

**AFRICA RISK CONSULTING****DRC Monthly Briefing June 2022**

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**DRC Summary 21 June 2022**

*Tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda have reached an all-time high after a resurgence of violence in the eastern DRC at the end of May. However, the team involved in the peace talks that started in April between rebel groups and the DRC government, known as the Nairobi Process, says the deteriorating security situation will not impact the process. The Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo (FARDC) (DRC army) and the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) extend the joint military operation launched in December, saying the threat of rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) is not yet eradicated. Belgium's King Philippe and Queen Mathilde conduct an official visit to DRC, viewed as an opportunity to promote reconciliation between DRC and its former coloniser.*

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**Rwandan tensions reach all-time high amid M23 offensives**

Tensions between the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** and **Rwanda** have reached an all-time high after a resurgence of violence in the eastern DRC at the end of May. The **M23** rebel group staged its largest offensive since 2013 between 23 and 27 May, near **North Kivu Province** capital **Goma**, which the group previously captured in 2013.<sup>1</sup> DRC accused Rwanda of supporting the rebels again (see *ARC Briefing Apr 2022*), igniting fresh diplomatic and security tensions. In response to DRC's accusations, Rwanda and M23 have accused the DRC of cooperating with the **Hutu** extremist group, the **Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)**.<sup>2</sup>

M23 is a group of former rebels of the **Congrès national pour la défense de la peuple (CNDP)**, comprising former members of a **Tutsi** militia group. The name came from the 23 March 2009 agreement between the CNDP and the DRC government to incorporate CNDP fighters in the **Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (DRC armed forces).<sup>3</sup> However, CNDP fighters rebelled in 2012, claiming the DRC government had not upheld the agreement, and renamed their group the **March 23 (M23) Movement**.<sup>4</sup> The M23 revolt peaked in 2012 and 2013 when it captured large parts of North Kivu province. The M23, one of many armed rebel groups roaming eastern DRC, briefly seized Goma before DRC troops, backed by **United Nations** peacekeepers from the **Mission de l'organisation des nations unies pour la stabilisation en RD Congo (MONUSCO)**, defeated them and drove them out of the DRC. Following its defeat, the M23 signed an agreement with **Kinshasa** that included provisions for its fighters' reintegration into civilian society. However, the group has accused the government of breaching the agreement again and fighting resumed in 2021.

The M23 has made significant gains since launching its latest offensive, capturing the town of **Bunagana** on the border with **Uganda** and the town of **Tshengerero** on 13 June.<sup>5</sup> The group also shot down an FARDC aircraft on 17 June.<sup>6</sup> The FARDC released a statement saying it was Rwandan soldiers who had occupied Bunagana, an M23 stronghold during the height of the group's activity in 2012 and 2013. The governor of North Kivu claimed that Rwanda soldiers had occupied Bunagana "*not only to asphyxiate the city of Goma but also to put pressure on the Congolese government*".<sup>7</sup> M23 rebutted the FARDC statement and later claimed the seizure.<sup>8</sup> The **United Nations Refugee Agency** reported on

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<sup>1</sup> Reuters, 27 May 2022

<sup>2</sup> Reuters, 28 May 2022

<sup>3</sup> DW Akademie, 8 Apr 2022

<sup>4</sup> DW Akademie, 8 Apr 2022

<sup>5</sup> The Africa Report, 13 Jun 2022

<sup>6</sup> Reuters, 17 Jun 2022

<sup>7</sup> Reuters, 13 Jun 2022

<sup>8</sup> Reuters, 13 Jun 2022

27 May that the fighting had pushed over 72,000 civilians to flee the border area with many taking refuge in Uganda.<sup>9</sup>

Following the latest M23 offensive, the DRC on 27 May suspended **RwandAir** flights to the country and summoned Rwandan ambassador **Vincent Karega** to address the situation.<sup>10</sup> DRC government spokesman **Patrick Muyaya** declared that M23 had been designated a terrorist group.<sup>11</sup> A press release from Goma on 29 May indicated that local security services had arrested two soldiers from the **Rwanda Defence Force (RDF)**, alleging they had planned to attack a camp close to the Rwandan border.<sup>12</sup>

Escalating tensions have caused concern among regional bodies, leading the **African Union (AU)** to appoint **Angola's** President **João Lourenço** (2017-present) as a mediator between DRC's President **Felix Tshisekedi** (2019-present) and Rwanda's President **Paul Kagame** (2000-present).<sup>13</sup> After initial talks on 31 May, it was agreed that DRC would release the two Rwandan soldiers. Kagame stated Rwanda's commitment to working with the DRC both bilaterally and through established regional initiatives:

*"This includes the expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the [International Conference on the Great Lakes Region] ICGLR and the Nairobi Process within the framework of the East African Community [EAC], as well as through multilateral collaboration, for security, stability and development. in the long term of the Great Lakes region."*<sup>14</sup>

Despite Kagame's affirmations, hundreds of citizens protested in Kinshasa and **Bukavu** on 2 June against Rwanda's alleged support for M23.<sup>15</sup> Demonstrations have continued throughout June, demanding the DRC government sever diplomatic ties with Rwanda and expel Karega.<sup>16</sup> The **United States (US) Foreign Affairs Committee** denounced Rwanda's support for M23, calling on the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**, MONUSCO and the US **Bureau of African Affairs** to investigate the situation.<sup>17</sup>

While on a visit to the **Republic of Congo (RoC)** on 6 June, Tshisekedi maintained that he is still seeking a peaceful solution with Rwanda and expressed his belief that the tensions will not impact the Nairobi Process peace talks that started in April between rebel groups and the DRC government (see below and *ARC Briefing DRC May 2022*). However, tensions have not de-escalated, with Tshisekedi telling RoC media there was "no doubt that Rwanda has supported the M23 to come and attack the DRC".<sup>18</sup> On 11 June, Rwanda and DRC accused each other of rocket strikes over their shared border. A spokesperson for the DRC army reported that two children were killed in one of the strikes, although this could not be verified.<sup>19</sup> While both sides have presented evidence backing their accusations, it has not been independently verified. The **Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism (EJVM)**, established in 2012 to monitor and investigate security incidents in the **Great Lakes** region, has had a team deployed since the escalation of tensions; however, the number of incidents currently requiring investigation may be too overwhelming for the body to draw quick conclusions.

More recently, on 17 June, a Congolese soldier was killed after firing on Rwanda's border police. Goma military governor Colonel **François Kabeya** said the incident is not uncommon along the border,

<sup>9</sup> Actualite, 27 May 2022

<sup>10</sup> Reuters, 28 May 2022

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, 28 May 2022

<sup>12</sup> ACP Congo, 29 May 2022

<sup>13</sup> Congo Independent, 31 May 2022

<sup>14</sup> Radio Okapi, 2 Jun 2022

<sup>15</sup> Africanews, 3 Jun 2022

<sup>16</sup> Actualite, 19 Jun 2022

<sup>17</sup> Actualite, 14 Jun 2022

<sup>18</sup> ACP Congo, 6 Jun 2022

<sup>19</sup> Reuters, 11 Jun 2022

choosing not to ignite further tensions.<sup>20</sup> However, after the announcement, DRC ordered that its border posts with Rwanda be closed at 3pm every day, several hours earlier than usual.

Since the escalation in tensions, the **Conseil supérieur de la défense** (superior defence council) has been pushing the government to end all agreements and conventions signed with Rwanda.<sup>21</sup> After an extraordinary meeting of the council on 15 June, which included the two chambers of parliament and the heads of the security services, it was decided that government would go ahead with the suspensions. Several agreements were signed between 2006 and 2018 under former president **Joseph Kabila** (2001-2019), while three trade agreements were signed in 2021 under Tshisekedi. The council also demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Rwandan soldiers allegedly present in DRC's territory.<sup>22</sup>

The latest tensions have affected EAC plans to deploy a regional military force to address the insecurity and violence in eastern DRC, with DRC insisting it will not accept Rwanda's participation in the joint force.<sup>23</sup> **Kenya's** President **Uhuru Kenyatta** (2013-present) on 15 June called for the immediate deployment of the regional EAC military force to the eastern DRC. Regional representatives of the armies involved were anticipated to meet on 19 June to discuss final plans for the deployment.<sup>24</sup> EAC leaders met on 20 June in **Nairobi** (Kenya) to discuss the security situation and progress of the peace talks. It was agreed during the meeting to deploy the regional military force in the coming weeks, but it remains unclear if Rwanda will be involved.<sup>25</sup> The EAC military force is mandated to assist the Nairobi Process, encouraging groups to participate in the talks and the **Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Regeneration and Stabilization Program (DDRCS Program)**.

The team involved in the Nairobi Process claims that the deteriorating security situation in DRC will not impact the peace process. During a session with **European Union** (EU) ambassadors in Kinshasa, special representative of the head of state, **Serge Tshibangu**, affirmed that he and his team will continue the talks after completing a visit to armed groups in **Ituri**, North Kivu and **South Kivu**.<sup>26</sup>

The peace talks have continued to draw support from the international community. Foreign affairs minister **Christophe Lutundula** completed a mission to **Morocco** in June where his Moroccan counterpart expressed Morocco's support for the Nairobi Process.<sup>27</sup> US secretary of state, **Anthony Blinken** also commended the peace talks during a visit by Lutundula to the US on 1 June.<sup>28</sup> On 3 June, the UNSC urged other armed groups to join the peace talks and **Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Regeneration and Stabilization Program (DDRCS Program)**.<sup>29</sup>

During his visit to the US, Lutundula highlighted that 56 armed groups and 40 local community leaders are actively participating in the talks, with M23, **Mai-Mai Zaire, Ya Kutumba** and the **Co-operative for the Development of Congo (CODECO)** resisting talks.<sup>30</sup> M23's designation as a terrorist organisation by the government on 27 May has excluded the group from further participating in talks. CODECO signed a unilateral ceasefire with the government on 6 June and entered into peace talks after taking part in intra-community dialogues organised by MONUSCO and the **Lendu** community leaders.<sup>31</sup> On 15 June, CODECO leaders handed a declaration of their

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<sup>20</sup> Reuters, 17 Jun 2022

<sup>21</sup> Radio Okapi, 17 Jun 2022

<sup>22</sup> Actualite, 16 Jun 2022

<sup>23</sup> Actualite, 17 Jun 2022

<sup>24</sup> The East African, 20 Jun 2022

<sup>25</sup> The East African, 20 Jun 2022

<sup>26</sup> Radio Okapi, 27 May 2022

<sup>27</sup> Actualite, 12 Jun 2022

<sup>28</sup> ACP Congo, 2 Jun 2022

<sup>29</sup> Radio Okapi, 4 Jun 2022

<sup>30</sup> ACP Congo, 2 Jun 2022

<sup>31</sup> ACP Congo, 17 Jun 2022

commitment to cease hostilities to the governor of Ituri province.<sup>32</sup> The rebel group additionally expressed its support for the DDRCS Program, asking the government to accelerate the programme.

### Uganda extends its military operation

The FARDC and the **Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF)** on 1 June extended their joint military operation launched in December 2021, saying the threat of the rebel group **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)** is not yet eradicated. There are approximately 1,700 UPDF soldiers present in DRC, the largest foreign intervention in DRC since the launch of MONUSCO in 2000.<sup>33</sup> It has not been disclosed how long the operation has been extended.

The ADF began operations in Uganda in 1996 but relocated its bases to DRC in the late 1990s to avoid capture. The group has pledged allegiance to the **Islamic State** and is viewed as one of the most violent rebel groups operational in DRC, carrying out 119 attacks in March.<sup>34</sup> In November, the group carried out several attacks in Uganda, including a coordinated triple suicide bombing.<sup>35</sup>

However, a report released in June by the **Congo Research Group (CRG)** and its research partner, **Ebuteli**, has called into question the real reasons behind the joint military operation. CRG reports the operation is focused on protecting economic interests, such as Uganda's oil deposits in **Lake Albert**, which borders DRC.<sup>36</sup> The oil would be transported to the port of **Tanga in Tanzania** via the **East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline**. In February, an investment agreement for the oil project was agreed upon by Uganda's President **Yoweri Museveni** (1986-present), Tanzania's President **Samia Suluhu Hassan** (2021-present), the **Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation** and France-headquartered **TotalEnergies**. The deal is worth \$10 billion while the pipeline's construction will cost \$3.5 billion. The greatest security threat to the oil deposits and refinery comes from eastern DRC.<sup>37</sup>

Another factor reportedly behind the operation is the construction of road infrastructure joining Uganda and DRC. The CRG reports that in December, when the joint military operation was launched, road construction also began on a project financed by Uganda, DRC and Uganda-based company **Dott Services**, which also signed a series of deals in eastern Congo in 2020, including mining deals.<sup>38</sup>

The CRG report also raises questions about France's interest in the project and military operation. France reportedly holds the interests of its oil major, Total Energies, very close and is keen to see the success of the oil deposits in Uganda.<sup>39</sup> The French government has also committed to reducing investment in oil projects by 2040, adding pressure on TotalEnergies to successfully complete as many projects before this process begins.

### Historic visit by Belgian monarchy

**Belgium's King Philippe** and Queen **Mathilde** conducted an official visit to DRC between 7 and 13 June, viewed as an opportunity to promote reconciliation between DRC and its former coloniser.<sup>40</sup> Belgium's prime minister, **Alexander De Croo** (2020-present), and members of his cabinet accompanied the royal couple on their first visit to DRC. The restoration of relations between DRC and Belgium may see increased economic and security cooperation. The two countries shared a contentious relationship under the rule of former president Joseph Kabila; however, President Tshisekedi has looked to renew relations and partnerships.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Radio Okapi, 16 Jun 2022

<sup>33</sup> Reuters, 1 Jun 2022

<sup>34</sup> Africanarguments.org, 20 Jun 2022

<sup>35</sup> Reuters, 1 Jun 2022

<sup>36</sup> Actualite, 14 Jun 2022

<sup>37</sup> Africanarguments.org, 20 Jun 2022

<sup>38</sup> Congo Research Group, accessed 21 Jun 2022

<sup>39</sup> Congo Research Group, accessed 21 Jun 2022

<sup>40</sup> France24, 7 Jun 2022

<sup>41</sup> Actualite, 10 Jun 2022

Before the visit, DRC's minister of foreign affairs, **Christophe Lutundula**, announced on 6 June that the Belgian government would make \$263m to support DRC in several sectors from 2023 to 2027.<sup>42</sup> During the historic visit, King Philippe and Tshisekedi signed three memoranda of understanding focused on development cooperation, finance and foreign affairs, the diamond sector and the port sector.<sup>43</sup>

King Philippe took the official visit as an opportunity to reiterate Belgium's regrets for the human rights abuses the Congolese population endured during the Belgian colonial regime.<sup>44</sup> An underlying issue during the visit was also the repatriation of Congolese works of art and relics that were taken to Belgium during colonial rule. On 19 June, DRC's prime minister, **Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde**, arrived in Belgium with several other ministers to oversee the official ceremony where the last remains of the first prime minister of DRC, **Patrice Emery Lumumba**, will be handed over to his family.<sup>45</sup> Lumumba was assassinated by separatists and Belgian mercenaries in 1961.

The Belgian contingent did not ignore the backdrop to the visit of increased tensions between Rwanda and DRC. Belgium's minister of cooperation, **Myriame Kitir**, while accompanying the king and queen, stated Belgium's support of DRC's right to defend the integrity of its territory and to defend its population against armed groups and against any outside interference:

*"Both the DRC and its neighbours must be respectful of internal efforts to improve internal security. Putting diplomacy in the region to restore confidence and bring about appeasement seems urgent to us."<sup>46</sup>*

The Belgian national financial prosecutor's office announced on 15 June that it will investigate Belgium-headquartered private investment company founder and CEO **Philippe de Moerloose** for corruption of public officials in DRC under former president Joseph Kabila.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Actualite, 7 Jun 2022

<sup>43</sup> ACP Congo, 8 Jun 2022

<sup>44</sup> ACP Congo, 8 Jun 2022

<sup>45</sup> Actualite, 19 Jun 2022

<sup>46</sup> Actualite, 13 Jun 2022

<sup>47</sup> Actualité, 15 Jun 2022

## Planner

20 Dec 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** End date of peacekeeping mission **Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO)**;  
2023 **(DRC)** Scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections

## Chronology

20 Jun 2022 **Lubumbashi (DRC)** *Copperbeltkatangamining.com*. State-owned mining company **Gecamines** is threatening to block exports and seize the shareholding of its partner, **China Molybdenum Co.** in the **Tenke Fungurume** cobalt mine;

20 Jun 2022 **North Kivu (DRC)** *Daily Monitor*. Rebel group **M23** announces it will re-open a border post between DRC and **Uganda** it seized on 13 June;

17 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. Government announces it will freeze value added tax (VAT) to try control the increasing prices of petroleum and cereal foodstuffs;

15 Jun 2022 **Brussels (Belgium)** *Actualite*. The **Belgian** national financial prosecutor's office announces it will investigate Belgium-headquartered private investment company founder and CEO **Philippe de Moerloose** for corruption of public officials in DRC under former president **Joseph Kabila**;

12 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. **Zambia** and DRC sign an agreement for the facilitation of commercial transactions;

12 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Radio Okapi*. **Assemblée nationale** (national assembly) declares it has tabled a newly updated bill on the suppression of human trafficking;

11 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualité*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** relaunches cooperation with **India** in a bid to complete the construction of the **Kakobola** hydroelectric power plant, being built by India-headquartered company **Angélique International Limited**;

10 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Radio Okapi*. Secretary general for the economy, **Célestin Twite**, confirms that the government has approved a \$10m subsidy for the national hydrocarbons company **SONAHYDRO**;

9 Jun 2022 **South Kivu (DRC)** *Actualite*. Militia group members release five **Chinese** gold miners after holding them captive for six months;

9 Jun 2022 **Kasai (DRC)** *Reuters*. Six people have died after an artisanal diamond mine caved in;

8 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *ACP Congo*. **Banque centrale du Congo** (central bank) forecasts DRC's economic growth will reach 6.1% in 2022;

8 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. Undisclosed sources say **DRC** government has sent invoices to the country's four telecom operators, **Orange**, **Vodacom Group**, **Airtel Africa** and **Africell**, to pay levies totalling \$180m per year, which operators have reportedly refused to pay;

7 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. The **Senate** adopts five bills of ratification for the finance, agriculture and infrastructure sectors;

6 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** directs the ministry of industry to begin feasibility studies for a new special economic zone (SEZ) in the east of the country;

8 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. **World Bank** signs two funding conventions for \$900m to fund development projects in eastern Congo;

4 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. DRC anti-corruption agency, the **Inspectorate General of Finance (IGF)**, announces it found several irregularities during an audit of state-owned mining

company **Gécamines**, including the loss of \$414m in tax and loans, which was transferred to the central bank but never arrived;

4 Jun 2022 **Oyo (Republic of Congo) ACP Congo**. President **Felix Tshisekedi** arrives in **Oyo** to meet with **Republic of Congo's** President **Dénis Sassou Nguesso** to discuss bilateral issues;

2 Jun 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC) ACP Congo**. Defence minister **Gilbert Kabanda Kurhenga** receives the military attaché of the embassy of **Turkey** to discuss a working visit to **Ankara**;

31 May 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC) ACP Congo**. Prime minister **Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde Kyenge** signs a cooperation agreement with **Australia**-based **Fortescue Future Industries** on energy transition, specifically green hydrogen production;

31 May 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC) ACP Congo**. Hydrocarbons minister **Didier Budimbu Ntubuanga** announces that government has disbursed \$30m to oil companies to ensure the supply of fuel to transport companies and petrol stations;

28 May 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC) Actualite**. The council of ministers adopts the bill extending the state of siege in **Ituri** and **North Kivu** for 15 days from 4 June;

24 May 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC) Reuters**. Mines ministry releases data that indicates copper and cobalt exports rose 12.3% and 7.4% respectively in 2021;

24 May 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC) Actualite**. The presidential candidacy process has officially been launched ahead of the 2023 scheduled presidential elections;

23 May 2022 **Kinshasa (DRC) ACP Congo**. Ministry of hydrocarbons orders petrol stations to close at 10 pm to combat fuel scarcity;

22 May 2022 **Maluka (DRC) Actualité**. The **African Development Bank** has released \$20m for the construction of the **Maluka Special Economic Zone**, which was created in 2012 but has faced several delays;

21 May 2022 **Bujumbura (Burundi) Actualite**. President **Felix Tshisekedi** arrives in **Burundi** for an official visit to discuss security, trade and economic matters with his counterpart, **Evariste Ndayishimiye**;

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