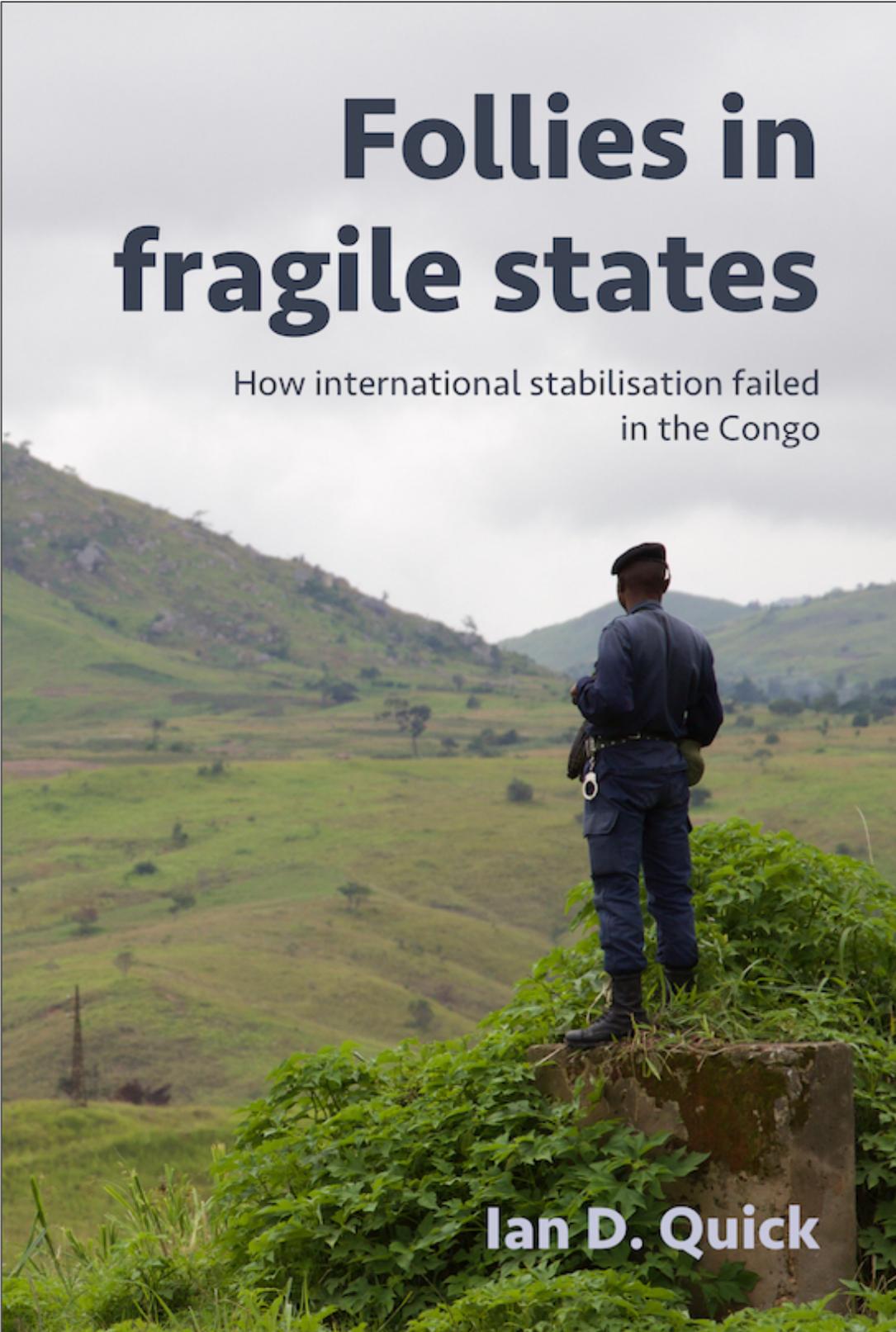# Follies in fragile states

How international stabilisation failed in the Congo

Ian D. Quick

Follies in
Fragile States

How international stabilisation failed
in the Congo

Ian D. Quick

Free preview chapter
June 2015

Table of contents

Introduction

This book is about efforts to reshape countries in crisis. It reflects on a decade's work around the world, spurred by the realisation that the results have been slim or perhaps even negative.

In one sense, it is the perspective of someone who knows, or suspects, where the bodies are buried. That most interventions in fragile states have not lived up to expectations is plain to see. The question is rather what to do with this fact, because there is both opportunity and motive to ignore it. The opportunity arises because such interventions layer a complex system onto a complex system. A mad jumble of foreign actors find allies and enemies among an equally confusing array of domestic factions, and the resulting mess seems to actively defy attempts to establish causation, contribution or responsibility. The temptation to take this 'out' is ever-present because identities are thoroughly bound up in the job—*we are the good guys*. Self-interest leads us to leave unspoken our failures against declared ambitions, or to redefine them as success against narrow technical criteria.

Here, I try to take failure—both personal and institutional—more seriously. I take a single case, efforts to 'stabilise' eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo from 2007 to 2012, and aim to deconstruct a complex history into a few 'big ideas' on what went wrong.

An inquest is well justified by the case's own merits. Congo exemplifies in many ways the steady expansion of ambitions to reshape fragile states that has occurred in the background of international relations over the last twenty years. And yet, as the *New York Times* put it, 'many critics contend that nowhere else in the world has the United Nations invested so much and accomplished so little'.[1] Core goals to build local capacity and draw down the UN's largest peacekeeping mission were not achieved, and the numbing tide of everyday atrocities ebbed and flowed without much regard to announcements of new peace accords and strategic frameworks. For lack of better ideas this led the Security Council to put ever-increasing stress on 'protection of civilians' under imminent threat, directing twenty thousand foreign soldiers to try and police a vast and restive territory. This approach hit its limits when political re-alignments led rebels to rout the national army and capture the biggest city in the conflict theatre in late 2012.

At the same time, looking at the Congo might tell us something useful about interventions elsewhere. Ambitions to reshape 'fragile states' have grown up incredibly quickly, and the approaches to pursue those ambitions are likewise new and unproven. In the DRC's case I argue that our work was handicapped by a group of dangerous half-truths and peculiar assumptions—

the Five Follies. These were system maladaptations attributable more to the politics and economics of intervention than any careful reading of problems on the ground.

As an interpretive framework, this is no doubt too cute by half. But my hunch is that the Follies pose common-sense questions that should be asked for any stabilisation or 'post-conflict' intervention.

The effort is timely, I think, because the 'fragile states' agenda is far from dead. In the Anglophone world, a generation of security and foreign policy professionals has been traumatised its experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan—but circumstances conspire against retirement from the stage. In the course of writing this book two entirely new complex UN operations were launched in Mali and the Central African Republic, while a third was reconfigured in South Sudan. All three were driven by great power interests that are unlikely to disappear. These include: fears of regional destabilisation and transnational terrorism (Mali); Chinese import dependence and aspirations to global influence (South Sudan); and increasingly sophisticated advocacy to mobilise voters in the rich democracies (all three cases).

The suddenness with which all these crises struck was a pointed reminder of an unfortunate fact—that complex problems are frequently also urgent problems. We have no right to sit back and take an experimental attitude, but must rather work it out on the fly.[2] That means learning as much as we can, as quickly as we can, from real, living cases.

Pre-modern medicine

The French crisis consultant Pat Lagadec works on major wildfires, nuclear incidents, liquidity crises and the like. He often writes about *brutal audits*—situations where 'at a moment's notice, everything that was left unprepared becomes a complex problem, and every weakness comes rushing to the forefront'.[3] These are situations that surpass the capacity of existing systems to cope: where normal frames of reference seem to crumble and the outcome that was to be avoided at all costs has somehow managed to occur.

The concept is apt for work to stabilise fragile states. Here international intervention must reckon with enormous political and social forces. We make our best guesses on how to influence them, and where to find the best points of leverage. The problem is that the sheer complexity of the situation means that we can be wrong for a long time without realising. The effects of our actions are delayed, or mutated by contact with the plans and reactions of a hundred other actors. But on occasion a brutal audit comes along and unambiguously disproves our theories. Sri Lanka, the Prologue to this story, was one such case. It has been described as the UN

Secretary-General's 'Rwanda moment'; he himself conceded that there had been a 'systemic failure' with 'profound implications for our work across the world'.[4]

There are many other examples. A conservative list, sticking just to the last decade, would include Haiti (2004), East Timor (2006), Somalia (2006), Iraq (2006-07), Côte d'Ivoire (2010), Mali (2012), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2012), the Central African Republic (2013) and South Sudan (2013-14). Each of these countries received substantial international assistance for stabilisation and governance, and each followed the same trajectory. First, there was a period in which lofty policy goals and realities on the ground were a long way apart—accompanied by optimistic official narratives repeatedly denying the gap. Then, a dramatic failure stripped away all pretence, rapidly growing and metastasising along the fault lines and vulnerabilities that were always already present. Finally a reset and reconfiguration of the work, trying to coax the genie back into the bottle. In some cases the situation recovered; in others it remains mired in a deeply dysfunctional equilibrium.

What should we conclude from this? Is it just a numbers game, as suggested in the Prologue? Is our success rate just *inevitably* low?

The honest answer is: we don't know. In fact, we can't know. Much of the work that is currently attempted to stabilise and reshape fragile states was unknown ten years ago, and virtually all of it twenty years ago. Against this, we are dealing with social and political systems whose evolution is most comprehensibly described in centuries. The consequence is that the data just isn't available. As a perceptive observer of Afghanistan has put it, our 'techniques resemble the early days of medicine, when the human body was poorly understood and doctors prescribed bloodletting, or drilled into skulls to treat madness.'[5]

To grasp how rudimentary our pre-modern medicine really is, consider two trends over the last twenty years. The first is rapid *quantitative* growth. For UN peace operations, the average lifetime cost for missions started between 1985 and 1994 was USD 585 million. For missions starting between 1995 and 2004 it was USD 2.35 billion, a fourfold increase even adjusting for inflation. For those starting between 2005 and 2014 the average cost is already USD 4.29 billion, notwithstanding that the meter is still running for most of them.[6] Likewise for bilateral aid. The OECD's Development Assistance Committee, the club of rich-country donors, didn't even keep a 'working list' of fragile states until 2005. But it recently noted approvingly that total resource flows to these countries have doubled in real terms over a decade, and now account for 38% of total assistance.[7] In the United Kingdom, for instance, this has meant that aid going to fragile states surged from £1.8bn in 2010-11 to £3.4bn in 2014-15.[8]

Concurrent with this has been massive *qualitative* expansion, i.e. growth in the kinds of tasks attempted. Consider the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. This is the 2011 product of an elaborate consultative process involving some forty-five governments and most of the key multilateral institutions in the development business. It is intended to map out future orientations for foreign aid to fragile states, with the point of departure five 'peacebuilding and statebuilding goals'.[9] These are: legitimate politics; security; justice; revenue and services; and economic foundations.

This is a remarkably broad remit. The technical and political complexities that confront serious reform in any one of these areas are enormous. But it has become par for the course to intervene in all of them simultaneously. In the UN peacekeeping sector, 'statebuilding' work of this kind was pretty much unknown before 1991. Then came a few initial forays in El Salvador, Cambodia and Bosnia as Western powers tested the limits of the possible in the post-Cold War environment. From there, it was as if a switch had been flipped. From 1995 onwards, the Security Council mandated UN operations that cut across those big, intimidating themes in no fewer than fifteen countries.[10]

For development agencies there are similarly expansive ambitions. The Millennium Development Goals were formulated in September 2000 to 'create an environment conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty'. The preamble included some aspirational language on peace and governance—but the eight goals themselves related to extreme poverty, primary education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, burden of disease, environmental sustainability, and the size of aid flows.[11] Each was subsequently associated with quantitative indicators, compiled and managed centrally to track achievement towards the target year of 2015. As the deadline approaches, expectations have grown for successor arrangements and it is now commonplace to argue for targets on conflict and fragility.

To take the highest-profile example, the UN Secretary-General convened a high-level panel in 2013, including several former heads of state. It recommended targets, among many others, to 'Enhance the capacity, professionalism and accountability of the security forces, police and judiciary'; 'Reduce violent deaths per 100,000 by x [sic] and eliminate all forms of violence against children'; and 'Stem the external stressors that lead to conflict, including those related to organized crime'.[12] Just as for the original Goals, these would be linked with 'precise metrics' for centralised analysis and reporting.

At this point, some caution is surely appropriate. It is clear that these are pressing concerns, and that we do not have the luxury of doing nothing. (Neither did those early medical practitioners!) But it has been a remarkably short span of time in which to invent a wholly new art and science.

The need for prudence is perhaps best illustrated by a quick glance backwards, at the brief history of the aid business. Here it is now conventional to acknowledge multiple 'lost decades' of effort. Successive orthodoxies had to play out at massive scale and for long periods before it was accepted that things were just not working as anticipated—first capital formation in the 1950s and 1960s, then 'basic needs' in the 1970s, then neo-liberalism in the 1980s. The profession cycled through each of these in turn before settling into a sort of eclecticism that tends to eschew grand theories.

There is no reason to think the same fate unlikely for the 'fragile states' agenda, which boasts both bolder objectives and country 'clients' who are considerably less able to defend themselves against technocrats looking to test out their bright new ideas. To borrow a metaphor from Karl Popper:[13]

> Science does not rest upon rock-bottom. It is like a building erected on piles. The piles are driven down from above into the swamp, but not down to any natural or 'given' base; and when we cease our attempts to drive our piles into a deeper layer, it is not because we have reached firm ground. We simply stop when we are satisfied that they are firm enough to carry the structure, at least for the time being.

Well—we are a long way out into the swamp, and the building has been built very quickly. And for my part, I think that there is convincing evidence that some of the pillars are rotten.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a good place in which to explore this intuition, as among the patients of the new interventionism it is perhaps the longest-standing and most intensively treated. Every year from 2007 to 2012 it hosted the largest or second-largest UN peace operation in the world; was in the top five largest appeals for emergency relief assistance; and in the top ten for dependency on development aid.[14] At the political level, it hosted no fewer than five super-ambassador 'special envoys'. But all this effort did not translate into progress against stated policy goals. This largely escaped comment until the brutal audit came—the split of the *Mouvement de 23 Mars* from the national army and the capture of Goma, the most important city in the conflict theatre, in December 2012. Rwanda intervened directly, threatening a return to the international free-for-all of a decade earlier. The Congolese army was grossly mismanaged and quickly broke and ran, making a mockery of a decade of 'state-building' efforts. The (lack of) response of the UN's peacekeeping force was also widely derided, turning a crisis for the Congolese into a crisis of credibility for the world body.[15]

In the aftermath of a serious crisis event like this, the Harvard leadership guru Ron Heifetz has suggested that effective leadership has two elements. The first is *stabilisation*: stemming the bleeding and buying time. This certainly occurred. The UN deployed its first-ever 'Intervention Brigade' to shift the balance of forces on the ground; huge diplomatic pressure was brought to

bear on Rwanda to curtail its meddling; and yet another political framework (the 'Framework for Hope') was agreed between countries in the region. The second element of effective leadership, however, is *adaptation*. This means investigation of the habits and practices that led to crisis and the 'innovation, experimentation and creativity required to learn new ways of doing things'.[16] This certainly did not occur. The story that led up to the fall of Goma wasn't investigated with much seriousness, and the UN and bilateral aid providers managed to avoid serious scrutiny once the initial media interest petered out. For its part the Congolese government failed to do much about the M23's core grievances, up to and including the latter's former combatants starving to death in their demobilisation camps.[17]

Follies in Fragile States attempts to fill this gap. My aim is to decompose 'failure', a complicated historical narrative, into specific hypotheses on 'what went wrong'. Which of our pre-modern medical techniques muddled through to a positive result, and which inadvertently caused harm?

Action and stagnation

The focus of this book is on the Congo's Third Republic, introduced to the world in 2006 with a new Constitution, President and National Assembly. And it is impossible to understand the tragedy of what followed without also understanding the optimism that was present in the early days.

In 1996-7 the First Congo War had seen a modest Rwandan incursion topple the Mobutu dictatorship. It turned out that the latter had been thoroughly rotted from the inside-out by thirty years of kleptocracy: actual fighting was limited, although the human toll was not. But the Second Congo War (1998-2003) was a very different animal. No fewer than seven countries became embroiled on Congolese soil, enlisting or creating local allies and earning the nickname 'Africa's World War'. When the exhausted belligerents finally signed the 2003 Sun City Agreements, the power-sharing government that followed was unsteady and impractical. For many, it was a minor miracle that it was wound up with more-or-less successful elections over the course of 2006. Neighbouring countries refrained from overt intervention, for the most part, as local political factions jockeyed for position. The Government that eventuated was far from perfect but good enough to play ball with the international community—a fact to be signalled in 2010-12 by cancelations of old international debts to the tune of five billion dollars.[18]

The exception to the success story was the East of the country. This is a loosely defined chunk of territory that runs roughly from the southern tip of Burundi up to the top of Lake Albert in Uganda, and a few hundred miles into Congolese territory. It had been the cockpit of the Second Congo War, as the neighbours pushed across the borders and met resistance from both local

communities and the national government. And the arrangements hammered out in the Sun City Agreements had not calmed the situation here to the extent that people had hoped. The political and security situation remained precarious, with many factions that had not bought into the new status quo and a steady drip of everyday atrocities.

The biggest single vulnerability was the Congolese army. This was an unstable patchwork of the belligerents left standing at the end of the war, 'divided against itself, with Kinyarwanda speakers poised to fight members of other ethnic groups and to fight among themselves according to the Tutsi–Hutu line of cleavage'.[19] It was clearly ready to fall apart if the right thread was tugged, a scenario that had already knocked on the door several times.

Meanwhile many smaller players felt marginalised by political machinations happening a thousand miles away in the capital. Thorough-going militarisation after many years of bush war meant this translated into dozens of armed groups that never quite demobilised. They retained both capability and willingness to skirmish with each other over resources and more intangible grievances. The most ferocious was the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP, after the French title). This was a descendent of one of the belligerents in the Second Congo War, put together by senior officers who felt they had lost out in the political transition and backed by parts of the Rwandan government. They kept flirting with the new national army but never consummating the relationship, with agreements in 2007 and 2008 breaking down quickly and then yet another tentative rapprochement in early 2009. On each occasion there was a chain reaction among smaller militias who feared being left in the CNDP's sphere of influence as they had been during the war. They were bankrolled by local business and political elites who shared those fears and also by the national army, which kept getting routed on the battlefield.

Sharing this already complex ecosystem were a few more exotic species. Most notable were the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a mutant offspring of the *génocidaires* who had fled from Rwanda into the DRC in 1994. Over time the group had evolved to incorporate parts of the Congolese Hutu community, and lived an opportunistic life with no real political agenda beyond survival. However, its soldiers were relatively well organised and trained and thus often enlisted by local communities in score-settling among themselves. Other factions that didn't fit the usual mould included the FNL, a small Burundian insurgency that found Congo a convenient home, and the ADF, a peculiar Islamist group originating from Uganda. After long obscurity the latter would burst into international prominence in late 2014 after (murky) involvement in a string of gruesome massacres.[20]

All this was in a region where the relevance of the central government had always been in question. Mobutu Sese Seko had been a dictator for thirty-two years, finally dying in 1997. But he had ruled by the judicious distribution of spoils and skilful manipulation of factions against

each other, not by an overwhelming concentration of force. The East had not lived under a heavy hand, and indeed had resisted many of Mobutu's centralising efforts.

Two subsequent wars had not improved the situation, with combatants either pulling apart state institutions or else bending them to their will. By any conventional measure—policing, taxation, even physical access—DRC was an archipelago state, barely present outside the major urban centres. Communities functioned and in a few cases even thrived. But in Thomas Hobbes' formulation, they 'lived without a common power to keep them all in awe'.[21] Security, transport infrastructure and most social services were subject to the unofficial motto of the Mobutu period: *débrouillez-vous* ('manage it yourself').[22]

This was most dramatically illustrated by an epidemiological survey that estimated a total 5.4 million 'excess deaths' between 1998 and April 2007—due not to battle but rather disruption of basic sanitation, health services, subsistence farming and trade.[23] (The figure led to the standard media tag 'the deadliest conflict since World War II'.) Day to day, shifting patterns of insecurity continued to keep between one-and-a-half and two million people displaced from their home communities at any one time. For the rest, a survey in 2007 found that about 20% of respondents felt safe meeting a soldier, and less than 40% when meeting a stranger of any kind.[24] The big reason for this was near-total militarisation of competition for economic resources. This ranged from the omnipresent 'checkpoints' on roads—taxing a bundle of cassava here, a few hundred Congolese francs there—through grazing disputes resolved at gunpoint, right up to the big prizes of artisanal mining sites and the cross-border trade of fuel and timber.

Faced with this situation, international actors had enthusiastically taken on public functions. The United Nations Mission in the DRC (MONUC) had been first launched in 1999 and a decade later it had grown to an authorised strength of 20,575 military personnel, 1,440 police and nearly 5,000 civilian staff. Of these 90% were deployed in the East, with their first priority to protect Congolese civilians under the imminent threat of physical violence.[25] In practice this meant a far-flung network of ninety or so field deployments that acted as a sort of UN 911 service in parallel with the national army and police.[26] Concurrent with this, a dizzying array of humanitarian agencies had also set up permanent shop. One representative appeal document asked for funds to underwrite health services for 5.3 million people, and to support the food security of 4.3 million people. It explained that these needs were driven by 'crises' on the one hand and 'general poverty and precariousness' on the other.[27]

Of course all this posed an obvious question: What was the exit strategy? Nobody was comfortable with what amounted to a sharing of sovereign functions.[28] The Congolese government first suggested a drawdown plan for MONUC in 2007, shortly after President Kabila was sworn into office, and then stepped up its efforts aggressively in 2009. The UN's

financial contributors were not averse to the idea, with peacekeepers costing USD 1.3 billion annually and emergency relief agencies asking for another seven hundred million on top of that.

The plan, when it came, was not short on ambition. In late 2008 the Security Council directed MONUC to help the central government in 'disarming the recalcitrant local armed groups'.[29] The following year it expanded on this: the UN system was to aim for 'consolidation of State authority throughout the territory'. This included the 'completion of activities of [demobilisation] of Congolese armed groups or their effective integration in the army'; and 'deployment of Congolese civil administration, in particular the police, territorial administration and rule of law institutions'.[30] All this for an area comprising—on the most restrictive interpretation—about 190,000 square kilometres and some fifteen million people.

In formulating these goals, the Council was constantly egged on by Western advocacy groups. In 2009, Human Rights Watch offered a typically optimistic recommendation to the Government and its international partners:[31]

> Develop a new and comprehensive approach for disarming armed groups, including the FDLR, that emphasizes protection of civilians, apprehending those wanted for crimes in violation of international law, a reformed disarmament and demobilization program, and options for temporary resettlement of combatants and their dependents within or outside of Congo.

The Enough Project chimed in with an 'Action Plan to End the World's Deadliest War'. It proposed an American/French/British sally against the FDLR, precise tracing and documentation of mineral supply chains, and 'reform of the Congolese justice system so that it prosecutes the warlords who use rape, village burning, and other attacks on civilians as tools of war'.[32]

Now let's jump forward to early 2013. To put it mildly, all those bold ambitions were not realised. A credible overview from an independent think-tank indicated twenty-four significant armed groups active at this time, the accompanying map a crazy quilt of colour blotches with notations like 'diverse factions of same franchise'.[33] This was fully consistent with intelligence estimates within the UN. I spent a lot of time writing sentences like the following in my cramped office in Goma:[34]

> Security remains the major challenge in many areas. The proximate causes of violence are not yet addressed; and work with civil institutions remains premature. At the same time: There is no political framework for action in the security sector and the role of the [stabilisation strategy] remains limited.

This comes from a public report and is already much too upbeat. We had supported small police deployments to locations where they were shot at, kidnapped and ultimately driven off (occasionally with the collaboration of the local community). In other places, they huddled in rapidly disintegrating tents, derided as the 'UNOPS police' in reference to the UN agency that had procured—and of course branded—their equipment.

In late 2010 a small armed group took over the ultra-remote town of Luvungi, perpetrated some unusually savage violence, and then disappeared back into the bush. Some months afterwards the UN mission prodded Congolese police to deploy in the area, dropping them off in UN helicopters with yet more tents. The press release that followed almost defies belief:[35]

> About a hundred women, the majority of whom were rape victims, met with the delegation on arrival. The mood was festive. Changes were visible everywhere in the town.
>
> Today, the population feels entirely confident, and can express itself freely. Economic activity around the village is picking up, and the villagers are now contemplating the future, leaving behind a painful past.

The same armed group 're-captured' the town—or rather walked back in with minimal fighting—two months after this press release was written. They killed a few people, assaulted many more, and then left again. Of course this fact was buried in an anodyne UN narrative report rather than a press release, while international organisations squabbled in the pages of *Foreign Policy* over the precise number of victims of sexual violence for the original attack.[36]

In short, something was off. We were speaking a polite language—prosecuting warlords, demobilisation and retraining of combatants, efficient civil administration—in an environment that was considerably more anarchic. Local leaders were playing real politics. They relied on linkages with hugely unreliable armed factions and a thoroughly criminalised economy for any real influence. Our efforts to train them in record-keeping and budget execution were accordingly a little beside the point, or rather didn't take their day-to-day political reality seriously. They were much more concerned about sudden, violent shifts in political equilibrium.

They were frequently proven right, but most definitively in November 2012. This is when the *Mouvement de 23 Mars* captured the city of Goma, shortly after splitting from the national army. This was as unambiguous a failure as one can imagine versus overall policy goals. Government forces had been routed despite maximally favourable operational conditions, the direct support of the UN peacekeeping mission, and the city being indisputably the highest-value target in eastern Congo. It was, moreover, the hub for most international relief agencies, and the small international press corps.

Against this background, 'apprehending and prosecuting' anyone began to look a bit fantastical. Far from drawing down, the peacekeeping budget for Congo actually *grew* by 7% in real terms from 2007 to 2012. After the fall of Goma the UN's presence was further strengthened, with its new Intervention Brigade specifically tasked with combat operations. For the bilateral partners funding aid projects, the picture was no prettier. Twelve of the biggest commissioned an evaluation of their work in 2011 and received a rather blunt response:[37]

> Fundamentally, it is difficult to define the progresses achieved by the interventions towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as the contextual analysis is defective. In fact the operational instruments such as humanitarian aid fill the gap left by donor strategies.

Meanwhile the various institutions estimating Congo's overall 'fragility' saw no improvements. They reckoned the DRC to be in company with Iraq at the peak of its crisis in 2006–07, or Sudan just before the secession of South Sudan.[38] In fact the best-known ranking, the Failed States Index, actually pushed the Congo up the table from seventh-most fragile in the world in 2007 to second place in 2012. Experts haggled about the precise trends but could not deny the overall pattern, which is best described as *action and stagnation*.[39]

Each year the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations returned to the Security Council for renewal of MONUC's mandate for 22,000 peacekeepers. Each year a funding appeal for humanitarian agencies would circulate for the 'Congo crisis', the world's second- or third-biggest, with an explanation of 'challenges' copied from the previous year's appeal and a few per cent added onto the price tag. That this pattern could repeat itself with little controversy, right up until the brutal audit finally came in late 2012, is a very troubling fact. As the British parliamentarian Rory Stewart has asked about Afghanistan: 'Why was no-one ever exposed? Why did neither colleagues nor bosses nor the public ever challenge such sublime "cautious optimism"?'[40]

The Five Follies

The short explanation is that we were asking the wrong questions. Specifically, we misled ourselves in five key regards:

The makeover fantasy—an untested assumption that formal state institutions were an unalloyed social good. This ignored serious unresolved questions about how these institutions should be governed and to what ends, and prevented identification of widely shared *goals*.

Policy without politics—the failure to understand the fears, uncertainties and interests that lay behind inertia on sensitive issues like security sector reform. This prevented the identification of viable *pathways for change*.

Geography denial—the construction of a fictional entity of 'eastern Congo' that left planning and analysis at unworkable levels of abstraction. This prevented effective *adaptation* to huge variations in conditions across the theatre of operations, and left us with serious mismatches between ends and means.

The coordination panacea—the insistence that more analysis and more planning were the answers to all of the above failings. This put off indefinitely a serious discussion of *willingness and capabilities*, as major gaps in what international agencies were actually prepared to contribute were never confronted.

The iron triangle—domination of the policy process by a small group of Kinshasa-based officials, rich-country governments, and the expert policy community. This limited *feedback*, the inclusion of crucial ground-truth in the policy conversation.

These are best summarised as respects in which international engagement was unfit for purpose in the DRC. I do not go further and suggest that all can be explained by a lurking ideology (neo-liberal 'empire in denial') or specific professional norms ('the tyranny of experts').[41] Rather each Folly has its own history and reinforcing incentives. It must also be emphasised at the outset that they were shared by many Congolese counterparts, who so often spoke in the peculiar dialects of 'statebuilding' and 'peacebuilding' that they forgot those ideas that were better expressed in everyday language.
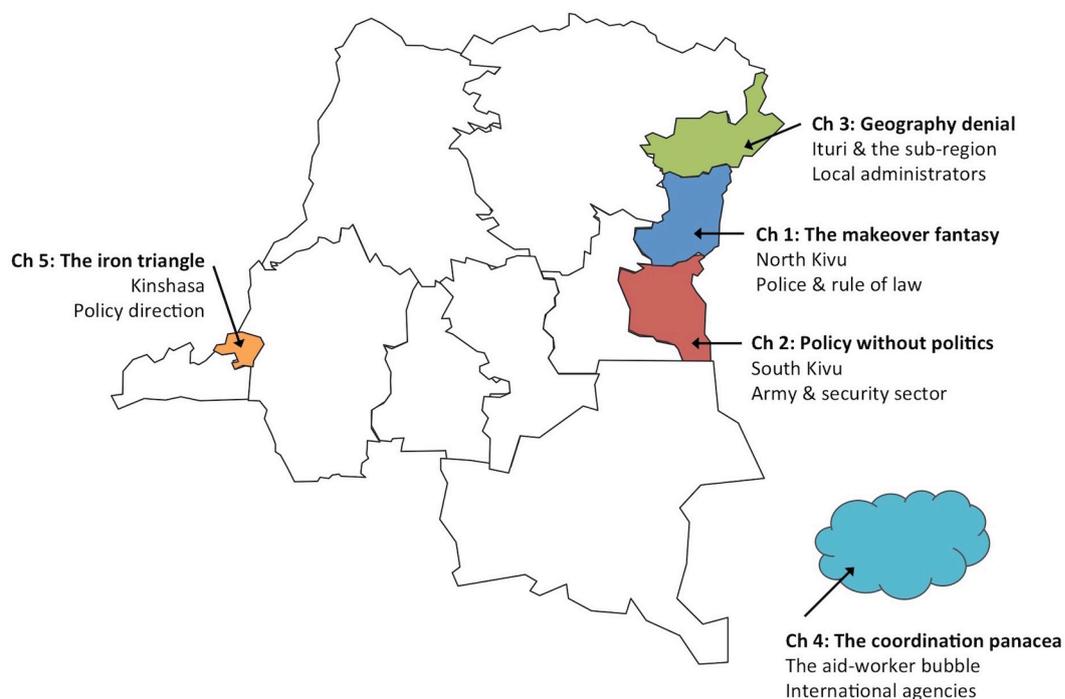
Following this overall scheme, the plan of this book is straightforward. The period is 2007-12. The focus is on 'stabilisation', loosely defined as the DRC escaping its dependence on massive foreign security assistance and emergency relief in its eastern provinces. With one eye on this overall goal we pick our way through the Follies sequentially. In each case I reconstruct decision-making in a key priority area, as far as possible letting the original documents and stakeholders speak for themselves. I then compare the assumptions and mental models with how the situation actually evolved on the ground, tracing the actions and reactions of specific individuals, institutions and communities.

The overall effect is to jump in and out, revisiting the same situation from different ground-level perspectives. Figure 1 summarises how we will travel in this regard, superimposing the plan for *Follies in Fragile States* upon a provincial map of the DRC. We start in Chapter 1 in the company of the Congolese National Police (PNC), following close behind deployments into the province

of North Kivu. In Chapter 2 we switch subject to the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC), tracking perilous schemes to internally restructure and 'integrate' the remaining illegal armed groups in South Kivu. Chapter 3 then jumps to a regional perspective. We turn to frontline civil administrators and add a third area—Ituri district—to compare and contrast the varying situations across the East. Chapter 4 shifts emphasis from Congolese to international institutions, looking at the profusion of international agencies working in-country and their efforts to formulate coherent policy. Finally, Chapter 5 looks at the *grosses légumes*, the Kinshasa-based political elites who dominated the conversation on what ordinary people wanted or needed.

Figure 1: Conceptual map for Follies in Fragile States
Location and primary subject of each chapter

Ch 3: Geography denial
Ituri & the sub-region
Local administrators

Ch 5: The iron triangle
Kinshasa
Policy direction

Ch 1: The makeover fantasy
North Kivu
Police & rule of law

Ch 2: Policy without politics
South Kivu
Army & security sector

Ch 4: The coordination panacea
The aid-worker bubble
International agencies

The focus on local and intra-institutional perspectives is partly to avoid the sanitising effects of distance. The tale is quite often bloody, and it is useful sometimes to emphasise that 'stakeholders' deal with real stakes. But it is also because eastern Congo's predicament is irreducibly about trust, risk and historical memory. Discussing any individual 'variable' stripped from its context is thus bloodless in a different way, in that it substitutes an observer's perspective for that of the participants who actually shape events. I aim instead for an approach outlined by Aaron Wildavsky, perhaps the greatest modern observer of how policy is made:[42]

> By quoting extensively from participants, by paying careful attention to the features of their environment as they describe it, and by examining the explanations they give for their own behaviour, we hope to create a recognisable context within which recommended change must take

place. Hopefully participants… will recognise in our book the world in which they work and want to use it both to explain to others what they do and to examine their own behaviour.

The method reacts against the usual practice of international agencies, which is to compartmentalise and focus only on 'their' part of the story. This has been driven home for me many times, but perhaps most vividly in a conversation with a senior UN official in Kinshasa in 2009. He was tall and Scandinavian, fond of loud ties and business jargon that was never used quite correctly. He was also considered a hot talent and knew how to make the right noises to get ahead. I quote:[43]

> At the end of the day… you're not accountable for these overall results. We can't talk about results for return and recovery in general. Accountability is really about contracts, the specific commitments we make in project documents to our donors. That's what we sign on to.

On this view, the proper level of analysis is the project agreement—a few million dollars passed from a single donor (say the United Kingdom) to a single agency (say the UN Development Programme). Most of these projects have success indicators and some are even formally evaluated. The problem is that it ends there, with this very parochial viewpoint. Overall success is not discussed because everybody reserves the right to define it for themselves.

Even where there have been formal post-mortems of strategic failure in fragile states, they have been kept within tight parameters. The Review Panel that followed the debacle in Sri Lanka (Ban Ki-Moon's 'Rwanda moment') was directed unambiguously to the 'final stages of the war', and the 'contribution and effectiveness of the United Nations system in responding to the escalating fighting'.[44] This occluded the uncomfortable fact that the UN system had been present in the country all the way through three decades of violence. (In fact Sri Lanka had often been cited as a success story for development work.) Earlier post-mortems for action in the face of genocide in Rwanda and Srebrenica skirted around the history of policy engagement in precisely the same fashion.[45]

Such tendencies are amplified, or enabled, by a lack of serious outside scrutiny. What is striking about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, for someone working on lesser-known conflicts, is that they have been *picked to death*. There was heavy parliamentary/Congressional oversight; ceaseless third-party muckraking accounts; credible surveys of public opinion; strong investigative reporting (after a slow start) from an array of news outlets; and a torrent of insider accounts from mid-level and senior-level officials. But we find none of this for those crises which are left to the UN and regional organisations. Accounts from knowledgeable insiders are remarkably rare.[46] The rich countries that foot the bill never regard any individual dossier as a significant political issue because their contributions are individually small. The institutions that are tasked to supervise—the UN Security Council and its African Union counterpart—seem

constitutionally incapable of doing so. Meanwhile the media instinctively distrust the official narrative, knowing spin when they see it, but are unwilling to bear the costs of investigative reporting in these very difficult contexts.

Follies in Fragile States is a modest attempt to break those habits. It is muckraking, with a lot of narrative detail and an array of colourful characters. I wrote it in the firm belief that there is 'no arcane form of social science that has to be mastered before one can begin to think about development policy'.[47] Intervention in the Congo—and in other 'fragile states'—is indisputably an area where policy-makers and the public can be informed consumers, and ask the right questions.

Notes & references

Notes to Introduction

[1] Gettleman, J (2010) 'Mass rapes in Congo reveal U.N. weakness', *The New York Times*, 3 October.

[2] Rittel, H (1972) 'On the planning crisis: Systems analysis of the "first and second generations"', *Bedriftsøkonomen* 8: 390–396. This is property number 11(!) of wicked problems.

[3] Lagadec, P (1993) 'Preventing chaos in a crisis: Strategies for damage prevention, control and damage limitation', McGraw-Hill.

[4] Charbonneau, L (2012) 'U.N. failed gravely in Sri Lanka—internal review panel', Reuters, 15 November.

[5] Smith, G (2013) 'The dogs are eating them now: Our war in Afghanistan', Counterpoint, p2.

[6] Quick, ID (2013) 'Peacekeeping Agendas dataset', www.rethinkfragility.com.

[7] OECD (2014) 'Fragile states 2014: Domestic revenue mobilization in fragile states', p25.

[8] Independent Commission on Aid Impact (2015) 'Assessing the impact of the scale-up of DFID's support to fragile states', Report 40, February.

[9] International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (2011) 'A new deal for engagement in fragile states', December.

[10] Quick, ID (2013) 'Peacekeeping Agendas dataset', www.rethinkfragility.com. From 1995 to 2014, seventeen of twenty-five missions covered three or more of the Peacebuilding & Statebuilding Goals. The total figure bundles contiguous missions in a single country into one unit.

[11] GA Res 55/2, 'United Nations Millennium Declaration', 8 September 2000, UN Doc A/RES/55/2.

[12] United Nations (2013) 'A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development', The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, p52.

[13] Popper, K (1934/1992) 'The logic of scientific discovery', Routledge, p94.

[14] Quick, ID (2013) 'Peacekeeping Resources dataset', www.rethinkfragility.com; World Development Indicators, the World Bank. Defined here as net ODA received as percentage of GNI, 2005–14. For humanitarian funding appeals, see Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Plan d'Action Humanitaire: République Démocratique du Congo', editions of 2008–12.

[15] There were too many scornful reactions to recap here. Among the most virulent was Hatcher, J and Perry, A (2012) 'Defining peacekeeping downward: the U.N. debacle in eastern Congo', *TIME*, 26 November. For a more balanced view: Boutellis, A (2013) 'Will MONUSCO fall with Goma?', *Global Observatory*, 3 December.

[16] Heifetz, R (2009) 'Leadership in a (permanent) crisis', HBR Ideacast, *Harvard Business Review*, 23 July.

[17] BBC News (2014) 'DR Congo ex-fighters "starve in demobilization camp"', 1 October; Human Rights Watch (2014) 'DR Congo: Surrendered fighters starve in camp', 1 October.

18 International Monetary Fund and International Development Association (2010) 'Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative Completion Point Document and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative', June 15.

19 Prunier, G (2008/2011) 'Africa's world war: Congo, the Rwandan genocide, and the making of a continental catastrophe', Oxford University Press, p299.

20 BBC News (2014) 'Second massacre in days leaves 20 dead in east DR Congo', 18 October; Kibangula, T (2014) 'RDC: la situation explosive de Beni expliquée en 4 points', *Jeune Afrique*, 4 November; Reuters (2015) 'At least 21 killed in machete attack in northeast Congo', 4 February.

21 Hobbes, T (2008) 'Leviathan', Oxford Paperbacks edition, ch. 13.

22 Vlassenroot, K and Raeymakers, T (2004) 'Conflict and social transformation in Eastern DR Congo', Conflict Research Group, ch. 6.

23 Coghlan, B, et al. (2009) 'Update on mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Results from a third nationwide survey', *Disaster Med. Public Health Prep.* June 3(2): 88–96.

24 Vinck, P et al. (2008) 'Living with fear: A population-based survey on attitudes about peace, justice, and social reconstruction in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo', Berkeley-Tulane Initiative on Vulnerable Populations, August, p26.

25 United Nations (2009) 'Performance report on the budget of MONUC from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009', 18 December, UN Doc A/64/583; SC Res 1856 (2008) 22 December, UN Doc S/RES/1856.

26 Martin, B (2012) 'The protection of civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Conflict Trends* 2012(2): 33–40.

27 United Nations (2012) 'Plan d'Action Humanitaire 2012: République Démocratique du Congo', p5 ('une pauvreté et une précarité générales'), www.unocha.org.

28 Krasner, SD (2004) 'Shared sovereignty: New institutions for collapsed and failing states', *International Security* 29(2).

29 SC Res 1856, 22 December 2008, UN Doc S/RES/1856.

30 SC Res 1925, 28 May 2010, UN Doc S/RES/1925.

31 Human Rights Watch (2009) 'You will be punished: Attacks on civilians in eastern Congo', 13 December.

32 Prendergast, J and Atama, N (2009) 'Eastern Congo: an action plan to end the world's deadliest war', The Enough Project, July, p11.

33 Stearns, J et al. (2013) 'The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo: Untangling the Gordian knot of insecurity', Rift Valley Institute Usalama Project, p4.

34 United Nations (2011) 'International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy for the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Quarterly report for April to June 2011', p6.

35 Padovan, C (2012) 'Life returns to normal in Luvungi, Nord Kivu, thanks to the National Police', press release, MONUSCO Public Information, 8 February.

36 Heaton, L (2013) 'What happened in Luvungi? On rape and truth in Congo', *Foreign Policy*, March 4; Williams, M and Cragin, W (2013) 'Our experience in Luvungi', *Foreign Policy*, March 5. For the incidents

of April–June 2012 see: Radio Okapi (2012) 'Walikale: 27 morts dans les affrontements entre FARDC et Mai-Mai Cheka à Luvungi', 18 April; Le Congolais (2012) 'Nord-Kivu – Les miliciens Maï Maï Cheka occupent une dizaine de villages à Walikale', 18 April; Radio Okapi (2012) 'Nord-Kivu: les FARDC tuent 4 rebelles de Cheka à Ihana', 23 May; United Nations (2012) 'Report of the Secretary-General on MONUSCO', 14 November, UN Doc S/2012/838, para. 13.

37 Brusset, E et al. (2011) 'Amani labda, peace maybe: Joint evaluation of conflict prevention and peace building in the Democratic Republic of Congo', Synthesis Report, Channel Research.

38 Fund for Peace, 'Failed States Index', editions of 2007–12; Marshall, MG and Cole, BR, 'Global report on conflict, governance and state fragility', Center for Systemic Peace, editions of 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011; Norman Patterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, 'Assessing state fragility: A country indicators for foreign policy report', editions of 2007–2012.

39 Demetriou, S and Quick, ID (2012) 'The sobering lessons of stabilization in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo', unpublished manuscript.

40 Stewart, R and Knaus, G (2012) 'Can intervention work?', Norton Global Ethics Series, p54.

41 Chandler, D (2006) 'Empire in denial: The politics of statebuilding', Pluto Press; Easterly, W (2014) 'The tyranny of experts: Economists, dictators, and the forgotten rights of the poor', Basic Civitas Books. For the latter argument in respect of the DRC specifically see Autessere, S (2010) 'The trouble with the Congo: Local violence and the failure of international peacebuilding', Cambridge University Press.

42 Caiden, N and Wildavsky, A (1980) 'Planning and budgeting in poor countries', Transaction Publishers, pxi.

43 Quick, ID (2011) 'End of assignment report: UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', internal report.

44 United Nations (2012) 'Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations action in Sri Lanka', p4.

45 United Nations (1999) 'Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/35: The fall of Srebrenica', 15 November, UN Doc A/54/549; United Nations (1999) 'Report of the Independent Inquiry into the actions of the United Nations during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda', 15 December, UN Doc S/1999/1257.

46 With some creditable exceptions: Anstee, JM (1996) 'Orphan of the Cold War: The inside story of the collapse of the Angolan peace process 1992–3', Palgrave Macmillan; Ould-Abdullah, A (1999) 'Burundi on the brink, 1993–5: A UN special envoy reflects on preventive diplomacy' United States Institute of Peace.

47 Toye, J (1987) 'Dilemmas of development', Blackwell, p18.