# TERM PAPER:
# Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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# Abstract

The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the most problematic spots on the African and global map. The purpose of this term paper is to reconsider the roots and various aspects of the violent conflicts in Congo that took place between 1996 and present. The paper includes a detailed historical review of the political and resource-based causes of the conflicts. A brief profile of DRC is provided. The paper offers three alternative solutions to the problem of violence in Congo. Recommendations to improve the situation in the country are included.

*Keywords:* Congo, DRC, violence, conflicts.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (further, DRC) remains one of the most problematic spots on the global map of political conflicts. Years of civil opposition and military actions have exhausted the country to the extent that leaves little space for effective state building. Between 1996 and 2013, more than 5 million people were killed in DRC as a result of military and political violence. Not surprisingly, political revival presents one of the biggest challenges facing DRC. Despite numerous efforts of the international humanitarian and peacemaking organizations, human suffering continues to persist. The uniqueness of the cultural environment in DRC renders standardized methods and conflict resolution models as irrelevant and even inapplicable in the conditions of an unnamed war. The purpose of this paper is to review the origins and current state of conflicts in DRC, develop a thorough profile of the country, and offer alternative evidence-based solutions to facilitate the country's development and state building in the long run.

## Statement of the Problem

Being located at the center of the African continent, Congo exemplifies

one of the most problematic aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural development in Africa. The past decades witnessed the repeated cycles of violence followed by the implementation of peacemaking decisions and the returning hope for sustained stability and peace. Yet, the complexity of the conflict itself reflects the sophisticated nature of its origins, which can be found in the history of the Congo state. Those who want to understand the origins of conflicts in Congo in greater detail should consider the following: the notorious Rwandan genocide, the 32-year rule of Mobutu and the growing scope of violent opposition, the main characteristics of the Kabila regime that started in 1997, and the challenges facing the country at the turn of the first decade of the 21st century.

Any discussion of conflicts in DRC should begin with the analysis of the Rwandan genocide. More specifically, understanding the nature of the conflict is impossible without considering the citizenship of the Banyamulenge people, who had been brought to Congo under the Belgian rule. With the growing pressure of genocide in Rwanda, more members of the Banyamulenge minority had to join their compatriots in DRC, changing drastically the country's previously peaceful landscape. The growing number of those who came to DRC to escape the genocide led to an enormous inter-communal conflict – a conflict of the scale and complexity the African continent had never seen. The Rwandan genocide compelled more than one million Hutu to move to DRC, changing its political and social balance. Apart from the fact that they upset the eternal ethnic balance in Kivus, the Hutu used their new

territory to launch attacks against the new government of Rwanda. With time, Congo turned into a territory of war and violence, because the Congolese people were entirely dissatisfied with the growing power of the Hutu. The attacks against Tutsi also became more common. Those were the basic prerequisites for the subsequent war with the Mobutu regime.

The 32 years of Mobutu rule in DRC translated into ethnic isolation, conflicts, and local tensions. The Mobutu rule failed to unite the Congolese populations into a cohesive political or social force. Following the genocide in Rwanda, in 1996, the first riots were organized to challenge the decades-long rule of Mobutu in Congo. In September 1996, the first strike was organized by the Banyamulenge against the soldiers of the national army (at that time, Zaire) and the Hutu tribes living in refugee camps. That was the moment when the first war in Congo actually started. In the months that followed, the Hutu would have to retreat deeper into the territory of DRC, fighting against the Mobutu rule and, at the same time, struggling against the anti-Mobutu armies from Rwanda. By the middle of 1997, the Mobutu rule was defeated, mostly due to the lack of external support from the United States and Europe that did not believe in the story of foreign invasion to DRC.

In 1997, with the establishment of the new Kabila regime, the civil conflicts in DRC became even more violent. On the one hand, Namibia, Angola and Zimbabwe supported Kabila in his fight against Ugandan

and Rwandan rebels. On the other hand, the native population was highly disappointed with the new anti-pluralistic policy in the country. The development of solidification of numerous armed units made the situation even more complicated, and Kabila found it particularly difficult to ensure the loyalty of all those armed groups. The countries and political forces that had been supporting Kabila in the first months of his rule started to show the signs of being strongly dissatisfied with the way he was resolving government and civil conflicts. That dissatisfaction shaped the basis for the second major conflict in Congo.

The Second Congo War began in 1998, with many historians describing it as the First World War in Africa. The military conflict became a result of numerous political miscalculations of the country's leader. The number and power of the rebels increased to the level that allowed for the emergence of a full-scale war that lasted in DRC until 2003. It should be noted that, in 2000, the United Nations organized a peacemaking mission to Congo, but its weak mandate of only 5,500 troops failed to bring any consistent results. The conflict did not wane until, in 2003, most Kabila's allies withdrew along with the rebel groups. In 2004, new rebels and riots took place to express the country's indignation with the relative inactivity of the United Nations in DRC. 2006 witnessed the first free elections in the history of DRC, but even they could not stop the sporadic violence that persisted across DRC until 2009.

Here, the fact that natural resources greatly contribute to continuous violence in DRC should not be ignored. Freedman describes the conflicts in Congo as being "resource-based". Diamonds, coltan, cobalt, copper, and gold create a dangerous mixture of influences, which translate into political and military power. "The cycle of violence that has enveloped the DR Congo since 1997 has presented opportunities for various armed groups, both state and non-state, to engage in the plunder of natural resources by creating and maintaining an environment of exploitation, instability and appalling inequality". The state keeps fighting with militia groups to control the most profitable resource areas, and any attempt to demilitarize the state will automatically lead to profit losses. Unfortunately, even in the presence of numerous peacemaking mechanisms, approximately 45,000 people keep dying every month in Congo, with thousands of others facing sexual violence of unprecedented scale.

The main reasons why the conflict continues to persist is because, in the words of Reuveny, Maxwell and Davis, any conflicts based on natural resources can sustain for years. Moreover, resource-conflicts and civil conflicts are much more complex than even the best theoretical models developed to describe them. Simultaneously, it is difficult to imagine that a conflict as complicated as that in DRC will be easily resolved by external means only. According to Oder, "the Congo conflict is likely to be sustained by a marked political tendency to seek compromises that do not offend anyone, but which therefore fail to deal with the realities of the situation". Finally, although many

international organizations eventually decided to withdraw their troops from Congo and provide the locals with sufficient opportunities for internal communication, the country's leadership refused to negotiate with rebels. Congo never had any explicit state-building policy that could communicate a comprehensive pathway out of the continuous crisis.

As of today, the situation in Congo is not better than it used to be a decade ago, even though physical violence is no longer as pervasive as it used to be earlier. Nonetheless, the Democratic Republic of Congo has not failed to escape many of the difficulties associated with its transition to a new stage of development and performance. Tull suggests that international influences shape the direction of the country's transition to post-war politics. However, liberalization presents a serious threat to peace in DRC, at least because it has the potential to uncover weak political institutions and put them under unnecessary stress. In addition, the post-war reconstruction project does not display any tangible progress, and chances are high that the elected government will appear completely incapable of rebuilding Congo into a peaceful state. Congo is in drastic need for effective solutions to its violent conflicts, which have far-reaching social, economic, and human implications. However, it seems that such solutions should be based on a balanced use of external and internal resources for the purpose of achieving peace in a long-term perspective.

# Background and Overview

Because of the continuous conflict, the Democratic Republic of Congo remains one of the most problematic territories on the African continent. The country was first established in 1908 to become a Belgian colony, and colonization remains a source of pervasive influences on DRC's politics, economy, and culture. In 1960, Congo became an independent state. That was also the beginning of the Mobutu rule, which eventually led to one of the bloodiest struggles in the history of whole Africa. In 1997, the country acquired its current name, the Democratic Republic of Congo, although democracy remains a myth Congo is vainly trying to achieve.

One of the distinct characteristics of DRC is that it has become home to more than 200 ethnic groups. The four largest tribes living in Congo include: Luba, Mongo, Mangbetu-Azande, and Kongo. 50 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, with another 20 percent being Protestants. This religious structure minimizes the risks of religious conflicts, while the threat of ethnic violence remains rather high. The country's administrative structure includes 10 provinces, which had to be further subdivided into 26 new provinces, but the decision was never implemented. The country's legal system is based on French civil law, and the chief of the state is President, currently Joseph Kabila. Congo ranks 115th among the world's countries with the highest GDP. GDP per capita is $200, and annual GDP rates reach 6.2 percent. The

chief agricultural products are coffee, palm oil, and sugar, while the mining industry represents the most essential element of the national industry sector. Congo is still experiencing considerable problems with communication, due to the lack of adequate infrastructures. More than 50,000 refugees from Rwanda live in DRC, with another 54,000 from Central African Republic. One of the biggest social problems is drug manufacturing, and DRC remains one of the largest cannabis producers in Africa.

# Alternative Solutions to Conflicts in DRC

## Violence and Socioeconomic Recovery

Numerous attempts have been made to eradicate violence in Congo and establish a peaceful environment for further development. However, the problem is that the culture of DRC and its current political climate are based on the principle of impunity. Violence cannot be eradicated without addressing the problem of impunity for offenders and sexual perpetrators. To make that happen, DRC should initiate a complete restructuring of its political and judicial culture, which will shape the basis for subsequent socioeconomic recovery. Until the Democratic Republic of Congo maintains an atmosphere in which some citizens are above others and enjoy their impunity and wealth at

the expense of fairness and justice, such atmosphere will favor repeated violent conflicts without any single chance for peace.

## Resource-Based Conflict Resolution

One of the proposed solutions should be based on the well-known fact that conflicts in DRC have their roots in the country's resource base. Between the carrot and stick approaches, carrots will hardly have any positive effects on the current situation. In this sense, external assistance provided by nongovernmental organizations could alleviate the existing tensions and offer relevant guidance, as Congo seeks to step out of the crisis. The contribution provided by NGOs would not be limited to advice. NGOs could monitor the compliance of companies working in the mining sector with the fundamental international rules of law. Otherwise, the lack of regulation and effective monitoring would create a fruitful land for conflicts. Second, the importance of this solution lies in the problems discussed earlier in this work: in the absence of an effective judicial culture, Congo itself and its mining companies can only rely on transnational resources. Yet, this alternative solution also has limitations.

## Helping the Congolese to Develop Effective Self-Management Skills

Oder is right: external solutions similar to the ones proposed in the

earlier sections of this work will hardly help DRC to avoid future conflicts. The fact is that the internal culture and environment in Congo differ considerably from the cultures and environments, in which environmental norms and assistance strategies had been developed. In light of the strategic complexity facing DRC, no standard solution can bring any relevant results. As Oder suggests, no external solutions will work for Congo, unless they are intended to teach the Congolese effective self-management skills. In other words, the best solution to the conflicts in DRC is the provision of adequate information and knowledge resources that will empower the local population to manage their internal affairs without any external support or control. The Congolese should be given voice in the development and control of such policies, and accountability should become a distinctive feature of the country's socioeconomic development and post-conflict survival.

## Conclusion

The conflicts in Congo cover a long period of time. Since 1996, the growing instability in the region has had considerably negative impacts on the situation in Africa. The conflict has multiple roots that grow from the natural resources available to the Congolese, the lack of effective political force, the genocide in Rwanda, and others. The given work includes three alternative solutions to the problems in DRC.

These solutions include: restructuring the judicial system and culture; addressing the resource-based aspects of the problem; and providing the Congolese with the information and guidance to help them develop self-management skills. The latter proposition seems to be the most promising, because it creates a good ground for long-term improvements and, at the same time, minimizes the risks of unnecessary dependence on external resources.