

## **The Clones of 'Mr. Kurtz': Violence, War and Plunder in the DRC**

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### **Abstract**

This paper sets out to review the activities of the actors in the DRC placing special emphasis on their particular interests and how these interests have worked to promote or obstruct the peace efforts in the DRC. The main argument is that essentially their real and perceived interests drive the strategies and actions of the major actors in regional conflicts. The strategies and tactics adopted by the various actors before, during and after the negotiation of various peace agreements have been largely shaped by the logic of these interests, albeit, within the limitations imposed by the interests of other actors. Thus there are times when some actors have collaborated in pursuit of their mutual interests and other times when they have conflicted because either their interests clashed or they have failed to come to some mutually beneficial arrangements, which can accommodate their mutual interests. The assumption therefore that every party in conflict has a vested interest in peace building and the resulting pre-occupation with negotiating peace agreements may be highly misplaced if major actors have vested interests in other objects such as the mineral wealth. Imperialists, plunderers, warlords, gunrunners, drug-barons and such other predatory actors, in particular, tend to thrive in chaos in a relatively anarchic environment.

### **Introduction**

One of the most vexing questions regarding the current conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the question of periodization. This is mainly because the DRC has been through a series of continuous conflicts and wars ever since it became King Leopold II's personal colony in 1885. Indeed it can be persuasively argued that the Congo has known no peace since the onset of the slave trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1880 and 1920, for example, the Congo lost nearly ten million people (approximately one half of its population) to barbaric genocide perpetrated by the likes of Conrad's

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'Mr. Kurtz' (Conrad, 1988). The National Colonial Congress held in Brussels in 1924 came to the conclusion that the African population of the Congo might 'collapse or disappear' (Hailey, 1957). In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries' scramble, the brutality (of genocidal proportions) was committed in the plunder of ivory and rubber. In the current scramble the loot is diamonds, gold, coltan, copper, cobalt, timber, wildlife reserves and fiscal resources. Because these conflicts have been continuous, interconnected and with lasting demographic, economic political and social impact it becomes difficult to demarcate particular periods in which specific conflicts are nested.

For the purpose of this paper, however, which is intended to contribute to on-going efforts to bring the ongoing war to an end and establish peace in the country and region, we shall focus upon the events and developments that have occurred in the post-Mobutu period beginning in May 1997, when the Mobutu regime was formally overthrown and Laurent Kabila came to power. Circumstances and developments immediately surrounding the overthrow of Mobutu, including the military campaign waged by the ADFL (Allied Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire) will be dealt with only to the extent that their impact has spilled over into the post-Mobutu period. It is well established, for example, that in April, 1997 the US based mining company, American Mineral Fields (AMF) provided money for Kabila's military campaign in return for future diamond mining rights and obtained exploration rights for cobalt, zinc and copper after the war when the value of the firm's stock on the Toronto stock exchange jumped from \$3 to \$10. The company's concessions are part of the controversial discussions on the review of legal and illegal concessions in the Inter-Congolese dialogue (Pelman, 2000). The company also appears in the UN Panel final report among the plunderers and violators of the OECD code of conduct (UN Security Council, 2000)

What distinguishes this period is, firstly, the break with the Mobutu era, which had prevailed since independence in the early 1960s. It should be pointed out however, that one of the bones of contention in the present conflict is that some believe that no such break has occurred. They claim that what we are witnessing under the successive Kabila regimes is the continuation of Mobutuism without Mobutu (Baregu, 1999). Secondly, this period and the conflicts associated with it have been characterized by the intensification of competing and predatory economic interests revolving around the exploitation of the resources of the country by a whole range of economic agents. In order to protect, defend and prolong their interests, some of these actors have fuelled the war in the DRC and variously obstructed the peace process in the country. This is somewhat reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century plunder during King Leopold II's rule which, incidentally, was responsible for triggering the first European scramble for Africa and unleashing the wave of col-

onization that engulfed the continent at the end of the century (Hochschild, 1999). It is also what is captured by the recent final report of the UN Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of the DRC which found that even after the withdrawal of the armed forces of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Zimbabwe the elite networks that have emerged and entrenched themselves in exploiting the country's resources would not disband readily and voluntarily because; "They have built up a self-financing war economy centered on mineral exploitation" (UN Security Council, 2002).

This paper sets out to review the activities of the actors in the DRC placing special emphasis on their particular interests and how these interests have worked to promote or obstruct the peace efforts in the DRC. The principal argument is that essentially their real and perceived interests drive the strategies and actions of the major actors in regional conflicts. The strategies and tactics adopted by the various actors before, during and after the negotiation of various peace agreements have been largely shaped by the logic of these interests, albeit, within the limitations imposed by the interests of other actors. Thus there are times when some actors have collaborated in pursuit of their mutual interests and other times when they have conflicted because either their interests clashed or they have failed to come to some mutually beneficial arrangements, which can accommodate their mutual interests. The assumption therefore that every party in conflict has a vested interest in peace building and the resulting pre-occupation with negotiating peace agreements may be highly misplaced if major actors have vested interests in other objects such as the mineral wealth. Imperialists, plunderers, warlords, gunrunners, drug-barons and such other predatory actors, in particular, tend to thrive in chaos in a relatively anarchic environment.

## **Some Conceptual Issues**

One of the key problems confronting conflict transformation and peace-building processes revolves around the matter of definition of stakeholders in conflicts. A number of approaches have adopted a limited definition of conflict parties who are narrowly identified as those individuals or groups of actors who are immediately and visibly involved in the conflicts. The Inter-Congolese dialogue, for example, is conceived in these terms and that is the basis on which three hundred or so political groups were recently facilitated by the EU and the US in Sun City, South Africa to come to some agreement on the appropriate political order in the DRC. This narrow approach to defining parties to the conflict in the form of political parties, for example, leads to the fallacy that in order to reach a stable and sustainable agreement all self appointed political groups have to be included in any negotiations with parties all carrying the same weight. The outcome, as we have witnessed in the Lusaka Accord process and more recently in the Sun

City process, is that we end up with a protracted stalemate either at the point of reaching the agreement or at the point of implementation. It is at these points that we have observed the intervention of powerful interest to arm-twist the parties to an agreement that they can live with.

Thus this approach means that the other less visible but frequently quite powerful actors with interests in the conflicts are left out of the negotiation equation even though they may wield such significant influence in the background as to fundamentally affect not only the process itself but also the outcomes of the process. Even worse, some actors may present themselves as and become regarded as impartial mediators in the conflict on the basis of their claims while they are, in fact, acting in the defense and pursuit of their particular interests. An interesting example relates to ambulance chasers such as the UNHCR. A recent statement by the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Security in Tanzania suggests that the organization is obstructing the on-going voluntary repatriation process because it would put their personnel out of work. The same report indicates that there is considerable refugee fatigue in the host areas. Kigoma Region, for example, has resolved not to open new refugee camps and demanded complete repatriation of existing ones by the year 2000 (*Mtanzania*, July 13, 2001).

A second conceptual concern relates to the scope of the conflicts. Some approaches tend to be, by and large, internalist or statist in the sense that they narrowly define conflicts by territorial boundaries. Consequently we have the Sierra Leone conflict, the Burundi conflict, and the DRC conflicts even when such conflicts clearly transcend and indeed defy national boundaries. It is rare that violent conflicts can be completely contained and restricted to particular areas. Even if the violence is successfully contained there are always spillover effects in the form of refugees or insurgent groups retreating to regroup and fight again. The Great Lakes region features both phenomena in abundance with refugee flows from DRC, Rwanda and Burundi moving to Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and even as far a field as South Africa. The existence of Interahamwe militia and Ex-FAR forces in Eastern DRC is believed to be at least one of the legitimate reasons for Rwanda's presence in the DRC.

It is for this reason that concepts of regional conflict formations, complexes, systems, matrices, etc. have emerged. These concepts do not only refer to interconnections between conflicts in terms of reciprocal effects but also to explicit linkages and interactions (overt or covert) among actors in the conflicts including their involvement in the same conflicts in a regional setting. A clear example of this would be the interactions between warlords, gun runners, drug barons, money launderers, weak states and imperialist interests, for example. Moreover, such conflict formations may emerge on the basis of

physical geography (e.g. the occurrence of minerals over particular geological formations), politics, ethnicity, etc. but they are always defined and mediated by actor interests. For this reason these formations are not stable or fixed in time and space but are quite fluid and always shifting according to actor and/or interest dominance, interaction patterns and alliances between interests. In terms of resource struggles for example, Mwayila Tshiembe argues that the part of Africa which German 19<sup>th</sup> -century strategists referred to as *Mittel Afrika* "...lies at the confluence of the African mining region (which extends from the Cape to Kinshasa), the African oil region (from Luanda to Lagos) and the African agricultural region (from Dar es Salaam to Massawa) (Tshiembe, 1999). Thus to refer to a DRC conflict does not quite portray the scope of the conflict and the magnitude of the interests which may be temporarily concentrated in the DRC but are spatially and dynamically more expansive taking on regional as well as international dimensions in the globalized struggle for strategic resources. By the same token the superficial distinction between internal and external actors is not analytically helpful once we focus on actor/interests and their strategies rather than processes and paces of negotiating the termination of conflicts (Berdal and Malone, 2000; Adebajo and Sriram, 2001).

This paper therefore seeks not only to broaden the definition of conflict parties and widen the scope of actors in conflicts but it also sets out to identify actor orientations to peace initiatives on the basis of the logic of their interests. The underlying argument is that most peace agreements in the Great Lakes and indeed in Africa as a whole have not worked mainly because they have been based on three fundamentally flawed premises. One such premise is that the conflict parties are to be found solely in the countries in conflict. This is partly a result of the adoption of the narrow concept of 'conflict parties', which suggests some harmony of interests. We are contending that actors rather than parties is a more inclusive and dynamic concept since it allows for the inclusion of entities who would otherwise be considered as external to the conflict simply because of geographical location.

The second important false premise is the assumption that all parties to the conflicts are, al-be-it, to various degrees committed to peacemaking or can be persuaded to this position. This is a legacy from rational choice thinking and, in particular, the case of the prisoners' dilemma. In reality nothing could be further from the truth because commitment to peace is a direct function of the interests at stake. To this end we have identified three sets of interest-based actor orientations which define and structure the responses of particular actors to peace initiatives and have a fundamental bearing on the process as well as outcomes of these processes in terms of peace agreements and their implementation. The identified orientations are: peacemakers, peace spoilers and peace opportunists (Baregu, 2001).

## **Regional Dimensions of the DRC Conflict**

The Great Lakes is a geopolitical concept, which implies that the region constitutes a conflict and security complex (Buzan, 1991; Wallensteen, 1998). This, in turn, suggests that conflicts in the region are inter-related with reciprocal effects. This interrelationship further indicates, among other things, that conflicts in the region stem from common or at least inter-related root causes and driving forces. Since the identification of root causes and driving forces is the *sine qua non* for successful conflict transformation, it is necessary to identify and describe such root causes and driving forces and to distinguish them from exacerbating factors and trigger events.

As we pointed out earlier, some students of African conflicts have argued that most of these conflicts essentially revolve around strategic or otherwise precious resources. The DRC is *sui generis*. Some students of African conflicts have characterized them as basically struggles over contested resources. Paul Collier (2000), for example, in his 'greed Vs grief' thesis contends that it is not so much the articulated grievances such as ethnicity, inequality, lack of democracy, etc. that propel African conflicts. Rather, Collier argues, it is the economic opportunities created by such conflicts that drive and quite often prolong them. These ideas inform this study. The UN Fowler Commission (2000) report on the busting of sanctions against UNITA in Angola also revealed a complex web of interaction between warlords, diamond plunderers, smugglers and dealers, authoritarian states, gun runners, imperialist countries, weak states, private military companies and money launderers in a network that extracted and transported diamonds to reproduce the conflict in Angola. Along similar lines a report by Global Witness (2000) on Angola demonstrated how blood or conflict diamonds sustained Savimbi's warlordism on the one hand and how the oil incomes sustained the government's war effort and the elite in Luanda, on the other.

Pushing this conceptual frontier further the first UN report (April, 2001) on the illicit exploitation of resources in the DRC indicted Uganda and Rwanda as key plunderers and even went to the extent of questioning their motives for involvement in the DRC. It suggested that the real reason for the two countries' invasion of the DRC was the riches of the country rather than the much vaunted 'legitimate security concerns'. To demonstrate how contentious this whole issue can be, however, another UN report (Nov. 2001), which was intended to be an addendum to the first one turned out to be an erratum. It virtually reversed the findings of the first report arguing and rather curiously questioning the sovereign rights of the DRC, that Zimbabwe and DRC itself were the real culprits. In both reports nevertheless the range of actors was found to be wider than the internal conflict parties that have arrived at the Sun City, Durban, Pretoria and Luanda agreements without

any respite in the war. It is suggested here that the persistent failure of these agreements can, at least in part, be attributed to the backstage maneuvers of the other perhaps more powerful actors with vested interests. Until such interests are openly engaged in the process successful peace building will remain elusive.

In order to understand the origins of this complexity it may be helpful to outline some of the critical background or contextual features, which lie behind the conflict and peace-building processes in the DRC and the Great lakes Region as a whole. It is these features in which interests are nested and which provide the opportunities and constraints for actor collaboration or non-collaboration by significantly influencing actor interests, perceptions and behavior. These structural features also define and structure the negotiation space in which viable peace agreements are possible. Below we describe some of these structural features.

a) *Inter-imperialist rivalry.* The Great Lakes region has become a cauldron of multiple interests competing for the resources of the region. One of the features of this competition is the three cornered rivalry between the Western powers and the African resistance to this rivalry and the quest to redefine itself. In one corner of the inter-imperialist rivalry stands the US with its quest for global dominance and insatiable appetite for the strategic minerals of the region to feed its military-industrial complex (a la Eisenhower) incorporating electronics, aeronautics, nuclear medicine, missile technology, etc. The US is also strategically bent on bringing to an end the old colonial spheres of influence as presently defined by British, French and Belgian interests. In the other corner lies the traditional Franco-Belgian interest seeking to maintain their foothold albeit in a conflict and collaboration mode with Belgium unable to but France intent on expanding its sphere of influence into traditionally British areas. In the third corner stands the rest of the EU and Britain in particular seeking to dislodge the privileged position of France in particular in collaboration with the US. This struggle is what has been variously termed the second scramble for Africa seeking to impose a post-Berlin Conference order in the wake of the end of formal colonialism and the demise of the cold war which had temporarily put this inter-imperialist rivalry on hold. In effect this is a struggle to reverse the gains of independence and to bring the region and Africa as a whole under new forms of imperialist domination. As a counterforce to and object of the inter-imperialist rivalry is Africa, which, though presently characterized by weak states and societies, is seeking to redefine and reconstruct itself. This is the essence of the African renaissance and the revitalized quest for African unity under the African Union. Africa has responded to this challenge largely in two ways: One is acquiescence in which case some

countries have identified with either Anglo-American or Franco-Belgian interests. The other is resistance in which case some countries have, for the first time, staked a claim on Africa's resources and its political future. The first tendency in the region is represented by Uganda, Rwanda and to a lesser extent, Tanzania. Until recent changes, leading to the withdrawal of SADC allied forces from the DRC the second tendency was represented by the alliance between DRC, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe. In the DRC, which is the epicenter of the scramble, the prize is composed of strategic minerals such as niobium (15% of the world's reserves to be found in Africa, 80% of which is in DRC) coltan (80% of the world's reserves in Africa and all of it in DRC). The prize also includes conventional products such as diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, timber, wildlife resources, etc. Among the multinational interests in the region are Kenrow International of Geithersburg, Maryland, Little Rock Mining Ltd., Tenfields Holdings Ltd., Sapora Mining Ltd., Intermarket, Barrick Gold Corp (with major share holder George Bush Sr.); Russel Resources Inc. (Australia); Kraall (Austria); Banro (Canada), (Braeckman, 1999). Many more companies have been mentioned by the UN Panel's final report.

- b) *The quest for legitimate governance and democratisation in the region.* This is a feature, which pervades all countries in the region although it is either pursued hesitantly as in Tanzania and Kenya, resisted in Uganda and Rwanda or elusive in DRC, Burundi, Sudan. The defining element of the conjuncture is that in almost all countries we find weak states and weak societies. That the states are weak is shown by the fragility of constitutions and their low resource and institutional capacity manifested in and resulting from chronic donor dependence. That is why incumbents manipulate constitutions in order to extend their stay in power even as they assiduously court donor aid to sustain themselves. Weak states also entice predatory actors whose interests are best procured and protected under states with little or no regulatory capacity. The weakness of civil society stems from the low level of political competence which itself is directly linked with persistent and pervasive poverty. The people are more like subjects than citizens are. Hence the conflicts that arise between states and civil societies revolve around the weakness of states and civil-societies, which, in turn revolve around resource scarcity. Beggar states beget beggar societies.

That is why, in reacting to popular demands for political participation and enhanced welfare, the states have responded with either derision or excessive force. This is mainly because these states suffer from at least four kinds of deficits; material capacity; political legitimacy; accountability and transparency. The challenge for the region therefore is not



only to build strong but legitimate states but also to ensure that capacity of popular control of public power is enhanced. In the wake of September 11, however, this quest will prove even more difficult as donor preoccupations are already shifting from democratization and popular participation to strong repressive governments capable of combating terrorism.

- c) *Structural Militarism* is another dominant feature defining the region. The recent history of the region suggests that the region has a low threshold for violence. In the immediate post independence period in the early 1960s the region witnessed the violent overthrow of Patrice Lumumba, secessionist struggles in Katanga and the subsequent rise of Lumumbist and other armed struggles, which culminated in the overthrow of Mobutu in DRC in 1997, unleashing the current war in the country. Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan are all embroiled in all kinds of conflicts all of which overlap and overflow their boundaries as is the case with Uganda's and Rwanda's intervention in the DRC. International and unilateral intervention has become a regular geo-political feature of the region. These continuous and contagious armed conflicts have spawned the phenomenon of warlordism in the region in which the taking up of arms to settle political differences within and between states has become a norm. It is not accidental that the countries in the region, which include Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Eritrea, have been described as 'military princedoms' (Mbembe, 1999). Structural militarism is largely a consequence of state failure; the proliferation of small arms and light weapons supplied by sundry gun-runners; the culture of impunity (emanating from warlordism); retribution and revenge (resulting from unresolved grievances) and embedded mistrust (resulting from politicized ethnicity and social polarization).
- d) *Globalization and economic decline* is another feature of the conjuncture. Globalization has been variously defined but in most cases perceived largely as a positive force. However, it engenders contradictory tendencies with different consequences for different regions of the world. In Europe and America, for example, globalization has had an integrative impact resulting in the formation of large trading blocks (NAFTA) and even forging political unity in Europe. In our region however, globalization tends to generate disintegrative pressures by opening up the region to powerful multi-national actors through programs such as NEPAD (International Peace Academy, 2002). This kind of program is designed to promote the interests of the western businesses by integrating markets, linking them to the north and harmonizing regulations in favor of western trade and investment. This process cannot lead to regional autonomy with internally integrated self-sustaining economies and markets let

alone establishing effective control over the exploitation and utilization of the region's resources. Economic decline, state disintegration, economic exclusion, social fragmentation, and ethnic polarization in the region have also accompanied globalization and are a major source of some of the conflicts. Perhaps the most tragic irony and paradox of the conjuncture is that globalization has tended to centralize and intensify the access to and exploitation of Africa's resources while it has the effect of marginalizing and pauperizing Africa's people by alienating us from our resources. A good case is the Lake Victoria fish fillet industry (exporting to the EU countries), which has liquidated artisanal fishing, criminalized the activity and spawned conflict between the governments and the people living in the lake zone. Other cases include the forced removal without compensation (Afgem in Tanzanite mines) or entombment (Barric Gold's Bulyankhulu) of indigenous people in new multinational mining concessions.

Unlike the earlier periods when Africans featured as labor (either as slaves, plantation workers, mine labor or colonial crop peasants) it is now possible for the west to access and exploit Africa's resources without needing the people themselves. This is one of the crucial challenges facing the region as it responds to globalization pressures centered on the resources of the region.

### **Regional Conflict Dynamics.**

The scope of conflicts in the region is to be conceived at, at least, three levels: the national, the regional and the international. It should be understood, however, that although these levels might be analytically helpful they are not mutually exclusive and, in reality, they are not isolated categories. That is why an integrated framework of analysis such as a conflict matrix might be more reflective of the dynamic reality. Such a matrix as we have tried to construct here attempts to capture the various actors and interests not in site but in their dynamic interaction. What needs to be stressed, perhaps is that the multiplicity of actors and the intensity of interactions (both collaborative and conflictual) will depend on the intensity of the conflicts. This, in turn, is a function of the stakes at hand and the actor strategies and capabilities involved. Concisely stated: the more vital the interests, the higher the stakes and hence the greater the possibility of high intensity, regional spread and multiple actor involvement.

To this end, the war in the DRC has already claimed nearly 3 million lives, displaced millions more internally and created massive refugee movements across the region. Like a vortex, it has also sucked in and involved not only Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe quite directly but also the other neighbors such as the Central African Republic,

Sudan, Tanzania, South Africa and Zambia have been involved in one way or the other. Further more other interests such as countries outside the region, mining companies, illicit arms dealers, mercenaries, private militaries, money launderers, sans frontier organizations, UN agencies, etc, have been deeply involved although their role needs to be made more explicit. The major conflicts in the region are summarised below.

### **Major Conflicts in the Region by Countries.**

**Burundi** – Invasion and plunder of DRC resources (exporting internal problems?); politicized ethnic cleavage with interminable negotiations; Refugees in Tanzania and Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs; dispute with Tanzania over refugee dissidents; generalized political instability; Territorial ambitions (from population pressure?); generalized political instability under transitional ethnic minority rule.

**DRC** – Civil War from 1997 emerging from predatory rule under Mobutu; invasion by Rwanda and Uganda 1998 and intervention by Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe; 2.5 million dead, refugees in and out and numerous IDPs; multiple powerful interests in mineral wealth; contested governance with weak state.

**Kenya** – Natural resource struggles (land, water, fishing, grazing, etc.); Constitutional and succession problems; socio-ethnic disputes; border dispute with Somalia and Uganda; leading Sudan IGAD initiative.

**Tanzania** – Contested governance (Zanzibar/Union) conflict; religious (Christian/Moslem); border disputes with Malawi, Uganda and Burundi; refugees, armed dissidence and crime; resource conflicts (mining) between locals and mining companies in Shinyanga, Arusha and Musoma; human/wildlife, Illicit drug traffic. Quietly withdrew military training contingent from DRC at breakout of war.

**Rwanda** – Invasion, occupation and plunder of DRC resources; politicized intra-ethnic cleavage with high political tensions; genocide trials in Rwanda and at the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania; territorial ambitions due to land scarcity and population pressure; Interahamwe and ex-FAR infiltrations from DRC; maintains aggressive stance in the region. Enjoys US military support.

**Sudan** – Generalized war between SPLA (supported by US against Islamic Fundamentalist government) and the government; resource conflicts in oil, water, pastures; religious conflict – intra-Muslim, Muslim-Christian; Nile waters contestation with Uganda and the countries surrounding Lake Victoria to the South and Egypt to the North. Sent a detachment in support of the Kabila government in 1999.

**Uganda** – Invasion, occupation and plunder of DRC resources; border conflicts with Tanzania, Sudan, DRC, Rwanda and Kenya; collaborated with Rwanda and later clashed with it in DRC; insurgencies in North, West and East; conflicts between locals, refugees and IDPs. Enjoys US and British military support.

## **Actors, Interests and Strategies in DRC**

One of the vexing features of conflicts in the Great Lakes region and the DRC, in particular, is the question of the multiplicity of actors and complexity of interests. Apart from the visible internal parties to the conflict who are relatively easy to identify there are other actors either lurking in the background or actively working in the foreground. These other actors normally adopt strategies and play roles, which tend to, either promote the peaceful transformation of the conflict or intensify the conflicts. At any rate the roles played by these other actors may prove crucial either in prolonging the conflicts in the DRC or in terminating them. Furthermore some of these actors are quite powerful and capable of influencing conflict patterns and trends in significant ways.

The visible other actors may have the most noble stated motives, but in certain cases their actual activities on the ground may not be consistent with their stated motives and goals. This may arise either from deliberate strategies of deception or from weaknesses of orientation. It may be a fine combination of both. Furthermore such actors as the Red Cross, UNHCR, WFP, etc may have the best of intentions but disagree with some permanent members of the Security Council. The problem is that such actors are usually studied either as disaster relief organizations or as peace facilitators but rarely are they ever studied as a hindrance to peace making efforts.

The invisible but quite powerful actors are even more problematic. Some may work invisibly to promote peace but more often than not they work to subvert peace. Such actors as the intelligence and security services (CIA, MI6, regional security organizations) are by definition secret service organizations. Private military and security companies, drug dealers, arms merchants and money launderers operate in the seamy and gray areas of criminality. The plunderers (diamond and gold diggers), lords of poverty, International Financial Institutions, weak states and warlords all work together in complex interdependencies.

The activities and impact of these actors may be decisive in determining the eventuality of a violent conflict in the region. Yet they are hardly ever studied and when they are, the tendency has been either to give them casual treatment or to treat them as peripheral actors. Furthermore little attempt has been made to link their activities as integral and sometimes determinative in the conflict dynamics.

What follows is therefore an initial attempt to identify and describe some of the most important actors in the DRC conflict and to try and map out their interests and modes of action as well as their commitment to and reliability in peace-building initiatives.

## **Identities and Definitions of Actors and Interests**

**Imperialists** – Largely the Western countries led by the United States under the G8 or OECD with an interest in stable but weak states. They may operate overtly or covertly but always with an eye to power and wealth. Increasingly, governments such as the US, the UK, Israel, or France 'out-source' military, foreign trade, and intelligence activities to an alliance of intelligence agencies and private sector companies including PM/SCs (Graduate Institute of International Studies, 2001). Weakening states in collaboration with arms dealers, PM/SCs, lords of poverty, warlords, moneybags, globalizes, ambulance, chasers. In the DRC, apart from playing out their rivalry over wealth and influence, they have failed to reach a meaningful consensus on the mobilization of an effective peacekeeping force and hence prolonged the war. Their peace orientation is opportunistic.

**Robber Barons** – Individuals, companies and states essentially involved in activities of plunder and pillage. They thrive under conditions of relative anarchy with little or no government control over licensing or taxation. High but quick returns are the key in coltan, nobium, diamonds, gold, genetic resources, etc. They prey upon weak states in collaboration with imperialists, drug barons, arms dealers, mercenaries, PM/SCs, war lords, lords of poverty and money launderers. In the DRC they are the central actors in an international network plundering resources, financing the war and obstructing peace initiatives. Their peace orientation is spoilers.

**Drug Barons** – Individuals or companies involved in drug trafficking networks usually supplying warlords, mercenaries and child soldiers in war zones as well as civilians at large. Close collaboration with arms dealers, mercenaries, PM/SCs, warlords, and money launderers. They thrive under conditions of anarchy. Working with criminal networks such as Victor Bout, Sanjivan Ruprah and others they are responsible for supplying the drugs that keep the child soldiers under the influence so that they can kill, rape, maim, steal or burn property. Their peace orientation is spoilers.

**Gun Runners** – Individuals or companies involved in the procurement and supply of arms and ammunition either legally or illegally to any or all sides in conflicts. Thriving on armed conflicts in collaboration with drug barons, mercenaries, PM/SCs, warlords, weak states, and imperialists. Gunrunners are arguably the most important actors after the robber barons. They have

played a pivotal role in prolonging the war in the DRC by supplying the necessary weapons and ammunition to one or all sides in the war. Those actors identified by the UN Panel as airline companies are essentially engaged in supplying arms and evacuating resources. Air Cess, for example, a group of companies controlled by Victor Bout is known to have supplied UNITA and transported diamonds out of the UNITA controlled areas, airlifted Rwanda's RPA forces to Pweto in the DRC-Rwanda battle for Mbuji Mayi in 2000. The same company is known to have been under contract to supply the DRC and Angola forces in the war. Their peace orientation is spoilers.

*Mercenaries* – Individuals or companies of professional soldiers who are hired to take part in hostilities for private gain normally not being nationals, members of the armed forces a party to the conflict or a state. Otherwise known as soldiers of fortune they include such individuals as Bob Denard and Mike Hoare who featured in the early days of Africa's independence. They work closely with weak states, PM/SCs, plunderers, warlords. Mercenaries have been cited to operate on almost all sides in the DRC conflict although they have not received sufficient attention in the UN panel report. Since they are invited by conditions of state fragility, political instability and general insecurity they may provide temporary and limited relief, in the short term, but tend to exacerbate the conditions that brought them about, in the long term. Their peace orientation is spoilers.

*Private Military/Security Companies (PM/SCs)* providing a range of military and security services in conflict situations, extremely weak or collapsed states. They may include combat and operational support, military advice and training, arms procurement, intelligence gathering, hostage rescue, etc. Private security services are supplied in crime prevention, protection of businesses, people and property in non-conflict situations where state police capacity has diminished. These include Defense Systems Limited (UK), Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) (US), Sandline International (UK), Executive Outcomes (SA) (now defunct), Saladin Security, The Corps of Commissionaires, BDM/Vinnel Corp. (US) AirScan (US), Levdan (Israel), Gurkha Security Guards Limited (UK). Major clients are weak states, globalisers, ambulance chasers, plunderers, imperialists, drug barons. They have featured at different times and in different roles in protecting plunderers in the DRC. Their peace orientation is spoilers.

*War Lords* – Individuals or bands of usually rebels who organize and lead armed groups operating either as bandits or conventional forces carving out certain areas, which they continue to control and exploit by military force either through consent or coercion. The region has become defined by warlordism and features two kinds of warlords – those in power and those out

of power. Those in power attain it by force and violence, and are obsessed by state security; "...they build ramparts around themselves against the groups they have earlier driven out by force, and then they clone themselves elsewhere, particularly in neighboring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo..." (Mbembe, 1999). They work closely with plunderers, drug baron's arms dealers, mercenaries and PM/SCs. Their peace orientation is spoilers.

**Weak States** – States, which suffer from diminished capacity to exercise, legitimate authority over governance including the capacity to administer government, maintain law and order, provide social services, defend state sovereignty etc. Worst cases are called collapsed or failed states. The DRC may be the worst case in the region but the region generally features weak states with all the above diminished capacities. The incapacity to exercise effective control over their resources is, in part, the source of their crises of legitimacy. They are highly penetrated by foreign interests and therefore unable to take independent decisions with regard to long-term peace building processes. Even when they perform stabilizing roles as in the case of the SADC alliance in the DRC they are either ignored or, indeed, chastised. It is no wonder that the withdrawal of SADC forces in DRC has created a vacuum that is quickly being filled by South Africa eclipsing the Lusaka process with the support of the Anglo-American alliance. Weak states fall prey to imperialists, warlords, lords of poverty, ambulance chasers, drug barons, plunderers, PM/SCs, globalisers. They may be opportunists or peacemakers depending on whether they are seeking protection (acquiescent) or autonomy (resistant) from spoilers.

**Lords of Poverty** – Named after the 1989 book of the same title by Graham Hancock sub-titled "Power, prestige and Corruption of the International Aid Business". These are self-serving individuals and organizations that have perpetuated poverty and thrived on it through aid or donor organizations. This arises essentially from the fact that the donor countries have no fundamental interest in eliminating the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. On the contrary their interest lies in maintaining conditions of structural dependency, which spawn the weak states favored by imperialism. Lords of poverty are the thin end of the wedge that creates an enabling environment for plunderers and globalizers. The prey upon weak states and collaborate with imperialists, moneybags, globalisers, ambulance chasers and PM/SCs. Their peace orientation is opportunists.

**Money Bags** – International Financial Institutions include the World Bank, IMF and international commercial banks moving money swiftly across the globe with the effect of weakening the economies of weak states and keeping

them in debt. Moneybags are essentially interested in free and fast movement of capital into areas and activities where fast profits can be made. They are the flag bearers of liberalization driving the process of concentration of capital and centralization of control. In the DRC some banking establishments have been responsible for moving the money in the vicious circle of resources, guns and money. They include Barclays Bank (UK), B.B.L., Fortis and Belgolaise (Belgium), Standard Chartered. Preying upon weak states in collaboration with imperialists, globalizers, lords of poverty and ambulance chasers. Their peace orientation is opportunists.

*Globalisers* – Multinational Corporations – Gigantic companies with enormous financial resources, bargaining power and technological capacity, which they employ in directing capital movements in search of medium to long-term resources and markets. The holdings of some global giants often far exceed the GNPs of all African states combined. Currently a new wave of mega mergers has set in making them even more powerful and beyond the effective regulation of particular national governments. Preying upon weak states they are facilitated by imperialists and moneybags. Many of these firms are operating within the legal framework in the DRC but they are no less predatory under conditions of unequal power. A good number have been mentioned for violating the OECD code of conduct. They include Anglo-American (UK), Asa Diam (Belgium), Eagle Wings (USA), America Mineral Fields (USA) and many others blurring the boundary between legal and illegal exploitation. With an interest in long-term stability unlike the plunderers, globalisers are essentially peacemakers.

*Blue Berets* – The United Nations is the ultimate custodian of world peace. However, the UN system is presently constrained by the domination and marginalization of the General Assembly by the Security Council, on the one hand, and the subordination of the Security Council to the United States, on the other. This means that the UN is progressively losing credibility and legitimacy particularly among the smaller and weaker member states that feel that the principle of the sovereign equality of states is no longer the fundamental norm. Dominated by the national interests of the permanent members of the Security Council and driven by the interests of the globalisers including such bodies as the WTO the Security Council is constantly wavering between defending the sovereignty of member states and promoting unilateral interests. At times this has resulted in major inconsistencies and contradictions rendering the organization virtually paralyzed. In the DRC the competing interests and resulting tensions among the P5 in the Security Council have been responsible for the failure of the Lusaka process as well as the procrastination in deploying a viable peace-keeping mission beyond the largely symbolic MONUC. Working through



some ambulance chasers, the UN has conflicted and collaborated with PM/SCs, globalisers, moneybags, and weak states, imperialists. Like the imperialists their peace orientation is opportunists.

**Money Launderers** – Net-work of banks and other companies involved in transactions intended to 'clean' 'dirty' money obtained from criminal activities such as drug pushing, gun-running, plunder of resources, etc. The idea is to conceal the illicit source of the money. It is estimated to be a US \$500 billion industry. In the DRC money laundering has played a key role in the transactions of plunderers and gunrunners in particular. These activities are linked with criminal organizations dealing in smuggling, drug pushing, and currency counterfeiting and illegal foreign exchange dealings. The three 'clans' of Ahmad, Nassour and Khanafer have been mentioned in this regard but this is a very difficult area. Illegal money is sometimes recycled into commodities or finds its way into legal operations. Money launderers work in close collaboration with arms dealers, drug barons, plunderers, and mercenaries. Their peace orientation is spoilers.

**Ambulance Chasers** – A range of international humanitarian organizations including those in the UN system such as Department of Peace-Keeping Operations, OCHA, UNHCR, Inter-governmental of organizations such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, Inter and Non-governmental organizations, which respond to natural and man-made disasters. This has become a multi-billion dollar business with networks of food, medical and equipment suppliers. Naturally this has created not only jobs but also vested interests in industry. Refugees and other disaster victims have become sources of enormous profits with the same actors moving between emergency operations to repatriation, rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration programs. Instead of preventing and ending conflicts these organizations have developed a tendency to prolong them. There are a number of reported cases in the Great Lakes region where refugees have been abandoned, discouraged from repatriation or forcefully repatriated depending on the availability and direction of movement of resources. Ambulance chasers thrive on disasters and prey upon weak or collapsed states in collaboration with Blue Berets, Lords of Poverty, warlords, plunderers and PM/SCs. Their peace orientation is opportunists.

**Civil Society** – Civil society here is taken as defined by Antonio Gramsci as the counterforce to political society and not as non-governmental organizations. Whereas political society represents the sphere of contestation, civil society is the sphere of consent where legitimacy prevails. Civil society in this sense hardly exists in Africa since as we saw capacity and legitimacy deficits are the defining features of states. Where the state is weak or has

collapsed one can hardly talk of civil society in the Gramscian sense. Political competence is almost non-existent. One can talk of fractionalized societies and polarized communities sometimes struggling together for peace while at other times they locked in internecine Hobbesian struggles for survival. Either way they have little time left for organized, let alone effective institutional politics. This is roughly the situation in the DRC where politicized ethnicity has become one of the strategies of warlordism and plunder, on the one hand, and the inter-Congolese dialogue about 'power-sharing' is being conducted above the heads of ordinary people. The Lendu-Hema conflict as well as the Mai-Mai activities can be understood in this context. Yet there is no doubt that none of the actors has a greater desire for peace than the ordinary people who become targets and victims of the conflicts.

From this typology of actors we have evolved three clusters or categories of actors defined by their orientation to peace initiatives and suggested strategies of handling them in viable peace processes.

**A. – *Peacemakers*** – Actors whose interests are negatively affected by the conflict or who are likely to enjoy a peace dividend. They perceive the peace negotiation process as a positive-sum game, eg. Civil society, globalizers, weak autonomous states. These should be embraced and encouraged.

**B. – *Peace spoilers*** – Actors whose interests are promoted by the existence and prolongation of the conflict or whose interests would be threatened by the termination of the conflict, eg. Plunderers, drug barons, gunrunners, mercenaries, private military and security companies, warlords, money launderers. The should be exposed, isolated, condemned and sanctioned through Interpol and the International Criminal Court.

**C. – *Peace opportunists*** – This is an enigmatic and unpredictable group of actors. They may promote peace as easily as spoiling it. They may gain or lose through protraction or termination of the conflict, eg. imperialist states, weak and acquiescent states, lords of poverty, ambulance chasers. These may be converted to peacemakers through the judicious use of appropriate incentives.

It should be stressed that this is essentially a heuristic device and the list of actors is by no means exhaustive. This is work-in-progress which attempts to simplify reality but capture the essentials, hopefully without being too arbitrary or judgmental. The list of types of actors may grow as the model becomes more refined. The peace orientation categories are also neither static nor mutually exclusive. Actors and, in particular, the opportunists

may vacillate between categories or may be difficult to place in one category at any one time. It is note-worthy that according to our categorization out of fifteen actor types eight are spoilers; six are opportunists and only three are oriented towards peace making. This suggests that conflict prevention and peace building are formidable tasks with the balance of possibilities lying between spoilers and opportunists. What should be realized, however, is that opportunists include some of the most powerful actors capable of influencing, regulating, controlling or even sanctioning many of the spoilers. These are the strategic actors. Between imperialists, money bags and blue berets lies a lot of power and influence to affect the behavior of plunderers, gun runners, drug barons and mercenaries, for example. The challenge, therefore is how these actors can be persuaded to embrace peace

### **Actors and Interests in the DRC Conflict**

Focusing on the case of the DRC this paper will now attempt to examine the activities of selected actors in relation to their postulated peace orientation with the view to determining whether, in their behavior, these actors have tended to promote or obstruct peace in the region. Drawing upon the above observations the paper will seek to deepen these insights and to explore what they suggest in terms of alternative modalities of conflict resolution/transformation and peace building strategies in the Great Lakes region. The underlying concern is that too many attempts at resolving conflicts in the region have failed. We argue that these initiatives have failed not because of faulty processes, lack of political will or inappropriate timing, though these factors may account for some of the failure. We contend, instead, that the fundamental cause of these persistent failures is the faulty diagnosis of the problems particularly in terms of identifying the range of actors and their particular interests in the conflicts. Many peace agreements have not worked because they have been partial and subject to the rather vague and tenuous notion of 'political will' for their implementation. It is strongly suggested here that it is the 'logic of interests' rather than 'political will', which ultimately determines fate of any peace initiative. For this reason, not only do we urge a comprehensive approach to actors and interests but we also suggest that various actors have different orientations towards peace initiatives. In this regard we have evolved three clusters of actors comprised of:

**A. – Peace makers** – Actors whose interests are negatively affected by the conflict or who are likely to enjoy a peace dividend. They perceive the peace negotiation process as a positive-sum game, eg. civil society, globalizers, weak autonomous states.

**B. – Peace spoilers** – Actors whose interests are promoted by the existence and prolongation of the conflict or whose interests would be threatened by the

termination of the conflict, eg. Plunderers, drug barons, gunrunners, mercenaries, private military and security companies, warlords, money launderers.

C. – *Peace opportunists* – This is an enigmatic and unpredictable group of actors. They may promote peace as easily as spoiling it. They may gain or lose through protraction or termination of the conflict, eg. imperialists, weak and acquiescent states, lords of poverty, ambulance chasers.

The strategic implications for peace making are:

- A. Should be embraced and encouraged.
- B. Should be exposed, isolated, condemned and sanctioned. The newly formed International Criminal Court, assisted by an appropriate international policing mechanism (Interpol?), could be given the mandate to deal with such cases among others.
- C. May be converted to peacemakers through peace confidence building measures as well as through a judicious use of carrots and sticks.

In what follows we will briefly examine the role played by two groups of important actors in the DRC conflict in order to demonstrate that it is the logic of their particular interests which has influenced their behavior and the manner in which they have interacted with other actors. To do this we shall take the imperialist countries (particularly the EU and US) as peace opportunists and warlords as the quintessential peace spoilers. The choice of these two particular actors in the Great Lakes Region is not accidental. It emanates from the fact that the two actors seem to have the highest rate of interaction with each other as well as with the others. Together they have had the greatest impact on the conflicts and are, by and large, responsible for the situation that prevails.

At least two recent developments may serve to demonstrate this point. One is that the agreement between Kagame and Kabila for the former to withdraw his forces from the DRC was essentially reached under US pressure. The other development is that the differences that arose between Museveni and Kagame leading to the clash in Kisangani continue to receive the attention of No.10 Downing Street. This raises important questions concerning the relationship between the western countries and warlordism in general and in Africa, in particular (BBC News Report, November 10, 2002). For purposes of this study, as we shall demonstrate later, Kagame and Museveni are defined as warlords in power.

In analyzing the interactions of the two actors therefore we are interested in finding out how they have behaved in the pursuit and protection of their interest and how such behavior has promoted peace or otherwise. We will attempt to look at the following indicators.

- The identity of their interests.
- Strategies and resources employed in pursuing them.
- The extent and modes of involvement in regional conflicts.
- Visibility –the extent to which the actor is overt or covert.
- Commitment to Peace – the degree to which they have consistently supported peace initiatives.
- Reliability – the extent to which actors have been willing to negotiate and implement or to support peace agreements in the region.

## **Imperialist States**

The Congo has historically been a target and corner stone of various imperial designs. Since it became King Leopold II's personal colony in 1885 to the coming of independence, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the instauration of Joseph Mobutu by imperialist forces in the early 1960s the country has remained contested territory (Conrad, 1988; Hirsch, 1999). More recently, most enigmatic roles in the current crisis in the DRC has been the role played by the western countries during the days of Mobutu's rule, the process leading to his removal and in the post-Mobutu period. While western interests in the natural and particularly the strategic resources of the Congo is easy to discern through the direct involvement of mining companies and other enterprises, their geopolitical interests have been in a state of flux. This is mainly because the DRC conflict is going on at a critical juncture in the capitalist world system. This juncture is marked by the end of the cold war and the reconfiguration of the structure of power in the international system; the intensification of the globalization process and the rise of the United States to global dominance. All these developments call for major adjustments in the international system and some of the struggles attending these adjustments are being played out in the DRC conflict.

The United States, for example, supported the predatory and profligate Mobutu regime rhetorically and only partly to stem the encroachment of *communism* but mainly to promote its own interests in Africa during the cold war (Gibb, 1991; Kelly, 1993; Schatzberg, 1991, Sullivan, 1995). The US is consistent in this goal and that is why it displayed some ambivalence mixed with considerable hostility towards the new government of Laurent Kabila. This was partly because the US (through Ambassador Richardson) in collaboration with South Africa (through President Mandela) had failed to bring about some kind of government of national unity which would have bought time for Mobutu and for the US to secure its interests. This move would also have installed South Africa as the dominant actor in the region. The coming of Kabila to power without the blessing of the US meant that the regime had to be isolated and eventually sanitized so that the geo-strategic interests of the US could be secured. Some of the latest developments,

particularly after Joseph Kabila succeeded his father, suggest that the US is finally succeeding in placing its interests at the center of the peace process, putting South Africa in a strategic position and directing the Lusaka process.

The immediate reason why the Kabila government courted the wrath of the US and the Western countries in general, however, is that it displayed what one writer has described as 'strident nationalism' (Bangura, 1999) in at least five ways all of which did not curry favor with the west.

1. The government sought to cancel and/or re-negotiate most of the mining concessions which it decided were not consistent with the DRC interests. It actually cancelled some concessions and was taken to the International Court for the Settlement of Investment Disputes.
2. The government expressed the intention to repudiate the international debt accumulated under the Mobutu regime.
3. It rebuffed UN efforts to investigate the genocide committed largely by Rwanda forces against Hutus in Eastern DRC in the campaign towards Kinshasa.
4. It resisted pressures to democratize the country instantly and banned political parties and the political activities of the erstwhile non-armed opposition to Mobutu.
5. It expelled its Rwandese and Ugandan allies who enjoyed the support of the United States and invited the SADC allied forces. This was a surprise factor which suggested a different configuration of power in the region from that anticipated by the west under a Pax-Pretoriana.

It should be noted that the western countries have not always taken the same position on the situation in the DRC. France and Belgium, the ex-colonial powers in the region with entrenched interests have not always agreed with the United States. Indeed, as we pointed out earlier, there exists considerable inter-imperialist rivalry in the region resulting in a conflict and collaboration mode of interaction. At one level, the United States and Britain are seeking to dislodge France and Belgium from their traditional colonial positions of privilege in the region. At another level France is determined to resist Anglo-American encroachment while expanding its own sphere of influence. Belgium, on the other hand, is becoming progressively unable to pursue such grand unilateralist goals.

Consistent with this conflict and collaboration mode Britain and the United States have, by and large, played an obstructionist role in the DRC conflict particularly when it has come to the UN deployment of peacekeeping forces insisting on the withdrawal of the allied forces led by Zimbabwe as a pre-condition. Britain, in particular, has linked its support for the white settler farmers in Zimbabwe to the peace process in the DRC. The French, on the other hand, have tried to bring about an early end to the conflict in the DRC. They

have undertaken a number of initiatives including the Franco-Africa Summit of November 1998, as well as bilateral diplomatic activity to bring the parties to some agreement. Apart from openly condemning Rwanda's and Uganda's invasion of the DRC long before the Security Council did so, France has also acknowledged the presence of the allied forces as a stabilizing factor. To this end it has been more positively pre-disposed to Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe. It may be helpful to recall also that the RPF invasion of Rwanda in 1994, which triggered the genocide in Rwanda was sprung from Uganda and supported by Britain and the US. It found the French on the opposite side having been busy re-organizing and supplying the FAR under the 1975 France-Rwanda Defense Pact (Martens, 1999).

At this level, therefore, the conflict in the DRC is an expression of the inter-imperialist rivalry between the French on the one hand, and the Anglo-American alliance, on the other. Thus, the war is about high international politics as opposed to low domestic politics (democratization, human rights, ethnicity, etc.). It is, first and foremost, an imperialist war and like all imperialist wars in modern history, it is a war about the distribution of wealth and power. At the regional level this war is, among other things, about re-defining the position and role of 'post-apartheid' South Africa in a 'post-liberation' Southern Africa characterized by weak states, weak societies and weak economies all debilitated by two decades of armed struggles, destabilization raids and structural adjustment policies.

At the international level the war is about reconciling the new American hegemony with the post-World War II colonial possessions and spheres of influence. On this score it is a war about re-drawing the African geo-strategic and economic interests map to replace the Berlin Conference order which was only marginally modified by the two world wars without explicitly accommodating American interests. To some extent therefore Africa is only beginning to experience what Latin America experienced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and Asia (Laos, Cambodia, Korea, Vietnam, etc.) has been undergoing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Behind the pro-democracy, pro-growth rhetoric, the less publicized role of the United States in Africa has been the steady supply of arms, ammunition and military training – all stoking the fires of armed conflicts in the continent. In the Great Lakes Region in particular, the US has supplied arms virtually to all countries variously involved in the DRC conflict. From 1989 to 1998 the US provided over \$227million in weapons and training to African militaries. Of this, some \$111million (excluding \$75million emergency aid to Rwanda in 1994) went to countries that have been involved in the DRC war. They included Angola, Burundi, Chad, DRC, Namibia, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Of the \$19.5million in US arms and training delivered to Africa in FY1999, \$4.8million went to these countries with Uganda alone receiving

\$1.6million. As a proportion of total US arms sales globally which was \$16billion in 1999 this may not be so significant but in relation to the conflicts in the region it is not only substantial but also represents a tacit endorsement of the involvement of countries such as Rwanda and Uganda in the DRC war. It also clearly demonstrates the connection between the rise of warlordism in the region and US foreign policy in Africa. (Hartung and Montague, 2001).

## **Warlords and Warlordism**

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the emergence of warlords and militarism in the region has been linked with imperialism in at least in two senses. The first source is the legacy of armed struggles against imperialism and settler colonial occupation as in the case of Mau Mau in Kenya. The second and more immediate source however is the close relationship which has been forged between warlordism, inter-imperialist struggles and the defense and protection of western interests.

Warlordism has become a structural feature in African conflicts. There are at least two types of this phenomenon. Warlords may be defined as individuals or bands of rebels or dissidents who organize and lead armed groups operating either as guerillas or conventional forces carving out pieces of territory in a country which they control and exploit by military force either with the intention to secede or as a base to capture the whole country. They may impose or earn legitimacy in the areas they control but more often they rule by force. These we will call 'warlords seeking power'. They collaborate closely with gun-runners, plunderers, drug barons, mercenaries, private military companies and as we shall see, the imperialist interests in the region. The second group of warlords may be defined as the highest leaders in a regime which, having come to power by military force, maintains itself by the same means. These regimes tend to maintain themselves in power by repressive regimes at home and aggression against their neighbors. The conflicts in the Great Lakes are essentially driven by both types of warlordism fuelled by imperialist interests and frequently in competition with each other for political power and resource plunder as the UN reports on the plunder of DRC resources have indicated (United Nations, 2001).

In the year 2000 when demand for colton was rising while supplies were falling, a kilogram was internationally priced at \$200 while the obtaining price in DRC was only \$10. At that time the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) was exporting nearly 100 tons a month making \$20million a month and nearly \$250million in 18 months. This created a vicious circle in which the RPA provided protection and security for individual and corporate plunderers who, in turn, shared their profits with the army to ensure continued protection and exploitation. It is this situation which has led to the vicious circles of violence which pervade the whole social and political life linking the whole region in



a process of plunder, war and destruction as may be witnessed in the cycles of massacres and carnage and in pillaging and robbery sometimes reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century raiding parties.

Behind these vicious circles of violence and destruction lie very powerful interests. It is reported, for example, that when the UN report first came out it was not taken lightly. Several members of the UN panel received death threats. Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi also protested so vehemently that the UNSC dropped some of the members of the original panel and authorized an addendum which watered down some of the recommendations and reversed some others. This is not surprising given the power of the high tech industry for whom "tantalum is the magic dust, a key component in everything from mobile phones made by Nokia and Ericsson and computer chips from Intel to Sony stereos and VCRs" (Essick, 2001).

Addressing the problem of militarism Robin Luckham (1998) came to the conclusion that armed struggles for national liberation as well as military coups were not a new phenomenon in Africa. "What is novel is the geographic spread of armed revolt, the increasing rejection of political authority as such, the collapse of entire states, administrative systems and repressive apparatuses, and the emergence of warlords seeking power or personal enrichment rather than a broad national vision of national liberation, social revolution or development." (Luckham, 1998) (my emphasis)

Perhaps there is no better area to demonstrate the rise of warlordism in Africa thesis propounded by Luckham above, than the Great lakes Region. The region is awash with both kinds of warlords – those in power and those in search of power with the former striving to hang onto power while the latter fight to wrest it from them. This is sometimes played out in a tragic serial process of an endless spiral of violence. In Uganda, for example, Joseph Kony of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) is fighting Yoweri Museveni of the UPDF (formerly the National Resistance Army) of the National Resistance Movement which is now in power. Museveni himself came to power in 1986 by overthrowing Tito Okello who had overthrown Milton Obote in 1985. Obote had replaced Iddi Amin in 1980 after a year of political turbulence. The latter, in turn, had been removed by Tanzania in an invasion of Uganda which started with a border dispute in 1979. With the exception of Obote the rest are military people. In Rwanda, Paul Kagame, the commander of the Rwanda Patriotic Army which overthrew the civilian government of Habyarimana, initially served as Vice-President and Minister of Defense under civilian President Bizimungu from 1994 after the genocide before he overthrew him and more-or-less declared himself President and Commander in Chief in April, 2000. Meanwhile, like Museveni, he faces internal dissent because of blocking democratic politics and hostile borders not only from the invaded Congolese in the form of Mai

Mai but also from from Ex-Far and Interahamwe warlords encamped in the DRC without a clear political process of ensuring their safe return to Rwanda and future participation in democratic politics in the country.

Achille Mbembe refers to warlordism as 'military princeships' which he says have appeared in Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and, to a lesser extent in Eritrea and Ethiopia. They are characterized by the persistent use of force in putting their internal and external policies in effect. "Having come to power through violence and faced with internal disorder they are obsessed with security. So they build rampart around themselves against groups they have earlier driven out by force, and then they clone themselves elsewhere, particularly in neighboring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo whose state structures have proved fragile and unstable (Mbembe, 1999).

What should perhaps be noted is the umbilical cord that binds Kagame and Museveni to the imperialist countries. The RPF is the product of the Ugandan army supported by Britain and the U.S. Britain trained the RPF at Jinja Military base in Uganda while Kagame trained at Ft. Leavenworth, USA where he emerged to take command of the the RPF. In a play out of the inter-imperialist rivalry the RPF was first pitted against Zaire, France, and Belgium who supported the Habyarimana government and built its military force. "The RPF was established as a result of an NRA demobilization exercise for which Uganda received British and American funding. They demobilized by crossing the border in completely equipped units, taking their insignia off their shoulders as they crossed" (*Economic Intelligence Review*, 19 August, 1994). Ex-president Binaisa of Uganda says; "Only one conclusion can be drawn that the present conflict in Rwanda was started by Uganda and it would be a fiction to call it a civil war" (Binaisa, 1994).

## Conclusion

This paper was our initial attempt to apply our actors and interests model to regional conflicts in the Great Lakes region. As we pointed out initially I chose to examine the role of warlords and imperialists in the regional conflicts. What emerges is that there is a very close relationship between the two actors not only in terms of their intimate interactions but also in terms of the origins and sustenance of warlords by the imperialists. It is thus not accidental that when President Clinton made his highly publicized tour of Africa he not only praised the warlords as Africa's new crop of leaders, but also made more stops in countries with warlords in power than in those with civilian leaders. He stopped in Accra (Rawlings), Kampala (Museveni), Kigali (Kagame). In the case of the Great lakes region he even summoned a meeting of the regional leaders as if to install Museveni as the regional warlord. This all goes to suggest that claims to promoting democracy to the contrary, US has a preference for warlords. Presumably because of their strong-arm,

high handed and undemocratic politics they are considered to be better suited for the protection of their interests.

There are therefore at least three policy strategic options available in dealing with this relationship between warlordism and imperialism. In the short term all efforts should be made to place the burden of war termination and peacemaking on their shoulders. The imperialists, in particular, should be prevailed upon to rein in their protégés in order to ensure the implementation of peace agreements. To facilitate this process special UN panels such as have been created on the illicit exploitation of the resources of the DRC should be established to investigate relationships between imperialists and warlords and between them and other actors.

In the medium term efforts should be made to address the problem at source by convincing imperialists that it is in their long-term interests to promote genuine democracy in the interest of long-term political stability. This would also entail abandoning a policy of maintaining stable but weak (repressive but illegitimate) states and weak societies in favor of stable and strong states under-girded by strong societies.

In the long term the Great lakes Region as a whole can benefit from convening a Great Lakes Peace, Security and Development Conference involving as much as possible all the vested interests. Such a conference would seek realistic ways of making peace without ignoring or negatively affecting legitimate interests. By the same token, however, the conference would identify systemic peace spoilers and sanction them accordingly. The development component would aim at establishing an enabling environment for co-operation in joint development programs and conflict transformation mechanisms.

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