



# The Old is Dying and The New Cannot Be Born (Yet?)

**SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN THE  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

**Hans Hoebeker, Christian Chiza  
and Bienvenu Mukungilwa**

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## INSECURE LIVELIHOODS SERIES

The Insecure Livelihoods Series publishes independent and field-driven information and analysis on the complexity of conflict and security in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its reports are based on independent, non-partisan and collaborative research.

### AUTHORS

Hans Hoebeke is a consultant and Senior Associate Fellow at the Egmont Institute in Brussels. Previously, he was International Crisis Group's Senior Analyst for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Christian Chiza is a PhD student at Université Catholique de Louvain and a researcher at GEC-SH, based at Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Bienvenu Mukungilwa is a research assistant at CERUKI and a researchers at GEC-SH, respectively based at Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

## CONFLICT RESEARCH GROUP (CRG)

Director: Koen Vlassenroot

Research Director: Christoph Vogel

Project manager and learning lead: Michel Thill

[www.ugent.be/ps/conflict-ontwikkeling/crg/en](http://www.ugent.be/ps/conflict-ontwikkeling/crg/en)

## GROUPE D'ÉTUDES SUR LES CONFLITS ET LA SÉCURITÉ HUMAINE (GEC-SH)

Director: Godefroid Muzalia

Project officers: Francine Mudunga, Elisée Cirhuza and Cubaka Muderhwa

[www.gecshceruki.org](http://www.gecshceruki.org)

## GOVERNANCE IN CONFLICT NETWORK (GIC)

Coordinator: Tomas van Acker

[www.gicnetwork.be](http://www.gicnetwork.be)

## PUBLISHING

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# Executive Summary

During the past two decades, Security Sector Reform (SSR) has been an important and visible part of international support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Most of this time, the Kabila government (2001–2019) did not show much commitment to effective reform. Most donors and international partners thus left the scene and suspended their programmes and support during the electoral crisis that started in 2015. The balance sheet of accomplishments in the past 20 years thus appears rather meagre. Unlike the previous government, President Tshisekedi and most of his closest allies have few direct ties to the military or police. Nonetheless, important announcements regarding the security sector have been made, and it remains to be seen how they will materialize in the coming years. This report is the first systematic review of SSR in the DRC since the Tshisekedi presidency began. It analyzes the general state of affairs of the Congolese security forces in the context of the *état de siege* (state of siege) that has been declared since May 2021 in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri.

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# Introduction

During most of the past two decades, Security Sector Reform (SSR) has been an important and visible part of the international support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). For most of this time, the Kabila government (2001–2019) has never shown any real commitment to effective reform. Most donors and international partners left the scene and suspended their programmes and support during the electoral crisis that started in early 2015. The balance sheet of accomplishments during the Kabila years appears meagre. As a result, today, the security and defence forces are in a dire state and remain responsible for much of the violence against civilians and human rights violations. The security situation has not improved, and popular confidence in services remains low. Human resources management, payroll and legislative reforms require urgent attention.

In 2021, political developments in Kinshasa – where after two years of a shaky coalition, President Tshisekedi has effectively sidelined former President Kabila’s political and business network – offer a new opportunity for fundamental reform, including SSR. In contrast to Kabila, President Tshisekedi and most of his closest allies have few direct ties to the military or police. However, despite this lack of affinity and networking with the security and defence forces, Tshisekedi quickly reached out to the armed forces, showing an interest in the living conditions of the rank-and-file, while at defining political moments seeking the symbolic support of military commanders.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://laprosperiteonline.net/2019/02/05/nation/rdc-felix-tshisekedi-communie-avec-les-militaires-et-leurs-familles/> but also <https://www.radiokapi.net/2020/12/01/actualite/securite/rdc-les-officiers-generaux-et-superieurs-des-fardc-et-de-la-police> and <https://zoom-eco.net/a-la-une/rdc-des-officiers-fardc-reaffirmation-leur-soumission-au-commandant-supreme-felix-antoine-tshisekedi/>.

Moreover, he has initiated some cautious army command reshuffles. There are also considerable indications that the justice system has more leeway to fight impunity and is being weaponized as a tool in the fight against corruption.

Although it was already a political priority from the start of his presidency, security, SSR and justice reform now occupy prominent positions in the programme, announced in April 2021, of the new Union Sacrée de la Nation (USN) government.<sup>2</sup> The following month's decision to declare an *état de siège* (state of siege) in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri was a further defining moment of this government. Intentions, however, do not automatically translate into substantial reform; the declaration of the *état de siège* was itself also a response to increasing pressure from an exasperated local population in the east.<sup>3</sup> Given the state of the security forces, the complicity of several of its members in the violence, and the perceived lack of results, the decision has been increasingly criticized for putting the cart before the horse.<sup>4</sup> Politically, the *état de siège* has already led to increased government communication on security issues and an interesting report in Parliament, linking the implementation of the *état de siège* to needed structural reform.<sup>5</sup> The *état de siège* is a crucial statement of political intent and expresses a sense of political urgency to confront the issues.

Looking further ahead, the strong linkage between the capacity of the Congolese government to protect its citizens and MONUSCO's pull-out, as identified in the transition plan for the gradual retreat of the UN mission,

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<sup>2</sup> Plan d'Actions 2021-2023 Construire un État fort, prospère et solidaire ; Gouvernement de l'Union Sacrée de la Nation ; Premier Ministre ; Kinshasa ; April 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Nyenyezi Bisoka A., Vlassenroot K.; Corruption in the Congolese Army: Three Lessons for Modern Democracies; Commentary, Egmont Institute, 5 October 2021, at <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/corruption-in-the-congolese-army-three-lessons-for-modern-democracies/>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.dw.com/fr/rdc-ituri-nord-kivu-violence-urgence-tshisekedi-lucha/a-57417001> and <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1265265/politique/rdc-la-lucha-en-guerre-contre-letat-de-siege>.

<sup>5</sup> Rapport synthèse des auditions sur l'évaluation de l'état de siège proclamée par l'ordonnance N° 21/015 du 03 mai 2021, sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo, tel que prorogé à ce jour ; Commission Défense et Sécurité ; Assemblée Nationale, RDC, Kinshasa, August 2021.

provides another incentive for SSR. The transition plan places the focus of attention firmly on the development of the operational capability of the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC).<sup>6</sup> As a result, traditional train-and-equip programmes are likely to multiply. These, however, should not be confused with the necessary structural reforms required to build accountable, sustainable, and effective security forces. Under President Tshisekedi the DRC is again actively pursuing renewed bilateral security partnerships with its traditional partners such as the US, EU, France, and Belgium, and newer ones including Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The international preference for limited programmes risks being reinforced by growing – and controversial – concerns about the presence of (internationally connected) terrorist networks in North Kivu and Ituri. While operational support is welcome, the recent experience with the *état de siège* serves as a reminder that the effectiveness of the government response will to a large degree depend on more profound reform.

This report, the first systematic review of SSR in the DRC since the beginning of Tshisekedi's presidency, analyzes the general state of affairs of Congolese security forces and covers the *état de siège* in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. It draws on fieldwork conducted in North Kivu and South Kivu in May and June 2021 as well as on a series of communications and interviews with diplomats and policymakers in Kinshasa and Brussels. The timing and location of fieldwork was considerably impacted by Covid-19 international travel restrictions, the Nyiragongo volcano eruption, and the declaration of the *état de siège* in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. As a result, more fieldwork was conducted in South Kivu and long-distance communication was organized through a multitude of online channels.

SSR has been put firmly on the political agenda by Congolese civil society, several political leaders, including President Tshisekedi, the USN government

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<sup>6</sup> Plan de transition et compte rendu des discussions pour le retrait échelonné, responsable et durable de la MONUSCO, Groupe Conjoint de Travail, Septembre 2021.  
<https://www.primature.cd/public/2021/09/16/signature-du-plan-de-transition-pour-le-depart-echelonne-de-la-monusco-de-la-republique-democratique-du-congo/>.



in its April 2021 government programme and members of Parliament.<sup>7</sup> Beyond an analysis of the long-term trends and dynamics in SSR in the DRC, this report aims to contribute to and further stimulate the policy debate on SSR in the DRC. Through valuable contributions by members of the security forces, it aims to help bridge the gap between the strategic discussion and the difficult realities on the ground.

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<sup>7</sup> Rapport synthèse des auditions sur l'évaluation de l'état de siège proclamée par l'ordonnance N° 21/015 du 03 mai 2021, sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo, tel que prorogé à ce jour ; Commission Défense et Sécurité ; Assemblée Nationale, RDC, Kinshasa, August 2021. Inscire en priorité la réforme du secteur de sécurité et de justice en RDC – Note à l'attention de son excellence Monsieur le Premier Ministre du Gouvernement de la République Démocratique du Congo, RRSSJ, Kinshasa, March 2021 ; Kabengele Kalonji E. (et all) ; État des lieux de la réforme de l'Armée et rôle de la Société civile dans la supervision du secteur de la Défense ; RRSSJ, Cordaid, ASSN ; June 2021.

# Security Sector Reform: Training or Just Supplying?

The concept of Security Sector Reform appeared in the late 1990s as a key component of the peacebuilding and state-building paradigms. Since then, it has become a staple of international programming in post-conflict and post-authoritarian transitions. SSR has numerous and varying definitions. The United Nations (UN) define SSR as

a process of assessment, review and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation led by national authorities that has as its goal the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the State and its peoples without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, SSR is underpinned by a set of important assumptions: that there is an opportunity for change, that reform enjoys “national ownership” and that it is supported by external partners. The primary goals of SSR include democratic control over the security and justice systems, improved management of the

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<sup>8</sup> “Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform”, Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, 23 January 2008, p. 6. (<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/216/06/PDF/N0821606.pdf?OpenElement>). On 28 April 2014, the UN Security Council also adopted a resolution (S/RES/2151) on Security Sector Reform. The resolution acknowledged the many missions that were undertaken in Africa and stressed the centrality of national ownership. The African Union (AU) defines SSR as “the process by which countries formulate or re-orient the policies, structures, and capacities of institutions and groups engaged in the security sector, in order to make them more effective, efficient, and responsive to democratic control, and to the security and justice needs of the people.” African Union Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform, Adopted at the 20th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 27–28 January 2013 (<https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/au-policy-framework-on-security-sector-reform-ae-ssr.pdf>).

security system, and effective service delivery.<sup>9</sup> By definition, therefore, SSR implies a profound transformation of the political and security landscape. As it not only aims to improve operational capabilities, but to address citizens' concerns, instil public trust in the security forces (and thereby the state) and transform how national security and security policies are understood and formulated by involving Parliament, civil society organizations and communities, SSR is an ambitious undertaking, to say the very least.

On the donor side, SSR aims to bridge the gap between the development and security communities and was quickly championed by the OECD and led to the foundation of DCAF.<sup>10</sup> It was also quickly adopted by the EU as it looked for an added value as a new player in the field of peace and security.<sup>11</sup> For the EU, it was also important that it could embed this civil/military activity alongside its well-funded and more embedded development programmes. SSR's scope goes far beyond the traditional, predominantly bilateral security assistance programmes that continue to be a staple of international relations. Historically, the DRC is a major recipient of such bilateral support. Under former President Mobutu, for instance, then Zaire partnered with Belgium, France, the US, Morocco, China, and Israel. Despite the inclusion of development actors and some ambitious, more transversal initiatives, many of the recent activities that have been carried out under the banner of SSR in the DRC (and elsewhere) are very similar in their design and impact to these older generation train-and-equip programmes. When discussing SSR it also remains important to remain aware of the international policy environment. The recent disintegration of the Afghan government and its security forces, by far the largest recipient of SSR support and funding, and the recent coups

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<sup>9</sup> <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/SSR-Overview>.

<sup>10</sup> In 2005 the OECD Development Assistance Committee produced guidelines on Security System Reform and Governance, operationalized in 2008 in the OECD Handbook on Security System Reform: supporting Security and Justice ([https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/the-oecd-dac-handbook-on-security-system-reform\\_9789264027862-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/the-oecd-dac-handbook-on-security-system-reform_9789264027862-en)). In 2000, in the wake of the Balkan wars, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance – DCAF – was established, providing advisory services and support for SSR. (<https://www.dcaf.ch/>).

<sup>11</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Elements for an EU-wide strategic framework to support security sector reform, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 5 July 2016 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0031&from=EN>).

in Mali and Guinea, where international partners have been deeply involved in SSR and capacity building activities, warrant some rethinking of this paradigm, which continues to be driven by outside resources and expectations rather than domestic political realities and complexities.

## **2.1 The Lost Decades (2001–2019): SSR under Kabila**

As the DRC emerged from one of the deadliest conflicts since the Second World War, it was almost inevitable that SSR and the (often accompanying) Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) became priority areas for donors at the start of the country's political transition in 2003. The December 2002 Sun City Agreement, the political base for the power-sharing agreement, provided some principles for the military – the creation of a restructured, integrated national army – and the judiciary.<sup>12</sup> A diverse set of bilateral and multilateral partnerships and collaborations covering nearly all sectors and aspects of the Congolese national security forces followed. In parallel to these processes, donors and the Congolese authorities set up a series of (national and regional) DDR processes targeting members of the many Congolese and foreign armed groups.<sup>13</sup>

### **LOST IN TRANSLATION**

During the power-sharing phase that preceded the first democratic elections in 2006, the Congolese transitional government appeared open to reform, and international partners became involved in supporting the training and integration of the new Congolese army, the FARDC. The EU and the UN also worked on SSR and the police in the framework of the organization and securing of the 2006 elections. During the transition the international partners worked mostly in concert, which was facilitated through the robust

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<sup>12</sup> Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 16 December 2002. ([https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CD\\_021216\\_Global%20and%20Inclusive%20Agreement%20on%20Transition%20in%20DRC.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CD_021216_Global%20and%20Inclusive%20Agreement%20on%20Transition%20in%20DRC.pdf)).

<sup>13</sup> For more analysis on DDR policies and processes in the DRC: Thill M.; In Search of a Winning Formula: Lessons on DDR and Community Reintegration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Social Science Research Council, May 2021 (<https://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/in-search-of-a-winning-formula-lessons-on-ddr-and-community-reintegration-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>). Vlassenroot K., Mudinga E., Musamba J.; Navigating Social Spaces: Armed Mobilization and Circular Return in Eastern DR Congo; Journal of Refugee Studies, Volume 33, Issues 4, December 2020 (<https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article/33/4/832/5902023>).

coordination of the International Committee in Support of the Transition (CIAT). As an official institution of the transition, CIAT – made up the permanent members of the Security Council, MONUSCO, the African Union (AU), the EU, Angola, Belgium, Canada, Gabon, South Africa, and Zambia – was able to weigh in on political processes.<sup>14</sup> Despite these seemingly constructive conditions, effective reform was yet to begin when the transition ended. After the elections, however, the Congolese government resisted any intrusion into its sovereign domain.<sup>15</sup> All the while, the political and security situation in the eastern provinces rapidly degraded, leading to an ever greater fragmentation of armed groups.<sup>16</sup>

Bilateral partners developed support programmes, while MONUSCO and the EU, with its EUPOL (police) and EUSEC (military) missions, became the central nodes of the SSR effort. MONUSCO organized regular exchanges between international actors involved in SSR, but they at best remained limited to information exchange. In addition, the MONUSCO force and its police component delivered training, material and logistical support to their Congolese partners.<sup>17</sup> The EU missions and programmes – EUSEC, EUPOL RD Congo and REJUSCO – covered most sectors of the security system. The reinforcement of human resources management and support for national SSR coordination mechanisms was a common focus area amongst the EU

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<sup>14</sup> For the sake of clarity throughout this text, MONUSCO will be used to name the UN Mission. The Mission was known as MONUC from the establishment in November 1999 until 1 July 2010. The name change emphasized the increased focus on stabilization in the mission mandate with I4S/ISSSS and its Congolese counterpart STAREC. (For an in-depth analysis of the mission: Novosseloff A.; *Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Missions in the DRC (MONUC- MONUSCO); EPON; NUPI*; 2019. (<https://effectivepeaceops.net/publication/monusco/>).

<sup>15</sup> Boshoff H., Hendrickson D., More S., Vircoulon T.; *Supporting SSR in the DRC: between a Rock and a Hard Place*; Clingendael, April 2010 ([https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20100400\\_cru\\_paper\\_smore.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20100400_cru_paper_smore.pdf)).

<sup>16</sup> Verweijen J.; *Stable Instability Political Settlements and armed groups in the Congo*; Usalama Project, Rift Valley Institute, 2016 ([https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1426708/1226\\_1521104764\\_stable-instability-by-judith-verweijen-rvi-psrp-usalama-project-2016.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1426708/1226_1521104764_stable-instability-by-judith-verweijen-rvi-psrp-usalama-project-2016.pdf)).

<sup>17</sup> Delivering such support to the PNC and FARDC became more complex with the introduction of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) – a policy designed to prevent the UN forces from supporting elements of the Congolese security forces, which were suspected of involvement in serious human rights violations. This has led to political problems between the mission and the DRC government. (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0010836719828406>).

missions and programmes. One of EUSEC's flagships was the "chain of payment" system. The missions, however, were hampered due to their persistent disconnect from national political processes. Moreover, at the EU level, coordination with member states was not easy. The EU delegation in Kinshasa was not always in the loop of the various EU missions' work, hampering its potential political role. Thus, even the EU, a significant donor, was not able to substantially move beyond its technical work.<sup>18</sup>

The Congolese government worked to stovepipe its international partnerships and programmes as much as possible. At the same time, donors found it challenging to build sustained, long-term relationships with ministers or Congolese officials, as Kabila regularly reshuffled them. The strategic orientation of security decisions remained firmly in the hands of his presidency, its security advisors, and the *Maison militaire* – a parallel military staff attached directly to the presidency.<sup>19</sup> Several international partners, including the EU and the UK, worked closely with like-minded but politically insignificant Congolese institutions charged with SSR such as the *Comité de suivi pour la réforme de la police* (CSRPF, Follow-up Committee for Police Reform).<sup>20</sup> There was no effective strategic or operational dialogue or interface between international and Congolese security forces. This includes the liaison between either MONUSCO or the EU missions and the FARDC general staff. Ultimately, a wide range of regional and international partners ended up largely working parallel to each other, and most focused on the army. They provided training for several battalions and brigades and supported the establishment of

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<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the EU role in SSR: Country case studies to inform the EU-wide strategic framework for supporting SSR, Findings from Mali, DRC and Ukraine, Final Report, 11 March 2016 (<https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/SSR-in-Practice/Countries-Regions/Congo-Democratic-Republic-of/EU-SSR-Policy-Country-case-studies-Mali-DRC-and-Ukraine/EU-SSR-Policy-Country-case-studies-on-Mali-DRC-and-Ukraine>).

<sup>19</sup> Stearns J., Verweijen J., Eriksson Baaz M.; The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo Untangling the Gordian knot of insecurity; Usalama Project, Rift Valley Institute, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Boshoff H., Hendrickson D., More S., Vircoulon T.; Supporting SSR in the DRC: between a Rock and a Hard Place; Clingendael, April 2010 ([https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20100400\\_cru\\_paper\\_smore.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20100400_cru_paper_smore.pdf)); EU Support for governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, European Court of Auditors; Special Report N° 9, 2013. ([https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SRI3\\_09/SRI3\\_09\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SRI3_09/SRI3_09_EN.pdf)).

military training establishments.<sup>21</sup> The lack of coordination and the Congolese interest in bilateral plans led to wasted energy and frustrations. For instance, when MONUSCO planned a training structure in Kisangani to support the creation of the *Unités de réaction rapide* (URR, Congolese Rapid Reaction Forces), it realized that the FARDC general staff had made other plans and was already working with bilateral donors, such as the US, Belgium and South Africa. This is but one example that illustrates the lack of connection between partner initiatives and Congolese plans as well as the general lack of discussion between international partners.

The development of these primarily partner-driven SSR initiatives has largely mirrored the nature of the relations between the Kabila regime and its main international partners. From a semblance of partnership during the 2003–2006 transition, SSR evolved into an intermittent process over the next decade (2006–2017). The one notable exception was the 2012–2013 March 23 (M23) crisis when MONUSCO, regional actors and the main donors came to Kinshasa's aid and – despite the controversial 2011 elections – provided considerable diplomatic and military support that led to the defeat of the Rwanda-supported armed group. In exchange, Kinshasa promised some reform in the 2013 Peace Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement (PSCF), which contained a commitment “to continue, and deepen security sector reform, particularly with respect to the Army and Police”.<sup>22</sup> But successive UN Special Envoys became caught up in a technocratic follow-up process that failed to find traction and prioritize essential reforms. Once the M23 threat was neutralized, international partners again discovered that they carried little weight in Kinshasa.

In January 2015, the violent repression of popular protest against a potential third presidential term for Joseph Kabila sounded the alarm bells. By then, SSR was once more reduced to train-and-equip programmes. As the political

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<sup>21</sup> At one point this also led to the controversial deployment of a FARDC battalion to the Central African Republic to serve as UN peacekeepers. See <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/293607/politique/rdc-centrafrique-qui-pour-remplacer-les-soldats-congolais-de-la-minusca/>.

<sup>22</sup> Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, Addis Ababa, 24 February 2013 ([https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/DRC\\_130224\\_FrameworkAgreementDRCRegion.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/DRC_130224_FrameworkAgreementDRCRegion.pdf)).

crisis unfolded the relationship with donors became hostile. The military and police were charged with the crackdown of protests and were regularly accused of human rights violations.<sup>23</sup> Several senior Congolese officers, including the commander of the Kinshasa police, General Célestin Kanyama, were sanctioned by the US and EU. In these years of tension, the Congolese security forces were also tainted by their role in the violent crackdown of the Kamuina Nsapu insurgency in the Kasai region, including the assassination of two members of the UN Group of Experts in 2017. For donors, being involved in security sector reform during these years of crisis carried considerable reputational risk. As a consequence, most programmes, including those with regional partners (Angola and South Africa), were ended or slowed down.<sup>24</sup> Kinshasa was not impressed and appointed Kanyama, Kinshasa's controversial former police commissioner, to head the PNC general direction of schools and training – an obligatory stop for donors seeking to support the police.<sup>25</sup>

## **A LACK OF NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND COMMITMENT**

The DRC's international partners all too often lacked an adequate understanding of the Congolese governments' political intentions. This included a lack of understanding about the functioning of the DRC's political economy and the role performed by the security forces in Kabila's power structure.<sup>26</sup> This lack of understanding and tendency to oversimplify was also present when considering the attitudes of the members of the security institutions themselves.<sup>27</sup> The disconnect was most often considered a "lack of political will", a constant factor delaying most reform initiatives, and not only those

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<sup>23</sup> Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The "Street" and Politics in DR Congo, International Crisis Group, Africa Briefing N° 123, 13 October 2016 (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/boulevard-broken-dreams-street-and-politics-dr-congo>).

<sup>24</sup> Only MONUSCO continued with most of its collaborations and trainings of the Congolese security forces.

<sup>25</sup> See <https://afrique.lalibre.be/6222/rdc-nominations-a-la-police-un-peu-de-menage/> and: Time for Concerted action in DR Congo; International Crisis Group; Africa Report No. 257; 4 December 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Kets E., De Vries H.; Limits to supporting security sector interventions in the DRC; ISS Paper 257; July 2014 (<https://issafrica.org/research/papers/limits-to-supporting-security-sector-interventions-in-the-drc>).

<sup>27</sup> Eriksson Baaz M., Stern M.; Being reformed: Subjectification and security sector reform in the Congolese armed forces; Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, 2017 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2017.1337338>); Verweijen J.; Soldiers Without an Army? Patronage Networks and Cohesion in the Armed Forces of the DR Congo; Armed Forces & Society, 2017 (DOI: 10.1177/0095327X17740096).



that could be perceived as obvious political threats to the regime – such as those concerning governance and creating conditions to tackle the parallel networks of predation. Even in the programmes that did lead to the improvement of operational capabilities of some FARDC units, effective Congolese commitment and ownership remained mostly absent. An example was the Belgian-supported programme to set up and train an elite brigade of the FARDC *Unités de réaction rapide* (2008–2017). While the units proved their capability in the M23 campaign and in unrest in Equateur Province, the FARDC provided ill-prepared recruits, rarely respected timelines, and showed little inclination to protect its trained units from burning out as they were deployed at a high rate.<sup>28</sup>

Other initiatives, such as the *Police de proximité* (PdP, proximity police) project, supported by the UK and EU, also suffered the immediate effect of this lack of national ownership. Years after these projects were de facto halted when the main donors withdrew owing to harsh police repression in Kinshasa during Operation Likofi and the violent repression of protest during the electoral crisis, police officers still eagerly recite the basic PdP principles. They are however acutely aware that “since 2015 [departure of the donors] we have not advanced, and the project has not extended to the rest of the country.”<sup>29</sup> Despite positive feedback from local communities in test areas and the repeated commitments by the CSRP and others within the PNC leadership, “the authorities don’t consider it as important, and do not provide money for it”.<sup>30</sup> This lack of continued funding halted the work of the security meetings with the communities through which “the people understood that the police were not their enemy”.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, according to a civil society representative, “When the donors left, things fell apart, power generators were never used and lost, sixty motorcycles were provided and

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<sup>28</sup> Leclercq L.; 3 Para in Afrika De vorming van het 323ste Bataljon Commando van de DRC; Belgisch Militair Tijdschrift, Nr 8/2014, pp. 61–70. (<http://www.irsd.be/website/images/livres/rmb/08/rmb08.pdf>); Georges M.; Programme de partenariat militaire entre la Belgique et la République Démocratique du Congo: la formation des bataillons FARDC de réaction rapide, Revue Militaire Belge, Nr 11/2015, pp. 78–90. (<https://www.defence-institute.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/rmb-11.pdf>).

<sup>29</sup> PNC officer, Bukavu, 19 May 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Civil society representative, Bukavu, 21 May 2021.

<sup>31</sup> PNC officer MINOVA, 24 May 2021.

now only ten are left.”<sup>32</sup> And, of course, officers’ personal circumstances have not been altered, thus since the halting of the project, the same representative said, “The gratuity of police services is certainly not guaranteed, as the government no longer provides adequate funds”, adding that there are also strong conceptual concerns about the project’s design: “The community police functioned as a separate police force, which has blocked everything.”<sup>33</sup>

## **SOME ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Despite the challenging policy environment and the lack of national ownership there are some results that remain important stepping stones for ongoing and future reform efforts. An essential *acquis* is the partial adoption of essential legislation providing the legal foundations for the armed forces and the police.<sup>34</sup> Despite this progress, important legislation, in particular a long-awaited multi-annual programming law for the armed forces, has not yet been adopted.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the laws, decrees and policies that were adopted have never been fully implemented. In its March 2021 advocacy note to the incoming DRC government, the Congolese national civil society network on SSR (RRSSJ) presented a complete inventory of legislation that awaits proper implementation.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore not surprising that, for many soldiers and policemen on the ground, the laws regarding their status remain theoretical. An FARDC officer complained, “It is magnificent legislation, but there is zero implementation. The texts are not supported with resources, so there is not a significant impact”.<sup>37</sup> According to another officer, the legislation has also not been well explained: “Officers and the rank-and-file would want to have clarity on the conditions of work – including the duration of service, retirement, salary ...”<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the legislation has a

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<sup>32</sup> Civil society representative, Bukavu, 21 May 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Civil society representative, Bukavu, 21 May 2021; Hoffmann, K, et al. 2018. Competition, Patronage and Fragmentation: The Limits of Bottom-Up Approaches to Security Governance in Ituri. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 7(1): 14, pp. 1–17, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.578>.

<sup>34</sup> For a comprehensive list of adopted legislation: <https://www.droitcongolais.info/4.-securite.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Congolese Member of Parliament, 22 June 2021.

<sup>36</sup> *Inscrire en priorité la réforme du secteur de sécurité et de justice en RDC*, Note à l’attention de son excellence Monsieur le Premier Ministre de la République Démocratique du Congo, RRSSJ, Kinshasa, March 2021.

<sup>37</sup> FARDC officer, Bukavu, 20 May 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Participant in group interview with FARDC officers, Numbi, 27 May 2021.

considerable symbolic importance for members of the security forces: “It is proof that we are not goats, it provides us with protection, and gives us some guarantees”.<sup>39</sup> Officers of the Police Nationale Congolaise (PNC, Congolese National Police) also complain that, although the law states otherwise, they are still subject to military discipline and prosecution. The police are thus not demilitarized, a fact also reflected in its leadership ranks made up of many former army officers.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.2 “Reform” Seen from the Foxhole

Amongst the officers, soldiers and policemen interviewed for this report, the concept of SSR is certainly known, but few have a concrete idea of what it did or could mean for them. One group of soldiers said they were not aware of any reform having been passed.<sup>41</sup> In general, the level of frustration with the lack of progress and political steering in recent decades is palpable: “We don’t have to take stock, but we just know that things are not working out”.<sup>42</sup> As one officer said, “Unfinished projects lead nowhere.”<sup>43</sup>

The military and police rank-and-file are more positive about training sessions: “Training by partners responds well to operational needs, but it is insufficient, for the moment. Not more than 30 percent have received such training.”<sup>44</sup> Yet a colleague underlined some recurrent problems, including the lack of adequate follow-up: “Partners should accompany the people they train.”<sup>45</sup> The criticism is particularly strong on the lack of follow-up at the national level. There is little if any recognition or value attributed to training: “We receive training but upon return, this is often not called upon. The

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<sup>39</sup> Police officer Bukavu, 19 May 2021.

<sup>40</sup> The current head of the police, General Commissioner Dieudonné Amuli Bahigwa, is a military officer who previously headed the military intelligence service. He also served in other command functions in the FARDC. One of his notorious predecessors, John Numbi, also came from the military and returned to the military after his time at the PNC.

<sup>41</sup> Group of FARDC soldiers, Minova, 22 May 2021.

<sup>42</sup> FARDC soldier, Minova, 22 May 2021.

<sup>43</sup> FARDC officers, Ziralò, 28 May 2021.

<sup>44</sup> FARDC officer, Bukavu, 20 May 2021; Thill, Michel, Recycling as bricolage in the Congolese National Police: Lessons from police training in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Social Science Research Council; September 2019 (<https://www.ssrc.org/publications/recycling-as-bricolage-in-the-congolese-national-police-lessons-from-police-training-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>).

<sup>45</sup> FARDC officer, Bukavu, 20 May 2021.

speciality of the officers is not used, and it does not affect whether one is promoted or not”.<sup>46</sup> It can also lead to some tension: “Training is to the advantage of the individual – that can often lead to jealousy amongst others”.<sup>47</sup> Training opportunities that offer direct material advantages, such as considerable per diems, are also captured by the pervasive culture of corruption. This is not exclusive to the security forces but has been mentioned by several officers: “Sessions abroad or in Kinshasa are subject to influences”.<sup>48</sup> Such influences can be favouritism, selecting candidates not based on capacities or requirements, or direct profiteering with senior officers capturing part of the financial advantages involved in the training:

They let some candidates partake in selection exams, but the real candidates have already been selected. The money the donor provides for the trainee is split; they give him some and keep the most.<sup>49</sup>

Soldiers and police officers alike are critical of the role of donors and the lack of appropriation by the Congolese government. Without a national vision and political commitment to reform, donors follow their own political and budgetary agendas. For a senior FARDC officer, “Donors are too easily happy; when they have the group photo, they have the visibility they need.”<sup>50</sup> Initiatives were often not well thought through or very ad hoc in nature: “There cannot be reform without accompanying measures. When they give you a vehicle, but no fuel ...”<sup>51</sup> From the perspective of some observers on the ground, there also seems to be a lot of action for action’s sake. In the words of an urban political authority:

If you would count the number of sandwiches already eaten in different workshops, it can cover the size of our country. Every day there are trainings and capacity buildings, etc. ... But until they get to the crux of the matter, it will always be a waste of time. Do you really think that when these soldiers or police officers make mistakes, they don’t know what the law says? Or that they are not aware of this?<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Police officer, Bukavu, 19 May 2021.

<sup>47</sup> FARDC officer, Bukavu, 20 May 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Police officer, Minova, 24 May 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Senior FARDC officer, Goma, 20 May 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Senior FARDC officer, Goma, 20 May 2021.

<sup>51</sup> FARDC officer, Bukavu 20 May 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Local official, Uvira, 14 June 2021.

The frustration and concern owing to the lack of national appropriation and follow-through resounds strongly amongst the rank-and-file, such as this PNC group member:

The political authorities are not engaged enough in the issue, and we do not know how to perpetuate the achievements of programmes designed by others.<sup>53</sup>

And in the words of an FARDC officer:

In general depending on foreign support means that the country does not advance. It's the partners who do everything, they continue to provide us with buildings. The government has never fully implemented its engagements towards its external partners.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Group of PNC, Ziralo, 27 May 2021.

<sup>54</sup> FARDC officer, Bukavu, 20 May 2021.

## The Congolese Security

### Forces Today

Despite nearly two decades of SSR the Congolese security forces continue to carry a notorious reputation. Numerous, mostly still serving, senior officers are sanctioned by some of the DRC's international partners (the EU, US and UK) or appear on the MONUSCO Joint Human Rights Office (JHRO) "black list" as suspects of serious human rights abuses.<sup>55</sup> In its regularly published assessments of human rights violations, the Congo's state security services consistently come first.<sup>56</sup> The same holds true for the involvement of its members in the informal and illicit economy: exploitation of natural resources, illegal taxation at roadblocks, and participation in trade and cross-border smuggling networks. The security forces also represent an important source of weapons and equipment for armed groups.<sup>57</sup>

Many of these ills are traced back to the recurrent practice of integrating demobilized armed group combatants.<sup>58</sup> The practice finds its origin in

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<sup>55</sup> See <https://www.ft.com/content/de8c40c0-c08b-11e6-9bca-2b93a6856354>.

<sup>56</sup> In the 2020 UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO) MONUSCO – OHCHR overview of human rights violations documented in provinces affected by conflict, state security forces were considered responsible for 41 percent of alleged violations. Expanded nationally and including violations of fundamental freedoms linked to restrictions to democratic space, state services were considered responsible for 82 percent of violations. [https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unjhro\\_-\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_human\\_rights\\_situation\\_in\\_drc\\_2020\\_eng\\_.pdf](https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unjhro_-_analysis_of_the_human_rights_situation_in_drc_2020_eng_.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Rapport synthèse des auditions sur l'évaluation de l'état de siège proclamée par l'ordonnance N° 21/015 du 03 mai 2021, sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo, tel que prorogé à ce jour ; Commission Défense et Sécurité ; Assemblée Nationale, RDC, Kinshasa, August 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Le soutien de l'UE à la réforme du secteur de la sécurité en RDC – Vers une amélioration de la gouvernance des forces de sécurité Congolaises ? Eurac; February 2016 ([https://www.eurac-network.org/sites/default/files/rapport\\_-\\_le\\_soutien\\_de\\_lue\\_a\\_la\\_reforme\\_du\\_secteur\\_de\\_la\\_securite\\_en\\_rdc\\_-\\_eurac\\_-\\_fevrier\\_2016.pdf](https://www.eurac-network.org/sites/default/files/rapport_-_le_soutien_de_lue_a_la_reforme_du_secteur_de_la_securite_en_rdc_-_eurac_-_fevrier_2016.pdf)).

the arrangements following the 1996–1997 and 1998–2003 wars, when the armed forces and police were a hotchpotch of former Zaire military and police (including gendarmerie) members – several of which had joined one of the rebellions during the second war – and armed elements of Kabila’s and successive rebel groups (MLC, RCD-Goma, etc.). Both formal (as part of DDR programmes) and informal integration of armed group members has continued ever since. It has deeply affected the functioning, cohesion and unity of command of the security forces. The principle of the revolving door, with members leaving the forces to create an armed group in the expectation of rejoining with a higher rank, has sapped professionalism and nourished local collaborations between security forces and armed groups that have deeply affected the security of the civilian population.<sup>59</sup> International partners and interviewed members of the security forces alike welcomed the government’s commitment to stopping this practice of negotiating wholesale integration of armed groups into the security forces in the framework of its new DDR programme, the P-DDRCS. As a junior FARDC officer stated:

It is among the causes of the persistence of armed groups. Everyone now knows that he does not need any training, it is enough just to own a hill with a few troops as a door opener for integration. This weakens the FARDC. But if recruitment is to be done, let it respect the minimum logic to respect objective criteria. Otherwise, it is anarchy like what we witnessed in Kabila’s time.<sup>60</sup>

The leadership of the Congolese security forces was at the heart of the patronage networks of the former regime. These deeply embedded parallel networks formed a major blockage for outsiders pushing for reform.<sup>61</sup> While the top leaders were deeply entrenched in this system, which ensured some form of stability for the regime, the base of the security forces had to revert to informal mechanisms for its survival. This includes informal and illegal taxation and the generalised practice of “*Article 15*” – (*débrouillez-vous*).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Stearns J., Verweijen J., Baaz M.A.; The national army and armed groups in the eastern Congo Untangling the Gordian knot of insecurity; Usalama Project, Rift Valley Institute, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> FARDC junior officer, Goma, 25 May 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Shepherd B., Mugala P.; The Missing Piece in Security Sector Reform: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of Congo; Search for Common Ground; September 2018 ([https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/The-Missing-Piece-in-SSR\\_Lessons-from-DRC\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/The-Missing-Piece-in-SSR_Lessons-from-DRC_FINAL.pdf)).

<sup>62</sup> Liwerant S., Kienge-Kienge-Intudi R.; Perceptions de la population civile sue les militaires des FARDC et norms pratiques en question – Rapport Final; Kinshasa; Mai 2018.

### 3.1 A Lumpenproletariat in Uniform?

A consistent element in conversations with elements of the army and police is their low self-image: “Nothing is going well,” a FARDC soldier said, “the situation of the Congolese soldier, that we are, is not different from that of a street child.”<sup>63</sup> This sensation is shared by officers. As one said, “Respected? We are not, we are also not respected by the government. As officers we have no housing, we have just received two kilograms of rice and four kilograms of flour as rations for the month.”<sup>64</sup> This is to a large extent based on the sometimes extremely challenging social and living arrangements they and their families endure. As one in a group of soldiers explained: “When you take your family to a new location, you have to start from nothing and the people there consider you like a *maibobo* [street child, also called *shégué*]. It is for this reason that I am far from my family since 2017.”<sup>65</sup> Soldiers say the situation is particularly bad in North and South Kivu and think it is better elsewhere in the country. “It is in these two provinces that the military are suffering enormously,” one said, “If you go to other places like Lubumbashi, Equateur, Kasai, you don’t. Here it is terrible.”<sup>66</sup> The members of the security forces are also acutely aware of the effect this has on their relationship with the civilian population: “We are marginalized, badly paid, badly housed without even mentioning the contempt of certain individuals towards us. We don’t have our total authority.”<sup>67</sup> The material conditions are difficult: “Adaptation of equipment is something for professional armies ... we are not one.”<sup>68</sup> When new equipment, shoes or uniforms arrive, instead of distributing them to the rank-and-file, commanding officers often sell them to soldiers. A soldier explains:

The personal equipment is lacking. We received our last boots in 2013, and you must pay to get them. We often only have one good uniform, which we keep for ceremonies like the parade to look good; the other days we wear rags.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Group of FARDC soldiers, Sange, 7 June 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Group of FARDC officers, Numbi, 27 May 2021.

<sup>65</sup> Group of FARDC soldiers, Minova, 22 May 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Group of FARDC soldiers, Sange, 7 June 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Member PNC, Bukavu, 20 May 2021.

<sup>68</sup> FARDC officer, Ziralo, 28 May 2021.

<sup>69</sup> FARDC soldier, Minova, 22 May 2021.



As a result, according to a senior officer:

Here in the city you will see people in uniform but go only one kilometre and there is no difference between a FARDC and a Mai-Mai. The only difference will be in the belt, for the rest, they are in slippers, jeans and so on.<sup>70</sup>

The PNC faces similar conditions.<sup>71</sup> Considering the security forces' dire living conditions, getting paid on time is essential (see below). Yet regular pay is but one side of the coin. The other is that wages are not high enough to live on.<sup>72</sup> For the FARDC, respondents mentioned figures between FC 170,000 and 192,000/month (approximately \$85 and \$95).<sup>73</sup> Figures provided for the PNC range between FC 162,000 and 180,000 (approximately \$80 to \$90).<sup>74</sup> Soldiers can benefit from a range of premiums linked to specific positions and operations as well as when on the front. Given the low salaries, these are of considerable importance. Despite both forces working in very challenging conditions, soldiers, as opposed to the police, risk their lives on an almost daily basis for very little in return. This makes some of them jealous of the PNC: "I don't know, but the police are good I think, because the child who sits next to his mother's kitchen doesn't cry from hunger."<sup>75</sup> To provide some context to these figures, the Congolese defence budget for 2021 was \$305 million. The number of personnel stood at 197,380 (of whom 30,811 were inactive).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> FARDC senior officer, Goma, 20 May 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Thill M., Njangala R., Musamba J.; Putting everyday police life at the centre of reform in Bukavu; Briefing Paper; Rift Valley Institute; March 2018 ([https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/128887/2638393/Placing%20everyday%20police%20life%20at%20the%20heart%20of%20reform%20in%20Bukavu%20by%20Michel%20Thill,%20Robert%20Njangala%20and%20Josaphat%20Musamba%20-%20RV%20Polisi%20Siku%20Kwa%20Siku%20Briefing%20\(2018\).pdf](https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/128887/2638393/Placing%20everyday%20police%20life%20at%20the%20heart%20of%20reform%20in%20Bukavu%20by%20Michel%20Thill,%20Robert%20Njangala%20and%20Josaphat%20Musamba%20-%20RV%20Polisi%20Siku%20Kwa%20Siku%20Briefing%20(2018).pdf)).

<sup>72</sup> Independent Evaluation of the Security Sector Accountability and Police Reform Programme, Final Evaluation Report, Palladium, December 2015, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Bancarisation. Qui vole l'argent des FARDC ; Kivu Security Tracker; 13 March 2020 (<https://blog.kivusecurity.org/fr/tag/bancarisation/>).

<sup>74</sup> Figures derived from the interviews. For policemen, another interviewee gave the figure of 180,000 FC (approximately \$90).

<sup>75</sup> Group of FARDC soldiers, Minova, 22 May 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Rapport synthèse des auditions sur l'évaluation de l'état de siège proclamée par l'ordonnance N° 21/015 du 03 mai 2021, sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo, tel que prorogé à ce jour ; Commission Défense et Sécurité ; Assemblée Nationale, RDC, Kinshasa, August 2021. To offer some comparison, in terms of defence budget the DRC sits between Albania and Luxemburg with respectively 210 and 422 million \$US in defence expenditure but for 6,700 and 970 personnel respectively (NATO, 2020).

Due to their low salaries, in cases of medical emergencies, funerals and weddings, members of the security forces have little choice but to take out loans at so-called '*Banques Lambert*'—money lenders with prohibitive interest rates that lead to insurmountable debts. To make ends meet with these salaries is impossible, which puts them in a highly precarious situation. As long as this remains the case, any effort to reduce corruption will be limited at best (see below). Indeed, in the FARDC, having access to and control over operational funds, rations and equipment is so profitable that it can turn into an incentive to prolong operations and uphold a climate of insecurity.<sup>77</sup>

Medical care is organized through the '*mutuelle*' for the police or the military medical system for the armed forces. PNC members are supposed to contribute 5,000 FC/month to the *mutuelle*, including those who are stationed in an area with no infrastructure. The medical services are generally described as unsatisfactory: "The *mutuelle* has become a fraud, so many do no longer succeed to get care at the PNC medical centre – so they have to find another solution." And while there have been investments in the army hospital in Kinshasa and announcements of such investments elsewhere, for now, the situation remains difficult.<sup>78</sup> This is also due to the climate of corruption and

there is a lot of profiteering. Medicines are sent from Kinshasa to Goma, where they are transferred to the doctors' private pharmacy and then he asks you to go and buy the drugs. Even finding paracetamol is a miracle.<sup>79</sup>

Conditions are worse for those who are deployed outside urban areas. This is made more difficult still by corruption: "When you need medical help you need a '*feuille de route*' [movement order] from the hierarchy, which can cost you 10,000 FC".<sup>80</sup> During operations, the situation is dire:

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<sup>77</sup> Verweijen J.; Stable Instability Political settlements and armed groups in the Congo; Usalama Project, Rift Valley Institute; 2016 (<https://riftvalley.net/publication/stable-instability>).

<sup>78</sup> Allocution de son excellence Monsieur Félix-Antoine Tshilombo Président de la République Démocratique du Congo, chef de l'État sur l'état de la Nation devant le Parlement réuni en congrès ; Kinshasa, 13 December 2019. Inauguration du service médical de l'imagerie de l'hôpital militaire du Camp Kokolo ce samedi ; politico.cd ; 28 June 2019 (<https://www.politico.cd/encontinu/2019/06/28/inauguration-du-service-medical-de-limagerie-de-lhopital-militaire-du-camp-kokolo-ce-samedi.html/44222/>).

<sup>79</sup> FARDC officer, Goma, 25 May 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Group of soldiers, 22 May 2021.

Even if you have been shot, you must seek treatment yourself. The government never intervenes and it's at your peril. Except when you can get to the ICRC hospital which takes care of the soldiers. If one has to rely on that of the FARDC, it is certain death.<sup>81</sup>

The precarity contributes to the tense and sometimes violent interaction with civilians: "The police are poor and have to live in bad conditions," said a FARDC officer in Numbi.<sup>82</sup> "As a result," a Bukavu PNC member added, "they attack the population for something to eat."<sup>83</sup> For many in the security services as well as local officials, "it is at the social level that there are many things to do. A soldier will not have problems when he does not envy civilians, and this will improve the relations."<sup>84</sup> According to a local official in South Kivu,

the socio-economic condition of our soldiers leaves much to be desired. Our soldiers live on resourcefulness (*la débrouillardise*). There is no housing, they live in the same neighbourhoods and streets with the population and when they see the civilians for example eat well while they do not, it creates jealousy, frustrations between the population that they are supposed to protect and themselves.

The official partly blames the recruitment: "All this proves that during various recruitments, we based ourselves on other criteria than morality. It looks like they're just highwaymen, armed robbers who got endowed." He concludes: "You see that they have been [selected from previously ill-behaving units and thus] purposely and officially intended to be bad [units]."<sup>85</sup> Officers also strongly resent the greed and incompetence of many in the hierarchy:

In general, a policeman does not feel respected, our leadership monopolize all the financial means, because some are upstarts and do not know how to follow the articles of the PNC's organic law. Not only is intellectualism sometimes lacking, but also for many, the principle is 'Now is the time to enrich oneself', which diminishes our respect.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Group of FARDC soldiers, Sange, 7 June 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Group of FARDC officers, Numbi, 27 May 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Member PNC, Bukavu, 21 May 2021. For a deeper analysis: Thill M.; Police at Work in Bukavu: Negotiating Revenue-generation in Urban Pirate Markets; in De Herdt T., Titeca K.: Negotiating Public services in the Congo – State, Society and Governance; ZED Books; London; 2019.

<sup>84</sup> FARDC officer, Bukavu, 20 May 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Local official, Uvira, 14 June 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Member PNC, Bukavu, 21 May 2021.

### 3.2 *Bancarisation* and Human Resources Management

An area of reform that is generally applauded and seen as a lasting reform is the so-called *bancarisation* of wages – that is, the reform of the payroll system – and the accompanying reform of human resources management. *Bancarisation* is a major administrative reform intended to channel the payment of salaries of all Congolese state agents, including the members of the security forces, through the banking system.<sup>87</sup> This should (in theory) ensure the regularity and consistency of salary payments, reduce the problem of inflated numbers through invented “ghosts”, and root out the common practice by superiors of delaying or skimming salaries. For the individual civil servants, including the members of the security forces, it would not only ensure the salary payments but also offer access to the banking system, including loans. Before the introduction of *bancarisation* salaries were paid directly in cash through the hierarchy. There was also no functioning system to account for the number of civil servants, teachers, or members of the security forces. *Bancarisation* was introduced in 2011 and gradually rolled out from 2012.<sup>88</sup> Donors, in particular the EU EUPOL and EUSEC missions, assisted in developing and operating these policies through their support for FARDC and PNC administrative structures, the chain of payment system, and the biometric identification of the FARDC.<sup>89</sup>

*Bancarisation* is particular in its set-up, as it is a collaboration with the Congolese Association of Banks (ACB). The ACB manages the distribution of clients across the national network of participating banks. Members of entire security forces units, schools and other services are thus assigned to

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<sup>87</sup> In April 2016, 904,477 salaries were paid by the Congolese government via *bancarisation* (82.6 percent of the total). Marysse S.; La gouvernance au quotidien: entre réformes et éléphants blancs; Conjonctures de l’Afrique Centrale N° 92, 2018, p. 248.

<sup>88</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/38582286/16\\_Devoirs\\_CHESD\\_Promo3\\_Col\\_ELUMBA\\_MONGA\\_LIKUMBU\\_Ghislain\\_Myriam\\_Roger\\_12janvier18\\_doc](https://www.academia.edu/38582286/16_Devoirs_CHESD_Promo3_Col_ELUMBA_MONGA_LIKUMBU_Ghislain_Myriam_Roger_12janvier18_doc) (last accessed, 1 September 2021).

<sup>89</sup> [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief\\_3\\_Great\\_Lakes\\_and\\_the\\_DRC.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_3_Great_Lakes_and_the_DRC.pdf) (last accessed 1 September 2021); [https://www.eurac-network.org/sites/default/files/report\\_-\\_eu\\_support\\_to\\_security\\_sector\\_reform\\_int\\_he\\_drc\\_-\\_eurac\\_-\\_february\\_2016.pdf](https://www.eurac-network.org/sites/default/files/report_-_eu_support_to_security_sector_reform_int_he_drc_-_eurac_-_february_2016.pdf) (last accessed 1 September 2021).

a bank in a process in which the “clients” seem to have little choice.<sup>90</sup> Banks charge their clients a fixed amount per account. The provision of additional banking services such as loans remains seemingly arbitrary. The relationship between the client and the bank can change rapidly with deployment to another area or when in operations where the payment reverts mostly back to cash payments. Premiums and other additions to the standard salaries are not included in *bancarisation* and can thus be subject to the same embezzlement practices as before. With the generally low salaries and police officers’ and soldiers’ preference for cash, accounts are used like a mailbox. Little if any cash stays in the accounts. Since the payments are immediately converted into cash, queueing can take hours on payday.

The system is generally accepted as a step in the right direction: “The decision was good, before *bancarisation* we had to negotiate with our commanding officer to get at least part of our salary, if you were not careful you were punished and jailed for up to three weeks.”<sup>91</sup> And the experiences of rural policemen serve as a reminder of the structural problems within the manual payment system: “In rural areas, policemen often only receive half or a quarter of their salaries and police chiefs behave like small kings.”<sup>92</sup> It is no wonder that with donors and the government looking for success stories, the seemingly clean and technical process of *bancarisation* was easily considered such. It is also amongst policymakers generally considered the EUSEC mission’s most important (and lasting) contribution. Nevertheless, a decade later, there are numerous significant issues that remain unresolved. An officer from Numbi complained:

Occasionally they change the bank without warning the policemen. Or they deliberately forget to add some policemen to the list. The attribution of banks could be linked to undue influence and there are inconsistencies with people registered where they are not and have never been deployed. When things go wrong – people disappear from the list, or the banks or payment

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<sup>90</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the application of *bancarisation* in the education system – through its geographic spread and the number of individuals affected – a good comparison with the security forces is: Brandt C.; Illegibility as a State Effect – The limits of governing teacher identification in the Democratic Republic of Congo; University of Amsterdam, 2017 ([https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3316287](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3316287)).

<sup>91</sup> PNC members, Minova, 24 May 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Police officer, Minova, 24 May 2021.

systems are suddenly changed, it often results in losses – sometimes several months of salary, and given past experiences with commanding officers taking part of the pay, it feeds the suspicion that something is not right.<sup>93</sup>

Some of these problems are difficult to overcome, as they are linked to the Congo's underdeveloped banking system.<sup>94</sup> Access to banks and financial services outside of major provincial capitals (Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Goma, for instance) is limited, as there are no banks in rural areas.<sup>95</sup> Alternative options such as the mobile banking initiatives (such as Mpesa by Vodacom or Pepele mobile linked to the TMB bank) have difficulty getting off the ground in the DRC, where cash remains sellers' preferred payment form. Therefore, as is the case with teachers, most soldiers and police officers deployed in non-urban settings still receive their salaries and premiums via the old system. Those who are in rural areas or in an area where the bank that receives their salary has no office have to travel to gain access. These trips are costly and require authorization from commanders. Even mobile banking is not an option:

In the areas without banks, Pepele Mobile is a possibility but even for that you need to get to a major centre. In Shabunda for instance, they suffer, and the commander must come to Bukavu to get the salaries. M-pesa or Airtel Money are used in some cases, but if you have a bank account and the funds are collected by someone else, you have to pay 'transport fees', if you want to get it yourself. You need to pay your officer to get the *feuille de route* [travel authorization].<sup>96</sup>

Collecting ones' salary can therefore become a very expensive and lengthy exercise. Moreover, travelling back to often remote areas with sizeable amounts of cash exposes soldiers and police officers to theft, and it is not

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<sup>93</sup> Police officer, Numbi, 25 May 2021.

<sup>94</sup> According to the IMF (2019), 25.8 percent of the population has a bank account or an account with a mobile money provider, well below the average for sub-Saharan Africa. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2019/286/article-A004-en.xml#A04tab02> (last accessed on 31 Aug 2021).

<sup>95</sup> Detailed research on the impact of *banancarisation* on the payment of salaries for teachers provides more details on this issue. In rural areas the payment to teachers has been taken over by other structures such as Caritas (<https://www.unicef.org/drcongo/media/1106/file/COD-rapport-SITAN.pdf>).

<sup>96</sup> PNC members, Minova, 24 May 2021.

unheard of that some disappear with the funds.<sup>97</sup> One of the main aims of *bancarisation* – better human resources management and breaking the chain of payment from the chain of command – incurs a lot of criticism from a soldier deployed in the field.

*Bancarisation* contributes to absenteeism and desertion as those that leave continue to receive their salaries even if they join an armed group. Other soldiers have become traders.

Similar complaints exist with the PNC:

The system does not help the management of our effectives and it also leads to absenteeism, rambling, and disobedience of certain policemen. Some rarely come to the workplace or stop listening to the hierarchy as with the *bancarisation* they are sure to have their salary.”<sup>98</sup>

Some commanders are frustrated by the loss of a source of additional income. “At the beginning the commanders were not happy but they have come to accept it, they are now even kind close to pay day, so you can get them a beer ...” In principle, the disciplinary issues mentioned by the officers can be countered by reporting the absentees and blocking their payment at the level of the treasury: “To get back on the list you had to do punishment chores, such as extra-long guard duties in the ‘platoons of hell’”.<sup>99</sup> However, interviewees also indicate that some of these complaints are disguised attempts by senior officers to “blame banking for absenteeism or other problems, to justify a return to manual payment. Yet they had been told to report case by case to block the accounts of the culprits.”<sup>100</sup>

At the start, *bancarisation*, combined with the biometric identification of members of the security forces, most likely had an impact on the reduction of the initially very high number of ghost soldiers. However, it is unclear how much effort has gone into maintaining an up-to-date database. The problem

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<sup>97</sup> See <https://www.radiookapi.net/2020/02/21/actualite/securite/nord-kivu-5-morts-dans-lattaque-dun-convoi-qui-acheminait-la-solde-des> and <https://actualite.cd/2020/10/29/rdc-adj-un-officier-fardc-disparait-avec-la-solde-des-militaires-engages-sur-laxe-mbau>.

<sup>98</sup> Police officer, Minova, 24 May 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Police officer, Minova, 24 May 2021.

<sup>100</sup> FARDC officer, Numbi, 27 May 2021.

of ghost soldiers drew more attention with the introduction of the *état de siège* (cfr. infra). Since late 2019, it was reported that up to 20,000 FARDC troops were deployed in the fight against the ADF.<sup>101</sup> This number seems to have been considerably inflated.<sup>102</sup> It appears to be a generalized practice that all kinds of losses (casualties, wounded, desertions, absent without leave, etc.) were underreported and the salaries of the unreported missing were likely pocketed by the chain of command. In his 5 August parliamentary hearing, Defence Minister Gilbert Kabanda Kurhenga provided some explanatory elements for the differences in numbers: the size of the area, the mobility of military units, the difficulties of recovering all soldiers killed in action, and unrecorded desertions. The Minister recognized that this was an area that needed to be addressed urgently.<sup>103</sup>

The issue of fictitious personnel goes well beyond the security forces. According to a recent media report, the judiciary police reportedly identified 130,000 fictitious agents and 43,000 doubles among the Congo's approximately one million state employees – which, if the figures are correct, would represent nearly 20 percent of the total.<sup>104</sup> Since President Tshisekedi's June 21 remarks in Bunia about the shenanigans in the security forces, there has been an investigation and some arrests of military officers in North Kivu and Ituri. It is clear that a crackdown on the practice in the military has also started.<sup>105</sup> If there will also be investigations into the higher levels of the chain of command remains to be seen.

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<sup>101</sup> See <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20191102-rdc-operations-grande-envergure-beni-fardc> and <https://blog.kivusecurity.org/fr/l-etat-de-siege-va-t-il-dans-le-bon-sens/>.

<sup>102</sup> The battle over phantom battalions and retired generals; Africa Intelligence.com; 26 August 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Rapport synthèse des auditions sur l'évaluation de l'état de siège proclamée par l'ordonnance N° 21/015 du 03 mai 2021, sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo, tel que prorogé à ce jour; Commission Défense et Sécurité; Assemblée Nationale, RDC, Kinshasa, August 2021.

<sup>104</sup> See <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210324-la-rdc-recense-ses-fonctionnaires-pour-lutter-contre-les-cumulards-et-emplois-fictifs>. With 500,000 teachers, the education sector together with the security forces form the bulk of government employment and present massive opportunities for fraud. Tackling this issue opens considerable political risk. See: <https://theconversation.com/why-payroll-fraud-in-the-drcs-education-sector-will-be-hard-to-fix-162257>.

<sup>105</sup> See <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1191024/politique/rdc-felix-tshisekedi-denonce-la-mafia-dans-larmee-et-les-institutions/>.



### 3.3 Permanent Conflict

The lack of adequate manpower, mobility, communication, and equipment hampers the security forces' operational effectiveness. Nyunzu territory in Tanganyika Province (an area more than half the size of Belgium with a population exceeding 800,000), for instance, is policed by fewer than 100 police officers, who have very limited means to get around. The situation is not much better for the FARDC. Due to disease, injury, desertion and defection, several units in the eastern DRC are estimated to operate with a mere 30 to 80 percent of their official numbers.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, they are forced to establish small and largely static bases and are unable to effectively patrol or react to incidents. Neither is there logistics support. A senior officer said, "They send our guys to patrol with MONUSCO, the MONUSCO soldiers get their rations and water and our soldiers are left to drowse over their rifle – there is nothing".<sup>107</sup> Unsurprisingly, the FARDC's capacity to engage in effective operations against armed groups is seriously hampered. Moreover, the eastern DRC is a particularly complex, politically and militarily fragmented and dynamic ecosystem. The sheer multitude of armed groups – currently estimated at around 120 – barely reflects their diversity and the complex nature of their interaction with the FARDC and their local and regional environment.<sup>108</sup> Such interactions range from cooperation via varied degrees of complicity and coexistence to active hostility. In some areas, cooperation can be a consequence of operational considerations as some armed groups are used as auxiliaries to bolster campaigns against others. Collaboration, however, can also follow due to common identities or economic calculations. The latter drive vested interests amongst elements in the FARDC, local and national politicians, and regional actors to maintain the status quo: a highly profitable instability. Officers, soldiers, and policemen alike are keenly aware of the duplicity of some of their commanders and the fact that some politicians are implicated in the conflicts they are fighting in. A junior officer mentioned:

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<sup>106</sup> Skype call with Kinshasa-based diplomat, 8 June 2021.

<sup>107</sup> FARDC officer, Goma, 20 May 2021.

<sup>108</sup> See <https://kivusecurity.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/reports/39/2021%20KST%20report%20EN.pdf>.

Why do we have to go to the front to spill blood for this? I can ensure you every time we had the upper hand over the enemy, we received the order to halt the hostilities. This allowed the enemy the time to reorganize and even take back their lost positions.<sup>109</sup>

Another added,

There is a mess because of the politicians. Because they have their allies in the forest, but when people are killed, they are the first to cry out that the soldiers are doing nothing.<sup>110</sup>

Many Congolese citizens thus consider the security forces a source of insecurity or predation rather than a source of protection.<sup>111</sup> This, together with the threat represented by other – often community-based – armed groups that are not adequately addressed by the security forces, remains one of the main mobilizing factors for armed groups to this day. Many in the eastern DRC find themselves in this vicious circle. The foreign armed groups such as the FDLR, CNRD, ADF, FNL or RED-*Tabara* occupy a particular position in these vicious cycles of armed mobilization. First of all, they are a permanent source of concern and opportunity for the neighbouring countries from where they originate. On the one hand, after decades in the DRC, they have transformed but are still considered a permanent political and military threat in their countries of origin. On the other hand, their existence and the threat they represent also serve domestic and regional political and economic agendas. During the past few decades, the presence of these groups has justified numerous military interventions, some overt, others covert, with or without approval by the Congolese government.<sup>112</sup> These have included large-scale joint operations with the FARDC, unilateral commando raids, cooperation with selected FARDC elements and longstanding collaboration with local Congolese armed groups. Secondly, foreign armed groups have become deeply embedded in the local political economy.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>109</sup> FARDC junior officer, 25 May 2021.

<sup>110</sup> FARDC soldiers, Minova, 22 May 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Hoebeke H., Van Der Lijn J., Glawion T., De Zwaan N.; Securing Legitimate Stability in the DRC: External Assumptions and Local Perspectives, SIPRI Policy Study, September 2019 ([https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/0919\\_policy\\_study\\_drc.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/0919_policy_study_drc.pdf)).

<sup>112</sup> The most recent reports date from the December 2020 mid-term report by the UN Group of Experts (S/2020/1283).

<sup>113</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the FDLR, see Johnson D., Schlindwien S., Schmolze B.; Les FDLR, histoire d'une malice rwandaise: des forêts du Kivu aux tribunaux d'Allemagne, CH.Links, 2019.

some have come to regularly collaborate with Congolese security forces as well as with Congolese armed groups.<sup>114</sup> These alliances are based on past partnerships (the FDLR was an ally of both Laurent-Désiré and Joseph Kabila during the Second Congo War), joint interests against neighbouring regimes (particularly Rwanda), ethnic considerations, local conjunctural calculations and commercial interests. In recent years, foreign armed groups have been the main target of Congolese military operations. In response, these groups, possibly with the collusion of their local allies, have responded violently, imposing a heavy toll on local populations. The human cost of military operations such as the current operation against the ADF is significant, seriously undermining popular support for the government and its security forces. In North Kivu's Grand Nord, the anti-ADF operation fuels protests by civil society and community-based groups and politicians. The situation also deeply affects MONUSCO's credibility.

Rare successes that increased confidence, such as the victory against the M23 in 2013 (with considerable UN support and international pressure on Rwanda), proved to be short-lived. The assassination with the complicity of fellow FARDC officers of Colonel Mamadou Ndala, the heroic face of the FARDC's success, in the victory's immediate aftermath confirmed just how deeply entrenched the army's flaws are, and how dysfunctional it is as a result.<sup>115</sup> Beyond prosecution and conviction of some officers, no structural measures were taken to confront the parallel and partly nebulous networks and chains of command operating in the FARDC. Since the declaration of the *état de siège*, the spotlight is again on so-called *brebis galeuses*, (literally black sheep, as an interview partner called FARDC members with doubtful disciplinary track records) but with the exception of a few low- and mid-ranking officers, no measures have been taken thus far to begin a more serious overhaul of the military and police command structures. This focus on rotten apples is problematic as it implies that there are mere individuals at fault, selling their weapons or uniforms to armed groups or involved in

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<sup>114</sup> Inside the ADF Rebellion, A Glimpse in the Life and Operations of a Secretive Jihadi Armed Group, Congo Research Group, November 2018 (<https://insidetheadf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Inside-the-ADF-Rebellion-14Nov18.pdf>).

<sup>115</sup> See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congodemocratic-trial-idUSKCN0J12F120141117> and <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/congo-ending-status-quo>.

illegal taxation or violence against civilians, rather than structural problems that require political reforms in addition to disciplinary measures and judicial interventions.

Yet despite all these widely shared and acknowledged concerns, the Congolese security forces still fight. The Congolese military and police forces are deployed and engaged in quasi-permanent operations against armed groups in Ituri, North and South Kivu, Maniema, and Tanganyika. In other provinces, such as Kasai and Haut-Katanga, there are occasional clashes with armed groups. There are also frequent incidents at the borders with South Sudan and Zambia. Reports of soldiers wounded or killed in action are frequent. There is no total tally available but based on the limited available data, the casualties (wounded and killed in action) runs into the several hundred every year. In August 2021, the FARDC communicated that in the Beni area alone, it had lost more than 2,000 soldiers since 2014.<sup>116</sup> In the same month, in separate incidents against the ADF, the FARDC deplored nearly 60 casualties. The Kivu Security Tracker reported 119 FARDC soldiers killed in Ituri alone between June and mid-September 2021.<sup>117</sup> And yet, despite the highest of prices they pay and the above-documented extremely challenging living and operational conditions for the FARDC and PNC, as an institution, the Congolese security forces have not cracked.

This is at least partly thanks to MONUSCO's presence and support. The much-maligned UN mission performs many important roles in support of the FARDC beyond the above-discussed training. This includes medical evacuation and much needed logistical and mobility support. Most UN forces are deployed in the provinces as part of ongoing military operations, and the FARDC have considerable logistical dependency on MONUSCO. However, joint planning and effective joint operations are still the exception rather than the norm. This contributes to the image of the UN, including its Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), as an impotent bystander. For instance, despite much closer relations between the current Tshisekedi government and the

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<sup>116</sup> See <https://www.radiokapi.net/2021/08/06/actualite/securite/rdc-larmee-annonce-avoir-perdu-au-moins-2000-soldats-depuis-2014-beni>.

<sup>117</sup> See <https://blog.kivusecurity.org/tag/fardc-2/>.

UN mission, the mission leadership was not involved in or briefed on the planned declaration of the *état de siège* in North Kivu and Ituri provinces.<sup>118</sup> More recently, the mission and the DRC government jointly negotiated a transition plan for MONUSCO's progressive withdrawal. Planning is ongoing for joint operations against the ADF.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Communication with a senior UN official, April 2021. Since, the dialogue seems to have improved. There is now also some more structured and regular reporting and communication from the mission to the Congolese political leadership.

<sup>119</sup> Plan de transition et compte rendu des discussions pour le retrait échelonné, responsable et durable de la MONUSCO, Groupe Conjoint de Travail, Septembre 2021.  
<https://www.primature.cd/public/2021/09/16/signature-du-plan-de-transition-pour-le-depart-echelonne-de-la-monusco-de-la-republique-democratique-du-congo/>.

## A New Start with President Tshisekedi?

Despite the concerns about the December 2018 elections, the peaceful transfer of power between Joseph Kabila and Felix Tshisekedi was a historic first in the country's history. Felix Tshisekedi is also the first Congolese president without a "military" (or rebel) past since 1965. At the beginning of his presidency, most observers considered the security forces a bastion of influence of the Kabila regime and thus hostile ground for Tshisekedi. This was still clearly visible in Kinshasa, where the Republican Guard – considered loyal to Kabila – postured close to the presidential office and Kabila's private residence. Early on in his presidency, Tshisekedi reached out to his neighbours of the Republican Guard in Camp Tshatshi. Then he announced measures focused on improving the living conditions of the military (mostly focused on the military camps in Kinshasa) to be included in his initial budget.<sup>120</sup> Previous governments often promised improving the welfare of the military and security forces without ever following up with concrete measures. While it remains to be seen if it will be different under Tshisekedi, military officers noted, "The current government communicates on military and police matters; what the old regime did not do. It even speaks with the wives of the military".<sup>121</sup> More discretely, Tshisekedi also started to revamp his own security arrangements by including some party members in the Republican Guard.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> RDC: Félix Tshisekedi a visité le camp Tshatshi et a promis de s'impliquer pour améliorer les conditions du soldat et de sa famille; actualité.cd; 4 February 2019 (<https://actualite.cd/2019/02/04/rdc-felix-tshisekedi-visite-le-camp-tshatshi-et-promis-de-simpliquer-pour-ameliorer-les>).

<sup>121</sup> Group of FARDC officers, Numbi, 27 May 2021.

<sup>122</sup> RDC: Félix Tshisekedi veut reprendre en main les services qui gèrent sa sécurité; Jeune Afrique, 25 November 2021.

At the political level, however, it was clear that there was very little political room for manoeuvre in the coalition government with Kabila's FCC. Kabila's political allies held the justice and defence ministries, and his extensive networks within the security forces' command structures remained firmly in place. The influence of the Kabila camp was apparent in attempts to rebuild international partnerships in the security sector. A first overture to Belgium to re-establish military cooperation, for instance, was snubbed by the defence minister, who belonged to the Kabila camp.<sup>123</sup> The only area where some movement was possible was the justice sector. Here, Tshisekedi moved decisively and managed to make important appointments at the prosecutors' office and the constitutional court and succeeded in sidelining the justice minister. This also allowed him to skilfully neutralize the threat of a potential impeachment that was wielded by Kabila's majority in Parliament – which would also require the intervention of the Constitutional Court – and thereby free his hands to move against the FCC and Kabila's political and institutional grip on power.<sup>124</sup>

Beyond the army and police, President Tshisekedi quickly turned his attention towards another key security institution, the *Agence nationale de renseignements* (ANR, National Intelligence Agency).<sup>125</sup> The organization, which falls directly under the authority of the President, had become notorious as the regime's political police. The head of the service and close ally of Kabila, Kalev Mutond, was replaced by one of his deputies (who has been replaced since) and the President has insisted on humanizing the service, closing ANR detention centres and making the service work for state

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<sup>123</sup> During the electoral crisis, the Kabila regime had abruptly suspended military cooperation with Belgium. Vircoulon T., Lagrange M-A.; RDC: Le changement à pas feutrés; IFRI – Observatoire de l'Afrique centrale et austral, Note n° 10, 2020 ([https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/585586/9961172/file/202003-RDC\\_Afrique\\_australe-Note-10.pdf](https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/585586/9961172/file/202003-RDC_Afrique_australe-Note-10.pdf)).

<sup>124</sup> For an analysis of the political dynamics (2019–2021): Hoebeke H.; Rumble in the DR Congo: President Tshisekedi is Taking Control, Egmont Paper 112; 11 March 2021 (<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/rumble-in-the-dr-congo-president-tshisekedi-is-taking-control/>).

<sup>125</sup> Kapinga K. Nkashama (S.), Kabengele Kalonji (E.), Kadda (C.), Milemba (G.), Mukala (J.), Mutiti (M.) et Tshimbalanga (A.); Étude sur l'Agence Nationale de Renseignements en République Démocratique du Congo et quelques orientations stratégiques de réforme; ASSN; June 2021 (<http://www.africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Etude-sur-l'Agence-Nationale-de-Renseignements-en-République-Démocratique-du-Congo-et-quelques-orientations-stratégiques-de-réforme-1.pdf>).

security.<sup>126</sup> Despite these announcements, concerns about the role of the ANR remain. There are numerous reports about the persistence of arrests by ANR agents, who now hold their captives in police cells. Furthermore, the collaboration on the ground between the agency and other security forces remains difficult. ANR officials also reportedly remain engaged in the levying of informal taxes and in illicit (regional) trade.<sup>127</sup>

Despite the presidency cautiously tiptoeing around the leadership of the security forces, several key stalwarts of the Kabila regime who symbolized its impunity, violent repression and corruption have been removed and proceedings have been launched against several. Kalev Mutond is now under investigation.<sup>128</sup> The former head of the military intelligence service, General Delphin Kahimbi, died in unclear circumstances when he was to appear before the DRC's security council to answer charges about a plot to destabilize the presidency.<sup>129</sup> And John Numbi, a former police chief and FARDC general, is pursued by the Congolese justice department and has fled the country. In several searches at his residences in Katanga and Kinshasa, large weapons caches and sensitive materials have been discovered.<sup>130</sup> While none of these moves can make up for structural security sector reform, they are nevertheless a clear demonstration that the former regime is no longer able to provide protection.

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<sup>126</sup> RDC: comment donner un visage humain à la très redoutée ANR?; RFI; 28 February 2019 (<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20190227-rdc-anr-agence-renseignement-christian-lumu-tshisekedi>).

<sup>127</sup> Kapinga K. Nkashama (S.), Kabengele Kalonji (E.), Kadda (C.), Milemba (G.), Mukala (J.), Mutiti (M.) et Tshimbalanga (A.); Étude sur l'Agence Nationale de Renseignements en République Démocratique du Congo et quelques orientations stratégiques de réforme; ASSN; June 2021 (<http://www.africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Etude-sur-lAgence-Nationale-de-Renseignements-en-République-Démocratique-du-Congo-et-quelques-orientations-stratégiques-de-réforme-1.pdf>).

<sup>128</sup> RD Congo: en cavale, l'ex patron du renseignement Kalev Mutond, refait surface; RFI; 5 July 2021 (<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210704-rd-congo-en-cavale-l-ex-patron-du-renseignement-kalev-mutond-refait-surface>).

<sup>129</sup> DR Congo probes death of army military spy chief Delphin Kahimbi, BBC, 29 February 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-51689390>.

<sup>130</sup> RDC: un arsenal découvert chez le général déserteur John Numbi; RFI; 2 September 2021 (<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210902-rdc-un-arsenal-decouvert-chez-john-numbi>).



In early 2021, after nearly two years of an increasingly uneasy cohabitation, President Tshisekedi formed a new political alliance, the “Union Sacrée”, to make a clean break with the Kabila camp. In April, a new government led by Sama Lukonde Kyenge was inaugurated and the key government security ministries (interior and defence) are now held by allies of the president. The long political stagnation of several years of electoral crisis and two years of cohabitation were followed by a moment of grand ambition in which the reform of the security sector and bringing stability to the east were put back on top of the political agenda.<sup>131</sup> The two issues are inextricably linked: there can be no stabilization of the country without effective reform of the security forces, yet there can also not be any reform without stabilization of the east. The two issues, reform and stability, have now been placed high on the domestic political agenda with the *état de siège* declaration for North Kivu and Ituri provinces.

#### **4.1 État de siège: Taking on a Mafia**

On 3 and 4 May 2021, a few days after the Lukonde government had won a vote of confidence in the National Assembly, President Tshisekedi signed three decrees declaring the *état de siège* in North Kivu and Ituri provinces and appointing military governors for both provinces.<sup>132</sup> Under the measure, the provincial assemblies were suspended and all political posts in the provinces were replaced by military or police officers (with the exception of the provincial assembly and governor, none of the other posts, mayors or territorial administrators, were elected). In addition to the civilian administrators,

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<sup>131</sup> Programme d'actions 2021-2023 du Gouvernement Sama Lukonde, Primature RDC, June 2021 (<http://congomines.org/reports/2134-programme-d-actions-2021-2023-du-gouvernement-sama-lukonde>).

<sup>132</sup> The state of siege has its legal base in Arts. 85 and 144 of the Constitution. It is valid for 30 days and after this initial period requires successive prolongations every 15 days (Art. 144 of the 2006 Constitution). Ordonnance No 21/015 du 03 Mai 2021 Portant proclamation de l'État de siège sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo; Ordonnance No 21/016 du 03 Mai 2021 Portant mesures d'application de l'État de siège sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo; Ordonnance No 21/018 du 04 Mai 2021 portant nomination des membres des gouvernement provinciaux militaires dans les provinces de l'Ituri et du Nord Kivu. Tshiamala S.B.; État de siège en RDC : qui sont les chefs militaires choisis par Félix Tshisekedi ; Jeune Afrique ; 10 May 2021 (<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1169731/politique/etat-de-siege-en-rdc-qui-sont-les-chefs-militaires-choisis-par-felix-tshisekedi/>).

most of the commanding officers of the two Military Regions (32nd Military Region for Ituri and 34th Military Region for North Kivu) and the commanders of the three operational sectors (Ituri, Sukola I and Sukola II) were also replaced. By its nature, but also due to the government's high level of political investment, the *état de siège* is a defining move for the second half of the Tshisekedi presidency. It represents a radical shift in the approach to the conflicts in the two provinces, which includes additional ambitious plans such as a revamped DDR process that is now fused with the Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for the Eastern DRC (STAREC) and is known as the P-DDRCS.<sup>133</sup> In June 2021, illustrating his personal commitment, President Tshisekedi stayed in the east for nearly a month. In a meeting with civil society leaders in Bunia, he made his most direct public remarks yet on the state of the military:

We are aware that there is a problem with the numbers of troops in our army. In fact, there are a lot of shenanigans that undermine our security forces. It developed at the same time as the mafia, the same mafia in the army as well as in our institutions. It's not just the army and the police. We saw it recently in the Senate. It is this whole law of omerta, the law of silence. They kill in silence; they scheme in silence. That's what we need to tackle.<sup>134</sup>

This message was echoed by the chair of the Security and Defence Committee of the National Assembly, Bertin Mubonzi: "...the insecurity will be a thing of the past. But it will require the senior leadership to root out the evil from our security and defence forces".<sup>135</sup> Following these presidential remarks as well as investigations in Kinshasa into the number troops effectively deployed in the eastern provinces, the Inspector-General of the FARDC, General Gabriel Amisi, himself a highly controversial and internationally sanctioned person,

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<sup>133</sup> Ordonnance N° 21/038, 4 July 2021.

<sup>134</sup> Amunazo P.; Campagne anticorruption en RDC: pourquoi des officiers de l'armée sont mis aux arrêts; BBC Afrique; 6 August 2021 (<https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-58107300>). Nyenyezi Bisoka A., Vlassenroot K.; Corruption in the Congolese Army: Three Lessons for Modern Democracies; Commentary, Egmont Institute, 5 October 2021 (<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/corruption-in-the-congolese-army-three-lessons-for-modern-democracies/>).

<sup>135</sup> Tshiamala S.B.; RDC: « il faut sanctionner ceux qui ont détourné les moyens alloués à la lutte contre l'insécurité dans l'Est », Jeune Afrique, 9 September 2021 (<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1230572/politique/rdc-il-faut-sanctionner-ceux-qui-ont-detourne-les-moyens-alloues-a-la-lutte-contre-linsecurite-dans-lest/>).

began an investigation.<sup>136</sup> It is indicative of the complexities of the DRC that the general in charge of the Inspectorate-General and thus of overseeing discipline and these anti-corruption investigations is Gabriel Amisi Kumba – also known as “Tango Four”. General Amisi, who used to be a senior member of the RCD-Goma, originates from Maniema and was considered one of the pillars of the Kabila network in the security forces. He is under US, EU and UK sanctions for alleged human rights violations, including during the tense political stand-off before the December 2018 elections. He also appears in several reports of the UN Group of Experts for an alleged role in weapons smuggling and exploitation of mineral resources in the eastern DRC. Quite quickly a few dozen officers were arrested in both provinces.<sup>137</sup> Echoing the earlier remarks by President Tshisekedi, General Amisi mentioned that the arrested officers have accomplices in Kinshasa “who order them to embezzle funds”. Amisi announced that investigations into the issue would continue.<sup>138</sup> Beyond the few dozen arrests, important as they may be to disrupt some networks of corruption in the armed forces and local administrations, no senior commanders have been included in the process. The assessment about the internal rot in the armed forces finds resonance amongst officers and soldiers interviewed for this research. There is generally a wide understanding and acknowledgement of the structural problems affecting the FARDC and the security forces in general. The attitude towards the *état de siège*, however, is mixed. Some saw reasons for hope: “When the government speaks like that, it is well informed, it knows these people and it is prepared to achieve its objectives”.<sup>139</sup> A police officer stated:

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<sup>136</sup> The battle over phantom battalions and retired generals; Africa Intelligence.com; 26 August 2021.

<sup>137</sup> RDC: arrestations d'officiers en Ituri, accusés de détournements de fonds; RFI; 23 July 2021 (<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210723-rdc-arrestations-d-officiers-en-ituri-accus%C3%A9s-de-d%C3%A9tournements-de-fonds>); RDC: des officiers des FARDC arrêtés pour détournements de fonds, africanews.fr, 5 August 2021 (<https://fr.africanews.com/2021/08/05/rdc-des-officiers-des-fardc-arretes-pour-detournements-de-fonds/>); RDC: Nouvelles arrestations d'officiers au sein des FARDC; RFI; 29 July 2021 (<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210728-rdc-nouvelles-arrestations-d-officiers-au-sein-des-fardc>).

<sup>138</sup> Bunia, l'Inspecteur-general des FARDC enquête sur l'utilisation des fonds alloués à l'état de siège; Radio Okapi, 20 July 2021 (<https://www.radiookapi.net/2021/07/20/actualite/securete/bunia-linspecteur-general-des-fardc-enquete-sur-lutilisation-des-fonds>).

<sup>139</sup> Police officer, Bukavu, 19 May 2021.

There are officers that maintain notorious armed groups, they should begin by dealing with those. The authorities said: 'Tuchungishe mwizi bitu abichunge' [Let's watch the thief and guard him]. Let us then see if there will be more loopholes on the part of the officers. With four generals, there will be more strategies to fight the enemy.<sup>140</sup>

Officers from South Kivu would have liked to see the *état de siège* declared in their province as well:

This is a good measure, and it should also be applied in South Kivu. In North Kivu and Ituri, it is opportune because there are several killings orchestrated by the politicians of these areas in complicity with the FARDC. So, it was necessary to change the commanders in place.<sup>141</sup>

For a junior FARDC officer:

This is a new experience, let us see how it will materialize on the ground. I am concerned about the timeline but as we know military operations are the priority in eradicating the armed groups. These are all supported by senior FARDC officers but when military operations are launched in time, they will not be capable to contact their funders.<sup>142</sup>

Others, however, have serious doubts and concerns about the implementation:

They send us now this *état de siège*. The governor with what army? The same soldiers – these are the same soldiers! It's at that point that you'll hear: 'We have been sold-out' and 'We need to scamper as it makes no sense to die for a cause for which we will never be recognized'. With the same elements this will never work.<sup>143</sup>

Another senior officer added: "It's good but our authorities don't understand what has to be done with the manipulators and the armed groups."<sup>144</sup> According to a civilian official in Ituri, "We see that the political process was well ahead of the technical process. It was not really planned". The official was deeply concerned about the impact if the *état de siège* would fail to

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<sup>140</sup> Police officer, Numbi, 25 May 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Group session with FARDC officers, Numbi, 27 May 2021.

<sup>142</sup> FARDC junior officer, 25 May 2021.

<sup>143</sup> FARDC senior officer, Goma, 20 May 2021.

<sup>144</sup> FARDC senior officer, Bukavu, 20 May 2021.

accomplish its goals:

If we fail to bring peace, an unprecedented jurisprudence risks taking hold. I do not think there would be a more effective measure than this in the direction of eradicating hostilities in the East of the country. I try to tell people, whatever the inadequacies, whatever the defects of preparation ... what is important for the moment is that we must succeed. If we fail in this approach, this adventure, the risk is great.<sup>145</sup>

There is also growing criticism of the *état de siège*. The sceptics, concerned that a dysfunctional army would not be capable of making a difference, see their analysis vindicated by the lack of results on the ground thus far. The levels of violence in both provinces have reportedly increased while there is, as yet, no measurable progress in the neutralization of armed groups.<sup>146</sup> The situation is not helped by the controversies concerning the DDRCS and in particular its coordinator Tommy Tambwe Ushindi. Tambwe, formerly with the RCD-G and an M23 satellite group called ALEC, is considered to be close to Rwanda, which strikes a nerve in the eastern provinces. For several armed group leaders, this is an all too obvious and easy pretext to take objection with the DDR process. The controversies concerning the leadership and the legacies of previous failed DDR programmes make donors and other potential partners jittery and thus reluctant to engage with the process.<sup>147</sup> There is also considerable concern about the broad remit and focus of the new provincial military authorities. From the start, they have shown considerable interest in the economic and financial management of the two provinces. An officer in Goma stated:

The governor has been sent to restore peace and extend the state authority over the province, but he started to diverge. Of course, the means were not in position when he started, but when you start by meeting with the provincial taxation department, or the humanitarians.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Stabilization officer, Ituri, 2 June 2021.

<sup>146</sup> Ituri: Nouvelle embuscade des ADF sur la RN4; actualité.cd; 14 September 2021 (<https://actualite.cd/2021/09/14/ituri-nouvelle-embuscade-des-adf-sur-la-rn4>).

<sup>147</sup> Skype communication with UN official, October 2021.

<sup>148</sup> FARDC senior officer, Goma, 20 May 2021.

Similar concerns are recorded elsewhere – not least from provincial politicians who were sidelined and not immediately paid, the latter fact in particular seeming to reflect that natural opposition to the *état de siège* was institutionalized from the start. The lack of effort by provincial, political and social leaders to enhance stability and end violence before the *état de siège* shows that there was little appetite for disruption of the status quo. In his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2021, President Tshisekedi reacted to the criticism and noted that the *état de siège* will not be lifted until the causes that led to its creation have disappeared.<sup>149</sup> He confirmed as much during an interview shortly afterwards, in which he also appealed to all political forces to support the *état de siège*.

There is a fringe of Congolese who want the failure of the *état de siège*, but it must be the business of all Congolese. It is 20 years that the conflicts go on, 20 years without any solution and we have tried something innovative. And we believe it will work. At the same time, we will clean up the stable: put order in the army, purify it from all the bad elements – there are only very few thank God, most of our troops, we must realize, are brave soldiers who go to battle without asking for anything and they put their lives in danger for us, for our security and stability. So therefore, I decided to throw myself into the water with them and I invite all our compatriots to silence our differences and first to rid the country of this gangrene. The *état de siège* is a means that allows us to increase the pressure on the aggressors.<sup>150</sup>

Concrete information about military operations is limited, but by mid-October, no major new troop movements had been signalled. Furthermore, most units that have been in their positions for years (and that have often become deeply embedded in local conflict dynamics) remain in place. Given the depth of the crisis in the eastern provinces, any attempt at fundamental change will require a lot of time. It is however a question whether the *état de siège* will maintain momentum on the ground. If the aim of the *état de siège* was instead or also for President Tshisekedi to get a better grip of the

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<sup>149</sup> Discours de son excellence Monsieur Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, Président de la République Démocratique du Congo au débat de la 76ème session ordinaire de l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies, 21 September 2021.

<sup>150</sup> La doctrine Tshisekedi : putschs, terrorisme, covid, état de siège, élections, climat...; VoA Afrique; 24 September 2021 (<https://www.voaafrique.com/a/entretien-exclusif-avec-le-president-felix-tshisekedi-marius-muhunga-voa-afrique/6244758.html>, translated by the author).

security forces, it remains similarly unclear whether this has been achieved. Yet, without increased control, it will be difficult to push through and implement radical, yet much needed reforms of the state security services.

## 4.2 Increased Political Attention?

Clearly, since the installation of the USN government and the *état de siège*, more public attention is being paid to security and defence issues. Many of the concerns discussed in the previous section are covered in the August 2021 report on the *état de siège* by the Defence Committee of the Congolese National Assembly.<sup>151</sup> The report is based on a series of hearings conducted by the ministers in charge of most of the involved departments. It offers many interesting insights, including the acknowledgement by the Minister of Defence that the *état de siège* lacked planning due to the political context in which it was declared. The parliamentary report covers numerous issues and does not shy away from structural issues such as the lack of a national security policy and coordination between ministries, low salaries, the lack of adequate logistics, etc. It provides dozens of recommendations to the government including a recommendation for a profound restriction and renewal of the military chain of command. Other recommendations are more directly tied to the *état de siège* and insist on the definition of an exit strategy for the initiative.

The report also includes budgetary details delivered by the Ministers of Finance and Budget. For instance, for the period April-May 2021, \$54.4 million were paid to the defence and interior ministries for the *état de siège*. The Ministry of Defence had initially requested an extra funding of \$595 million for investment in equipment – partly related to the *état de siège* (nearly double the annual defence budget). To cover some of these needs, the FARDC had been allocated \$33 million, a considerable part of which was required to cover delayed salaries. The Minister of Budget also provided some insight in the different extra allocations for the FARDC, covering running operational expenditure and premiums, including healthcare. This

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<sup>151</sup> Rapport synthèse des auditions sur l'évaluation de l'état de siège proclamée par l'ordonnance N° 21/015 du 03 mai 2021, sur une partie du territoire de la République Démocratique du Congo, tel que prorogé à ce jour ; Commission Défense et Sécurité ; Assemblée Nationale, RDC, Kinshasa, August 2021.

amounts to approximately \$6 million per month. The payment of these premiums had been stopped for 17 months, before being started again by the current government. The Minister also provided information on the increased budgetary requirements for other involved agencies such as the ANR and the PNC.

Recent parliamentary work impacting SSR is not limited to this report. A parliamentary report on the exploitation of minerals in Mwenga (South Kivu) denounces the militarization of mining sites and identifies issues related to the DGM and the deliverance of visas.<sup>152</sup> During discussions on the 2022 state budget several MPs also made a case for an increase in defence expenditure.<sup>153</sup> The government had indicated that the allocations for defence and security would increase by 22.62 and 32.47 percent respectively.<sup>154</sup>

### 4.3 Return of the Partners?

From the start of the Tshisekedi presidency in January 2019, a gradually growing group of foreign partners has shown interest in relaunching security partnerships. In October 2020, the US and the DRC signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a Privileged Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. There have been several US military delegations to the DRC since.<sup>155</sup> Two other bilateral partners, Belgium and France, also re-engaged. France supports two strategic training institutes, the *Collège des Hautes Études de Stratégie et de Défense* (CHESD, established in 2016) and the new *Ecole de Guerre de Kinshasa* (EGK, established in January 2021). It has also provided some military training modules (train the trainer and pre-deployment, jungle

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<sup>152</sup> Rapport de mission effectuée dans le Territoire de Mwenga, Province du Sud-Kivu, du 08 au 14 Septembre ; Assemblée Nationale ; Kinshasa ; September 2021.

<sup>153</sup> RDC: la part du budget réservée à la défense fait polémique; RFI; 17 November 2021 (<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20211117-rdc-48-heures-pour-retravailler-le-budget-de-la-d%C3%A9fense-contest%C3%A9>).

<sup>154</sup> RDC: la sécurité, parent pauvre d'un budget à 10 milliards de dollars; Jeune Afrique; 22 November 2022 (<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1268415/politique/rdc-la-securite-parent-pauvre-dun-budget-a-10-milliards-de-dollars/>).

<sup>155</sup> U.S. Africa Command leaders visit DRC: U.S. Africa Commando Public Affairs; 30 January 2021 (<https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/33448/us-africa-command-leaders-visit-drc>); DR Congo Accepts US Military Help Against ADF Militia; voanews.com; 15 August 2021 (<https://www.voanews.com/africa/dr-congo-accepts-us-military-help-against-adf-militia>).



training to a FARDC battalion before deployment to North Kivu).<sup>156</sup> Military cooperation with Belgium was relaunched in 2019. In 2021, Belgium deployed a senior officer to Kinshasa as liaison officer to the FARDC general staff. After a long hiatus, it has also evaluated the infrastructure and human resources of earlier training to a FARDC Rapid Reaction Brigade in Kindu (Maniema). A potential follow-up is under consideration.<sup>157</sup> MONUSCO has continued to provide support to the Congolese security forces. There are regular training sessions for the police and military officers on human rights and sessions to enhance the capacity of the PNC and FARDC.<sup>158</sup> The mission is also building military camps in North Kivu Province.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, it provides regular support to ongoing military operations and cooperates with the FARDC in providing convoy escorts in areas of Ituri and North Kivu.<sup>160</sup>

Besides these “traditional” partners and the UN, there are also several new players that are engaging with the DRC on security and have announced collaborations. Egypt has been present in Congo over the last decade, but the political contacts have been scaled up since the arrival of President Tshisekedi. The country has provided training for new members for the Republican Guard. Such support is also reportedly provided by Congo-Brazzaville.

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<sup>156</sup> France uses its permanent regional presence in the Central African (CEEAC) region and Djibouti to provide training to FARDC and PNC elements. <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/espanol/operations/actualites2/efg-formation-infanterie-au-profit-des-fardc>; <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/espanol/operations/afrique/afrique-centrale/elements-francais-au-gabon/breves/efg-formation-au-profit-d-un-bataillon-de-combat-en-foret-des-forces-armees-de-la-republique-democratique-du-congo>; <https://www.vooafrique.com/a/tshisekedi-ouvre-une-ecole-de-guerre-a-kinshasa/5725245.html>.

<sup>157</sup> <https://www.7sur7.cd/2021/06/20/rdc-des-elements-fardc-deployes-dans-lest-seront-bientot-formes-par-des-officiers>; Belgian officials, Brussels, 20 September 2021.

<sup>158</sup> Ituri: MONUSCO has trained more than 650 FARDC officers and troops in combat tactics in the jungle; 27 July 2021 (<https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/ituri-monusco-has-trained-more-650-fardc-officers-and-troops-combat-tactics-jungle>).

<sup>159</sup> Beni: pose de la première pierre pour la construction du camp des militaires FARDC à Kididiwe, Radio Okapi, 30 January 2021 (<https://www.radiookapi.net/2021/01/30/actualite/securite/beni-pose-de-la-premiere-pierre-pour-la-construction-du-camp-des>).

<sup>160</sup> Fabricus P., The UN hopes a revamped Force Intervention Brigade can counter the ruthless tactics of the Allied Democratic Forces; ISS Today; 17 September 2021 (<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/quick-reaction-forces-to-the-rescue-in-eastern-drc>).

Others that have shown an interest in cooperation include the UAE.<sup>161</sup> For now, this international support appears to mirror past practice from 2006–2017. With the exception of the more strategic training of senior leadership in the CHESD and the EGK, the focus seems to be on operational training and advice. There remains an important need for such support, and more initiatives seem to be on the way, but these do not constitute reform.

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<sup>161</sup> The President of the Congo receives Major General Al Raisi, the UAE candidate to head Interpol; Ministry of the Interior, UAE; 4 August 2021 (<https://www.moi.gov.ae/en/media-center/news/080421n01.aspx>).

The acquis of nearly two decades of security sector reform is meagre. Under former President Kabila, the DRC government did not take ownership of reform, to the frustration of its main international partners.<sup>162</sup> The structural causes for this lack of progress in reform are many. They include:

- the general state of governance in the DRC, with a lack of commitment to and investment in public goods including security, high levels of corruption and informality, including informal taxation;
- the use by successive authoritarian regimes (those of Mobutu and the two Kabila regimes) of the security forces to ensure their control and grip on power, while (seemingly paradoxically) also maintaining the security forces in a condition of structural fragility, and relying on nepotism, clientelist or ethnic-based informal networks and the creation of “elite” units to avoid the emergence of an effective alternative power structure;
- the composition of the security forces since the First and Second Congo Wars with a de facto and nearly permanent osmosis between armed groups and the security forces;

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<sup>162</sup> Hoebeke H., Boshoff H., Vlassenroot K. “Monsieur le President vous n’avez pas d’armée” La réforme du secteur de sécurité vue du Kivu; in Trefon T.; Réforme au Congo (RDC) Attentes et désillusions; Cahiers Africains n°76; 2009; pp. 119–137.

- the absence of proper investment in the security forces resulting in lacking equipment, low and irregular salaries, deficient logistics and support during operations, dire living conditions for the military and lacklustre health services;
- pervasive corruption within the security forces, including the persistence of a deficient human resources management system;
- the long-term effects of impunity for human rights violations, deficient discipline, and a weak military justice system.

In retrospect, despite the donors' usual acknowledgements that SSR is essentially a political exercise and needs to be based on solid political assessments and understandings of the context, the bulk of activities labelled SSR were mostly technical interventions. The effective result of these interventions seems at best analogous to a Potemkin village. Since early 2021, the political context has changed considerably. Kabila and his political network have been effectively sidelined and several heavyweights from the security forces are under investigation. The 2021 government programme and several declarations by the President show that the political leadership is well aware of the structural deficiencies of the security sector. There is political urgency since, with the declaration of the *état de siège*, the government and president have launched an initiative that could offer the momentum needed for structural change, but it is also a decision of considerable political risk. An important report by the Defence Committee of the Congolese National Assembly and the continued work by some civil society organizations shows that in Parliament and civil society, there is some capacity and will to accompany such a process.

And, as our research has shown, so it is amongst the FARDC and PNC. That said, frustration amongst army and police rank-and-file deployed in the eastern provinces runs high. They live in dire conditions and, along with many officers, have to spend much time and energy on scraping together a livelihood, often to the detriment of their subordinates, their social environment and the civilian population they ought to protect. Members of both institutions are generally well aware of the duplicity amongst several senior ranks and the involvement of politicians in the country's continuing violence.

The window for reform may however be closing soon as the 2023 elections already cast their shadow over the political dynamics in the country. The government has not yet communicated its precise reform intentions, and disciplinary measures to disrupt corrupt networks have only targeted mid-ranking officers. At the same time, popular support for the *état de siège* is waning and opposition against the measure is becoming a mobilizing factor for the political opposition. This attitude risks to further embroil the government and complicate its high-stakes gamble. As the political fate of the Lukonde government and the Tshisekedi presidency to a considerable degree depends on the results they can show for the *état de siège*, it makes them increasingly dependent on the leadership of the security forces, which has done little to effectively prioritize reform.

If the Tshisekedi government genuinely aims to launch comprehensive security sector reform, it will have to act soon and use the momentum that remains of the *état de siège*. A starting point could be an uncompromising reshuffle of the security forces' command structures. It will have to work with a broad range of domestic actors to develop a national consensus including civil society and the political opposition. Any serious reform will be a lengthy process that will require significant investment and planning. Moreover, all reform will require consequential investment in the social and living conditions of soldiers and police officers as a prerequisite to enforcing discipline and fighting impunity. Despite some reasons for guarded optimism, there is, then, still a long way to go.

## *The Insecure Livelihoods Series*

