

## Are Congo's mines the main target of the armed groups on its soil?

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The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has a soil rich in minerals and a recent history characterized by an enduring armed conflict with enormous humanitarian costs. It is often assumed that there is a direct relation between these two characteristics.

Throughout the various stages of the conflict, the DRC's minerals have been used by the different armed groups to finance their war effort. After the presidential elections of 2006, natural resources all over the DRC have continued to attract armed men but it would be wrong to assert that minerals constitute the core issue of the current conflict dynamics. Our geographical research on four different war motivations for the period August 2007 to January 2008 shows how in the Kivu provinces of the DRC other factors, such as personal security issues, ethno-economic grievances, and the protection of individual business interests, play a role that is more important than the direct struggle over natural resources.<sup>1</sup>

Since the surge of econometric conflict analyses at the end of the 1990s, in the wake of the greed versus grievance debate, less attention has been given to in-depth studies of the motivations behind specific conflicts. For little less than a decade, quantitative econometric methodologies have dominated much of the research activity on the issue. Initially this research had a great appeal to policymakers and the general public. As opposed to the existing qualitative research, the statistical analyses, based on rational-choice theories, resulted in simple and clear-cut economic explanations of the phenomenon of civil war. However, the findings of the statistical analyses have proven to be highly sensitive to coding rules (and errors) in the quantitative data sets used, sometimes leading to contradictory correlations, which has made it clear that there is a continuing need for detailed and case-specific research on the drivers of war.<sup>2</sup>

For this reason, we have developed a qualitative geographical research tool that we have used for our DRC analysis and that we believe can furnish convincing evidence on war motivation. The geographical research model is intended to complement the existing qualitative and quantitative research on the drivers of (civil) wars. Whereas classic qualitative research on conflict motivation always risks being suspected of insufficient objectivity, the existing quantitative research, only draws conclusions on a general level. We felt that a scientific method assessing the behavior of individual conflict parties in a concrete war situation and making use of evidence open to objectification, was needed.

In the first, introductory, section of this text, we explain the geographical research

methodology we apply in our analyses on war motivation. In the second section, we turn to the analysis we made of the situation in the Kivu provinces at the end of 2007 using that research tool. We discuss the role of the mining sector in the armed conflict while comparing its importance as a war motivation to other conflict drivers found in literature on the causes of war. Although all warring parties receive income from the mineral sector, their behavior and tenacity are motivated by other factors. In the final section, we broaden our scope by arguing that the Eastern DRC is only one of Congo's important mining areas. Many of the other mineral deposits are located in post-conflict zones, where they continue to experience serious security problems of their own.

### The geographic research tool on war motivation

The theoretical model we use to analyze motivations of armed groups in the DRC, schematized in Figure 1, starts from the assumption that war is a means used to attain a certain goal or objective, for example the secession from an existing state. Such objectives are driven by a certain motivation: for example, people want to secede because they are being discriminated against and oppressed. The *objectives* of a war are an answer to the question to what end it is fought. War *motivation*, in contrast, explains why warring parties want to attain a certain objective. Motivation precedes objective. Why some motives lead to the outbreak of war and others do not, depends on opportunities and other situational factors.

Warring parties may claim to be driven by certain motives and toward certain objectives but this could be a mere misrepresentation. In order to reveal the real motivations of warring parties, we need to start from the facts on the ground. The objective one wants to attain and the motivation behind it will influence the way in which a war is being waged. If an armed group seeks power and self-rule for a certain region and fights to secede the territory from the motherland, this will show in its military actions. We can assume the group will

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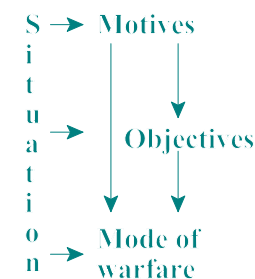


Figure 1: Model for the relation among motives, objectives, and the way in which a war is being waged.

attempt to secure the internal borders and to conquer the regional capital.

In short, our tool analyses concrete military actions and decisions and traces them back to what provoked them. A full description of the methodology is available online at [www.ipisresearch.be/mapping](http://www.ipisresearch.be/mapping) under the heading "Handbook." Because the tool is still being developed, the handbook is a draft that we revise every eight months.

In our analysis of the second half of 2007 phase of the Eastern DRC war, we have compared the relative importance of four basic motivations in explaining the behavior of armed groups on the ground:

- ▶ Profit is the central motivation in the "greed" theory of conflicts. War can create huge personal gain, which may be enough reason to wage one. Profit-motivated conflicts entail different phenomena, like trafficking of natural resources, pillaging, and illegal taxation.
- ▶ Grievance: In every society there are groups and individuals that oppose the existing political and/or social situation. Their dissatisfaction is caused by feelings of inequality, oppression, discrimination, hatred, and injustice. When these feelings remain unaddressed, they can become a driver of violent conflict.
- ▶ Survival: People or peoples who feel threatened in their survival quite often resort to violence to safeguard their future. Essential elements for survival are: access to food, access to water, physical security, shelter, living space, and outlet possibilities.
- ▶ Power: History has seen many examples of politicians using war to win more political or territorial power. Wars driven by the search for power are wars for conquest. The relationship between power and geography has always been the central topic in geopolitics.<sup>3</sup>

For each of these motivations we have identified geographical targets on a digital map of the Eastern DRC. We have produced, for example, a map with mining areas that represent targets for profit and a map that indicates dense forest areas, which can be a target for armed groups that want to hide and survive. The motivational maps are static maps. The geographical features on these maps have a fixed location. In our analysis, we have compared these sets of static motivational maps with a second collection of maps composed of dynamic elements. The dynamic maps are a series of snapshots of the positions of the armed groups in the area and the military incidents or human rights abuses in which they have been involved. All the online maps make reference to the sources used to build them. In general, the static maps have been constructed by combining existing cartographical material from geographic and other scientific or research institutes. Some maps, such as the natural resources and trade routes maps, also contain data acquired by the authors during interviews when interviewees were asked to pinpoint elements of their story on a map. The dynamic maps are based chiefly on data from interviews, with some elements from written sources with geographical references.<sup>4</sup>

We have compared the static and dynamic maps by making use of GIS software. A GIS (Geographic Information System) is software capable of integrating, editing, analyzing, and presenting geographical information. Characteristic of a GIS is that the different features of the digital map are organized in separate layers (e.g., places, rivers, territorial boundaries, land use, etc.) that can be combined at will (switched on or off) and that to each of these layers tables with additional information can be linked. Because it combines spatial with nonspatial data, it is a powerful analytic tool. Within the GIS environment we have superimposed the dynamic maps upon the maps of the static set. In this manner we have been able to check which motivational targets are present in those territories where armed groups have significant troop concentrations or where important military confrontations took place. We have worked under the assumption that armed groups concentrate their troops and efforts in those areas where their interests lie.

### **The armed conflict in the East**

The following findings are based on our reading of a set of digital maps produced at the International Peace Information Service (IPIS). A web version of these maps is published on our web server. It is advisable to consult these maps while reading the text in order to be able to fully follow the matters that are being discussed. The level of detail on the maps can be changed by zooming in or out. The maps are available at three different scales: 1:2,500,000 (initial view), 1:1,000,000, and 1:500,000. An advanced geographical search function is available and one can also search thematically for data by clicking the "Lists" button. The map will center on the requested map element and automatically a table will appear with additional information on the map feature. The same additional information on map features can be retrieved by clicking on the item directly on the map itself. The complete written conflict analysis and all conclusions are also available online. All facts mentioned below were taken from the maps and the analysis, where there are references to their sources.<sup>5</sup>

Despite relatively successful elections in 2006, the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo and to a lesser extent South Kivu, have been occupied by four warring parties involved in a protracted civil war. At the center of the conflict are the territories of Masisi and Rutshuru in North Kivu where the rebel movement of General Laurent Nkunda fights the government army and two other armed groups. The politico-military movement of Nkunda is called the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). It is a recent movement that was launched by Nkunda during the 2006 elections. The bulk of the CNDP forces are Rwandophones. Both Hutu and Tutsi are represented in significant numbers but most of the higher cadres are Tutsi. It is generally recognized that Nkunda and his movement serve the interests of (at least a part of) the Tutsi minority in the Kivus.<sup>6</sup>

One of the main reasons of existence of the CNDP is to fight the Forces

Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a movement that originates from ex-FAR (Forces Armées Rwandaises) soldiers, ex-Interahamwe militiamen, and Hutu civilians that fled the offensive of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in neighbouring Rwanda in 1994. The FDLR are the largest armed group in the Kivu provinces. The FDLR still comprise a few high ranking members that were implicated in the 1994 genocide but the large majority, among whom are many children, did not play any role in that event.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the FDLR, two Congolese forces are fighting the CNDP: the official Congolese army (FARDC) and the people's Mayi-Mayi militias. Since the beginning of 2007, the main bands of Mayi-Mayi warriors have forged an alliance called the Coalition of Congolese Resistant Patriots, "PARECO. In this text we will not deal with the Mayi-Mayi motivations.

### Conflict motivations

When analyzing the positions and behavior of the CNDP between August 2007 and January 2008, we find only limited evidence of direct involvement in illegal mining. Nkunda and his militia occupy only two important mining sites, one of which is not even operational. However, apart from the mining story, greed should not be ruled out as an important war motivation for them. Several of the main CNDP financiers have considerable business interests in the region, especially in cattle farming. A considerable percentage of the areas occupied by the CNDP are hilly grazing lands very well suited for cattle raising.

In the past Nkunda declared an independent Republic of the Volcanoes with its own flag and anthem. However, looking at our dynamic maps, it does not seem as if the CNDP is really interested in gaining power. It does not control any administrative capital and it has never seriously tried to take one since its inception.

With regard to its grievances, to a certain extent reality matches the discourse. The CNDP has set itself up as the protector of the Tutsi population in the region. On the one hand, it has frequently engaged the FDLR, heirs of the 1994 *génocidaires* that it considers to be a threat to the Tutsi population. On the other hand, it occupies many of the villages from which more than 40,000 Tutsi inhabitants fled to the neighboring countries and to which they want to return. Arguably, however, the CNDP is more concerned with safeguarding its territory than its people. In December 2007, for example, Nkunda seriously endangered the lives of "his people" when he used them as a human shield against a large-scale FARDC offensive.

Besides the larger towns and the Nkunda zones, the FDLR are virtually omnipresent in the Eastern DRC at the end of 2007. Some of the rare areas where they have no presence are the main mining sites. They control many smaller mining sites but the money they can make at these sites is very limited compared to the revenues from the larger ones. Moreover, the FDLR have deployed several of their 11 battalions in areas that are almost devoid of mines. In these areas, they use other

methods to generate an income, for example growing and trading marihuana. As in the case of the CNDP, the FDLR use their weapons as leverage to make a profit. Some FDLR members may prefer to stay on Congolese soil out of greed-related reasons. But it can hardly be claimed that the FDLR members lead a luxury life in the jungles and villages where they have been staying for 14 years. The FDLR do not control any major town center. They hold positions along several roads but in general their forces are concentrated in heavily forested areas. It seems that the large majority of them are in fact hiding themselves and surviving. This is especially true for the small minority of FDLR with a genocidal past.

Concerning their grievances, the FDLR claim their fight is not against the DRC government but against Rwanda. They say they seek a peaceful solution through an inter-Rwandan dialogue when security conditions in their home country are met. FDLR grievances seem a plausible explanation for their behavior in the field. They have taken a defensive stance, and since 2005 they have stopped carrying out armed attacks on Rwandan soil. It is true that they have never used their military power to try to gain political control in the Congo. However, there have been some reports of armed confrontations with the FARDC, and the FDLR have used force in a series of plundering raids on Congolese villages.

In general, the FARDC positions in the Kivu provinces during the same period are concentrated in areas neighboring the zones controlled by Nkunda and the CNDP. Most of the FARDC brigades are involved in military operations against the CNDP. They are trying to reestablish the power of the Congolese state, which is their legitimate task as the official protectors of the Congolese territory and its population. But some of the FARDC units are deployed in remote areas where they hold positions with little strategic value and far away from the frontlines. In these areas there is only a small presence of rebel groups but there are many mines. The main motive of these troops is to enrich themselves and their superiors by preying on the mining activity or by digging themselves. Besides mining, FARDC soldiers and officers are often also involved in other types of illegal economic activities such as timber, coffee, and marihuana trafficking and taxation.

### The war in the East and the mines: some examples

If it is not the main driving factor, then what role does the mining sector play in the war in the Kivu provinces? In this section, we provide additional insight into the involvement of armed groups in illegal mining and trafficking of minerals by giving some concrete examples from the August 2007 to January 2008 time period.

First, there are those militiamen who work as diggers on account of their superiors. For example in the Bibatama mine, the largest operational mine controlled by Nkunda, CNDP soldiers are mining tin ore, coltan, and wolframite. The CNDP is not the only conflict party that is directly involved in mining. FDLR and FARDC soldiers also take part. For instance, one of the incidents we have included on our

maps describes how FARDC soldiers of the 11th Integrated Brigade, deployed in the territory of Shabunda in South Kivu, have been digging for cassiterite at the airstrip of Tshonka causing serious damage to the runway. The minerals gathered by the soldiers are sold to trusted traders or sometimes the military commanders run a trading company of their own, most often through civilian intermediaries.

Second, each of the armed groups levies all kinds of taxes throughout the mining process. Artisanal miners often have to pay a fee to enter the mine or they have to hand over a part of their daily earnings. Other common types of taxation are the *péage de route* (toll) and other transport taxes. The FDLR control a stretch of road between Bukavu and Shabunda and have installed six barriers along it. At each barrier passers-by have to pay a dollar to be accompanied to the next checkpoint. In the same territory, the FARDC levy a tax on every cargo flight that leaves for the provincial capital of Bukavu. The CNDP controls the strategic crossings along which minerals are transported to Goma. In Mushaki and Kitchanga it has erected roadblocks where all vehicles passing by are stopped. It is estimated that the CNDP earns \$10,000 each week from taxes at the barrier of Mushaki alone.

Third, there is protection money. In Bisie, the biggest tin mine in the whole of the DRC, an FARDC brigade “secures” the site.<sup>8</sup> They are paid by the administrator of the territory who receives a share of 10 percent of the production for organizing the security there. It is, however, the FARDC themselves that cause the biggest security problems. In the past, different units of the 85th brigade currently deployed in the area have even fought among themselves.

Sometimes the control of certain mines by these armed groups is total. The militias determine the prices at which the minerals are traded, they preside at business meetings, control markets, and hire personnel. When several armed groups are present in the same mining area, it is mostly the FARDC that control the town center and the central pits and the rebel groups that control the outlying deposits. This is, for example, the case for the Numbi mine at the border of North and South Kivu. The FDLR and the FARDC each have their own pits and do not engage each other militarily.

The large majority of the minerals mined in the Kivu provinces arrives in Bukavu and most importantly in Goma before being exported. Often, they have gone through the hands of several middlemen. It is therefore nearly impossible to control the origin of the cassiterite or coltan that is being sold. Minerals sold by the militias end up in Europe and Asia.

### **Mining and conflict in the rest of the DRC**

The facts mentioned in the following paragraphs are also based on the maps and reports published at our web site.<sup>9</sup>

There are more than 2000 mining concessions in the DRC. The majority of them lie in post-conflict areas or in areas the Congo wars did not reach. But also in these

regions the mining sector is often characterised by conflicts and violence.<sup>10</sup> A first fault line runs between the artisanal miners on the one hand and international mining companies on the other hand. Congolese state-owned enterprises have signed a series of joint ventures with private companies to restart industrial production. However, the concessions these companies should operate are often occupied by large groups of artisanal miners who earn their living in the mines. The forced expulsion of artisanal workers from mining sites in the past has led to mass protests with violent exchanges between workers and the police. During a violent protest in Likasi in March 2008, one worker was killed.

The joint ventures between the Congolese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and the international companies are a problem in themselves. Most of the contracts have been signed during the war years or the transition period. The negotiation process has often been conducted in a very nontransparent way and the resulting deals are highly unfavorable to the Congolese state. A commission was appointed by the Congolese government to revise 61 mining contracts. Its final report was published in November 2007 and concluded that none of the existing contracts is acceptable: 39 should be amended and the other 22 cancelled.<sup>11</sup> The contracts the commission has selected for renegotiation contain some very unfavorable deals for the Congolese SOEs.<sup>12</sup> In a contract with the Australian mining company Anvil Mining for the Dikulushi mine in Katanga, for example, it has been agreed that Anvil should not pay any taxes for 20 years. Another example is the Tenke Fungurume Mining joint venture, in which the participation of the Congolese SOE Gécamines has been reduced to a meagre 17.5 percent. The renegotiation promises to be an outright legal battle with huge costs but also enormous potential benefits.

The joint ventures only concern a small percentage of all the Congolese mines. There are many other mines where only artisanal miners are active. Often these mines lie in remote areas and, although they are located outside the war provinces, they are being controlled by armed men. In most cases it is the FARDC who control these mines, in some it is other state officials or, in rare cases, remnants of people's self-defense groups. The soldiers present at the mining sites commit serious human rights violations. They extort money and minerals from the population, they force people to mine for them, they commit sexual crimes, they allow diggers in closed mining sites with radioactive material, they organize traffic of minerals, and commit many other crimes. Sometimes even a small-scale war erupts at such sites between units of the FARDC. For example, at the gold mine of Lunga in 2007 and the coltan mine of Kisengo in 2008, both in Katanga, gunshots were exchanged between army units. In Kisengo, which lies more than 200 km away from the Tanganyika Lake, even a unit of the Congolese Navy showed up. The perpetrators of these crimes go unpunished. In several instances in Northern Katanga, soldiers who had been arrested by the Military Justice were liberated by force by their comrades and commanders.

In the DRC new mines are being discovered regularly. Especially at such new sites the situation is comparable to the Wild West: population booms, epidemics, land

conflicts, exclusion of indigenous people, widespread crime, and the almost total absence of the state of law.

## Conclusion

We carried out in-depth research on a well-defined time period of the protracted war in the Eastern DRC. In our research we have compared the importance of four war motivations that could be driving the conflict and its armed groups. In this article we have summarized the conclusions drawn from that research while focusing specifically on the role of the mining sector which is often cited as the main source of the conflict.<sup>13</sup>

Our analysis reveals that, as opposed to persistent popular belief, Congo's mines are not the main target of the armed groups on its soil. The government army and the rebel groups control several mining sites in Eastern Congo but the fighting is not concentrated around them. Moreover, the sites controlled by the rebel groups are of relatively minor importance, especially when compared with mines from outside the war provinces. Other motives, such as grievances and security, deserve at least as much attention as natural resources.

However, Congo's mines remain places of insecurity even when they are far away from the front. If there are no rebel groups harassing the local population, it is most likely the FARDC who control the area and behave in a similar way as the rebel groups.

The significance of our research lies in the fact that the relative importance of four types of war motivations — greed, grievance, power, and security — was compared for each of the belligerent parties. Our findings acknowledge the importance of the greed versus grievance debate, but they also demonstrate the need to take the other two explanations for war motivation, power and security, into account. Moreover, they provide a detailed insight in how different motivations of warfare can interact.

More added value to existing research stems from the fact that a qualitative geographical analysis, as opposed to the more typical econometric studies, adds detailed information on the behavior of conflict parties and the war events on the ground. The insights generated from such geographical case studies can credibly help to explain some contradictory findings from quantitative research. Additionally, the geographic tool provides a solid amount of logical arguments, open to objectification, to sustain its conclusions (an aspect that is often lacking in nongeographic qualitative analyses).

Finally, the authors are convinced that should they have studied the further development of the same conflict, they could have clearly shown how motivations can change throughout a conflict. At the time of writing this article (October 2008), Laurent Nkunda has transformed his CNDP into a movement that will pursue the "total liberation" of the DRC. He has taken over the administration of the regional capital of Rutshuru and he would have captured the provincial capital of Goma had

not the United Nations intervened. Clearly, his change of discourse has also generated a change in his battlefield behavior, which could be convincingly illustrated on an accurate map.

## Notes

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1. Spittals and Hilgert (2008).
2. Dominated: The most prominent researcher on the topic is Paul Collier. As an illustration of the enduring influence of his work it suffices to mention that in 2008 Collier and Hoeffler (2004) was cited in 13 different articles published in the *Journal of Peace Research*; explanations: Woodward (2005); clear-cut explanations: Cramer (2002); case-specific: Woodward (2005).
3. Greed: see, e.g., Collier (2000); Collier, *et al.* (2003); Hirshleifer (1995); Keen (1998); grievance: see, e.g., Azar's theory on protracted social conflict in Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse (1999); Harff and Gurr (2004); Horowitz (2000); Sambanis (2001); survival: see, e.g., Homer-Dixon (1996); Peluso and Watts (2001); power: see, e.g., Agnew (1998); Chauprade (1999).
4. Elements taken from reliable written sources have been directly included on the maps. Those gathered through interviews have been presented for confirmation to at least two other local experts. Furthermore, because all geographical information is publicly available, permanent control by everyone involved is possible.
5. Maps: <http://www.ipisresearch.be/maps/Oost-Congo/web/index.html>; written analysis: [http://www.ipisresearch.be/mapping\\_kivu.php](http://www.ipisresearch.be/mapping_kivu.php) [both accessed 11 December 2008].
6. International Crisis Group (2007).
7. Romkema (2007).
8. The case of Bisie has been studied extensively by the U.N. Group of Experts and it has been the subject of many research reports. Some of the most important are Miller (2005); FinnWatch (2007); Global Witness (2005); Tegera and Johnson (2007);

Garret (2007).

9. See [http://www.ipisresearch.be/mapping\\_katanga.php](http://www.ipisresearch.be/mapping_katanga.php);  
<http://www.ipisresearch.be/updates-katanga.php> [accessed 11 December 2008].

10. Concessions: The report of the U.N. Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo of 18 July 2006 speaks of 2,144 concessions listed at that time. The examples used in this section all are based on research carried out in 2007 and 2008.

11. See <http://www.miningcongo.cd> [accessed 4 December 2008].

12. Custers (2008).

13. Some recent examples include Global Witness (2008); Hari (2008); Fédération des comités de Solidarité avec l'Afrique (2008).

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