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No easy road to peace

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The introduction of multi-party democracy in Congo-Brazzaville in 1992 led to civil war. A number of attempts were made to end the conflict. This article analyses the 1999 agreement and explains why it could not bring the desired results

The Republic of Congo

No easy road to peace

Juliet Ramzan

In 1992 the Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville) held its first democratic elections in which the incumbent president Denis Sassou-Nguesso was ousted and Pascal Lissouba was elected president. Tensions over poor government management and a disputed parliamentary election in May 1993 escalated into armed conflict between government forces and forces led by former president Nguesso (UCDP, 2011). Government troops were supported by the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nguesso's troops were supported by the government of Angola. Nguesso's troops took Brazzaville in October 1997 and he pronounced himself to be president of the country (USCP, 2011).

Facilitated by President Omar Bongo of Gabon, Nguesso's government began peace talks with rebel groups, and a peace agreement was signed in 1999 between the government and representatives of the Forces d'Auto-Défense de la Résistance (FADR), an umbrella group representing five of the armed factions in the conflict. While the peace agreement did help to dissolve tension between the parties to the agreement, fighting resumed in 2002. In 2003 a further peace agreement was signed. While there is some ongoing tension, the situation in the country is currently relatively stable.

This article discusses some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Agreement on Ending Hostilities in the Republic of Congo (1999) guided by a theoretical framework. It is not an exhaustive study of the agreement and the reasons why it failed. Rather, it provides a discussion of a few theories of conflict resolution as those theories apply to the empirical case of the Congo-Brazzaville peace process. More specifically, the article discusses to what extent the agreement addressed the credible commitment problem, the role of disarmament,

demobilisation and reintegration and the missed opportunity to involve civil society actors in the peace process.

Dealing with the commitment problem

In order to overcome the commitment problem, Walter (2002) posits that peace agreements must contain both a level of internal power sharing and a level of external security assistance. Where there are limited third-party security guarantees, there should be high power-sharing pacts and where there are extensive power-sharing pacts, limited third-party guarantees will be sufficient to sustain peace.

The 1999 peace agreement provided for military integration allowing all FADR fighters to be incorporated into the national security forces (article 6). Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) argue that in incorporating military power sharing, both sides send large cost signals, signifying their commitment to peace and helping to build trust between warring factions. However, military power sharing alone falls far short of the extensive power sharing described by Hartzell and Hoddie as being political, territorial, military and economic (2003). Applying Walter's (2002) theory, the 1999 peace agreement fell short of providing strict distribution of political and territorial power and thus, in order to avoid commitment problems, should have provided for high third-party security guarantees.

The agreement established a commission headed by the international mediator, President Bongo (article 3). Its tasks were to monitor and verify the implementation of the agreement, ensure redeployment of security forces and oversee the demilitarization of political parties, movements and associations and collect all weapons (article 2) of the deed supporting the commission). The monitoring commission was to be sup-

ported by a united alliance of security forces and FADR forces (presumably integrated into the national security forces), which were to oppose all forces hostile to the peace and reconciliation as well as supporters of violence in all forms (article 11). In Doyle and Sambanis' (2000) typology of international peacebuilding, this type of third-party intervention would be called a monitoring or observer mission. Its purpose is to monitor a truce and help negotiate a peace through military and civilian observers. The peace agreement made no formal determination about the extent to which force could be used by the monitoring commission. It was an interim arrangement which was due to conclude two months after the peace agreement came into force (article 25 of President's Decree).

Comparing this type of third-party security guarantee to UN peacekeeping missions deployed under Chapter VI or Chapter VII of the UN Convention, which are supported by international armed forces and funding (albeit in limited degrees), it cannot be said that the monitoring commission in the 1999 agreement was a strong third-party guarantee. Hence, applying Walter's theory, the agreement was not strong in addressing the commitment problem. It appears that the peace agreement foresaw that the parties would cooperate rationally for the purpose of building domestic peace together and failed to acknowledge what Doyle and Sambanis (2000) refer to as the confusion, "noise", violence and changing identification that come hand in hand with the peace process and which can affect rational cooperation.

Another serious concern that arises out of this agreement is that Nitsoumi, the original leader of the Ntsiloulous, one of the main rebel groups, refused to take part in the negotiations and



The Ninjas were a militia in the Republic of the Congo, which participated in numerous wars and insurgencies in the 1990s and 2000s. They fought the supporters of President Pascal Lissouba in the 1993-94 armed conflict, and then in the 1997-99 civil war allied with Lissouba's forces against the supporters of former President Nguesso.

throughout the peace talks remained in the Pool region with 1,500 armed men. Nilsson's (2008) research holds that where a party is excluded from a peace agreement, that fact does not affect the peace that is established between those privy to the agreement. However, her results also show that partial agreements can reduce the prospects of overall peace. While the agreement may have maintained peace between the signatories, the risk of conflict continuing between the signatories and Nitsoumi was ever present.

Civil society's role

Peacebuilding is an attempt after a peace has been negotiated to address the sources of the current hostilities and build local capacities for conflict resolution (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000). Civil society can play an important role in this process. Civil society actors can be trade unions, women's organisations and religious actors (Nilsson, 2012) who can communicate issues regarding the peace process to the wider community bringing legitimacy to the peace process and the agreements made in the peace accord (Bell and O'Rourke, 2007). Further, they can help to heal the wounds of conflict in a community and build a community's capacity for local conflict resolution (see, for example, the role of inter-faith dialogue groups in post-conflict Sri Lanka; see also Paffenholz, 2010).

Wanis-St. John and Kew (2008) find a correlation between direct civil society involvement in the peacebuilding process and lasting peace. Nilsson (2012) undertakes the first statistical study addressing the relationship between civil society actors and lasting peace. Nilsson finds that, where civil society actors are included in the peace process, either through being a part of the peace negotiations or in the process of peacebuilding following the peace deal, the risk of peace failing between the signatories is reduced by 64 per cent and the risk of overall peace failure is reduced by 50 per cent (Nilsson, 2012: 258).

The 1999 agreement provided for an "inclusive national dialogue" towards lasting peace and the return of democracy in the Republic of the Congo (article 13). The Agreement further called for compliance of ethical policies and a guarantee of pluralist expression of public opinion (article 13). These two articles do represent positive steps towards the peacebuilding process. Indeed the inclusive national dialogue led to a referendum passing a new constitution in 2002 (UCDP, 2011). Further, in article 7, NGOs are called upon for their assistance in rehabilitating and retraining former members of armed factions. In article 9, all citizens and organised groups are asked to contribute to the collection of weapons under the auspices of the monitoring commission.

It is unfortunate, however, that civil society actors were not included in the monitoring commission which was made up of the Security Forces and FADR (article 6 of the deed supporting the commission). Civil society can play an important role in monitoring peace agreements whereby the society becomes accountable to its own members rather than solely to an international commission. The provisions in the 1999 agreement provided only for a "top-down" approach to peacebuilding that failed to adequately recognise the important role that civil society actors plays in peacebuilding in a "bottom-up" approach. The signing of a peace agreement represents an opportunity for military and government leaders to reach out to civil society actors and to engage those actors in the process of peacebuilding. Emphasising the role of civil society actors in the 1999 agreement would likely have strengthened the legitimacy of the peace process and reduced the risk of failure.

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) form a central part of the agreement. All members of armed factions were called upon to relinquish their weapons and resign their membership of the armed faction in exchange for integration into the security forces, civil service or educational institutions (article 5). The peace agreement provided amnesty for all former members of armed groups who have laid down their arms (article 5). Militiamen were to be integrated into the military at the same rank that they held prior to the peace agreement. Spear (1999) argues that amnesty provisions are important for DDR to be successful. The agreement is, however, silent about the process of DDR to be adopted and, consequently, the monitoring commission was to determine the process of DDR on its own.

Military integration forms an important part of the 1999 agreement. It was seen as necessary to establish security guarantees and overcome the domestic security dilemma among parties to the conflict. According to Darby and MacGinty (2008), integration of opposing forces into the military is primarily a way of providing security guarantees for the more vulnerable

parties and is seen as a way of avoiding commitment problems in peace agreements. Glassmyer and Sambanis (2008) could not find a significant relationship between military integration and lasting peace. The authors then posit that military integration is an economic incentive against rebel remobilisation and therefore find that civilian reintegration should act as a substitute for military integration. Civilian reintegration should involve vocational training and other programmes to facilitate the transition to civilian life.

Darby and MacGinty (2008) argue that while successful military mergers and other military reforms can have an impact on short-term stabilisation of a peace process, police reforms and accompanying steps towards reduced military power arguably have more impact on the prospects for long-term peace. In order for DDR to be successful it must be closely tied to security sector reform (SSR). SSR is a whole-of-government approach to reforming the military, police force, statutory armed forces, the justice system and the monitoring bodies of these institutions (Schnabel and Born, 2008). The 1999 agreement provides for the reorganisation of the security forces (article 6) and creates a National Committee for the Reorganisation of the Security Forces (article 7), but the agreement failed to recognise the far reaching reforms needed to undertake full security sector reform.

Following the 1999 agreement, around 30,000 former fighters left their armed groups and the security situation in the country improved significantly (UCDP, 2011). However, in 2002, following power struggles within the government, there was a return to conflict between the Ntsiloulous and government troops (UCDP, 2011). In 2003 the Ntsiloulous and the government entered negotiations which resulted in a peace accord termed "Accords of Reaffirmation of the 1999 Accords" (UCDP, 2011). The agreement provides an amnesty to Nitsoulous soldiers and their integration into the national military. However full integration continues to be delayed largely because Nitoumi continues to demand a post in government (UCDP, 2011). Armed clashes between Ntsiloulous supporters and government troops were last reported in 2007 and the current situation in the Congo is relatively stable (UCDP, 2011). 🌿

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LPI in Congo Brazzaville

The Life & Peace Institute was engaged in community-based, bottom-up peacebuilding in the Republic of Congo (also called Congo Brazzaville) between 2000 and 2009. The engagement was initiated by the Swedish Covenant Church and designed as an accompaniment with the ambition to strengthen local non-governmental organisations and grassroots actors striving to promote peace and sustainable development. There was particular emphasis on the activities of churches and faith-based associations. LPI's national partner was the Resources Group on Peace and Reconciliation (GRPR), formed by Congolese citizens actively involved in civil society peacebuilding initiatives.

With support primarily from the Swedish governmental agency Sida, LPI supported a number of peace initiatives in partnership with the GRPR. The activities included publication and documentation, communication and training of civil society leaders in justice, reconciliation and conflict transformation, support to media with an emphasis on a Media Ombudsman



PHOTO: LPI

As part of an LPI project in Congo Brazzaville journalists from all types of media gathered to explore what they could do to contribute to peace.

function and peace education. Furthermore, the work included projects that had a human rights orientation, support to women's organisations, engagement in civil-military relations, monitoring and evaluation, cooperation with Congolese scholars and research.

A research report (2007) summaries three studies on civil society and peacebuilding in the Republic of Congo. It is available on LPI's website www.life-peace.org and print copies can be ordered from LPI.