south "where they have sought shelter," the frontline officer added. "We're pursuing them. Our goal is for them to lay down their arms and return to Rwanda."

The FDLR was founded by fighters who fled across the border from Rwanda in 1994, accused of taking part in the three-month genocide of 800,000 people, mainly minority Tutsis, before a Tutsi-led army led by today's President Paul Kagame put an end to the massacres.

The DRC government of President Joseph Kabila has been under international pressure to tackle the FDLR, which is among the most intractable of many armed

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groups operating in the North and South Kivu provinces, displacing scores of thousands of villagers.

The Rwandan rebels are blamed for killings, rapes, lootings and the forced enlistment of children in the resource-rich Kivus, where they also traffic in timber and gold.

A resident of Lemera, about 30 kilometres (19 miles) from Mulenge, told AFP that the situation was calm on Thursday. "We're fine. We can no longer hear guns being fired, but the soldiers who went up (on to higher ground) have still not come back. It seems that they have already moved further up on to the high plateau."

- 'Human shields' -

When the offensive was first announced by the Kinshasa government on January 29, the large UN mission in the country, MONUSCO, offered essential logistical, strategic and operational support, just as it had in 2013 to help defeat a rebellion by army mutineers in the M23 movement.

MONUSCO includes a Force Intervention Brigade of about 3,000 men with an unprecedented mandate in a UN Security Council resolution to attack armed movements "in a robust, highly mobile and versatile manner."

But the UN mission withdrew its offer of support when Kinshasa refused to replace two generals in charge of North Kivu operations, Bruno Mandevu and Sikabwe Fall, who are both suspected of serious human rights abuses.

While the Congolese offensive has concentrated on the Mulenge region, a military observer pointed out that "this zone is not (particularly) known for the FDLR", who operate "generally ... further to the west."

Efforts were under way to separate FDLR fighters from women and children in the movement, "who have been in difficulty for 48 hours and who get used as human shields," an army officer said Thursday.

An officer earlier told AFP that the FARDC had prepared a "humanitarian corridor" and would place civilians in the care of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The UNHCR and MONUSCO's department for disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration will deploy a joint team to assess humanitarian needs and "to support people potentially displaced since operations started", UN spokesman Charles Bambara said Wednesday.

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Feingold's Departing Remarks to Foggy Bottom Require an Addendum

Source: Huffingtonpost.com (Blog)

By Georgianne Nienaber, writer and author

26 February 2015 - Former Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) delivered his final speech as the U.S. Special Envoy to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region of central Africa yesterday. Media coverage, unfortunately, has focused only on the possibility that Feingold will seek a rematch against Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), and looked for "hints" in his speech that he may do so. There has been no critical analysis, so far, in U.S. media about what Feingold accomplished in his 18-month State Department post since Secretary of State John Kerry appointed him in 2013.

Speaking at the U.S. Institute of Peace, Feingold read remarks concerning the situation in the DRC. He began by outlining three areas: ongoing militia violence, the root causes of conflict, and future initiatives.

I am not sure that anyone unfamiliar with the history of violence and oppression in eastern Congo will learn anything from Feingold's rendering of what ails Congo. Perhaps that is why media has steered away from doing so. By omitting the significant body of evidence detailing the human rights abuses committed by the Kabila government does Feingold support these activities while condemning the Rwanda government of Paul Kagame? This is puzzling given the outspoken nature of the U.S. position on human rights violations and the reality on the ground in the Great Lakes region.

Feingold offered the standard State Department analysis of the beginnings and end of the M23 rebellion. He discussed the signing of an agreement, brokered by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community region, known as the Kampala Talks. Feingold stressed the U.S. position that there should be "no amnesty" for war crimes, but neglected to mention that the most instances of war crimes during the rebellion were attributed to the Congolese Army (FARDC) and not the M23.

Military Human Rights Abuses

I was surprised that Feingold did not refer to a document, that has not been widely publicized, but which is an impartial accounting of who is committing atrocities in eastern Congo. The onus falls squarely on the Congolese army in 2014 and less so on rebel forces.

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As part of its mandate, defined by the United Nations Security Council, the Office of the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) in the DRC provides close monitoring of human rights abuses. Information on these trends, which are regularly shared with the Congolese authorities, is presented monthly at U. N. press conferences.

Feingold did not mention a letter from the Congo representative to the United Nations Security Council calling for the expulsion of the head of UNJHRO, Scott Campbell, from Congo. The Kabila government accused him of bias against the government. The UNJHRO reports focused squarely on the Congo army as primary human rights abusers. This letter is illustrative of Congo's attempt to exonerate itself.

By omitting this information, is DOS tacitly supporting Kabila?

Of 2,360 recorded violations of human rights in DRC the most affected provinces were the provinces of eastern DRC (over 1,730 violations), the province of North Kivu (975 violations), the Eastern Province (525 violations) and the province of South Kivu (230 violations).

Government agents were named as being responsible for 1,354 violations, representing over 57 percent of the total number of violations of human rights UNJHRO recorded in 2014. Among state officials, the military and the FARDC PNC officers were primarily responsible for 1245 violations of human rights committed in 2014. The FARDC soldiers were allegedly responsible for 699 violations and PNC officers were allegedly responsible for 546 violations.

Other armed groups were responsible for 1,004 violations in 2014. Among the armed groups, the Mai Mai fighters were the main perpetrators of human rights (285 violations), followed by the fighters of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) (157 violations).

Root Causes

Personally, I was hopeful that Feingold would speak to the root causes of armed rebellions in the region. It was puzzling that the speech offered no mention of why armed groups are there in the first place. Does this reflect a fundamental misunderstanding, or worse, omission by State that illegal mining (aided and abetted by armed groups) and illicit financial flows contribute to extreme poverty and deprivation?

On paper, DRC is a member of The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). This global standard exists to guarantee accountable management of natural resources. Feingold completely ignored the graft and corruption in the mining sector in the "root causes" portion of his speech.

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Consider this one example.

In Katanga Province, the central government collected \$90 million from mining royalties in 2012. Only 12 million were donated to the province, well below the 40 percent required by law.

As a contact in the mining sector told me, "children work at gunpoint for \$1 a kilogram or less and all the mineral wealth slips out of Africa and into Switzerland and Washington DC via hidden bank accounts."

As far as eliminating armed groups, Feingold went on at great length to laud the government of Congo for its pledge to eliminate the FDLR, which consists of some former members of the Hutu Interahamwe responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. But, Feingold also avoided the reality that The United Nations mission (MONUSCO) suspended its support to the Congolese Army (FARDC) as part of these operations because of the presence of two Congolese generals suspected of serious human rights violations.

The United Nations told Congolese Foreign Minister Raymond Tshibanda during a meeting in Ethiopia at the end of last month that he had two weeks to remove two generals, General Bruno Mandevu and General Fall Sikabwe, who U.N. officials accused of being heavily involved in widespread human rights violations.

I doubt it was coincidence that at the same time that Feingold was talking, FARDC began an offensive, without the support of MONUSCO against FDLR positions. Was this designed to "soften" public opinion on the offensive and deflect criticism away from Kinshasa for not removing the generals accused of human rights violations?

Firing with heavy weapons and machine guns were heard this Tuesday, February 24th from early morning in the villages of Ruvuye Mulindi and overlooking the trays means Lemera in Uvira (South Kivu). The sources of the 33rd Military Region indicate that these heard shots marked the official start of military operations against Rwandan FDLR rebels in South Kivu.

One thing that needs to be clarified is the constant use of the descriptor "Rwandan FDLR rebels." The FDLR was responsible for the genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda. Yes, they lived in Rwanda at that terrible time in history, but the distinction must be clarified.

The African press is tired of the charade.

If the crimes committed by the members of the FDLR - both during the Genocide against the Tutsis and in the past two decades in the eastern DR Congo - weren't so

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serious, one would be tempted to start laughing with the farce currently surrounding their forced 'disarmament.'

In a strange moment, Feingold also wrapped the United States in the mantle of Pope Francis. After tying peace in eastern Congo to the "security interests" of the U.S., he quoted the Pope.

"Peace is always possible. But we've to seek it.

I feel like a naysayer when it comes to commentary on Congo. But as a Christian and a Catholic, I am tired of politicians dragging my Pope into their false political narratives.

The Future

Still, there is one element in Feingold's speech that holds promise.

Freshwater holdings in the North American Great Lakes, combined with the Great Lakes of Central Africa, hold almost one half of all of the fresh water resources on the planet. North America and central Africa face similar environmental challenges from big oil, pollution, runoff, and industrial contaminants. Feingold proposed a "Great Lakes to Great Lakes Initiative," to share solutions to these environmental challenges.

Before this can happen, and it should, the State Department should offer a realistic assessment of the root causes of extreme poverty in Congo. Wrapping itself in the mantle of peace without just and honest resolution of injustice gets us nowhere. The American people deserve an honest explanation of why peace in Congo is so vital to our "security" interests, as Feingold says.

"Security" equals access to strategic minerals; equals poverty; equals armed rebellions.

Un nouvel émissaire américain pour les Grands Lacs prochainement nommé

Source: RFI

Par Nicolas Champeaux

26 février 2015 - Washington entend rapidement nommer un nouvel émissaire dans les Grands Lacs. Le départ de Russ Feingold de ce poste ne signifie en rien que les Etats-Unis ont renoncé à exercer une pression sur le président de la RDC, Joseph Kabila, soupçonné de vouloir se maintenir au pouvoir au-delà du mandat prévu par la

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Constitution. C'est ce qu'a indiqué la vice-secrétaire d'Etat américaine chargée des affaires africaines, Linda Thomas Greenfield.

"Je tiens à remercier le sénateur Russ Feingold pour tous les efforts qu'il a accomplis. Ces efforts nous ont permis d'obtenir de nombreux résultats pour nous aider à trouver des solutions aux problèmes des Grands Lacs. Alors je réfute catégoriquement ce que disent certains observateurs, car malgré le départ de Feingold à ce poste les Etats-Unis vont tenir tous leurs engagements dans la région." Linda Thomas Greenfield vice-secrétaire d'Etat américaine chargée des affaires africaines

Thousands of Central African refugees face hunger in DR Congo: MSF

Source: AFP World News

Kinshasa, 26 February 2015 - Thousands of Central African Republic (CAR) refugees are threatened by malnutrition in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo where they have sought refuge, a medical charity said Thursday.

CAR is struggling to recover from the coup that ousted President Francois Bozize in March 2013 and triggered a wave of deadly sectarian violence between the country's Christian and Muslim populations.

The surging violence has forced tens of thousands to flee their homes in recent weeks to escape killings, rape and pillaging by militias.

"The majority of the refugees... depend largely on the generosity of the local population," which is itself poverty-stricken, Doctors without Borders (MSF) said in a statement.

"Access to food and drinking water is limited for everyone. These precarious living conditions bring problems of malnutrition and water-borne diseases," it added.

In one week MSF hospitalised 10 children suffering from acute malnutrition.

"Sometimes I work for a day for the local people and in exchange receive cassava leaves to feed my family," the NGO quoted 73-year-old refugee Anne Kabo as saying. She and her family have taken refuge in DR Congo since last May.

"We eat what we can, but we eat mainly cassava leaves. Sometimes we go two days without eating," she added.

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Since the beginning of the year, some 30,000 people have left their homes and found refuge within CAR, while more than 20,000 others have flooded into neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo since December, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said Tuesday.

Largely Christian "anti-balaka" -- or anti-machete -- militias have been formed to avenge atrocities by the mostly Muslim Seleka rebels who were behind the March 2013 coup.

Both sides are accused by human rights monitors of serious abuses, including killings, rape and pillaging.

Recent military operations against ex-Seleka in the eastern mining town of Bria has also prompted deadly reprisal attacks by the guerillas on nearby villages.

More than 19,000 refugees have flooded across the border to DR Congo from CAR's Kouango district since December, UNHCR said.

ICC prosecutor in Uganda after LRA rebel chief's capture

Source: AFP World News

Kampala, 26 February 2015 - The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor travelled to Uganda on Thursday following the arrest of a top commander of the brutal Lord's Resistance Army rebels.

Rebel leader Dominic Ongwen, a child-soldier-turned-warlord in Uganda's LRA, appeared before the ICC in The Hague for the first time in January, charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda will tour northern Uganda on a five-day visit, the court's regional coordinator said.

"The purpose of her visit is to provide updates to government, officials, MPs, civil society organisations, the international community, diplomats and the affected communities of Gulu, Lira and Soroti about the work of her office," Maria Mabinty Kamara told AFP, referring to northern areas that were hardest hit by LRA attacks.

The LRA is accused of killing more than 100,000 people and abducting 60,000 children in a bloody rebellion launched in northern Uganda almost three decades ago.

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Bensouda is also expected to meet with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, who in December called for African nations to quit the ICC, accusing the court of being used as a "tool to target" the continent.

However, Uganda is a signatory to the ICC, legally bound to support it, and Minister of International Relations Henry Okello Oryem said he welcomed the visit.

"We agreed as Uganda that we shall cooperate with the ICC so that the prosecution is successful," Oryem told the Daily Monitor newspaper.

"Ongwen's is a unique case. He was an innocent child who was abducted," he said, adding that Bensouda "wants to understand these unique scenarios".

Known as the "White Ant", Ongwen was notorious for leading his troops on punishment raids, which often involved slicing off the lips and ears of victims as grim calling cards.

The LRA first emerged in northern Uganda in 1986, where it claimed to fight in the name of the Acholi ethnic group against Museveni's newly established government.

But over the years it has moved across the porous borders of the region. The LRA shifted from Uganda to sow terror in southern Sudan before again moving to northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and finally crossing into southeastern Central African Republic and Sudan.