

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING DRC Monthly Briefing March 2015

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Seven political parties in the ruling coalition, known as the G7, write to President Joseph Kabila (2001-present) warning that his divisive ruling style risks splitting the coalition. The seven have links to the governor of Katanga province, Moïse Katumbi, who announces he will step down as governor amidst mounting speculation that he will run against Kabila in the 2016 general elections. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) renews the mandate of Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en RD Congo (MONUSCO) despite government requests to halve its military personnel. The Forces Armées de la RDC (FARDC) stall in their mission to dislodge the rebel Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) from North Kivu. Intelligence services arrest pro-democracy campaigners in Kinshasa and Goma, indicating the increased jitteriness of the Kabila government about the influence of activist groups. Three high-profile activists, Fred Bauma, Sylvain Saluseke and Floribert Anzuluni, remain in custody without charge. The government begins work on installing a fibre-optic backbone to bring high speed internet to Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Kisangani.

Coalition partners warn Kabila over divisive government

Seven political parties in the governing coalition have written to President **Joseph Kabila** (2001- present) warning him that what they call the government's divisive approach to politics risked splitting the coalition. The letter also warned Kabila that heavy-handed policing by state agencies under his control would only further sour perceptions of the coalition with the electorate and risked triggering further unrest.

Kabila's **Parti du peuple pour la reconstruction et la démocratie (PPRD)** – in effect his personal political vehicle – notionally leads the ruling coalition. But the coalition has been increasingly divided following large public demonstrations in January, a popular response to Kabila's thinly disguised attempt to delay the 2016 elections (see ARC January and February DRC Briefings).¹

The letter was sent on 5 March and then leaked to social media. The following parties signed it:

- **Mouvement Social pour le Renouveau (MSR)**, the second largest party in the presidential coalition;
- **Alliance pour le Renouveau du Congo (ARC)**;
- **Parti Démocrate Chrétien (PDC)**;
- **Union Nationale des Démocrates Fédéralistes (UNADEF)**;
- **Union Nationale des fédéralistes du Congo (UNAFEC)**;
- **Mouvement Solidarité pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MSDD)**; and the
- **Avenir du Congo (ACO)**.²

The parties, now known colloquially as the **G7**, comprise one third of the ruling coalition's parliamentary seats (ie, over 100 members) and could tip the balance of power in the national assembly in favour of the opposition if they were to defect. This poses a significant challenge to Kabila. In response, the president called a meeting at his farm at **Kingakati, Bas-Congo** on 22 March, to try to resolve the differences. According to sources with knowledge of the proceedings, the president was mostly absent. He delivered a brief speech on the importance of unity, emphasised that the coalition was a family and then handed mediation over to **Aubin Minaku**, the secretary general of the UNPD.³ The parties at the meeting aired their

¹ Radio Okapi, 16 Mar 2015

² Radio Okapi, 16 Mar 2015

³ Source with close ties to presidency, Kinshasa

disagreements over the way Kabila governs the country and agreed to better internal communications and regular meetings in the future. According to sources, the G7 think they have the upper hand:

“They believe that they have Kabila on the back foot because he (was caught by surprise and) reacted in a subdued fashion.... They will use these meetings to push for more reforms.”⁴

UNAFEC leader **Gabriel Kyungu wa Kumwanza** told the press after the meeting that he could not rule out the G7 operating as a separate political bloc within the coalition in the future. He also said that the group’s main aim was to ensure that national elections took place in 2016, and that his parties and allies would work hard to achieve this.⁵

The proximity of the elections will ensure that the divisions in the ruling coalition underpin politics for the next two years. And the G7 group may pose more of a threat to Kabila’s grip on power than the combined forces of the opposition. Participants at the Kingakati meeting were unable to agree whether the coalition should campaign together or as separate parties, keeping the door open for political challengers to Kabila for the presidency from within the current administration.

The MSR leader, security adviser **Pierre Lumbi**, has been a vocal critic of Kabila in the past, and especially of his attempts to extend his presidential term. The leaders of the UNADEF, **Charles Mwando Simba**, UNAFEC, Kyungu wa Kumwanza, and the ACO, **Danny Banza**, are all from the mineral-rich south-eastern province of **Katanga**. Katanga is both Kabila’s home province and home to one of his most popular political rivals, the billionaire provincial governor, **Moise Katumbi**. Government sources report that Katumbi had met ARC leader **Olivier Kamitatu** in early March.

“Government aides are furious with Kamitatu, Kabila views anyone who meets Katumbi as a traitor... They say he would not have dared to do so a few years ago.”⁶

Katumbi is currently the only opposition figure who looks strong enough to take on Kabila in 2016. He announced on 8 March that he would step down as Katanga governor when it is split into four separate provinces in January 2016 (the move by Kabila to split Katanga into four has been widely seen as an attempt to dilute the Katumbi power base). He has instead said that he is taking a break from regional politics. His decision to step down has fuelled speculation – which he has done nothing to dispel – that he will run against Kabila in 2016, and which he could not do as a sitting governor.⁷

Katumbi has also said that, for him, “...*politics is not a profession [la politique n'est pas un metier]*” indicating that he is keeping his options open.⁸ He knows that he will need the backing of major opposition figures in the DRC if he is to build a national coalition to challenge Kabila.

MONUSCO mission continues, as FARDC efforts against the FDLR stall in North Kivu

The **United Nations (UN) Security Council** unanimously voted in March to renew its largest global peacekeeping operation, the **Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en RD Congo (MONUSCO)**. The DRC government had requested that MONUSCO’s military presence be cut by half after MONUSCO commanders declined to assist the **Forces Armées de la RDC (FARDC)** in their offensive against the **North Kivu-based Rwandan Hutu militia, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)**, in February (see *ARC DRC February 2015 Briefing*).⁹ The MONUSCO decision was based on FARDC plans to put the offensive under the command of officers suspected of serious human rights abuses and war crimes.¹⁰

The UN Security Council backed the MONUSCO commanders, on the basis that moving against the FDLR was of paramount importance to international peace and security in the DRC (the FDLR contains the

⁴ Source with close ties to presidency, Kinshasa

⁵ Jeune Afrique, 30 Mar 2015

⁶ Source: political analyst, Kinshasa

⁷ Congosiasa, 16 Mar 2015

⁸ Radio Okapi, 17 Mar 2015

⁹ Radio Okapi, 26 Mar 2015

¹⁰ Reuters, 11 Mar 2015

remnants of those responsible for the Rwanda genocide in 1994), implying that the FARDC was unable to do so alone:

“The swift neutralisation of the FDLR is a top priority in bringing stability to and protecting civilians of the DRC.”¹¹

The Council agreed to a symbolic reduction in MONUSCO troop numbers of 2,000 (the force was already 2,000 short of its full complement), leaving a 20,000 strong force on the ground.

The government went ahead with the offensive without MONUSCO support but it quickly stalled. FARDC commander **Leon Mushale**, one of the two generals that MONUSCO accused of committing war crimes, said that the FARDC has taken back over 24 towns and killed or captured 182 FDLR fighters out of the estimated 1,400 remaining. However, sources in North Kivu say that the FARDC activity has been limited:

“We have not gone into the hills to take on the FDLR in weeks...we are just keeping them contained.”¹²

DRC analysts believe that the FDLR’s illegal charcoal trade and links to the local political elite – along with limits to FARDC capacity – insulate them from a wholehearted FARDC attack:

“Senior DRC security figures have been uncooperative with the FARDC mission....they are receiving kickbacks from the FDLR via the charcoal trade.”¹³

“Evicting the FDLR from the hills of North Kivu will be a slow and costly process, they know the local terrain well, blend with the local population and will retreat into the forest rather than engage the FARDC in direct conflict....without MONUSCO the FARDC doesn’t have the capacity.”¹⁴

There are also political reasons that the FARDC might not want to take on the FDLR directly. Local civil society groups believe that if the FDLR is neutralised then Kabila will no longer be able to justify government failures to provide basic local services.¹⁵

Government cracks down on pro-democracy activists

State agencies arrested a number of pro-democracy activists in March that they accuse of orchestrating campaigns against Kabila’s rule. The arrests have attracted a high international profile due to the arrest and subsequent release of a foreign official as part of the sweep. The DRC intelligence services broke up a news conference of activists on 15 March in front of journalists and civil society groups. The conference was part of an event organised by the **United States (US)** embassy. DRC authorities made more than 40 arrests, including **Kevin Sturr**, a **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** official attached to the US embassy in **Kinshasa**.

Those arrested also included **Fred Bauma**, leader of the youth pro-democracy group **Lucha**, based in **Goma, South Kivu**; and two leaders of Kinshasa-based protest group **Filimbi**: **Sylvain Saluseke**, an NGO worker for the **Global Access Health Network**, and **Floribert Anzuluni**, an **Ecobank** executive and son of former national assembly president **Anzuluni Bembe**.¹⁶ Sturr was released from custody a day later, and three **Senegalese** activists and a **Burkinabe** pro-democracy campaigner were deported following police questioning on 18 March.¹⁷ On 17 March, intelligence officials arrested a further ten members of **Lucha**, who had been protesting against the arrest of the activists, in Goma. The DRC nationals arrested have not been charged, nor have they yet been released.¹⁸

Government spokesperson **Lambert Mendé** claimed on 16 March that the government had discovered “*subversive elements from abroad*” that had been plotting to overthrow the regime. He said that the US

¹¹ UN Security Council declaration: 26 Mar 2015

¹² Source: military officer, North Kivu

¹³ Congosasia, 22 Mar 2015

¹⁴ Source: western conflict resolution specialist, Kinshasa

¹⁵ Reuters, 22 Mar 2015

¹⁶ Jeune Afrique, 30 Mar 2015

¹⁷ Reuters, 18 Mar 2015

¹⁸ Jeune Afrique, 22 Mar 2015

embassy had extended a “*black hand*” into DRC politics and had stirred up resistance and protests. The government said that it would release information on the detained persons on 20 March, but has made no further statements to date.¹⁹

The government has been on edge since widespread protests in January forced it to reverse a plan to extend Kabila’s current term by organising a lengthy national census in preparation for the next elections, which would have taken at least two years to carry out (see *ARC DRC January 2015 Briefing*). The arrests of Bauma, Saluseke and Anzulini show that the Kabila team is worried that educated, articulate and well-connected citizen organisers could add to the weight of voices campaigning against Kabila, especially in the key electoral regions of the east and the capital:

*“These are not rioters or looters, they are influential members of Kinshasa and Goma’s elite...the government is trying to intimidate them into backing down, but the fact that they have to shows how nervous they are.”*²⁰

DRC to install fibre-optic backbone for major cities

The government has started work on the fifth phase of the **Central African Backbone (CAB-5)** project to connect DRC to other central African fibre-optic cable grids. Minister for communications **Thomas Luhaka** said in March that Kinshasa (Bas-Congo), **Lubumbashi** (Katanga), and **Kisangani (Orientale** province) would all have fibre optic connectivity though it is not clear when the project will be completed. The project is part of a \$92m **World Bank** project to connect the communications grids of all central African states. It will connect DRC’s grid to its regional neighbours. Local companies will be contracted to oversee the DRC phase of the project which will involve laying 3,300 km of cable. The project will refinance the national telecoms operator **Société Congolaise de Postes et Télécommunications (SCPT)**. The SCPT has been unable to adequately fund the regeneration of DRC’s communications grids since the end of the second **Congo War** in 2003.²¹ It will also help the development of a digital economy:

*“For our operations outside of Kinshasa we have to rely on low speed internet connections which limits our operations....greater connectivity would make this considerably easier.”*²²

Implications

If it was not clear already, the events of March have shown that the 2016 elections will dominate politics over the next two years in the DRC and increasingly influence every government decision in every sphere, including the economy, licences and regulation.

It appears that the ‘G7’ are only just getting started. Splits in the ruling coalition have been increasingly evident for a number of months but now appear to be formalising as different political groups – often connected to different regions of the country or leading political personalities - jockey for influence. G7 already has enough votes to block legislation and the potential to block Kabila’s efforts to extend his term and any legislation he might try to enact to win electoral advantage. The question is whether Kabila will be able to attract them back into the fold with offers of plum jobs in the government, or other inducements.

The government has managed to negotiate itself into another self-defeating stand-off over the FDLR. The FARDC is plainly unable to take on the FDLR without MONUSCO backing. However, MONUSCO – learning from the past – is not prepared to play this role unless and until the Congolese government appoints credible FARDC commanders. For now, nothing will change in the Kivus, though it does seem likely that the FDLR itself can be contained if not yet defeated.

Ongoing heavy-handed official policing of opposition to Kabila is not weakening the resolve of activists, rather increasing it. If the campaigners currently being detained are not released soon, there will be more

¹⁹ Radio Okapi, 23 Mar 2015

²⁰ Source: political analyst, Kinshasa

²¹ Radio Okapi, 21 Mar 2015

²² Source: mining executive, Lubumbashi

protests. The closer the country moves to the elections in 2016, the more charged the environment is likely to become.

Against the background of political uncertainty, the installation of fibre optic connectivity for major cities is good news for business and for the strengthening of national infrastructure per se. The new lines will bring down the cost of doing business in the country and will help local businesses develop an online presence, boosting the digital economy. However, the government's track record of efficiently carrying out development projects is very poor. The World Bank has its work cut out to ensure that the cables are put in place in a fully functioning manner and deliver on promises to consumers.

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