

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### DRC Monthly Briefing February 2024

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#### DRC Summary 23 February 2024

*The presidency announces on 20 February that prime minister Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde has resigned, triggering the dissolution of his government. The United States (US) on 17 February condemns Rwanda's support of the M23 rebel group and calls on the armed group to cease hostilities. South Africa announces on 12 February that it will deploy 2,900 troops to restore peace and security in the eastern DRC as part of a 16-country Southern African Development Community (SADC) initiative. The US on 5 February signs a deal with the DRC in an attempt to secure supplies of critical minerals free of any Chinese involvement.*

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#### DR Congo government dissolved after prime minister resigns...

The presidency announced on 20 February that prime minister **Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde** tendered his resignation to President **Felix Tshisekedi** (2019-present), triggering a dissolution of his government.<sup>1</sup> Lukonde tendered his resignation eight days after the validation of his mandate as a national deputy.<sup>2</sup> Tshisekedi released a statement on the same day acknowledging acceptance of the resignation and called upon Lukonde's government to continue in their roles until a new administration is formed.<sup>3</sup>

Lukonde will now become a member of parliament (MP) following his election in the December polls as the representative of **Kasenga** district (**Haut-Katanga** province).<sup>4</sup> DRC's constitution notes that serving ministers cannot be members of parliament, which means an official must decide between remaining a legislator or resigning to join the government.<sup>5</sup> Lukonde was appointed prime minister in February 2021 following the collapse of the alliance between Tshisekedi and former president **Joseph Kabila** (2001-2019). Following his re-election in December, Tshisekedi named a representative to identify a majority within the national assembly to form his next government, and therefore, it may take some time before Lukonde officially leaves his position as prime minister.<sup>6</sup>

The provisional electoral results indicate that parties who support Tshisekedi won 94% of all the seats in parliament.<sup>7</sup> However, while the constitutional court on 9 January certified the results of the presidential election, confirming incumbent president Tshisekedi's victory, the court still needs to certify the parliamentary results.<sup>8</sup>

There is speculation about whether Lukonde truly resigned on his own accord or whether the relationship between him and Tshisekedi has reached a natural end. While Tshisekedi asked him to serve until a new administration is formed which could be indicative that there are no tensions, in **African** politics, it is not common for a senior official, such as a prime minister, to freely resign from their high-profile position to assume a much lower rank in parliament. That said, Tshisekedi's new

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<sup>1</sup> DRC Presidency, 20 Feb 2024

<sup>2</sup> Africa News, 22 Feb 2024

<sup>3</sup> DRC Presidency, 20 Feb 2024

<sup>4</sup> Africa News, 22 Feb 2024

<sup>5</sup> Africa News, 22 Feb 2024

<sup>6</sup> Reuters, 21 Feb 2024

<sup>7</sup> Africa News, 22 Feb 2024

<sup>8</sup> Anadolu, 8 Jan 2024; Reuters, 9 Jan 2024

term starts with greater support from the electorate than his first, and without the challenges from Kabila, so he is likely pushing for a prime minister from his own party.

### US condemns Rwanda's support of M23 rebels in the DRC...

The **United States (US)** state department on 17 February condemned **Rwanda's** support of the **M23** rebel group, calling on the Rwandan government to withdraw all its **Rwanda Defense Force (RDF)** personnel as well as its surface-to-air missile systems which the US says poses a threat to civilians and peacekeepers. The department further called on M23 to cease hostilities amid worsening violence in the eastern DRC.<sup>9</sup>

Since June 2022, Tshisekedi has also maintained that the RDF is guilty of conducting operations in the DRC in support of M23, leading to tensions escalating between the two governments on several occasions, and at some points, even prompting fear of war. To this point, the US also called on all sides to the conflict to de-escalate tensions, work towards a negotiated solution and respect *"each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and hold accountable all actors for human rights abuses in the conflict"*.<sup>10</sup> The US statement may put pressure on Rwanda, however, despite mounting *"solid evidence"* from the **United Nations (UN)**, its government has repeatedly denied any connection to the M23 or any other rebel groups operating in the DRC.

The international community, including the US, **France**, and **Germany**, almost unanimously considers that Rwanda is backing the **Tutsi-led M23**, they do not have the appetite to actually take retaliatory measures against Rwanda should it refuse to follow their instructions. A local source once told **Africa Risk Consulting and Briefing (ARC Briefing)** that the international community has historically been *"very reluctant to sanction Rwanda"* even when there was compelling evidence against it:

*"Maybe because of Western guilt from not intervening to stop the 1994 genocide. And Kagame has exploited that reluctance over the years."*<sup>11</sup>

In recent weeks, fighting near **Goma (North Kivu province)** has intensified as the M23 threatened to capture the major metropolis.<sup>12</sup> In the nearby town of **Sake**, residents have been fleeing heavy fighting between the M23 and **Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (armed forces of the DRC).<sup>13</sup> International aid group **Mercy Corps** has reported that more than one million Congolese have been displaced from the armed conflict in the eastern DRC since November.<sup>14</sup> The UN also estimates that at least seven million people have been displaced since the start of the conflict.

### South Africa to deploy 2,900 troops to eastern DRC...

**South Africa** announced on 12 February that the country will deploy 2,900 soldiers to help restore peace and security in the eastern DRC as part of a 16-country **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC)**, codenamed **Operation Thiba**, at a cost of \$106m.<sup>15</sup> South Africa noted that *"the obligation to contribute troops is borne by all SADC member states"*.<sup>16</sup> SADC forces began deploying in the DRC under the SAMIDRC mission on 15 December 2023.

The deployment of SADC forces comes as the UN peacekeeping mission, **Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO)**, prepares to withdraw from the eastern Congo. The **East African Community Regional Force (EACRF)** also officially exited on 31 December following tensions with Tshisekedi. After 25 years in

<sup>9</sup> US State Department, 17 Feb 2024

<sup>10</sup> US State Department, 17 Feb 2024

<sup>11</sup> ARC source, local resident

<sup>12</sup> Bloomberg, 17 Feb 2024

<sup>13</sup> Bloomberg, 17 Feb 2024

<sup>14</sup> Bloomberg, 17 Feb 2024

<sup>15</sup> South African Presidency, 12 Feb 2024

<sup>16</sup> South African Presidency, 12 Feb 2024

the country, the UN will withdraw its 13,500-strong peacekeeping force from the DRC by the end of 2024 and close its military and policy deployments in **South Kivu** province no later than April.<sup>17</sup>

Many Congolese feel that the deployment of the MONUSCO and EACRF has done little to benefit them and their exit from the country has been celebrated. Regular protests against UN and EACRF forces in the DRC have also become common in recent years. Government spokesperson **Patrick Muyaya** had previously said in August 2023 that the EACRF has been “*ineffective*” and is too friendly with the rebels.<sup>18</sup> The Congolese government thinks that the SADC regional force will be more effective in restoring stability in the country, but if the combined forces of UN peacekeepers, EACRF and FARDC cannot halt the violence, major doubts persist about SADC’s chances of success.<sup>19</sup>

### US again attempts to secure China-free critical resources supply from the DRC...

For the second time in two years, the US has signed a deal with the DRC in an attempt to secure supplies of critical minerals free of any **Chinese** involvement.<sup>20</sup> The US state department announced on 5 February that the government had signed a non-binding memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Congolese state-owned mining company, **Gécamines**, and the **Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC)**, under the auspices of the **Minerals Security Partnership (MSP)**.<sup>21</sup> The state department describes the agreement as:

*“A framework for coordination in mineral exploration, production, and processing in alignment with our shared commitment to the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI)’s development of the Lobito Corridor”.*<sup>22</sup>

This latest MoU is very similar in scope to one the US signed in December 2022 with the DRC and **Zambia**, which has thus far failed to materialise.<sup>23</sup> Both agreements seek to establish an electric vehicle (EV) value chain in the DRC, which possesses the world’s largest known reserves of cobalt.<sup>24</sup> However, the difference is the inclusion of JOGMEC, which is already involved in this kind of exploration in **Botswana** using state-of-the-art technology, that it hopes to use in the mines owned by Gécamines.<sup>25</sup> President **Joe Biden’s** (2017-present) administration is also hoping that this deal with the DRC will bolster US-led efforts to revamp the strategic **Lobito Corridor**, which will transport critical resources from the Congolese and Zambian cobalt/copper belts over thousands of kilometres to the Atlantic ocean **Port of Lobito (Angola)**.<sup>26</sup> While the Biden administration’s efforts to liberate the US from its current reliance on China in the EV supply chain have been largely unsuccessful, the inclusion of JOGMEC increases the odds of achieving something tangible.

### Planner

Apr 2024 **South Kivu (DRC) Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO)** to close its bases in South Kivu province;

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);**

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, 13 Jan 2024

<sup>18</sup> Bloomberg, 29 Aug 2023

<sup>19</sup> The East Africa, 27 Nov 2023

<sup>20</sup> The China Global South Project, 6 Feb 2024

<sup>21</sup> US State Department, 5 Feb 2024

<sup>22</sup> US State Department, 5 Feb 2024

<sup>23</sup> The China Global South Project, 6 Feb 2024

<sup>24</sup> The China Global South Project, 6 Feb 2024

<sup>25</sup> The China Global South Project, 6 Feb 2024

<sup>26</sup> The China Global South Project, 6 Feb 2024

15 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** End date of the SADC peacekeeping mission **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC)**

## Chronology

23 Feb 2024 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The East African*. **Angola** calls an African heads of state meeting under the auspices of the **African Union (AU)** to discuss the escalating conflict in eastern DRC;

21 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *AFP*. **United Nations Security Council Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) UNSC** calls on DRC and **Rwanda** to “walk back from the brink of war” amid escalating tensions while also sanctioning six leaders of armed groups in DRC;

19 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *The East African*. **Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF)** says it has no reason to get involved in an internal conflict in eastern DRC unless it is a regional peace effort;

17 Feb 2024 **Goma (DRC)** *La Prosperité*. DRC accuses **Rwanda** of carrying out a drone attack which damaged a civilian aircraft at the Goma airport;

16 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. Rwanda writes to the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** objecting to its plan to support a military deployment by **Southern African** nations in the eastern DRC;

16 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *The East African*. Sixteen of DRC’s 26 provinces are grappling with the fallout from floods, which killed at least 221 people, damaged tens of thousands of homes and exposed vulnerable communities to increased risk of malaria and typhoid;

16 Feb 2024 **Kigali (Rwanda)** *Bloomberg*. **Rwandan** President **Paul Kagame** will attend a meeting of heads of state in **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** on 23 February called by **Angola** to discuss the escalating conflict in eastern DRC;

15 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Al Jazeera*. Rebel group **CODECO** kills at least 12 people and kidnaps 16 others at a gold mine near **Djugu** district in **Ituri** province;

15 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Reuters*. The **South African National Defence Force (SANDF)** says two of its soldiers were killed and three wounded by a mortar bomb that landed inside a military base in the DRC, where its troops are helping to fight armed groups;

14 Feb 2024 **Rome (Italy)** *The East African*. An **Italian** judge rules that two **United Nations (UN)** workers cannot be tried over the 2021 deaths of the **Italian** ambassador to the DRC, his bodyguard and a driver;

14 Feb 2024 **Luanda (Angola)** *Jornal de Angola*. Border guard police commander **José Domingos Moniz** says the increased number of crimes along the land border between Angola and **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** is worrying, especially as fuel smuggling is one of the main crimes;

13 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *The East African*. **United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)** condemns a bomb explosion in the **Zaina** refugee camp on 11 February that killed several people and injured others;

8 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *MiningMx*. **Eric Kalala**, the chief executive officer of the state-owned company, **Entreprise Generale du Cobalt**, created to buy all of the DRC’s hand-dug cobalt, says the company could start operating within three months after years of delays;

7 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *AFP*. **United States (US)** calls for dialogue between the DRC government and **M23** rebels with the aid of former **Kenyan** president **Uhuru Kenyatta**;

6 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. A joint venture between the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** and the DRC wants to quadruple shipments of hand-dug gold from the DRC this year;

5 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *News24*. **M23** rebel group accuse the **Tanzania** contingent of the **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the DRC** of using heavy artillery during fighting, adding that they have allegedly launched rocket attacks;

1 Feb 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. **Swiss** mining giant **Glencore Plc**, which has mines in the DRC, is cutting its production target for cobalt this year in response to weak market conditions, which prompted the miner to stockpile metal that's proving tough to sell;

31 Jan 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *News24*. President **Felix Tshisekedi** asks the **United Nations (UN)** and **African Union (AU)** to sanction **Rwandan** leaders and **M23** rebel group who he claims are violating DRC's sovereignty;

30 Jan 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Energy Capital & Power*. **China's** state-owned **Sinohydro** and **China Railway** agree to invest up to \$7 billion towards infrastructure development in the DRC under a revision of the existing **Sicomines** mining deal;

30 Jan 2024 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *The China Global South Project*. A PhD dissertation by the former president of the DRC, **Joseph Kabila**, has been approved by **South Africa's University of Johannesburg**. His dissertation title is 'Geopolitical Turn: USA-China-Russia Rivalry and Implications for Africa';

28 Jan 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Times Live*. **United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)** says it has deployed soldiers to help secure a corridor for people fleeing **Mweso**, where **M23** rebels have been carrying out attacks since Thursday.

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

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