

MONUC and India's Peacekeeping Concerns

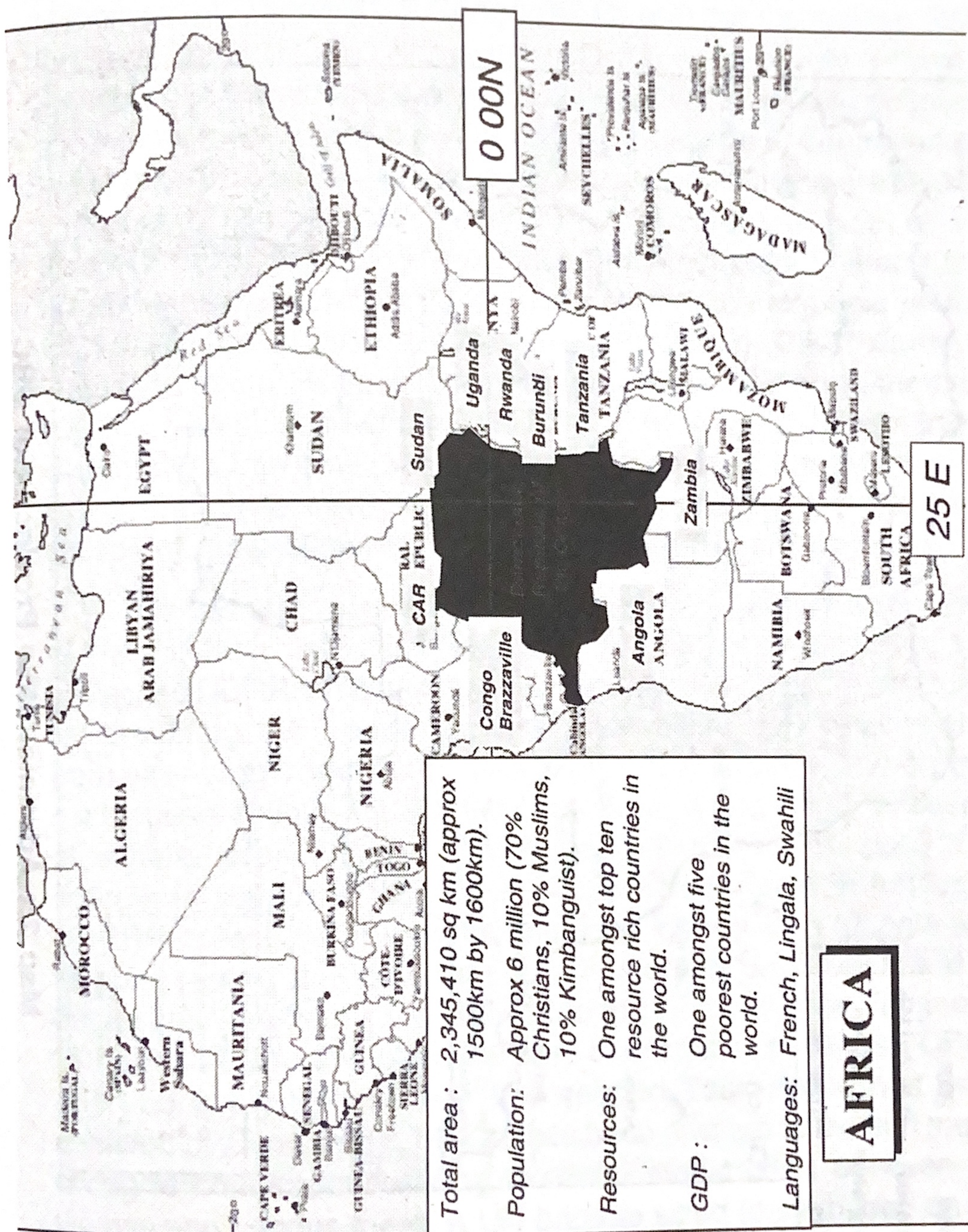
Lieutenant Colonel Ali Ahmed

MONUC is the acronym of the French reading of the 'UNO Mission in the Congo' (See Maps 1 and 2). To Congolese children it is simply an affectionate 'Monique!' tossed lightly at passing MONUC personnel! It is an ambitious UN undertaking, in light of earlier perceived failures of the UN in Somalia and Rwanda. In fact, with regard to the latter, the MONUC is almost a kind of atonement, given that the failure in Rwanda sparked off the conflict in Congo that has required UN attention in the form of its most expensive mission budgeted at over \$ 600 million a year. Expanded mandates conceding the demands made in the periodic Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) reports on the mission and reflected in the Secretary General's reports on MONUC and Congo to the UN Security Council indicate the interest of the international community in alleviating a human tragedy and international security threat that has consumed about 3.5 million lives. In CNN headlines of disturbances in its North Eastern Ituri region, glimpses of Congo's broader plight can be obtained from the reported instances of cannibalism, tribal war, warlordism, child soldiers on drugs and murder of UN military observers. With India contributed an Air Force contingent comprising attack helicopters in July 2003 and utility helicopters and an infantry guard company for their protection, it is worth revisiting the conflict to assess if the Indian peacekeeping investment will be both secure and successful.

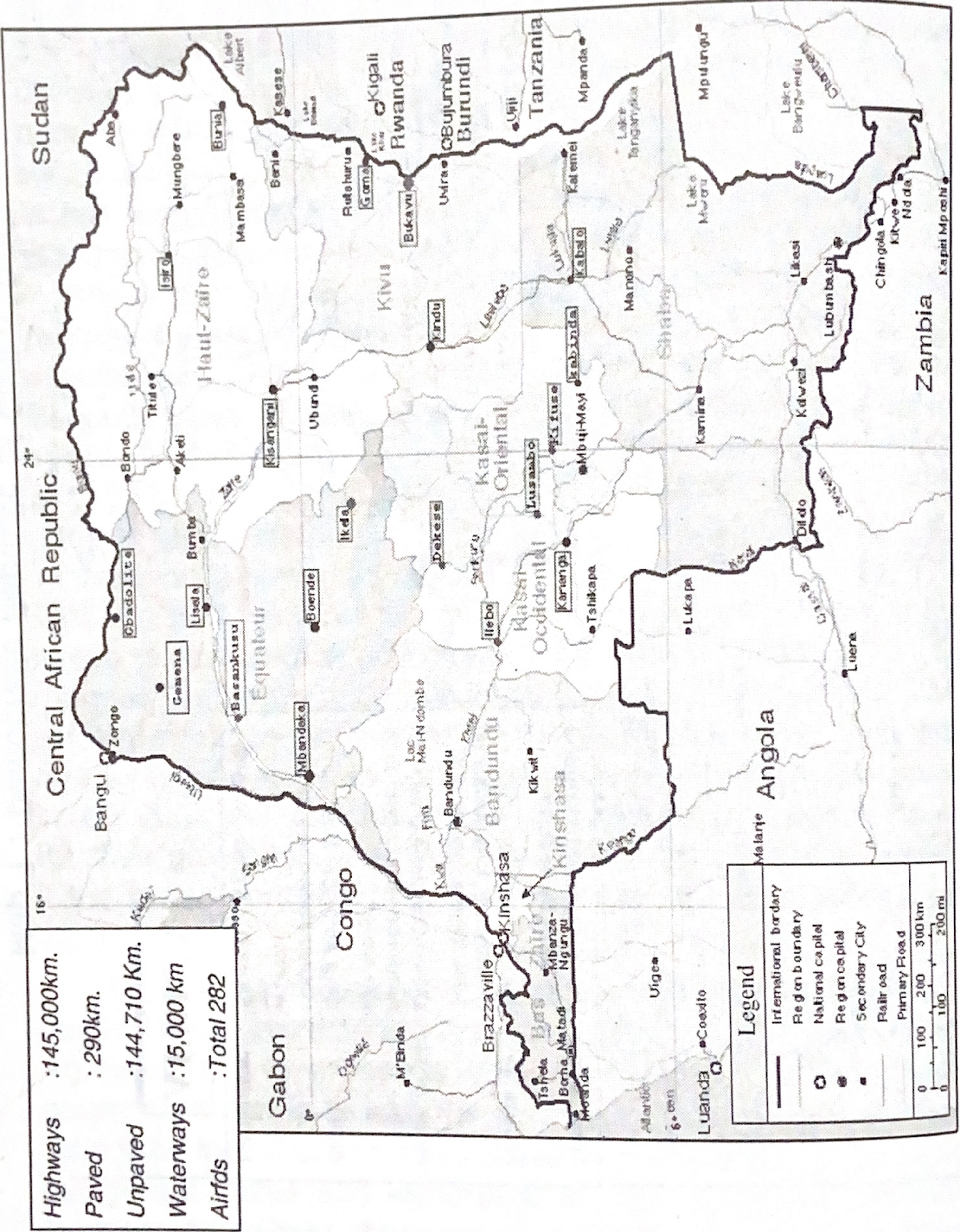
Despite its chequered history, the MONUC has delivered peace. Having implemented the initial phases of the Lusaka Peace Agreement, it is presently poised in support of the interim government that is to lead the country into democratic elections scheduled for 2005. The initial phases were the disengagement of belligerent forces and withdrawal to new defensive positions, overseen by military observers of MONUC. Thereafter, in Phase

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Map 1 : Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)



Map 2 : Administrative Provinces of DRC

2 of its operations, MONUC verified the withdrawal of foreign troops from Congolese territory, particularly Zimbabwean troops who were supporting the Government at Kinshasa (GoDRC), and Ugandan and Rwandese troops who were behind the rebels, namely the Movement of Liberation of Congo (MLC) and the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), Goma or RCD (G) respectively. Phase 2 arguably has been completed in 2002. However there are continuing allegations made by all sides of foreign presence in contravention to their mutual and multilateral agreements. Since these are seldom verifiable, despite several mechanisms to investigate such as the South African Third Party Verification Mechanism. Since this admittedly intractable problem does not threaten strategic peace, MONUC has rightly moved on to making Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (DDRRR) as its main effort. This has necessitated a change in the deployment from overseeing peace along the ceasefire line to concentration towards the East of the country where the main groups of fighters slated for voluntary DDRRR are anchored.

This has also required the expansion of the military component of the mission to include two task forces for undertaking the envisaged DDRRR. Though India had initially been a prime candidate for providing the troops for task force owing to its formidable peacekeeping reputation and skills, in the event the troops contributing country for the task has been South Africa in search of regional preeminence. The Indian helicopter contingent is to operate in support of the South African Task Force in furthering DDRRR operations in an area imagined loosely as a triangle with its apex resting at Kindu, the Task Force and Sector HQ, and its base stretching from Lake Edward to the North to Lake Tanganyika to the South. This triangle is the area of interest in so far as DDRRR operations are concerned. The second Task Force has been cornered by Bangladesh, but this has been diverted to the Ituri region owing to compulsions arising from the ethnic crisis between the Hemas and Lendus there. A UN brigade sized force, based on the Task Force from Bangladesh, has take over from the International Emergency Multinational Force, an European Union (EU) contribution as its first 'out of area' operation, currently engaged in stabilising the delicate ethnic conflict in Bunia area.

DDRRR is a multi-million dollar enterprise funded by the World Bank for foreign fighters in Congo. The programme is 'voluntary' and envisages move back to Rwanda of disarmed fighters for reintegration with civil society. The exit of these groups from Congo will not only partially reduce the internal military turmoil in Congo but will end Rwandese security interest in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since these groups are seen by Rwanda as an existential threat. Given external security dimension of the problem, DDRRR is focused on more intimately by the UN. The groups targeted are the ex-Armed Forces of Rwanda (FAR), comprising the Hutu elements of the former Rwandese Army who fled in the wake of the post genocide Tutsi victory in Rwanda, and the Interhamwe, a militia recruited in the mid-1990s from the Hutu refugee camps that came up in Congo in the aftermath of the genocide perpetrated by majoritarian Hutus on Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda in 1994.

The problems with this programme are considerable, not least of which is that of reaching information through MONUC public information channels, the principal means of which is its radio Okapi, to the fighters in the African bush. The groups have placed the mountain barrier of Mounts Mitumba and the Great Lakes between themselves and their Rwandese enemy. In order to regain these territories to answer to a central authority at Goma, the RCD (G) has launched multi axial operations. So long as these operations continue, the targeted groups would not yield themselves for DDRRR. Therefore the prerequisite for DDRRR is for an end to RCD (G) expansionist operations. This is an unlikely development given the political requirement of RCD (G) appearing as a rebel faction in control of its territory in order to extract maximum from the political engagement with the GoDRC in the Interim Government in Kinshasa.

DDRRR operations themselves have been low key, proceeding from 'preliminary' to 'progressive' DDRRR in the period prior to the arrival of the Task Force and requisite air assets to penetrate into the interior. Thus far the focus has been in employment of civilian facilitators with language skills on information operations under a civilian dominated DDRRR set up within the MONUC. To enhance their efforts Military Observer (Milob) Teams have been suitably redeployed, a slow task at best in face of an RCD (G) 'go

slow' with security guarantees in areas requested by MONUC. Such an attitude is understandable in light of these areas being the very areas of ongoing operations by the RCD (G), referred to earlier, to gain control over claimed areas. These facilitators run a string of 'contacts' who are able bodied and conversant with the terrain. The contacts penetrate the jungle with the DDRRR message. Thus far their dragnet has yielded a steady stream of volunteers and their dependents for the process that can at best be classified as 'refugees' rather than 'former combatants'. For the process to be more effective there is a requirement of proactive Milob-centric contact operations. With the authority of the uniform, these Milobs would be better able to convince the leadership to volunteer their motley groups for the process. Presently, lack of security in the areas prevents Milob activity of this kind. There is thus an understandable deficit of information on the attitude towards DDRRR of the leadership of the targeted groups. At the moment the junior lot of soldiery are amenable to repatriation as they are too young to be implicated in the genocide. Given that it is the leadership, comprising those 'wanted' for their role in the genocide by the UN Tribunal dispensing justice in the case, it is hardly likely that their accession would be readily forthcoming. In the absence of a break through in this regard, the DDRRR process can be expected to do no better than to attract a steady trickle of weaponless deserters, hardly the result MONUC would like to countenance over the long term.

It is at this juncture that the Indian helicopter contingent, comprising four Mi 25 attack helicopters and five Mi 17 utility helicopters, acquires relevance. This is in keeping with UN's long standing request for India's participation in MONUC. This also reflects success of our air assets in UN mission in Siera Leone (UNAMSIL) in 1999-2000. In terms of military employability, the helicopter assets are to help deploy and protect Task Force troops sent into the proverbial African 'bush'. The plan is to deploy 'reception areas' and 'assembly areas' in vicinity of the targeted groups for enticing them into the DDR process. These will of necessity have to be air maintained and secured owing to absence of road access in Congo's interior. The groups are then to report at these centres, be disarmed, and rehabilitate for their subsequent reinduction into the civil society.

The foremost problem is providing security to the Task Force II which has taken our responsibility from the French led multinational force in Eastern DRC with effect from 01 September 2003 and expected to assist in the process of DDRRR. It cannot be the RCD (G) given that it does not have physical control over the areas. Gaining the same from the groups on ground would require contact with them. And as Holmes might opine: 'Gaining that, Watson, is the precise problem!' The masterminds of the Tutsi genocide are unlikely to be keen on the process as it hits at their power base of forcibly recruited Hutu child fighters. They can be expected to disrupt it by striking at those groups willing to participate in the process leading to a fratricidal intra-Hutu war in the Congolese interior. Therefore it is only an acceptance of reality that the DDRRR process remains a 'voluntary' endeavor, with the MONUC using its political acumen for inducing a sense of participation in these groups. The air assets could thus play a very crucial role in terms of both combat and logistic support of the Task Force and in the propaganda war as visible instruments ready to provide security to those willing to sign up. It is only prudent that a constant watch be kept in the mission area and in New York on the institutional factors and Security Council political dynamics that largely account for mission expansion despite sobering on-ground reality, should India consider a larger participation at a later stage.

A word on the threat assessment of these assets while based at Goma, their place of deployment, is in order. Goma is a visually exciting place nestling as it does on the lava slopes of the active volcano Mount Nyiragongo that merge with the inland sea, Lake Kivu. It is the politico-military stronghold of the strongest rebel movement in Congo, RCD (G). As can be expected, the sway over Goma of the faction is complete, and its hold decreases only with distance from Goma. Therefore the assets are secure while at the helipad abutting the airstrip at Goma and guarded by alert Garhwali infantrymen who have earlier served in 'hotter spots'. The over the horizon 'threats' can only arise from the presently far fetched possibility of an implosion within the RCD (G) in which splinter groups fight it out for control of their capital and its geo-strategic airport. This threat has been adequately taken care of by deploying the strong and robust infantry contingent. Moreover, given the positive progress made so far, by the inter Congolese dialogue to

amicably share power in the future government, large scale outbreak of hostilities between protagonist groups is not likely. Development, if any in this direction can be monitored by reading the political undercurrents in Goma, its environs and Kinshasa.

A positive outcome in terms of DDRRR has potential to emerge from the political outlook in Kinshasa. An interim government comprising representatives at Vice Presidential level from all factions has been formed under President Kabila. The integration of respective militaries of the rival factions is underway under supervision of an appointee of the UN Secretary General Mr. Niasse and a Canadian General, after initial hiccups over portfolios and power sharing. Understanding reached at this level and cooperative working relationships established will over time ease the political factors that impact adversely on DDRRR in the East. A politically secure and placated RCD (G) would be in a better position to permit MONUC access to the targeted groups on its territory. An eventually integrated army would be best positioned to induce, if not coerce, the groups in question for exiting Congolese territory. MONUC facilities could thus provide a safer and quicker way out for these groups. The success of DDRRR is further dependant on one other factor, it being the handling of indigenous groups of Congolese fighters, the Mai Mai, who as has been mentioned are in a tactical alliance with the Interhamwe and ex FAR groups. It is envisaged that a programme administered by the MONUC and funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will help resettle the Congolese groups. Once this is underway, the targeted groups will be isolated and their continued violation of Congolese sovereignty will attract no outside support, thus making DDRRR as their only option. When this stage arrives or is imminent within a timeframe of about a year plus, India could revisit the question of contributing a Task Force comprising an infantry battalion to the MONUC to operate alongside its airmen.

Stating that peacekeeping in Africa is challenging would be an understatement. In other words it is fraught with the risk of situations getting out of control in fairly short order. Take for instance the latest crisis to emerge out of the heart of Africa, Congo. The situation in its Ituri province deteriorated to the extent of mass ethnic killings on account of inattention of the Security Council seized as it was

with the Iraq War. More pertinent was the power vacuum left by Uganda withdrawing in double quick time in accordance with the injunctions of its agreement with the GoDRC and pushed for by the UN as represented by MONUC. With MONUC unable to fill in the vacuum, the security situation spiraled out of control necessitating the quick fix of French led European Union (EU) troops in an 'out of area' operation. This indicates that the institutional evolution of the MONUC is not of the order as to be able to handle multinational military operations, particularly in crisis situations.

Congo requires every support that the international community can extend to enable it to emerge from its testing times. Its leaders have made giant strides in reconfiguring their country from its time of war. India could extend a supportive hand, not only for altruistic reasons, but also for strategic ones. There is a large Indian trading community in Congo and in Central Africa in general. India has a respected image as a political heavyweight in Africa and a considerable cultural influence emanating from its film industry (Bollywood). India would only be bolstering its strengths by being militarily involved through peacekeeping under UN auspices. Given the larger political gains expected thus, the risks attending any military undertaking in Africa must both be courted and negated with elaborate mental and procedural preparation. While lessons from India's Liberia experience need to be taken into account, any unwarranted caution they impose is unjustified. It is a spirit of engagement that should inform India's participation in MONUC and future peacekeeping in Africa.

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