



IPSS

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PEACE & SECURITY REPORT

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC) CONFLICT INSIGHTS



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The purpose of this report is to provide analysis and recommendations to national, regional and continental decision makers in the implementation of peace and security-related instruments.

The opinions expressed in this report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies.

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SITUATION ANALYSIS

FIGURE 1. COUNTRY PROFILE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION	HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)	GDP PER CAPITA
89.98M	INDEX: 0.459	\$511.6
NEIGHBOURS	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YRS)	RECS
CAR CONGO (BRAZAVILLE) ANGOLA ZAMBIA TANZANIA BURUNDI RWANDA, UGANDA, SOUTH SUDAN	60.4	COMESA ECCAS SADC

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is Central Africa's largest country with a surface area comparable with Western Europe, and one of the world's most resourced countries.¹ As a primary producer, its economy is made up of agriculture, fishing, mining, forestry and the informal sector which all account for its internal economy and export. Christians make up over 94% of the population, and the Bantus are the majority ethnic group among many others.² While French is DRC's official language, there are four national languages — Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili, and Tshiluba. DRC's conflict can be split into two periods: before the peaceful power transition in January 2019, and after. The former is characterised by authoritarianism and militarised approach while the latter has a more democratic and diplomatic outlook. Thus, although there are links and continuities from the past, a new context is beginning to evolve.

The country is fragile and the eastern part is the most vulnerable.³ The Islamic State (IS), a terrorist group from the Middle East, has made an introduction while

other armed groups continue to operate.⁴ The conflict situation is leveraged to employ child (cheap) labour for mining—about 40,000 children— and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is rampant.⁵ The number of people killed in the first half of 2020 is about three times that of what was recorded within the same time frame in 2019.⁶ Over 4.5 million people have been internally displaced: 1.6 million from Ituri, 1.9 million from North Kivu, and 1 million from South Kivu provinces.⁷ While some armed groups in South Kivu pledged to end the crisis in their controlled areas, the conflict has intensified in Ituri and North Kivu provinces as of September 2020.^{8,9}

1 World Bank (2020). Overview: Democratic Republic of Congo. Where We Work. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview>

2 Whetho, A., and Uzodike, U. O. (2008). Religious Networks in Post-conflict Democratic Republic of the Congo: A prognosis. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 8(3), 57-84.

3 UNSCR (2020). Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Report of the Secretary General S/2020/272. Retrieved from <https://undocs.org/S/2020/272>

4 The Defence Post (2020, September 10). Notorious ADF Militia Kill 58 in Eastern DR Congo's Ituri Province. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/09/10/adf-kill-58-ituri/>

5 See <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/congo-democratic-republic-drc>; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/06/drc-cobalt-child-labour/>; and Human Rights Watch (2020). World Report 2020: Events of 2019. Human Rights Watch.

6 The Defense Post (2020, August 5). DR Congo Armed Groups Killed 1,300 in First Half of 2020: UN. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/08/05/dr-congo-armed-groups/>

7 UNHCR (2020). Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces: Democratic Republic of The Congo. Bi-Weekly Emergency Update, 8-22 June, 2020 and 22 June-July 6, 2020

8 Fork, R. (2020). 70 armed groups agree to end hostilities in DR Congo. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/70-armed-groups-agree-to-end-hostilities-in-dr-congo/1976763>

9 International Crisis Group (2020). Democratic Republic of Congo. Crisis Watch: Tracking Conflict Worldwide.

Political Factors

Post-independence political fragmentation was provoked by resource distribution, identity (ethnicity) and ideological differences. Because of this, some supported the central government while others did not. In rebellion against or support for the central government's interest, armed groups and economically driven informal networks were created and exploited to perpetuate violence.¹⁰ These were common threads with the Katanga and South Kasai wars of secession (1960-65), and the Congo Wars (1996-97 and 1998-2003), for example. This fragmentation and its effects constitute a large part of what underlies the weak legitimacy suffered by all DRC's central governments, as there has not been any time when all factions were totally on the same page. The fragmentation also informed the protraction of the conflict to date and further weakened the capacity of the state;¹¹ hence, the heavy dependence on foreign intervention in terms of security, financial and humanitarian aid from the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC/MONUSCO), the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF).¹²¹³ In addition, from the 1960s until 2019, when Joseph Kabila handed over, state-led repression was rampant. Responses to critiques, dissents and opposition through these years speak to this.

While political fragmentation and economically driven informal networks are still very much present, President Tshisekedi does not engage state-led repression when responding to dissent.¹⁴ However, fragmentation and networks, with their socio-economic and socio-political impact, encouraged the creation, remobilisation, and support for armed groups.¹⁵

Furthermore, inactions and fear of reprisals prevent many from justice or reporting excessiveness of security forces.¹⁶ This indicates lack of confidence in the justice system due to absence of judicial independence and, uncontrolled corruption which render it weak. This partly informs President Tshisekedi's opposition to the parliament's controversial bill on judicial reform. The bill vests more power in the Minister of Justice, an executive officer, in an attempt to tamper with judicial independence.¹⁷ For President Tshisekedi, therefore, a Kabila coalition-controlled parliament has been a problem with respect to institutional reforms. This partly explains his political attempts at a more favourable parliament. His latest win towards this is the end of his coalition with Joseph Kabila and successful vote to remove the pro-Kabila Speaker of the Parliament, Jeanine Mabunda.¹⁸

Socio-economic Dearth and Inequalities

Mobutu Sese Seko's Zairianisation and nationalisation policies plunged the DRC into economic crisis and that still haunts the country today.¹⁹ For instance, farms, factories and businesses were expropriated from foreigners using those policies. This created a faulty economic foundation for his successor, Laurent Kabila. Under the guise of those policies, President Mobutu redistributed wealth to his ally-elites in the 1970s. During this period, there was a commodity price shock that affected DRC's main export—copper. The shock recurred in the 1980s, and by the 1990s, the country was yet to recover when the Congo Wars broke out. Economic mismanagement, lack of infrastructure, currency crisis, and collapse of public and private sectors' economic activity and huge debt made recovery difficult. Because of this, DRC's inflation rate became as high as 511% while Per Capita Income was \$100. This was what Laurent Kabila inherited and there was no GDP growth until after his death.²⁰

10 Interview with Analyst, Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences, September 20, 2020 via WhatsApp Call

11 Ntung, A. (2019). Dynamics of Local Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Challenges Ahead for President Félix Tshisekedi Tshilombo. *Fletcher F. World Aff.*, 43(2), 131.

12 Smith, A. N. (2018). Foreign Aid and Development in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Analysis of International Barriers to Development. *Perceptions*, 4(2)

13 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2019). 2019 Annual Report. DRC Humanitarian Fund

14 Ibid

15 Misser, F. (2020). Rivers of Arms, Democratic Republic of Congo: Arms Flow. *Africa in Fact* 52.

16 See Amnesty International (2020, June 16). Democratic Republic of Congo: President Tshisekedi reneges on justice pledge, leaving victims in despair <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/democratic-republic-of-congo-president-tshisekedi-reneges-on-justice-pledge-leaving-victims-in-despair/>

17 Hoebeker, H. et. al. (2020). 60 Years of Congo's Independence: Power, Complicity and Protest [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2020/06/30/60-years-of-congo-anniversary-independence-power-complicity-protest/>

18 Fessy, T. (2020). Justice at Risk in Democratic Republic of Congo: Draft Laws Endanger Independence of Courts. *Human Rights Watch* [Blog post] Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/08/justice-risk-democratic-republic-congo>

19 UNECA (2015). Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Causes, impact and implications for the Great Lakes region. UN Economic Commission for Africa

20 Gebrewold, B. (2016). Anatomy of violence: Understanding

Since then, the DRC has not been able to recover to improve macro-economic stability and economic freedom in the country is ranked low.²¹ The reliance on agriculture and natural resources without industrial capacity and the disinterest on the part of investors worsen the situation.²² Furthermore, social infrastructures such as health care and education are poor and limited; access to economic opportunities is restricted. Youths are thus motivated to join armed groups as an attractive and reasonable economic alternative and social space.²³

This is in addition to the problems associated with natural resources that affect the occurrence and duration of conflicts. For example, warlords in North and South Kivu compete and fuel the conflicts in their regions to export coffee, gold, and diamonds illegally. Likewise, different informal groups clash with one another or with security forces over mining squares.²⁴ Ethnic groups in Hema and Lendu (Ituri region) also clash over communal access to land and natural resources.²⁶ Lastly, external actors like Rwanda interfere to benefit from the absence of order and writ in eastern DRC. Peace and order threaten conflict-beneficiaries' (external actors and warlords) access to natural resources.²⁷

External Factors

Despite its weak presence at or distance from the grassroots, the DRC government has struggled to manage its institutional and operational crisis in the eastern part of the country.²⁸ Rwandan and Ugandan rebels fighting with their governments on the other side of DRC's borders do not have a strong base in their respective countries. Thus, they use DRC's porous borders for hideouts to attack and interact with vulnerable communities.²⁹ Examples of such rebels include the Allied Democratic Force (ADF) and Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). ADF is a Ugandan rebel group that has failed to operate in Uganda since 2007 and is now based in eastern DRC. The group aims to emancipate Uganda from what they perceive to be a domination attempt from Rwandan Tutsi. FDLR is a Hutu rebel group and is one of the last factions of Rwandan rebels now active in the DRC; the group is opposed to the Tutsis.

In addition, there was a huge refugee influx from Rwanda. Hutu génocidaires who allied themselves with Mobutu formed armed groups³⁰ while the Tutsis and other opportunists followed suit by creating theirs with support from Rwanda.³¹ This is used as an excuse by neighbours (Rwanda especially) to meddle in the fray. The interference eventually led to the Congo wars.³² Rwanda's meddlesomeness, for instance, played a significant role in the creation of Mai-Mai militias and related violent confrontations.³³ Some Mai-Mai militias were created as a form of resistance. However, after some time, others began to pursue other interests.³⁴ The Hutu-Tutsi ethnic rivalry has continued to date. Beyond the rivalry, the conflict allegedly serves Rwanda's interest in illicit coltan extraction; hence Rwanda's interference, even though it denies it.³⁵

In addition, the Congo Wars exposed soldiers of the neighbouring countries to the resources in eastern DRC. These soldiers built and explored cross-border networks to fuel and leverage the conflict.³⁶

the systems of conflict and violence in Africa. Routledge; see also <https://tradingeconomics.com/congo/gdp>

21 Miller, T. et. al. (2020). 2020 Index of Economic Freedom. The Heritage Foundation

22 DRC cannot withstand economic shock. See for example: 'After reaching 5.8% in 2018, economic growth slowed to 4.4% in 2019, owing to the drop in commodity prices, particularly for cobalt and copper, which account for over 80% of the country's exports'. World Bank (2020). Ibid

23 Vlassenroot, K., Mudinga, E., and Musamba, J. (2020). Navigating social spaces: armed mobilization and circular return in Eastern DR Congo. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 00(0), 1-21.

24 International Alert. (2010). The Role of the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Fuelling and Prolonging Crises in the Eastern DRC. International Alert: Understanding Conflict. Building Peace.

25 UNDP (2019). Human Development Report 2019 - Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century. Global Human Development Reports

26 See ICG Africa Report No. 64 titled 'Congo Crisis: Military Intervention in Ituri'

27 Juma, M. and Mengistu, A. (2002). The Infrastructure of Peace in Africa, Assessing the Peacebuilding Capacity of African Institutions: A Report submitted by the Africa Program of the International Peace Academy to the Ford Foundation. International Peace Academy

28 Steven Spittaels: Congo (Democratic Republic) – a complex civil war/Interviewer: van Efferink, L [Transcript]. Retrieved from https://exploringgeopolitics.org/interview_spittaels_steven_democratic_republic_congo_geopolitical_briefing_nkunda_civil_war_rwanda_africa/

29 For Examples Allied Democratic Force (ADF), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)

30 See Council on Foreign Relation's Global Conflict Tracker here: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>

31 Marcucci, G. (2019). The War Report 2018: The Democratic Republic of Congo. Geneva Academy

32 Ibid, Ahere, J. (2012).

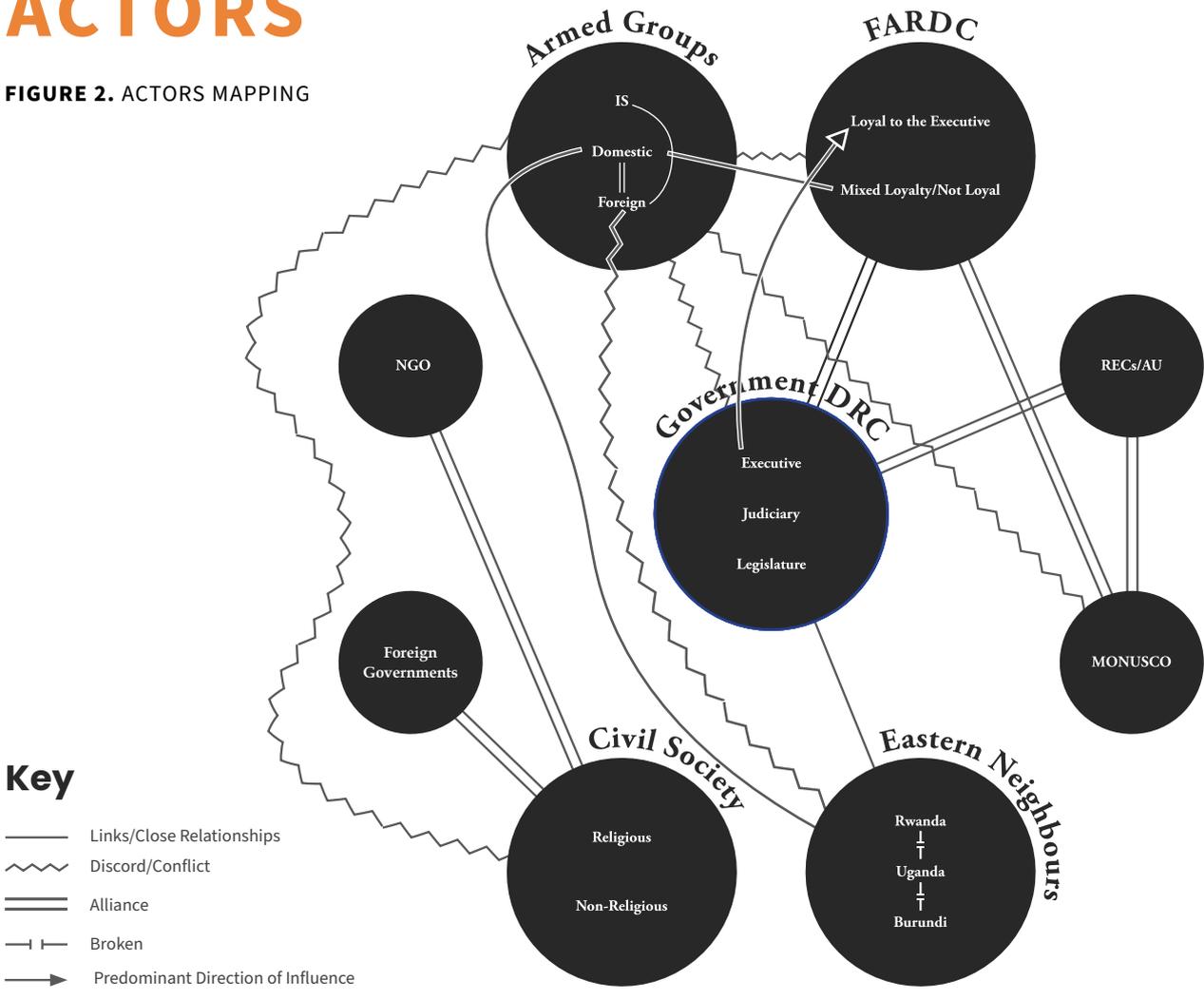
33 de Heredia, M. I. (2017). Everyday violence and Mai-Mai militias in Eastern DRC. In *Everyday resistance, peacebuilding and state-making*. Manchester University Press.

34 See Human Rights Watch Report after a series of interviews at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602-03.htm>

35 Interview with Correspondent, The Africa Report and Contributor, CNN, September 22, 2020 via Email Exchange.

36 Samset, I. (2002). Conflict of interests or interests in conflict? Diamonds and war in the DRC. *Review of African Political Economy*, 29(93-94), 463-480.

FIGURE 2. ACTORS MAPPING



Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

This is made up of the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary who make, interpret and execute laws according to the constitution.³⁷ The legislature (parliament) and judiciary struggled for independence since the 1960s, thereby impeding checks and balances. Since the coming to power of President Tshisekedi in January 2019, however, more efforts have gone into maintaining their independence. For instance, President Tshisekedi did not support reforms as proposed by the Legislature which tends to subject the Judiciary to an executive office—The Ministry of Justice. By doing so, he did not violate the sanctity of the legislature’s independence. However, amidst the crisis over the shaky coalition with the pro-Kabila Common front for the Congo (FCC), there are threats to dissolve the Parliament for a new parliamentary election.³⁸

The distance between the state and grassroots drives the conflict and creates conducive atmosphere for similar conflict drivers.³⁹ The distance is mostly because of insufficient resources; the DRC state is obliged to perform its functions leaving its people vulnerable. The provincial/local governments, for instance, dispute over fiscal decentralisation in relation to Article 175 of the Constitution which contributes to the provinces’ receiving less revenue than they ought to from the national tax. This undermines their financial capacity leaving them unable to provide the necessary social infrastructure.⁴⁰ They also struggle with the problem of legitimacy and security which weakens their provincial authority. Altogether, the situation exacerbates existing structural gaps in the communities and partly informs the success of cross-border networks that fuel the conflict.

opposition-fights-move-to-scrap-shaky-coalition/
³⁹ Szayna, T. S., O’Mahony, A., Kavanagh, J., Watts, S., Frederick, B., Norlen, T. C., and Voorhies, P. (2017). Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections. RAND Corporation Santa Monica United States.
⁴⁰ International Crisis Group (2016). Katanga: Tensions in DRC’s Mineral Heartland

³⁷ The Democratic Republic of Congo (2005). The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo
³⁸ See <https://www.africanews.com/2020/12/07/dr-congo->

Also, the inter-ethnic rivalry would likely not have worsened in the post-Congo War years if the writ and influence of the state had been substantial. To emphasise the importance of the state-grassroots nexus, the Inter-provincial Commission to Support the Awareness, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Community Reintegration Process (CIAP-DDRC) was formed after President Tshisekedi visited South Kivu in October 2019. By September 2020, seventy active armed groups in South Kivu pledged to withdraw hostilities.⁴¹

The Government works with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanisms (RMs), and other foreign actors with respect to the conflict. Partnership with UN-MONUSCO (boots on the ground), for instance, has been an advantage. Victory over the M-23 rebellion in 2013, ADF in 2020, and the CIAP-DDRC success are instances.

Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)

Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) comprises approximately 134,000 personnel.⁴² It is overwhelmed by internal crisis because of patronage networks. This is primarily caused by the mixed chain of command adopted after the integration of ex-militias, political elites within the military, and people with identity differences.⁴³ This causes a risk of disloyalty and lack of cooperation as reported by a FARDC officer during an interview with Human Rights Watch.⁴⁴ Overall, President Tshisekedi struggles with control over FARDC, but its capacity and professionalism is too weak to handle the demands by the conflict. However, it partners with MONUSCO in offences against armed groups.

Furthermore, a UN Security Council report shows that it engaged in Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and other human rights violations.⁴⁵ Moreover, while FARDC fights armed groups, some of its commanders work with domestic armed groups for mutual economic benefits, sales of arms and ammunition, or non-aggression deals.^{46,47}

41 See Africa Media Review for September 18, 2020 by the African Centre for Strategic Studies at <https://africacenter.org/daily-media-review/africa-media-review-for-september-18-2020/>

42 See details of assets and firepower at https://www.global-firepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=democratic-republic-of-the-congo

43 Stearns, J., Verweijen, J., and Eriksson Baaz, M. (2013). The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo: Untangling the Gordian knot of insecurity. Rift Valley Institute

44 See <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/background/africa/drc1204/3.htm>

45 UN Security Council A/HRC/30/32

46 UN Security Council, S/2010/596.

47 Verweijen, J. (2018). Soldiers without an army? Patronage

Non-state Armed Groups

There are over 130 active armed groups in the DRC: home-bred and foreign, and their membership is young.⁴⁸ These groups cooperate, clash, and experience internal crisis. They also serve as social, economic, and security alternatives for locals. The main armed groups include Allied Democratic Force (ADF) formed in 1998, Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) formed in 1994, and Mai-Mai Militias (a community-based group formed in the 1960s but reappeared in force in 1993).⁴⁹

ADF is a Ugandan rebel group based along the Rwenzori Mountains of eastern DR Congo. The group was formed because they felt alienated after the overthrow of Former President Dada Idi-Amin. They employ economic and religious tactics for recruitment, and seem to be receiving external funding from an unknown source, albeit Ugandan officials accuse Rwanda of supporting them. ADF is highly secretive and its strength is unknown. It is affiliated with IS and aligned with FDLR in terms of its hatred for Tutsis. They have coordinated attacks together in recent years.⁵⁰ They are most active in Beni territory, North Kivu. The most recent defeat they suffered sparked insecurity for those in the Ituri region through their reprisal attacks. Other reprisal attacks before them affected the trust locals have in MONUSCO forces.

FDLR also operates in North Kivu and it is the largest foreign armed group in the DRC. It is made up of Rwandans ousted in 1994 and Rwandan refugees. There is dispute over its objective because openly it appears to push for an open dialogue with the Rwandan government but secretly it seeks to overthrow it. FDLR is made up of over 2,000 combatants.⁵¹ Rwanda uses FDLR's continued existence to justify its interference in the DRC. It is vital to note that FDLR likely receives support from Uganda and Burundi. Their continued attack against Tutsis and unsuccessful negotiation with the Rwandan government continues to constitute a threat to sustainable peace in the DRC.

Many of the Mai-Mai militias were formed to resist the invasion of Rwandan forces and armed groups affiliated to Rwanda, while the more recent ones were created to exploit the protracted conflict. The Mai-Mai militias are community-based and about 20,000 to 30,000 of them are scattered across the region.⁵² The group is highly decentralised; and while some factions clash, others work together loosely. Sometimes, different factions have

networks and cohesion in the armed forces of the DR Congo. *Armed Forces and Society*, 44(4), 626-646.

48 See IRIN Special Report on ADF at <https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/irin-120899c.html>

49 See Human Rights Watch Report after a series of interviews at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602-03.htm>

50 Fabricius, P. (2020). Asking the right questions about the Force Intervention Brigade. ISS Today

51 See a brief on ADF and FDLR on MONUSCO's official page at <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/foreign-armed-groups>

52 See Human Rights Watch Report after a series of interviews at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602-03.htm>

different allies or enemies. For example, Mai-Mai Nyatura and FDLR coordinate attacks together while Mai-Mai Gideon attacked FDLR during elections.⁵³

These armed groups have kinship ties with communities, exercise influence over elites within their geographical sphere of operation, and exploit local communities.⁵⁴ Thus, they are able to participate in social life, sometimes run or participate in a parallel administration at local level, and engage the diaspora when necessary.⁵⁵ This is leveraged for recruitment, local intelligence, financing and access to resources, intelligence gathering, logistics, and intellectual resources.⁵⁶

The United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)

The United Nations (UN) has been the major Inter-Governmental Institution (IGI) in the DRC conflict since 1999 when MONUC was created. MONUSCO was later established by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2010 as an upgrade on MONUC with two strategic priorities: protection of civilians and support to the stabilization and strengthening of state institutions in the DRC and key governance and security reforms.⁵⁷ Personnel are contributed by the various member states of the United Nations (UN).

One of MONUSCO's operations devastated ADF in October 2019. As a result, ADF fled to Irumu, near Ituri region. This has a mixed result because the number of attacks in Irumu and Ituri increased.⁵⁸ In February 2020, the people of Beni demanded MONUSCO's departure because of its ineffective response to reported attacks against civilians. The poor effectiveness was due to weakened financial, personnel and logistical capacity, and the rules of engagements which do not support rapid intervention when called upon.⁵⁹ Despite these negative experiences, MONUSCO's partnership with FARDC and the National Police (PNC) enabled secure return of displaced persons.

A recent example is the case of late October 2020 in Pinga, Walikale territory of North Kivu.⁶⁰

Civil Society

The Catholic Church in the DRC, whose congregation accounts for more than 50% of the country's population, is the leading civil society organisation in the nation. It engages in DRC's peace process by presenting itself as a neutral party (mediator) and facilitates political participation (mobiliser).⁶¹ Actions beyond mediation were provoked by the delayed election and repression.⁶² There were 149 peaceful marches mobilised by the church. Out of these, 133 were attacked by government forces or infiltrated by pro-government supporters. This adversely affected Kabila's legitimacy. Most armed groups are in the eastern DRC and they saw Kabila's weakening legitimacy as an opportunity to escalate violence and demonstrate the importance of their inclusion in the peace process. There is a link between the politics in Kinshasa, in which the church plays a vital role, and eastern DRC. Since Tshisekedi became a president, the church has focussed on its mediator role. An indication is its hosting of President Tshisekedi at the Vatican in January 2020. Human rights violations and democratic deficits under Kabila informed his mobiliser's role but Tshisekedi's administration operates with a different approach.

Furthermore, Actions et Initiatives de Développement Pour la Protection de la Femme et de l'Enfant (AIDPROFEN) focuses on women and children and receives support from International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) and the US Embassy, among others. The equal education campaign for abandoned girls and boys has helped prevent many from joining armed groups in Goma, North Kivu.⁶³

53 Nantulya, P. (2017, September 25). A Medley of Armed Groups Play on Congo's Crisis [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/medley-armed-groups-play-congo-crisis/>

54 International Peace Institute et. al. (2019). Prioritization and Sequencing of Peacekeeping Mandates: The Case of MONUSCO. Workshop. International Peace Institute (IPI)

55 Verweijen, J. (2016). Stable Instability Political settlements and armed groups in the Congo. Rift Valley Institute

56 Akamo, J. O. (2020). How Can MONUSCO Contain the Activities of ADF? Non-State Actors

57 UN Security Council, S/RES/1925; S/RES/2053; S/RES/2147; S/RES/2409; S/RES/2502

58 See <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/drc-attacks-adf-armed-group-may-among-crimes-against-humanity-and-war-crimes>

59 Minani, R. (2020, February 18). Exasperated, the People of Beni Demand the Departure of the United Nations Troops (MONUSCO) from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Southern Voices, Wilson Centre [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://africaupclose.wilsoncenter.org/exasperated-the-people-of-beni-demand-the-departure-of-the-united-nations-troops-monusco-from-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

60 See <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/pinga-reassured-presence-peacekeepers-and-army-families-have-returned-home>

61 Vail, C. (2020). Catholic Peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the COVID-19 Emergency. Faith in Action.

62 Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2017, February 17). Interview: Prospects for Peace in the DRC [Blog post] <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/interview-prospects-peace-drc-katunga/>

63 Interview with Founder and Executive Director of AIDPROFEN, September 19, 2020 via WhatsApp Call and Chat. See also <https://aidprofnasbl.wordpress.com/>

DRC's Eastern Neighbours

The rivalry among Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi as well as their internal crises prove to be a threat to the DRC. These countries have used militias operating in the DRC to fight proxy wars among each other. FDLR, for instance, is linked with Uganda and Burundi against Rwanda.⁶⁴ In turn, Rwanda is linked to supporting rebel groups operating in South Kivu against Burundi and backing insurgents like ADF against Museveni's Uganda.⁶⁵ This dynamic is what President Tshisekedi hopes to diplomatically resolve; hence, the quadrilateral arrangement between Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi for a rapprochement.

64 International Crisis Group (2020). Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes. Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°150

65 French, H. W. (2009). Kagame's Hidden War in Congo. The New York Review of Books, 24. Global Policy Forum.

There was a violent mutiny within FARDC in April 2012 named the M-23 rebellion which sparked violent confrontations in North Kivu. The rebellion was formed by former members of National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) who got integrated into the FARDC. CNDP was another rebellion group established by Laurent Nkunda in 2006. It was backed by Rwanda and Uganda.⁶⁶ M-23 was defeated in April 2013 and those that were neither captured nor killed were split into two and fled to Rwanda and Uganda.⁶⁷ Later, they returned to eastern DRC and reintegrated themselves into the conflict about two years before the 2018 election. Their return added to the tension between Rwanda and Uganda because Rwanda believed that Uganda was using the ex-M-23 mutineers who meet regularly with Ugandan military officials and operate freely in Kampala.⁶⁸ This summarises the regional context of the rivalry and the possibility of a proxy war when DRC's 2018 election was held. This was what President Tshisekedi inherited from his predecessor, Kabila, who had rather delayed the election and only allowed it due to political pressure.

After a series of pressure from civil society due to repression and delay, elections eventually took place in December 2018 without Joseph Kabila's candidacy. In fact, Kabila's legitimacy had already suffered due to the political uprisings ascribed to the delay. It was the Catholic Church that played a critical role in mobilising protests against Kabila who responded with the use of force. Armed groups took this as an opportunity to make a statement as stakeholders and that resulted in an upsurge in the sub-regional conflicts during the time. The problem of legitimacy is still at the nexus of the conflict and a change in administration did not evidently guarantee a shift in the state of affairs. This was accompanied by inter-ethnic violence, weak capacity of the state and its institutions, restricted access and absence of economic opportunities, resource conflict and external interference.⁶⁹

Records show that there were 790 organized political violence events across more than 420 locations in the DRC between 24 January 2019, Tshisekedi's inauguration date, and July 2019. Fatalities were 1,900. By the end of 2019, fatalities have risen to 3,300.⁷⁰ In the first half of 2020, according to the UN, additional 1,300 fatalities were

recorded.⁷¹ The figure outnumbers what was recorded within the same period in 2019.⁷² Over 90% of the cases were from Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu provinces (eastern DRC). In addition, the Islamic State has made an intrusion and recognised ADF as an affiliate.⁷³

ADF exploits the absence of state institutions and local grievance to maintain its presence in the Rwenzori borderlands of the DRC side rather than the Ugandan side.⁷⁴ It also leverages social, cultural, religious and economic sentiments. Because of this, it has been able to maintain strong presence in the region and manage to recover when loss is suffered.⁷⁵ FDLR and the Mai-Mai Nyatura focus on ideological differences— attacking the Tutsi's who later formed Raia Mutomboki for self-defence. Notably, the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) case in 2020 is an example of internal crisis within armed groups.⁷⁶

Apart from regular activities, these armed groups also entertain internal crisis. A recent instance was when FARDC killed CODECO's leader, Justin Ngudjolo, in April 2020, and left a power vacuum that needed to be filled. The struggle for power led to violent confrontations that spread around and led to a fighting between the Lendu and Hemu militias.⁷⁷ Also, the Congo Ebebi of Dragon and the Resistance Nationale Lumbiste (RNL), both Mai-Mai militias, clashed. This was after RNL attacked Congo Ebebi of Dragon fighters in the village of Liboyo, captured eight members of the group and forced the others to retreat.⁷⁸

66 Final Report of the UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo", S/2012/843, 15 November 2012.
 67 Muleefu, A. (2013). Beyond the Single Story: Rwanda's Support to the March 23 Movement (M23). Amsterdam LF, 5, 106.
 68 Ibid. International Crisis Group (2020).
 69 Ibid. International Crisis Group (2020).
 70 Ibid. French (2009)

71 USAID (2020). Democratic Republic of the Congo - Complex Emergency. Factsheet
 72 See <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/08/05/dr-congo-armed-groups/>
 73 See a report from the US Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>
 74 Nantulya, P. (2019, February 8). The Ever-Adaptive Allied Democratic Forces Insurgency [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-ever-adaptive-allied-democratic-forces-insurgency/>
 75 Titeca, K., and Vlassenroot, K. (2012). Rebels without borders in the Rwenzori borderland? A biography of the Allied Democratic Forces. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 6(1), 154-176.
 76 Kleinfield, P. and Flummerfelt, R. (2020, May 5). Rebel splits and failed peace talks drive new violence in Congo's Ituri. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2020/05/05/Ituri-Congo-Hema-Lendu-CODECO-demobilisation>
 77 Kleinfield, P. and Flummerfelt, R. (2020, May 5). Rebel splits and failed peace talks drive new violence in Congo's Ituri. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2020/05/05/Ituri-Congo-Hema-Lendu-CODECO-demobilisation>
 78 See the alert at <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/385426/drc-rival-mai-mai-militias-clash-in-lubero-territory-north-kivu-province-october-1>

MONUSCO and FARDC are at the vanguards of conflict response in the DRC and their primary objective is civilian protection. FARDC is structurally and operationally weak, and it relies on MONUSCO which also has logistical and procedural limitations. Due to this, MONUSCO's response to rescue calls has not been impressive. This led to calls for their departure as locals, especially those in Beni, have lost confidence in them.⁷⁹ This is in addition to cases where local communities (due to some form of affiliation) and external actors like Rwanda (for natural resources) assist the armed groups.⁸⁰

While these situations remain unchanged, President Tshisekedi, unlike his predecessor, adopted a more diplomatic approach. This includes acting a third party to bridge the gap between Rwanda-Burundi/Uganda. He recognises the need for regional and geo-political advantage in eastern DRC's peace process.⁸¹ Reaching middle ground and building cordiality can be leveraged to reduce or stop the support armed groups receive from neighbours. However, he seems to be alone in his attempt to handle the case of external support armed groups receive from DRC's neighbours.⁸² The international community is yet to take concrete action concerning Rwanda's role in prolonging the conflict. President Tshisekedi's policy thrust favours a reconfiguration from the 1960-2018 realities. However, he struggles to break away from the previous regime.⁸³ This is evident in the controversies around judicial reforms and anti-corruption crusade.

Beyond the popular and military interventions, there are CSOs on the scene. One of them is AIDPROFEN, and there are others. Their focus is on abandoned girls and boys and it may not provide immediate impact. However, in the long run, it is thought that they contribute to reducing the number of youths that join armed groups.

Lastly, DRC's youths are at the nexus of this conflict as victims, tools, and perpetrators; thereby reiterating their vulnerability. While there is no accurate statistics on the age distribution of members of armed groups, corroborating sources report that majority are youth.⁸⁴ Despite this, the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda is yet to receive due attention.

Some armed groups have surrendered in South Kivu while unrest in the regions of North Kivu and Ituri has intensified. The external support the fighting armed groups receive is yet to cease, and they still attack the civilian population. Despite this, President Tshisekedi is focussed on building legitimacy and brokering peace with its eastern neighbours to stabilise the region. He demonstrates that the chances of peace are high if the neighbours discontinue the support they give to armed groups and forge a united front.

79 Akamo, J. (2020). Depleting Trust: Threatened Communities and the Future of MONUSCO. Featured Intelligence Report.

80 RULAC (2019, February 5). DRC: A Mapping of Non-International Armed Conflicts in Kivu, Kasai and Ituri [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.rulac.org/news/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-a-mapping-of-non-international-armed-conflict>; See also: French, H. W. (2009). Kagame's Hidden War in Congo. The New York Review of Books, 24. Global Policy Forum. Retrieved from <https://www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/index-of-countries-on-the-security-council-agenda/democratic-republic-of-congo/48118-kagames-hidden-war-in-the-congo.html>

81 Gras, R. (2020, October 2). Rwanda: 'Our rapprochement with the DRC can't please everyone' – Vincent Biruta. Diplomacy Chat. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.theafricareport.com/44287/rwanda-our-rapprochement-with-the-drc-cant-please-everyone-vincent-biruta/>

82 Ibid. Ntung (2019)

83 Smith, P. (2020, September 29). DRC: 'To survive, Tshisekedi is trying to outmanoeuvre, not confront the Kabilists'. Young Administration. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://www.theafricareport.com/43502/drc-to-survive-tshisekedi-is-trying-to-outmanoeuvre-not-confront-the-kabilists/>

84 Interview with Secrétaire Général, Generation Epanouie, November 18, 2020 via WhatsApp Chat.

CURRENT RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

MONUSCO

In response to the conflict, MONUSCO's mandate is focussed on civilian protection. However, its responsiveness to regular attacks is not as impressive as communities would expect and the public even blames them for some of the attacks.⁸⁵ This costs MONUSCO local support in some communities like Beni.⁸⁶ A complexity that limits the mission is the tie between rebel groups and communities. The Bembe community and the Lulua-Luba community support one or more armed groups.⁸⁷ An offensive against these armed groups may create an enemy out of such communities.⁸⁸

MONUSCO currently struggles with shortage of organisational and logistical capacities which limits its ability to respond to retaliatory attacks from armed groups. In addition, MONUSCO's military intervention has attracted a number of reprisal attacks against itself, communities and civilians.⁸⁹ An example is ADF's reprisals.⁹⁰ Yet, there is no strategy in place to prevent them.

AU

The AU falls short in terms of action with respect to Rwanda's involvement. It is critical, yet, it has taken no tangible step. Rwanda's interference violates the AU's Constitutive Act and thus requires an AU's reaction. Without a concrete action, AU's political will and commitment to peace in the DRC is thus questionable.

⁸⁵ Novosellof, A. et. al. (2019). Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Missions in the DRC (MONUC-MONUSCO). Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Akamo (2020).

⁸⁷ Stearns, J., Verweijen, J., and Eriksson Baaz, M. (2013). The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo: Untangling the Gordian knot of insecurity. Rift Valley Institute

⁸⁸ Day, A. (2017, May 15). The Best Defence Is No Offence: Why Cuts to UN Troops in Congo Could Be a Good Thing. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/why-cuts-to-un-troops-in-congo-could-be-good-thing.html>

⁸⁹ Levine-Spound, D. (2019, December 18). Backlash in Beni: Understanding Anger against the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the DRC. [Blog Post] Retrieved from <https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/backlash-in-beni/>

⁹⁰ See <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/b148-new-approach-un-stabilise-dr-congo>

SADC

In response to worsening conditions, SADC restated its commitment in May 2020 and its primary position is the reconfiguration of the FIB.⁹¹ While this seemed like a good step to strengthen boots on the ground, further militarisation may not be helpful due to the increase in reprisal attacks on citizens within the last one year.

91 De Coning, C., and Peter, M. (2019). United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order. Springer Nature

Best Case Scenario

This scenario may involve President Tshisekedi consolidating the following: public trust by balancing the interest of political elites with citizens, the required support within the government, executive control, and support from the country's Parliament and international community to implement a popular peace initiative (legitimacy). It may also include fast-tracking DRC's diplomatic success with its neighbours which will be beneficial in solving the crisis. This would go a long way in building social cohesion and support from some local communities. As a result, President Tshisekedi may be able to deliver the reforms required to delink from the previous era, set a suitable governance structure that would be responsive to present realities, and reduce local communities' support for armed groups.

Worst Case Scenario

The worst-case scenario could involve stagnancy because Tshisekedi's government and other actors would need to strike a balance. This balance will aim to allow a peaceful transition from the divisive landscape woven into DRC's political history to a democratic one that requires loyalty and legitimacy from all factions. Unfortunately, this is almost impossible. Mistrust is still high while majority are yet to adopt a national perspective to the instability. Furthermore, the entrance of the IS and its affiliation with ADF is problematic. ADF may regain lost grounds and build more confidence, while IS will seek to establish itself in the region. The dispersal in the up north direction of ADF, a group already affiliated with IS, could give way for cooperation with other groups such as the Lord's

Resistance Army (LRA). The linking of these three extremist groups threatens the region. Also, misconceptions over negotiations (as a means to extort government) could go on to encourage the creation of new armed groups and membership of existing ones.⁹² In the same vein, continuous military expedition may lead to more reprisal attacks on civilians. Lastly, the collapse of the Kabila-Tshisekedi coalition and exit of the Parliament's Speaker may kick-start a domino effect that will end at grassroots. This effect may end up as violent confrontations, directly or by proxy, between Pro-Tshisekedi and Pro-Kabila politicians. As a result, there will be a setback in DRC's peace agenda.

Most Likely Scenario

In this case, irregular confrontations between the FARDC and armed groups will remain while the economically driven informal networks will be sustained. Tensions in eastern DRC may gradually reduce depending on these three things: the bolstering of MONUSCO's capacity to deter retaliatory attacks and be more responsive to distress calls; increasing of diplomatic efforts by President Tshisekedi; and intervention from the international community in terms of problems related to natural resources and external interference.

President Tshisekedi would intensify his political efforts to have and maintain a supportive Parliament to pursue his reform agenda. The collapse of the coalition with the Pro-Kabila camp and the Speaker's exit in December 2020 are symptomatic of these political efforts.

92 Interview with Founder and Executive Director of AIDPRO-FEN, September 19, 2020 via WhatsApp Call.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS

To the DRC Government

As demonstrated, governance issues are central and the national government does not have the buoyancy to fill the dearth. Hence, the government should lead a structural transition from one that overburdens the central government to one that allows provinces to cater for their own affairs. This means decentralisation in terms of economy and security. Thus, legitimate authorities at grassroots will lead to conflict prevention and management. This will encourage ownership of governance, peace and security infrastructures at grassroots levels. Through this decentralisation process, the burden on the central government will be reduced. This would enhance institution building which is a priority of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG).⁹³

In this vein, especially with respect to conflict resolution, more initiatives with the political will to work like the Inter-provincial Commission to Support the Awareness, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Community Reintegration Process (CIAP-DDRC) inaugurated in South Kivu in 2019 is required in eastern DRC, and its context specificity should be emphasised.

Specifically, this would ease the following: the transition of armed groups that have connections with local communities into provincial security forces able to receive adequate professional training; the political participation by directing the attention of the DRC citizens and civil society to appointing suitable leaders to manage the affairs of the provinces; the making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies to suit the realities of each province rather than take a blanket approach; the shift into a more productive economic and social system because the move would reduce the dependence on a weak central government. It would also create an environment where inter-provincial competition can be diverted from violent confrontation to development-oriented.

More diplomatic effort is required at regional and continental levels with respect to external interference from DRC's eastern neighbours. This is critical to conflict management in the region.

To the UN

There is a need for UN member states to support and facilitate the timely reconfiguration of FIB.⁹⁴ It has so far proven to be the only effective force against armed groups following its victory over the M-23 movement; hence, the need to heed SADC's call for the reconfiguration of FIB. However, the focus should be on strengthening its capacity for civilian protection. There is also a need to focus on the local grievances and ties with local communities which the armed groups exploit. These grievances can be easily framed to the disservice of MOUNUSCO and it would be detrimental to the much-needed public trust and support in local communities. Therefore, managing and preventing further attacks would require that the UN MONUSCO find a way to prevent reprisal attacks and increase efforts in public diplomacy.

To the AU, RECs, and ICGLR

Firstly, for peacebuilding, there is a need to facilitate technical and capacity-building assistance for institutions at grassroots levels so they could develop sense of ownership of governance, peace and security infrastructures. This is critical to peacebuilding because failed institutions partly underlie the longevity of the conflict in eastern DRC.

Furthermore, with respect to the youth, there is a need for the AU to increase its presence in the DRC in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, African Youth Charter and the African Union Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security and other related normative framework(s). This is critical to conflict prevention and peacebuilding as it would help preoccupy and divert the attention of the young population so as to help them see beyond use of violence to make a living. It would also reduce followership of politicians who exploit youth's idleness to perpetuate violence. This furthers the priorities of the ACDEG.

The AU PSC may also need to intervene to combat international terrorism and violent extremism; develop strategies to prevent genocide or similar crimes; and be more involved in human rights issues, especially to curb the excesses of the FARDC.⁹⁵

⁹³ Union, A. (2007). African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

⁹⁴ ISS (2020). Africa: Why Is SADC Slow to Intervene in Political Crises? PSC Report. Retrieved from <https://allafrica.com/stories/202009070054.html>

⁹⁵ Union, A. (1993). Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.

RECs and the ICGLR should partner with the AU on the youth agenda in the DRC. In addition, RECs and member states need to increase their support for President Tshisekedi's diplomatic approach to boost cooperation for regional security.

Lastly, for the AU and RECs, maintaining peace and facilitating successful dialogue between Pro-Kabila and Pro-Tshisekedi should be prioritized. This would lead to having a healthy opposition, as expected in a democracy, without fuelling conflict or sabotaging state institutions.

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1960–2020

June 1960 – DRC becomes an independent sovereign state.

July 1960 – Katanga is declared an independent state by Moïse Kapend Tshombe, marking the beginning of the Congo crisis – a civil war with external ramifications and interventions.

August 1960 – South Kasai declares autonomy from central government.

July 1964 – October, 1965 – Moïse Tshombe becomes Prime Minister. Katanga is reintegrated into the DRC.

November 1965 – Mobutu Sese Seko replaces Kasa-Vubu in a coup.

August 1974 – Mobutu Sese Seko promulgates a new DRC Constitution.

October 1996 – May 1997 – The First Congo War breaks out and ends.

August 1998 – July 2003 – The Second Congo War breaks out and ends.

June 1999 – SADC and UN representatives meet in Lusaka and draft a ceasefire agreement.

August, 1999 – The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1258 is unanimously adopted.

November 1999 – The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1279 is unanimously adopted and United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) is established.

January 2001 – Laurent Kabila is assassinated amidst violent confrontation between the DRC Government and armed groups, and his son, Joseph Kabila, takes over power 10 days after.

May 2005 – DRC's National Assembly adopts a new constitution.

May 2006 – The insurgency in central Katanga ends as the Mai-Mai leader, Gédéon Kyungu Mutanda and his wife surrender.

July 2006 – The DRC holds its first General Elections after the Congo Wars.

December 2006 – CNDP is formed.

January 2008 – The DRC government and 22 armed groups sign the Goma Accords.

November 2008 – Rebels massacre an estimate of 150 people in Kiwanji.

January 2009 – Rwanda, the DRC and MONUC plan and conduct a joint military operation against FDLR.

July 2009 – FDLR and LRA execute retaliation attacks.

July 2010 – MONUC becomes MONUSCO with additional mandates.

November 2011/February 2012 – Presidential election. Joseph Kabila is elected again.

April 2012 – Mutineers from CNDP members who joined the FARDC form the M-23 rebellion group.

December 2017 – Protest is led by the Catholic Church (and it continues till the fourth quarter of 2018).

December 2018 – Presidential elections are held in the DRC and Felix Tshisekedi emerges winner.

January 2019 – Felix Tshisekedi is sworn in as President of the DRC.

October 2019 – The Inter-provincial Commission to Support the Awareness, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Community Reintegration Process (CIAP-DDRC) in South Kivu is formed.

November 2019 – FARDC kills a top ADF leader. The people of Beni protest against MONUSCO asking them to leave.

April 2020 – IS claims its first attack (bomb blast).

May 2020 – ADF kills civilians in a retaliatory attack.

July 2020 – DRC's Justice Minister resigns after judicial reform dispute.

September 2020 – Seventy armed groups in South Kivu surrender Felix Tshisekedi hosts the quadritite summit in Goma with Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Seventy armed groups in South Kivu agree to end hostilities in the DRC.

Peace and Security Reports

Although key continental and regional institutions have their own early warning reporting systems, policy making within these institutions also benefit from a number of analytical and periodic reports generated by think tanks and research institutes. The Research Unit at IPSS provides brief and critical analyses of the state of peace and security in different African countries as well as critical appraisals of interventions by various African actors. The reports will cover African countries showing positive signs as well as those undergoing negative developments.



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