

# Limits to supporting security sector interventions in the DRC

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## Summary

Since 2003, the international community has invested considerable resources in keeping the peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Many interventions were focused on supporting security sector reform (SSR) and on the stabilisation of the volatile 'militia belt' in the eastern DRC, but these only achieved limited impact and the security context remains volatile. To explain why international efforts did not bring about the expected changes, the authors examine issues such as the peculiar relationship between the armed forces and local communities, and the neo-patrimonial incentives of the Congolese elite. A largely technical approach that ignored the bigger political picture underscores the failure to fundamentally change the DRC's security context. The defeat of the M23 rebellion in 2013 was a rare success, but it now threatens to take away the necessary pressure for meaningful reform.

OVER THE YEARS, THE Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has acquired the reputation of being a 'hopeless case' among diplomats and aid workers because of the vicious cycle of armed conflict, regional meddling, corruption and poverty that holds back the country's development. Since the Congolese wars formally ended in 2003 with the signing in Pretoria of the *Accord Global et Inclusif* (Global and All-Inclusive Agreement), violence has still remained rife for many Congolese, especially in the densely populated so-called militia belt in the east, which stretches from the Ituri district, in the northern Orientale

Province, over the hilly Kivu provinces to the southern province of Katanga.

An important factor contributing to the continuing insecurity in the eastern provinces is the inability of the security forces, particularly the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC), to effectively control terrain against armed groups.<sup>1</sup> In response to this shortcoming, the international community has dedicated significant resources to security sector reform (SSR) in support of the Congolese government (GoDRC) in the past few years. At the same time, an international security and stabilisation support strategy (ISSSS,

or I4S) was rolled out in the eastern provinces to support the GoDRC in its efforts to build and maintain its presence in areas from where armed groups had been cleared. So far, however, neither SSR nor the ISSSS has had a far-reaching impact on the situation, and the FARDC and the GoDRC are struggling to stop armed groups from controlling eastern parts of the country.

It was a low point in recent Congolese history when Goma, the capital of North Kivu Province, fell to the March 23 (M23) rebel movement in November 2012. Although the FARDC did regain the upper hand during 2013, and the military

wing of the rebel movement has formally disbanded at the time of writing,<sup>2</sup> the long-term political consequences of this recent episode are not yet clear.

This paper looks at the ways in which the armed forces and local communities interact, and the neo-patrimonial incentives that guide the Congolese elites' decision making on matters of security. It also examines the largely technical efforts that the international community has undertaken to support the GoDRC in its attempt to re-establish its authority in the eastern provinces. Finally, the paper sets out a number of political considerations that would lend further support to security and stabilisation in the DRC.

To better understand the prevailing insecurity in the eastern DRC, it is important to take the neo-patrimonial nature of the Congolese state and society into account

### The army and the people

The reason for insecurity in the eastern DRC is often presented as the state and its armed forces, the FARDC, lacking capacity to control territory, thereby leaving vacuums, which are then filled by armed groups in search of power and illegal sources of income.<sup>3</sup> The people are then caught between the armed groups and the FARDC, and suffer from human-rights violations inflicted by both sides. The simplistic assumption is that if the state had the support to expand into these vacuums and the armed forces were trained and paid, then the GoDRC would be able to control these pockets of resistance and the armed groups would be forced to negotiate and lay down their arms. This sort of assessment has been referred to as a 'technocratic interpretation of violence as a law-and-order problem linked to weak state institutions'.<sup>4</sup> In reality, however, the local dynamics are considerably more complicated: formal authorities

are not merely suffering from a lack of capacity and communities are not merely apathetic victims either.

To better understand the prevailing insecurity in the eastern DRC, it is important to take the neo-patrimonial nature of the Congolese state and society into account.<sup>5</sup> In neo-patrimonial systems, each member of society, from high to low, belongs to mutually obliging social networks, which are usually formed around ethnic, geographical, professional or socio-economic lines. These networks are essential for people to make a living because they need connections to access jobs, capital and other economic opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors. Those

who reach influential positions within this system by attracting a large group of followers or clients need to 'feed' their networks to maintain their positions. Perhaps the most convenient way for a person to gain influence and work their way up is via state apparatus, such as an elected political position, the civil service or, particularly as they wield the instruments of force, the FARDC and the police service, the *Police Nationale Congolaise* (PNC).<sup>6</sup> Positions in such state services are valued resources because people have a chance to make an income for themselves and feed their networks.

This has important consequences for the way in which the state functions. The system has fragmented the state apparatus and, in some cases, privatised it. It may be in the interest of many of the elites to keep this system the way it is: the weaker the state administration and judiciary and security

actors are, the easier they can be controlled by private political, economic or military networks.

This neo-patrimonial system is particularly prevalent in the FARDC, which is itself a product of years of co-option and power-sharing with armed groups. Peace agreements have commonly included provisions to integrate former opponents into the army. Unlike other peace processes in the region, which usually give armed groups only one chance to integrate, the DRC's integration process has been open-ended. Ironically, the lure of army positions or reintegration packages has actually led many armed groups to mobilise.

As a result of continuing rounds of integration, the current FARDC comprises a hotchpotch of former Zairean and Congolese government forces; remnants of several political-military armed movements from the eastern provinces (RCD, RCD-K-ML, RCD-N, MLC, PARECO and CNDP); and local Mayi-Mayi militia groups.

It has often been the case that the armed groups have integrated on condition that they could keep their command structures intact and remain in the same areas where they used to be active. This has given them the opportunity to continue controlling their old territories – only this time in a formal FARDC uniform. As a result, the current FARDC is still subject to different command-and-control structures and rivalries among the various commands.<sup>7</sup>

This situation has hampered the combat abilities of the FARDC soldiers, who do not always trust their commanders, and led to units receiving conflicting orders. In addition, there is sometimes little loyalty or *esprit de corps* among the various battalions – a key ingredient for an effective fighting force.<sup>8</sup>

The division of the FARDC also makes it easier for local or national elites to influence it. Some of these power brokers work together with the commanders to control politically or economically important areas, collect illegal taxes or protect certain ethnic groups. On occasion, FARDC units have also made deals with opposing armed groups, such as the *Rwandan Hutu Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) rebel movement. Over the years, the armed forces have become more geared towards revenue generation than operational effectiveness.

This is not to say that there are no FARDC commanders and soldiers who are professional and motivated to protect their people. The neo-patrimonial system does not determine everything that happens in the FARDC, and command and control does matter to a certain extent. Many officers do the best they can, but their room to manoeuvre is limited by the context in which they are deployed, their position within the patronage network and the composition of the unit they command.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, to say that citizens are caught between the armed groups and the FARDC as apathetic bystanders and victims is to oversimplify the issue. People's connections to armed actors are more ambiguous than that. First, and in marked contrast to the official discourse of the model of 'rebels filling state vacuums', the armed groups are not always considered to be interlopers. Many of them have their roots in local communities and may justify violence by claiming it is used in defence of local prerogatives.

They are sometimes more familiar to the communities where they operate than the locally deployed FARDC. People have often regarded the FARDC as thieves who abuse their formal authority, and this has caused some soldiers to resent the communities they are

supposed to serve.<sup>10</sup> Second, even if communities consider the FARDC to be a more legitimate figure of authority than the armed groups, people will make pragmatic decisions about which side to collaborate with. As noted by Kalyvas (in reference to communities in wartime in general) and Verweijen (the DRC in particular), people interact with the controlling power in the interests of their own survival, needs and convenience.<sup>11</sup>

Because the FARDC is organised around various competing political-military networks, the central government's leeway is quite limited

There is no simple ideological dividing line between people's loyalties – pro-state or pro-rebel, people are usually consistently loyal only to their own interests, which depend on which side is in control, which side offers more opportunities and which side is more likely to retaliate against the community should things turn sour. On occasion, communities have used locally deployed armed factions for their own ends. They have also engaged in protection schemes with FARDC commanders to benefit their businesses or eliminate competition, in exchange for a part of the profits.

All things considered, people are not merely silent voices for peace but have learnt to adapt to the fact that power often comes from the barrel of a gun.<sup>12</sup> Many eastern Congolese have learnt to instrumentalise violence and see it as a legitimate tool to resolve conflict.

### Ten years of 'Army Reform' (2003–2013)

Western states recognise that the composition and capacity constraints of the FARDC are a problem for the stabilisation of the eastern provinces, and have, over the past decade, repeatedly urged the GoDRC to move ahead with SSR. The often-heard lament that there is no political will from the government

for SSR, however, tends to stem from a misunderstanding of the GoDRC's complex restraints that prevent it from fully engaging with such a process. The historical trajectory of army formation in the DRC and the neo-patrimonial nature of the FARDC and the Congolese state apparatus have set certain limits to the reform agenda.

To begin with, the central government doesn't actually have enough influence

over the army to fundamentally reconfigure it. Because the FARDC is organised around various competing political-military networks, the central government's leeway is quite limited. Taking this into account, four considerations seem to have been important to the Congolese political and military decision-making elites, who defined the security agenda.<sup>13</sup>

First, the conflict with armed groups, such as the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP), /M23 (which had its origins in CNDP), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and FDLR, is defined as much as possible in military terms. To a certain extent, the GoDRC pitches the conflict as one between a legitimate government and foreign-backed armed groups who are hungry for power and natural resources, and feed off a non-political defenceless population. Rwandan-backed armed groups supposedly have a more sinister agenda: to 'carve up' the eastern provinces (the so-called Balkanisation conspiracy<sup>14</sup>) and turn them into a Rwandan-controlled zone of influence. The rhetoric about the conflict is phrased in black-and-white, absolute terms, thereby justifying a firm military response. The political root causes of the conflict – related to community grievances, a

predatory state and conflicts over land, identity and citizenship – are more or less papered over, because addressing these would require political trade-offs that the elites are hesitant to make. Moreover, keeping the focus on a military solution requires substantial investments in the armed forces, which creates a source of income and patronage for influential commanders.

Second, the FARDC should have enough combat capacity to keep armed groups from threatening the DRC’s territorial, or rather governmental, integrity.

following professional guidelines and controlled by internal disciplinary measures.

Should this happen, it would make it more difficult to play factions against one another by giving certain commanders promotions or control over profitable territories.<sup>16</sup> Some politicians may fear a coup d’état if the army were to function as a unified, professional organisation. This is one of the reasons why the presidency micromanages part of the FARDC and relies on a better-paid and well-equipped Republican Guard, which

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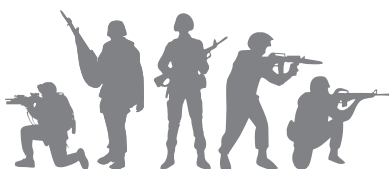
Although it is debatable whether even politically motivated armed groups such as the CNDP and later M23 ever intended (or had the capacity) to carve up the country geographically, increased local autonomy for certain ethnic communities, supported by the force of arms and outside of the control of the state, is a threat to Kinshasa’s political powerbrokers. If these communities turn to sources of patronage outside of the state – for example, by looking to regional powers through their armed proxies – then Kinshasa would lose a key source of influence over them.<sup>15</sup> To subdue or counter this dynamic, the FARDC needs to be strong enough to keep the main population centres under control and the armed groups out.

Third, although the FARDC should be more combat-capable, the neo-patrimonial system dictates that it remains divided in its loyalties and controlled by political-military networks. It is in the interests of political and military powerbrokers that the FARDC does not become an organisation led along a single chain of command,

consists mainly of Katangans and others who are loyal to the head of state.<sup>17</sup>

The final consideration is that the FARDC should remain on standby for the integration of former militia members, and function as a short-term solution to security problems. This approach seems to have lost some of its appeal because of pressure from Western donors and the realisation that the old way of integrating armed factions into the FARDC’s operations created more problems than it solved. Nonetheless, the idea of integrating armed groups and redeploying them to different zones across the country may still resurface as a solution of sorts, should the circumstances call for it. After all, it is unlikely that the FARDC will be able to suppress all the armed groups on its territory anytime soon. Therefore, integrating them is actually a way of preventing the problem from spinning out of control and becoming worse.

Although there is a common discourse in the international community that there is ‘no political will’ for SSR and that this means the government doesn’t care and



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has an attitude of 'If SSR doesn't work, too bad' and that they 'won't lose any sleep over it,' this isn't true, because all this is not, in fact, an ideal position and in reality the situation is far from ideal for the GoDRC.

Stalled army reform and the prominent roles of ex-CNDP members in the FARDC have seriously damaged President Kabila's electoral base in the eastern provinces.<sup>18</sup> However, the GoDRC's choices are limited. As a result of the above deliberations, the government has taken, so far, a rather particular approach to supporting the security sector.

In the years between the peace deal in 2003 and the elections in 2006, integrating armed groups into the FARDC was made a priority

Over the years, the GoDRC's interest in SSR has waxed and waned, depending on political expediency. In the years between the peace deal in 2003 and the elections in 2006, integrating armed groups into the FARDC was made a priority to neutralise potential 'spoiler capacity' and backlash from rebel leaders-turned-politicians, who felt they had lost out in the peace agreement. This position changed after President Kabila's electoral victory and consolidation of power in 2006. The government then made it clear that it wanted to deal with SSR donors in a bilateral fashion, and largely side-lined the UN as the coordinator of international support for the process. When the government needed external support to integrate or demobilise the many armed groups that signed the Goma agreements of 2008, the rhetoric changed briefly to become more inclusive and open to a coordinated SSR effort. This didn't last long, however, as the government continued to conduct business in a bilateral way and, again, side-lined the UN when it signed agreements with Rwanda and the CNDP on 23 March 2009.

The M23 rebellion in 2012 made the pendulum swing back the other way, and the GoDRC became outwardly more compliant with the international community's desire to return to a more political SSR process. Since then, President Kabila has taken every opportunity to emphasise the importance of army reform to the stability of the DRC, despite the fact that his government has slowed down the process repeatedly since 2003.<sup>19</sup>

In the meantime, and despite continuing pressure from Western donors, there is still no realistic long-term plan for

the reform of the FARDC. Ideally, the composition of a country's armed forces is informed by detailed threat and capacity assessments, but the DRC has never undertaken such assessments. The desired size and structure of the armed forces remain open to interpretation, so the government is not pinned down to a plan with future visions and benchmarks. As a result, the current defence-reform plan is little more than a PowerPoint slideshow and reads like a long shopping list to the value of \$686 million, mainly for military equipment. The plan does not address internal control mechanisms, military justice, parliamentary oversight, procurement checks, command structures or disciplinary measures.<sup>20</sup>

MONUSCO (the UN's stabilisation mission in the DRC) and the main Western donors were approached by the GoDRC to support the armed forces in two main ways. First, MONUSCO (formerly known as MONUC) was asked to provide operational support to the FARDC's military operations. MONUSCO has gradually become more assertive and taken a directly combative

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23 MARCH

2009

THE GOVERNMENT SIGNS  
AGREEMENTS WITH THE CNDP  
AND RWANDA, AGAIN SIDE-LINING  
THE UN

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role with the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB, explained in more detail below). This suits certain elite interests well, because if the FIB and MONUSCO brigades do part of the fighting for the FARDC, or at least continue to provide it with logistical support, there is less pressure on the FARDC to reform. Second, international partners were asked to provide training and equipment to the FARDC, mainly in a bilateral fashion. The government stated that it had sovereign concerns about the international support given to the coordination (which the UN would normally undertake) of such a sensitive issue. In this way, political discussions could largely be avoided.

provided the government with two specific types of security-sector support. The intention was for these to work in tandem with the operational military support that MONUSCO provided.

The first type was top-down, country-wide technical support to the FARDC. Elements of SSR were already included in the 2003 peace agreement, although SSR was only formally adopted by the UN General Assembly as a UN policy in 2008, through the UN secretary general's report, *Securing Peace and Development*. The *Accord Global et Inclusif* called for the transitional government to engage in army, police and justice reform to provide human

SSR is defined as a countrywide political process to improve human security by employing more effective security actors and laying out a foundation for sustainable development

By adopting this approach, elites within the GoDRC and the armed forces have hoped to build the army's capacity without actually threatening the foundations of the neo-patrimonial system. Simultaneously, they have allocated certain projects to the international community and therefore, can claim that progress is being made on SSR. This has led to a 'train-and-equip' approach, but this is only a limited part of what SSR should be. In essence, SSR is defined as a countrywide political process undertaken to improve human security by employing more accountable and effective security actors and laying out a foundation for sustainable development.<sup>21</sup>

security and establish the rule of law through effective and accountable security and justice institutions. However, the SSR process soon became one-sided, with the GoDRC pushing its partners to focus on short-term technical interventions, such as training, equipment and infrastructure, rather than on longer-term political issues like better governance and oversight. Considerable support was given by a wide range of partners, such as Angola, Belgium, China, the European Union, France, the Netherlands, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. This led to the training of FARDC battalions, construction of barracks and provision of support to root out the many so-called 'ghost soldiers' from the army's payroll.

However, serious difficulties arose in coordinating donors and the government took few steps to address command and deployment issues, disciplinary matters or payment of its soldiers.<sup>22</sup> The outcome

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2010

THE DRC'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE

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**International responses: SSR and the ISSS (2008 – 2013)**

In response to the demands of the GoDRC and members of the UN Security Council, the international community

was, predictably, disappointing and resulted in an undisciplined army that was either unable to resist armed groups or even worked with them in some areas to divide the spoils of war.<sup>23</sup> Despite these shortcomings, training continued, while 'political' SSR descended into little more than handing out code-of-conduct booklets to soldiers and supporting projects to improve military justice, which were accepted with lukewarm enthusiasm by the FARDC.<sup>24</sup>

## The occupation of Goma by the M23 in November 2012 created a watershed in political opinion about the DRC

Although these technical efforts continued, the UN's appetite to push for political SSR with a hesitant government abated over the years. In 2009 the MONUC mandate explicitly stated that support for security-sector reform, which included the coordination of international efforts in partnership with the GoDRC, was a key mission objective. The mandate also linked the new ISSSS strategy for the east to the broader SSR approach.<sup>25</sup> This seemed to hit a nerve with the GoDRC and in the jingoistic atmosphere of the DRC's 50th anniversary of independence in 2010, it decided to deflect these attempts at outside coordination.

There was strong political pressure on the mission to do two things: first, to change its mandate to MONUSCO, with the addition of the 'S' ('stabilisation') indicating that the DRC had entered a transitory phase, where the worst problems had supposedly been solved and the country had started moving towards a 'normal' state of affairs;<sup>26</sup> and, second, to deprioritise SSR in the mission mandate altogether. Resolution 1925 (2010) only mentions army, police and justice reform as separate technical processes, which rendered political SSR dead in the water in 2010 and 2011.<sup>27</sup>

The international tide turned again in favour of a comprehensive SSR approach after the controversial elections of November 2011 and the mutiny of army units in the east in April 2012. This mutiny shattered the already unconvincing illusion that the eastern DRC was moving towards stability and shone a spotlight on the fragmentation of the FARDC. Noteworthy, and perhaps even instrumental at that time, was the successful advocacy campaign

of the Congolese civil society's SSR network. With the support of international NGOs, the network published a widely distributed report that called for urgent army reform.

Network members toured North America and Europe with their report, which exploded the international belief that 'the Congolese just don't want SSR'.<sup>28</sup> Controversy surrounding the elections, renewed rebellion and civil-society advocacy put SSR back on the agenda, and the 2012 UN Security Council resolution called on the GoDRC to establish 'a new strategic partnership with MONUSCO in the area of SSR', once again linking SSR to the consolidation of state authority in the east.<sup>29</sup> By this time, however, the M23 rebellion was in full swing and culminated in the occupation of Goma in November 2012. Despite these setbacks – or perhaps because of them – SSR was firmly kept on the international agenda as part of the 'post-Goma' peacebuilding process. The regional Framework Agreement, signed in February 2013, clearly mentions it as an obligation for the GoDRC.

The second type of support provided by the international community to the government's attempts to retake the

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69

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90

STATE BUILDINGS  
CONSTRUCTED

900

CIVIL SERVANTS AND  
POLICEMEN TRAINED

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eastern provinces was the roll-out of the ISSSS stabilisation programme in the two Kivus, Ituri and Maniema, after the Goma agreements of 2008 and the agreements of 23 March 2009.<sup>30</sup> The Goma agreements (where a host of armed groups came together to integrate into the army) and the 23 March agreements (in which the CNDP decided to integrate into the FARDC) were indicative of a phase of international optimism about the DRC. The government made all the right noises about reform, and the UN, sensing a window of opportunity, rapidly set up a stabilisation strategy that would support the government in 'clearing, holding and building' in areas affected by conflict in the east, more or less along the lines of classical counterinsurgency theory.<sup>31</sup>

an effective and accountable FARDC and PNC in the long term, and the ISSSS would work provincially to calm tensions and help both local state authorities and the communities until the newly trained troops and policemen could take over security tasks from MONUSCO. If the two processes worked out as planned, MONUSCO would have a suitable exit strategy as well.

Initially, the ISSSS had considerable technical success: between 2008 and 2012, 69 projects were implemented, to the value of \$367 million. This resulted in, among other things, the rehabilitation of a network of roads extending over 1 700 kilometres, the construction of 90 state buildings and the training of 900 civil servants and policemen.

The ISSSS had five pillars: security, political processes, restoration of state authority, return, reintegration and socio-economic recovery, and the fight against sexual violence

The ISSSS had five pillars: security; political processes; restoration of state authority; return, reintegration and socio-economic recovery; and the fight against sexual violence.<sup>32</sup> The strategy would kick-in after certain priority axes had been cleared of armed groups. Along these axes, MONUSCO, UN agencies and international NGOs would support dialogue between the state and potential political spoilers; build roads to open up the hinterland for the authorities; support administration, police and justice in key strategic zones; roll out socio-economic programmes to provide economic alternatives to potential combatants; set up activities to counter sexual violence; and, particularly relevant to this paper, support the FARDC by building barracks and upholding military justice. In principle, the ISSSS would complement the work done under SSR. The SSR would work nationally to create

Almost half a million people benefited from programmes for agriculture, health and sanitation.<sup>33</sup> However, much like the SSR process, the ISSSS ran into a number of serious political problems. First, the peace processes fell apart, and tensions in the army increased between the integrated CNDP and the resurgent FDLR and Mayi-Mayi groups. The GoDRC was hesitant to invest the necessary political capital and address the grievances of local communities, both of which were required if the accords were to hold. Together with the lack of progress on SSR, this created ongoing insecurity. In this context, stabilisation programming could only have a limited impact. Second, the ISSSS had a rather technocratic approach to restoring state authority. It provided infrastructure, and standardised training for civil servants and policemen with no consideration for where they would be deployed

24 FEBRUARY

2013

THE PEACE, SECURITY AND COOPERATION FRAMEWORK IS SIGNED



afterwards, and with little input from the local communities. With little follow-up or disciplinary measures, and a state that was either incapable of or unwilling to pay salaries, civil servants and policemen often subjected the communities to new types of corruption.

The international approaches to both SSR and the ISSSS were technical responses to inherently political problems and, as such, struggled to change the situation on the ground. These medium-to-long-term processes stalled, and operational support by MONUSCO peacekeepers to the FARDC could only have a temporary impact. The FARDC remained divided and unmotivated, and the international community seemed to slip into a sense of defeatism regarding SSR and stabilisation. Few international partners were willing to take the political struggle to the top in Kinshasa and address the ongoing cycles of violence. Serious 'Congo fatigue' was setting in.

### **Revising the international approach (2012–2013)**

However, the years 2012 and 2013 turned out to be eventful. In 2012 the tensions within the FARDC and between communities finally came to a head. The initial success of the Rwandan-supported M23 rebellion in beating back the FARDC destroyed any remaining international faith in the progress of army reform and revealed the government's unwillingness to engage with political issues.<sup>34</sup> The occupation of Goma by the M23 in November 2012 created a watershed in political opinion about the DRC. The badly undersupplied FARDC fled in the face of the M23 offensive, and MONUSCO's peacekeepers stood aside as the rebels entered the town. MONUSCO limited itself to protecting its assets and patrolling the streets, pointing out that its mandate was to support the FARDC, not fight in its stead.

The international community had too many international crises on its hands and seemed to tire of the ongoing conflict, so it joined the regional governments to debate the political problems that formed the basis of the crisis. Consequently, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) was signed on 24 February 2013.<sup>35</sup> Under this framework, regional states supported the boosting of MONUSCO's capacity to undertake unilateral offensive military operations against the M23 and other armed groups by setting up the Force Intervention Brigade. The FIB consists of South African, Tanzanian and Malawian peacekeepers under the command of an assertive force commander.

Although the FIB is active, an FARDC rapid-reaction force would be trained to take over from the international brigade in due course. Of equal importance was the fact that the international and regional partners re-emphasised the need for political reforms in the DRC. Under the PSCF, a national oversight mechanism was set up, through which Kinshasa committed itself to moving forward on a number of reforms, including SSR and decentralisation – both critical to stabilising the eastern provinces. MONUSCO's resolve seems to have been boosted by the PSCF and its first results. The FIB took a while to become operational, but as of the summer of 2013, it has been supporting the FARDC in fighting the M23 and the ADF-NALU group with considerable success.

By the end of 2013, the M23 was defeated and the communities in North Kivu seem to have gained some confidence in their armed forces.

As a result, MONUSCO has also taken a stronger line on SSR and stabilisation in the eastern provinces.

First, the new special representative of the secretary general of the mission, Martin Kobler, seems to have used the

leverage the mission now has with the GoDRC – created by the deployment of the FIB – to raise the thorny issue of SSR again. Kobler has formally made SSR a top priority for the mission's civilian, police and military components, in line with the PSCF agreement and UN Security Council Resolution 2098. He has managed to rally a number of SSR donors to support a leading role for MONUSCO in the coordination of SSR. The mission also asked the GoDRC to provide a clear defence-reform plan to match the FARDC's needs to what donors could provide. MONUSCO's renewed drive to support SSR may have come just in time to fill the gap created by EUSEC and EUPOL (Europe's army reform and police reform support missions), which are drawing down because of the European Union's budget cuts on international support operations.

Second, and predating the M23 events, in 2012 and 2013 the ISSSS was revised to address the shortcomings of its first phase. The revised stabilisation strategy has dropped its top-down approach and now takes as its starting point the fact that the root causes of the crisis in the east are often community-based and differ fundamentally for each location – depending on struggles among the local communities, and between communities and the state over land, citizenship, access to natural resources and provision of security.<sup>36</sup>

According to the revised ISSSS, communities and state authorities should be brought together to discuss their differences and analyse the root causes of conflict. It is hoped that this will bring communities closer together and provide a more realistic basis for conflict-sensitive programming than the generalised programmes that were put in place during the ISSSS's first phase. Programmes for socio-economic recovery and restoration of state authority will be based on these types of dialogues

and, therefore, should be locally relevant and resolve conflict.

On the positive side, the FARDC has defeated the military wing of the M23,

The international community must have a frank discussion about the limits within which the Congolese government can, and is willing to, move on reforms

The ISSSS's security pillar will focus more directly on damage control at the local level. In areas held by the FARDC after operations, the ISSSS has proposed to work with locally deployed FARDC units and the surrounding communities to set up dialogue platforms in which communities can express their security needs to the FARDC and PNC. Training on protection issues will be set up *in situ*, and the FARDC's *Service d'Éducation Civique, et d'Action Sociale* will be supported to improve civil-military relations. Socio-economic programmes will target military and civilian families together to increase social cohesion, and the management of small arms and light weapons may help reduce armed violence. The revised ISSSS will also play a leading role in the new Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration process that was launched in early 2014. The strategy also has a new monitoring and evaluation framework that brings the various implementing partners together around a set of qualitative and quantitative benchmarks, which should enable them to measure the broader progress on stabilisation beyond the project-output level.

with the support of MONUSCO's FIB. This seems to prove, if anything, that the armed forces do have a few battalions capable of doing their job in difficult circumstances if the situation requires it. However, this should not be seen merely as a success story of the train-and-equip approach. A recent analysis shows that the FARDC was effective this time for three reasons. First, the troops were paid and well equipped; second, the troops were led by specially selected commanders and many of the eastern brigades' senior officers were recalled to Kinshasa, perhaps to prevent them from pillaging operational supplies and bickering among one another; and, finally and most importantly, Rwanda did not intervene and support the M23 this time, which fundamentally weakened the rebel movement's military strength.<sup>37</sup>

This points to another positive change, namely the increased political pressure on Rwanda to stay out of the eastern DRC.<sup>38</sup> With the defeat of the M23's military wing, this is the first time in decades that there is no substantial Rwandan-supported armed group in the eastern provinces. This may have an important impact on conflict dynamics because local armed groups will no longer have their usual 'bogeyman' to agitate against.

At the same time, however, many questions remain.

The first and foremost question is, will the incentive structure of the neo-patrimonial political system have changed to such an extent that Congolese political and military elites will actually push to have a unified and competent FARDC? This

### What next? Caution and opportunities

So what does this new dynamic mean for the possibility of the DRC effectively changing track in the coming years? Despite the renewed international enthusiasm, it is simply too early to say. For the time being, it may be best to be cautious about the new developments.



IF THERE EVER WAS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO PUSH FOR CHANGE, THIS MAY NO LONGER BE AVAILABLE FOLLOWING THE MILITARY DEFEAT OF THE M23

is rather doubtful. It may be that, in the coming year or so, extra attention will be given to SSR, or at least to training and equipping certain battalions to better secure the eastern provinces. With a parliamentary opposition that is larger than ever and increased international scrutiny, the government may have no other choice than to keep the pressure on for the time being. However, what happens in the long run is anybody's guess. The GoDRC's main concern was the M23 because it perceived this movement as a direct threat to its control of the eastern DRC and a proxy force for foreign encroachment. Now that the armed wing of the M23 has disbanded, however, it is questionable whether the government will remain as vigorous in fighting either the FDLR, with which it has repeatedly negotiated in the past, or the various Mayi-Mayi groups, which it can bribe with reintegration packages. It would also be more difficult for the FARDC and FIB to fight the FDLR and Mayi-Mayi because – unlike the M23 – these opponents do not hold onto set positions, but use guerrilla tactics and move around the DRC's immense forests. This makes them a difficult enemy to get a grip on.

While the M23 was an active threat, Kinshasa needed the support of the regional states and the FIB, which forced it to make certain concessions on national reforms. Once the pressure is off, though, it is not certain that this momentum will be maintained. And the historical precedent is not very promising. This situation is not improved by the fact that there is still no detailed long-term technical framework to accompany the required reforms. The benchmarks mentioned in the national oversight mechanism of the PSCF are rather technical and mostly focus on numbers of state personnel deployed to the east.<sup>39</sup> So far, the neighbouring states of the Great Lakes region have

not put much pressure on the GoDRC to comply with the national reforms, possibly because they consider this a matter of national sovereignty, which tends to be a sensitive issue for these governments as well.<sup>40</sup>

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Finally, the government is still unclear about the future composition of the armed forces. The defence reform plan mentioned earlier in this paper is in effect and has been presented by the military and political leadership to the donors for them to more or less 'pick and choose' from.<sup>41</sup> There is still no clarity about the link between the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration process, and SSR. Even though the government has stated that the FARDC will no longer accept the wholesale integration of ex-combatants, the back door has been kept open because former fighters can join the FARDC through the regular application procedure, provided they have no damaging human-rights record.<sup>42</sup> Training continues on a bilateral basis, and whether or not MONUSCO will be able to reclaim its role as the coordinator of the international effort, despite the rhetoric, is still up for debate. Since the events of 2012, the government seems to be less outspoken about the wish to work in a bilateral manner with partners, but considering the political sensitivities involved, this may still be their preferred option.

In other words, although there have been a few significant changes in the balance of power in the eastern Congo, the margins for reform are still narrow and if there ever was a window of opportunity to push for change, this may no longer be available following

the military defeat of the M23. This may be a cynical view, but the events of the last decade have instilled precious little faith in those working on security and stabilisation in the DRC. Nonetheless, the new situation does present a chance

for the international community to take stock and decide on the kind of security support to give the GoDRC in the coming years.

At the political level, two matters are important. First, the international community must have a frank discussion about the limits within which the Congolese government can, and is willing to, move on reforms. The neo-patrimonial system that dominates the DRC cannot be changed from the outside overnight, but 'political willingness' is not an absolute – it varies according to the subject and the powerbroker. International partners could try to outline where small changes maybe made and determine incentives to support these changes. This will be a difficult exercise, however, because the paths of power in Kinshasa are highly opaque. It is important to include the provincial and local governments and communities in the discussion because this would open up the traditionally Kinshasa-focused discussion and allow voices from the provinces to have their say. The ISSSS's dialogue activities at the community level may be a starting point to integrate local realities and concerns into the discussions at the national level.

Second, MONUSCO should map out the agendas of the DRC's various international partners, because it is clear that they do not all share the

same considerations. At the moment, there seem to be three main camps. First, there are the ‘multilaterals’, such as the United Kingdom, Sweden and the Netherlands, which work in a coordinated manner through UN frameworks like the ISSSS and have funds, but relatively little political leverage. Second, there are the ‘bilaterals’, such as the United States, the European Union, France and Belgium, which give technical support directly to the government and may have more political clout than the ‘multilaterals’, but seem to have little interest in discussing sensitive political matters, or claim to do so in a bilateral, behind-the-scenes sort of way. Finally, there are other countries like China or Russia, which may have economic interests in the DRC but usually abstain from participating in the peace-building discussion, perhaps because they consider this an intrusion of the DRC’s sovereignty.

It will be difficult to move the government if the international partners do not find some common ground between their positions. MONUSCO has recently re-launched the *Groupe de Coordination des Partenaires*, which creates a forum

for a joint-donor agenda to be discussed. This platform should receive high-level support and feed into discussions in the UN Security Council.

In terms of programmes, the UN and the international community could unite the various existing frameworks into a single response to the crisis in the eastern DRC. At the regional political level, there is the PSCF; for national reforms, there is the national monitoring framework; for SSR, there is the new impetus from the MONUSCO leadership; and, finally, there is the revised ISSSS to address local conflict dynamics. These strategies could be consolidated into a single approach with – and this is crucial – a strong monitoring and evaluation framework with political benchmarks to assess progress. These benchmarks should not merely be government statements or project outputs, which mean little on their own, but instead should be issues such as the changing perceptions of communities in the east.<sup>43</sup> The revised ISSSS has developed a framework that includes a number of such issues, which could be used as a base to build on. Going forward, it will be necessary to be clear about who is

in charge of what, and to tighten high-level coordination so that the mission, agencies and donors do not stray from the chosen strategy.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, it is important to be realistic about what may be achieved. Because it will be virtually impossible to fundamentally change the incentive structure of Congolese political and military powerbrokers anytime soon, or to get the international partners to follow the same agenda, the most that may be achieved over the coming years is a certain degree of damage control at the local level. Small changes may be made through smart, community-based programming that addresses local needs and by working directly with Congolese partners that have an interest in improving things. Such changes are worthwhile on their own, but they would also afford communities some security and provide opportunities for them to develop themselves, which, in turn, creates the potential to increase bottom-up pressure on the authorities to develop a more inclusive system. This may take decades, however, and it remains to be seen if the international community’s patience with the DRC will last that long.

## Notes

- 1 This paper does not discuss in detail the complex root causes of the conflict in the DRC, but instead will focus specifically on the role of the security sector. For more extensive studies on the wider conflict in the DRC, see, for example, Sévérine Autessere, *The trouble with the Congo: Local violence and the failure of international peacebuilding*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the glory of monsters: The collapse of the Congo and the great war of Africa*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011; International Alert, *Sortir de l'impasse: Vers une nouvelle vision de la paix à l'est de la RDC*, September 2012; and the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS) 2013–2017, MONUSCO, 2013.
- 2 February 2014.
- 3 See, for example, the special report of the secretary general (United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2013/96, 15 February 2013) on the mandate of MONUSCO states that peace-consolidation challenges stem from 'a serious shortfall in terms of the capacity and the lack of accountability of state institutions', that 'impunity ... is itself a symptom of weak state authority' (para. 9) and that armed groups are 'taking advantage of power and security vacuums' (para. 5, 47).
- 4 Jason Stearns, Judith Verweijen and Maria Eriksson Baaz, *The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo: Untangling the Gordian knot of insecurity*, Rift Valley Institute, Usalama Project, 2013.
- 5 Booth (2012) notes that 'patrimonialism... refers to the blurring or absence of a distinction between public [state] wealth and the private wealth of the ruler. The prefix neo indicates a system that combines patrimonial and legal-rational or modern bureaucratic features.' (David Booth, *Development as a Collective Action Problem; addressing the real challenges of African governance*. Synthesis report of the African Power and Politics Programme. Overseas Development Institute, October 2012.) In more explicit terms, Clapham defines neo-patrimonialism as a 'peculiarly consumption-oriented form of political management, which depends on the diversion of consumption opportunities to those groups which offer most help, or pose most danger, to people in power'. Clapham continues: 'The state was needed, if at all, as a kind of license which facilitated access to certain kinds of resources; it was not needed, and could indeed even be threatening, as a governing institution in its own right ... personal networks rather than effective institutions provided the best road to survival.' (Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the international system: The politics of state survival*, Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in International Relations, 1996.) Neo-patrimonialism varies widely in scope and form across countries.
- 6 See, for example, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Ola Olsson, Feeding the horse: Unofficial economic activities in the police force in the DR Congo, *African Security*, 4 (2011), 223–241; Koen Vlassenroot and Hans Romkema, *Local governance and leadership in DRC*, Oxfam-Novib, May 2007; and Jennifer Smith, Democratization and good governance in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A case study of South Kivu province, *International Alert*, March 2009.
- 7 For more on the problematic integration process, see Maria Eriksson Baaz and Judith Verweijen, The volatility of a half-cooked bouillabaisse: Rebel-military integration and conflict dynamics in the eastern DRC, *African Affairs*, 112(449)(2013), 563–582.
- 8 The limited fighting ability of the FARDC was evident during the various military operations held between 2008 and 2012, such as Umoja Wetu, Kinia I and II, and Amani Leo. These operations mainly involved moving FARDC units around the countryside after the armed groups had already moved out of areas beforehand (having received advance warning). The armed groups would then retake the terrain once the FARDC was forced to retreat due to the lack of resources needed to sustain its presence. Human-rights violations were common and many people were displaced.
- 9 Stearns, Verweijen and Eriksson Baaz, *The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo*.
- 10 Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, *The complexity of violence: A critical analysis of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*, SIDA working paper on gender-based violence, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2010.
- 11 Stathis N Kalyvas, *The logic of violence in civil war*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; and Judith Verweijen, Military business and the business of the military, *Review of African Political Economy* 40(135) (March 2013), 67–82.
- 12 Helene Morvan and Jean-Louis Kambala Nzweve, *La paix à petits pas: Inventaire et analyse des pratiques locales de paix à l'est de la République Démocratique du Congo – Cas de Nord et Sud Kivu*, *International Alert*, November 2010; Verweijen, Military business and the business of the military.
- 13 It should be noted that the points made in this chapter are partly deductive. In addition to the discussions of the literature mentioned in this paper, the authors continually noticed these tendencies during their work in the DRC. GoDRC decision-making procedures are far too opaque for outsiders to have a full view of what happens. The points are also presented in a way that suggests more of a rationalised or deterministic decision-making process than may exist in reality, and it is also implied that there is a Congolese government 'bloc' of decision makers, which may not be the case.
- 14 The Balkanisation conspiracy theory has been cultivated by Congolese intellectuals and politicians since the country's first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, mentioned it in the early 1960s. This thesis has proved to be remarkably persistent over the years, and is used by some political powerbrokers not only to protest against the formal decentralisation of state functions, as foreseen in the Constitution, but also to mobilise eastern communities against supposed 'Rwandophone interlopers', like the Banyamulenge community in South Kivu.
- 15 Stearns, Verweijen and Eriksson Baaz, in *The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo*, show that this process has been ongoing for a long time, with regional powers taking over important local sources of patronage from national parties.
- 16 Influential or effective army (and police) commanders can be moved by their hierarchy to 'profitable' areas where there are more opportunities to impose taxes or collect an income. If they don't perform well or do not pay off their superiors as they should, commanders can be moved to 'dry' areas where there are fewer economic opportunities. See Verweijen, Military business and the business of the military, and Eriksson Baaz and Olsson, Feeding the horse.
- 17 Stearns, Verweijen and Eriksson Baaz, *The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo*, 39.
- 18 During the 2011 elections, the president was repeatedly attacked by his political opponents for 'letting the Rwandans in'. His decision to dismantle the CNDP-led Amani Leocommand structure was a result of mounting political resistance to the composition of the FARDC.
- 19 President Kabila called SSR a national priority on 23 October 2013 in his speech to Parliament at the occasion of the closure of the national dialogue, which had been intended to address the issue of national cohesion in the light of the M23 rebellion and the controversial 2011 elections. He had already mentioned the need for army and police reform in his inaugural speech on 17 January 2001, when he succeeded his assassinated father as president of the DRC.
- 20 FARDC presentation, June 2013. The budget for civil-military cooperation activities, which is supposed to help the FARDC regain the trust of the local communities, is \$2,7 million, or 0,39 per cent of the total budget. By contrast, the plan asks for \$241 million for the



- air force and \$211 million for the navy. Most civil–military cooperation and related ‘soft’ activities depend on funding from international organisations such as the UN Development Programme, UN Women, EUSEC and international NGOs like Search for Common Ground.
- 21 See, for example, OECD/DAC, *Supporting security and justice. Handbook on security system reform*, 2007; United Nations Secretary General report, *Securing peace and development: The role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform*, 2008; United Nations Secretary General report, *Securing states and societies: Strengthening the United Nations comprehensive support to security sector reform*, 2013.
  - 22 Henri Boshoff, Dylan Hendrickson, Sylvie More et al, *Supporting SSR in the DRC: Between a rock and a hard place*, Clingendael Conflict Research Unit, April 2010; Oxfam, *No will, no way: US-funded security sector reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 2011.
  - 23 Oxfam, *No will, no way*; Verweijen, *Military business and the business of the military*.
  - 24 Evaluation by the UN’s Peacebuilding Support Office of the Prosecution Support Cells, 2013.
  - 25 UNSC (United Nations Security Council), Resolution S/Ref/1906 (2009).
  - 26 UNSC, Resolution 1925 (2010) states that the country is ‘now entering a new phase of its transition towards peace consolidation’.
  - 27 UNSC, Resolution 1925 (2010).
  - 28 *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Taking a stand on security sector reform* was published in English and French by 13 civil-society groups, including the Congolese Réseau pour la Réforme du Secteur de Sécurité et de Justice. See [www.rssj-rdc.org](http://www.rssj-rdc.org) for further information.
  - 29 UNSC, Resolution 2053 (2012).
  - 30 On the ISSSS and its effects, see the ISSSS Integrated Programme Framework, 2009; Sarah Bailey, *Humanitarian action, early recovery and stabilisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, HPG working paper, Overseas Development Institute, July 2011; Oxfam, *No will, no way*; Emily Paddon and Guillaume Lacaille, *Stabilising the Congo, forced migration policy briefing 8*, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University, December 2011; International Alert, *Sortir de l’impasse*.
  - 31 On overall counterinsurgency practice, see US Army Field Manual FM-3-24, 2006.
  - 32 Rather confusingly, SSR was one of the five components of the sexual violence pillar of the ISSSS, the others being the fight against impunity, prevention and protection, multisectoral assistance and data mapping. This led some people to believe that SSR was merely a matter of preventing acts of sexual and gender-based violence by the FARDC and the PNC.
  - 33 ISSSS revised strategy for 2012–2017.
  - 34 For an extensive history of the M23 rebellion, see Stearns, *Dancing in the glory of monsters*. One of the direct causes of the rebellion was President Kabila’s decision to dismantle the Amani Leocommand structure within the FARDC, in which many CNDP officers held lucrative positions. This was a direct threat to their independence and led to a clash of arms.
  - 35 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, 2013.
  - 36 See International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, 2013–2017, MONUSCO, 2013. The revised ISSSS defines stabilisation as an ‘integrated, holistic but targeted process of enabling state and society to build mutual accountability and capacity to address and mitigate existing or emerging drivers of violent conflict, creating the conditions for improved governance and longer-term development’.
  - 37 See Darren Olivier, *Pincer movements, choppers and teamwork: How the M23 was rolled back*, Think Africa Press, 30 October 2013.
  - 38 Strong evidence has been provided in various UN reports that Rwanda gave military support to the M23’s invasion, and, consequently, Rwanda’s main strategic donors, particularly the United States, seem to have put pressure on President Kagame’s government to take a back seat during operations against the M23. The United States cancelled support to a Rwandan-army training programme and thereby provided a clear signal that Washington recognised Kigali’s culpability.
  - 39 See GoDRC, *Mécanisme National de Suivi. Critères et indicateurs de progrès de Septembre 2013 à Septembre 2014: engagements pris au niveau national aux termes de l’accord-cadre pour la paix, la sécurité et la coopération en République Démocratique du Congo et dans la région*, Government of the DRC, September 2013.
  - 40 The PSCF repeatedly states that support to the regional and national oversight mechanism will be given ‘in full respect of the national sovereignty’ of the DRC and the participating states.
  - 41 The minister of defence and his general staff presented the plan to the ambassadors of the main donor states for funding in June 2013.
  - 42 The national oversight mechanism actually mentions that the FARDC intends to recruit 16650 new soldiers per year.
  - 43 For example, at the time of writing, the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative has just finished collecting inputs for a broad baseline study of people’s perceptions of security and access to justice in the two Kivus and Ituri. This baseline will be used for quarterly assessments to measure changing perceptions. The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative’s work will provide critical inputs for the monitoring of the revised ISSSS.
  - 44 At present, there is a bewildering array of frameworks for support to the DRC, officially all complementary to one another, but in reality they often overlap and all use different benchmarks and indicators. This allows donors and implementing agents to ‘pick and choose’, and link their work to whichever framework provides the best fit.





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