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## Militias in Congo Tied to Government and Rwanda

By [LYDIA POLGREEN](#)

GOMA, [Congo](#) — A report to the [United Nations Security Council](#) by a panel of independent experts found evidence of links between senior officials of the Congolese and Rwandan governments and the armed groups fighting in eastern Congo. The findings portray a complex proxy struggle between the nations, with each using armed forces based in the area to pursue political, financial and security objectives in a region ravaged by conflict.

The report, which was based on months of independent research in the region, gives the clearest picture yet of the underpinnings of the fighting in eastern Congo, revealing a sordid network of intertwined interests in Congo and [Rwanda](#) that have fueled the continuing chaos.

Tiny Rwanda and its vast neighbor to the west, Congo, have long been connected by a shared history of ethnic strife. In the aftermath of the [Rwandan genocide](#) in 1994, Hutu militias that carried out the killing fled into Congo, then known as Zaire.

In 1996, Rwanda backed a rebel force led by [Laurent Kabila](#) that ultimately toppled Congo's longtime president, [Mobutu Sese Seko](#). The initial aim had been to capture the Hutu fighters who had carried out the genocide, but the fighting devolved into a frenzy of plundering of Congo's minerals, spawning a conflict that drew in half a dozen nations and left as many as five million people dead. Most died of hunger and disease.

The report's findings on the current conflict are likely to strain already tense relations between the countries, providing ammunition for each. Congolese officials have accused Rwanda of supporting Tutsi rebels led by a renegade general from the same ethnic group as much of Rwanda's establishment.

Rwanda has accused Congo's government of colluding with an armed group led by some of the Hutu militia who carried out the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. These are the fighters who fled afterward to Congo and eventually formed a group known by its French abbreviation, the F.D.L.R. It preys on Congolese civilians and enriches itself with the country's gold, tin and coltan, a mineral used in making the tiny processors in electronic equipment.

The independent experts found extensive evidence of high-level communication between the government of Rwanda and the Tutsi rebel group known as the Congress for the Defense of the People, led by the renegade general [Laurent Nkunda](#), based on reviews of satellite phone records.

The report said that the calls were "frequent and long enough to indicate at least extensive sharing of information."

In interviews, several of General Nkunda's fighters described Rwandan soldiers' helping the rebels inside

Congo, according to the report. Rwandan soldiers also helped bring recruits, some of them children, to Congo's border to fight in General Nkunda's rebellion, the report said.

It also investigated how General Nkunda was paying for his militia, documenting hundreds of thousands of dollars in payments for taxes in territory that he controls. The report also named prominent business executives who had backed him financially.

Congo's military, meanwhile, has been collaborating with the Hutu militia that is led by the authors of the Rwandan genocide, according to the report. The weak and undisciplined Congolese Army has frequently relied on help from these fighters in battling General Nkunda's troops.

In exchange for ammunition, the militia fighters have helped in numerous offensives, the report said, citing by name several senior Congolese military officers who had handed over matériel to the Hutu forces. According to satellite phone records, senior military and intelligence figures in Congo have spoken frequently with top Hutu militia leaders.

"It is obvious that Rwandan authorities and Congolese authorities are aware of support provided to rebel groups," Jason K. Stearns, the coordinator for the five-member panel that produced the report, said Friday at a news conference at the [United Nations](#). "They haven't done anything to bring it to an end."

He said the Congolese government said that it had no policy to aid the Hutu militia but that there might be support from individual military commanders. Both governments said that telephone records showing conversations between officials and rebels did not constitute support, he added.

*Neil MacFarquhar contributed reporting from the United Nations.*

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