

# UN Intervention: Help or Hindrance in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

Written by Swithun Rumble

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SWITHUN RUMBLE, NOV 18 2018

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PCSF) was signed on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2013 between the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), led by President Joseph Kabila, and 11 regional countries as a renewed commitment to ending the violence in eastern Congo, and progressing with a liberal peacebuilding project of democratisation and state reform (Stearns, 2013: 107). This essay focuses on the effectiveness of the UN's strategy to manage the key spoilers undermining the peace process by engaging in, and supporting, acts of violence against civilians and government/international forces.

Drawing on Stephen Stedman's spoiler typology (1997: 5-53), I argue that the UN's strategy, the UN Force Intervention Brigade (UNFIB), was based on a problematic construction of the central spoilers as solely existing as a limited entity outside of the PCSF, meaning it ignored and even facilitated spoiling behaviour, and was as such significantly ineffective as a strategy of management in the DRC. Since the UN's strategy UNFIB represented a failure to even identify the main spoilers, it was doomed from the onset, continued violence in the DRC supporting the claim that successful management must involve an adequate recognition and categorisation of spoilers, and the subsequent formulation of an appropriate multifaceted strategy (Ibid).

This essay begins by outlining the analytical framework pertaining to the concept of 'spoilers', before giving an overview of the political and military situation in the DRC, as well as an account of UNFIB. The essay then proceeds in three parts, assessing the impact on the main spoilers to the PCSF: 'outside' rebel groups, the Rwandan government under the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and the Congolese army (the FARDC). Firstly, I argue that in practice UNFIB was only ever mandated to tackle the M23, and as such was ineffective in managing the wider range of outside spoiler groups. Secondly, I argue that UNFIB represented an unwillingness to identify the Rwandan government as the most significant spoiler to the PCSF, and so as a strategy failed to have any significant impact on the overall management of spoilers in the DRC. Finally, I argue that the UN's strategy furthermore not only overlooked the role of the FARDC as a significant spoiler, constraining its effectiveness in the management of spoilers, but UNFIB's actions in collaboration with the Congolese army facilitated its spoiling behaviour, making its overall effect negative.

### Spoilers

Stedman's definition states that 'spoilers' are "leaders/parties that believe peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview or interests, and use violence to prevent it" (1997: 6). The importance of effectively managing spoilers for longstanding peace is stressed in the literature, Doyle & Sambanis argue that peace implementation is contingent on the successful control or elimination of spoiling agents (2006: 28-29). A key component of Stedman's work is that this necessary effective management of spoilers requires their correct identification and categorisation, and the adaptation of a specific strategy for dealing with each. He argues that spoilers can be categorised as inside or outside of the peace process; 'inside', those officially involved within the peace process, and 'outside', those officially excluded (1997: 10-12). Spoilers further differ in their commitment and aims and should be placed on a scale from 'limited' to 'total', the effective approach for dealing with them varying accordingly between 'inducement' and 'coercion' (Ibid: 5-53).

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Höglund & Zartman have argued that Stedman's conception of spoilers should include state actors, as these are often involved in using violence to obstruct peace, and so need to be identified, and incorporated into any strategy of management (2006: 11-31). The need to broaden the definition is supported by Richmond & Newman who argue that the complexities of conflict (especially since the emergence of 'New Wars' (see Kaldor 2013: 1-16)) require that the term 'spoilers' be extended to include actors 'geographically external to the conflict but who support internal spoilers (2006: 102).

In this essay I argue that the UN failed to correctly identify and categorise the main spoilers in the DRC, instead choosing to pursue an overly simplistic, unidirectional process of management which focussed solely on methods of coercion, using UNFIB to combat the 'total outside' spoiler of M23. This failed identification and categorisation of the Rwandan government and the FARDC as spoilers, meant that in practice the UN pursued a policy constructed to deal with only one spoiler, ignoring the harmful impact of others seeking to disrupt the peace process, and rendering UNFIB highly ineffective.

## The Conflict

Violence in the DRC has been ongoing since 1994, claiming over 5.4 million lives between 1998 and 2007 alone (IRC, 2008) and leaving a total of 4.49m people internally displaced (UNICEF, 2018). The origins can be traced back to the influx of 1.2m Hutu refugees into the eastern Congo following the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Lemarchand, 2013: 429). Concerned about a lack of commitment from the DRC government in bringing the Hutu genocidaires to justice and protecting Tutsis, Rwanda (aided by Uganda) invaded the DRC in 1996 leading to a bloody conflict which became known as 'Africa's World War' (Ibid: 417-437). In August 1999 the Lusaka Ceasefire was signed, ending the immediate conflict, and a peace accord emerged between Rwanda and the DRC in July 2002, followed by an agreement between the 11 main Congolese parties in December 2002 to commit to a formal transitional period and the subsequent implementation of democracy (Berdal, 2017: 8). However, despite these agreements, and elections in 2006 and 2011 (both won, amidst allegations of vote-rigging, by Joseph Kabila (Tull, 2018: 172)), violence and insecurity has continued to ravage eastern DRC, specifically the provinces of Ituri and North/South Kivu. This violence takes place between a multitude of armed groups and government/UN forces, and has involved considerable atrocities against civilians (over 680 civilians killed between October 2014 and September 2016 alone in a series of massacres (HRW, 2016)). Recognising the role of neighbouring governments like the RPF in funding and supporting rebel groups in the area the PCSF was signed in 2013 (Berdal, 2017: 14), committing all DRC's neighbours to a principle of non-interference, and to support Kabila's government in regaining its sovereignty in eastern Congo.

The UN Mission in the DRC began with the creation of MONUC to monitor the Lusaka Ceasefire in 1999, and by 2017 it was the UN's largest peacebuilding mission, employing over 21,726 personnel and commanding a budget of over \$1.14bn (UN, 2018). Its mandate has slowly been extended to include the protection of civilians, monitoring of elections and overseeing the development of the Congolese economy (Berdal, 2017: 1-30). The decision of Resolution 2098 on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2013 to deploy a UN Force Intervention Brigade (UNFIB) to "carry out offensive operations against all armed groups" was a strategy taken to manage spoilers continuing to use violence in the eastern Congo, and so threatening the PCSF (Rudolf, 2017: 170). The force was made up of 3096 soldiers from Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi, and included a reconnaissance and air artillery unit. The significance of UNFIB lies in its recognised position of marking a UN first, and perhaps even the creation of a new precedent, in the extent of its capabilities and mandate to find and destroy 'negative forces' to the peace process (Murphy, 2016: 209-246). Thus, I argue that UNFIB was a novel attempt at the coercive management of spoilers and so a strategy employed against those outside the peace process perceived as engaging a total commitment to disrupting the PCSF. I argue that this strategy has been mainly ineffective, as it was constructed in theory to deal with only one perceived type of spoiler, and in practice only one actual spoiler entity, neglecting to identify and categorise other impediments to peace.

## Spoiler 1 – Rebel Groups

I argue that a significant spoiler to the PCSF are the heterogeneous rebel groups excluded from the official peace

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process. These groups, which include (amongst others) the M23, the FDLR and various self-defence forces known collectively as the 'Mai-Mai' (Fuamba et al, 2013: 225), pursue multiple complex, often contradicting agendas, such as the recognition of longstanding issues surrounding land and citizenship for both Tutsis and Hutus (Autesserre, 2010). They routinely use violence against each other, civilians and the national government. The Mai-Mai for instance are implicated in the ethnic cleansing of 34 civilians in Luhanga on November 28<sup>th</sup> 2016 (DW, 2016). Whilst these groups have been recognised as spoilers by the UN, apparent in the official mandate of UNFIB, I argue that the strategy of management was practically limited, and so deeply ineffective in combating these rebel groups.

I argue that the UN failed to have a significant effect on the management of outside spoilers as UNFIB *in practice* identified and targeted only one spoiler in this broad group, the M23, failing to even attempt to constrain numerous rebel groups which continue to use violence in the DRC. Whilst the UN mandated UNFIB to target 'all armed groups' operating in eastern Congo (UN, 2013b), in reality the nature and agenda of the Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) meant that only M23 was identified and targeted as a significant spoiler, suggesting that the strategy could only ever be significantly limited in its effectiveness. Whilst Piiparinen claims that UNFIB was instrumental in the defeat of M23 rebels by 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013, providing significant logistical support (including the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) to the FARDC in joint missions throughout October/November 2013 (2016: 166), it is evident that it 'lost momentum' soon afterwards (Tull, 2018: 17), and since then its impact on outside spoilers has been negligible. I argue that UNFIB's composition (it was constituted exclusively by forces from Sub-Saharan nations who had a geopolitical interest in reducing perceived Rwandan hegemony in the area (Berdal, 2017: 13)) meant that the military focus was solely on M23, the group most widely believed to have been a recipient of direct Rwandan support after a UN report found that M23 leaders were receiving military orders directly from RPF (Reuters, 2012b). The TCCs thus had a specific agenda at odds with the UN mandate. Its unwillingness to at least attempt a more comprehensive management of outside spoilers in the DRC were further compounded by covert links with some rebel groups. The foreign minister of Tanzania, Bernard Membe, referred to the FDLR as "freedom fighters" (Mungai, 2015) despite them constituting an entity described as the "main spoiler in the DRC" by Yonekawa (2014: 163).

Thus, I argue that geopolitical limitations problematically shaped the practical identification and targeting of outside spoilers in the DRC, narrowing UNFIB's remit, and dooming the initiative to failure. This failure of UNFIB to have an overall impact in managing outside rebel spoilers, was made apparent by a UN Strategic Review in 2014, which found that "Congolese and foreign armed groups continue to pose a threat to civilians", a sentiment supported by data which indicates that in 2015 as many as 70 armed groups (including the FDLR) continued to operate in eastern DRC (Stearns & Vogel, 2015) and literature which emphasises how UNFIB's current role in attempts to counter them is "not clear" (Fabricius, 2017). Thus I argue that whilst UNFIB may have been initially effective in dealing with the M23, it failed as a general strategy of management in the DRC as the pursuit of the spoilers it was constructed to target was subject to political constraints, rendering it limited in practice, and so ineffective.

## Spoiler 2 – The Rwandan Government

I argue that, as well as the outside rebel groups formally identified as spoilers by the UN, the 'inside' Rwandan government constitutes the most significant spoiler to the PCSF. Since 1996, Rwanda has maintained near constant interference in eastern Congo in order to maintain access to lucrative mineral smuggling routes (mineral exports in Rwanda jumped 62% in 2010-11 despite a 22% rise in domestic production, highlighting the importance of the plundering of Congolese resources to the Rwandan economy (Reuters, 2012a)) and protect Tutsis in the DRC from Hutu militias (Fuamba et al, 2013: 319-338). This 'spoiling' has been primarily carried out through the financing and directing of a changing myriad of rebel groups. Whilst Rwanda was party to the PCSF in 2013 (and so to the principle of non-interference) amidst international condemnation of its role in the DRC, evidence suggests that Rwanda continued to act as an inside spoiler. A UN report found that M23 received troop reinforcement from Rwandan soldiers in fighting against the FARDC in August 2013 (UN, 2013a). Thus, the RPF should be considered a spoiler, and an important underlying cause of the instability in the eastern Congo, through its consistent support of numerous belligerent armed groups. I argue that this was largely ignored by the UN, which instead, in the UNFIB, decided to target M23, and so focus merely on the symptoms of Rwandan interference.

I argue that the UN should be seen as considerably ineffective in managing spoilers in the DRC, as UNFIB was a

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strategy which, not just in practice but *by its very nature*, failed to address the role of the Rwandan government as the most significant spoiler to the PCSF, allowing it to continue its disruptive activities. I argue that a strategy, like UNFIB, which focusses on the military defeat of rebel groups, was unequipped to ever have any significant effect on curtailing Rwanda's interference given its historical tendency to shift affiliation. This is evident in the history of the region; for instance Rwanda was instrumental in the formation of other rebel groups, like the CNDP between 2004 and 2006, before moving on to support M23 (Siasa, 2012), suggesting, as is argued by Lemarchand, that it operates by "manipulating one set of rebels after another" (2013: 407).

The inefficacy of a strategy which seeks to tackle the symptoms of Rwandan spoiling rather than the causes is compounded by the specific nature of the situation in eastern Congo, the lack of governance and abundance of precious minerals like cobalt (it is estimated that the untapped natural resources in the DRC are worth \$24trn (Lee, 2016)) keeping the emergence barrier for new rebel groups low (Fuamba et al, 2013: 223), and thus providing numerous opportunities for renewed Rwandan interference.

Whilst it should be noted that there has been some international condemnation of Rwanda's recurring interference in the DRC (for example, in 2012 donors threatened to withdraw \$200m of aid forcing Rwanda to at least formally commit to the PCSF (Stearns, 2013: 111)) the fact that the UN still pledged \$400m worth of aid in 2013 illustrates the parochial application of any potentially useful strategy of donor diplomacy. Rwanda relies on external funding worth \$2.6bn for 40% of its state budget (Ibid: 107), suggesting a critical reliance on financial aid for its prosperity, and that robust donor diplomacy could be an appropriate strategy of management. However, the fixation on UNFIB, which represents a failure to view Rwanda as an inside spoiler and adopt an appropriate strategy of management like donor diplomacy, indicates that, looking forward, it is likely that the UN has failed to prevent Rwanda interfering again in the DRC. As such I argue that a parochial military strategy like UNFIB was ineffective and doomed to failure as it neglected to address the underlying behaviour of Rwanda, instead focussing on M23, a symptom of the spoiling.

## Spoiler 3 – The FARDC

Finally, I argue that the FARDC, despite not being recognised as such by the UN, should also be considered a major inside spoiler given its role in consistently perpetrating violence against civilians which has significantly contributed to the context of insecurity and thus directly undermined the PCSF. For instance, a UN report outlined the routine use of extra-judicial executions throughout 2014 by the FARDC during Operation Sukola 1 against the ADF, an Islamist rebel group (UN, 2015). Moreover, Congolese soldiers were implicated in 4032 human rights violations between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 (OHCHR, 2016). The motivations for this spoiling are again multifarious; Fuamba et al argue that government inefficiencies meant that salaries are rarely paid on time, encouraging looting (2013: 231) and Yonekawa blames the failed integration of rebel groups for creating a highly undisciplined body with multiple chains of command (2014: 8). Thus, taking the broad definition of spoilers to include state actors (Richmond & Newman, 2006: 101-110), I argue that the FARDC, which has been described "as big a menace as the FDLR" (Fuamba et al, 2013: 333), should have been recognised as a spoiler by the UN and a strategy formulated accordingly.

I argue that UNFIB, in focussing solely on the use of coercive force against rebel groups, represented a failure to identify another key spoiler in the FARDC, and so ignored and even contributed to, spoiling behaviour in the DRC by the Congolese army, making it a highly ineffective strategy of spoiler management. I argue that by assisting the FARDC through UNFIB, often actively ignoring the atrocities committed against civilians, the UN's strategy of spoiler management was partially complicit in spoiling behaviour. UNFIB undertook many of its missions against M23 in collaboration with the Congolese forces, supplying up to 14,000 FARDC soldiers with food in missions between October 1<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November (UN, 2013), a figure which illustrates the extent of assistance supplied by the UN. UN complicity in atrocities is thus evident in the fact that the problematic FARDC actions often took place during the joint missions themselves, a further example being a June 2014 massacre in the village of Mutarule by FARDC forces committed whilst UNFIB maintained an 'auxiliary role' in the very same mission (HRW, 2014).

This suggests that UN support for FARDC not only meant that the spoiling behaviour of the FARDC was ignored in much the same way as that of the RPF, but that it may inadvertently have contributed to the illicit activities of the

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Congolese army, again implying that the flawed identification of spoilers made this strategy grossly ineffective at their management. Whilst the UN did temporarily pause joint operations in February 2015 after the ICC indictment of two FARDC generals for human rights abuses, the collaboration later continued (Murphy, 2016: 220), again suggesting that the UN never really recognised the FARDC as a spoiler, or was ever serious about tackling its behaviour. Yonekawa argues that this amounts to a common problem with UN spoiler management: the body's 'peace-first' strategy ignores human rights abuses perpetrated by state forces in order to focus on maintaining peace, whilst not recognising the role that these violations themselves have on contributing to insecurity (2014: 162). Thus, not only did UNFIB represent a failure to conceive of the Congolese army as a significant spoiler, it is a convincing conclusion to draw that this culminated in the UN even contributing to the spoiling behaviour of the FARDC, suggesting UNFIB was significantly ineffective.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I argue that the UN's Force Intervention Brigade has been highly ineffective as a strategy to manage spoilers in the eastern Congo. Firstly, the geopolitical interests of the TCCs meant that it failed to successfully target numerous violent rebel groups, despite identifying them as spoilers. Secondly, it failed to identify and target the Rwandan government, the most significant spoiler to the peace process in the DRC. Whilst a seemingly successful strategy in donor diplomacy has been utilised to some effectiveness, it remains unincorporated into any general UN strategy of spoiler management. Finally, the UN's strategy failed to identify and target the FARDC as a considerable spoiler to the PCSF, instead mandating UNFIB to collaborate with this force, a decision which contributed to spoiling behaviour. Thus a failure to both correctly identify, and then target, the most problematic spoilers meant that any reduction in spoiling as a result of the UN strategy was subject to strong limitations.

As the literature on spoilers suggests, a more adequate approach would recognise each of the spoilers in turn, categorising them according to their nature and aims, before pursuing a varied strategy which takes these factors into account (Stedman, 1997: 5-53). It should be noted that this essay does not claim that coercive strategies, like UNFIB, cannot be effective (unlike Berdal who argues that the UN is not "structurally equipped or politically suited" to be successful in offensive peace enforcement (2017: 3)), but merely that it was highly inadequate as the only formal strategy to deal with spoilers in the DRC, representing a limited consideration of the range and nature of the key actors. In fact, initial successes against M23 suggest that it can in fact be effective as part of a wider UN strategy employed to manage certain types of outside spoilers, perhaps alongside donor diplomacy against the RPF and widespread security sector reform to constrain the negative actions of the FARDC (Berdal, 2017: 26).

Further research may wish to consider the effect of UNFIB, and suggest possible alternative strategies of management, for other spoilers which could be identified in the DRC, such as transnational resource exploitation networks (Fuamba et al, 2013: 327), or the institutions of the Kabila government itself, which has been accused of supporting certain rebel groups to maintain its position of power (Yonekawa, 2014: 169).

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