

FAST International Monitors the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Swisspeace

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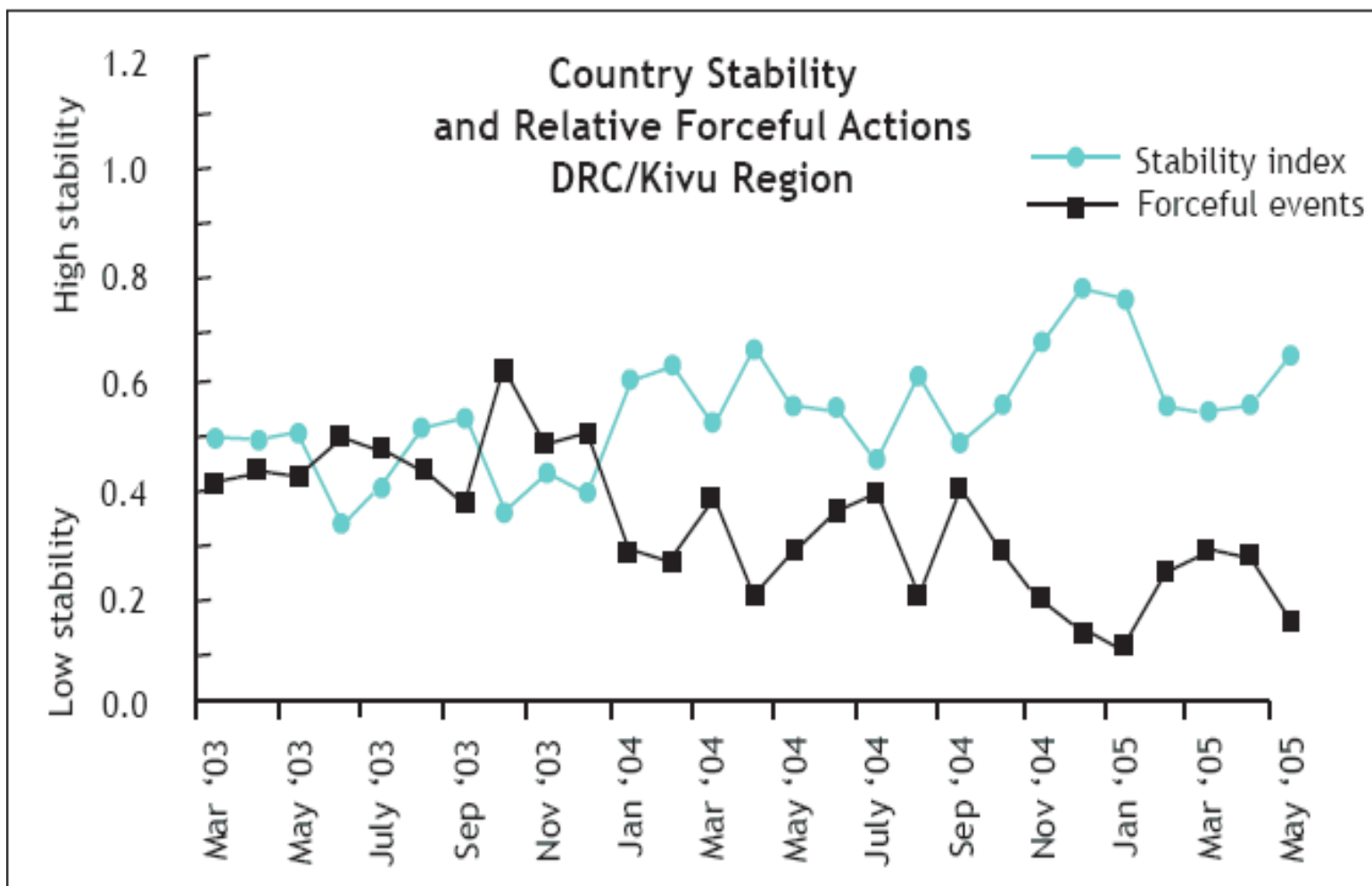
Background

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly called Zaire), began with the ousting of the former President and dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. It is the widest of the post-Colonial African wars, involving up to nine other countries. It is also the most intense and deadly conflict since the end of the Cold War; according to the International Rescue Committee, up to three million people have been killed and millions more internally displaced or seeking asylum in neighboring countries.

Swisspeace, an action-oriented peace-research institute in the area of conflict analysis and peacebuilding, coordinates FAST International, an independent early warning program covering 20 countries/regions in Africa, Europe and Asia. Swisspeace has been monitoring the situation in the DRC since it established its Local Information Network (LIN) there in the summer of 2005. The risk assessment, graph, and table for this article come from the May, 2005 FAST update on the DRC.

Risk assessment

As shown by the roller-coaster quality of the Stability Index (see figure below), the DRC has experienced a succession of crises over the last few months. By far the most serious occurred in December 2004 when President Kagame of Rwanda warned the international community that he would send his troops across the border unless appropriate steps were taken to disarm the former Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR, a militia consisting of Hutu rebels, mostly drawn from the former Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) and Interahamwe. Kigali's claims that the FDLR made eleven armed incursions into the country in 2004 seem grossly exaggerated. At no time has the FDLR posed a mortal threat to Rwanda, yet there is no question that they do pose serious threats to the security of civilians in Eastern Congo, where they number between seven and eight thousand.



Variable	Description/Definition
All Events	All coded events, both peaceful and forceful. Local Information Networks (LINs) in each country or region collect, track and report relevant information in accordance with a specific set of indicators and categories. LINs are trained and their data are verified by FAST International Early Warning Program analysts.
Relative Actions	Proportion of All Actions to All Events
Relative Direct Actions	Proportion of Direct Actions compared to All Events. Direct Actions are conflictive events that can be assigned to the following event types: threaten, demonstrate, reduce relationships, expel, seize and force. These categories encompass direct actions regardless of origin or target.
Relative Forceful Actions	Proportion of Forceful Action events compared to All events. The indicator forceful actions depicts all reported uses of physical force by any actor. This includes non-injury destructive acts, non-military injury-destruction, and military engagement.
Conflict Carrying Capability	The Conflict Carrying Capacity (or CCC) is a composed index that depicts the overall stability of the country or region of interest. The CCC is operationalized in terms of the multiplicative interaction among three proportional measures: 1) civil contentiousness or the proportion of civil actions that are reported as contentious or "direct" and thus challenge (at least implicitly) the state's monopoly on conflict regulation; 2) state repression or the proportion of state actions that are reported as extra-institutional or "direct" both in response to direct challenges from the civil sector and those initiated by the state to repress and control opposition; and 3) violent contention or the proportion of actions entailing physical damage to persons or property. The index is scaled between 0 and 1, where 1 means high and 0 low stability.
Country Stability	The country stability index is another version of the CCC measure with minor changes in order to improve the responsiveness of the index to events that influence the stability of a country.
Cooperative	Proportion of all actions belonging to all cooperative categories (yield, comment, consult, approve, promise, grant, reward, agree, request, and propose) to All Events.
Conflictual	Proportion of all actions belonging to all conflictive categories (reject, accuse, protest, deny, demand, warn, threaten, demonstrate, reduce relationships, expel, seize, and force) to All Events.

Strong diplomatic pressures from the UN Security Council, the African Union, the European Union and the US were instrumental in defusing the crisis. The most promising sign for a normalization of DRC-Rwanda relations, however, came with the announcement in Rome, on March 30, 2005, that the FDLR had agreed to lay down their arms, and to accept “their voluntary disarmament and the peaceful return of their forces to Rwanda.”

Since then other portents of instability have emerged, including the following:

- 1) In January violent demonstrations erupted in Kinshasa after the head of the National Electoral Commission raised the possibility of a postponement of the elections. Four people were reported killed. The government blamed members of Etienne Tshisekedi's Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social (UPDS) for the unrest.
- 2) On May 13 an attempt at secession was nipped in the bud in Katanga province, leading to the arrest of at least 35 civilians and military officers; some reports say 100.
- 3) In mid-May violent demonstrations erupted in Mbuji-Mai, in the Kasai region, in protest against a 6-month extension of the transitional period initially scheduled to end in June 2005.
- 4) In February nine UN peacekeepers were killed in Ituri, leading to the arrest of several militia leaders, including Thomas Llubanga, head of the Union des patriotes Congolais (UPC), Mandro Panga Kahwa of the Parti pour l'unité, la sauve-garde et l'intégrité du Congo (PUSIC) and Germain Katanga of Forces de résistance patriotiques en Ituri (FRPI).

Prospects for stability

Prospects for future stability will hinge in large part on whether the commitment to disarm made by the FDLR leadership will be heeded by local commanders on the ground, and, if not, whether the Congolese army has the capacity - and will - to disarm them. On both counts the prospects are far from encouraging. Internal obstacles to the implementation of the Rome accords include the extreme fragmentation of the FDLR, their operational autonomy and tendency to shift sides. Hardliners within the FDLR are unlikely to agree to a deal that many would consider as political suicide. Nor are they willing to take the risk of going back to Rwanda. As for the Congolese armed forces, not only do they lack the military capabilities to disarm the FDLR, but there is not the will to do so amongst those high ranking officers with ties to the rebels.

Rwanda's response to the announcement has been characteristically cautious, if not downright counter-productive. Charles Murigande, Rwandan Minister of Foreign Affairs, has warned that should FDLR combatants live up to their declaration to disarm, they "will have to account for their actions during the genocide," a statement which is as much a warning as it is a disincentive to lay down their arms. It is easy to see why, from a strategic standpoint, the disarmament of the FDLR would not serve Rwanda's interests in the DRC. If implemented, the Rome accords would deprive Kagame of a major justification for renewed incursions into the DRC (the other being the protection of its ethnic clients).

While Rwanda has been unwilling to provide carrots to the FDLR, Kinshasa has wielded few sticks. No effort has been made to get the demobilization and disarmament process under way. This is hardly surprising when one considers the extent to which fractures within the army, the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), tend to replicate the political divisions in North and South Kivu. This was made clear during the December crisis, when the commander of the 8th military region, General Obed Rwibasira, a Rwandaphone Tutsi from North Kivu, turned against the troops sent by Kinshasa to repel the invasion. In fact, it now appears that very few Rwandan troops took part in the fighting in Kanyabayonga in mid-December, and that many of the so-called "invaders" were ethnic Tutsi sympathetic to the more radical wing of the Rassemblement Démocratique Congolais-Goma (RCD-Goma). Again, it would seem that much of the looting that occurred in the region was done by FARDC troops whose salaries had not been paid and who were sent to the front lines without food supplies.

Although Rwabisira has been replaced by General Gabriel Amisi, another ex-RCD officer, as commander of the 8th military region, the relations between the 10th and 8th military regions remain tense. The troops of the 8th military region consist almost entirely of ex-RCD soldiers whose sympathies lie with the RCD-Goma. Doubts as to their loyalty to the transitional government are the main reasons for the recent arrival of some 10,000 FARDC troops in North Kivu. There is also growing evidence that in some localities former RCD troops are resisting their

incorporation into mixed units of the FARDC.

In the short run, the prospects for stability have improved significantly since the December crisis. Especially noteworthy are:

- 1) The reactivation of the Joint Monitoring Mechanism, established by Rwanda and the DRC in the wake of the Bukavu crisis (May-June 2004);
- 2) The establishment of a buffer zone between Rwanda and the DRC, north and south of Kanyabayonga in North Kivu, protected by elements of the South African Defence Forces;
- 3) The arrest by the MONUC of key militia leaders in Ituri following the killing of nine UN peacekeepers by the UPC;
- 4) The rapid defusing of the attempted Katanga secession in May;
- 5) The strengthening of the arms embargo at the request of the UN Secretary General; and
- 6) The adoption in May of a constitution by the Congolese National Assembly, thus removing a major obstacle in the way of the organization of elections.

Over the long-term, however, the picture is not nearly as bright. Rwanda's nuisance capacity cannot be overestimated; to help safeguard its political and economic interests in the DRC, Kigali is willing to go that extra mile (across the border), even if it means putting at risk the lives of ethnic Tutsi. To counter this threat the FARDC simply does not measure up. The FARDC are no match for the Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF), in terms of equipment, professionalism and strategic skills. The balance of military forces, in short, will remain to Rwanda's advantage for years to come.

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