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PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

MICHAEL O'HANLON
Senior Fellow and Co-Director, Africa Security Initiative
The Brookings Institution

Panelists:

FRANCESCA BOMBOKO
Director
Bureau d'Etudes pour les Recherches et
Consulting International (BERCI)

DANIELLE RESNICK
David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Global Economy and Development
The Brookings Institution

JASON K. STEARNS
Founder and Chair of Congo Research Group

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning and good day everyone in the United States, Canada, around the world, wherever else you may be, and certainly friends in the Democratic Republic of Congo. My name is Mike O'Hanlon, I'm a senior fellow at Brookings, and the co-director with Vanda Felbab-Brown at the Africa Security Initiative. Also a former Peace Corps volunteer for the former Zaire in 1982 and 1984 in the great city of Pique, so I hope some friends there may be watching. But I am just thrilled today to be able to convene and honor and publicize the work of outstanding scholars, practitioners, activists, who have thought long and hard about Congo.

And we're going to begin with a discussion of Jason Stearns' new book "The War that Doesn't Say its Name." Jason has an uncanny ability both for choosing outstanding titles as well as for the amazing field research he's done now for a couple of decades or longer in DRC. Also having created the Congo Research Group at New York University where he's still active, and he's assistant professor at Simon Fraser University out in the great wild west of British Columbia in Canada where he resides.

So he will begin today with a little bit of an opening, talking about two or three of the major themes of his book, which certainly, as many of you will have gathered from the title or having read it yourselves already, underscores the degree to which the conflict, especially in Eastern Congo, as just proven intractable. Really is almost the world's number one forever war, and there's almost a political economy that perpetuates this, has made it very hard to solve or stop despite the presence of a UN peacekeeping mission and a UN peace deal for a couple of decades. So that is the starting point.

We will then, with great privilege and pleasure, turn to Francesca Bomboko who is a Congolese citizen, Columbia University graduate, many wonderful things she's done throughout her career. Today she leads the Bureau d'Etudes pour les Recherches and Consulting International, BERCI, as it's, you know, its shortened and by its acronym in

French. And she will speak not only to Jason's book and the thesis that he will have laid out at that point, but also to her broader views about the state of politics and conflict in the DRC today.

Then my colleague, Danielle Resnick, will speak, and maybe take a little broader prism on how friends in Congo relate to broader issues and trends than the great Continent of Africa. She is a David Rubenstein fellow at the Brookings Institution. She's part of the Africa Growth Initiative, a related sister effort that we are privileged and pleased again to partner within our work at Africa Security Initiative.

And her most recent book is "Urban Poverty and Party Populism in African Democracies," as well as many other publications that she's produced over the years and done field research in close to a dozen African countries.

So that's the basic format. After we hear from each of the three, I'll add a couple of questions myself and then we'll hope to get some of your thoughts and questions at Events@Brookings.edu. The email address if you'd like to send those in, would be at Events@Brookings.edu, and as moderator I will try to sort of condense some of those questions into ones that I can then pose to the panel in our last 20 minutes or so.

So that's the game plan. Again, thank you everyone for joining. Merci mengi as we say in Pique, and Jason, over to you my friend.

MR. STEARNS: Thanks very much, Mike. Thank you everyone for being here. I will try to be brief since we have a lot scheduled.

There are academic reasons that I wrote this book, and some of the book does actually engage with the academic literature on wars, the kind of methodologies we use. But the main reason I wrote this book is due to a moral urgency.

The main paradox that I highlight is that after the two first wars in the Congo, the great wars of 1996 and 2003, a peace deal was signed involving massive international involvement, the African Union, the United Nations. And due to this peace deal the country was reunited, all former belligerence merged into a new National Army. A new

constitution was passed and the Third Republic was forged, in which we now find ourselves today in the Congo.

This Third Republic is characterized by democratic institutions, and in 2006 the first truly democratic elections were held in over 40 years. That was a huge success. And yet violence in the Congo has persisted, it's even escalated, becoming more amorphous, less sensational, less newsworthy, but no less detrimental.

Today as we speak there are 5.6 million people displaced in the Eastern Congo. That is more than ever before in Congolese history, around 2 million more than at the height of the great Congo wars. That's also more than anywhere else in the world outside of Syria. There are 120 armed groups fighting over a host of different, often extremely parochial issues. And the Congo has largely disappeared from news headlines and the priorities of the United Nation's Security Council, the U.S. government and others. It's a war, as one Congolese friend told me, that does not say its name, hence the title for the book.

And so the question that my book seeks to answer is why, why does this war, why did it persist despite all of this involvement, and what did we get wrong. What did outsiders get wrong, what did the Congolese themselves perhaps get wrong. Part of the answer I provide, but I won't dwell on it too much here if you read the book. It's historical like trace the trajectory of the peace process to try to understand what happened. And broadly speaking, the peace deal that was signed in 2002, despite all of its successes, also carried inside it the seeds of a new war. It was lopsided, with one of the most powerful belligerence, the RCD that controlled a third of the country, was feted to be decimated at the upcoming elections. It knew this, and it launched a sort of Plan B, a new rebellion, the CNDP in 2004 with the backing of the Rwandan government.

In response, the new Congolese government under Joseph Kabila, still unsure of itself, unsure of the loyalties of the new National Army responded not by creating an efficient disciplined Army, but rather by bolstering patronage networks within the security

forces and supporting proxy militias in the Eastern Congo. This was the beginning of the fragmentation that continues until today.

Underlying this was a misunderstanding by many actors, especially foreign donors that invested over \$40 billion, sent the largest peacekeeping mission in the world to the Congo. A misunderstanding of what was driving the crisis. In the civil wars literature or in the literature on conflict we can often find variables that people seek to use to explain conflicts. Natural resources, poverty, ethnicity, land, all of these play an important role in the Congo, very important role in the Congo. But for me the importance is not in understanding variables because they actually don't sufficiently explain the crisis, I can get back to that if you want.

But what I focus on is the nature of the Congolese in the Rwandan states. For me these are the two most critical actors and I spend most of my book focusing on understanding how they perceive their own interests and how they're structured. For a parenthesis, I think actually this parallels a lot of debates that are currently being had on the Ukraine and understanding the interests of the Russian state and the Russian leadership in what's going on in Ukraine.

In brief, in the Congo over 25 years of fighting, many have suffered from the conflicts, but a slim class of commanders and politicians has merged and the Congo has become a source of survival and profit. That's what I call Military Bourgeoisie. These protagonists have had little interest in bringing an end to a conflict that was peripheral for the government but for many combatants has become a livelihood. Conflict in other words, as well as peacemaking, has become an end in itself. The fighting has become carried forward by its own momentum.

Meanwhile foreign donors and diplomats provide food and urgent health care for millions, preventing the Congolese state from collapsing, but unable to bring about transformation change. The Congolese have developed their own often very witty ways of expressing the sad state of affairs. In the Eastern Congo one could often hear no Nkunda,

no job. That's referring the main rebel commander in 2008, or more recently they refer to Ebola Business, relating to the humanitarian efforts to bring an end to the Ebola conflict in the Eastern Congo.

The Congolese, the great Congolese author, In Koli Jean Bofane, explains this culture of a l'ethique or unethical behavior in his novel *Mathematiques Congolaises*. The protagonist in this novel, who's a mathematical savant, makes use of his skills to uncover the hidden logic of Congolese politics. Having grown up in poverty he puts his creativity to use for a powerful government minister, only to discover that his boss was staging falsified protests in order to manipulate public opinion and crack down on his opponents.

And so in Congolese culture, in Congolese sayings, even in pop music, the fantastic Congolese, very eccentric Congolese pop star, Koffi Olomide, once said (speaks French), which means we live in a system of hell, everywhere the fire is raging but we don't get burned. Throughout all these sayings you can see the Congolese themselves understand that the involution, as I put it, of the Congolese conflict, the degree to which the conflict has folded in on itself and perpetuates itself through its own logic.

Part of this is through naked economic interests, as Mike pointed out, the political economy of the conflict. But part of this, and this is important for me, is also highlighting this has become ideational, or even cultural. There's been a normalization of violence, in particular through a cultivation of apathy both in the Congo and abroad, through the essentialization of identity. That's just the way the people are in the East, that's just the way things are. And I discuss these two issues, these two trends, normalization and essentialization, in the book.

The second actor that I put a lot of emphasis on is the Rwandan government where different factors led to a very similar outcome. The Rwandan government itself was perhaps the most important actor in perpetuating the conflicts and making sure the conflicts would be reignited after the peace deal in 2003, and had become

invested in conflict at least until 2013 when its main proxy in the Eastern Congo, the M23, was defeated.

Here it was a very different set of factors that played into it. The RPFs, the ruling party's institutional cultural, internal conflicts within the government, and a concentration of power in the presidency or even in one person played an extremely important role.

In contrast with a lot of explanations for Rwanda's involvement, I don't think that either ethnic solidarity, in other words, solidarity with Kinyarwanda speaking people in the Eastern Congo or natural resources played a role. In fact the Rwandan government make much more money today off the natural resources in the Eastern Congo than it ever has in its history even though there are very few Rwandan soldiers, if any, deployed currently in the Eastern Congo.

Instead I focus on other factors, on the nature of the Rwandan government and the RPF ruling party itself. The RPF's main perceived threat come from its own Army, it doesn't face much threat from internal democracy. There's a President Kagame, runs a fairly tight shop in Kigali. And it knows that if it will be overthrown it will probably come from within its own ruling class, and from particular its own Army. It's also very afraid of the Uganda governments where itself was based when it was still a rebellion. And so therefore a lot of its focus has been trying to figure out how to manage its own ruling elite and how to manage its own Army.

Waging a war against "Genocide deger," in other words the people who carried the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, waging a war against them in the Congo focused the attention of the Rwandan defense forces and highlighted the ongoing threat of genocide. And the legitimacy of the RPF is really wrapped up in the genocide and the notion that it is the protector of the Rwandan people, especially the Tutsi, against the renewed genocide and that it brought an end to the genocide in 1994.

In sum, and I'd be happy to expand on this in question and answer. In sum,

I highlight the symbiosis of the Congolese conflict to the degree to which all the actors involved to a certain extent have an interest in perpetuating the conflict. It's a system of conflicts, it's not a grand conspiracy of conflict I don't believe, I believe many of these actors would prefer not to have a conflict in the Eastern Congo, but by the nature of the system it keeps on perpetuating itself.

Perhaps just to finish, some of the main flaws of international intervention in Eastern Congo, we misdiagnosed the Rwandan state and the Congolese state to a certain extent. We misdiagnosed in a sense that foreign donors believed, and I document this in my book, that the Rwandan government was actually not engaging in destabilization of the Eastern Congo in much of this period or did not play a major role at least in much of this period. And we were in a perverse situation where foreign donors were bankrolling the Rwandan state, often to the tune of around half of its budget at the same time as we were spending billions of dollars dealing with the humanitarian consequences of Rwandan involvement in the Eastern Congo.

We misdiagnosed the Congolese state by believing that it actually was trying, it had an interest in creating an efficient, even if authoritarian, state. That was not correct in the Congo, the Congolese government was not, and remains relatively apathetic towards the creation of a stable, secure Eastern Congo.

And finally, I think the liberal peace building model believed that by creating both simultaneously a democracy and a free market in the Congo that peace would come about. In other words by creating a democratic system that's the new Third Republic that we live in, as well as in liberalizing the economy, especially the mining sector, in inviting in or boosting foreign direct investment in the Congo, that that would stabilize the country, provide a peace dividend and stabilize the country. Instead what happened was the influx of billions of dollars in foreign direct investment, was very quickly captured by this new nation's elite and undermined the fledging democratic institutions that would be created during the transition and have undermined them until today because this new elite has captured much

of this wealth that came in, especially the mining sector.

So I'm going to keep it to there. I was asked to talk for around 12 to 15 minutes and I think that's about it. I very much welcome the thoughts of both Danielle and Francesca as well as Mike, as well as those of anybody else on the call. Thank you very much.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic overview, really succinct and eloquent and yet rich in detail and very accessible, so thank you. Let me ask one small follow up and then I will go to Francesca.

You talked about Rwanda, you talked about the various 120 armed ethnic groups, the various strifes and localities in the East. You talked about the role of the government, power brokers. Could you add a word about the UN peacekeeping mission? How have they been part of the problem? Is it just lack of capacity despite the relatively large size, or making the wrong political associations and alliances? How would you describe their roles?

MR. STEARNS: So I mean the UN peacekeeping mission, I was a member of the UN peacekeeping mission way back in the day. They played an extremely important role in bringing an end to the conflict and the peace deal in 2002. They were then, they shepherded through the transition, again with many successes. The fact that today the Congo is united, has a constitution, has democratic institutions, holds elections. Much of this is thanks to the UN peacekeeping mission.

You know, UN peacekeeping doctrine says, puts an emphasis on what they call the primacy of the political. In other words everything the UN does should be aimed at shepherding through a political process. That political process existed, and the UN played that role, with many flaws, but played that role up until 2006. In 2006 after the first elections, the government said we're sovereign now, we're a sovereign nation, we will not allow for you meddling in internal political affairs, and the UN transitioned into a post-conflict stabilization mission.

And this is the paradox. We are not at a post-conflict period, in many ways the conflict is very much alive. And there are 120 different armed groups. But there is no political process. Since 2006 there has been virtually no political process to engage, especially with those domestic actors. The UN is not playing the role of a political broker. It's been marginalized from that because the government doesn't want it to play that role. And the UN doesn't feel like it should meddle in internal affairs. And so you often see the UN being very reticent at commenting on what it perceives to be the affairs of a sovereign member state.

I mean to a certain degree there's nothing the UN can do about this, this is just the cards that it was dealt. But it refuses, and this is my criticism of the UN mission, it refuses even to acknowledge that. And it refuses, or at least its leaders, often refuse to acknowledge the fact that it's been politically marginalized, and it's dealing with a government in particular that does not often act in the best interests of its own system.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. Francesca, we're really honored to have you with us today. You've contributed so much to your country throughout your career and you have such a deep and rich perspective on these questions.

So I would just like to hand the floor to you to talk about Jason's book to the extent you wish, but also to just pick up the subjects that he's raised and talk about how things look in Congo to you today with the big problems, maybe the big possibilities, any, you know, positive trends you see as well, but just to help frame the subsequent policy discussion for us. And thanks again for joining today.

MS. BOMBOKO: Okay. Thank you. First of all I would like to say that I thought that Jason's book was very sensitive in a way, you know, there was no preconceived judgement of any of the issues that he talked about. And it shows a real understanding of the Congolese dynamic.

And three things came across to me while reading the book, misdiagnosis, missed opportunity, and lack of understanding of Congolese dynamic. Those are the three

issues that I think are coming across again and again in a different chapter as we go along. And I will try to relate that what's happening today.

One of the things that you talked about, you know, in your introduction, is how violence is seen as an acceptable and establishment of obtaining power and resources. It's still the case today and I do agree basically what described the best Congolese dynamic, but what I don't particularly agree is the onset of those dynamic. I would say that if you look at, you know, you need to really look at the root causes of it into the 60s, which I don't know, in English you say, mutiny, would you say that?

MR. O'HANLON: Mutiny.

MS. BOMBOKO: What you call mutiny.

MR. O'HANLON: A mutiny.

MS. BOMBOKO: Hello.

MR. O'HANLON: Mutiny.

MS. BOMBOKO: Yes, '60, and if you look at the profile of those soldiers, they were exactly the same profile of the rebels today. Meaning people with very little educations, people with really no sense of the state, and people who were gratified, which balance is a means to get political power at that time.

The first government of DRC gave in to all of the demands without any conditions. And, you know, if you look at the profile also of the people within that government, only two people had university degrees. So the weaknesses of the Congolese politician in the '60s to actually understand what was going on by giving in to the military, you know, after killing, after raping, you know, after looting, had some analysts actually saying that the real coup d'etat was not in 1965 but was in 1960.

In 1965 was just a recognitions of the military took over the situations. What we see and what you're describing in the 2003 and in the 2008 Congolese war is actually a reverse phenomenon. When people who originally didn't belong to the Army became, I mean if you look at the head of RDC Gombo, the head of MLC, to some extent, you know,

except maybe Joseph Kabila, people realized that the only way actually to gain political power was to actually join the rebellion.

And there's something that you described very well also with the example of the Mai-Mai team. You know, once the negotiation were actually over in the Sun City Peace Agreement, the (speaks French) they become, I mean people gain some political statutes, they also gain some political positions and they were selling their political positions. And this is something that's, it's not only, it's not only part of the, I would say conflict dynamic, it's also something that you see in different level of the society. I will just give you one example.

At the Security Council DRC has been known to sell a seat several times to an African country just to be able to actually, there was no political reasons particularly, but just to be able to survive. So it's also a question of survival of the different dynamics. I don't know if I understand myself correctly, please, Jason, help me out here. But this is something that I thought was very interesting.

About the missed opportunity. If we agree that the violence and the war, the armed organizations, give the means to seize power in DRC, we have really in 2018 a missed opportunity with the new elections. The elections actually, like you say, in 2006 was well perceived, 2011 a little less. The 2018, the latest one, we actually saw something that gave, I mean gave the power back to the Army, so to speak. Because Joseph Kabila, which is a product, a pure product of the Army, had to decide who won the elections. So if the system of avoiding violences could stop one day in DRC, we actually had a missed opportunity to do something in 2008.

And once we talked about the lack of understanding of Congolese dynamic there's something very interesting happening at the moment that we need to comment at the worldwide issue, particularly with Ukraine. Was a lot of people do not understand, particularly the international community, they do not understand the perception that DRC, and particularly DRC population, have with the conflicts. They thought with what we went through with sovereignty issue regarding the Eastern part of Congo, that the population will

actually support more so than they have been doing, particularly when you look at social networks, the conversations. The support is not what was expected. And there's a real huge debate here about, you know, some of the issues and also about the reactions of the international community, which can explain some of the issues that you brought out regarding the Congolese dynamic.

MR. O'HANLON: Francesca, can I ask you a question right there, and then I want to move on to Danielle in a minute and then come back to you on the policy discussion.

But I really would like to explore your thinking about President Tshisekedi. You just mentioned the 2018 elections were not impressive, Jason talks about those in his book. But he also acknowledges that President Tshisekedi seems to have partly pushed aside some of the Kabila since he became president, and perhaps that's a hopeful sign. I'd certainly like Jason to speak to that later as well. But from your point of view is there any positive movement at all in Congolese politics today? If you could comment on that, and then I'd like to go to Danielle and then come back to all three of you on the policy discussion.

MS. BOMBOKO: No, absolutely. Because in a way President Tshisekedi actually is true. You know, there was a saying in DRC by the old politicians that say it's the driver that changed but the car is still the same. So, you know, Jason is talking about the system, the system has not changed.

We have a new President, it's true, but what apparently, what President Tshisekedi basically and his team are doing is they're perpetuating the system that was put in place without trying to change anything out of the system. Profiting at the same time of the system but not initiating real change. To the exception maybe issues involving corruptions is something that we see a lot of action being taken. But the question is, are those actions actually taken to change the system or is it a way to replace some of the old actors of the system into new actors that would be from your team versus the other teams, basically what's going on.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, that's very helpful. And, sorry to interrupt, but that's very helpful. I just really want if I could go to Danielle and stay on this subject for a minute and then come back to all of you on the policy discussion as well as the questions we're getting from the audience.

Because, Danielle, I know you've studied African democracy more generally across the Continent, and just with your cross-national perspective, how the state of play in DRC look to you today. And then any other broad comments you'd like to make to set the tone for the conversation going forward.

Thanks to you as well for joining us.

MS. RESNICK: Yeah, thanks a lot, Michael, and thanks to Jason and Francesca.

I mean I think the DRC, it's really a quintessential case in so many respects, especially given that the African Continent has really seen a record number of insurgent and civil conflicts over the last five years and it really starts to raise a lot of questions. You know, about as Francesca was alluding to, you know, state legitimacy and sovereignty and what does it mean to be a nation state within territorial borders when service provision is extremely low, minimal accountability for corruption, and the government lacks a monopoly in the legitimate use of force.

So I think, you know, Jason's book's really a masterpiece in many, many respects, especially for those interested in understanding the war and ongoing conflict. But what I really like is he kind of debunks this academic impulse to uncover the one overriding cause of conflict and in turn the practitioner's impulse to find the one or two policy interventions needed to address it.

So it's clearly the story about conjunctural conditions, and this great concept he talks about the involution of interest. That comes about as conflicts are layer upon each other and new sources of patronage, you know, from various sources start to take precedent.

And also this generational clash between young and old and a reordering of the relevance of customary authority and ethnic relations. You have waves of refugees, immigrants, and IDTs over time.

And so for that reason I think it's really a cautionary tale about the long-term dynamic that can emerge in many of the other regions' conflicts.

I think as you noted, Michael, there's a lot of relevance to the rest of the region. Let me just touch briefly on six areas I think are key more broadly.

One of those Jason was, you know, was talking about towards the close of his remarks, the role of Rwanda. Is it a developmental state or a rogue state? You know, Jason showed the extent of Rwanda's role under Kadomi and the DRC and the need for Rwanda to have an amenable leader in Kancha to really, to continue to ensure Kabila's own regime longevity. And that clearly exacerbated the instability in the country.

There's really this ambivalent role the international community has with Rwanda. With on the one hand, you know, seeing within its border a highly lauded developmental state because it's commitment to national development and anti-corruption. And then on the other hand many saying that Rwanda's most prominent export is its military. And we haven't just seen this in the DRC, but we've also seen it in the Central African Republic and in Mozambique, you know, and the latter, the Mozambique and government controversially sidelined the Southern African Development Community and preferred to use the Rwanda's military to intervene to deal with insurgents there in the Cabo Delgado Region. So I think the role of Rwanda in the DRC really resonates more broadly in the region.

And secondly I think, you know, for me Jason's book raises a lot of questions about the right approach to peacekeeping in post-conflict settlements. There's this tradeoff that he points to, you know, about you either incorporate only the major actors in the hopes of reducing the log rolling and patronage needed to keep a wide cast of actors involved, or alternatively you have to keep the process broad enough to ensure that excluded groups don't destabilize the political settlement. But this ultimately becomes very

unwieldy for actual effective governance. This fragmentation issue that Jason points to.

And I think, you know, Sudan has been a really good example of this. You know there was an attempt to bring in a very broad tense, the military, the para military, the rebel forces into a coalition with citizens resistance committees, trade unions, and various opposition parties with very distinct interests and diverging incentives around the democratic transition, which as we saw in October, you know, eventually reversed course and went back to kind of a military government.

And third point relatedly is, you know, the inordinate attention sometimes given to elections as the false and point of the post-conflict settlement. Elections really change the rules of the game, and to some extent, you know, Jason argues that they, in some cases, you know, exacerbated parts of the conflict by solidifying military and societal divisions through the mechanism of political parties. Which I think you stated now there's more than 600 political parties in the country, which is mind blowing.

And at the same time the elections, you know, can both increase the stakes of winning, and if there's a credible threat for dissatisfied parties to defect and resume or form that conflict, elections do not always create that safety valve for conversation and debate that they hope they will. Especially if parties are emerging from rebel groups and militia rather than civil society.

So in this regard I think there's a lot of cautionary tales when the international community demands electoral timetables, you know, without examining the party landscape and concern who may have interest in derailing elections or undermining a democratic transition. This is where I think a lot of the recent demand from the international communities to hold elections as soon as possible in the Sahrawian countries that have been overrun by coups such as Farina Faso, Mali, and Guinea, you know, need to be carefully considered. Because elections are also the beginning rather than the end point of the post-conflict settlement.

Fourth is devolution and decentralization. You know, is that really an

answer to mitigate conflict, or does it, again, contribute to the fragmentation that Jason mentioned, you know, making it more difficult to reign in some of the various actors who foment conflict.

You know as Jason was talking about with the constitution in 2006 in the DRC, we've seen this gradual movement towards greater decentralization. I think it's been an ongoing process culminating I think in 2016 with the creation of 26 provinces, with a set of non-concurrent powers to the provinces, and using devolution as a hopefully way to mitigate tensions.

We've seen this across the continent and it raises a lot of questions, you know. The decentralization, devolution and/or federalism as a form of conflict resolution, is that the right approach? We've seen this raised with regards to civil war in Ethiopia where ethnic federalism had previously been viewed as a way to mitigate fights over controlling the center by giving local communities greater autonomy. But of course, you know, we saw the way it exacerbated different divisions in Ethiopia.

Similar questions being raised about devolution as a mitigation technique in Cameroon between the Anglophone and Francophone Regions. Mozambique changed its constitution recently to devolve a little bit more to appease the main opposition party and resistance group, Renamo (phonetic), and Kenya of course is the great example in 2010 constitution, switching to devolution to deal with the kind of post-electoral violence based on 2008.

So do those types really kind of defuse tensions or does it create a new set of powerful local elite who can make more demands on the center?

And I think I'll just end with, you know, the role of civil society, particularly religious organizations. You know, I think Jason pointed to the role of the Catholic Church in his book as being a really critical civil society actor. We know that in past elections like in the 2008 elections, they were one of the few that was able to allocate election observers across the whole country. And I know more recently they have been raising questions about

the appointment of the head of the Electoral Commission.

And this really mirrors what we see in broader parts of the continent where religious organizations, especially if they have a large following and are not seen to be compromised, can be a really important voice for oversight when formal institutions of oversight, like the legislator and political parties are not working as they should. This was for instance quite key in Zambia, you know, the most recent elections in August, where the churches assisted with the parallel vote tabulation of the results to avoid the incumbent rigging the election. And we've seen this in other parts of the continent such as Muslim marabout leaders playing a very strong role in oversight and accountability in Senegal, for instance.

So I'll leave it there with those five points, and thanks again for the opportunity to participate.

MR. O'HANLON: Danielle, that was fantastic. So what I'd like to do now in our remaining 20 some minutes is to have two rounds where each of you will speak, you know, once in those rounds. And first I want to just sort of turn things open to ask each of you to say what's on your mind at this point in the conversation. Very rich, conversation. But I would hope maybe one or two policy recommendations would also be part of your next intervention, whether for the international community, the United States, Canada, the European Union, and of course the UN system, President Tshisekedi, Rwandan government, anybody you want to emphasize. Really maybe just one or two of your most specific policy recommendations.

After we hear from everyone then I'll go to the questions. We've got about a half dozen we received. I'll read them all quickly, you can take notes on which one or two you might want to respond to in our final round.

I think, if you don't mind, Jason, I'll start with Francesca at this point since I sort of interrupted her last time and she is our Congolese friend who's sitting in Kinshasa. And I would really love to know what is most on your mind, Francesca, about what you think

needs to be done next and who you want to address that proposal or plea to, whether it's the international donor community, the President Tshisekedi government, or someone else.

Then I'll go to Jason and then Danielle, please.

MS. BOMBOKO: Hello.

MR. O'HANLON: There you go. Yep, coming through loud and clear.

MS. BOMBOKO: Okay. I think what happened so far was the government issue with the international donors and the conflict and security sector issue were kind of dealt with separately.

What we tried to do, Jason is starting his book with the Goma Conferences, and I was there at the Goma Conferences. And my role was to make sure that every resolution that came part of this community peace process is integrated into the development program of the government. And this is sometimes something very difficult to do because the security sector is a prerogative of the presidency and so some reforms need to be there to have a security sector accountable and to actually try when we think about government we think about poverty, we think about stabilizations. It's not a coincidence, and most of the unstable parts of the country are also the poorest part of the country, you know. There's something to be said about that. Is to really find a way to integrate all those issues together with the most personal orders.

I mean what we do, what the government does when they're planning a development program with donors, I mean the Army doesn't know, the security doesn't know, the presidency is not involved. So this fragmentations of coalesce policies and we don't have a lot of vision also what type of coalesce do you want, do we want in the next 30 years.

Push everybody together, and I think what needs to be done next is to sit down and to really look at, you know, talk about coalesce visions for the next generation, for what they want to be as a country. Then maybe that could be the beginning of all those different components, you know, working together, and that could lessen some of the

fragmentation that we see.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Jason, over to you please for your thoughts about going forward as well as anything else that's on your mind at this part of the conversation.

MR. STEARNS: Yeah, I mean I really appreciate the comments everybody's made and I agree I think with almost all of them.

I think speaking of missed opportunities Francesca raised, in 2018 elections, and I really agree. I think that throughout there's been a notion that sometimes we need to sacrifice the perfect for the good. And I understand that impulse. But sometimes it's also aligned with the fact that we made compromises on accountability, and I think accountability really is the key thing that has been missing from this whole process.

In other words, you know, for example in the East now, and I think this is the one point that perhaps I'll make. The government imposed a state of siege in order to deal with armed groups. Now the state of siege I think does exactly the opposite of what is required. The real thing that's required in the Eastern Congo is not actually dealing with the 120 different armed groups, but is dealing with the Congolese Army itself.

The Congolese Army is the crucible really of this conflict. And if you want to bring about transformational change, it's not about dealing with one or the other of these 120 different armed groups, it's about reforming and rendering more efficient and accountable the Congolese Army itself.

State of siege did the opposite. The state of siege actually suspended civil liberties and so made it more difficult to criticize that Congolese Army. There are youth activists in the Eastern Congo in jail at the moment because of the criticism of the Congolese Army.

The U.S. government as well has been tending in this direction, and I think unfortunately, because it's framing some of the conflict in the Eastern Congo as counterterrorism operations. Because there is an Islamist armed group involved in the

conflict, and the U.S. government, or parts of the U.S. government I would say, tends to see this through the lens of that war on terror. And I think that as well again is not going to be conducive because that instead of deflecting attention from the Congolese government, the Congolese Army, and focusing on this one actor, which is a very brutal and reprehensible actor, but again I think the key actor if you want to bring about transformational change, it's the Congolese state and in particular the Congolese Army itself.

And so I think that they need to be much more focused in terms of if you look at USAID spending, very, very little of that goes to democracy and human rights and governance. If you look at broadly speaking spending in general, very little goes to that. And so I think there needs to be much more emphasis on that going forward.

And these Machiavellian compromises that we make about, I mean the U.S. government, you know, pretty much in private said that it knows the 2018 election was rigged but it was the best possible outcome we could hope for. I don't think that that is helping anybody going forward.

MR. O'HANLON: Danielle, over to you, please.

MS. RESNICK: Well, yeah, I couldn't have said it better than Francesca and Jason. And they obviously know the country much better than I do. I guess just on that last point, I mean as the elections come up next year in 2023, I think that's obviously a key point of focus for the international community and for domestic civil society.

And I guess, you know, my one kind of take away there is to obviously we need to focus on investing in, you know, these mechanisms of accountability, the electoral commission, making sure the voters register, you know, is clean, you know, the basic function of holding elections, allowing election observers.

But I think the importance of having a kind of 360-degree perspective on these, you know, these broader dynamics that Jason's highlighted and that we have seen kind of reappear in different elections.

So, you know, one is the role of foreign lobbyists in the DRC, which has

actually been quite active. And some of the opposition parties have been lobbying U.S. politicians for their, you know, for their visibility with the government. I think, you know, the role of Uganda currently in the DRC as it's, you know, trying to root out the allied, I think defense force of ADF, is going to play probably a role in that.

And I think the diaspora community. We saw they played a really important role in different ways around the 2018 elections with the diaspora in Europe. And in South Africa there's a large Congolese diaspora, you know. So the different ways of information and disinformation that we saw around those elections from the diaspora, I think, you know, require a lot of attention from the international community as well.

So my kind of take away with this kind of trend is 60 degree prospective, not just focusing on the usual infrastructure of elections but these broader array of internal and external forces that could determine, influence the outcome and in Tshisekedi's response.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you all for very important and succinct comments. So I think now I can actually do two final rounds. Let me begin with a couple of questions that are influenced and informed partly by the audience and partly by my own take.

And starting with one for Jason on Rwanda and its role. You talk about the evolution of Rwanda's role. So here we are in 2022, what needs to change today in U.S. policy towards Rwanda, if anything, that could make a meaningful difference.

And then for all of you together, but again springing from Jason's book, but also Francesca and Danielle, points you've made. Does the international donor and business community need to develop a more common set of demands on the Tshisekedi government as a condition for engagement, for access to free trade and investment accords, foreign assistance? In other words you've talked about how the Tshisekedi government has in many ways perpetuated the same cronyism and corruption of its predecessor. How do we try to make a difference on that front, we, the outside world, the donor community, etcetera.

So Rwanda specifically but then more generally the donor and business community. If I could put those two questions on the table, starting with Jason, please.

MR. STEARNS: Well I mean the Rwandan government doesn't nearly play as important a role as it used to. I mean it really was the key actor in destabilizing the Eastern Congo between 2004, broadly speaking, and 2013 when its most important military ally in the Eastern Congo, the M23, was defeated.

It's remained involved. Most of its operations in the Eastern Congo are now done with the Tacit Agreement of the Congolese government and it carries out many of those operations. What I would say that the key risk at the moment in the Eastern Congo is, again, misdiagnosing what neighboring countries actually are really up to in the Eastern Congo.

At the moment the Ugandan government has deployed a large force into an operations with the Congolese government against the ADF, this infamous Ugandan armed group in the Eastern Congo. I think the important thing to understand is that the overriding interest, as I see it, of the Uganda government is actually not security and stability in the Eastern Congo. And it's actually not even the ADF when it comes to these operations. Instead Museveni is in a position, President Museveni is in a position where he is trying to bolster his own support within the country and possibly also orchestrate, after being in power for some 36 years now, a handover to somebody else, possibly his son.

And so once again, operations in the Eastern Congo are, you know, important in order to provide patronage to his own officers, focusing on external enemy, and probably also relates to economic opportunities, including oil and gold which are extremely important for the Ugandan economy.

The Rwandan government is also extremely worried about these Ugandan operations. Uganda and Rwanda have been in a competitive relationship at least since the 1999 clashes in the City of Kisangani in the Eastern Congo. And so Rwanda sees everything in the Eastern Congo through this lens of competition with its Ugandan "Big Brother."

And so I think it's important going forward to understanding that those are

probably the most important interests at stake for those neighboring countries, and not the security and stability of the Eastern Congo.

I'll stop there, and I have a couple of thoughts about your second question as well.

MR. O'HANLON: Why don't you go ahead with the second question, please, right now? Because I'm not sure the others are going to comment on Rwanda as much as you were just able to. But they can certainly feel to as they wish. Go ahead while you've got the floor.

MR. STEARNS: So the second question regarding stability, I guess, was it, Mike if you could repeat.

MR. O'HANLON: It was the way donors should potentially coordinate better and not being played off against each other and perpetuate inadvertently or intentionally the system of corruption that you've all been criticizing.

MR. STEARNS: Well I think Tshisekedi, actually I mean we have to be fair to Tshisekedi. He came in and there's certain things he has tried to change. I think the problem is it's a very scattershot approach, there's very little follow through. The East is I think a good example of that. Some things have changed though.

For example the big thing that has changed for average Congolese is free primary education. This is a real thing, and now millions of students in the Congo have access to free primary education they did not have before. It is not very good quality primary education in many cases, it's led to strikes amongst the teachers who are no longer getting paid, for a variety of reasons, it's complicated. But the bottom line is that there's some things that are changing.

Francesca mentioned the fight against corruption. There's one government agency that has been extremely, has a crusade against corruption, and these things need to be strengthened, absolutely.

But there is also a tendency that sort of underlies the systemic nature of the

problem that I highlighted in my book, to continue to use the government as a means not of guaranteeing the interest of the population, but of distributing favors and patronage.

And I think the donor class needs to be extremely vigilant. At the moment the World Bank in particular, and IMF, have become extremely prominent as donors to this new government. They see in Tshisekedi a great hope, and that's fantastic. But they also need to be very clear that they don't become complicit in this problem of bad governance.

The last thing I would say, and again getting back to this notion of international political economy. There's no way for the Congo out of this mess and this morass without solving the fundamental paradox in the Congo, which an extremely rich country and it's an extremely poor country.

The Congo should be at the heart of the international economy. It produces more cobalt than any other country in the world. And that is key for renewable batteries that we need in everything, including in cars. It produces more copper than any country in Africa. And yet it is extremely poor.

And the reason for that is, well there's many reasons for that, but one of the reasons is that the international system, the international financial system has become complicit in the fact that this is just extraction, it's almost no value that stays. There's no profit added in the Congo, there's very few jobs created by the mining industry. And that's something that many countries are complicit in. There's a lot of corruption, there's a lot of transfer pricing, there's a lot of bad mining deals struck. And I think the donors really need to pay attention, much more attention to that. That's going to be key to a long-term solution.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. If I could go to Francesca and then Danielle, please, on the same questions about, again, what Jason's been addressing. Rwanda if you wish, but especially the donor community, how it works with the government, likes to change the incentives and improve the performance of the government. Francesca, over to you, please.

MS. BOMBOKO: Okay. Am I on? Hello? Okay, perfect. Okay.

So I do agree totally with what Jason has said, you know, totally. I mean regarding the international community, you know, from the Paris Declarations they have to align with the government priorities. And which is something they've tried to do. But I think since the last election actually, I think since 2015, the government doesn't have a program that was directed at all level of the government, provincial, central, so we don't have a program anymore. And why 2015 was the last call because that was the last one that was required by the international community. Since it's not required we have something that's close to that but so it's difficult for them to align with our priorities.

When we do they actually do align pretty well with the priorities that is set by the government. But the point is not, the point is that they are not accountable to the Congolese government. They are accountable to their own governments so they all come in basically with the same policies and they pick and choose which provinces they have to work with, creating de facto some pocket of poverty that can, for example, Kasai, the conflict that arose in Kasai. You know, if you look at it, it was also one of the provinces that was totally neglected by the international community. So we need to be very careful about that.

But regardless of that, I really think that the problem is not the international communities, mostly that the profile of the RC politician. I think what we should be doing is what South Africa has done at the end of apartheid, you know, every minister coming into office they actually had a book where they were explaining, they call it the Blank Book, you know, what is your role, what, you know, what are you supposed to do, what are the limits, what is the law. One of the great things that could improve governance is for instance to have a system of assurances. Every minister, when he comes into office and, you know, when he leaves he leaves with everything, the car, the computer, and everything else. And there is even let's look at (audio skip) which is a (speaks French), you know. We don't have difficulty tracing all the electronic votes machines and insurance, like they did in South Africa, is something that can be done.

It's not the role of the international committee or the government to do so,

but having this blank book of explaining what is the Minister of Education supposed to be, what is the role of the Administrations, what is the law, what the law says about your own competencies, so to speak, I think is something that really helped South Africa after the apartheid when they had this new minister coming in and that have no idea what their function was. And something that wasn't done in country like DRC that could I think be extremely useful for day-to-day governance.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. And then Danielle, and then we'll have a lightning round to wrap up.

MS. RESNICK: Okay. Well, yeah, of course I agree with the other panelists. I think, you know, what donors can do is, you know, some of the other interventions that the other panelists talked about, particularly investing in parliamentary oversight of loans and grants, you know, making that a condition of some of their assistance so that you're kind of indirectly strengthening the oversight body. Investing in audit agencies, in particular in parliamentary budget offices.

And I think, you know, as Francesca I think alluding to this mechanism of performance contracts within, you know, ministries and agencies where, you know, there's accountability upward. You have a set of deliverables and targets and you have to meet those. And there's some accountability and there's some kind of public transparency about what those are.

And I mean one of the best performers of a performance contract in Africa is Rwanda. So there could be some opportunity from a positive experience from the neighbor to the east in having used that approach to get better performance.

On a broader scale there, I don't know if you can get donor coalescence because it's an issue for Africa. I mean it's a very diverse donor landscape now. You don't just have a body and traditional, you know, western donors. Of course the DRC, like much of Africa, is getting support from a variety of global actors, as we know some of which are not concerned about good governance. And they're getting a lot of money from, you know,

Eurobonds and sovereign role finance with private sector creditors as well. So I think there's opportunities for parts of the donor community to have an influence, but I think we need to be a little bit realistic about how much influence they can have given that the donor landscape has shifted in the region more broadly.

Lastly I would just say there could be even greater integration within development agencies, you know. The USAID for instance will give a lot of money for food security and agriculture, you know, without much attention to what its democracy and governance colleagues are doing. So if it's kind of greater integration of the development and democracy assistance, communities even within the same donor organizations, you know, would be very fruitful in DRC and more broadly.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. So there's just a couple of questions outstanding and just a couple of minutes where we can maybe wrap up with your thoughts as well as any final brief concluding statement any of you would like to make.

But one of them of them has to do with whether energy is an area where investment is important in Congo and could that be transformational or not.

Second question has to do with the EAC, the East Africa Community, and Congo's relationship to that and whether that could be an opportunity for, you know, maybe more transparent and legal trade and help deal with some of the issues multiple actors extorting or acting in corrupt ways with the current economy as it exists, often with many of the resources in Eastern Congo.

And then finally there was a question just asking for a shout out for any of the one or two or three groups that you'd most want to celebrate. You know, Danielle's talked about the Catholic Church, and others of you have talked about some of the NGOs. And, Francesca, you of course come from the Bureau d'Etude where they share a Consulting International LCU so you represent one such group. But I wondered if anybody wanted to just remind us about the great things the Congolese people are already trying to do in the NGO and other sectors. And one of the questions from the audience asked for

that, so that could be a nice inspirational way to finish as well.

So if I could, Jason, we'll start with you and then just have a brief comment from each.

MR. STEARNS: It's a lot of stuff to put on the table. Very briefly, rapid shot, I think the energy plays an important role. Congolese have a huge energy deficit, it's a huge problem. I don't think that the big massive projects, creating a dam is the utopian project for the Africa Continent, it could be the largest hydroelectric project in the world at some point if ever realized. I think that the way that's currently displayed or planned will not alleviate poverty in the Congo, it's mostly going to be for neighboring countries and for elites. I think you need to rethink the way that energy is provided to make it pro-poor, much more investment in agricultural, much more investment in micro and solar and things like that at the local level, micro grids. That I think would be much more transformational. It's a little bit outside of my expertise but I definitely, from my experience, that sort of emphasis.

But I do think that, you know, there is a tendency, especially within the U.S. and the UK government, to think that private enterprise will drive transformation. And while I don't necessarily disagree, I think what you need to have is you need to make sure that any transformation also includes and puts an emphasis on the state.

And that brings me to my final point, which you asked me what kind of groups to give a shout out to. There are inspirational groups, especially youth organizations such as Lucha in particular, that have understood that the challenge is a challenge of transformation, the nature of the state, transforming the nature of the state in the Congo.

They're out there in the streets all the time, they're protesting over potholes, over electricity, over governance, over all kinds of stuff, and they're trying to transform (speaks French) from a bad word into a good for the Congolese people.

And finally, news organizations such as (speaks French) which is probably now the biggest and most important Congolese news organizations, all online, good, fact-driven news, has been really transformational for Congolese conversations about this as

well.

MR. O'HANLON: Jason, thank you very much. Francesca, over to you, please. You're still on mute, my friend.

MS. BOMBOKO: Yeah. In 2005 and in 2010 we did a huge survey for the World Bank, you know, to help them set up their priorities in DRC. And one questions, one of the priority that the populations, we asked them what should be your priority if you wanted to join a community and do something was, the number one was electricity, and the number two was water.

And basically they said that for education we actually go by and we organize ourselves, you know, to bypass the government. We did the same thing to help. But for those two things, energy and water supplies, we will need the help of the government.

So I really think those issues, you know, are one of the main keys, you know, for DRC government if we are able to manage that.

I do agree also that the direction that the state is taking right now with the aim, may not be the good one, but still I would think that if one day we can speak about a country that's going to be less, poverty is going to be actually reduced, those two things, energy and water, and education, I think are the keys.

Regarding I do agree the youth organizations are wonderful and the news organizations are wonderful. But we also see a lot of very active women's organizations who are, you know, pushing some issues at the governance level and which also, and I also say, you know, violence against women. And also Dr. Maquaga (phonetic), what he does at the DRC level and also what he does at the continent level issue is something really that we need to talk about more often than we do.

MR. O'HANLON: And passing and handing the baton also to Danielle. I also thank my friend, Tony Gambino, who works with one of these great organizations. And other inspiration to me Professor Cabita (phonetic) who's helped me stay on DRC issues over my career.

So, Danielle, over to you for the last words.

MS. RESNICK: Yeah, I'll just touch on the second question you had about the EAC. And, you know, here I'm not super optimistic, I mean I think DRC is one of the few that have the overlapping now membership with SATIC (phonetic) and EAC.

I think we've seen in Africa more recently a kind of retreat to bilateralism, despite having these regional organizations. I mean even Kenya is more interested in its free trade area agreement with the U.S. than, you know, enhancing its linkages, trade linkages in the EAC.

And it's unfortunately been one of the kind of weaker organizations in terms of fostering trade in the region. So while certainly I think, you know, the rhetoric and the intentions of greater integration with the EAC it's good in theory, I think, you know, the fact that we've seen a lot of pushback to regional organizations over the last year and, you know, I think DRC hasn't even ratified the African Continental Free Trade Agreement yet, you know, suggests that it would be much more complicated to tackle some of these big picture issues that Jason has shown in his book, than just joining this organization.

Even Rwanda and Uganda have been very hostile to each other and closed their border at one point, and just like they're both been long-standing members of the EAC. So that's just my pessimistic take away on that point.

MR. O'HANLON: Well pessimistic take away on that point but still some pretty encouraging words from all of you in the sense that you've helped identify problems in DRC and some paths going forward where progress perhaps can be made.

I want to again thank Jason Stearns for this outstanding book that I recommend highly, *The War That Doesn't Say its Name* that provided the inspiration and catalyst for our conversation today.

I want to thank friends from all over the world, especially in Congo, for joining us, and wish everyone a very happy and successful March and beyond in this year 2022.

So thanks for joining us today, and farewell from all of us at Brookings and around the world.

MR. STEARNS: Thank you.

MS. BOMBOKO: Thank you.

MS. RESNICK: Thanks.

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