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of "The Rape of the Congo" by Adam  
Hochschild*

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## September Roundtable: Introduction

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## September Roundtable: Introduction

### Abstract

An annotation of:

The Rape of the Congo. By Adam Hochschild. The New York Review of Books. August 13, 2009.

### Keywords

Human rights, Democratic Republic of Congo, War, Sexual violence, United Nations (UN), Politics

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[The Rape of the Congo. By Adam Hochschild. \*The New York Review of Books\*. August 13, 2009.](#)

An Annotation

### **Democratic Republic of Congo: Humanitarian Crisis and the International Community**

Among the largest countries in Africa and with vast economic resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been one of the worst humanitarian emergencies to unfold in Africa in the past decades. The civil war in Congo has claimed millions of lives, either as a direct result of fighting, widespread violence, disease or malnutrition. Violence has been used indiscriminately against civilians, particularly on women and girls that have been victims of sexual violence in a context where rape is used by all the warring factions as a tool to spread terror.

What turns a wealthy country into one of the poorest, most corrupted, dangerous, and ungoverned states in the planet? Adam Hochschild, in this month's centerpiece "The Rape of Congo," underscores several features explaining the brutality and the origins of a conflict with complex political, economic, and regional dimensions that have been exacerbated by a long history of civil wars and political corruption. **"Four problems, above all, drive Congo's unrelenting bloodshed. One is long-standing antagonism between certain ethnic groups. A second is the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the two million or so people who flowed across Congo's porous border in its aftermath: Hutu killers, innocent Hutu who feared retribution, and a mainly Tutsi army in pursuit, bent on vengeance. The third is a vast wealth in natural resources-gold, tungsten, diamonds, coltan (a key ingredient of computer chips), copper, and more-that gives ethnic warlords and their backers, especially Rwanda and Uganda, an additional incentive to fight. And, finally, this is the largest nation on earth-more than 65 million people in an area roughly as big as the United States east of the Mississippi-that has hardly any functioning national government."**

What can be done? The international community has been involved in the Congolese conflict fundamentally through the UN peacekeeping force (MONUC), a mission with more than 17,000 troops and military observers that have been deployed in the country for almost ten years. The results, however, are far from optimistic. **"Far better equipped and disciplined than the Congolese army, these troops have kept a bad situation from getting worse. Yet it is hopeless to expect so few soldiers to provide protection for most civilians in such a vast country. 'How many troops would it really take to stop all the fighting here?' I ask one UN official, out of his office. 'Oh, about 250, 000,' he replies."**

Apart from the UN presence and some international NGOs working in the field, very few collective international efforts have been taken to address the current humanitarian crisis, and even less has been done to help building a functional state that provides the minimal guarantees

for its citizens. The international community has chosen to remain largely silent towards the ongoing tragedy in Congo. This roundtable offers some recommendations to strengthen international involvement in this African country, with special emphasis on international human rights law and the economic dimensions of the conflict.

**These issues and others are considered in this month's Roundtable.**