

SECURITY BRIEF

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SOMALIA: 14TH TIME LUCKY?

By the end of 2003 there were few observers who held out much hope of a successful outcome to the Somali peace talks being hosted by Kenya under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). This round of negotiations, the 14th by most reckonings, had begun in Eldoret in 2002 and by December 2003 had achieved little of any substance. The expense of hosting a vast number of delegates had also created problems for the organisers and donors, and it was largely out of desperation and frustration that a final effort was launched to rescue something from the wreckage. It was decided to hold a retreat in Mombasa at which the principal players themselves would attempt to iron out their differences. Failing this, it was apparent that the foreign governments who had footed most of the bill would reconsider their commitment, having concluded that the Somali leadership in all its forms lacked seriousness.

Eventually, after several delays and petty objections, the meeting was convened on 9 January 2004 in Nairobi. To the great surprise of all involved, on 29 January it was announced that agreement had been reached on a transitional federal charter, and rules established for the selection of a national parliament.

It was only days before some of the 40 signatories revoked their commitment, however, claiming that the final text had been amended

without their knowledge or consent. International pressure persuaded the dissidents to think again, but new protests were raised by certain prominent warlords, who held that their vital interests had been compromised. Specifically they cast aspersions on the role of Kenya and Djibouti in favouring certain elements close to the rump transitional government installed in Mogadishu. Some indicated that Ethiopia was willing to back their cause.

Thus resurfaced a perennial problem that has bedevilled these talks. Many of the regional and international mediators have their own particular agendas when it comes to the reconstruction of a Somali state. At present the international community at large would probably settle for any outcome that would hold out the possibility of a return to juridical statehood in Somalia. The local power brokers are well aware of these imperatives, and are only too ready to exploit them to the full in an exercise of calculated brinkmanship.

That protracted and repeated efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement have met with so little success bears witness to the extreme complexity and fragility of these peace negotiations. Agreements have been made before, only to be violated almost immediately. Either that, or elements outside the negotiations have engaged in a spoiling role to assert or improve their bargaining position in the next round.

The UN Security Council has warned would-be spoilers that they will be held responsible for their actions should the nascent agreement fail.

One wonders how much weight such threats will carry with the recalcitrants, and whether a lasting settlement can be achieved ahead of a 15th attempt. — *RC*

ZIMBABWE'S MDC: PERILS AND PROSPECTS

Since attaining its independence from Britain in 1980, Zimbabwe has been ruled by the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), led by the current president, Robert Mugabe. Even though the country is considered to be a *de jure* democracy, credible opposition to ZANU-PF only began to emerge in the early 1990s, as public concern grew about issues such as mass poverty and unemployment in a political context of increasing presidential power.

The steady decline in living standards throughout the 1990s not only led to growing popular dissatisfaction with the government, it also galvanised civil groups and the country's trade union movement, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, into forming a political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999. Only one year after its formation, under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC won 57 seats in the 2000 parliamentary election, making it Zimbabwe's only significant opposition party.

As a party, the MDC continues to reflect the diversity of its origins, which include trade unionists, students, workers, middle-class professionals and human rights activists. It is a coalition united more by distaste for Mugabe and ZANU-PF than by unity of political theory or policy. Its diffuseness made it a perfect target for the state media's accusations that it was little more than a vehicle for foreign interests—the 'white imperialists' determined to overthrow Mugabe's visionary rule and frustrate his revolutionary project.

As the government's controversial land reform programme came to dominate the political arena the MDC found itself in a quandary: how to question the motives for the policy and criticise its execution without being associated with sectional interests of the white commercial farmers and their overseas

sympathisers. To couch the debate in abstract and macro-economic terms was hardly calculated to stimulate the MDC's grassroots following.

The damage wrought by the last years of politically motivated economic mismanagement will be difficult to redress. Whether the MDC's supporters have the stomach for the hardships involved in a recovery programme must be in doubt, particularly after what they have already endured. Probably as a result, MDC policies are articulated in only the broadest terms and specific measures are wanting.

As ZANU-PF moves into election mode, well ahead of the parliamentary contest due in March 2005, the MDC leadership finds itself assailed by the state on all sides. Draconian legislation wielded by a co-opted police force and a coerced or suborned judiciary allow little room for the MDC to rally the forces of popular dissatisfaction. Beyond that, ZANU-PF militias will ensure that electoral competition is neither free nor fair.

In these circumstances the MDC's immediate future seems unpromising unless new, untried initiatives and tactics are attempted. ZANU-PF, for all its dominance, has never been a monolith. As the economic crisis deepens and begins to threaten the clientelist networks essential to its cohesion, survivalist instincts may be expected to surface within the ruling oligarchy. The increasingly open debate about a post-Mugabe dispensation has shown clear signs of this. How long might it be before the victims on both sides of the political divide make common cause? — *CM*

NORTHERN UGANDA'S HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY: SITUATION UPDATE

In 2002 Uganda recorded a growth rate of 6.5%, one of a handful of countries in Africa that has been doing well for a decade or so. This performance is widely considered to be a reflection of good governance; but there is another face to this country, and one largely hidden from the public eye. As a UN official recently pointed out, Uganda is the "world's

biggest neglected humanitarian crisis”, presenting “a situation worse than anywhere in the world, even Iraq”.

It is a crisis, that no one seems especially committed to ending.

According to the UN, the recent increase in military incursions by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in the northern areas, combined with violent looting and cattle raids by Karamojong pastoralists in the east, has resulted in significant levels of internal displacement and a humanitarian crisis that has now reached unprecedented proportions. In July 2003 the UN World Food Programme warned that food aid needs had increased markedly and malnutrition rates were rising to disturbingly high rates. By year-end those affected included some 200,000 refugees (mainly Sudanese), 1.4 million internally displaced people (IDP)—a number that had more than doubled in the course of 18 months—and half-a-million drought-affected in Karamoja.

There is little evidence that either the government or the LRA is committed to ending this 18-year-old conflict peacefully. Kampala remains convinced that only military victory will suppress Joseph Kony’s rebellion, though the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF) has made little progress in achieving this. The LRA, on the other hand, driven by a grand though imprecise vision of a state based on the Ten Commandments, shows no sign of relenting in its strategy of killing and mutilating innocent civilians, or abducting thousands of children, who are then conscripted into combat or subjected to torture and sexual violence.

The LRA’s attempt to overthrow Museveni’s government has resulted in the displacement of some 80% of the entire Acholi population, who now live in camps with little food, minimal health services, insufficient water supply and poor sanitation. Nevertheless, while LRA attacks are the primary cause of displacement, the forced relocation of people by the UPDF into camps has worsened the problem substantially.

The recent escalation of the conflict has followed intensified efforts by the Ugandan army to wipe out the rebels. ‘Operation Iron Fist’, aimed at rooting out and destroying LRA

rear bases inside southern Sudan during March 2002, had disastrous consequences for local populations. Rather than ending the war, Operation Iron Fist pushed the elusive LRA fighters southwards into northern Uganda, resulting in an increase in the number of districts affected: from the initial four in the Acholi sub-region—Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Katakwi—12 districts are now affected, including the Teso and Lango sub-regions.

Kony’s edicts have become ever more bizarre, as evidenced by the recent ‘declaration of war’ on the owners of white chickens and pigs, who face certain death if found by LRA rebels, and the humanitarian situation has now reached horrendous proportions. The abduction of children (as fighters and sex slaves) is on the rise—numbers exceeded 8,000 during the past year. These children face horrifying initiation practices, including the forced torture, mutilation and murder of others. As part of the LRA’s deliberate strategy of destroying livelihoods by disrupting agricultural and economic activities, the IDP camps that were created to protect civilians have become as much a target as the villages once were. These attacks are evidence that the rebels are not being defeated. In fact, the UPDF’s attempts to protect the camps by stationing small detachments in their midst has proved ineffective, not only because of the difficulty in protecting such a massive displaced population spread over a very large area but also because of a lack of willingness by the UPDF to engage in combat to protect their charges.

In February 2004 rebels razed an IDP camp near Lira after having duped the civilian militia into believing they were members of the UPDF. Over 50 people were killed after the rebels attacked them with clubs and machetes and then set the camp on fire, leaving a scene of ‘unprecedented cruelty’. Some two weeks later a second attack on an IDP camp left some 230 dead, highlighting again the weakness of the protection provided by government forces. Delivering humanitarian assistance to the widely dispersed camps has become an increasingly perilous business as convoys, reliant on UPDF military escorts for security, come under regular attack.

Humanitarian agencies are not able to access the rural camps in Lira at all.

President Museveni seems unable to destroy Kony's rebels, despite Sudan having allowed Uganda to attack the LRA bases. Further violence seems unlikely to result in any deeper resolution. The government refuses to recognise the LRA as a bona fide rebel group, denouncing it simply as a terrorist organisation. Negotiations are nigh impossible—the LRA does not have a political wing and is divided into small 'cells' operating across the country. Religious leaders have long been at the forefront of brokering peace negotiations, but so far all their attempts have failed. In June 2003 Kony effectively severed links with these mediators; the latter together with local politicians and civil society groups are now asking the international community to help bring an end to the bloody conflict.

The ultimate responsibility of addressing the conflict rests squarely on the shoulders of the government. An imperative would be for the government to give priority to redressing severe development imbalances, because the continuing security problems are not just about the millenarian ambitions of certain Acholi leaders. Political and economic patrimonialism along a north–south divide has resulted in northerners having deep-rooted grievances against the current government arising from inadequate development assistance, and has served as a barrier to national unity. (It must be noted that the LRA is not an expression of these and enjoys no popular support.) The considerably higher infant and maternal mortality rates and HIV/AIDS prevalence figures of the north are evidence of this uneven development. These issues have never been addressed and may again re-surface and cause renewed conflict if left unresolved. Arming of the Teso and Lango militias is also a concern, as people feel that it may lead to an ethnic war against the Acholi who are widely blamed for the Kony conflict. Giving credence to these fears, 15 Acholi's were killed in Lira in late February amidst strong and growing anti-Acholi sentiment on radio phone-in programmes. There are also increasing concerns that Amuka militia based in Lango may carry out revenge attacks on the

Acholi following attacks on Lango people in Gulu.

Another critical aspect of the conflict is that the consequences of the war are themselves becoming the very reasons for its perpetuation and intractability, resulting in intense three way tensions between the LRA, the affected civilian population and the government. The national government has the primary responsibility to protect IDPs but has so far largely failed to do so or to assist the displaced by providing proper accommodation and basic services. Rather, it has trivialised the conflict by branding the LRA as criminal elements or terrorists.

Following several initiatives by the UN to address issues of access to, the conditions and rights of IDPs, the government announced in January that it is preparing a draft policy for managing IDP situations, and that it intends to close all the camps and resettle people as soon as the security situation allows. In another announcement welcomed by some, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in late January stated that it would begin an investigation into crimes committed in Uganda. Ugandan civil society is ambivalent about the ICC involvement with religious leaders fearing that this may hamper peace negotiations. Museveni's government, which referred the crimes of the LRA to the court, is the first government to ask the ICC to act on such an issue. Nevertheless, Human Rights Watch has drawn attention to human rights abuses by Ugandan government troops too, and pointed out that the referral does not limit the investigation to the LRA only. Of particular concern to the court will be the urgent need to stop the widespread abduction of children and to secure the release by the LRA of its captives.

In addition to a serious engagement by the government of Uganda, an end to this conflict needs an appropriate and concerted response from the international community. To date, foreigners have paid little attention to Uganda's displacement crisis. When George W Bush visited Uganda in June 2003, Museveni was commended for his economic successes and efforts to combat HIV/AIDS; but no mention was made of the country's humanitarian crisis. Donor funds continue to

flow into the country—external donors finance 48% of Uganda's national budget. Yet these same donors have failed to put sufficient political pressure on the government to address unequal development in the country, and are also notoriously unpredictable in their reaction to the humanitarian crisis, rarely providing sustained support. Neighbouring countries, the African Union and IGAD also have a role to play in taking measures against African states that supply the LRA with weapons, and with identifying and capturing LRA rebel leaders.

The population in the conflict zones of the north are now almost totally dependent on external assistance. Their own reserves are exhausted. Aid is no longer sufficient. The prevalence of the conflict and the scale of human rights violations require urgent action—action that is based on an integrated strategy to reduce poverty, avert conflict and foster respect for human rights. The ending of the conflict is but the first step; the next will be implementation of a broad-based recovery and development strategy that ensures that Uganda moves beyond a negative, fragile peace. — *JC*

ADVANCING PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE DRC

Earlier this year South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki made his first state visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country whose travails have featured large in his country's foreign policy since 1994. South Africa's interest in the crippled giant of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has not always been welcomed. The elder President Kabila treated South African interventions initially with disdain and later with outright hostility. In this attitude he was encouraged by Zimbabwe, which saw the promise of lucrative financial and economic ties threatened by its southern neighbour's more sophisticated economy. Neither did regional perceptions of Pretoria's pro-Kigali stance auger well for cordial relations with the administration in Kinshasa.

South Africa's continued and persistent commitment to achieving a peaceful settle-

ment to the DRC's civil strife and to the malign interference of other regional states seems to have modified opinions in Kinshasa to a degree. Certainly, without the bold diplomatic initiatives sustained by Pretoria in the face of most unpromising circumstances, efforts at peace-building and the reconstruction of a Congolese state probably would have ground to a halt before now. Mbeki's visit therefore reflected not just an effort to build a warmer relationship with the Kinshasa administration, but also a realisation that without further movement the impetus towards a lasting solution would be lost.

Despite the signature of comprehensive agreements after rounds of protracted negotiations, restoring order in this vast country has been a slow and incomplete process. The eastern provinces of North and South Kivu and the Ituri District in Orientale Province in the north-east are still subject to sporadic outbreaks of fighting. Ituri is largely under the control of rival militias, although a strengthened UN peacekeeping force is gradually restoring security there.

The Congolese government is also struggling with establishing proper control of areas previously under rebel administration, while civilians in many parts of the country still face hardship in the form of chronic shortages of food, water and other basic needs.

The transitional government has yet to establish the five institutions required in terms of the transitional constitution: a truth and reconciliation commission; a national human rights observatory body; a high authority for media; a national electoral commission; and a commission for ethics and the fight against corruption. The International Committee to Accompany the Transition, which comprises foreign ambassadors to the DRC and is chaired by the UN Mission in the country (MONUC), made its concerns known in a recent public statement. In an effort to make up for lost time, the DRC's two chambers of parliament, the Senate and the National Assembly, which had just ended their ordinary session, have been reconvened. There is a real worry that unless the process picks up speed, the 30-month deadline set by the interim constitution will pass before

elections can be organised. Obviously there are elements in the transitional government, installed on 30 June 2003, that perceive a protracted transition as serving their own selfish interests. President Mbeki should continue to warn them of the likely consequences of a dilatory approach: an eventual return to open insurgency, probably with foreign assistance.

MONUC has been unable to make much progress in the vital business of disarming and demobilising combatant factions in the east of the country. This process depends vitally on the resolution of local conflicts, primarily in the Kivus. In the absence of a national programme, MONUC has had to make ad hoc responses to the increasing number of Mayi-Mayi fighters who have been approaching the mission expressing an interest in disarming. Despite frequent representation by MONUC, urging the rapid establishment of the national disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme no structured mechanism exists as yet.

Even given the genuine commitment of the various Congolese protagonists and their back-

ers to a peaceful solution and the construction of a functioning state, by no means assured, the Congolese peace process will remain extremely difficult. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has recently indicated, it is no easy task to convince the richer member states of that organisation to commit funds and manpower to so drawn-out and uncertain an exercise. Co-ordination of diplomatic, political, humanitarian and military initiatives has also left much to be desired, sometimes because of battles over turf or for kudos, but more often as a result of a lack of fit between the guiding principles of the various international actors.

Following his return from Kinshasa President Mbeki should have a clearer appreciation of the difficulties; and possibly a clearer view of the road ahead. Whatever the case, it is highly improbable that he will relax South Africa's diplomatic and political effort to help resolve a set of conflicts that threatens the immediate future of south-central Africa, whatever his own electorate thinks. – *HB*