




Written by on November 20, 2008

UN to Increase Troop Strength in DR Congo

A BBC correspondent reported that MONUC  had come under criticism for not doing enough to protect civilians from Tutsi rebels while the army was in retreat. The report noted further that the security council vote provided for MONUC forces to implement their mandate "in full," through robust rules of engagement. This amounts to carte blanche authorization to commanders to use all means necessary to protect the civilian population.

France's UN ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert, who took the lead negotiations to achieve passage of the French-drafted resolution to increase MOUNUC troop strength, was quoted by Reuters news service as saying it would probably "take some weeks" to get the new UN troops in place. Ripert also suggested that MONUC needed to be more aggressive in protecting civilians and implementing its mandate, which he said was a robust one.

"The rules of engagement, if they are strong enough, they are not being used strongly enough," complained Ripert.

A related report from Agence France Presse (AFP) noted that Didier Bitaki, a spokesman for a local Mai-Mai militia (allied with the DRC government), said Nkunda's CNDP and UN troops with MONUC had joined forces against them.

"MONUC fired on our forces, they found themselves in difficulty called for help to the CNDP... it is a CNDP/MONUC coalition against the Mai-Mai," said Bitaki.

"The CNDP are trying to dislodge us from Katoro."

AFP reported that CNDP spokesman Bertrand Bisimwa said the use of heavy weapons against them indicated that government troops and Rwandan Hutu rebels were involved in the fighting and that the Hutu force was fighting alongside the government soldiers.

A local villager who had fled Katoro to Kiwanja, about three miles away, told AFP: "It started towards 7:30 am. The Mai-Mai were advancing on Katoro. When the CNDP saw them, they opened fire. They were using all sorts of weapons." The area of conflict is 45 miles north of North Kivu's provincial capital of Goma.

In summary, the UN MONUC forces are working in conjunction with General Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) in opposition to troops of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who are supported by members of the Mai-Mai militia.

The DR Congo is currently headed by President Joseph Kabila, who took office in January 2001, 10 days after the assassination of his father and DRC president Laurent-Désiré Kabila. (The latter had gained the presidency following a 1997 coup against former dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, formerly known as Joseph Mobutu, the president of what was then known as Zaire.) He was reelected in July 2006. Kabila attended the PLA National Defense University in Beijing, China. Upon graduation in 1998, Kabila was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Congolese Armed Forces, with the rank of



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Major-General. In 2000, he was appointed Army Chief of Staff, a position he held until he assumed to the presidency. As president, Kabila serves as commander-in-chief of the DR Congo's armed forces.

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