

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### DRC Monthly Briefing September 2023

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#### DRC Summary 15 September 2023

*Congolese authorities accuse Rwanda and the M23 rebel group of delaying a peace process that would allow voters in eastern DRC to participate in the December elections. Interior minister Peter Kazadi says on 4 September that police authorities arrested two high-ranking officials of the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) (armed forces) for participating in a crackdown on anti-United Nations protests on 30 August. The crackdown that left 43 people dead and 56 seriously injured. Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni (1986-present) announces on 7 September that the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) has killed hundreds of DRC-based Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militants. The European Union (EU) and the United States (US) are moving forward with their plans to upgrade the 1,300-kilometre Lobito Rail Corridor that connects the cobalt and copper belts in Zambia and the DRC with the port of Lobito in Angola.*

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#### Stalled peace process threatens elections preparations...

Authorities in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** have accused **Rwanda** and the **M23** rebel group of delaying a peace process that would allow voters in the eastern DRC from participating in the December elections.<sup>1</sup> Electoral officials for months have been restricted from entering the rebel-held eastern region to finalise the registration process, which officially concluded nationally in April.<sup>2</sup> The disarming of M23 rebels has stalled over the militia's refusal to completely withdraw its forces without first holding discussions with the government, a demand that President **Felix Tshisekedi** (2019-present) has repeatedly declined. In a call with the **United States (US)** media house Bloomberg on 29 August, government spokesperson **Patrick Muyaya** said that authorities are under pressure from the US government and international partners to hold the elections on time, but that approximately 1.5 million people in **Masisi** and **Rutshuru** are still waiting to be enrolled.<sup>3</sup> The Rwandan government spokeswoman, **Yolande Makolo** said in response to Bloomberg on 29 August:

*"Rwanda is committed to the ongoing regional peace mechanism — our priority is security along our Western border as well as stability and development for our entire region."<sup>4</sup>*

Conflict has ravaged the eastern DRC since the 1990s when violence in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide spread across the border. Tensions reached an all-time high in June 2022 after a resurgence of violence that led DRC to accuse Rwanda of supporting the M23 rebel group.<sup>5</sup> Rwanda denied the accusations and instead accused the DRC of supporting armed groups that aim to topple its government (*see ARC Briefing DRC Jun, Jul, Aug, Oct, Nov & Dec 2022*). However, DRC and UN experts claim that Rwanda has been fighting alongside and equipping the rebel group.<sup>6</sup> The Rwandan government has also accused the DRC of using an ethnic **Hutu**-dominated rebel group with links to the genocide, the **Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR)**, to fight the M23.

However, Tshisekedi has been campaigning for months for the US and **Western** governments to sanction Rwanda and its officials for supporting M23 rebels, partly because military action has thus

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<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

<sup>2</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

<sup>3</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

<sup>4</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, 27 May 2022

<sup>6</sup> Bloomberg, 26 Oct 2022

far not worked. Muyaya said that the **East African Community Regional Force (EACRF)** has been “*ineffective*” and is too friendly with the rebels.<sup>7</sup> The government is now in talks with the **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** about sending another of its peacekeeping units which could arrive later this year.

Tshisekedi and the DRC’s frustrations with the EACRF come amid plans by the president to bolster his political campaign for re-election.<sup>8</sup> Tshisekedi wants to have neutralised the M23 by the election so he can fulfil his promise made to voters in the eastern DRC four years ago that he would eliminate the rebel threat. While Tshisekedi originally banked on the support of the EACRF, the bloc’s troops have stuck to their buffer role. At the same time, the M23’s reluctance to retreat from territory they agreed to give up, is causing a major political headache for Tshisekedi who is under severe pressure to show results. The legitimacy of the December elections could also be called into question if a significant portion of the population in the eastern DRC is not able to vote due to M23 rebels.

### Anti-UN protests leave 43 dead...

Interior minister **Peter Kazadi** stated on 4 September that police authorities arrested two high-ranking officials of the **Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo), **Mike Mikombe** and **Donat Bawili**, for participating in a crackdown on anti-**United Nations (UN)** protests on 30 August that left 43 people dead and 56 seriously injured.<sup>9</sup> The UN rights office also noted authorities arrested over 220 people in relation to the protests and subsequent crackdown.

Security and defence forces used lethal force to quell the planned anti-UN protests organised by a sect of the local organisation, **Natural Judaic and Messianic Faith Towards the Nations**, known locally as **Wazalendo**.<sup>10</sup> The protestors were set to demonstrate in the eastern city of **Goma (North Kivu)** against the presence of the regional EACRF and **United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)** peacekeeping forces.<sup>11</sup> MONUSCO in particular has faced increased pressure from locals to withdraw from the country after more than two decades.

A government delegation arrived in Goma on 4 September to hold hearings and other proceedings “*to establish responsibility*”.<sup>12</sup> Kadazi stressed that the government has “*no interest in hiding anything*” and the “*whole truth will be known*”.<sup>13</sup> Authorities in Goma also called on the families of the victims to come forward with any information for the inquiry.

US-headquartered rights organisation **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** said on 31 August that before the demonstrations could take place, armed authorities shot at Wazalendo protesters on the streets, resulting in an “*apparent massacre*” in Goma.<sup>14</sup> In the aftermath of the killings, young protestors in Goma barricaded roads on 4 September and subsequently paralysed the city. However, police were able to disperse these demonstrators without incident. The tragic events illustrate two key points - authorities can be as brutal as the rebels they are supposed to be protecting citizens and that local strongly view the EACRF and MONUSCO missions as failures.

### Uganda kills Islamist rebels near Congo border...

**Ugandan** president **Yoweri Museveni** (1986-present) announced on 7 September that the **Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF)** had killed 547 **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)** militants in clashes on the border region. The ADF is a DRC-based **Islamic State (IS)**-linked group that launches attacks

<sup>7</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

<sup>8</sup> The East African, 10 May 2023

<sup>9</sup> Bloomberg, 4 Sep 2023; Aljazeera, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>10</sup> Bloomberg, 4 Sep 2023; Aljazeera, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>11</sup> AP 31 Aug 2023

<sup>12</sup> Aljazeera, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>13</sup> Aljazeera, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch, 31 Aug 2023

on Uganda from DRC.<sup>15</sup> Museveni also revealed that another 50 militants had been captured and dozens of weapons have also been confiscated.<sup>16</sup> The UPDF and FARDC have been focusing on fighting jihadist groups in the region of the DRC near Uganda's **Rwenzori Mountains** through a joint mission with both governments collaborating to find other ADF members.<sup>17</sup>

Uganda blames the ADF for a 16 June attack on a school in western Uganda two kilometres from the DRC border that left 42 people dead (*see ARC Briefing DRC Jun 2023*).<sup>18</sup> Following the attack, ADF rebels escaped back into DRC via the **Virunga National Park**.<sup>19</sup> Museveni confirmed that the UPDF is "hunting for these people" and "the only option for them is to surrender or else they will die".<sup>20</sup> Museveni also said on 18 June that the DRC government has allowed the UPDF to operate on Congolese territory and Uganda has "no excuse in not hunting down the ADF terrorists into extinction".<sup>21</sup> Ugandan forces are also stationed in the eastern DRC as part of EACRF fighting against the M23 rebels.

Two years ago Uganda launched a campaign against ADF forces active in neighbouring DRC and the group previously took responsibility for carrying out terror attacks in the East African country, including bombings in the capital **Kampala** that left seven people dead.<sup>22</sup> The ADF fought against the Ugandan government in western Uganda in the late 1990s before fleeing into **Beni (North Kivu)** in the DRC, from where they launched terror attacks over the past decades.<sup>23</sup> The rebel group now includes a majority of Congolese fighters, although they still recruit members from around the region.<sup>24</sup>

In recent years, the ADF has launched several attacks on civilians, United Nations (UN) peacekeepers and FARDC. IS publicly acknowledged the ADF as an affiliate in late 2018 and started claiming responsibility for ADF-attributed attacks in April 2019.<sup>25</sup> In September 2020, the leader of the rebel group, **Musa Muhsin Baluku**, said the ADF had disbanded and become an autonomous Islamic State province.<sup>26</sup> The US state department refers to the ADF as **ISIS DRC** and has designated the group a terrorist organisation.<sup>27</sup> Uganda's elimination of 567 ADF militants is a big step towards eliminating the group, however, there is a long way to go in bringing peace to the region where over 100 rebel groups are based.

### US and EU announce next steps in expansion of Lobito Corridor...

The **European Union (EU)** and the **United States (US)** are moving forward with their plans to upgrade the 1,300-kilometre **Lobito Rail Corridor** that connects the cobalt and copper belts in **Zambia** and the DRC with the port of Lobito in **Angola**.<sup>28</sup> In separate announcements on 9 September, the US and EU confirmed that a feasibility study to extend the railway between Angola and Zambia will be undertaken.<sup>29</sup> The two countries also said that they will partner to upgrade critical infrastructure across the region in order to "unlock the enormous potential of this region".<sup>30</sup> The EU and the US will also collaborate to combine their technical know-how and financial resources in order to "accelerate" the development of the Lobito Corridor, including agricultural value chains and digital access as a strategy to increase the region's competitiveness.<sup>31</sup> This is the first major update on the major project since the

<sup>15</sup> NBS TV, 7 Sep 2023

<sup>16</sup> NBS TV, 7 Sep 2023

<sup>17</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Sep 2023

<sup>18</sup> NBS TV, 7 Sep 2023

<sup>19</sup> Bloomberg, 17 Jun 2023

<sup>20</sup> NBS TV, 7 Sep 2023

<sup>21</sup> President Yoweri Museveni, 18 Jun 2023

<sup>22</sup> Bloomberg, 17 Jun 2023

<sup>23</sup> Bloomberg, 17 Jun 2023

<sup>24</sup> US State Department, 2019

<sup>25</sup> US State Department, 2019

<sup>26</sup> Bloomberg, 17 Jun 2023

<sup>27</sup> Bloomberg, 8 Sep 2023

<sup>28</sup> China Global South Project, 11 Sep 2023; The White House, 9 Sep 2023

<sup>29</sup> China Global South Project, 11 Sep 2023; The White House, 9 Sep 2023

<sup>30</sup> The White House, 9 Sep 2023

<sup>31</sup> The White House, 9 Sep 2023

US announced a pledge of \$250m to refurbish the line in May (see *ARC Briefing DRC June 2023*). It will also be the first major infrastructure project in **Africa** under the **Washington**-led \$600 billion **Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII)** and the EU's €300 billion (\$319 billion) **Global Gateway** programme, which are targeted at competing with **China's** \$1 trillion **Belt and Road Initiative project (BRI)**.<sup>32</sup>

However, early developments indicate that it is going to be difficult to persuade mining firms in the region to back the key infrastructure project.<sup>33</sup> Thus far, only **Canada**-headquartered **Ivanhoe Mines** has announced its plans to use the newly refurbished rail route billion (see *ARC Briefing DRC Aug 2023*).<sup>34</sup> Ivanhoe Mines announced on 16 August that it will ship 10,000 tonnes of copper from its **Kamoa-Kakula** joint venture in the south eastern DRC by rail to the port of Lobito in Angola under a trial agreement to examine whether the logistics route can cut transport costs.<sup>35</sup> Some analysts have also criticised the project for continuing colonial traditions. This was highlighted by China expert **Eric Olander** who said on 11 September:

*"The fact is that this is the first major PGII/GG infrastructure initiative on the continent and it's a mine-to-port railway that is eerily similar to European infrastructure priorities in Africa during the colonial period".<sup>36</sup>*

DRC, Zambia and Angola established the **Lobito Corridor Management Institution** on 27 January in preparation for additional investment for the project.<sup>37</sup> Tshisekedi said that when fully operational, the Lobito Corridor will ensure the opening up of mines in the DRC and Zambia, in addition to "access to and circulation of inputs essential to both the mining and agricultural industries".<sup>38</sup> South Africa stands to lose the most from the emergence of the Lobito Corridor as a viable alternative to the Port of Durban for the transportation of the region's copper and cobalt.<sup>39</sup> For the DRC, the project could see more efficient export of its critical minerals, a major contributor to its GDP. The DRC's mining sector contributes about 30% (\$2.15 billion in 2020) of its GDP and, according to **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** data, has accounted for more than 90% of total exports over the last five years.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> China Global South Project, 11 Sep 2023

<sup>33</sup> China Global South Project, 11 Sep 2023

<sup>34</sup> Bloomberg, 27 Feb 2023; China Global South Project, 19 Apr 2023

<sup>35</sup> Bloomberg, 16 Aug 2023

<sup>36</sup> China Global South Project, 11 Sep 2023

<sup>37</sup> China Global South Project, 9 Feb 2023; China Lusophone Brief, 7 Feb 2023

<sup>38</sup> Bloomberg, 5 Jul 2023

<sup>39</sup> China Global South Project, 9 Feb 2023

<sup>40</sup> Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2 Dec 2020



## Planner

8 Dec 2023 (DRC) End of EACRF mandate in the DRC

Dec 2023 (DRC) Scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections;

20 Dec 2024 Kinshasa (DRC) End date of peacekeeping mission **Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO)**;

## Chronology

13 Sep 2023 Kinshasa (DRC) *Africanews*. Court of cassation sentences presidential party **Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social** former leader **Jean-Marc Kabund** to seven years in prison on offenses including insulting the head of state, insulting institutions of the republic and spreading false rumours;

12 Sep 2023 Kinshasa (DRC) *The East African*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered **Amnesty International** in conjunction with local rights group **Initiative pour la Bonne Gouvernance et les Droits Humains (IBGDH)** release a report noting that the expansion of cobalt and copper mines near **Kolwezi**, southern DRC, has led to the forced eviction of entire communities and human rights abuses;

12 Sep 2023 Kinshasa (DRC) *Africanews*. International rights groups join the calls for the release of journalist **Stanis Bujakera**, the **Reuters** and **Jeune Afrique** correspondent for DRC as well as deputy editor of local news site **Actualité.CD**. Bujakera is accused of spreading false rumours and disseminating false information over an article published by Jeune Afrique implicating military intelligence in the assassination of former minister **Chérubin Okend** even though Bujakera was not the article's author;

11 Sep 2023 Kinshasa (DRC) *Mining Weekly*. **Canada**-headquartered mining junior **Tantalex Lithium** secures the backing of **Swiss**-based **Glencore** for the development of a lithium mine which would be DRC's first; 7 Sep 2023 Kinshasa (DRC) *Africa Business*. The government of the of the

DRC suspends more than 20 mining licences, in a move that critics say will damage investor confidence in an already tricky market;

8 Sep 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Business Insider Africa*. DRC and **Kenya** agree to eliminate visa requirements for citizens as a way to enhance trade opportunities between the two countries and promote integration within the **East African Community (EAC)**;

6 Sep 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Anadolu Agency*. Leaders of the **East African Community (EAC)**, namely **Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda** and **South Sudan**, and representatives from the DRC and **Uganda** meet at the **22nd Extra-Ordinary Summit of the East African Community Heads of State** and unanimously vote to extend the mandate of its regional force, the **East African Community Regional Force (EACRF)**, in eastern DRC;

6 Sep 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualité*. Government yet again contacts the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** to request an early withdrawal of the **United Nations Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO)**;

2 Sep 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. **European Commissioner** for justice **Didier Reynders** is set to arrive in DRC to discuss cooperation between DRC and **Belgium**, security in eastern DRC and the upcoming December presidential elections;

1 Sep 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *United Nations*. The **United Nations (UN)** demands an “*independent*” probe after dozens of people are killed in a crackdown on an anti-UN protest in **Goma (North Kivu)**;

29 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *European Union*. The **European Union (EU)** announces that it has granted 350,000 euros (\$373,005) in aid to combat the mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) epidemic in the DRC. Congolese health authorities have reported nearly 9,000 cases of mpox in the country;

28 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Africa News*. Local sources say that at least fifteen people have been killed in an attack attributed to the **Codeco** community militia in **Ituri** province;

29 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Sika Finance*. Mines ministry reports that DRC produced approximately 14.82 tonnes of gold during the first half of 2023, an 11% increase year-on-year, while diamond exports declined 38.8% to reach 3.8 million carats;

28 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Actualite*. **Burundi's** President **Evariste Ndayishimye**, while on a visit to Kinshasa, says that the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) linking DRC, Burundi and **Tanzania** is progressing well;

26 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Africa News*. Ruling party **Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS)** confirms President **Félix Tshisekedi's** candidacy for the 2023 presidential election at an extraordinary congress in Kinshasa;

24 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. The DRC reportedly wants to buy back some of the country's prized copper and cobalt deposits, as the government tries to gain more control of crucial green metals;

24 Aug 2023 **Washington DC. (DRC)** *United States State Department*. The **United States (US)** imposes sanctions on six individuals contributing to the most recent escalation of conflict in the eastern DRC;

22 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *AFP*. A former private adviser to President **Félix Tshisekedi**, **Fortunat Biselele**, prosecuted for “*intelligence with Rwanda*”, is acquitted;

21 Aug 2023 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Africa News*. The trial of the former prime minister **Augustin Matata Ponyo**, opens before the country's constitutional court. Ponyo is accused of embezzlement.

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

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