

## Behind DR Congo's war games

By Arnaud Zajtman

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**The Masisi Hospital, deep in the green mountains of war-torn eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, is a place of miracles.**

Run by aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres and cut off from supplies because of insecurity, it is still treating wounded civilians and fighters from all sides of the conflict.

Some of the patients seem to have miraculously survived this war between renegade Gen Laurent Nkunda on the one side and the national army and various militias on the other.

A woman and her baby were admitted with only flesh wounds after a bullet skimmed between her and the infant she was carrying on her back.

Similarly a Rwandan Hutu militiaman had his vital organs spared even though a bullet tore through his cheek into his elbow and out through his back.

A direct witness of such extraordinary escapes, it is no wonder that Commander Bravo believes in miracles.

Before the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda in 1994, he was an army colonel, now he is one of some 6,000 Rwandan Hutu militia hiding out in DR Congo.

### Worlds apart

The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), as the militia is known, is hoping to go back to Rwanda, where 800,000 Tutsis were killed in 1994, and seize power.

"Those currently in power in Rwanda have spent over 30 years in the bush, but they managed to fight their way back in. We will do the same," Commander Bravo says.

Only a few kilometres away, Rwanda seems worlds apart from the mayhem surrounding Masisi.

It is a country that is trying to put the trauma of ethnic violence behind it by building a modern nation.

Its capital, Kigali, is now a large building site where people can step in the local bank and get a loan to buy a property, something quite extraordinary in Africa.

But it is these FDLR fighters deep in the Congolese bush who many allege represent the main cause for instability in eastern DR Congo.



More than 300,000 people have sought shelter in camps

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-FDLR's Commander Bravo



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## **Mission**

Others blame the troops of Gen Nkunda, whose troops in recent months have stormed dozens of Congolese villages driving more than 370,000 civilians into displaced camps.

"We tried to wipe out the FDLR, at least we were doing something against them," says Gen Nkunda, sitting in his straw hut camp in the mountainous stronghold of Kitchanga.

Surrounded by his own heavily armed militiamen, he holds a cane - the head of an eagle carved into its handle.

"As long as the Hutu rebels are not disarmed, we will continue to fight," he says.

He has an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 well-armed troops and claims to protect the Tutsi population of eastern DR Congo.

But many believe that Gen Nkunda, a former member of the Rwandan army, is also fighting a proxy war on behalf of Rwanda to keep the Rwandan Hutu militiamen at a distance from the DR Congo-Rwanda border.

## **'Same enemy'**

In recent months, new local militia groups have appeared in the east on the pretext of fighting Gen Nkunda.

Instead of disarming all these disparate groups, some witnesses believe the authorities have encouraged collaboration between them and the UN-backed army.

"We all share the same enemy: Laurent Nkunda and his men," says Commander Bravo.

One of the only places where top commanders of all the different Congolese militia groups coexist peacefully is the Masisi Hospital.

The other is at the workshops held by the Initiative for Collaborative Leadership and State Cohesion (ILCCE), an international think tank that promotes peace in eastern DR Congo.

For ILCCE's Michel Nourredine Kassa, who is not always successful in getting the foes to talk, the solution is at the same time simple and very complicated to implement.

"It is only when the FDLR are dealt with that stability will return to DR Congo," he says.

Thirteen years on from the Rwandan genocide, the region and the international community have not managed to resolve its consequences, he says.

As long as this is not done, fighters in DR Congo's bush will continue to dream of taking power in Kigali, while traumatised genocide-survivors may continue to use eastern DR Congo as their battlefield.

