

# INTRA-STATE VIOLENCE IN D.R. CONGO AND FEATURES OF THE ‘NEW WAR’ SCENARIOS

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**Abstract:** *The chief objective of this paper is to demonstrate that the characteristics of new wars (described by scholars Mary Kaldor and Herfried Münkler) are identified in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Hence, the main argument is that the wars in D.R. Congo displayed most features of the new wars. Former Zaire/RDC was a weak state, completely unable to retain monopoly on the use of organized violence or to control its entire territory. Many armed groups and local militias had free vein in the east part and at some point they also controlled the north east and south east areas. Moreover, they gained autonomy and resorted to atrocities. The distinction between combatants and civilians was blurred. The locus of belligerence moved from the military sector to the societal one, thus also pinpointing to the need to reconceptualize security. Most attacks were carried out systematically and deliberately against groups of individuals, without discrimination between civilians and members of the militias. Child-soldiering was present and violence against women was prevailing systematically. Looting, raping, and killing was the bulk of the fighting and on several occasions civilians were used as human shields.*

**Keywords:** new wars, D.R. Congo, human displacement, human insecurity

## 1. Introduction

This article aims at demonstrating that the three armed conflicts that broke out between 1996 and 2005 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R. Congo) are illustrative for the scenarios of “new wars”. The latter represents a concept which was coined in the post-Cold War period in order to indicate the transformation of warfare, from inter-state to intra-state wars, and the new features of belligerence at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty first century.

With this main objective set, I will firstly present the transformation of wars, as theorized by scholars Mary Kaldor and Herfried Münkler, and focus on main characteristics of new wars. Secondly, I will describe the nature and dynamic of armed violence during the three Congo wars and,

thirdly, I will show that the main features on new wars’ scenarios were present in the Congo wars.

## 2. Characteristics of new wars

Martin van Creveld introduced the idea of the transformation of war in 1991. He focused on the main differences between inter-state, Clausewitzian, trinitarian wars, on the one hand, and the changing aspects of post-Cold War armed conflicts, which the scholar referred to as “future wars”, on the other hand [1]. A salient and coherent debate emerged during the 1990s and entailed arguments pertaining to the old wars–new wars dichotomy. In what follows, we will synthesize the claims of two scholars preoccupied with the new wars, namely Herfried Münkler and Mary Kaldor.

## **2.1. Herfried Münkler's thesis on the new wars**

According to Herfried Münkler, “the classical model of inter-state war [...] seems to have been discontinued” and states tend to lose their *de facto* monopoly on organized violence and are replaced by “military entrepreneurs”. Münkler shows that new actors (namely “para-state or even partly private actors – from local warlords and guerrilla groups through firms of mercenaries operating on a world scale to international terror networks”) have overtaken the war-waging role of states. The main argument related to the features of new wars is built on the emergence of a “multiplicity of interest groups”, which breed on war economies and hence have no direct or lucrative interests in initiating peace processes or in the “renunciation of violence”. The author's contention about the transformative nature of war is centred on several developments: de-statization of war or privatization of military force, greater asymmetry of military force, autonomization of forms of violence [2].

Herfried Münkler's tenet claims on the “newness” of current wars are centred on the distinction between “state-building” wars, on the one hand, in Europe and North America and “state-disintegrating wars” in the Third World or the periphery of the First and Second Worlds, on the other hand. In the case of the latter, the author argues, the wars led to the failure or collapse of “young and still unstable states” due to constant interference from outside powers and also due to the challenges from “world market systems that makes it impossible for them to politically control the developments of their national economy.” The core argument is that certain areas are exposed to new patterns of conflict and the underlying causal factor for the transformation of wars is economic globalization. The result is the inability of weak states to compete (by controlling national wealth and linking it to the growing of their economies) or to achieve development. In fact, the scenario

described by Münkler is one in which war is triggered and perpetuated by the destructive and cumulative effects of globalization and tribalism upon state-building capacities in the Third World. Since such wars tend to be prolonged (because of shadow economies, support from outside powers, increased consumption of resources, and local warlords' reliance on profits from war economy), one major observation is that the “short-wars between states” (from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth century) were replaced by “long wars within societies.” The latter imply the following intertwining characteristics: the asymmetry of forces/belligerents; the gradual privatization of violence; the deviation from codified rules of warfare; and the use of force (in its utmost brutal force) against civilians [3].

Münkler showed that a major characteristic of new wars is “the association of military violence with starvation and epidemics”. The author attributed three main phenomena to the new wars' scenarios: warlordism, child-soldiering, and refugee flows. Also, he demonstrated that recent and contemporary wars produce regional destabilization and the internationalization of such intra-state violence [4].

## **2.2. Mary Kaldor's thesis on the new wars**

Mary Kaldor argued that during the late 1980s and early 1990s a new type of organized violence has emerged (especially in Eastern Europe and Africa) as a result of globalization. Kaldor uses the term “war” to emphasize the political nature of this form of violence, but she underlines that “the new wars involve a blurring of the distinctions between war [...], organized crime [...] and large-scale violations of human rights” [5]. Kaldor posits globalization as a key cause of new wars and argues that globalization has produced a “revolution in military affairs” which entailed “a revolution in the social relations of warfare” [6]. Mary Kaldor showed that one major transformation in the new wars' scenario is the targeting of civilians and

that “the ratio of civilian to military casualties appears to have risen quite dramatically” [7]. Mary Kaldor claims that “the logic of new wars” rests upon four chief elements. The first one refers to *actors*, since “new wars are fought by varying combinations of networks of state and non-state actors – regular armed forces, private security contractors, mercenaries, jihadists, warlords, paramilitaries”. Secondly, she mentions the *goals* and explains that “new wars are fought in the name of identity”, be it ethnic, religious or tribal identities. Thirdly, Kaldor brings in new *methods* which entail forced population displacement, lack of direct military confrontations and attacks against civilians. Finally, she argues that *forms of private finance* emerged especially in weak states wherein “tax revenue is falling and new forms of predatory private finance include loot and pillage, ‘taxation’ of humanitarian aid, Diaspora support, kidnapping, or smuggling in oil, diamonds, drugs, people” [8].

### 3. The Congo Wars

#### 3.1. The First Congo War

One major cause of the first war in Congo (at the time still officially named Zaire) was represented by the spill-over effects of the genocide in Rwanda. The Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) defeated the Hutu government in July 1994 and this triggered a refugee emergency. The refugee flows comprised approximately one million Hutu who streamed into eastern Zaire (especially into the two Kivu provinces). Amongst the refugee camps were also the *génocidaires*, members of FAR (Forces Armées Rwandaises/Rwandan Armed Forces) and Interahamwe (the Hutu extremists who had been the perpetrators of the genocide) [9].

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) set up refugee camps in eastern Zaire. The dramatic result was that “these camps were subsequently used as staging grounds from which these Interahamwe/ex-FAR regrouped and launched offensives against the new Tutsi-dominated government in Rwanda” [10].

The huge exodus was soon followed by a

cholera epidemic which received ample media coverage and produced major human losses (between 20,000 and 50,000) among the camp residents [11]. The events immediately led to the destabilization of eastern Zaire and the outburst of the so-called First Congo War.

According to Nicholas Wheeler, the organizers of the genocide, “militia leaders and government soldiers found themselves without food or medicines living side by side with their Tutsi victims” in the refugee camps [12]. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee reports, the emerging humanitarian emergency was illustrative for “the changing nature of conflict, with internal and regional wars generating cross-border movements of mixed groups, including military elements” and for how militarized camps raised a huge threat to refugee insecurity [13].

The First Congo War had internal causes, but also displayed the scenario of an internationalized war. Zaire accused Rwanda of backing up the rebels in the Kivu regions, while Rwanda accused Mobutu Sese Seko of sheltering the Hutu extremists. Local authorities in north Kivu have been resorting to a “quasi-ethnic cleansing campaign” [14] ever since 1993 and in 1996 the Banyamulenge/Congolese Tutsis were told they had to leave Zaire or be “exterminated and expelled” [15]. This led to another exodus of people, but one armed group among them (trained and armed by the RPF) started to fight the FAZ (*Forces Armées Zairoises/Zairean Armed Forces*) and the Hutu militias. The parties to the conflict invoked security reasons. On the one hand, Zaire accused its neighbours, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, of destabilizing its eastern territory (over which it actually had no control) and received military help from the Interahamwe/ex-FAR operating out of the refugee camps. On the other hand, Rwanda and Uganda accused Zaire of protecting the *génocidaires* and of backing up insurrection movements operating against their governments from eastern Zaire. The initial local rebellion turned into an extended anti-Mobutu revolution. Laurent-Désiré

Kabila became the leader of the rebels and four dissident factions grouped together into the AFDL (*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire*). The rebels took control over Shaba (the mineral-rich province in south-eastern D.R. Congo) and later advanced very close to the capital city Kinshasa. The last phase of the war was in May 1997 when Mobutu's regime collapsed [16].

### **3.2. The Second Congo War**

The second phase of the so-called Congo Wars was marked by Kabila emerging as the new leader of D.R. Congo and as the victorious figure of the anti-Mobutu rebellion. Kabila's takeover of power was in fact possible due to the Banyamulenge/Congolese Tutsis' support and to the assistance of Rwandan and Ugandan armies [17]. Very soon, though, he triggered domestic dissatisfaction, as well as former supporters' (both foreign and internal) discontent. His rebellion was dependent on the Banyamulenge and the armies of Rwanda and Uganda, hence "there was a reaction against these allies in Kinshasa and, in particular, resentment at the Tutsi" [18] and consequently conflicts escalated. Discrimination and violence against the Tutsis were launched. The newly-installed government of Rwanda perceived the actions of Kabila as fostering the anti-Tutsi feelings and condemned his inability to end "the problem of border insecurity by neutralizing the insurgency groups threatening Uganda, Rwanda, and Angola from the Congo" [19].

A mutiny within AFDL emerged and the breakaway RCD forces (*Rassemblement Congolaise pour la Démocratie/Rally for Congolese Democracy*) started fighting against the Kabila government, hence marking the Second Congo War. What followed suit was the fragmentation of military troops, the emergence of other groups, but also shifts in alliances. The violence displayed all attributes of a civil war and the conflict dynamic showed further complexities. The RCD split

into two factions due to divergent views: the RCD-ML (*Mouvement de Libération*) was backed by Uganda and the RCD-Goma was supported by Rwanda [20]. By 2000 the Rwandan and Ugandan forces were fighting among themselves and Kabila's government had no control over Congolese territory (with the exception of the western part) [21]. In 2001 Laurent Kabila was assassinated and his son, Joseph Kabila, took over.

The Second Congo War was characterized by mounting violence against civilians and human insecurity. According to a report released by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in 2001, approximately "2.5 million excess deaths have occurred during the 32-month period beginning in August 1998 and ending in March 2001" and the overwhelming majority of deaths were caused by disease and malnutrition [22].

### **3.3. The Third Congo War**

Large-scale violence continued and the Third Congo War was complicated by the eruption of fighting between tribal groups in the northeast area. The Ugandans supported the local Lendu agriculturalists and backed their militias while Rwanda provided support for the cattle-herding Hema [23]. Clashes between the local militias led to immense human losses. According to Human Rights Watch reports the massacres in Ituri caused 50,000 deaths and 500,000 refugees in 2003, and according to IRC most of the deaths were a result of generalized violence, lack of medical facilities, food insecurity; the prevailing and tragic characteristic is that "the vast majority of deaths have been among civilians and have been due to easily preventable and treatable illnesses" [24].

### **4. The Congo wars as illustrative for the new wars' scenarios**

The Congo wars emerged in the context of state weakness and clearly indicated that new wars are internal and internationalized. Also, the case of Congo wars reveals that new types of wars are no longer waged by state entities, but rather by sub-state or para-state actors. The central Congolese government and its military agent the *Forces Armées Zairoises*

were fighting against an insurgent paramilitary enemy which was backed up by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Since the government in Kinshasa had no control over its eastern territory, it received military help from the Interahamwe/ex-FAR operating out of the refugee camps. Hence, D.R. Congo has lost its *de facto* monopoly on organized violence.

Other features of new wars' scenarios indicate the privatisation of military forces, the fragmentation of factions, and the absence of direct military confrontations (since new wars are asymmetric wars wherein the weaker side deliberately avoids facing the stronger opponent on a battlefield). As shown, the AFDL (*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire*) was fragmented, a new armed faction emerged, the RCD (*Rassemblement Congolaise pour la Démocratie/Rally for Congolese Democracy*), which started fighting against the newly installed government in Kinshasa. At its turn, the RCD also fragmented and external sources of financing kept the fighting ongoing. Also, as the case of DR Congo illustrates, it was highly difficult to determine exactly how many battlefield-related deaths were direct consequences of the armed conflict. In fact, the violence in DR Congo is illustrative for a "new war" scenario, and not for a conventional war, since most of the violence was carried out against the civilians (either against the Banyamulenge/Congolese Tutsis or against the Hutus who had fled Rwanda after the genocide, either against local Lundu agriculturalists or against cattle-herding Hema).

The *locus* of belligerence was shifted from the

military field to the societal sector. This aspect of the violence was corroborated by the systematic attacks on civilians, the looting, raping, kidnapping and sexual violence. The cumulative effect was complete endemic insecurity for the civilians.

According to an ICRC Report in 2009, "three-fifths (61%) of the people of the DRC have had direct experiences of armed conflict...", while "older people (aged 45 or over) report vulnerability to displacement, to looting, to theft of food by combatants, and to serious property damage"; the same report indicated that "sexual violence (i.e. knowing someone who has suffered this violation) has affected over a quarter of the people interviewed (28%)" [25].

Another effect of new wars is forced human displacement, either refugee flows or internally displaced people. The Great Lakes crisis and the subsequent Congo wars have become emblematic for this. Huge numbers of people fled the conflict areas only to be looted and attacked by irregular troops. Thousands of people hardly survived in the Congolese dense woods. Approximately 58% reported that they have become internally displaced persons. For most of them, irregular warfare was the cause for endemic insecurity.

## 5. Conclusions

The intra-state violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was characterized by human displacement, systematic attacks against civilians, looting and rampage, sexual violence and lack of organized, conventional military confrontations. All these features are emblematic for irregular and asymmetric armed conflicts. It is my main contention and conclusion that all these traits are illustrative for new types of warfare, often called "new wars" or "small wars".

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