

Central Africa

The last region of Africa to be examined in this report is Central Africa, which stretches from Nigeria to Burundi, and includes Zaire, the Congo, Rwanda, Gabon, Cameroon, Uganda and the Central African Republic. Although the inclusion of Nigeria and Uganda in Central Africa is somewhat contestable, the former is Africa's largest and most powerful state (with about 20 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa), and the latter has been involved in the political and security crisis (and genocide) in Rwanda and Burundi. Hence their military and economic situations are worthy of some scrutiny. Likewise, East African states such as Kenya and Tanzania have not been included in this section; their security environment is more closely linked to that of the rest of the Horn of Africa.

Like most of the rest of Africa, pure inter-state conflicts are not prominent in this region. On the other hand, almost all of the peoples of the region are profoundly "insecure" and live in "weak states," whose borders do not enjoy unconditional legitimacy (in spite of the Organization of African Unity's injunctions in this direction), whose citizens do not express primary loyalty to the central government, and whose societies are a patchwork of cross-cutting ethnic, communal and religious groupings. The cross-border consequences of the internal conflicts generated by these forces can be profound, as was made clear with the mass exodus of refugees from the Rwandan genocide into Zaire and other neighbouring states, and the civil war waged against the Hutu government by groups based in Uganda.

Most of the region's conflicts are communal and societal, and range from the extremely tense situation in Burundi, to the acute repression in Nigeria and Zaire, to the difficult transitions to civilian and more representative rule in Uganda and the Congo. This is the region of potential "failed states": those countries who colonial legacy and post-colonial economic and political misrule have led them to the brink of complete internal collapse, where organized violence is widespread.¹ Although analysts disagree on what can or should be done, most agree that the personal, societal and economic security of citizens in places such as Zaire, Burundi or Nigeria is extremely precarious, and that "new power centres are emerging...such as armed gangs who roam the countryside living off the land, or the local defence committees set up to defend the people against them."² Addressing this problem through the optic of military expenditures may not by itself be a panacea, it does provide one window onto possible medium-term measures that might provide a somewhat greater measure of stability and peace in the region.

¹ For an overview, see Robert Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic* (February 1994); Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, "Failed States," *Foreign Policy*, 89 (Winter 1992-93). See also Jeffrey Herbst, "Is Nigeria a Viable State?" *The Washington Quarterly*, 19:2 (Spring 1996), 151-175.

² For some details, including a discussion of the role of regional mercenary and protection groups, see IISS, *Strategic Survey 1995/96* (London: IISS, 1996), 211-219.