

U.S. Must Press for Expanded UN Peacekeeping Mandate in Congo
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Anthony Gambino is an independent consultant on international development and author of a recent report for the Council on Foreign Relations called Congo: Securing Peace, Sustaining Progress. Previously, he was the USAID Director for the Congo and other countries in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa. He monitored elections in the Congo in 2006.

Although Congo is not in the daily news today as much as it was a few weeks ago, make no mistake, eastern Congo continues to descend ever more deeply into a humanitarian hell. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced over the last few months, in addition to the more than one million people who had already fled their homes. Rampant sexual violence against girls and women, reportedly the worst in the world, continues unabated.

Insecurity in eastern Congo is a threat to the entire region. If the violence persists, there is very little to prevent it from spilling over volatile borders with Rwanda and Uganda, igniting another conflict that could pull in states from around the continent, as in the late 1990s when African armies from Angola to Zimbabwe fought in the Congo. ()

Eastern Congo is buried in multiple layers of violence. The current displacement and violence is layered on top of the struggle between the Congolese government and the CNDP of Laurent Nkunda. That is on top of the horrific abuses committed over the last fourteen years by a militia group, now called the FDLR, led by Hutus who were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. That layer sits on top of the spillover of the genocide itself into eastern Congo. Under that layer is one of longstanding ethnic enmity and conflict over land and other resources that predates the tragedy in Rwanda.

All these layers of conflict and violence ultimately must be addressed. But how? As I argue in a recent Council on Foreign Relations report, underneath these layers is the longstanding ineptitude and inability of the Congolese army to establish and maintain control over territory in eastern Congo. Reports from Goma and throughout eastern Congo demonstrate that they are closer to a band of looters than an effective fighting force. ()

In 2005, the UN adopted a principle known as the "**responsibility to protect**," which requires the international community to protect a country's citizenry when their government cannot. This is clearly the situation in the Congo today, and the international community must step up and do what is necessary to achieve stability and end the violence raging throughout the region. ()

Just two years ago, the situation was much brighter. MONUC brought this chaos under control in mid-2006 and could do so again. I was an elections monitor in Goma in 2006, traveling throughout North Kivu, which, then as now, was dominated by forces loyal to the rebel Laurent Nkunda. North Kivu, if not completely secure, was calm that summer. Nkunda's troops were not fighting. Instead, many were deserting his movement, which appeared to be getting weaker by the day.

On election day, July 30, 2006, there was not a single incident of violence anywhere in North Kivu because MONUC was given the specific mission to guarantee that the elections succeeded. MONUC soldiers, deployed throughout North Kivu in advance of the election, made it clear to Nkunda and other rebel leaders that interference in the electoral process would not be tolerated. ()

No political agreement will hold as long as eastern Congo, with its rich mineral resources, remains lawless. Once order is re-established, then talks between Nkunda, other militias, and the Congolese government are far more likely to succeed, and the people of eastern Congo, who thought they were voting for a brighter future when they went to the polls in July 2006, might finally have a chance at the peace they deserve.

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