Warlords threaten state-building in Africa

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The enduring presence of warlords in Africa, and the influence of their international supporters threaten the process of state-building in the region, according to research at the University of Birmingham.

Dr. Danielle Beswick, from the University's International Development Department analysed data relating to warlords in Congo, focusing in particular on the eastern Kivu provinces which borders Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.

Her findings reveal that foreign agencies have been spending huge amount of money on reconstructing the Congolese state, but they are yet to develop strategies which can incorporate or effectively challenge warlords and their supporters.

Dr. Beswick explains: "Not only are warlords poorly accounted for in post-conflict state building, but neither is the influence of their international and regional backers effectively tackled. This demonstrates what can be considered a fatal flaw of many state-building strategies in Africa: the focus on one source of sovereign power in a region where the state has historically been only one amongst many competing authorities."

Laurent Nkunda's downfall as a warlord in eastern Congo shows that the security and the integrity of the Congolese state remain linked to the actions of warlords and regional neighbours, according to the author.

Nkunda was a commander in the Rwandan-backed Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) - the main rebel group which controlled most of eastern DR Congo during the civil war.

Dr. Danielle Beswick suggests that international agencies should adopt a strategy that emphasises regional and local level governance rather than reinforcing a central government which, historically, has seemed unable to provide basic security, much less development, in border regions.

"As long as state-building starts from the fiction that Africa's states are single sovereign entities, ignoring or trivialising the myriad other actors with significant influence on the ground, democratisation efforts and security reforms will falter and regions such as Kivu will continue to defy incorporation into a global system of states," she concludes.

The war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly called Zaire) is the widest interstate war in modern African history.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

- Dr. Danielle Beswick' research 'The Challenge of Warlordism to Post-Conflict State-Building: The Case of Laurent Nkunda in Eastern Congo' is published in Round Table, The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs.

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