



The International Contact Group and Steps toward Stability in the Great Lakes

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On February 9-10, 2012 the International Contact Group on the Great Lakes Region will meet at the Department of State in Washington, DC. This body, consisting of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the European Union, and the United Nations, aims to meet on a quarterly basis and has been convened regularly since the early 2000s. The Contact Group works to address political, diplomatic, security, and development issues in the region, and since 2008 has included a task force focused on the illegal trade in natural resources. The intention of the group is to act as a medium for regular exchange of information, the harmonization of messaging, and for the identification and discussion of gaps that exist in regional foreign policy among the members of the group. The group originally included regional countries such as Angola and South Africa, but over the years has slimmed down to its current members that now act as a North American - European alliance on development, security, and economic diversification in the Great Lakes Region.

The Contact Group has a unique ability to advance a coordinated regional policy from all members based on the collective knowledge the group brings to the table. The Group tends to meet just below the ministerial level, occasionally receiving participation from senior principals, and in general allowing for interaction among working level and deputy assistant secretary level and equivalent representatives. This framework is beneficial in that it engages those who have an in depth working knowledge of the issues and situations on the ground. Ultimately, this allows those officials most responsible for crafting the nuts-and-bolts of policy to communicate and coordinate with their counterparts.

The Great Lakes Contact Group is intended to compliment several of the field-based coordination mechanisms that exist among the members, such as the Ambassador's Forum and the Tripartite-Plus Joint Commission, which brings together senior government officials not only from donor nations but also from Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, since the Group is composed of policy experts who are able to influence their respective state or organizational policy platforms, it provides a real opportunity for improved coordination on international diplomatic engagement in the Great Lakes. To this end, the Group is perhaps one of the best-suited bodies to reform donor nations' regional engagement as well as improve multilateral relations.

The upcoming Contact Group meeting has significant implications for regional stability, security, and economic development in the Great Lakes. With the electoral turmoil in Congo, deteriorating state security institutions on the Congo/Rwanda border, and the deployment of U.S. military advisors to the region to end the remnants of the Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, the Great Lakes nations are at a critical turning point with regards to multi-lateral relations with donor states. The massive irregularities in Congo's recent elections, coupled with an increasingly illegitimate government in that country, is causing many Contact Group members to rethink their

relationship with Congo with regards to assistance, development, and investment. In turn, this has implications for relations with other states in the region that have a history of acting as destabilizers on the Congolese political and security landscapes, such as Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi.

The upcoming meeting in Washington will focus on four urgent subject areas: the Congolese elections, security sector reform in Congo, conflict minerals, and armed groups and regional dynamics including the LRA. As a whole, these areas represent core impediments to peace, stability, and development in the Great Lakes. The following are recommendations to the group on specific elements of each subject area where this body can act to create real progress to mitigate conflict and fill critical gaps in cross-border coordination and communication.

1. Congolese Elections

The recent elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been criticized by members of civil society within the country and by members of the international community because of glaring irregularities, willful manipulation of results by the ruling party, and the violent oppression of non-violent opposition movements throughout the country. The Contact Group should:

- Call for the resignation and reconstitution of Congolese National Electoral Commission, or CENI, into a more equitable and representative body as a precondition for all continued assistance to the Government of Congo. Building the capacity of the CENI in its current state will be counterproductive. It must be reformed so that it consists of new members that equitably represent the different parties. This will restore the integrity of the electoral process in the DRC.
- Enact strong consequences and accountability measures for electoral fraud and manipulation by the current government. Donor nations within the Group must indicate publicly that they will not support a Congolese government that denies the will and right of the Congolese people to elect their own leaders. If those most responsible for electoral fraud and violent repression of the opposition refuse to move forward and respect democracy, the U.S. should work with other donor nations to coordinate a set of consequences, potentially including aid reconfiguration including World Bank and IMF agreements, security assistance, and individual sanctions and travel restrictions.
- Coordinate statements that strongly and publicly condemn all state-led efforts to suppress citizens' rights. Congo remains in a post-election crisis. Supporters of opposition parties have been killed, detentions are becoming more prevalent, and the lead opposition candidate for president—Etienne Tshisekedi—is now effectively under house arrest. The exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the freedom of expression, the freedom of assembly, and free movement of people and goods, has been systematically violated by the police and other security forces in an effort to stifle peaceful protest provoked by the controversial elections.

2. Security Sector Reform in Congo

International policy on security sector reform, or SSR, continues to suffer due to lack of coordination, resources, and political will from within the Congolese government and armed forces. International Contact Group members should focus on coordinated partnerships among nations to catalyze meaningful security sector reform.

This coordination should be based on the push for comprehensive military justice reform that runs parallel with good governance reform and oversight in financial management. Military justice is essential and the parties of the Contact Group can provide significant contributions by investing in, and helping to promote, a serious military justice initiative within the Congolese army. Such an initiative will take the revitalization of a multi-donor framework to address national army reform using financial, technical, and political carrots and sticks to create the political will to address ineptitude and abuses in the national military structure. The Contact Group should:

- Focus coordinated assistance on the opportunity with greatest potential to affect change—military justice. This would pay dividends both in fighting impunity and reforming army behavior. There is a need to broaden the focus of existing military justice training programs so that in addition to sexual violence, they include economic crimes. President Kabila must hold up his commitments and crack down on senior, Congolese Armed Forces, or FARDC, commanders who are committing human rights abuses, exploiting natural resources, and extorting communities. In addition, there is a need to ensure that current military justice training programs are followed through to implementation by supporting prosecutions in the military justice system, focused on holding senior commanders to account.
- Address the issue of pay to soldiers and other military personnel. SSR in Congo cannot, and will not, happen if military personnel do not receive fair and regular pay. A payment system that soldiers are able to access and that is independent from the chain of command is essential. The international donor community must work with partners to help set up an efficient payment system.
- Lead a sustained and coordinated SSR investment package with the government of Congo and national army. This should be done in coordination with key donors possessing military expertise, as well as significant bottom-up input from civil society organizations, women’s groups, and local leaders. This also must include a renewed strategy for disarming, demobilizing, and re-locating elements of the rebel Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, or FDLR, as a means to addressing the largest impediment to SSR in Congo—the parallel command structure of the Rwandan linked CNDP and the continued influence of the government of Rwanda in eastern Congo’s security landscape. Focus areas within the investment package should include: battalion training, building livable barracks, livelihood alternatives for units and their families, and helping to streamline overly large units into smaller and more effective units with mechanisms to prevent regional manipulation by former rebel commanders or other external elements.

3. Conflict Minerals

Underneath the deeper social fissures, the conflict in eastern Congo continues to be driven by the battle for strategic mineral reserves. The international community has made progressive steps in establishing due diligence guidelines for companies using potential conflict minerals from the Congo but a process leading to a certification scheme is the missing link in terminating mineral-driven violence. The Contact Group should:

- Work with the U.S. Government to begin a multilateral negotiation process on an internationally agreed upon certification scheme. This negotiation process would include up to 20 members, including representatives from regional governments, industry (key electronics companies and smelters), faith leaders, Congolese civil society and NGOs, to broker agreement on the five critical issues that plague the current set of initiatives: transparency standards, existing loopholes, security, incentives for a clean trade, and conflict gold. The myriad of existing projects requires a diplomatic process to bridge the gaps and

mistrust that currently exist among the stakeholders and provide assurances to industry that the donor countries are committed to opening markets for access to Congolese materials.

- Support the establishment of a regional monitoring mechanism, such as the of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, or ICGLR's, Independent Mineral Chain Auditor, to verify whether mines and traders are conflict-free. This mechanism should include a team of 20 to 30 international and local experts to monitor mines, trading routes, and traders in the region. The experts should be credible and independent and receive access all mines, trading routes, and minerals data. The first monitors should be deployed immediately, so that companies may begin responsible, verifiable sourcing as soon as possible. Independent monitoring will allow for increased development, investment, and security in the most affected mining areas. The system has an estimated cost of between three to five million USD per year, according to experts at Partnership Africa Canada, the UN, and the ICGLR.

4. Armed Group and Regional Dynamics, including the LRA

Efforts to end the 25 year-old LRA crisis have been boosted by the recent deployment of U.S. military advisors and supporting personnel to the region. However, the regional military operations led by the Ugandan army have largely reached a standstill, as the Ugandan People's Defense Forces, or UPDF, is deployed in other strategic locations. The regional armies lack the required intelligence and logistical capabilities, and Congo is likely to become a safe haven for the LRA if Kinshasa continues to require the Ugandan army to halt all operations there. Meanwhile, efforts to encourage LRA commanders and rank-and-file fighters to leave the group are generally underdeveloped and underinvested and have been stymied by confusion surrounding the application of the Amnesty Act in Uganda – limiting the effectiveness of the U.S. military advisors and the regional military operations. Contact Group members should:

- Engage vigorously with governments in and outside the Great Lakes region and the A.U. to secure more capable troops to apprehend the group's senior leadership and protect civilians, while deploying a sufficient number of soldiers to cover the vast area affected by the LRA, which spans approximately 115,000 square miles. Working with the regional governments and the African Union Special Envoy on the LRA, the Contact Group should immediately broker an agreement between Kinshasa and Kampala that allows the UPDF to operate in LRA-affected areas of Congo.
- Coordinate to provide more robust intelligence and transport capabilities vital to enabling the troops to locate key LRA commanders, analyze LRA activity, identify threats to civilians, and act quickly on information. This should include helicopters and other air transport, ground transport, night flights by surveillance aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and infrared technology. The Contact Group should secure support from other countries where gaps are not filled.
- Pursue a two-tiered defection strategy that encourages LRA commanders and rank-and-file fighters to leave the group, adding a pull factor to the push factor of the military strategy. This strategy should consist of an initiative targeted at commanders to weaken the LRA's leadership, a substantial aid package to increase radio programming to LRA members and sensitize communities in affected areas to accept ex-combatants peacefully, and the creation of a physical and legal infrastructure to receive them, especially in Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. Further, the Contact Group should work with the regional governments to develop a robust initiative targeting commanders, establish more assembly points where the LRA can safely surrender, create and adhere to amnesty laws, and fund increased radio and sensitization programs.