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## A Better, Bad Choice

by Richard M. Wrona, Jr.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a modern-day nightmare. After more than a decade of conflict, the country's eastern region is known for its seemingly unending human misery. Mass murder, forced displacements, and the horrible distinction of being the world's "rape capital" embody Thomas Hobbes' description of life in an anarchic world, (i.e. nasty, brutish, and short.) Reports two weeks ago of hundreds of women, girls, and babies being gang-raped by rebels and tribesmen within miles of a United Nations peacekeepers' camp only serve as the most recent chapters in an epic tragedy (["Congo mass rape numbers rise to 240—UN," BBC](#)).

Yet, policy Realists (and I consider myself one of them) realize that the United States has few national interests threatened by eastern DRC's horror. Particularly when one considers its importance *relative* to American global interests and threats to those interests (combating al Qaeda, nuclear weapons proliferation, a rising China, and Mexican instability to name but a few,) eastern DRC legitimately garners little attention. Could any American political leader credibly argue that, in an economic downturn with all of the attributes of a double-dip recession, we have more funds to spend on foreign adventures? Could the President really address the nation and say that even one brigade of U.S. troops (an element of a few thousand servicemembers) would be better allocated to DRC than to Afghanistan or even the United States' southern border?

Americans, however, are directly addressing the insecurity in DRC, albeit in a way that is completely ineffective. In addition to millions of dollars of aid that we provide to DRC's thoroughly corrupt government (["Corruption Perceptions Index," Transparency International](#)), the United States provides over 27% of assessed contributions to the United Nations' peacekeeping budget. (["United Nations Peacekeeping," UN](#)) The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) budget for July 2010-June 2011 is \$1.369 billion dollars. (["United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," UN](#)) This year, whether they know it or not, U.S. citizens will be providing over \$371 million to fund MONUSCO peacekeepers.

Unfortunately, we would do just as well to burn the money. MONUSCO and its predecessor, MONUC, have been worse than worthless. In the most recent gang-rape incident, not only were U.N. peacekeepers in the DRC ignorant of and/or unresponsive to atrocities occurring so close to one of their camps, but they may have turned a blind eye to rebels' construction of road blocks that would fly in the face of the U.N.'s peace enforcement mandate. (["UN 'was not told about DR Congo mass rapes," BBC](#)) Even worse, previous U.N. peacekeepers in the DRC have actually contributed to greater insecurity in the region through their own sexual abuse of Congolese children. (["Peacekeepers' sexual abuse of local girls continuing in DR of Congo, UN finds," UN](#)).

One reason for MONUSCO's lack of effectiveness has to do with its composition. MONUSCO, like most U.N. missions, is overwhelmingly manned by militaries unable to provide security even within their own countries' borders. As an example, Pakistan—although unable to pacify its western regions and address jihadist threats emanating from the same—contributes over 10,000 troops to U.N. peacekeeping missions. One need only list the top five troop-contributing countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nigeria, and Egypt) and then study said countries' fragility to see a possible negative correlation between a regime's competence and its troop contributions.

Given the lack of vital U.S. interests at stake, some might argue that it would be best to ignore the DRC; that close to \$400 million could certainly be better spent on reducing the deficit, on education, or on a host of other domestic issues. I am very sympathetic to such arguments. However, advocates and bureaucrats get a vote, and are—in many cases—more influential than appeals to the national interest. The twin themes of “We can't simply ignore it” and “It's only...” (as in “It's only \$300 million dollars when the government is spending trillions”) will hold decisive sway.

If one assumes that the United States will continue to fund peacekeeping efforts in the DRC and other unstable regions, American citizens should get a better return on their investments. One possible avenue to improved efficiency and effectiveness may be the employment of private military/security companies in these endeavors. An idea entertained in the past by pundits and policymakers, the employment of PMCs might address insecurity on the ground, and do so in ways that are far cheaper than supplementing the Pakistani and Bangladeshi defense budgets. Examples from the 1990s of PMCs' employment by Angola and Sierra Leone demonstrated, if nothing else, that such contracts can be effective at bringing about a modicum of stability. Moreover, a scheme by which the United States Government hired PMCs that were then seconded to the United Nations (as an alternative to future peacekeeping budget contributions by the U.S.) might allow for a greater level of legal accountability than presently exists for troops coming from countries with nascent, non-existent, or corrupt judicial systems.

Employing PMCs entails a number of second- and third-order consequences that must be considered and mitigated. Legitimizing the privatization of force is not something to be taken lightly, although the United States seems to have established significant and haphazard precedent with its contracts supporting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. From the narrow perspective of increasing security in eastern DRC, and recognizing that the situation is of little *relative* threat to U.S. national interests, there hardly seems to be a better alternative. PMCs may be the better, bad choice that we need, especially when compared to endless, ineffective, and harmful U.N. missions.

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