

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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United States (US) president Joseph Biden (2021-present) announces on 4 December \$600m in new financing to advance plans to extend the Lobito Corridor to facilitate the export of critical minerals across the Atlantic Ocean to the US and European markets, as well as to counter Chinese influence in the region. Fighting escalates between the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and the M23 rebel group, despite a recent agreement that seeks to restore peace in the war-torn region. Southern African Development Community (SADC) leaders extend the bloc's security mission in the DRC by a year until 15 December 2025. The Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) says on 9 December that it is struggling to identify a mysterious flu-like sickness dubbed 'Disease X' in the DRC, which has killed more than 100 people and left hundreds ill.

Biden provides \$600m in new funding for Lobito Corridor

United States (US) president Joseph Biden (2021-present) met African leaders in the Angolan port of Lobito on 4 December to advance plans to extend a key railway line that will facilitate the export of critical minerals across the Atlantic Ocean to the US and European markets, as well as counter Chinese influence in the region.¹ Biden, who was rounding off his first and last trip to Africa as president, announced \$600m in new financing for the US and European Union (EU)-backed Lobito Corridor railway project, which runs from Zambia and DRC to Angola.² The Lobito Corridor connects DRC's mining regions in Katanga Province and Zambia's Copperbelt Province to Angola, presenting a strategic alternative route to export markets for both countries and offering the shortest route linking their key mining regions to the sea. The \$600m is in addition to \$553m that the US International Development Finance Corp (IFC) pledged earlier this year to develop the 1,300-km Lobito Corridor.³ Biden said the new US investment will not only fund rail infrastructure but also agriculture, renewable energy and associated supply chains, as well as health and digital access in Angola.⁴ Biden emphasised that the US,

"understands how we invest in Africa is just as important as how much we invest in Africa...To help Africa lead the way we need more capital, more infrastructure to deal with these real solutions. That's why we're here today."⁵

While in Lobito, Biden also toured the port, met with companies investing in the project and engaged with Angola's President **João Lourenço** (2017-present), DRC's President **Félix Tshisekedi** (2019-present), and Zambia's President **Hakainde Hichilema** (2021-present), as well as Tanzania's vice president, **Philip Mpango**.⁶

Despite Biden's efforts, it is uncertain whether US investments in Africa will persist under the next **Donald Trump** (2017-2021) administration.⁷ Biden's visit also comes as the US attempts to catch up with China, which has spent decades building its influence in Africa through extensive infrastructure loans worth billions of dollars and now holds a dominant position in the region's mining sector.

¹ China Global South Project, 4 Dec 2024; AFP, 4 Dec 2024

² China Global South Project, 4 Dec 2024; AFP, 4 Dec 2024

³ Bloomberg, 4 Dec 2024; Reuters, 4 Dec 2024

⁴ Bloomberg, 4 Dec 2024; Reuters, 4 Dec 2024

⁵ Reuters, 4 Dec 2024; Bloomberg, 4 Dec 2024

⁶ Reuters, 4 Dec 2024; Bloomberg, 4 Dec 2024

⁷ China Global South Project, 4 Dec 2024; AFP, 4 Dec 2024

Speaking on Biden's visit to Angola, a local source told **Africa Risk Consulting and Briefing (ARC Briefing)** she was "not sure" whether the Lobito corridor would remain a priority under Trump but,

*"The DRC's minerals won't lose their value just because the US has a new president."*⁸

Fighting escalates in DRC despite recent peace deals...

Fighting is escalating between the **Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)** (armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and the **M23** rebel group, despite a recent agreement that seeks to restore peace in the war-torn region.⁹ Angola's foreign ministry announced on 26 November that the foreign ministers of DRC and **Rwanda** had approved a **Concept of Operations** document, which outlines a framework for coordinated military and security operations to address shared security challenges.¹⁰ The deal requires the DRC to disarm the **Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)** (democratic forces for the liberation of Rwanda) rebel groups and in return Rwanda will withdraw the **Rwanda Defence Force (RDF)** deployed in eastern DRC.¹¹ The deal also aims to enhance border security to prevent cross-border attacks and insurgent movements and promote mechanisms for intelligence sharing and operational collaboration.¹²

While signing the document was hailed as a major development in ending the long-running conflict in the DRC, renewed fighting between FARDC and M23 has been reported in the eastern territory of **Lubero (North Kivu province)**. This has not only violated the peace deal that was signed in Angola on 30 July, taking effect on 4 August, but also cast doubt on the Concept of Operations peace deal.¹³ The FARDC has been fighting M23 rebels who have captured swathes of territories in North Kivu province since 2021. Congolese authorities say the FARDC has recaptured the village of **Luofu** in Lubero from the rebels but the situation remains volatile.¹⁴ The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** on 9 December also convened an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, to discuss ongoing regional efforts to address the deteriorating security situation in the DRC.¹⁵ The escalating violence in the DRC is a major reason for the extension of peacekeeping missions in the country (see below).

... as SADC leaders extend mission in DRC

In an extraordinary leaders summit hosted in **Harare (Zimbabwe)** on 20 November, leaders of the 16-member **Southern African Development Community (SADC)** extended the bloc's security mission in the DRC by a year until 15 December 2025.¹⁶ The **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC)**, which deployed troops in the DRC in December 2023 to help the government fight rebel groups, was initially intended to end its mandate on 15 December 2024.¹⁷ SADC leaders issued a communique on 20 November, voicing concern at the humanitarian and security situation in the DRC, and announcing that the peacekeeping mission was extended to "address the prevailing unstable security situation".¹⁸

SADC member countries have committed almost 3,000 troops to SAMIDRC, with just over 2,000 or more forces coming from **Malawi** and **Tanzania**.¹⁹ However, the SADC mission is one of several forces operating in the mineral-rich DRC, which has been plagued by decades of armed violence. These include the FARDC, the **United Nations (UN)** peacekeeping force, **Mission de l'Organisation des**

⁸ ARC source, local resident

⁹ SABC, 9 Dec 2024

¹⁰ RFI, 26 Nov 2024

¹¹ SABC, 9 Dec 2024; RFI, 26 Nov 2024

¹² RFI, 26 Nov 2024

¹³ SABC, 9 Dec 2024; UNSC, 9 Dec 2024

¹⁴ SABC, 9 Dec 2024

¹⁵ UNSC, 9 Dec 2024

¹⁶ Reuters, 20 Nov 2024; The East African, 21 Nov 2024

¹⁷ Africa News, 21 Nov 2024; The East African, 21 Nov 2024

¹⁸ SABC, 21 Nov 2024; Reuters, 20 Nov 2024

¹⁹ Africa News, 21 Nov 2024

Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO), foreign mercenaries, and more than 100 rebel groups fighting for power, land and minerals.²⁰

MONUSCO troops were also set to leave the DRC on 31 December, but UN under-secretary for peacekeeping operations **Jean-Pierre Lacroix** confirmed on 22 September that MONUSCO troops would not withdraw (see *ARC Briefing DRC Oct 2024*).²¹ Lacroix, who was on an official visit to the country, emphasised that the 31 December date had never formally been agreed on by all the parties.²² The escalating violence in the eastern DRC had also prompted MONUSCO to stay, with no new departure date announced.²³ Lacroix said that MONUSCO has committed to reinforcing its positions in **Ituri** province and to continue supporting the SAMIDRC. The UNSC also agreed on 6 August to offer logistical and technical support to SAMIDRC, a move that will undoubtedly strengthen Tshisekedi's hand in dealing with armed rebel groups.²⁴

While the extension of MONUSCO and SAMIDRC mandates in the DRC will provide crucial support in the fight against rebel groups, it also signals a worsening security situation on the ground, highlighting the growing instability and challenges in restoring peace.

Mystery disease sparks fears of new pandemic...

The **Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)** said on 9 December that it is struggling to identify a mysterious flu-like sickness dubbed 'Disease X' in the DRC that has killed more than 100 people and left hundreds ill, with young children the most vulnerable.²⁵ Reports suggest that all those infected have been severely malnourished.²⁶ While cases have been confined to the DRC so far, the disease has ignited concern about the possible emergence of a pathogen that could give rise to another global pandemic.²⁷ The **World Health Organization (WHO)** dispatched a rapid response team to the DRC on 6 December to help investigate the disease, and has listed influenza, acute pneumonia, measles and malaria as potential causal factors.²⁸

Although the illness was first detected in late October, the Congolese government was only alerted to it on 1 December.²⁹ The nearly six-week delay is understandable given the DRC's rudimentary healthcare system, which has limited capacity for rapid illness diagnosis while serving a population of over 100 million.³⁰ The outbreak occurred in the remote southwestern **Panzi** zone in **Kwango** province, hundreds of kilometres from the nearest laboratory, where the 48-hour drive from **Kinshasa** reduces the risk of wider disease spread but complicates efforts to trace its origin and cause.³¹ To further complicate matters for the DRC, the outbreak comes as the country continues to battle an mpox epidemic, which has resulted in more than 47,000 suspected cases and more than 1,000 reported deaths.³² Despite these challenges, health authorities in the DRC are highly experienced in managing infectious diseases and operating in difficult environments, expertise they have refined over several years of addressing various health crises.³³ However, **Jean Kaseya**, the director of the Africa CDC, which from 5 to 7 December also dispatched a rapid response team to the DRC, noted on 9 December that the extended delay in raising the alarm in the DRC indicated yet again that the country's surveillance and laboratory capabilities need to be boosted urgently.³⁴

²⁰ Africa News, 21 Nov 2024

²¹ The East African, 22 Sep 2024

²² The East African, 22 Sep 2024

²³ Africa News, 21 Nov 2024

²⁴ News24, 7 Aug 2024

²⁵ VOA Africa, 9 Dec 2024; WHO, 9 Dec 2024

²⁶ Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024; MSN, 10 Dec 2024

²⁷ Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024; IOL, 10 Dec 2024

²⁸ WHO, 6 Dec 2024; Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024

²⁹ WHO, 9 Dec 2024; Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024

³⁰ Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024; MSN, 10 Dec 2024

³¹ RFI, 5 Dec 2024; MSN, 10 Dec 2024

³² RFI, 5 Dec 2024

³³ Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024; MSN, 10 Dec 2024

³⁴ Bloomberg, 10 Dec 2024

US rating agency **Fitch Ratings** on 28 August highlighted the potential economic impact of outbreaks, including that they might impact economic activity and erode the fiscal metrics of affected countries.³⁵ While Fitch said that international assistance could mitigate these effects, the agency also noted that its timing and size are uncertain, as is currently evident in the DRC.

Key things to watch in 2025...

As the DRC heads into 2025, several critical issues could shape the country's political and economic landscape. One critical area of focus will be President Tshisekedi's proposed constitutional revisions, announced on 23 October, which could remove term limits and lay the groundwork for him to pursue a third term in office. This move is likely to trigger significant domestic and international scrutiny, potentially fuelling political tensions.

Meanwhile, the ongoing conflict in the eastern DRC remains a major challenge, straining government finances as increased defence spending has diverted resources from critical priority areas. Should revenue shortfalls and increased spending continue in 2025, it could exacerbate the deterioration of the external balance, exchange rate depreciation, excess domestic currency liquidity, and persistent inflation.

However, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** said on 13 November that despite ongoing challenges from the prolonged conflict in the eastern region and the health crisis caused by the mpox epidemic, economic growth in the country is projected to stay resilient, exceeding 5% throughout the next three years. This resilience is expected to be bolstered by a renewed dedication to fiscal discipline, improved coordination between fiscal and monetary authorities, and a continued buildup of international reserves toward recommended levels. These efforts aim to help curb inflationary pressures, reduce the rising cost of living, and bring inflation back to the **Banque Centrale du Congo** (central bank) target of 7% by 2026. The IMF called on DRC authorities to intensify reform efforts focused on enhancing governance and transparency, particularly within the extractive sector, combating corruption and improving the business climate.

The DRC economy has also been largely anchored by the mining sector this year and will continue doing so heading into 2025. On the geopolitical front, observers will closely watch the significance that the incoming Trump administration gives to the Lobito Corridor. Africa was not a primary focus for Trump during his first term, and it would not be surprising if this remains unchanged in his second term.

³⁵ Fitch Ratings, 28 Aug 2024

Planner

2025 (DRC) Constitution review process to start;

Jan 2025 **Washington D.C. (United States) International Monetary Fund (IMF)** executives expected to approve new DRC loan programme;

Dec 2025 **Kinshasa (DRC)** End date of the **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC)** peacekeeping mission;

Chronology

11 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Africa Intelligence*. Dozens of Congolese nationals suspected of planning to destabilise their country were reportedly arrested and deported from neighbouring **Zambia**, in an October operation greenlit by **Lusaka**;

11 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Jacaranda FM*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered non-governmental organisation **Amnesty International** accuses senior Congolese army officers of “possible crimes against humanity” in a massacre in the northeastern city of **Goma** that killed 56 people in 2023;

10 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Morocco World News*. **Morocco**, the DRC and **Zambia** are joining forces to create a regional value chain for electric mobility in **Lusaka**, with the aim of transforming **Africa’s** automotive industry;

10 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *SABC News*. Fighting breaks out in **Lubero (North Kivu Province)** between government forces and the **M23** rebels, violating the peace deal brokered in **Angola** in August and casting doubt on the recent peace deal known as the **Concept of Operations Document** signed between DRC and **Rwanda**;

9 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *VOA Africa*. **Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)** says it is struggling to identify an unknown disease in DRC that has killed at least 79 people;

6 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. Health officials in the DRC say they expect to know within days the cause of an infectious disease outbreak termed ‘Disease X’ that has sickened hundreds of people and killed at least 79 since late October;

4 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Bloomberg*. The **World Food Programme (WFP)** says that war, disease and climate crises have left 40 million people on the brink of starvation in the DRC;

3 Dec 2024 **Kwago (DRC)** *The Guardian*. Kwago province deputy governor **Remy Saki** reports that an unknown disease has killed 143 people in the province and the number of infected people is rising;

1 Dec 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Daily News*. In a communiqué released during the 24th summit of the **East African Community (EAC)** held in **Arusha (Tanzania)**, **East African Community (EAC)** heads of state pledged to strengthen their coordinated approach to restoring peace in the DRC;

29 Nov 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Visa News*. Tourism minister **Didier M’piamba** has announced that the DRC will launch an electronic visa (e-Visa) service “in early 2025”;

26 Nov 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *RFI*. **Angola’s** foreign ministry says the foreign ministers of DRC and **Rwanda** have approved a concept of operations, a strategy under which Rwandan soldiers will disengage from DRC;

26 Nov 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC)** *Africa Report*. A political alliance has emerged in the DRC, bringing together prominent figures, including former president **Joseph Kabila** and former presidential candidates **Moïse Katumbi** and **Martin Fayulu**, to block President **Félix Tshisekedi** from amending the constitution and extending his time in office;

21 Nov 2024 **Kinshasa (DRC) Mining.com**. President **Félix Tshisekedi** inaugurates the **Kipushi** zinc mine, built as a joint venture between state-owned **Gécamines** and **Canada's Ivanhoe Mines**;

About Africa Risk Consulting:

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