



Armed Conflicts Report

Congo-Brazzaville [Republic of Congo] (1997 - first combat deaths)

The peace agreement signed in 2000 held through 2001 and there were no reports of fighting between government and rebel forces. In a symbolic gesture 800 weapons were turned over by rebel groups in April 2001 and publicly destroyed to emphasize both sides' commitment to peace.

Summary

Type of Conflict

Parties to the Conflict

Status of the Fighting

Number of Deaths

Political Developments

Background

Arms Sources

Economic Factors

Summary:

2000 Following the signing of a cease-fire agreement between the warring parties in January, the demobilization of militia and improved access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the security situation in the country improved substantially. There were no reports of fighting. Thousands of militia members were disarmed and thousands of civilians and refugees returned to their homes. There were no reports of conflict related deaths this year.

1999 Armed confrontations between government forces and militia groups persisted, with most intense fighting in the first half of the year. The death toll of more than 1,000 was similar to 1998.

1998 Abandoning a tenuous peace in place since October 1997, government forces and rebel troops renewed the country's civil war in late 1998. Following months of sporadic fighting, the rebels infiltrated Brazzaville's southern suburbs in early December and the government, with Angolan military support, responded with an intensive counterstrike.

Type of Conflict:

State control

Parties to the Conflict:

1) The army and the Cobra militia of President Denis Sassou Nguesso who won the June-October 1997 round of the civil war.

"The regular army has traditionally been led by officers mainly from northern Congo. A portion of the army reportedly remained sympathetic to Sassou after his defeat by Lissouba in the 1992 elections. Since his return to power, Sassou's control over the army has, however, been tenuous. One of the problems has been irregular payment of soldiers' salaries. The army is supported by Angolan troops, who have remained in the country since helping Sassou win the 1997 war." [IRIN, February 19, 1999]

"The Cobra members are drawn from Sassou's sparsely-populated northern Congo. Since Sassou's return to power, it has been difficult to make a clear distinction between the Cobra and the regular army. Human rights groups have accused ill-disciplined Cobra militia of rape, arbitrary killings and other abuses against civilians. The number of Cobras is estimated by 'L'Autre Afrique' magazine at 8,000. While Sassou has integrated some into the regular army, many Cobras not selected for integration have retained their weapons and resorted to banditry and looting. Recent reports indicate a factionalism within the ranks of the Cobra." [IRIN, February 19, 1999]

Versus

2) The Cocoye militia;

"Former President Pascal Lissouba Abuilt up his own militia when his political opponents created the Ninja and the Cobra. Since the end of the 1997 war, his Cocoye militia, also called Zulus, have remained active in the southwestern regions of Niari, Bouenza and Lekoumou (known collectively as Nibolek). In April 1998, Cocoye militia took over the Moukoulou hydro-electric dam near Mouyondzi, cutting off electricity to much of southern Congo including the economic capital of Pointe-Noire for weeks. The crisis was resolved following an agreement between the Cocoye and a government delegation." [IRIN, February 19, 1999]

3) The Ninja militia;

"The Ninja are allied to Bernard Kolelas, who was former president Pascal Lissouba's last prime minister and mayor of Brazzaville until Lissouba was defeated by Sassou's forces in the June-October 1997 civil war. Kolelas remained neutral through most of the war and served as a mediator in the early part of the conflict. However, he later threw in his Ninja militia on the side of Lissouba in an unsuccessful joint attempt to defeat Sassou's forces. The Ninja then retreated into Kolelas' home region of Pool, which surrounds Brazzaville. The security situation in the Pool region has remained uncertain since then, with clashes between government forces and the Ninja intensifying in late September 1998." [IRIN, February 19, 1999]

Status of Fighting:

2000 Following the signing of a cease-fire agreement between the warring parties in January, the demobilization of militia and improved access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the security situation in the country improved substantially. There were no reports of fighting. Thousands of militia members were disarmed; the fittest are to be integrated into the army and the rest to return to civilian life. Meanwhile, thousands of civilians and refugees returned to their homes.

[Sources: IRIN, 24 February 2000]

"A committee established to follow up December's peace deal was currently engaged in the voluntary disarmament of militias. Up to now, 3,000 militiamen had handed in some 5,000 guns in an operation scheduled for completion in two months' time, Djombo added." [IRIN, 10 March 2000]

"The President of the Republic of Congo, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, has said the military phase of the national reconciliation process had all but ended, 'in the sense that there is no more war... [that] peace has undeniably returned to the whole national territory'. In an interview with Radio France Internationale, broadcast on Monday, he said the government was continuing to collect weapons, mobilise militiamen to disarm, and assist the people who have surrendered their weapons to go back to their villages and towns." [IRIN, 14 July 2000]

"Of an estimated 810,000 displaced persons (including tens of thousands of refugees), more than 630,000 had returned to their places of origin by July, according to OCHA statistics." [IRIN, 2 August 2000]

1999 Fighting between government forces and militias in the Republic of Congo continued, with most clashes taking place in first half of the year. Militia members destroyed villages of people suspected of assisting infiltrators or contemplating a return to government-controlled areas. Fighting decreased in the last few months of the year, allowing some refugees to return home.

"There were credible reports that rebels burned villages suspected of harboring infiltrators or whose inhabitants contemplated returning to government-controlled areas. During rebel advances in the town of Dolisie in January and February, opposition "Cocoye" militiamen summarily executed government officials and military officers in the town, although precise numbers are unknown." [Congo Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1999, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, 2000]

"Eight militiamen allied to former president Pascal Lissouba were killed on 7 November in a clash with the army at Lougui, about 80 km southwest of Brazzaville, news agencies reported. AFP quoted army spokesman Jean-Robert Obargui as saying on Tuesday that there were no casualties on the government's side." [IRIN, November 12, 1999]

"Four Ninja militiamen were killed during a clash with government forces at Mayama about 80 km west of Brazzaville, army spokesman Colonel Jean-Robert Obargui said last week. Reuters quoted him as saying several government soldiers had been wounded in the clash." [IRIN, October 29, 1999]

"The number of refugees who fled to Gabon in the past couple of weeks to avoid fighting in ROC now stands at around 30,000, with the border provinces of Nyanga and Haut Ogooue having taken most of the influx. Some 2,000 are estimated to have made their way to the capital, Libreville." [IRIN, July 27, 1999]

1998 Renewed fighting occurred later in the year, as rebel insurgents were unwilling to accept President Denis Sassou Nguesso's military government. After intermittent conflict began to break down the peace in September and October, a major strike against the government took place in December through the re-entrance into Brazzaville. Many civilians were killed in this insurgency. A

brutal, four day counterstrike by the Government left hundreds dead, including numerous civilians, and fighting carried on into the new year with little chance of peace foreseen for the near future.

"The combats have pitted forces loyal to President Denis Sassou Nguesso against the Ninjas, a militia that supports ex-Prime Minister Bernard Kolelas... The Ninjas, who control the Pool region just south of Brazzaville, had infiltrated the capital's southern suburbs late last year. The regular army reacted on December 15th with an offensive against these areas. With the help of the Cobras, the President's militia and the Angolan army, which helped Sassou win the 1997 civil war - the army has been pounding neighborhoods and villages south of the capital." [*IPS News Service*, Feb 2, 1999]

"Amnesty International today condemned the deliberate and arbitrary killings of unarmed civilians as well as other abuses, including indiscriminate shelling of civilian targets perpetrated by government forces and armed opposition groups in and around the capital, Brazzaville. The organization has received reports of government forces, including President Denis Sassou Nguesso's own militia known as Cobras, deliberately killing unarmed civilians suspected of supporting the armed opposition group known as Ninjas loyal to former Prime Minister Bernard Kolelas. Government forces are also reported to be using heavy weapons such as multiple rocket launchers to shell heavily populated areas said to be strongholds of the Ninjas. There are also reports that Ninjas have targeted unarmed civilians suspected to be government supporters. Combatants on both sides are reported to be raping women and deliberately wounding civilians." [*Amnesty International News Release*, December 23, 1998]

Number of Deaths:

Total: 7,000 to 11,000.

2000 There were no reports of conflict-related deaths this year.

1999 As many as 2,000 people were reportedly killed in southern Brazzaville during December 1998 and in early January 1999 in addition to people killed in other areas during the rest of 1999. An estimated 810,000 people, many of whom were recent returnees, were internally displaced by the end of the year.

"Numerous sources in Brazzaville have claimed that as many as 2,000 civilians, many of them elderly people who had failed to flee, were killed in southern Brazzaville's Makélékélé and Baongo districts during December 1998 and in early January 1999." [*Amnesty International*, March 25, 1999]

"The estimated 810,000 displaced people and recent returnees in the Republic of Congo were among the >largest groups of forgotten humanitarian victims's, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the Republic of Congo William Paton said on Wednesday. Although the overall situation in the country was improving and fighting had declined in recent months, there were still grave humanitarian needs that had to be addressed, Paton told a press briefing at the UN headquarters." [*IRIN*, November 12, 1999]

1998 As many as 1,000 people, many civilians, were killed during renewed fighting, most of which occurred during the December insurgency. An additional 100,000 to 150,000 people were displaced.

"Thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes into forests in the Pool region and as many as 15,000 are reported to have fled to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. Amnesty International fears that those who are internally displaced may be at risk of further human rights abuses, starvation or disease." [*Amnesty International News Release*, December 29, 1998]

Political Developments:

2000 In January, the government and the umbrella group representing the country's rebel militias, the National Resistance Council (CNR), signed an accord to end the country's civil war.

"...The new accord followed secret negotiations between the Congolese Armed Forces and the CNR, mediated by the president of Gabon, Omar Bongo, in his nation's capital, Libreville...The accord provides for a general amnesty for those who lay down arms, a cease-fire, and the cessation of hostilities throughout the country...The accord also calls for all qualified militiamen to be recruited into the army and the police." [*InterPress Service*, 4 January 2000]

"In its broadest outlines, the peace plan provides for a five-year transitional period, led by President Nguesso, a round table conference uniting the government with all other political parties, civil society, and finally an accord to end the hostilities in the Congo." [*InterPress Service*, 4 January 2000]

"The Congolese government has presented a three-step plan to achieve sustainable peace in the country. A public memorandum recently presented to the international community stated that, first, a national dialogue on reconstruction would be organised. A transitional period would then include institutional rehabilitation and the adoption of a new constitution. The third phase would be the holding of free and fair elections." [*IRIN*, 6 April 2000]

"All inclusive national reconciliation talks are to be held in Republic of Congo before the end of the year to find a consensual and final solution to the crisis, which has engulfed the country since the 1997 civil war...Participants in the talks would define a new transitional period and establish an electoral calendar." [*Panafrican News Agency*, 23 October 2000]

1999 In November, officials from the armed forces and Ninja and Coceye militia representatives signed a truce calling for the cessation of hostilities. Within a month, the government adopted an amnesty bill for Awar-related crimes.

"The cabinet on Wednesday adopted an amnesty bill for >war-related crimes=, referring to the country=s civil wars from 1993-1999, Congolese radio reported. According to the bill, all combatants who withdraw from militia groups and lay down their weapons by the end of this year will benefit from the measure. However those who >misused= their positions will be excluded. Under the bill, victims of the wars can sue the culprits and claim damages, the radio reported." [IRIN, December 10, 1999]

"Congo's armed forces and representatives of the Ninja and Cocoye rebel militias signed an accord in the southern port city of Pointe-Noire on Tuesday calling for a cessation of hostilities, news agencies reported. The accord called for "the unconditional, nationwide end of armed clashes between the different militias and government forces," Reuters reported." [IRIN, November 19, 1999]

1998 A forum on unity and national reconciliation in January 1998 was unable to ease tensions and avert the renewed fighting which followed later in the year. There were no official peace talks planned at years end.

Background:

Since its first democratic elections to elect President Pascal Lissouba in 1992, the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville or Congo-B) periodically has endured conflict, largely between the ethnic-based private militias of three rival presidential candidates. In June 1997, one month before new presidential elections, government forces under President Lissouba attempted to arrest members of a private militia led by the pre-1992 head of state, Gen. Denis Sassou-Nguesso. Fighting between the forces of the two rival election candidates escalated to a civil war that emptied the capital Brazzaville of most of its population of 800,000. In October, Lissouba fled Brazzaville (and eventually the country) after the intervention of Angolan military troops and equipment in support of Sassou-Nguesso who formed a new government. The Angolan intervention was reportedly in response to Lissouba's fraternization with UNITA rebels opposed to the Angolan government. Attempts by the UN and the Organization of African Unity at mediation during the conflict failed, and a forum on unity and national reconciliation in January 1998 was unable to avert the renewed fighting.

"During the Congolese National Convention in the late 80s that preceded the 1992 elections, it was revealed that as President for nearly a decade, Dennis Sassou Nguesso had stashed away billions of French francs derived from the country's immense oil wealth. Indeed when he returned to power this month, some French analysts called him "ELF's man," in reference to the French oil company ELF that has petroleum mining concessions in Congo.... Nguesso therefore had sufficient wealth and connections to sustain his private Cobra militias, five years after he lost power." [The All Africa Press Service, ALessons From Turmoil In Congo Brazzaville," October 27, 1997]

"The civil war between rebels of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) led by Jean-Pierre Bemba and government forces in the Equator province, north-east of Kinshasa, is taking a heavy toll on neighbouring Congo (Brazzaville). The country, which is barely emerging from two devastating civil wars, currently hosts thousands of refugees in the Likouaka province fleeing from the war on the west bank of the Oubangui River. According to official statistics released by the National Department for Assistance to Refugees, the number of refugees has increased from 73,000 in July to 117,000." [Panafican News Agency, 4 October 2000]

Arms Sources:

1999 Italy recently supplied transport aircraft to the Congo-B government. The militias have access to arms through black markets fed by regional conflicts, while a substantial amount of the rebel arms have been brought in by Angolan troops.

"Congo (Brazzaville) received three G-222 transport aircraft from Italy and three Mi-8 helicopters from Russia in 1995-96. The most recent deliveries of combat equipment were some 12 ex-Soviet MiG-21 fighter aircraft in the late 1980s. However, the only major weapons that seem to have influenced the conflict belonged not to the Congolese armed forces but to Angolan units supporting the rebels which ousted the government in 1997" [SIPRI Yearbook 1998]

Economic Factors:

1999 Economic ambitions of Congolese leaders are regarded as one of the main driving forces of the civil war. The Republic of Congo is sub-Saharan Africa's fourth largest oil producer after Nigeria, Angola, and Gabon.

"Congo's economy consists mainly of village agriculture, an urban informal sector (i.e., unregulated business, commerce, and service activities), and an industrial sector dominated by oil and oil-related services. Since the 1980s, the oil industry has provided the major share of government revenues and exports, replacing timber production and exports as the principle growth sector. Oil accounts for 70% of Congolese government revenue and 85% of Congo's exports. Oil exports grew from approximately \$820 million in 1994 to nearly \$1.3 billion in 1997...

"... what we have in Congo is a competition for scarce resources, made more desperate by the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) insistence on budgetary austerity and cuts in the numbers and pay of civil servants. More than half of the country's three million people live in the towns of Brazzaville and Pointe Noire, many in shanty suburbs defined according to the ethnic and regional origins of their inhabitants." [Institute for Strategic Studies, Occasional Paper, September 1999]

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