



MONUSCO's 2021

Mandate Renewal

Transition and exit

Dr Yvan Yenda Ilunga

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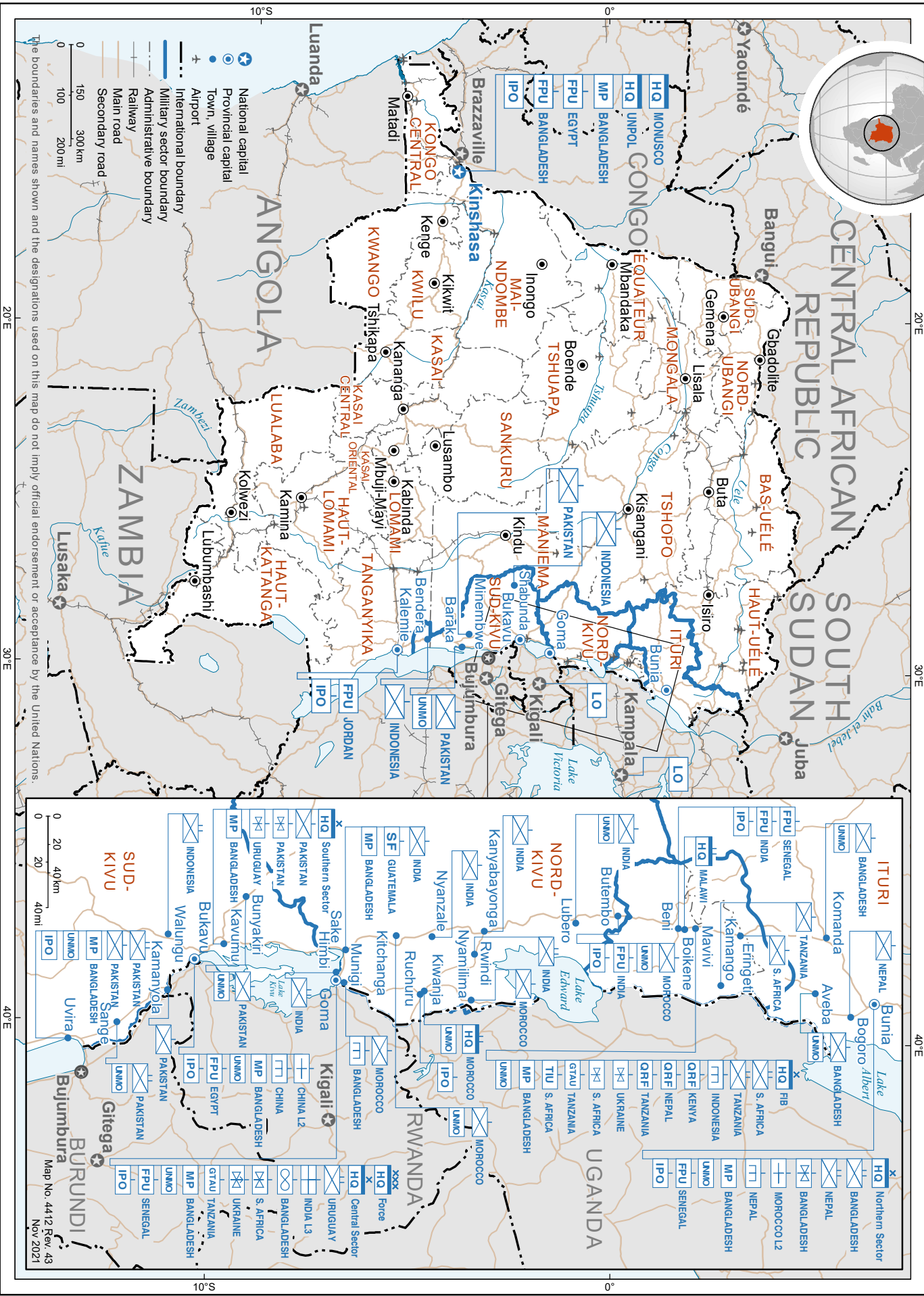
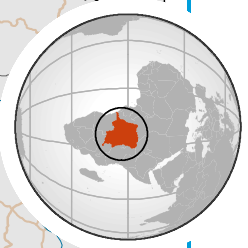
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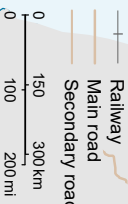
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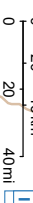
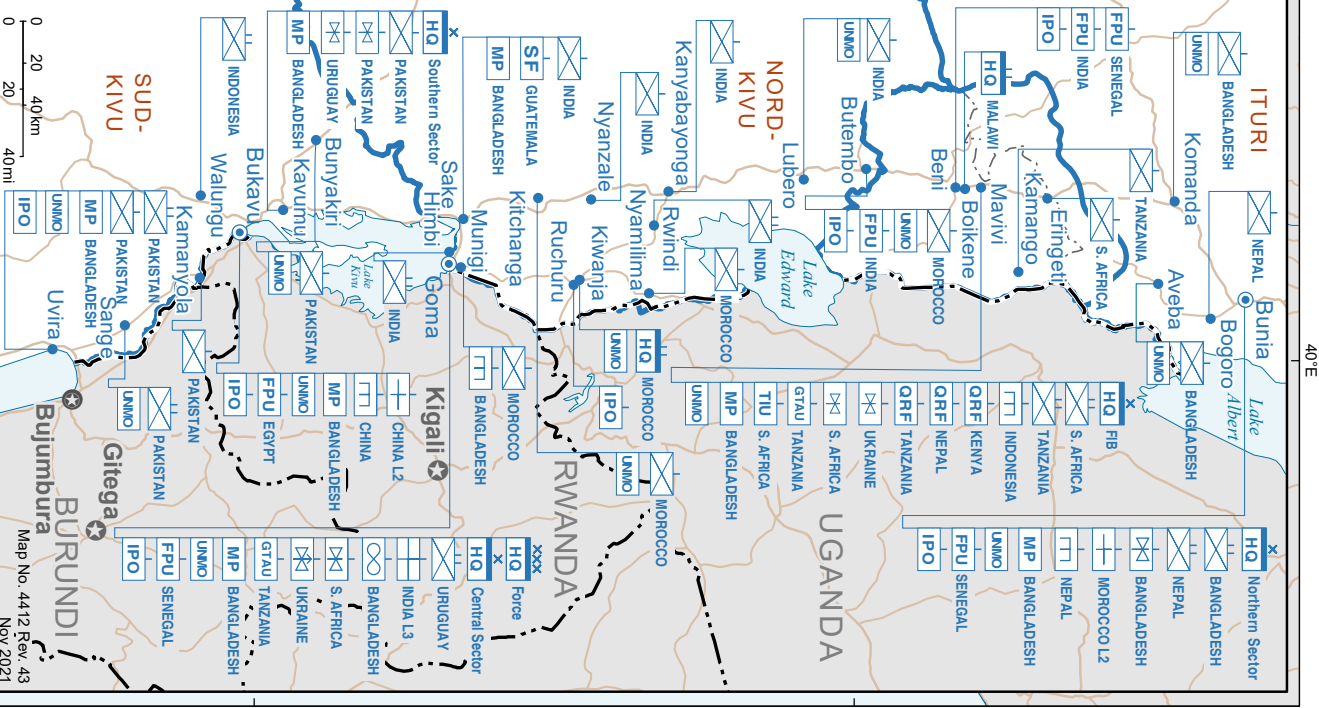
UNITED NATIONS
Geospatial



- ⊕ National capital
- Provincial capital
- + Town, village
- ✈ Airport
- International boundary
- Military sector boundary
- Administrative boundary
- Railway
- Main road
- Secondary road



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



Map No. 4412 Rev. 43
Nov 2021

2. Executive Summary

In December 2021, in the context of mounting political tensions and growing insecurity in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) will decide whether to renew the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The state of siege declared by President Tshisekedi in May 2021 has yet to stabilize the provinces in which it has been implemented. The political coalition in power remains fragile, and social and identity-based conflicts are on the increase. Everyone expresses the need for stability, but effective strategies and decisive actions are still lacking. The joint transition plan developed by the United Nations team with participants from agencies, funds and programmes, and the DRC government recognizes the complexity of stabilization and provides a holistic plan for long-term stability and peace recovery. This plan goes beyond traditional peace processes and expands its reach to social and economic issues. Although very ambitious, it offers a necessary bold step toward a responsible transition with clear benchmarks and a timeframe.

This transition plan speaks to Congolese expectations toward MONUSCO, with priority accorded to the security situation in eastern DRC and the eradication of armed groups, based on three focus areas: the need for institutional reforms, an emphasis on holistic peacebuilding, and a people-centred approach to stabilization. The Security Council will have to decide how to strengthen and support these multiple reform processes by ensuring they are depoliticized and objective.

Security sector reforms, administrative reforms, and fair redistribution of the dividends from natural resource exploitation will be central to the effectiveness of institutional reforms. The upcoming mandate should also look at how instability is caused/driven by not only violence

and armed conflict, but also by socio-economic factors (inequalities, competition) and the weak social contract. For instance, despite the estimated labour participation of 64.07 per cent,¹ the persistent high poverty rate (80 per cent, according to the 2019 UN Human Development Index Report) constitutes one element with the potential for social instability. One example of the weak social contract is the government's struggle to provide essential services such as free education. Since the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year, in October 2021, many primary and secondary school children, and their teachers, have been protesting the lack of governmental support to provide funding to public schools. These protests come in addition to others in sectors such as healthcare and public transport.

All these elements fuel social and institutional instabilities, in turn affecting the prospects for a sustainable peace. It is important that the terms and framework of the mandate and logistical support to the DRC be expanded to include these areas as key determinants of stability. There is a need for a people-centred approach in defining stabilization, which must be locally owned and driven. While the UN mission supports the DRC in re-establishing peace, MONUSCO remains an outsider in this setting: it is up to Congolese and the DRC government to lead the process: local voices and adaptation to local contexts and strategies must be taken into consideration and included. MONUSCO can achieve its goals only if it focuses on ensuring local ownership of the peace process. The Security Council can empower the mission to this end, through a more reflective and context-sensitive mandate.

1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/993786/labor-force-participation-rate-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

3. Introduction

Question: is there any guarantee that this transition plan will work?

Diplomat: Nothing is ever guaranteed in politics. We are trying our best to make this plan successful. But we cannot guarantee anything.²

The current mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) expires on 20 December 2021. Central to discussions and negotiations on the upcoming mandate renewal led by Niger, as UN Security Council Presidency in December 2021, will be the strategic priorities of protection of civilians, stabilizing the country, and strengthening state institutions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – in addition to the issue of drawdown and exit.

While the issue of a gradual, responsible and conditions-based drawdown, to ensure a responsible transition, is essential to renewal of the mandate, this remains subject to considerable political, security, and socio-economic improvement in the DRC, as articulated in the 2019 independent strategic review.³ The strategic review acknowledged that there was already momentum for peace recovery, but the DRC needed more international community support. Building upon issues highlighted in the strategic review and following the EPON study on the effectiveness

² This was the first response received from one of the interviews with a UN official stationed in Kinshasa.

³ UNSC, Transitioning from stabilization to peace: An independent strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2019/842), 25 October 2019 [accessed 10 October 2021] <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/transitioning-stabilization-peace-independent-strategic-review>

of MONUSCO conducted in 2019,⁴ this study examines critical determinants within the DRC that will support the quest for an effective transition based on UNSC Resolutions S/R/2594 (2021) and S/2020/1041 (2020). Under Resolution 2594, the UNSC requested the Secretary-General to ‘incorporate comprehensive reporting on the status of ongoing transitions of United Nations peacekeeping operations in his regular country-specific reporting on relevant missions.’⁵ In the same spirit, the recently signed MONUSCO-DRC transition plan projects complete withdrawal and end of mission by 2024. This plan reflects the ideas set out in the Joint Strategy on the Progressive and Phased drawdown of MONUSCO (S/2020/1041).⁶

While the issue of a gradual, responsible and conditions-based drawdown, to ensure a responsible transition, is essential to renewal of the mandate, this remains subject to considerable political, security, and socio-economic improvement in the DRC.

Although COVID-19 put a damper on the discussions, talks between MONUSCO and the DRC authorities have progressed. In the course of the past year, MONUSCO has outlined province-level strategies and priorities on thematic areas of engagement, including human rights, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the rule of law, and facilitation of handover and exit, which all are included in the eighteen benchmarks of the transition plan. Although this plan is vital for the stability of the DRC, it is also essential to recognize that implementing such an ambitious approach will be difficult without political will in the DRC and UNSC, and without taking regional aspects and actors into consideration. These regional actors include regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Southern African Development Economic Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the neighbouring countries to the DRC: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

This study examines critical determinants within the DRC that will support the quest for an effective transition.

4 A. Novosseloff et al. (2019). Assessing the effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in the DRC/MONUC-MONUSCO. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Report 3/2019 [accessed 11 October 2021] <https://effective-peaceops.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EPON-MONUSCO-LowRes.pdf>

5 UNSC Resolution 2594 (2021) [https://undocs.org/s/res/2594\(2021\)](https://undocs.org/s/res/2594(2021))

6 UNSC, Joint strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO, October 2020 [Accessed 10 October 2021] S_2020_1041_E.pdf ([securitycouncilreport.org](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org))

The present study offers reflections on internal as well as external angles of stabilization in the DRC: the nature of stabilization for the DRC, the nature of instability, challenges in strengthening institutions, opportunities for peace, and the political outlook with the 2023 general elections on the horizon.

Although this plan is vital for the stability of the DRC, it is also essential to recognize that implementing such an ambitious approach will be difficult without political will in the DRC and UNSC.

4. Country Conditions and Context Overview

President Tshisekedi's administration has expressed its commitment to advancing critical reforms to steer the country towards lasting and sustainable peace and development. However, in addition to the mounting political tensions, the security situation in the eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri remains highly volatile. These provinces continue to experience clashes between armed groups over territory and natural resources, ethnic conflicts, violence linked to differences between interests such as cattle farming vs. agriculture, as well as inter-communal tensions. Civilians are continuously threatened, attacked, even killed. In a report presented on 10 September 2021, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Boris Cheshirkov noted an estimated 1,200 civilian deaths, 1,100 rapes, and 25,000 human rights abuses in that year alone.

Admittedly, the Tshisekedi administration inherited an unstable political and security situation, but the government's weak commitment to institutional effectiveness exacerbates the situation and hinders progress toward peace.

Here it is essential to contextualize the relationship between the country conditions and the transition. The DRC has experienced a political transition following the 2018 general elections, which established President Tshisekedi as the new head of state. This political transition

marked the end of Joseph Kabila's eighteen years of rule, but has not yet managed to end insecurity and instability. On the contrary, security and political conditions have become acute, with widespread violence, conflicts, and persistent tension between political actors on issues such as the independence of judiciary system, tension around the independence of the electoral commission, and other signs of growing institutional instability across the country. Admittedly, the Tshisekedi administration inherited an unstable political and security situation, but the government's weak commitment to institutional effectiveness exacerbates the situation and hinders progress toward peace. The DRC government must be encouraged to implement a transition within its strategic policy and stabilization approach. Excitement over the peaceful political transition of power, and the multiple promises made, and the high expectations raised by President Tshisekedi, cannot overshadow the pressing need for policy and strategic change. Everything will have to be re-made and re-established. Stability must be taken seriously and promoted through a holistic approach that includes socioeconomic, local cultures and identities, natural resource management, and security factors in the overall stabilization framework. This means that the DRC government must mobilize resources, develop appropriate strategies, redefine its stabilization framework, and work toward a more inclusive and participatory peace-building process – one that is locally owned and defined, and can lead to the community-based integration of former combatants through the creation of livelihoods and income opportunities. Effective implementation of this approach can cement the gains of the 2019 peaceful transition of power– and, importantly, lay a stronger foundation for sustaining peace and development following MONUSCO's exit.

Excitement over the peaceful political transition of power, and the multiple promises made, and the high expectations raised by President Tshisekedi, cannot overshadow the pressing need for policy and strategic change.

A second important observation concerns the UNSC's request that MONUSCO plan for exit. MONUSCO, which transitioned from being a peacekeeping mission (MONUC) to a multi-dimensional and integrated peacekeeping operation, was never meant to stay indefinitely in the DRC. Various reasons motivate the UNSC call for exit. One is the fact that the mission has been in the DRC for more than twenty years, without restoring peace in the country. However, some UN officials do not share this view and reject the repeating failure narrative. One diplomat interviewed for this study argued that it was inaccurate to assess the result of the mission without taking into consideration the small, yet important, contributions and sometimes sporadic successes that the mission helped to make possible. For instance, at the political level, the mission enjoys good relations with politicians at national and provincial levels on a wide range of issues. Apart from accompanying the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), in the field at the security level, the mission also performs dissuasive work, as through patrols to protect civilians, or escorting civilians to their farms. The mission also

provides logistical support for UN and non-UN humanitarian agencies. These small and sometimes unnoticed activities are important for local stability. Although the big picture of achieving peace and stability has not been yet achieved, the mission should not be considered a failure, argued another diplomat stationed in the DRC. Instead, the diplomat continued, this transition should be recognized as an opportunity for ending dependency and calling the DRC government to full responsibility. The mission has created a culture of dependency within the DRC government where political leaders keep underperforming on their duties because they know that the international community, through the UN system, will help them out. Hence, instead of seeing this call for exit as a UN issue, the transition and exit should be seen as a wakeup call, a call to responsibility for the DRC government to honour its social contract.

This transition should be recognized as an opportunity for ending dependency and calling the DRC government to full responsibility.

Be it motivated by funding concerns, the failure to restore peace, or the inability of the government to be responsible and effective, the current transition plan constitutes a critical turn for both the DRC and the UN. The DRC must assume responsibility – and MONUSCO must leave. How, when, and to whom responsibility is to be transferred remain pending questions. Although MONUSCO see the primary responsibility as lying with the DRC government, issues of capacity, capability and resources are all to be considered.

Be it motivated by funding concerns, the failure to restore peace, or the inability of the government to be responsible and effective, the current transition plan constitutes a critical turn for both the DRC and the UN. The DRC must assume responsibility – and MONUSCO must leave.

The COVID-19 pandemic hindered MONUSCO troops for several months in 2020, but operational tempo had recovered momentum as of 2021. After the freeze on rotations and other restrictions ended in July 2020, the MONUSCO military managed to conduct more than 17 000 patrols in three months,⁷ in addition to those performed by the Armed Forces of the DRC, FARDC.

⁷ <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/monusco-military-racks-up-17-000-plus-patrols-in-three-months/?referrer=newsletter>

The eastern part of the country suffers from persistent instabilities. Other provinces struggle with poverty, lack of service delivery, highly politicized civil society and public institutions, lack of accountability among certain politicians with stakes in the exploitation of the country's mineral resources – to mention only some issues.

Another social frustration observed is connected to the sense of triumphalism and tribalism promoted by certain key players in the president's political party and circles. Some community members argued these latent tensions might develop into unhealthy social relationships between communities and ethnic groups.

There is also growing social tension between the government and some school teachers who are dissatisfied at how the government has gone about reforming the state education system. For instance, the government had pledged to make primary education free and accessible for all. However, lack of funding and slow organization have affected how these services are delivered. Although this issue is not directly related to the mission's mandate, it fits within the holistic approach that the transition plan is meant to advance for a more stable DRC. Another social frustration observed is connected to the sense of triumphalism and tribalism promoted by certain key players in the president's political party and circles. Some community members argued these latent tensions might develop into unhealthy social relationships between communities and ethnic groups. Here it is crucial to understand that the pursuit of peace in the DRC must include factors that were ignored in previous peace operation strategies, and are now highlighted in the 18 points of the transition plan.

MONUSCO and the DRC government should make sure that (a) the government in charge or actors who take over from MONUSCO are well equipped and capable of providing lasting peace; (b) the peace process is inclusive, involving all parts of society, including women, youth and the private sector (c) the transition plan is clear, well understood, and owned by the government (i.e. effective allocation of resources) and local communities ; (d) there is strong coordination at local, national, regional and continental levels on how best to sustain peacebuilding initiatives in the DRC and the region; (e) there is a sustained political will among actors on the continent as well as those within the UNSC, UN system, and International Financial Institutions to the cause of the DRC and the region. Failure to establish this foundation for sustainable peace and responsible exit will only perpetuate the status of fragility and conflict in the DRC.

5. Eighteen Benchmarks: An Ambitious and Risky Agreement?

The eighteen-benchmarks transition plan responds to multiple calls by Congolese actors (governmental and civilian) and the international community, including UNSC member states, for MONUSCO to exit the DRC. In the view of most Congolese civilians and government officials, MONUSCO has demonstrated its inability to meet the expectations of restoring peace and security. For the UNSC and others within the UN system, with the United States leading the chorus in 2017, not only has MONUSCO been unable to meet its multiple renewed mandates fully: it has also been one of the most expensive UN peacekeeping missions ever.⁸

In response to these concerns, several adjustments have been made, including the 2019 strategic review, FIB reconfiguration, rapidly deployable battalions, development of the joint strategy 2020, and the closure of some field offices. The current transition plan offers holistic and pragmatic ways for MONUSCO to exit responsibly, while also ensuring that the DRC will remain on the path towards sustainable peace. The plan captures the multidimensionality of the Congo crisis and peace process, but is both ambitious and risky. It is ambitious because its operationalization assumes that DRC institutions will be able to take over and ensure state authority and responsibility by 2024; risky, because failing to meet these goals and then exit on time will only continue to discredit the work of the mission as well as that of the entire UN system. According to the plan, for MONUSCO to withdraw ‘the threat posed by national and foreign armed groups must be reduced so that it can be managed by national authorities and tackle the root

⁸ Katharina P. Coleman, ‘The Dynamics of Peacekeeping Budget Cuts: The Case of MONUSCO’ (10 July 2017) <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/07/monusco-drc-peacekeeping-budget-cuts/>

causes of conflict'. Additionally, good governance, institution building, and the promulgation of reforms are actionable measures to be considered as essential factors in the transition. The projected exit date is 2024, which coincides with the end of the current cycle of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), but important events to consider closely include the preparation and organization of general elections in 2023, and promotion of the rule of law. The DRC government participated in drawing up the plan, and must take an active role in implementing the strategies and objectives listed there. Overall, the exit/withdrawal must be conditions-based, set around the end state rather than the end date.

It is ambitious because its operationalization assumes that DRC institutions will be able to take over and ensure state authority and responsibility by 2024; risky, because failing to meet these goals and then exit on time will only continue to discredit the work of the mission as well as that of the entire UN system.

The transition plan has two major categories: (a) minimal conditions for the exit of MONUSCO, (b) priority actions involving collaboration with UN agencies, funds and programmes.

Of these eighteen benchmarks, subject to the engaged political will of Congolese actors, as well as the support and pressure from the international community, at least the following are likely to be achieved:

- women's and youth participation in decision-making processes for stabilization;
- protection of civilians;
- consolidation of peace;
- reform and improvement of the judiciary system ; and
- organization of fair and credible national election within the constitutional timeframe
accountabilities and sanctions for acts of corruption, especially those concerning doing business with armed groups.

However, signals indicate that there are deliberate and organized strategies and plans aimed at undermining the planned 2023 presidential elections; and in the field, strategies for protection of civilians have not produced the expected results. Violence has increased in some of the provinces under state of siege. There must be a sustained political will for peace within the DRC, and the international community must put pressure on the DRC government and other national actors to be accountable in case of deliberate sabotage of the plan.

The DRC government participated in drawing up the plan, and must take an active role in implementing the strategies and objectives listed there.

By contrast, the following points, while critical to responsible exit, remain over-ambitious, especially in view of the proposed 2024 timeline:

- Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Reintegration and Stabilization Programme (P-DDRCS).⁹
- Reduction of armed groups threats with potential for generalized violence in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri.
- Effective and functional state institutions in targeted areas. For instance, reform of the security sector may take longer and go beyond the proposed timeline. This makes it difficult to argue on the end state within the foreseeable future.
- Stabilization of mining regions and operations.

These elements will require sustained, long-term momentum from international and national actors as well as strong political commitment within the UNSC. Asked whether MONUSCO can meet these goals, one diplomat stated, 'the mission is willing and ready to deliver as long as the political will is there. Politics are in the UNSC, and whatever member states agree upon, the mission will implement.' The merit of the plan is that it provides a fairly accurate picture of areas of intervention – but its practical implementation calls for local and regional involvement.

The merit of the plan is that it provides a fairly accurate picture of areas of intervention – but its practical implementation calls for local and regional involvement.

⁹ <https://blog.kivusecurity.org/does-the-new-disarmament-and-demobilization-program-stand-a-chance-of-success/>

6. Assessing the Effectiveness of MONUSCO after 2018

6.1. Stabilization

One reality of the concept and practice of stabilization is the complex dynamics involved in its implementation, with the assumption of an end-state based on ‘stabilizers’ measures. To avoid often-imported notions of stabilization, it should be designed and recognized as an emerging organic process that is context-specific and locally driven. With the DRC, this would mean identifying a Congolese-based and -supported model of stabilization. The underlying rationale here is that, in the absence of MONUSCO or other international actors, the DRC institutions and people must be able to continue the effort. This approach recognizes the fundamental idea of context-specific and appropriate solutions for the DRC.

All conflicts are different: simply assuming that transplanting solutions from one conflict situation to another will solve similar issues is misleading. Given the ongoing changes in the DRC security and political landscape, it is evident that the mandate and strategies of MONUSCO must be adapted to these new situations. Just as politics and political situations are dynamic, so should the approach to the situation be, argued one Kinshasa-based diplomat. A recent significant change which calls for urgent operational and strategic adaptation to the collaboration between the FARDC and MONUSCO was the declaration and implementation of the state

of siege declared by President Tshisekedi from 6 May 2021.¹⁰ This state of siege concerns the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri – two of the main zones affected by violence and massive violations of human rights.¹¹ The presidential declaration of a state of siege signalled the need for strategic and tactical adaptation of forces in the eastern DRC. However, it poses serious challenges concerning access and adaptation for humanitarian agencies and civil society organizations, requiring greater flexibility in their administrative processes and operational strategies while dealing with the military-led system. Additionally, the state of siege puts pressure on MONUSCO to deliver on its mandate to protect civilians – also fuelling anti-MONUSCO sentiment among civilians who view the continuation of massacres as a failure of the mission.

To avoid often-imported notions of stabilization, it should be designed and recognized as an emerging organic process that is context-specific and locally driven.

Here, it is essential to understand ‘stabilization’ as projected by the DRC government. What the state of siege tells us about stabilization, as approached by the DRC government, is that it involves the use of military capabilities or force to solve conflicts in the eastern DRC. Alone, this strategy and approach to recovering security is limited, and has proven ineffective. Continuing along this path would be counterproductive, as it overlooks and neglects community grievances – grievances that have more to do with the government’s lack of institutional capacity to deliver on economic and social needs, than security threats from armed groups. A holistic approach to stabilization must be encouraged. The DRC government should consider this approach as a prime guarantor of stability. Failure to incorporate such vital considerations into the agenda for peace in the DRC would only perpetuate the pursuit of fragile peace.¹² Stabilization must be customized and properly contextualized in the upcoming mandate and ongoing joint operations on the ground. The DRC today lacks resources and a sufficient political arsenal to advance a more holistic approach. Here, international partners, UN agencies, the AU and regional organizations can all step in, drawing on their respective specializations, to provide the essential human, logistical, financial and political resources.

It is evident that the mandate and strategies of MONUSCO must be adapted to these new situations.

A second vital element to consider by UNSC members in the upcoming mandate renewal is the relevance of the peacekeeping doctrine in this context. MONUSCO is meant to remain within the framework of traditional peacekeeping, which stipulates the use of force solely in

10 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/4/dr-congo-extends-state-of-siege-in-trouble-hit-eastern-region>

11 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/21/sixteen-civilians-killed-in-overnight-eastern-drc-village-attacks>

12 See T. Debiel & A. Klein (eds.) (2002). *Fragile Peace: State Failure, Violence and Development in Crisis Regions*. Zed Books.

self-defence, with the exception of the United Nations Force Intervention Brigade (*FIB*) – but the ongoing attacks on civilians by groups such as the Force patriotique et intégrationniste du Congo (FPIC) in Djugu and Irumu, and the armed group ‘Zaire’ in Djugu and northern Irumu in Ituri province, undermine the mission’s credibility and give rise to fundamental ethical questions regarding the application of ‘peacekeeping’ in an asymmetric war setting. The traditional approach to peacekeeping in the DRC has failed. Peacekeeping should not be a display of UN Blue Helmets and uniforms, but a responsible activity that aims to save lives by all necessary means. That being said, however, the transition plan provides the opportunity within the context of stabilization to consider alternative providers of security in the DRC. Transferring military responsibilities and operational duties to the African Union (as with AMISOM) may provide new momentum and strategic alignment for effective, sustainable peace. Implementation of such a strategy must be an integral part of the holistic approach to peace.

The DRC today lacks resources and a sufficient political arsenal to advance a more holistic approach. Here, international partners, UN agencies, the AU and regional organizations can all step in, drawing on their respective specializations, to provide the essential human, logistical, financial and political resources.

Third, the economic determinants of stabilization must also be addressed. One area that needs assistance is the domain of natural resource exploitation. The DRC government has already set about developing and implementing mechanisms for better control of mineral resources in provinces and territories with low state presence, or no state control. This approach, combined with military, social and administrative approaches, is essential because, in addition to the local economic development opportunities that come with mining investments, control of the mining sector could end the financing of armed groups, ensure state authority, and promote economic opportunities for the populace. The UNSC should support this highly necessary move for the betterment of the Congolese people. More specifically, the mandate should empower the mission with strong monitoring tools to report and propose appropriate sanctions against actors (also in government) who use their political influence or armed groups to promote illicit trade and illegal exploration of the country’s mineral resources. The DRC has already embarked on a nationwide anti-corruption campaign: the UNSC should support such a campaign with targeted sanctions.

Peacekeeping should not be a display of UN Blue Helmets and uniforms, but a responsible activity that aims to save lives by all necessary means.

One challenge that the mission and well-intentioned political leaders could face in supporting this approach is resistance from many who seek to promote insecurity and the illicit exploitation of natural resources, in the DRC and elsewhere. The 2015 background report of UNEP-MONUSCO-OSESG experts on illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources in the DRC estimated that ‘illicit natural resources exploitation in eastern DRC is valued at over USD 1.25 billion per year (USD 722–862 million if excluding diamonds also sourced outside eastern DRC). Of these amounts, an estimated 10–30 percent (range USD 72–426 million per annum) goes to transnational organized criminal groups.’¹³ These illegal activities benefit from a powerful and complex network with political, security, and economic ramifications. Additionally, the exploitation and management of mining revenues must be streamlined, with transparent and apolitical management. The Tshisekedi administration has yet to prove its engagement in breaking down the old networks and imposing government control. Indeed, in places (such as the Katanga region) where the old network has been dismantled, it has been replaced by new actors operating similar corrupt schemes. The international community must follow a policy of zero tolerance in its working partnership with the DRC government.

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6.2. Regional Actors of Stabilization: AU, ICGL, ECCAS, SADC

Neither the DRC government nor MONUSCO can stabilize the country alone. Achieving peace and security in the eastern DRC will call for a coordinated and concerted approach with both African and regional organizations involved. For instance, the DRC could benefit from the AU’s proven capabilities in advancing security and political solutions. It could also draw on the International Conference of the Great Lakes region (ICGL), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Southern African Development Economic Community (SADC) for economic and security harmonization.

13 UNEP-MONUSCO-OSESG. 2015. Experts’ background report on illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources benefitting organized criminal groups and recommendations on MONUSCO’s role in fostering stability and peace in eastern DR Congo. Final report, 15 April 2015. Available at https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/UNEP_DRCongo_MONUSCO_OSESG_final_report.pdf

President Tshisekedi, current Chair of the AU, has vowed to promote peace across the continent, and continues to use this narrative as the signature of his AU presidency. This position gives him excellent opportunities and political leverage to advance AU peace and security strategies toward his own country. However, with AU involvement and a multi-stakeholder approach to security in the DRC, it is crucial to avoid creating another Sahel-like security issue in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where operations could lack coordination, uniform agenda, or standard benchmarks for success.

6.2.1. What Can the African Union Do?

Speaking at an online seminar event on 29 September 2021, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye argued that the AU approach to the issue of stability in Africa should have a triple focus: on peacemaking – peacebuilding – peace enforcement. This marks a specific and deliberate shift from the ‘AU’s intent to shift the doctrinal and operational direction from peacekeeping to peace support operations.¹⁴ Unlike AMISOM, where the AU has a combat force on the ground,¹⁵ in the DRC, the AU could help MONUSCO transition by supporting training for units in both FARDC and the national police. Attention should focus more on reducing the politicization of the military, and on improving the defence system. Political leaders’ deliberate disorganization of the police and armed forces for own their political gain imperils stability in the DRC. With the support of the AU and UN, such acts of sabotage must be ended, by strengthening the political accountability of politicians and government. The ability of African troops to accompany this transition is in line with ‘the African solutions to African issues’ narrative. To ensure the long-term stability and independence of such AU operations, the narrative should be *African solutions to African issues with African resources*.

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In addition to security-oriented assistance, the AU is well-positioned to provide its good offices and political backing on issues related to regional political tension; the AU can also help to strengthen coordination for humanitarian response actions.¹⁶ One of the strengths of AU-led humanitarian support is that the AU has policy tools at its disposal. The foreseen the

14 Lise Morjé Howard (2019), *Power in Peacekeeping*. Cambridge University Press.

15 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211011-african-union-to-broaden-somalia-operations>

16 Yvan Yenda Ilunga (2020), *Humanitarianism and Security: Trouble and Hope at the Heart of Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.

African Humanitarian Agency (AfHA)¹⁷ will serve as the AU's operational unit for supporting a continental framework for humanitarian assistance. This could help humanitarian actors and MONUSCO's transition on the humanitarian aspect in 2024, once when the transition becomes effective. Despite issues of logistics and political will, the AU would be the appropriate vehicle to advance a holistic continental strategy that can ensure a smooth exit for MONUSCO while providing institutional support to the DRC government for an effective transition – along with the UN and other international humanitarian instruments beyond MONUSCO. Such a wider African involvement would promote the momentum of stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Here it is essential to note that the advancement of regional economic integration must not bury or overlook the pursuit of justice for crimes committed against civilians in the DRC and other parts of the region. Failure to promote justice and accountability would only reinforce the cycle of violence and the lack of trust that characterizes relations between the political leaders and the people in the region.

6.2.2. International Conference of the Great Lakes Regions (ICGL)

The United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region¹⁸ supports a more regional approach to conflict resolution based on economic cooperation and shared security strategies. If effectively implemented, this framework for peace could ensure prosperity among countries in the region (Burundi, Central African Republic, DRC, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda) by promoting socio-economic development strategies. These strategies align with the priorities set in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and speak to the needs of local communities long mired in poverty and economic hardship. The merit of such an approach is that it acknowledges that the use of force is not the sole route to peace and security. As is the case with the African Union, the effectiveness of the ICGL strategy will depend on local, national, and regional political will.

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17 See <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/press-statement-on-the-operationalization-of-the-african-humanitarian-agency-of-the-au-afha>

18 See <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14491.doc.htm>

other parts of the region. Failure to promote justice and accountability would only reinforce the cycle of violence and the lack of trust that characterizes relations between the political leaders and the people in the region. One diplomat in the region argued that, despite the lack of trust among states, the question of security remains their main common ground. This shared interest in security motivates their bilateral and regional cooperation. This regional momentum can be effective if proper coordination, political will, international support, and trust-building are implemented. Establishing this could take time, but one interviewee argued that the move to trust-building is already underway at the ministerial level, where countries have agreed to share intelligence, and to reflect together on DDR processes and economic strategies.

Also, the first pillar of the 'peace, security and justice' of the regional strategy indicates dialogue and inclusive process as crucial factors for peace restoration.¹⁹ This dialogue must be inclusive not only between countries but within states as well. Importantly, addressing the root causes of violence and community grievances would also mean dialoguing with armed groups. Precedents in the DRC involving armed groups such as Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC) and Mai-Mai (which later became political parties) show that inclusive dialogue is vital.

6.2.3. Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

Also important is the issue of transhumance and regional migration due to humanitarian crises in countries such as South Sudan and the Central African Republic. The exit of MONUSCO would also mean that the DRC must stabilize its internally created or externally promoted humanitarian crises. Multiple actors operate in this space: here the ECCAS could help to manage this crisis and support a smooth transition at the institutional and regional levels. In 2012 ECCAS established the Migration Dialogue for the Central African States (MIDCAS) to cooperate on the migration issue.²⁰ MIDCAS was formally endorsed in 2014 and adopted by the ECCAS in 2015. It aims to promote experience- and information-sharing, and to identify priority issues on technical cooperation, capacity building and data collection.

More specifically, this aligns with the plan for the transition of MONUSCO and the needs of the DRC: among its thematic areas, ECCAS MIDCAS intends to investigate migration and development, migration and security, protection of migrants' rights, irregular migration, and mixed migration flows. The latter includes the issue of transhumance and climate-related migration – a major concern in the region.²¹ Hence, ECCAS is also well positioned to play a significant role in this transition, promoting sustainable peace in the DRC and the region.

19 <https://undocs.org/S/2021/306>

20 <https://www.iom.int/migration-dialogue-central-african-states-midcas>

21 <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/09/un-security-council-to-discuss-climate-related-conflict-but-what-role-should-it-play/>

6.2.4. The Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Traditionally, SADC member-countries have been instrumental in supporting the peace process in the DRC. For instance, the majority of troop-contributing countries for the FIB are from SADC.²² This military support comes in addition to historical political and diplomatic support from SADC over the years. Both the 1999 Lusaka Agreement,²³ which aimed to end hostilities in the DRC, and the Sun-City Agreement, which marked the end of the Congo War in 2003²⁴ are testaments to the role of SADC and individual regional actors in efforts for peacebuilding in the DRC. SADC enjoys unquestioned credibility in the region. Although created to advance economic cooperation, the organization has incorporated security capabilities in its work. In Mozambique, for instance, the organization applies its political influence, economic resources, and the military readiness and capabilities of its member states to restore security and enforce peace. The case of Mozambique speaks to regional political intent and coordinated actions to silence guns and promote a more stable region. As a member of SADC, the DRC stands to benefit from this regional momentum and commitment.

It should seek to harmonize regional and international agendas, and promote them under one operational framework, a true ‘Multi-Regional Integrated Framework for Sustaining Peace in the DRC’ (MRIFSP) managed by the AU.

6.2.5. Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen?

With such a regional perspective, might there be too many cooks in the kitchen? Different and sometimes competing interests on the part of states and private entities could make it difficult to achieve a sustainable peace. For instance, the eastern DRC might experience a similar scenario as that in the Sahel region, where the area remains fragile despite various political and military missions. For the DRC to thrive, it should seek to harmonize regional and international agendas, and promote them under one operational framework, a true ‘Multi-Regional Integrated Framework for Sustaining Peace in the DRC’ (MRIFSP)²⁵ managed by the AU. Rather than being simply another policy idea, MRIFSP could serve as a framework that provides a detailed breakdown of each actor’s contribution, region of operation, and timeline of their interventions.

22 <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/reinventing-the-force-intervention-brigade>

23 The Lusaka Agreement between Angola, DRC, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CD_990710_LusakaAgreement.pdf

24 https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CD_030402_SunCityAgreement.pdf

25 Note: ‘Multi-Regional Integrated Framework for Sustaining Peace in the DRC’ (MRIFSP) is the title proposed by this author for a potential inclusive regional framework.

Establishing a 'Fund for the Reconstruction of the DRC',²⁶ co-managed by the AU and the UN, could help to mobilize and allocate resources. This specialized and targeted fund could exist in addition to the Peacebuilding Fund and other contributions from international financial institutions.

The AU-supported regional stabilization strategy (RSS) for the Lake Chad Basin could serve as an example. The Lake Chad Basin Commission was tasked to

...organise and facilitate the mechanisms and processes required for enhanced cross-border cooperation on security and stabilization, early recovery and development. In March 2015, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) authorized the deployment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) as an expression of its support to the efforts by the Member States of the LCBC and Benin to create a safe and secure environment and contribute to stabilizing the situation in the areas affected.²⁷

The proposed MRIFSP could follow the same logic, with a well-established RSS funded by international partners and other relevant agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, regardless of regional and subregional interventions and coordination, achieving a sustainable peace and an effective transition and responsible exit from MONUSCO will require strong political will and functional institutions in the DRC.²⁸

26 Also the 'Fund for the Reconstruction of the DRC' is an initiative proposed by the author of this report.

27 African Union, 'Regional Strategy: For the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region' (2018). <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/regional-stabilisation-recovery-and-resilience-strategy-rss-.pdf>

28 Yvan Yenda Ilunga, 'After Strategic Review, What Should Be Done With MONUSCO?' <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/06/after-strategic-review-what-should-be-done-monusco/>

7. Strengthening State Institutions

Peace recovery and stable institutions should have been set as pre-conditions before the MONUSCO withdrawal plan was announced. But that was not the case. The DRC government and MONUSCO reached an agreement and announced the transitional plan – in a worrisome context of continuing fragile political and security situations.

There is a pressing need for strong institutions capable of neutralizing potential security threats and rebuilding DRC state authority in highly volatile eastern regions, and for institutions that can identify and prevent future non-armed violence.

During the past two decades, peace and security were gauged by the level of violence in the provinces of Ituri, South and North Kivu, and Tanganyika. Using the level of violence as a measurement is indeed vital in the determination of successful peace operations and the promotion of national security, and the rebuilding of state authority in places with active armed groups. However, the current political and security situation of the DRC requires that stabilization goes beyond actual war zones. There is a pressing need for strong institutions capable of neutralizing potential security threats and rebuilding DRC state authority in highly volatile eastern regions, and for institutions that can identify and prevent future non-armed violence. Now emerging in urban and semi-urban locations, the demons of tribalism and identity politics could prove to be the next significant determinants and promoters of insecurity in the country.

To meet this challenge, the DRC will need to strengthen, build, and rebuild its institutions, at local as well as national levels.

7.1. Army and Police

Among the first reforms of his mandate, President Tshisekedi reshuffled the army by putting new officers into chains of command. This move was well-received by the international community, including MONUSCO. A main reason for their support was that some high-ranking officers had received sanctions/penalties from certain international entities or had been accused of unethical practices. The reshuffling provided a path for collaboration on security-sector reform and renewed military cooperation with countries like the USA and Belgium. However, these reforms are only the beginning of long-awaited actions. The DRC government still has a long way to go in terms of translating these changes in leadership into effective institutional reform. Some of the newly appointed officers and those deployed in the eastern part of the country have already been accused, arrested, or prosecuted for embezzlement of funds allocated to military salaries, or for supplying ammunition to armed groups. Some have even been detained for inflating the number of active-duty military personnel in their ranges and using these incorrect figures to embezzle money.²⁹

As a first step in institution building or rebuilding, there must be a focus on restoring credible and transparent administration and administrative processes for and within the army.³⁰ This can help to ensure that an exemplary leadership is in place, equipped with all the tools necessary for advancing the military's mission and streamline its logistics. For instance, it is essential to ensure that material logistics and salaries destined for those on the battlefield reach them on time. The international community can help here, by providing logistical and administrative support and training to the government and to relevant personnel.

Also, the police face issues of training and logistics. More than ever, the DRC needs a well-trained, discipline, and apolitical police force that can build trust with civilians and advance the overall governmental agenda of promoting peace and public order. The recent use of excessive force during peaceful protests called by the opposition leader Martin Fayulu, with violence against journalists, revealed the persistence of internationally condemned behaviour as *modus operandi* inherited from the previous administration.³¹

29 Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka, Koen Vlassenroot. 5 October 2021, Corruption in the Congolese Army: Three Lessons for Modern Democracies. <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/corruption-in-the-congolese-army-three-lessons-for-modern-democracies/>

30 Yvan Yenda Ilunga (2020), *Humanitarianism and Security: Trouble and Hope at the Heart of Africa*, Palgrave MacMillan.

31 <https://www.radiookapi.net/2021/09/15/actualite/politique/marche-de-lamuka-et-nogec-kinshasa-martin-fayulu-et-adolphe-muzito>

7.2. Public Administration and Services

A second area in need of reforms and support is that of public administration and services. This sector faces many challenges, among which two stand out: inability to renew the workforce (culture of actors and institution); and transparency and corruption.

As to the first point, the public administration in the DRC is a victim of its inability to retire its workforce. Most of the workforce is of retirement age, but the lack of funding makes it difficult to send them honourably into retirement, so that the staff of civil servants can be renewed. This makes the government lag within its own operating system. The lack of funds and the poorly organized administrative system is at the centre of poor service delivery and multiple local grievances. For instance, there has been talk about sending in retired educators/teachers from state schools. But there too, the challenge is that the government cannot provide retirement funds. The same problem is evident in several other public sectors where in addition to the inability to renew personnel, those who are currently working must struggle to get their salaries on time.

The arrests of these high-profile politicians sent strong signals for the anti-corruption campaign, but within the country, public opinion is divided. Some see these arrests as politically motivated actions targeting potential challengers to Tshisekedi in the 2023 presidential elections.

The absence of adequate public service delivery also affects communities and germinates the seeds of violence. The 2006 DRC Constitution projected a decentralized political and administrative governance system that would make the government more responsive to local needs. Unfortunately, the country has yet to implement effective political and administrative decentralization, and local elections are repeatedly postponed. The organization of local elections and the promotion of effective decentralization would advance the work of institution building. This should be in focus now, as 2022 will determine the type of elections the DRC will organize in 2023.

Second, there is the issue of corruption among political appointees as well as civil servants. Ever since 2019, the Tshisekedi administration has conducted anti-corruption campaigns, tracking corrupt leaders and anyone suspected of corruption. Noteworthy cases include the arrest of the Presidential Chief of Staff, the former Minister of Health, and the former Minister of Primary and Secondary Education. Another ongoing high-profile case currently in court is the prosecution of Mr Matata Ponyo, a former Premier Minister under President Kabila. The arrests of these high-profile politicians sent strong signals for the anti-corruption campaign, but within the country, public opinion is divided. Some see these arrests as politically motivated actions

targeting potential challengers to Tshisekedi in the 2023 presidential elections, or persons who, although effective in their work, are not fully committed to Tshisekedi's political views or agenda.

It would be dangerous and could obstruct the prospects for sustainable peace and stability if the government politicizes its anti-corruption campaign.

Although it is indeed encouraging to see moves to end the persistent issue of corruption in the DRC, it is also important to recognize the fine line between the pursuit of effective reform within the public administration and a politically motivated anti-corruption agenda. It would be dangerous and could obstruct the prospects for sustainable peace and stability if the government politicizes its anti-corruption campaign – especially if those who are prosecuted on charges on corruption happen to be mainly persons who had worked closely with former President Kabila or who do not embrace Tshisekedi's agenda. Effective reform of the country's public administration must be objective and impartial. This must be made clear to the DRC government as the international community considers appropriate support to institutional reforms and peacebuilding.

In addition to corruption perpetrated by public servants or political appointees, another central area championed by the Inspector General of Finances (IGF) is public spending and reallocation of resources. More than USD five hundred million were recovered and/or stopped from being misused through systemic review and audit in the past two years alone. There have been positive advances on this front, but the DRC still needs more support with its tax collection strategies.

The DRC has indeed been plagued with tensions and conflicts concerning its natural resources. Here again, the country is at a crossroads between successful reforms and conflicts.

The next significant and challenging task is the call by President Tshisekedi to re-assess mining contracts signed by many companies during the previous administration. It is widely held that most of these contracts were not signed in conformity with the law, but were the results of political manipulation and corruption. On the other hand, concerns have also been voiced that this move to revisit mining contracts is a political push supported by the Western powers, aimed at countering Chinese influence in the DRC.

The DRC has indeed been plagued with tensions and conflicts concerning its natural resources. Here again, the country is at a crossroads between successful reforms and conflicts. These reforms should be carefully considered by both the international community and the DRC government.

8. Conclusion: Too Early to Leave, Too Late to Stay

The political and security situation of the DRC is far from stable today. The government still struggles with issues of the legitimacy of its institutions³² and the unstable and unpredictable political behaviour of actors within the Union Sacrée pour la Nation coalition in power. This ruling political coalition is very fragile; indeed, it seems questionable whether it will survive until the end of Tshisekedi's term. In addition, three years since Tshisekedi took office, his regime continues to face social tension and ongoing protest from teachers, students, health practitioners, public servants, and others. The people of the DRC are beginning to realize that they have set their expectations too high, and they are now less optimistic that the current government will be able to meet them.

Although the exit of MONUSCO would mean a positive step toward the DRC's regaining its sovereignty, the announcement of this transition and of the timeframe for its implementation seem to have arrived at the wrong time, with political tensions and violence mounting throughout the DRC. Hence the pertinent question: 'too early to leave, too late stay?'

Three key points deserve special attention from the international community and the DRC government concerning the prospects of MONUSCO leaving responsibly: institutional reforms, the involvement of regional actors, re-imagining stability the Congolese way.

32 Concerns of legitimacy as to the government's inability to provide services and be present in communities affected with issues of both violence and poverty.

8.1. Institutional reforms

The DRC government must invest in its national and local institutions in the same way as it has focused on political activities. Issues of governance and political leadership always seem to be central to the DRC security development and narrative, it is vital to bear in mind that the long-term stability and development of the country depends on the existence of viable and well-reformed institutions. These reforms must go beyond sectoral reforms aimed at the security and defence sector: they must be holistic, and with a greater focus on areas of administrative organization.

This would provide opportunities for shared governance with local communities, fair and adequate distribution of resources, better localization of development programmes, and the streamlining of transparent administrative processes.

History has shown that political leadership is not permanent. Therefore, the DRC will need to be encouraged and supported in building a strong and functional administrative system. This would provide opportunities for shared governance with local communities, fair and adequate distribution of resources, better localization of development programmes, and the streamlining of transparent administrative processes. All this will require a well-planned approach and political will on the part of the leadership. Importantly, these institutional reforms should not be used to score political points, but to ensure responsible behaviour on the part of the leadership.

With or without MONUSCO or the AU, these reforms are all needed. However, the presence of MONUSCO or other regional bodies and UN agencies while the reforms are implemented could serve as to help to promote accountability, political streamlining of the process, and technical support. Also, the UNSC could ensure that the resources allocated to the mission and other UN agencies working on the intended transition are geared toward projects and programmes clearly aimed at institutional strengthening. This is in line with Pillar 11 of the Eighteen-point Transition Plan: 'Effective and functional presence of state institutions to guarantee a minimum supply of public services to the population'.

8.2. Involvement of regional actors

Regional actors have the legal, institutional and structural capabilities need for operating within the areas of their specific mandate. Some have worked on promoting stability as well as change, but most of them still need logistical, financial, and technical support. The SC could help the DRC, via these regional actors, to mobilize resources and coordinate their programmes. In

particular, the African Union should stand forth as a continent-wide organization with flexibility and capacity to define and coordinate the security and development plan for the DRC, after the departure of the UN Stabilization Mission, MONUSCO.

8.3. Re-imagining stability the Congolese way

In addition to furthering logistical and institutional capabilities for the DRC, a much-needed step is for the UNSC to define and model MONUSCO's stabilization strategies as expected by local Congolese communities. In view of the transition plan, a more context-specific strategy would involve replacing MONUSCO with an AU mission under the MRIFSP framework. Not only would this improve coordination and regional involvement: it could also serve as a good example of a local to global people-centred stabilization strategy.

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly undertake research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network produces a series of reports that are shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. All the EPON reports are available via <https://effectivepeaceops.net>. The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and its research, including via the UN Peace Operations (UNPO) project and the Training for Peace (TfP) programme.