



Mapping Conflict Motives in War Areas

Tackling a problem starts with a complete understanding of it. In order to resolve wars, we need to understand what drives them. Therefore IPIS (International Peace Information Service, Belgium), member of the Fatal Transactions campaign has launched a research project to develop a research tool that should make it easier to analyse and discuss war motives in conflict areas. The most distinguishing feature of the analytic tool is a collection of maps. Maps are a verifiable and unambiguous source of information. When made with sufficient care, they are an ideal source for an objective analysis.

IPIS has so far published 2 studies on 2 regions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The following article is based on the report 'Mapping conflict motives: the Eastern DRC'. For the full reports and maps, please visit the website of IPIS: www.ipisresearch.be

The Drug Traffic in North-Kivu

Armed FDLR rebels produce drugs and sell them at local markets. Officers of the regular army buy them and facilitate the transport to the borders of the neighbouring countries of Rwanda and Uganda. An important drug traffic, profitable to different categories of armed men, flourishes in the centre of the North-Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The drug that is grown in central North-Kivu is called 'chanvre', which is French for hemp. It is a strong local variety of cannabis. The climate and soil of the region are well-suited for growing hemp and the drug is popular in the DRC and its neighbouring countries. When walking along the streets of cities such as Goma, Bukavu or Lubumbashi one regularly catches the scent of somebody smoking 'pot'. For the local population, however, it is not cheap to purchase the herb. Some people make enormous profits out of the drugs trade.

The hemp is produced in rural areas. Some of the fields are even situated within the boundaries of the Kisimba Ikobo Natural Reserve. The production cycle of hemp takes 3 months. There are 4 harvest periods each year and during each harvest period a total quantity of approximately 10 tons of hemp is being produced.

Most of the hemp fields are controlled by the rebels of the 'Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda' (FDLR). The FDLR originated as a movement of Rwandan Hutu rebels and can be considered as successors of extremists who have fled their home country after the genocide in 1994. Although it is only a small minority, they have in their ranks some of the perpetrators and instigators of the genocide against the Tutsis. Since a few years they have stopped carrying out attacks on Rwandan soil but they remain a security hazard. They have retained their arms and refuse to return to Rwanda before their security is guaranteed and the current regime has accepted to start a political dialogue.

The FDLR have several hemp fields of their own but they profit from the production of the local population too. They 'secure' the fields where hemp is grown and they 'escort' the villagers who grow the drugs when they bring them to the road at night. The bags of hemp, each weighing 60 kilos, are transported by youngsters who walk with the bags on their back. The trip between Miriki and Kayna, one of the usual routes, is approximately 20 km. It takes the carriers more than 3 hours one way. Civilian traders pay them a bit less than US\$ 2 for the trip but the FDLR frequently force them to do it without payment. Many of the young carriers have become problematic consumers of the cannabis. The consumption of hemp among youth in the region is high. This has serious repercussions for the schooling system since school attendance has dropped significantly.

When the drugs arrive at the road, they are loaded on a truck and hidden beneath a shipment of manioc or other goods. The trucks bring the hemp to the provincial capital of Goma where it is treated before it crosses the border with Rwanda. Whereas the lower-quality hemp is sold to the local consumers, the better product is exported to Rwanda. Besides Goma, the hemp is exported at two other border crossings. One of them, Bunagana, is controlled by soldiers loyal to the rebel leader Laurent Nkunda, the sworn enemy of the FDLR rebels. Throughout the whole process, negotiations on the price, transport, delivery and other aspects of the traffic are held within private houses, hidden from sight: although their own national military is involved, the trade of hemp is still prohibited by the Congolese criminal code. The profits are considerable. In the villages a bag of 60 kilos of untreated hemp costs 30 dollars. At a local market the price of the bag doubles to 60 or 70 dollars. In Rwanda the treated herbs are worth 90 to 100 dollars for a kilo.

'Chèvre contre chanvre':

Ever more local farmers start to grow hemp instead of growing other products or keeping cattle. This is partly because they can make good profit from the cultivation but also because of the 'chanvre contre chèvre' (hemp for goat) phenomenon. At the market the price of a goat equals the price of a bag of hemp, which has led to institutionalised barter of a bag of hemp for a goat. Because of this, goats have become very popular animals in the region and for a while the area was plagued by a series of cattle thefts. Since the local population preferred to sell drugs to the FDLR rebels instead of having them steal their cattle, many have started to grow hemp instead of keeping goats.

If the FDLR are the biggest sellers of hemp, elements of the regular army are the biggest buyers. In fact, it is often not the soldiers themselves who buy the drugs but their wives. While their wives organise the transport to the provincial capital of Goma, the husbands make sure that the trucks can pass any barrier along the road without too many problems. The regular army and the FDLR rebels seem to cooperate well together. They each control their part of the territory and the production chain. During negotiations in Nairobi in December 2007 with his Rwandan counterpart, the Congolese president Kabila pledged to solve the FDLR problem militarily. However, in the hemp area there are little or no reports of military confrontations between the two groups.

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Fatal Transactions is an international campaign that strives for a just and fair exploitation of Africa's natural resources. It was launched in October 1999, by a consortium of European civil society organisations working in close collaboration with African partners, to increase public awareness of the funding of rebel armies across Africa through the trade in so-called 'conflict' or 'blood' diamonds. Such 'fatal transactions' directly link Western consumer goods to armed conflict and human rights violations in Africa. The campaign aims to transform these fatal transactions into fair transactions that truly benefit the people by fostering growth, alleviating poverty, and help build a just and equitable society, and has since acted as a critical watchdog of governments, international institutions and extractive industries.

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