



The urgent need for a renewed SSR effort in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Summary

The relatively peaceful 2006 elections which concluded the process of transition from civil war to a legitimate government in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) certainly gave some grounds for optimism. However, many root causes of the conflict remain unresolved and could jeopardise the electoral achievements, as some recent incidents have demonstrated. The *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC), the regular Congolese armed forces, have been unable to influence the security situation to any great extent, as they themselves are still a security risk rather than a factor contributing to the solution of the country's many problems. There is therefore an urgent need for renewed effort in the area of security sector reform (SSR), driven by the new Congolese government but with the assistance of the international community. In the meantime, the presence of a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force, the *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies au Congo* (MONUC), remains of fundamental importance for the country's stability. For this reason, these 'blue helmets' should more than ever continue to contribute to the SSR process as part of their exit strategy. In the longer term, as this paper will point out, the European Union (EU) should take over the lead and develop a common strategy with the rest of the international community and the Congolese authorities.

Evert Kets

Post-electoral violence

The Congolese elections were generally seen as a success. Indeed, the vast majority of the population could freely exercise their right to choose the country's president and parliament for the first time since independence in 1960. But the presidential election also exposed again the deep divides in this continent-sized country. While the Swahili-speaking eastern and southern provinces saw President Joseph Kabila as the best candidate to restore the authority of the state, the Lingala-speaking populations of the north and the Kikongo-speaking populations of the west preferred the flamboyant former rebel leader and transitional Vice-President, Jean-Pierre Bemba.

After losing the second round of the presidential elections, Bemba was destined to become the leader of the opposition, but he was eventually forced out of the country after the bloody clashes that took place

on 21–22 March in downtown Kinshasa between his bodyguards and troops loyal to President Kabila. Bemba currently resides in Portugal for – according to the official version – “medical reasons”, and fears have been raised that with the lack of any serious political opposition an authoritarian regime might once again develop in the DRC.

The presence of a large, apparently uncontrolled group of Bemba's bodyguards in the capital's administrative district of Gombe was indeed a security threat. But negotiations with this heavily armed militia were still ongoing when the fighting started, leading to an EU condemnation of the perceived premature use of violence by the DRC authorities. The fact that the bodyguards could break out of their supposedly sealed-off barracks and create a trail of death and destruction through Kinshasa's commercial centre is certainly not an indication of the FARDC's professionalism.

Furthermore, FARDC troops themselves were once again reported to have harassed innocent civilians and looted their property.

As in the case of similar incidents involving Bemba's bodyguards during the electoral period, the *Garde Républicaine* (GR), which is loyal only to President Kabila, was called to the rescue; however, even this better-equipped praetorian guard was incapable of ending the violence quickly. Some of the GR troops, who are mainly drawn from President Kabila's southern home province of Katanga, were even reported to have joined the looters in Kinshasa. Disturbingly, this downtown gun battle, which received widespread media coverage, was preceded by another post-electoral upsurge of violence on 31 January in the coastal Bas-Congo province. Here, members of a regionalist politico-religious movement rioted in protest at what they saw as a fraudulent election for the provincial governor, and the FARDC's violent response was once again highly indiscriminate.

Brassage process runs aground

The integration of former government troops and rebels into a single national army was seen as a necessary precondition for the organisation of the 2006 elections. This integration was intended to dissipate the military capacity of the former combatant leaders in case they reacted in the face of an electoral outcome not to their liking but the integrated units were also to be used for stabilising the volatile east of the country, which was the major battleground during the civil war. Of the projected 18 integrated brigades (each brigade containing up to 3,500 troops) deemed necessary for securing the elections, only 14 materialised out of the *brassage* (literally, 'brewing') process. Moreover, while the brigades formed in the initial period were trained by highly professional instructors from Belgium, Angola or South Africa, those formed later were hastily assembled, at the expense of the quality of the training. Since the elections the whole process seems to have ground to a halt, as only one more brigade has come out of the *brassage* camps, making a total of 15 integrated brigades.

The EU was already involved in the pre-electoral SSR process as well. While the EUPOL mission assisted in the training of some police units, the EUSEC mission tried to improve the FARDC's administration. It was too little too late, however, to end the corrupt

practices that commonly affect the way military pay is distributed in the DRC, before the elections. As a result, in many integrated units the troops have become demoralised by the late and irregular receipt of their pay, which means they often find themselves once again obliged to live at the expense of the local population.

Even the 'model' 1st Integrated Brigade, which was trained by Belgian instructors in 2004 in Kisangani, did not escape this fate. In addition, although this brigade had received human rights training, discipline degenerated to the extent that in 2006 civilian mass graves were found in one of its camps in the north-eastern Ituri district. Despite these disciplinary problems and the dire living conditions of the rank-and-file soldiers and their families, the Kinshasa authorities embarked on the purchase in eastern Europe of a batch of armoured vehicles in the tense period just before the first round of elections. There is no available information to suggest that these armoured vehicles have been in use recently, or indeed that they were ever really needed.

Another disturbing development that should be noted is in North Kivu province, where the troops loyal to renegade Congolese Tutsi general, Laurent Nkunda, have joined the ranks of the FARDC under their own specific conditions. While the stated goal of the *brassage* is to obtain a truly national army which can be deployed countrywide, Nkunda's troops underwent a process known as *mixage*, allowing them to remain in their province of origin. One of the reasons given for this exception is that the FARDC lacks the means to fight Nkunda's troops, and that these forces can be useful in the fight against the foreign armed groups still present in the east – in the case of North Kivu, mainly the Rwandan Hutu rebels of the *Front Démocratique pour la Libération de Rwanda* (FDLR). In total, six brigades came out of the parallel *mixage* process. Recent operations carried out by these troops against the FDLR have caused thousands of civilians to flee their villages, which raises serious doubts about their methods.

The *mixage* process allowed for Nkunda's troops in North Kivu has had some perverse consequences outside North Kivu as well. Firstly, other non-integrated armed groups in the east of the country have demanded similar treatment. In the case of the Ituri

armed groups the demand has been firmly rejected, with the result that negotiations for their later entry into the *brassage* process have been slowed down. Secondly, Kinshasa's dealings with controversial General Nkunda has left the non-Tutsi populations in the east disgruntled, possibly eroding Kabila's power base and hence the stability of the country. Optimists explain the *mixage* provision as a temporary, local solution and see it as an intermediate step towards *brassage*. It is doubtful, though, whether all the troops of Rwandan origin in the mixed units see things this way, and in order to achieve *brassage*, the process needs to be revitalised as soon as possible.

It should be clear by now that unless the *brassage* process can be revitalised, the vision of a new national army remains a vain hope. Not only is it necessary to increase the number of troops going through the process, but the quality of the training must be improved. Only in this way can the FARDC contribute to creating the safer environment that the Congolese population desperately needs.

A major problem in the planning is the fact that nobody seems to know the exact number of FARDC troops, but according to various estimates, at least 40,000 troops remain to be integrated or demobilised. At the same time, a similar number in the 14 pre-electoral integrated brigades need to be recalled for refresher training. Ideally, the estimated 15,000 GR troops should also be included in the process, but so far the Presidency has made only superficial attempts to give up its control of this crack unit. To consolidate the results of the pre- and post-electoral *brassage* processes, there is also a need for improved administration, logistics and justice systems in the FARDC in order to prevent and punish any corruption or crime committed by its personnel. Last but not least, government control of the FARDC should be reinforced. Unfortunately, the government led by octogenarian prime minister Antoine Gizenga has so far given the impression of simply letting events happen instead of taking the initiative.

The importance of DDR and DDRRR

A successful SSR is hard to imagine if those who finally leave the military have only bleak prospects in Congolese society. For this reason, the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process needs to be revitalised as well, with a special focus on the 'reintegration' of former combatants by means of material support and skills training. So far, almost 120,000 former fighters have been demobilised in the DRC with funding from the Multi-Donor Reintegration Programme (MDRP), managed by the World Bank. About 70,000 of them have signed up for a reintegration programme. The *Commission Nationale pour la Démobilisation et la Réinsertion* (CONADER) has requested resources to deal with another 60,000 to 70,000 ex-combatants, but if this delicate task is to be successfully completed, CONADER's efficiency needs to be greatly improved. One of the main problems relates to payments made to the demobilised combatants, a problem that has manifested itself nationwide.

The related process, disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement (DDRRR), which aims to return members of foreign armed groups to their countries of origin, has had only limited success so far. Of an estimated 40,000 foreign

fighters at the start of the DRC's transition in 2003, only about 13,000 have returned to neighbouring Rwanda, Burundi or Uganda. Although their departure may have weakened the foreign armed groups to a certain extent, none of these groups has been completely disbanded yet. The problem seems to have been further compounded since the rebels of the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 2005 swapped their traditional hide-outs in southern Sudan for the north-eastern corners of the DRC, thus adding another group to the already too-long list of foreign armed groups. The DDRRR process is also complicated by the fact that many members of these groups have been, over the years, 'Congolised' through local recruitment or intermarriage.

A considerable number of FDLR militia have even obtained DRC voter cards, whereas many Congolese refugees missed this unique opportunity in 2005. A solution to this problem requires some creative thinking in the near future.

New vocations for MONUC and the EU?

It should be clear by now that continued foreign pressure and assistance will be necessary to keep SSR at the top of the Congolese agenda. The EU's declared ambition is to take the lead but its planning process is taking a painfully long time, while what is actually needed is results on the ground, without delay. MONUC, on the other hand, is already present and under UN Security Council resolution 1756, adopted on 15 May, the peacekeeping force is to provide basic training to the FARDC's integrated brigades in order to launch new joint operations. Some MONUC pilot projects in the east have already shown good results. With one major player gearing up and another one already active in the field, it is of course of utmost importance that the EU and MONUC efforts are co-ordinated, and also harmonised by using a common framework.¹ The DRC government, for its part, should finally come to a decision regarding the size of the FARDC at the end of the SSR process, taking into account its future missions and sustainability.

Ideally, the inputs of the multilateral actors should be integrated with those of bilateral donors such as Angola, Belgium, China, France, South Africa and the USA. Such co-ordination is uncommon and may be beyond the realms of possibility. Nevertheless, a minimal common strategy agreed upon by key members of the international community and the Congolese authorities is certainly needed in order to achieve successful SSR in the DRC.

The best way to achieve this objective at the political level would be to create a follow-up mechanism for the obsolete Comité International d'Accompagnement de la Transition (CIAT), which served well during the transition period. So far, there have been only small steps in this direction. However, in order to safeguard what has been achieved in 2006 and to keep the country moving towards greater democracy and development, it is important that the main actors overcome any existing distrust or any inappropriate pursuit of prestige. It should be clear to all that persistent insecurity in the DRC can only reignite the spiral of violent conflict in Central Africa and that if this happened, there would only be losers.

While MONUC's contribution should best be seen as part of its exit strategy, the EU's assistance should be a long-term involvement, as it will be 5 to 10 years before a satisfactory outcome of the SSR process can be expected. It may even be necessary to sequence these approaches, in the sense that attention should first focus on DDR and the military pillar of SSR, rather than initially broadening the process too much by immediately moving into the areas of the police and the judiciary. Considering the historical impact of the armed forces on the DRC's internal security and the continued presence of foreign armed groups in the country, the logical choice would be to prioritise reform of the FARDC in this process.

¹ The 'Implementation Framework on SSR' recently drawn up by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) could be used as a common framework.

Recommendations:

It is clear that in order to consolidate the achievements of the 2006 elections and to allow further democratisation and development, the entire security sector and especially the FARDC should actively contribute to a safer environment. For this reason, these recommendations could provide a useful guideline for a renewed SSR effort in the DRC.

- The current DRC government should decide on the size of the FARDC at the end of the SSR process, taking into account its future missions and sustainability.
- The Congolese authorities and the international community should co-ordinate their efforts and at least agree on a basic training programme to enhance the FARDC's professionalism. Nkunda's troops, the Republican Guard and the remaining non-integrated troops should undergo this training, and the existing 15 integrated brigades should receive refresher training. Member states of the international community should be invited to send not only instructors but also basic military equipment such as clothing and tents.
- Military support services such as administration, logistics and judicial systems should be improved, in order to consolidate the results of the basic training. The EUSEC mission made already a valuable contribution in this respect, as it has improved the efficiency of the procedures by which troops are paid. Special attention should be given to the living conditions of the families of FARDC personnel.
- In accordance with resolution 1756, MONUC should play a leading role in the basic training of the FARDC as part of its exit strategy. In so doing, the UN peacekeepers will maintain a visible presence in the country while improving their working relationship with the FARDC. This could be further used to launch new joint operations against the foreign armed groups. Eventually, the EU should take the lead in SSR, inviting other bilateral and multilateral donors to join in their effort.
- Once the military component of the SSR process is under way again, focus should shift to the police and the judiciary in order to extend civilian-driven rule of law over the whole country, allowing the FARDC to concentrate on its military core business.
- The Gizenga government should take a firmer grip of political matters. The international community should attempt to reach an agreement with President Kabila on a successor committee for the CIAT that could advise and assist the new DRC state institutions, including those in the security sector.
- In order to consolidate the results of the existing DDR and SSR programmes, new reform programmes should become part of a larger agenda aimed at poverty reduction, economic growth and state capacity-building in the DRC.

The views expressed here are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Clingendael Institute or its staff members.

ABOUT...

The Clingendael Conflict Research Unit

The Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' is a training and research organization on international affairs. The Conflict Research Unit (CRU) is a specialized team, focusing on conflict-related issues in developing countries.



The Author

Evert Kets is a research fellow of the CRU working on security and conflict issues in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa.