

Altruism or economic expediency? A descriptive account of Namibia's 1998 involvement in the DRC conflict

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Abstract

In 1998, Namibia joined the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a conflict referred to by some as the most devastating war to have occurred since the Second World War, resulting in the death and displacement of millions of people. Involving about eight African countries, this war destabilised the region, resulting in it being referred to by many as 'Africa's First World War.' During this war, extensive resources of nation states were allocated to warfare, instead of being channelled towards more productive and life-saving welfare and poverty alleviation programmes. For example, the United Nations (UN) estimates that the war in the DRC cost Namibia about N\$700 Million. While the involvement of Namibia attracted much criticism, it failed to attract academic research of equal measure. Of the research projects conducted, few are by Namibian researchers. There has not been a coherent descriptive account of Namibia's involvement in this conflict. This article provides a descriptive account of Namibia's involvement in this conflict while exploring and examining Namibia's motive for being involved in this devastating conflict.

Introduction

The recent partitioning of the Sudan into North and South effectively made the DRC the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa. This largest central African state has not, as has been widely acknowledged, enjoyed peace since King Leopold II pocketed it as his colony in the 1880s, until the successes of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. The lack of peace for more than a century has not only led to the loss of millions of lives, but has also robbed the DRC of its potential to become a prosperous nation, for it is one of the most resource-rich countries on the face of the earth (Meredith, 2014).

This article discusses the DRC conflict in which Namibia participated. First, the history of the DRC is briefly described, from the 1880s through to the period after the coup of Colonel Joseph Desiré Mobutu, who ruled the country with an 'iron fist' until the 1997 capturing of Kinshasa by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo Zaire (AFDL). The rationale of a brief over-

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view of the history of the DRC is that it provides an understanding of the dynamics that ultimately led to the DRC conflict.

The following section discusses the brief period of Kabila's presidency which led to the 1998 conflict, and which is the concern of this article. The conflict is discussed in terms of its genesis, and in terms of how it has played out. Specific emphasis is placed on Namibia's intervention, locating the debates surrounding Namibia's motive(s) of joining the war, on both a domestic and international level, and subsequently the peace process that led to the resolution of the conflict.

This article is qualitative in approach. It is aimed at providing a descriptive account of a historical event which, while well-researched in general, has not been adequately researched with a particular focus on Namibia. The study relied on authoritative literature on conflict, reports and statements of credible institutions, independent reports, speeches and statements of the key actors, and other primary and secondary data. In short, the methodology selected is one that fits the purpose of the article: to provide a descriptive account of a historical and political narrative which has not been adequately researched.

The DRC before 1965

At the famous Berlin conference of 1884/5, where European countries met to partition Africa into economic spheres of interest, the DRC was allocated to King Leopold II. As was agreed in the Berlin Treaty, Leopold created an administration in the DRC, ostensibly to facilitate international trade (Kabemba, 2009). As was characteristic of imperialistic policy, Leopold II ran the DRC as an enterprise, in order to amass personal wealth. As Kabemba (2009, p. 101) observes: "Leopold accumulated a vast personal fortune from ivory, rubber and precious commodities, by using Congolese slave labour". It is estimated that ten million people died from forced labour, starvation and outright extermination during his rule. The Congo was the only European colony to run at a profit, almost since its inception. In fifteen years, the king, who publicly claimed a cumulative loss of US\$5 million on his Congo enterprises, actually earned \$ 25 million in profit.

In 1908, when the Belgian government took over from King Leopold II, the administration of the DRC did not change much as far as the maintenance of the Belgians' grip on, and control of, the DRC was concerned. The Belgium colonial government administered the DRC from Brussels, in alliance with the Catholic Church and mining multinational corporations. Both Leopold II and the colonial government administered the vast DRC in a way that not only failed to strengthen state institutions, but

that effectively failed to build a cohesive society. The colonial government strengthened the exploitative tendencies of the King's administration, for it "practiced exploitation in more regulated forms. It systematized the use of forced labour and cash cropping, and used coercive taxation to transform the Congolese peasantry into a wage labour force working for Belgian-owned mining and agricultural firms" (Kabemba, 2009, p. 102).

Encouraged by other African countries that were waging and winning their struggles for self-determination and independence, the Congolese were soon to pose a challenge to the Belgium colonial establishment with their demand for independence. After riots and bloody repressions, Belgium finally conceded to the reality of the demand, and granted the Congolese self-determination. Thus, in January 1960, the Belgians announced that they would grant independence to the DRC within six months, with 30 June 1960 being the day on which independence would be declared (Iyenda, 2005; Kabemba, 2009; Lemarchand, 1964).

The self-determination that was so promptly granted to the Congolese had its own consequences. As revealed earlier on, the colonial project failed to build a cohesive society and strong institutions, due, at least in part, to the native Congolese hardly being ready to take over from their colonial masters. As Iyenda (2005, p. 11) explains:

At independence, the country had fewer than 10 university graduates. The Congolese army, the Force Publique, was more like a police force, to maintain internal law and order among the local people.

Kabemba (2009, p. 102) explains many deficits of the colonial project and the problems either presented or inherited by the independent state. Precisely as Iyenda states above, the challenges of the independent state ranged from those relating to education to those of the military. He argues:

The instability that plagued the new state from the eve of independence was a direct consequence of colonial policies and a lack of preparedness for independence... the Congo was expected to build modern state institutions from scratch... for the first years of its Independence, the Congo remained a country without a single, effective political authority to govern it, a situation exacerbated by the lack of trained personnel to run the country. At Independence, there were less than a dozen Congolese university graduates. In addition, the newly independent state was under threat

from tribal and ethnic conflict, and was built on laws, which were not adapted to Congolese realities.

The lack of preparedness presented the newly independent DRC with an overwhelming number of challenges. Colonial power in the DRC did not end at independence. What largely happened was solely a transfer of political power, with the economy remaining in the hands of the colonialists. At independence, Patrice Lumumba of the *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC) party had entered into a political alliance with the *Alliance des Bakongo* party. Joseph Kasavubu became the ceremonial President of the DRC, while Lumumba became the first Prime Minister of the country. The country was renamed the Republic of the Congo (Kisiangani, 2009). When Lumumba attempted to chart a new course towards taking economic power, he was overthrown and assassinated, after having been in office for only a few months. In short, the colonial masters were not prepared to let go economically. A Belgian commander is said to have stated that “after independence equals before independence” (Kabemba, 2009, p. 103). Roberts (1965, p. 5) diagnosed what contributed to Lumumba’s fallout with the Belgians, and his subsequent overthrow and assassination. He states:

...no sooner had Lumumba been elected ... [than] Belgium began to take steps to weaken his government. The Belgians had forced the Congolese to allow them to maintain an army and air bases in the Congo, ostensibly for ‘mutual cooperation.’ A week after independence, when Congolese soldiers demonstrated against their Belgian officers with a demand for pay and rank raises, the Belgian troops fired on demonstrators. Lumumba, in turn, removed the Belgian officers, and appointed Joseph Kasavubu Commander-in-Chief. The Belgians quickly exploited the situation they had provoked ... they rushed in new troops, and separated Katanga from the Congo Republic – using Moïse Tshombe, a wealthy plantation owner and businessman, as their Katanga front man.

With Lumumba overthrown and assassinated, Kasavubu took over the running of the country and managed, with the help of the United States and the UN, to reincorporate the Katanga province that had broken away. However, the Kasavubu government was also not free of political instability. The years that followed were marked by political instability, thus providing an enabling environment for a new chapter to be launched in 1965 (Iyenda, 2005; Kabemba, 2009; Kisiangani, 2009; Lemarchand, 1964).

The DRC between 1965 and 1997

By 1965, the Cold War was already at its pinnacle in Africa, with Zaire being no exception. Under such conditions, on 24 November 1965, Colonel Joseph Desire Mobutu, with the assistance of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, came to power through a coup. The Americans could not allow the DRC to fall to communism, for they considered it to be strategically located. The fall of the DRC to communism could have meant communism's further advance into central and southern Africa (Kabemba, 2009). Consequently, in order to ensure that the country did not lapse into communism, Mobutu was supported, but more importantly so in order to secure the West's strategic economic interests. Kisiangani (2009, p. 40) explains this as follows:

Although the justification for support of Mobutu by Western countries is often found in the Cold War argument – that the Soviet influence in Africa needed to be checked – it had much to do with competition for access to the Congo's mineral wealth. It is argued that Western support for Mobutu was related to his willingness to allow the US and other Western multinational corporations access to the Congo's resources.

Mobutu ruled Zaire similar to how King Leopold II had ruled it previously. Both men treated the state as an instrument to deliver and to facilitate the accumulation of personal wealth. At the time of his rule, almost forty per cent of the DRC national revenue was 'pocketed' by him and his associates. Life expectancy by 1994 had fallen to 53 years (CCR, 2011; Kabemba, 2009).

Mobutu consolidated power by eliminating the opposition and institutionalising kleptocracy and dictatorship. In the early 1970s, he nationalised much of the economy and changed the name of the country to Zaire – and his own to Mobuto Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga ... During Mobutu's long presidency, Zaire became notorious for cronyism and sustained periods of institutionalised corruption and misappropriation of state resources. Large proportions of the revenues from state owned companies were diverted to Mobutu and his closest allies (Kisiangani, 2009, p. 40).

While busy plundering national resources and safeguarding the interests of the West that had helped to install him to the helm of looting, Mobutu did not foresee the change that awaited him in the near future. However, the early 1990s brought with an important event in the history of the politics of the 20th century - the fall of the Berlin Wall (which marked the end of communism) and the spread of liberal democratic ideas. Thus, international politics changed in most profound ways. Francis Fukuyama labelled this period 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). Mobutu lost his usefulness

for the United States and its allies, who were now interested in the democratic project and in liberal institutionalism. As Kabemba (2009, p. 104) corroborates:

With Communism defeated, the strategy of the US changed. An earlier generation of African dictators was abandoned in favour of a new generation of leaders who accepted the new creed of globalization. Mobutu, who had been applauded for nationalising mining companies when he took power in 1965, was asked to embrace economic liberalisation and privatisation. He failed to read the signs of the times and was so reluctant to democratize and privatise companies that his allies started to consider bringing about a change of regime.

Mobutu was finally overthrown in May 1997, by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo Zaire (AFDL) under the leadership of Laurent Kabila. Kabila was supported by the West and by such neighbouring countries as Burundi, Uganda and Rwanda, which had national security interests in the DRC (Kisiangani, 2009).

The DRC conflict (1997–2002)

The origins of the conflict

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 features profoundly as one of the contributors to the DRC conflict. After the genocide, the perpetrators left Rwanda for exile in eastern DRC, where they were housed in United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) camps. The 'Interahamwe', as they were known, started reorganising themselves in order to launch new attacks on Rwanda, using the refugee camps as incursion bases. The Rwandan government then began arming the group called the Banyamulenge, who were also in the eastern DRC, to counter the planned attacks of the Interahamwe (Kabemba, 2009). As was the case with Rwanda, Uganda was also concerned with the DRC-based rebels who were causing instability in northern Uganda. The Congo, under Mobutu, thus became a concern to Uganda and Rwanda. Further, the Rwandan government sent in troops to counter the planned attacks. This angered Mobutu, who, in response, ordered them to leave Zaire. Mobutu's order intensified hostilities and increased the anti-Mobutu sentiments in the country. These led to the formation of the AFDL, with the support of Uganda and Rwanda, under the leadership of Laurent Kabila. Uganda and Rwanda preferred Laurent Kabila, because, among many other reasons, he was associated with Yoweri Museveni (the Ugandan President), through them both having been university students and due to his marriage to a Tutsi woman (from the tribe of Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda) (Baregu, 2002; Iyenda, 2005; Kabemba, 2009; Mwaniki, 2009; Prunier, 2009).

In addition, Angola also harboured anti-Mobutu sentiments. The Angolan Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government considered the DRC, under Mobutu, as a serious threat to its continued existence, because the Katanga province of the DRC served as the training ground of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels fighting the Angolan government. The AFDL, with the assistance of Rwanda and Uganda, started organising themselves to topple the Mobutu government. They then started taking over towns and cities, such as Kisangani and Lubumbashi, until they finally captured the capital city, Kinshasa, on 17 May 1997. After overthrowing Mobutu, Kabila changed the name of the country from Zaire (which it had been named by Mobutu) to the DRC. While charting his way to Kinshasa, Kabila had made several concessions to various multinational mining companies, including Anglo-American, Texaf, George Forest International, American Mineral Fields, and others. Once in power, Kabila had given influential governmental positions to Rwandese nationals, including James Kabarebe (Chief of Staff of the Congolese Armed Forces), Bizima Karaha (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Deo Bugera (Minister of State and Secretary-General of the AFDL), Moise Nyarugabo (Chief Executive Officer of the Acquired Goods Office), and Michael Rudatenguha (Financial Director in the President's Office). Such deals and decisions, as well as his failure to fulfil his democratisation promise, led to dissent and disappointment with his government (Baregu, 2002; Iyenda, 2005; Kabemba, 2009; Mwaniki, 2009; Prunier, 2009).

In 1998, on suspicion that the Rwandese he appointed were planning to overthrow him, and seemingly in an attempt to appease the Congolese, Kabila ordered the Rwandese and Ugandan forces and personnel to leave the country. This order, which was harshly accepted by those on the receiving end, led to mutinies in the army, particularly in Kinshasa and in the eastern province of Kivu. Whereas the mutiny in Kinshasa was halted, the one in the eastern province continued, culminating in a drive to topple the government. In the same eastern province, the Banyamulenge formed the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) and swiftly gained control of such towns as Bukavu and Uvira, and many of the eastern provinces. The RCD based their operation in the city of Goma. By that time, Kabila's relation with the allies that had brought him to power had already soured. Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda retaliated by occupying parts of the eastern and north-eastern parts of the DRC. At the same time, Uganda 'engineered' a rebel group, called the Movement for Liberation of the Congo (MLC). Seeing that the anti-Kabila rebel forces were advancing towards Kinshasa, Kabila appealed for assistance from SADC. In response, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia sent troops to aid the Kabila government. By August 1998, the conflict had culminated in an outright war, involving more than seven African countries. This war had been referred to by many as 'Africa's First World War' (Baregu,

2002; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2009; Iyenda, 2005; Kabemba, 2009; Kisiangani, 2009; Mwaniki, 2009; Naidoo, 2000).

Namibian intervention in the conflict

As was already stated, Namibia, Angola and Zimbabwe joined the war in the DRC after the Rwandan and Ugandan supported rebel forces captured most of the towns and headed towards Kinshasa. Kabila appealed to these countries in the name of SADC. On 7 and 8 August 1998, President Mugabe, the then chairman of the OPDS, convened a meeting in Victoria Falls to discuss the DRC conflict. The meeting was attended by Namibia, Angola, Tanzania, Zambia, the DRC and Zimbabwe. The meeting agreed to set up a verification committee of Foreign Ministers of Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The committee was tasked with investigating the nature of the conflict, and thereafter proposing peace recommendations (Meyns, 2002). President Mugabe called for a follow-up meeting, which was held in Harare on 18 August 1998. This meeting was a special meeting of the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC) Defence Ministers, which was held to consider the findings of the verification committee. Following the findings of the verification committee, the meeting resolved that those SADC members that were able to, had to give assistance to President Kabila, for it was found that Uganda and Rwanda had violated the sovereignty of the DRC. SADC allies' intervention was thus also found legitimate in terms of Article 51 of the UN Charter, which provides for a state's individual or collective self-defence, should such a scenario manifest itself (Meyns, 2002; Punungwe, 1999).

Joining the war – economic motives or defending DRC sovereignty?

There is a vast amount of literature on the exploitation of the resources of the DRC by the parties involved in that particular conflict. Many argue that all the external forces (Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Namibia, Angola, and Zimbabwe) had ulterior motives to that of coming to the aid of the Kabila government (specifically with reference to the SADC allies). Such clandestine motives have largely been documented as being of an economic nature. The official version of Namibia's motive was provided by the Namibian Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Namibian Defence Force (NDF), President Nujoma, as quoted in Orogun (2002, pp. 36-37), qualifying Namibia's intervention as follows:

Our troops are there to safeguard Namibia's future security. We should not behave like children and delude ourselves in thinking that the peace and stability that we are enjoying today will remain forever. As the Commander-in Chief, I took the necessary action to come to the aid of an aggressed neighbour and fellow member of

SADC. I did so conscious of the inherent dangers and problems, including the death of our troops. It is an honourable act of enlightened self-interests. The very worst was in store for us.

Lumb (1999) adds:

The NDF envisaged the DRC campaign to be a short to medium term operation comprised of two phases. The objective of phase one was to protect the Kabila government in Kinshasa and prevent it from being overthrown by rebel forces, as well as to secure the western economic corridor, Kinshasa's vital link to the Atlantic Ocean ... Phase two's objective was to contain the rebel forces in the eastern region of the DRC and prevent them from capturing towns and other strategic areas.

The internationalisation of the DRC conflict also meant that the UN and the Security Council would also intervene in the conflict. One of the United Nations (UN) interventions was the establishment of a panel of experts to investigate the illegal exploitation of resources in the DRC. The panel was known as The Expert Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of Congo. On 16 April 2001, the Panel published its report, which identified those that had been involved in plundering the resources of the DRC.

According to Iyenda (2002, pp. 15-16), it was also found that “foreign forces allied with the Congolese government, namely Angola, Namibia and especially Zimbabwe, were also profiting from the conflict through economic deals and agreements, exploitation of mines and one-sided contracts on several goods and merchandises”. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (1998, p. 8) states that “some observers suggest that Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia each has its own reasons for intervening. Zimbabwe and Namibia have economic interests in the DRC that they wish to defend, safeguard and promote. According to Taylor and Williams (2001, p. 276) “Namibia’s \$25 million trade deal with Kabila, which stands to benefit key players associated with the Nujoma regime, similarly played a role in Windhoek’s decision to enter and remain involved in the war”.

Orogun (2002, p. 36) believes that Namibia’s intervention in the DRC is based on “political and economic expediency rather than sheer altruism”. He argues that Namibia, much of which is a dry country, was interested in using the Congo River as a water resource. As such, the intervention could “secure economic and vital resource benefits.” This observation corresponds with what President Nujoma had to say, especially in regards to Namibian troops being there “to safeguard Namibia's future security” and also that the intervention was “an honourable act of enlightened self-interests”.

The argument as to the motives of Namibia is neither here nor there. It is, indeed, possible that Namibia partook, and was interested, in plundering the resources of the DRC, and that the intervention was an act of “enlightened self-interest”. There seems to be evidence on both sides. It is very clear, though, that both Angola and Zimbabwe were involved in plundering the DRC’s resources. The UN Panel, for example, provided details of the specific involvement of the two countries, and the shares held, as well as in which sector and industry. Compared to the available information on Angola and Zimbabwe, there is little precise information available on Namibia’s looting and plundering of the DRC resources. However, it is interesting to note the ‘\$25 million trade deal’ that Namibia had with Kabila, as covered by Taylor and Williams (2001). The possibility also exists that the money involved is that which is referred to in the following: “during the time when Namibia became involved in the DRC conflict in 1998, Namibia granted DRC a loan of N\$ 25 million” (Mushelenga, 2008, p. 131).

Providing further clarity on this point, the International Crisis Group (1999, p. 10) argued that “there are few reasons for the continued military involvement of Namibia in the DRC. The Namibian involvement can only be explained in terms of the warm relationship between Namibian President Sam Nujoma, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and Kabila. The friendship between Nujoma and Mugabe started in their early days as freedom fighters against white minority rule in their countries. Nujoma and Kabila used to belong to informal Marxist discussion groups in Dar es Salaam, where they were exiled in the 1960’s.”

In addition, Prunier (2009, p. 265) states: “Windhoek had joined [the DRC conflict] only because [of] the SADC big boy pressure”. In the light of the above, De Carvalho (2010, p. 38) summarises the situation as being one in which “... the international community has not slated the former [Namibia] over the plunder of Congolese resources, as was the case with Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. The riches gained by Namibia from the DRC were granted by the DRC government in compensation for Namibian spending in the conflict. Therefore, with or without the business issue, Namibia was already inclined to support Kabila.”

Joining the war – the domestic debate

Joining the war in the DRC was a contested phenomenon not only in SADC, but also inside Namibia. This contention was especially profound in the National Assembly, Namibia’s legislative body. Mushelenga (2008, p. 131) captures this debate as follows:

[Namibia's] involvement in the DRC ... has created controversy in foreign policy - making. The manner in which information on Namibia's involvement in the DRC conflict was communicated to the public does not augur well for foreign policy-making. When the issue came, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theo-Ben Gurirab, denied that Namibia has sent troops to the DRC, only for President Nujoma to confirm this state of affairs within two days. Accordingly, an opposition politician, Moses Katjuongua questioned the granting to the DRC, during the conflict, of a loan of N\$25 million. This issue has created a controversy in Namibia's foreign policy-making.

Other arguments that were advanced by the opposition and the media were that President Nujoma had bypassed Parliament and had acted alone in sending troops to the DRC. The resultant confusion even created the belief, in some lawmakers, that a violation of the Namibian Constitution had taken place. Of these, Elizabeth Amukugo, a member of the main opposition party at the time, the Congress of Democrats (CoD), was quoted in Mushelenga (2008, p. 128) stating that the

...involvement in the DRC conflict and Angola was not consistent with the policy of nonalignment or international settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. Since the fighting in the DRC was not a secret war, it was beyond our comprehension that the decision was taken to get involved secretly, without informing Parliament or even informing the public whose tax money had to be spent without their authorization.

However, Lumb (1999) clarifies this matter as follows:

Section 29 of the Defence Amendment Act (No. 114 of 1990) stipulates the circumstances in which members of the NDF can be deployed on foreign soil, but the Constitution is silent as to who has the authority to make such a decision. In reality this means that the President has the discretion to declare war and send soldiers to another country without consulting the legislature prior to the decision. As a consequence of this Constitutional provision, President Nujoma circumvented the National Assembly when he made the decision to deploy troops in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Mushelenga (2008, pp. 128-129) also corroborates Lumb's view, stating:

...members of the opposition parties misunderstood constitutional provisions regarding Parliament's approval of martial laws. The relevance of the opposition arguments in this respect is applicable only when martial laws and state of emergency

are applied in case of civil war or threat to constitutional order, peace and stability ... Article 27 of the Namibian Constitution requires the President to consult the National Assembly only when declaring the public emergency, state of national defence and martial law, in the event of threat to national defence and security due to either civil war or threat by another state ... The Namibian Constitution is silent on the issue of deploying the NDF to defend another state from aggression.

It is very important to note the words of the President, as a principal foreign policy maker, as quoted earlier. That considered, it would appear that Namibia went to the DRC to respond to President Kabila's plea. However, this does not mean that it was blind of the economic and strategic self-interest, as stated by the President.

The role of Namibia in the conflict in the DRC

The role played by Namibia in the DRC was twofold: firstly, a military role, and secondly, a diplomatic role. The military role refers to the actions and results brought about by military intervention in the conflict, whereas the diplomatic role refers to the actions and results of Namibian political leaders' efforts to have the conflict resolved.

The military role

Namibia sent about 2 000 troops and about 20 tons of military weapons and other supplies to the DRC. The NDF, with the support of the allies, managed to secure Kinshasa, and prevented it from being captured by the rebels. According to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (1998, p. 8), "without the intervention of... Namibia, Kinshasa would have been captured by the rebels". Specifically, it was also the responsibility of the NDF to provide for the personal security of President Kabila. In addition to safeguarding the city and its airport, the NDF also managed to secure the DRC's strategic link to the Atlantic Ocean, the western economic corridor. The force also controlled the western part of the DRC, causing the rebels to withdraw, and to cross the Congo River into Congo-Brazzaville. As a result, Namibia and its allies brought about a stalemate, which can arguably be said to have decreased the number of war mortalities (Cornwell & Potgieter, 1998; Lumb, 1999; Orogun, 2002).

The diplomatic role

The other significant role that was played by Namibia was of a diplomatic nature. Before the military intervention, Namibia was already involved in diplomatic attempts to find a solution to the conflict. Namibia was chosen, together with Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia, to be part of the verification

committee tasked with assessing the disposition of the conflict and with, thereafter, making recommendations for its peaceful resolution. This verification committee was established by the SADC Organ on Politics Defense and Security (OPDS) meeting that took place on 7 and 8 August 1998 (Meyns, 2002; Punungwe, 1999).

Even after joining the war, Namibia remained committed to the diplomatic resolution of the conflict. As Lumb (1999) confirms: "... by late-March 1999, President Nujoma readily admitted that this war could not be won militarily, and favoured a negotiated settlement instead ... By September, after several months of intensive diplomatic bargaining, a cease-fire agreement [the Lusaka peace agreement] was eventually signed by most of the important parties. This cease-fire agreement stipulates that all foreign troops, including the approximately 2 000 NDF soldiers, must withdraw from DRC territory by February 2000".

The allies' intervention caused a stir in SADC, adding on to the already existing differences between President Mugabe (Chairperson of SADC OPDS) and President Mandela (Chairperson of SADC) at the time. It appeared that there were differences and conflicting views on how best the conflict could be resolved, although there was consensus that President Kabila was the legitimate authority in the DRC, whose territorial integrity and sovereignty was to be respected. The allies, led by SADC OPDS chairperson, felt that providing military aid to fellow SADC members whose sovereignty was being violated by foreign aggressors was apt; while the SADC Chair saw peaceful means, rather than military intervention, as the way forward (Meyns, 2002).

In the light of the above, President Nujoma played an enormous role in reconciling these divergent views and in shaping the direction of events, based not on condemning the allies, but on supporting their intervention, as a basis of the roadmap. Specifically, President Nujoma managed to convince President Mandela, the SADC Chair, to support the allies' intervention in the DRC. President Mandela was quoted in Cornwell and Potgieter (1998, p. 78) as stating:

It is quite reasonable when the legitimate head of a government of a country says: 'I have been invaded by a foreign force. Come and help me defend my country... for the neighbouring country to respond positively ... There was some confusion before. But once Sam Nujoma gave me this explanation and he repeated it in the summit, we unanimously supported that initiative and expressly acknowledged President Kabila as the legitimate head of that government. There is no difference whatsoever on this point now that those explanations have been given.

As such, it is no surprise that the SADC Annual Summit, which was held in Grand Baie from 13 to 14 September 1998 gave its blessing to the intervention of the allies. The summit statement read:

The Summit welcomed initiatives by SADC and its Member States intended to assist in the restoration of peace, security and stability in DRC, in particular the Victoria Falls and Pretoria initiatives. In that regard, the Summit reaffirmed its call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and commended the Governments of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe for timorously providing troops to assist the Government and people of the DRC defeat the illegal attempt by rebels and their allies to capture the capital city, Kinshasa, and other strategic areas (SADC, 1998).

The DRC conflict resolution process

Before the intervention of the allies in the DRC conflict, there was considerable propensity to resolve the DRC conflict, as evidenced by the meeting that was held at an early stage in Victoria Falls involving the belligerents. SADC continued with efforts to resolve the conflict. With the passage of time, this protracted international conflict became of greater concern to the international community than it had been earlier on. It is for this reason that both the OAU and the UN were involved at the highest level. In 1999, SADC tasked the late Zambian President, Frederick Chiluba, with facilitating dialogue between the warring parties. This culminated in the signing of the Lusaka Peace Agreement between Namibia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Angola, and the DRC on 10 July 1999. In addition, the Agreement was also signed by the RCD and the MLC, being the two rebel formations, two months later. The Lusaka Peace Agreement called, amongst others, for a ceasefire in the DRC; the establishment of a unified army and joint military commission to tackle disarmaments of armed groups; the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the DRC; the deployment of the UN peacekeeping force to safeguard the implementation of the agreement; and an all-inclusive political dialogue – the Inter-Congolese Dialogue –to bring about a new political dispensation in the DRC. The Dialogue was to be initiated by a neutral facilitator chosen, in consultation with the belligerents, by the OAU (of which the former President of Botswana, Sir Katumile Masire, subsequently became the facilitator).

All did not go according to plan, for there was still divergent interest and mistrust among parties, although they had signed the Lusaka Peace Agreement. Fighting started again in the DRC, prompting the UN, in February 2000, to deploy more than 5 000 troops to monitor the ceasefire. President Kabila was also said to be indifferent to the facilitator, President Masire. On 17 January 2001, President Kabila was assassinated and his son, Joseph Kabila, was unanimously elected by Parliament to be his

father's successor. The young Kabila showed considerable inclination to peace and resolution of the conflict in his country, with the peace talks beginning to take shape in the early 2000s (Apuuli, 2004; Iyenda, 2005).

The Inter-Congolese Dialogue involved lengthy talks, including agreements, disagreements, protests, deals and boycotts. This was the most important part of peace-making in the DRC conflict. The facilitator tried to hold a meeting between the parties in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, but the talks failed when the participants could not agree on the inclusion and exclusion and inclusion of delegates. Between February and April 2002, About 360 delegates later converged on Sun City, South Africa, as part of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. The Sun City Talks led to the signing of a peace deal between Rwanda and the DRC on 30 July 2002, which called for the withdrawal of Rwandan soldiers from the DRC and the dismantling of the Rwanda-supported rebel forces. A month later, on 6 September 2002, the Luanda peace agreement was signed between the DRC and Uganda. The agreement directed Uganda to withdraw her troops from the DRC, while calling for improved relations between the two countries. The Inter-Congolese Dialogue finally made a breakthrough on 17 December 2002, when the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement was signed by all the parties that had been present at the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, including the DRC national government, the MLC, the RCD, the Rally for Congolese Democracy-Liberation Movement (RCD-ML), the Rally for Congolese Democracy – National (RCD-N), opposition parties, civil society organisations, and the Mai Mai. The Global and All-Inclusive Agreement outlined the path for the future which included, amongst others, the establishment of a transitional government and legislative and Presidential elections (Apuuli, 2004; Iyenda, 2005; Kisiangani, 2009; Meyns, 2002).

There is little mention of the role of Namibia during the conflict resolution process although the country took part in SADC efforts to resolve the conflict. It must be noted, however, that the then Namibian Ambassador to the UN, Martin Andjaba, did form part of the MONUC team sent to the DRC by the Security Council (UN, 2000). Namibia's main contribution to this conflict resolution process appears to be the withdrawal of troops from the DRC, according to the schedule of the Lusaka Agreement, to allow for the Inter Congolese Dialogue to take effect. In discussing the importance of the Inter Congolese Dialogue in one of the sessions of the Security Council, Jamaican Ambassador, Curtis Ward, thanked Namibia for withdrawing, by the end of August, from the DRC (ReliefWeb, 2001). The former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan was also reported to have "applauded the withdrawal of Namibian troops last month from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as a positive sign for the peace process after three years of conflict" (IRIN, 2001).

Namibia's 'laid back' approach during the conflict resolution process can be best understood in the words of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hidipo Hamutenya, who then remarked that, "with the Rwanda and Uganda aggression blunted and their hegemonic ambitions checked, it was now possible for other parties, such as the UN and South Africa, to step forth with proposals for peacekeeping and national reconciliation" (Dzinesa & Rupiya, 2005, p. 225). From the above, it appears that Namibia regarded conflict resolutions and post-conflict reconstruction as the business of others, such as South Africa.

Conclusion

The ending of the DRC conflict finally closed the devastating century-old chapter in the history of the DRC. From the plundering, exploitation and underdevelopment of King Leopold, Mobutu and the likes, the DRC can now look forward, with determination and focus, to the humane development of its people. This, however, does not mean that we can forget the history of 'peace-less' DRC.

This article provided a descriptive account of the role of Namibia in a highly internationalised conflict that saw about eight African countries fighting one another on African soil. While Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and their rebel creations were fighting to topple the Kabila government, Namibia, Angola and Zimbabwe fought to prevent the overthrow of the Kabila government. Chad and Sudan are said to have been part of the conflict as well. The above phenomenon led scholars to describe this event as 'Africa's First World War'. With the efforts of the UN, OAU and SADC in particular, the conflict was finally resolved, even though it was a lengthy process that required diligence and commitment from those tasked with the responsibility of bringing the belligerent forces together.

There is a large body of literature providing evidence that the war had a dimension of looting the DRC resources by those involved. The UN constituted a panel of experts to investigate the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of the DRC. The findings of the panel, which were released in 2001, affirm that plundering of natural resources from the Congo indeed, did take place. The panel report and scholars in the field found Zimbabwe, Uganda and Rwanda mostly guilty of having plundered the resources of the DRC. Namibia is mentioned as being part of the group, but there was little mention of specific looting and plundering activities, as was the case with her allies. The article does not, however, conclude that Namibia did not take part in the plundering of the DRC resources – it is possible that Namibia did take part in the plundering of the resources – but that there is little specific and lucid indication of such.

Namibia, which played a crucial role in the DRC conflict, and her allies swiftly moved into the DRC and managed to secure Kinshasa, which was about to be captured by the rebel forces. There is wide consensus that, if it had not been for the SADC allies coming to Kabila's aid, Kinshasa would have been captured by the rebels and the Kabila government overthrown (Lumb, 1999). Namibia also gave 20 tons of weapons and other supplies, and a loan of N\$25 million, to the DRC government at the time of war.

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