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Main Menu

- [Home](#)

- [About Us](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Donate](#)
- [Gifts](#)
- [News from the Front](#)
- [PINR](#)
- [PINR-Español](#)
- [PINR-Français](#)
- [Store](#)
- [Submissions](#)
- [Volunteer at YT!](#)

Other Options

- [AvantGo](#)
- [Feedback](#)

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News from the Front: Politics of Deception in Congo

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Report by YellowTimes.org NewsFromtheFront.org



TORONTO (NFTF.org) -- When the United Nations Security Council voted a couple of weeks ago to support an international peacekeeping mission in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) ([Background Report](#)), there was relief in some quarters and disbelief in others; the latter group may have turned out to be the more realistic. In an editorial appearing today in Taiwan's *Taipei Times*, the U.N. is accused of sponsoring "gesture politics"; it will not achieve its objectives because there is no intent to achieve them, and in a few short months DRC will return to the same violence that presently simmers.

The article notes that the forces being accumulated in DRC to help restore peace after a bloody period of ethnic violence is unlikely to stop the violence, and doesn't appear interested in doing so. The *Times* quotes the commander of the French-led force, Brig.-Gen. Jean-Paul Thonier, as saying that he will not strip the warring militias of their weapons, venture outside the town of Bunia, nor get in the middle of protracted gun battles. "Separating the factions is not part of my mission," he stated. Despite the bravado of the U.N. telling the world it will march in to help, the troops being deployed are apparently restricted by their mandate to protecting the population, helping aid agencies carry out their activities, and providing security -- but only within the city limits of Bunia. Whatever happens outside city limits will continue to happen. The international force has a mandate only to September 2003 and all local parties agree that when it leaves, the violence will return unless the militias are disarmed.

The people of DRC and critics in neighboring nations are not kindly disposed to what they see as inadequacy, ineffectiveness, and disinterest on the part of the U.N.

Meanwhile, new fighting erupted yesterday in the province of North Kivu that has sent thousands of people scurrying for safety. The U.N. has not deployed troops in that area.

In related news, the U.N. is attempting to jumpstart stalled negotiations on the future of DRC. An agreement by all warring factions was reached in April and promises a coalition transitional government to shepherd the country through to national elections in 2005, the first democratic elections in over forty years. But the sides have been unable to agree on the formation and makeup of a national army and no forward progress has been made since that roadblock reared its head. The chief of the

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U.N. Security Council mission to DRC, Jean-Marc de la Sabliere, says he has received concurrence from all parties that they will do what it takes to form a unified government by the end of June.

However, Mark Doyle is a BBC correspondent stationed in Kinshasa and he says it is difficult to see how any of the U.N.'s efforts to date are going to stop the fighting. In his view, what is needed is good government, something Congo has never known, and harnessing of the nation's vast natural resources in a way that will benefit its treasury and, ultimately, its people. He does not see that happening from the present U.N. activities. Despite huge natural wealth, the people of DRC are pathetically poor and need the stability of a solid government along with the benefits of their vast potential wealth, says Doyle.

YellowTimes.org correspondent Paul Harris drafted this report.

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