Central Africa

Central Africa is a hub of both UN peacekeeping and political missions. As of 2010, the UN had troops deployed in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR) and southern Sudan. Yet it also maintains a separate political mission in CAR and a peacebuilding office in Burundi. It recently concluded the mandate of a special envoy focused on the Lord’s Resistance Army (see box), a militia that has operated in northern Uganda as well as CAR, DRC and south Sudan.

These overlapping activities represent the latest stage in the UN’s efforts to stabilize Central Africa, which date back to the 1990s. For much of the last decade, these efforts have centered on military operations. While the largest missions in the region have been those in the DRC (with over 20,000 personnel) and south Sudan (with nearly 9,000), UN peacekeepers also deployed to CAR from 1998 to 2000 and Burundi from 2004 to 2006. The Security Council mandated a small peacekeeping presence in north-eastern CAR in 2008 as part of a larger mission (MINURCAT) primarily based in neighboring Chad.

Yet, while the number of peacekeepers in the region remains significant, there appears to be a shift away from the military option to political engagement across central Africa. The limits of peacekeeping – and potential for new approaches to mediation – were highlighted in late 2008, when UN forces in the eastern DRC faced a major rebel offensive. The UN deployed a special envoy, former Nigerian President Olesegun Obasanjo, with a small political team to lead negotiations (see “Regional Approaches”).

After a long-running dispute with the government of Chad, MINURCAT will close in December 2010. Early this year, the Congolese government called for the UN to withdraw troops by mid-2011.
Ange-Félix Patassé, in office it was clear that CAR’s future stability was not guaranteed. BONUCA was charged with supporting the government, promoting human rights and continuing security sector reforms initiated by MINURCA – from the beginning, the mission included a small number of uniformed military and police personnel for this task.

Civil-military relations remained tense. There were attempted coups in 2001 and 2002. In February 2003, General François Bozizé succeeded in seizing power while President Patassé was abroad. Although Bozizé enjoyed the support of French troops and a small sub-regional peacekeeping force, he faced significant disorder in the north-west of the country (where Patassé loyalists mingled with local resistance groups) and in the north-east (affected by a spillover of violence from neighboring Chad and Darfur). This worsened in 2004-6, with large numbers of refugees flowing from north-east CAR into Chad amid rumors of severe violence by rebels and government forces against civilians.

BONUCA's ability to affect the course of these conflicts was slight. In 2005, it supported elections won (fairly, by most accounts) by Bozizé. The head of mission Lamine Cissé was also involved in mediating specific crises as they arose. But BONUCA's efforts at security sector reform proved limited – by mid-2005, it had trained fewer than 500 police and gendarmes, and the army remained small and irregularly-paid.

When, at the end of 2006, President Bozizé agreed to hold a national political dialogue in an
The Lord’s Resistance Army

In December 2006, the outgoing UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Joaquim Chissano – former President of Mozambique – as his Special Envoy for the LRA-Affected Areas. The Lord’s Resistance Army, formed in the late 1980s, is a militia with an appalling record on human rights abuses, initially in northern Uganda. In 2006-7, it seemed possible that the Government of South Sudan might be able to broker a peace agreement between Uganda and the LRA, and Chissano co-chaired talks in Juba, Sudan.

The talks were unsteady from the beginning – although Chissano is credited with having played an important role in ensuring that they did not break down very early. Nonetheless, the situation in northern Uganda did improve somewhat through 2007. This was in part because the LRA used the lull of the talks to relocate to north-east DRC. In mid-2008, however, the talks founderered on the fears of the LRA’s leader Joseph Kony that he could be sent before the International Criminal Court, which had issued his arrest warrant in 2005.

In November 2008, Chissano and his south Sudanese counterpart issued an ultimatum calling for Kony to return to negotiations by the end of the month. Kony did not comply, and Ugandan forces launched a large-scale military offensive against the LRA in the north-east DRC. This mission had Congolese permission, and the LRA went into retreat. Though Chissano’s mandate was set to run through December 2009, the Secretary-General chose to suspend the Envoy as of June 30, 2009, in response to Kony’s lack of cooperation with the process. He indicated that any dramatic shift in LRA policy might alter this choice.

This success was only temporary, however. The LRA continues to operate on Congolese territory, and is an increasingly frightening presence in south-eastern CAR. It also has a growing presence in southern Sudan on the border with the DRC and CAR. The UN estimates that it has driven 25,000 people from their homes in 2010. The LRA thus has the potential to destabilize these three countries, all of which face other internal threats. While the US government has committed to draft a strategy for dealing with the movement, it threatens to be a dangerous factor in the region’s politics for years to come.

1 This account of negotiations with the LRA follows Ronald R. Atkinson, “From Uganda to the Congo and Beyond: Pursuing the Lord’s Resistance Army,” International Peace Institute, 2009.

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<th>Special Envoy, LRA-Affected Areas</th>
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<td><strong>Authorization Date</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Start Date</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Strength as of 22 September 2008</strong></td>
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There were simultaneous calls for an overhaul of BONUCA, which was accused – in the words of the International Crisis Group – of being weak in “research, analysis and the development of policy lines.”

In May 2008, the Security Council requested the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) to consider policy options for CAR. Belgium led the commission's
suggested to the Security Council that the emphasis should be on strengthening CAR’s security forces.

The second major security issue has been the infiltration of the Lord’s Resistance Army – pushed out of Uganda and eastern DRC – into south-east CAR in 2008. The NGOs Human Rights Watch and Enough estimate that the LRA has killed some 2,500 people and abducted nearly 700 children in CAR and the DRC in the last eighteen months. BINUCA has also highlighted this crisis, reporting that thousands of civilians have been displaced.

BINUCA faces gigantic immediate security and political challenges, to say nothing of the underlying development and governance issues highlighted by the PBC. While based on one of the longest-running UN political missions, its work has hardly begun – and the context for achieving its stated goals is deteriorating. It remains to be seen if the Security Council and regional powers will give it the long-term support it needs to stabilize CAR.

**UN Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB)**

| Authorization Date | 25 October 2006  
|                   | (UNSC Res. 1719) |
| Start Date        | 1 January 2007   |
| ERSG              | Charles Petrie (UK/France) |
| Deputy ERSG       | Bintou Keita (Guinea) |
| Budget            | $46.3 million  
|                   | (1 January 2010-31 December 2010) |
| Strength as of early 2010 | International Civilian: 117  
|                     | Local Civilian: 243  
|                     | Military Experts on Mission: 5  
|                     | Police: 8  
|                     | UN Volunteers: 47  

For detailed mission information see p. 144

**BINUB**

In late 2006, the Security Council mandated a peacebuilding office in Burundi (BINUB) to replace a peacekeeping force (ONUB) deployed in mid-2004. ONUB took over military duties from a peace operation deployed by the African Union in 2003 to oversee a ceasefire between the government and rebel force and assist with national elections.

The elections went smoothly but the new president, Pierre Nkurunziza, believed that ONUB...
had been too close to his political opponents, and asked for the mission to leave.

BINUB took over many of ONUB’s non-military duties on 1 January 2007. It was also charged with overseeing a ceasefire between the government and Palipehutu-FNL, the last major rebel group, signed in October 2006. A South African contingent from ONUB remained in Burundi to provide security. It was decided that Burundi would be one of the first countries put on the PBC’s agenda, and it agreed to a country strategy in June 2007.

The political situation in Burundi was not promising. Talks between President Nkurunziza’s government and the FNL broke down in the second quarter of the year, and there was heavy fighting between FNL factions in September 2007. BINUB had only an observer status in the talks, and a South African mediator led efforts to calm matters. In April and May 2008, government forces and the FNL returned to hostilities, which lasted one month. Over the course of the year, the FNL and government resolved their differences, and in January 2009 the FNL turned itself into a “normal” political party.

Following this success, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa (the leading members of the long-standing Regional Initiative for Burundi) announced the creation of a Partnership for Peace in Burundi (PPB). This involved the three countries as well as BINUB – additionally tasked with acting as the new entities’ secretariat – and the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region. The PPB’s goals were to prepare the way for elections scheduled for 2010 and assist in rehabilitating restive former FNL fighters.

The optimism of early 2009 eroded as the 2010 elections approached. In late 2009, Burundi’s government requested that the UN replace the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General, Youssef Mahmoud. Although government spokesmen insisted this was a routine request, they did not deny that they felt Mahmoud had been too critical of the authorities and too lax on the opposition. As the polls approached, a steady stream of violent incidents – often involving the radical youth wings of the competing parties – added to international concerns, especially as the police did little to halt the violence.

On 1 June 2010, the main opposition candidates competing with President Nkurunziza for the presidency – including FNL leader Agathon Rwasa – withdrew, citing intimidation and fraud. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited Burundi just over a week later and urged all parties to move forward with the electoral process. The Security Council made a statement to the same effect. The President ran unopposed at the end of the month, gaining nearly 92% of votes cast. Although there were violent incidents around the presidential poll, they did not escalate as severely as some analysts feared. In August, dissatisfied members of the FNL voted Agathon Rwasa out of office as party leader.

BINUB thus continues to face a troubled political climate, in which a consensual political process is not yet secure. The mission has also had to contend with the managerial challenges of acting as the primary conduit between Burundi’s government and the Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Fund (PBF), both new elements of the UN system. Two recent reviews of BINUB’s performance in this regard highlight that both BINUB and the government faced a “steeper learning curve” in dealing with these new mechanisms, especially as BINUB struggled to find staff to evaluate projects.5 Nonetheless, the Peacebuilding Fund disbursed $35 million on 17 projects in Burundi between early 2007 and late 2009. While it has been argued that some of these met short-term needs rather than serving long-term strategic peace consolidation, some projects clearly did help foster stability in difficult political times. These include initiatives to improve military morale and increase the
mediators devised a range of agreements aimed at reducing violence and assisting the vulnerable in eastern DRC.

The European Union has also had a Special Representative (EUSR) for the Great Lakes Region since 1996. This post was held from its inception to 2007 by Aldo Ajello, a former senior UN official, and since then by Roland van de Geer. While the post’s mandate was initially very broad – to help mediate the regional wars of the late 1990s – it gradually became more focused on the peace-building process in the DRC. This was reinforced when the EU sent a series of military, police and SSR missions to the DRC – although the EUSR does not have command responsibility for these, he is meant to provide political guidance. Additionally, the EUSR is mandated to support stability in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda and interact with the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region. The mandate was updated in 2007 to include, among other tasks, contributing to the efforts to deal with the LRA. While a number of EUSRs’ mandates will end shortly, European governments decided to extend that for the Great Lakes.

The UN Department of Political Affairs has argued that it should maintain a regional approach to central Africa by setting up an office in the region comparable to UNOWA in Dakar (see p. 207). UN officials suggest that this should be a relatively focused set-up, with a strong envoy backed by a small political team. This proposal has been debated at length in New York in 2010, and although it encountered some skepticism from Security Council members, has finally been approved.

**Regional Approaches**

While both BINUB and BINUCA are engaged in the specific problems of strengthening unstable political systems, the UN and other international organizations continue to explore regional approaches to stabilizing Central Africa. From 2002 to 2006, Ibrahima Fall of Senegal acted as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region. As such, he was involved in the creation of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region. This grouping, developed under the auspices of the UN and AU, was meant to create a legal framework for regional diplomacy, in some ways comparable to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (forerunner of the OSCE).

Ban Ki-moon did not replace Fall as Special Representative for the Great Lakes, but in December 2008 he appointed Olusegun Obasanjo Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, albeit with a very different brief. The eastern DRC had been shaken by a successful offensive by the Congrès National Pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP) led by Laurent Nkunda. The UN peacekeeping force (MONUC) had been involved in Congolese army operations against the CNDP and was now at a military disadvantage. A range of powers, including the US, France and Britain, became involved in mediation efforts.

It was widely recognized that Rwanda was key to any settlement in the eastern DRC. Obasanjo and his co-facilitator Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania opened up communications between the Congolese government, General Nkunda and Rwanda. Obasanjo initially conducted shuttle diplomacy in the field, but an office staffed by officials from the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) was set up to support his efforts with Mkapa. Nkunda was arrested in a joint DRC-Rwandan operation, and on 23 March 2009 the Congolese government and new CNDP leadership signed a peace agreement. The Nairobi office continued to function until June 2010, and the mediators devised a range of agreements aimed at reducing violence and assisting the vulnerable in eastern DRC.

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Conclusion

Central Africa and the Great Lakes face manifold unresolved security threats, from the continuing activities of the LRA to the possibility ramifications of violence in southern Sudan after the 2011 referendum on independence there. The structures of democratic governance are still evolving across the region, with frequent setbacks. The overall number of peacekeepers in the region (possibly excluding Sudan) is likely to decline in the years ahead – potentially increasing demand for effective political missions to take on some of their duties. BINUB and BINUCA both still have many problems to resolve. But they may well be the prelude to a new growth of political missions in central Africa.

NOTES


3 J. Brouillard, “CAR Configuration and Security Council Meet to Discuss Elections and Chairman’s Visit to Bangui,” Institute for Global Policy, 7 July 2010.