Going around in circles

The challenges of peacekeeping and stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

With the aim of explaining the cyclical recurrence of crisis and conflict in the DRC, this report identifies and explores two main causes. First, the government of Congo's engagement with the eastern provinces is used to maintain and extend a state that is kept purposefully weak so as to better manipulate it on behalf of private interests.

Second, the international community, MONUSCO first and foremost, has been unable to counter these dynamics due to a series of acute constraints and a limited set of technical formats for interventions. These formats, particularly those involved in 'restoring state authority', have become so ingrained that more innovative ways of undertaking peacekeeping and stabilization have been neglected.

Illustrative in this regard is the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (I4S). The I4S experience shows that technical interventions for peace consolidation, popular as they are with the government and MONUSCO, do not 'stabilize' the eastern DRC. It also points at the limitations posed by a the central government that is not interested in political peacebuilding or social transformation. Finally, it suggests that MONUSCO is not capable of engaging with stabilization and peace consolidation in a manner that is not in line with its limited strategy.

This report concludes with a mix of good and bad news. On one side, there is little evidence for optimism about the future. The international community has proven itself unwilling to engage more strongly with Kinshasa, or to think of a more original approach for peacebuilding in eastern DRC. On the other hand, the report shows that the Congolese experience with stabilization and peacekeeping has provided critical lessons for future international engagements.

Chronology of events

1996 - 1997	First Congo War. Rwanda and Uganda, in support of Kabila Sr, defeat Mobutu. Kabila Sr installed as President.
1998 - 2003	Second Congo War. DRC, Angola, Zimbabwe vs Rwanda and Uganda. Mushrooming of local armed groups (mayi-mayi).
1999	First deployment of MONUC as an observation mission.
2001	Kabila Sr assassinated. Kabila Jr takes over.
2003	Sun City agreements: foreign protagonists leave the DRC. Focus shifts to local rebel groups and FDLR. Ituri crisis leads to Chapter VII mandate. MONUC strengthening its presence in the east.
2004	Bukavu taken by Laurent Nkunda's forces.
2006	First-ever democratic elections. Kabila elected for the first time. Army reform process started.
2007	Nkunda forms CNDP, controls large parts of Masisi and Rutshuru. Threatens Goma. MONUC and FARDC fight him off.
2008	Goma accords. Host of local armed groups sign peace agreement. New army reform plan.
2009	23rd March agreement between DRC, Rwanda and the CNDP rebel movement. CNDP integrates into the army. Anti-FDLR/armed group operations start.
2010	MONUC becomes MONUSCO. Starts conditionality policy for support to Congolese army. Large-scale displacement because of military activities.
2011	Elections, widespread fraud. Kabila wins. Government proposes drawdown of the UN mission.
2012	Disbandment of Amani Leo operation. Ex-CNDP officers start the M23. M23 routs Congolese army. Fall of Goma to the M23.
2013	Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework signed. MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade started. Military defeat of the M23.
2014	New electoral calendar revealed. Opposition protests against possible third term for Kabila. Anti-ADF operations.
2015	Anti-FDLR operations start under blacklisted generals. MONUSCO told to slim down by 6,000 men.

The eastern provinces of the DRC[1]

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1   Map by the Rift Valley Institute and Mapgrafix.

Executive summary

For a short while, in late 2013 and the first months of 2014, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) seemed at last to have turned a corner. The M23 rebel movement had been defeated by the Congolese army with the support of the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO. A regional peace agreement had been signed. The Congolese government and its international partners seemed committed to ending the long-running and destructive conflict in the country's eastern provinces.

However, more than a year later, little is left of this optimism. Hundreds of people have been killed in renewed fighting. Armed groups are hedging their bets and stalling the demobilisation process. Local causes of conflict around land and identity have been left to fester. The government has disengaged from the international community, halted necessary reforms and shifted its focus to consolidating its political power. Mistrust between the Congo and its regional neighbours is as bad as ever.

This report's fundamental argument is that this should not have come as a surprise. Violent periods always follow these cyclical 'downswings' in the DRC. With the aim of explaining this cyclical recurrence of crisis and conflict in the DRC, this report identifies and explores two main causes. First, the government of Congo's engagement with the eastern provinces is used to maintain and extend a state that is kept purposefully weak so as to better manipulate it on behalf of private interests. This is visible in the government's emphasis on the trappings of the state (buildings, equipment, training), but not on its actual functioning. None of the state-building programmes introduced are likely to have an impact on the drivers of conflict, which tend to be highly context-specific, related to local security dilemmas and competition around land and identity. Furthermore, long periods of disengagement typically follow these brief spells of activity, during which the situation inevitably worsens.

Second, the international community, MONUSCO first and foremost, has been unable to counter these dynamics due to a series of acute constraints and a limited set of technical formats for interventions. These formats, particularly those involved in 'restoring state authority', have become so ingrained that more innovative ways of undertaking peacekeeping and stabilization have been neglected. The result has been an open-ended and largely supply-driven strategy, where MONUSCO does what it thinks it can, and what it has always done, rather than devise a new way of operating.

Unsurprisingly, these constraints are reflected in the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (I4S). The I4S experience shows how technical interventions for security and state authority failed, as buildings, equipment, training

and generalised development programmes did little to counter conflict. The strategy was fundamentally revised after 2012 to take a more realistic bottom-up approach to peace-building, but even then the continuation of old practices on the ground showed that MONUSCO was unable to look beyond its traditional format of extending state authority – in this case through the notion of 'Islands of Stability'.

In short, the I4S experience illustrates three points. First, that technical interventions for peace consolidation, popular as they are with the government and MONUSCO, do not 'stabilize' the eastern DRC. Second, that the central government is not interested in political peacebuilding or social transformation. And third, that MONUSCO is not capable of engaging with stabilization and peace consolidation in a manner that is not in line with its limited strategy.

This report concludes with a mix of good and bad news. On one side, there is little evidence for optimism about the future. With local conflict left to fester, and regional tensions increasing over the lack of progress against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group, future episodes of conflict might very well arise. The international community has proven itself unwilling to engage more strongly with Kinshasa, or to think of a more original approach for peacebuilding in eastern DRC.

On the other hand, the Congolese experience with stabilization and peacekeeping has provided critical lessons for future international engagements. First and foremost, it is crucial to be very careful with certain set formats for interventions, such as those based on 'phasing' and the need for a speedy intervention to win a 'peace dividend'. Second, it is vital to understand the political context. Third, it is important to understand what 'ownership' means in the context of patrimonial governance. And finally, the Congolese experience shows us there is a need for strong coordination to keep all partners in line around a joint agenda.

Introduction

'Today, the DRC, and the region of the Great Lakes as a whole, are living a unique moment, with genuine peace and stability finally within grasp. The deadlock of the past years has been broken. Now we can end atrocities and conflict, rape, displacement and child recruitment. Now we can progress on the path to success. Now we can achieve lasting peace. In a long journey together, the region has closed the darkest chapters of the war in Congo (…) the job remains far from finished (…but) we have already made impressive progress. At last, opportunity is on the horizon (…) we are closer than ever to our destination.'

Peace It!, MONUSCO Mission concept, December 2013

For a short while, in late 2013 and the first months of 2014, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) seemed to have turned a corner. The M23 rebel movement, which had taken the strategic eastern town of Goma, had been defeated by the Congolese army with the support of the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO. A regional peace agreement had been signed. The Congolese government and its international partners seemed re-energised and committed to finally end the long-running and destructive conflict in the country's eastern provinces. At the time of writing, a little more than one year later, there is not much left ofthis optimism. Hundreds of people have been killed in fighting in the North Kivu province. Armed groups are hedging their bets and stalling the demobilisation process. Local causes of conflict, around land and identity, have been left to fester. The government has disengaged from the international community, halted necessary reforms, and shifted its focus to consolidating its political power. Mistrust between the Congo and its regional neighbours is as bad as ever.

This report argues that this should not have come as a surprise. Instead of a gradual transition from conflict towards peace and 'normalcy', it is more useful to see the situation in the DRC as cyclical. Because of a complex mix of incentives, Congolese elites have consistently pushed for short-term, technical 'solutions' to conflict, and only for the short period of time necessary to prevent the worst from happening, or when their positions of power were threatened. Long periods of disengagement would follow these brief spells of activity, during which the situation would inevitably worsen. The current post-M23 period is a typical example of one of these cyclical downswings and could have been predicted some time ago. The international community, MONUSCO first and foremost, has been unable to counter these dynamics, due to a combination of strong international, institutional and contextual constraints, which have led the peacekeeping mission to rely on an open-ended, supply-driven strategy, and limited

technical formats for interventions. These formats have become so ingrained that more innovative ways of undertaking peacekeeping and stabilization have been passed by.

The structure of this report is relatively straightforward. Chapter 1 will give an overview of how the political-military struggle between the government and a number of foreign-supported armed groups has developed over the last few years, and subsequently outline three main 'cycles' of (dis)engagement by the government: from the elections of 2006 to the agreement between the DRC and Rwanda in 2009; from the 2009 agreement to the fall of Goma and the subsequent defeat of the M23 by late 2012/early 2013; and finally, the current disengagement post-M23. Chapter 2 will examine why this cyclical engagement does not address the reasons for instability in the east, by looking into the drivers of conflict, the DRC's patrimonial political system, and the way in which the government has instrumentalised outside attempts at peacebuilding to strengthen the central state. The third chapter focuses on the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, whichresponds with little more than technical interventions against the government's machinations. It pays special attention to the deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) and shows how this new 'peace enforcement' brigade is, in many ways, new wine in old skins.Chapter 4 takes a closer look at the International Security and Stabilization Strategy (I4S). By looking at the results of this programmatic framework, it intends to demonstrate firstly why technical interventions do not stabilize the east; secondly, how the government disengages from the east; and finally, why MONUSCO is unable to develop a more original approach. The final two sections are forward looking: Chapter 5 speculates about what may happen to the DRC and its international supporters in the year to come and proposes a more evidence-based way forward; the Epilogue sets out a few critical assumptions about 'stabilization' which outside supporters should be wary of.

A note from the author

It is only fair that I insert a personal note at this point. I was seconded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs to MONUSCO, and worked in the mission's Stabilization Support Unit for four years, in Bukavu and Goma, coordinating stabilization programmes with the government and international partners. I have had my share of frustration working with the Congolese government and MONUSCO, and have actively contributed to the 'paper reality' of some of what the UN does. Consequently, I am undoubtedly biased in my views. Finally, I hope the reader will understand that this report is a personal analysis that reflects no one's views but my own. In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding that I signed with MONUC in 2010, none of the information in this document is confidential.

1   A cyclical history of conflict

To some commentators, the conflict in the DRC between 1996 and the present day has followed something of a linear trajectory: from a regional inter-state war, to large outside-supported rebellions, to a situation over the last few years where one armed group after the other has been knocked out of the balance and there has been a slow re-establishment of state control over the territory. As we shall see, the reality is considerably more complex. This chapter provides a short overview of what is considered to be the 'main cleavage' in the Congolese conflict: the political-military fight between the government and a number of armed groups with foreign backing, particularly the CNDP, M23 and the FDLR, and how international partners have attempted to support the government in this struggle up to the present day.[2] From roughly 2006 onwards, the Congolese government's cyclical engagement with the east has set in, disengaging when the worst is over and focusing on strengthening its power while letting the political situation fester, until another crisis occurs. The post-M23 period we are currently witnessing is yet another example of a cyclical downturn.

A short history of the Congo wars and rebellions: 1996-2006

What came to be known as the First Congo War (1996-97) began when Rwanda and Uganda, formally in support of a Congolese rebel group led by Laurent-Desiré Kabila, invaded what was then Zaire in response to cross-border attacks by *Interahamwe* extremists driven from Rwanda after the genocide. Zaire was a mere shadow of a state after decades during which President Mobutu kept state institutions, especially the armed forces, weak and corrupt so they were more easily controlled. Kabila was installed as the new president, but relations between him and his patrons soured rapidly. The subsequent Second Congo War (1998-2003), where the Rwandans and Ugandans dug in on one side, with the DRC and a plethora of African states on the other, still had a clear regional dimension. The overriding conflict dynamics were starting to change, though. First, the economic dimension of the conflict became more obvious: all sides were involved in the export of minerals and other valuable goods from the areas under their control. Second, the presence of armed forces sped up the process of local mobilisation and self-defence groups, or 'mayi-mayi', became increasingly active all

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2   This chapter does not pretend to do justice to the complexity of the war in eastern DRC. For more detailed analyses see, for example, Prunier (2009), Stearns (2011) and Deibert (2013).

across eastern DRC.[3] Mayi-mayi used their new prominence to control territory and try to be of benefit to their own communities vis-à-vis others.[4]

After a series of peace agreements in 2002 led the regional states to leave the DRC, two principal armed groups with a foreign dimension remained active. The first was (what would later be called) the *Congrès National pour la Défense du People* (CNDP), a movement of mainly North Kivutian 'Rwandophone' Congolese, whose ancestors had migrated from Rwanda over the 20th century, and are still seen as outsiders by many 'autochthonous' Congolese.[5] The CNDP received tactical and material support from Rwanda, which used the group as a proxy force to control a strategic buffer zone along its border with Congo. The CNDP set up parallel administrations in strategic parts of North Kivu. The second group was the *Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération de Rwanda* (FDLR), led by former Hutu extremists and Rwandan ex-armed forces who had fled Rwanda after 1994. Their official goal was to take back Rwanda from President Kagame's 'Tutsi regime', though their ideological motivation may well have been replaced by a more economic one over the years, as they became increasingly involved in the mining business, settled down in Congolese society, and attracted or pressured into service an increasing number of Congolese recruits.[6] The FDLR has had a long working arrangement with the Congolese armed forces, the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC), which used them to counter the influence of the CNDP and Rwanda's wider agenda.[7] The CNDP, the FDLR and the FARDC fought each other over the next few years, trying to wrest territory from each other and making ad hoc agreements with the various mayi-mayi groups in the area, who often opportunistically switched sides. Aside from the population displacement that the fighting caused, the Kivutian dislike of 'foreigners' increased exponentially. This would have a lasting impact on already strained inter-tribal tensions.

With violence worsening across the eastern provinces, and in support of the Congolese government, the Security Council mandated a peacekeeping mission, the *Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en Republique Democratique du Congo*, MONUC,

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3   'Mayi-mayi' means 'water-water'. There exists a rather romanticised image of them as 'heart of darkness'-like bush rebels who go into battle naked, with bows and poisoned arrows, protected by magic charms. Some of them do, but many mayi-mayi are politically savvy and well organised.

4   Vlassenroot and Van Acker (2001), pp. 51-77

5   The most prominent 'Rwandophone' groups are the Hutu and Tutsi people of Walikale, Lubero and Rutshuru territories in North Kivu and in Kalehe territory in South Kivu; and the Banyamulenge people of South Kivu's *Hautes Plateaux*. Their relationships with foreign forces are considerably more complicated than political propaganda would have it. For in-depth studies on inter-community dynamics, see Life and Peace Institute (2011, 2013 and 2014) and the Rift Valley Institute's Usalama project.

6   Pole Institute (2010); Marijnen (2014)

7   International Crisis Group (2010)

from 1999 onwards. The mission started as a small force of observers to monitor the implementation of the various peace agreements, but rapidly scaled up in the following seven years with infantry support and air assets as violence spread across the east. It is from this point onwards, roughly 2006, that a cyclical dynamic can be noticed in how the Congolese government, with MONUC in tow, responded to the crisis in the eastern provinces.[8] As will be seen, short-term responses have dominated the government's approach to dealing with armed groups in the east, and the international community has had little choice but to follow suit.

The first cycle: from the 2006 elections to the 23rd March 2009 agreement

In early 2006, relations between the government and the international community were relatively good and there was a joint sense of purpose. President Joseph Kabila and his government needed all the outside support they could get: first, to support the army against the armed groups who went against the peace agreements; and second, for the enormous logistical support required to organise the country's first-ever democratic elections that were planned for that year. MONUC expanded rapidly, moving assets to the eastern provinces to take a more hands-on approach to protecting the population.

The cyclical downswing set in after the elections. Once Kabila was elected president and the subsequent electoral violence was quelled, the relationship between the government and the UN became frostier. The government felt that its power had been consolidated and legitimised, and resorted increasingly to short-term and politically painless solutions for the east.[9] Violence in the Kivus and Ituri was presented as a law-and-order problem caused by bandits, rather than linked to the grievances of the local population. Reform of the country's army was nominally started but turned into a largely technical training exercise instead of improving control and oversight. Military operations against the armed groups mainly succeeded in temporarily pushing the rebels around the countryside and led to the large-scale displacement of the population. This lukewarm approach left the eastern provinces more insecure than ever. Armed mayi-mayi groups multiplied, making use of the resulting security vacuum and mobilising to protect their communities and their own interests, and controlling increasing swathes of territory. Resentment against the state grew.[10] The military offensives against the CNDP failed to

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8   There is an argument to be made that 2002-2006 also represented a 'cycle', with the Sun City agreements representing the starting point, the violence across the east the cyclical downswing, and the cycle picking up towards the elections. For simplicity's sake, and because it adds little to the argument of this report, it has been left out.

9   Deibert (2013); Quick (2015)

10   Vinck et al (2008)

gain traction. The low point came when a well-disciplined rebel force consisting of the CNDP and their media-savvy commander, Laurent Nkunda, together with a number of smaller groups, marched on Goma in late 2008. The Congolese army was scattered and Kinshasa was forced to come to MONUC and the international partners for support. A 'carrot and stick' approach was used: for the stick, MONUC used its gunships to fight off the CNDP from the outskirts of Goma; for the carrot, the government opened up its army integration process to the armed groups.

This started the upswing of the cycle. At the end of 2008, the Goma accords were signed, in which a host of local armed groups came together to lay down their arms and openly debate the grievances, disappointments and ambitions of the people of the east.[11] This left the CNDP and the FDLR, but unbeknownst to the international community, Kinshasa and Kigali had been negotiating a secret rapprochement. The CNDP, under pressure from Kigali, had its commander, Nkunda arrested and replaced. The rebel movement integrated into the FARDC, and joint operations of the Rwandan and Congolese armies pushed the FDLR back into the bush. The 23rd March 2009 agreement formalised this arrangement.

The second cycle: from the 2009 agreement to the defeat of the M23

In early 2009, the Congo and its international supporters were in an optimistic mood. The Goma accords and the 23rd March agreement were enthusiastically welcomed as a fundamental break with the past. This was the moment when international partners would begin to consider the eastern provinces of the DRC as a 'post-conflict zone' and adjust their development toolkits to support a transition to 'normalcy'. However, this optimism overlooked a few critical dilemmas and, as a result, the cyclical downswing was right around the corner.

The respite given by the Goma accords of 2008 and the 23rd March agreement of 2009 was temporary at best. The 2008-2012 'post-conflict' period would see some of the worst insecurity in the country's history. In the wake of the 2009 operations, the government did little to support an inclusive peacebuilding process and focused instead on a consolidation of its power and expansion of its military control over the east. From 2009 onwards, the FARDC undertook an open-ended military operation, rather ironically named 'Amani Leo' ('peace today'), which was dominated by integrated CNDP cadres and managed to severely worsen the security situation. The FARDC behaved so badly that MONUC was forced to start a conditionality policy and would only support FARDC

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11   International Crisis Group (2008). The Goma agreement was meant not only to stop the fighting but also to take stock of the atrocities that had been committed since 1994 and address mutual fears and distrust. It had a sort of cathartic effect this way.

brigades whose commanders had a clean human rights record. The integration of the armed groups had made the army bloated and increasingly difficult to control. People were caught in a pendulum movement between the poorly disciplined FARDC and the armed groups, and many thousands were displaced.[12] The countryside became heavily militarised and there was a mushrooming of armed groups, who took control of large swathes of the Kivus and Ituri.[13] Moreover, the government again began to cold-shoulder its international partners. Integrating the rebels into the army had provided a temporary 'solution' and Kinshasa felt it needed less international support and monitoring as a result. Under pressure from the government, MONUC was turned into MONUSCO in 2010, with the 'S' in stabilization indicating that a return to 'normalcy' was envisaged down the line, even if this was not reflected by what was happening on the ground.[14] However, as the mission still did not consider that its mandate was to provide direct fighting support to military operations, the central government announced to MONUSCO in 2011 that it had to start drawing down its presence.[15] The mission also had to provide substantial logistical support to the 2011 elections, which were marred by fraud and, predictably, won by the ruling coalition.[16] By 2012, MONUSCO had effectively been battered into a corner by the government.

The low point of the cycle was soon to hit with a vengeance. With antipathy building within the armed forces, and with the population opposed to the integrated CNDP cadres, it was only a question of time before the bubble burst. This happened in 2012 when President Kabila, under heavy internal pressure, decided to dismantle the Amani Leo operation. This decision cut many CNDP officers out of the army's command chain and threatened their grip on strategic areas under their control. Some of these CNDP cadres broke off, formed the M23 and organised the most substantial revolt against the government in years. The M23 received the support of Rwanda, which was worried about the loss of a CNDP-dominated security buffer on its borders.[17] The M23 routed the army in a manner of months and marched on the capital city of North Kivu province,

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12 International Crisis Group (Vircoulon, 2010); United Nations (OCHA, 2010)

13 A good example was the resurgence of the mayi-mayi Raia Mutumboki ('outraged citizens') over these years, which grew from a small Barega self-defence group into a force that pushed the FDLR and the FARDC out of most of the huge Shabunda territory, then turned into an 'armed franchise', with local groups claiming their cause for their own purposes, and spread into southern North Kivu, Kalehe and Kabare territories as well (Rift Valley Institute, 2013).

14 UNSC resolution 1925 (2010) states that the DRC is 'now entering a new phase of its transition towards peace consolidation'.

15 Quick (2015), p. 131-132. Kabila had repeatedly tried to move the peacekeeping mission to take a more aggressive stance in fighting the armed groups.

16 Stearns (2013); Berwouts (2014). The national elections were meant to have been preceded by local elections, but these were never held, perhaps so Kinshasa would not lose ground to more popular grassroots political movements.

17 Rift Valley Institute, Usalama (Stearns, 2012)

Goma, in December 2012. The FARDC fled, and MONUSCO, which interpreted its mandate to only support the FARDC and not fight on its own, stood aside and let the rebels take the town. After a decade of peacekeeping, the strategic centre of the eastern DRC fell into the hands of a rebel movement: a more symbolic defeat could hardly be imagined. The government's emphasis on expanding its control over the east through force while letting the political causes of the conflict fester had once more backfired badly.

The fall of Goma made the pendulum swing back. The government had to once again work with the international community, after having sidelined it over the past few years. A period of frantic international diplomacy followed, in which the Security Council threw its unconditional support behind Kinshasa, a regional peace agreement was envisioned, and heavy international pressure brought to bear on Kigali to keep away from the M23. The crisis atmosphere inside both MONUSCO and the central government was clear. A Force Intervention Brigade, consisting of concerned regional states (South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi) was set up under the mission's mandate to provide combat support, or even fight armed groups unilaterally – a clear break with the past. The Congolese government agreed to an oversight mechanism that would keep track of the implementation of the same reforms it had blocked over the previous year. The upswing of the cycle gained momentum over 2013: there was a noticeable thaw in relations between Kinshasa and its international partners, the government 'talked the talk' about the need for cooperation and reform, and a regional agreement for collaboration in the region, the Peace, Security and Collaboration Framework (PSCF) was signed and brought the regional states together for an inclusive dialogue – it was even dubbed the 'Framework of Hope' by the incoming UN Special Envoy for the region, Mary Robinson. Finally the M23 was beaten back and militarily defeated at the end of that year through a joint effort by the Congolese army and MONUSCO's Intervention Brigade. At the end of 2013, much as in 2009, the mood was festive: the country had turned a page, and peace was finally in sight after so many years. And again, unfortunately, there was considerable wishful thinking involved.

The third cycle: a new downturn post-M23

The defeat of the M23, and with that the elimination of a threat to the government's control over strategic areas in the east, seems to have once again changed Kinshasa's attitude. A third cyclical downturn, after 2006-2009 and 2009-2012, may well have set in. As far as the government is concerned, the war against the M23 has been won – and with that threat to regime control disappearing, so is the need to kowtow to the international community. With the crisis over, the government is again focusing on consolidating power in the east, by force if it has to. This is apparent from what has happened in the post-M23 period in terms of security and politics.

In terms of security, the supposed 'window of opportunity' created by the defeat of the M23 did not lead to a thought-out military-strategic approach nor to a more secure eastern DRC. Post-M23, the Kivus, Northern Katanga and Orientale province are still home to dozens of mayi-mayi movements that seem to be as active as ever.[18]

Illustrative of the situation is the plight of 'foreign' armed groups. Since the 'Rwandan' ex-M23 was defeated, Kinshasa has been politically neutralising the last remnants of the movement. The Ministry of Defence developed a new demobilisation programme (the 'PNDDR-III') that sent a first group of ex-M23 fighters to camps on the other side of the country, far away from their communities of support, despite international criticisms that this amounts to forcible displacement.[19] Donors have not been enthusiastic about funding the programme so far, and with supplies running short, several people have starved in the camps.[20] This has obviously not motivated the remaining ex-M23, currently in camps in Uganda and Rwanda, to return to Congo. Several of the former rebels decided to 'auto-demobilise' instead and flee into the bush. As long as the ex-M23 are in camps, however, they are no bother to the government, so there is little urgency on Kinshasa's side to move forward with the demobilisation and reintegration programme. While the neutralisation of the M23 was going on, military operations were launched against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the northern part of North Kivu. The ADF had barely registered in this story so far: it was a small movement, led by Ugandan (supposed) Muslim extremists who used the Congo as a fall-out base against the Museveni government. However, the conflict around the ADF, in true Congolese fashion, expanded and mutated rapidly throughout 2014. Where the army initially drove the movement back, a number of smaller politico-military networks and copycat groups started causing trouble, claiming to be ADF but in fact using this mantle to settle scores and manoeuvre political allies into important positions at community level.[21] Over 300 people have been brutally murdered since late 2014, with the government denying that this has to do with grassroots tensions and blaming Ugandan influences instead. The FARDC has been given free rein to 'stamp out' these threats, with dubious results so far.

Perhaps the strongest piece of evidence that the government is returning to 'business as usual', is its engagement with what are, arguably, the biggest spoilers of regional peace, the former Rwandan *genocidaires* of the FDLR. After the defeat of the M23,

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18   Vogel (2014) mapped 30 active armed groups spread over the two Kivus, as of December 2014.

19   International Crisis Group (2014), p. 9. 'None of them can tell us what to do,' said government spokesperson Lambert Mende about the programme, '[international donors] must support the programme, as we know what is necessary.'

20   UNSC report on MONUSCO, December 2014; Human Rights Watch (2014). In a cynical turn of events, the government more or less blamed the donors' financial foot-dragging for this.

21   Radio France International (2015); Sweet (2015).

there was a widespread belief that the FDLR would be next to be knocked out militarily. The government, however, did not seem to share this opinion. With the war against the M23 over, the FDLR could once again be kept on hand as a tool against 'Rwandophone influences' in the eastern provinces. A textbook version of stalling and spin started.[22] The FDLR, not for the first time, announced that it was ready to disarm and surrender. This gave the government the excuse it needed to delay operations. The delay was used by the rebel movement to demobilise its older and disabled members and re-organise itself, after which it re-launched its usual demands of amnesty for senior leaders and participation in the Rwandan political process – demands they know are unacceptable forKigali. With matters politically blocked this way, a new deadline for the FDLR's surrender was set for January 2015. With international pressure mounting, Kinshasa made a clever strategic move. To lead the anti-FDLR operation it appointed two generals who had been blacklisted by the UN for human rights abuses, which meant that the UN peacekeeping mission, under its conditionality principle, would be unable to participate.[23] This not only kept the pace of any upcoming operations firmly in the hands of the Congolese government, but also gave Kinshasa an argument to criticise MONUSCO for not supporting the Congolese army after first accusing it of dragging its feet. Kinshasa has pushed MONUSCO on the defensive this way, and has been arguing for a substantial downsizing of the peacekeeping force. At the time of writing (early 2015), FARDC operations have started, with an uncertain outcome. Military operations have in the past managed to weaken but never destroy the FDLR, as they move around and have no fixed support base among the population and, more importantly, rebel commanders were warned about operations in advance by FARDC officers.[24] There are few reasons to be more optimistic about operations this time around.

On the political front, there seems to be little left of the ambitions of 2013-14 either. At the regional level, the Peace, Security and Collaboration Framework (PSCF), the 'Framework of Hope' has lost most of its momentum. Mistrust between the countries of the Great Lakes region is as great as ever, and seems to be crystallizing around a Uganda/Rwanda bloc and a DRC/Angola/ South African Development Community (SADC) bloc.[25] Rwanda is furious at the delay around FDLR operations, which it sees as a genocidal enemy of its people. If Kigali decides to turn its back on the regional agreement, it would turn the PSCF into a lame duck. The National Oversight Mechanism, which came with the PSCF and was meant to keep track of national reforms in the Congo, is not doing much better. Kinshasa claimed that it wanted to form a 'government of national unity' before moving on any reforms; when this finally happened after a

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22 International Crisis Group (2014); UN Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the PSCF (2014); Vogel (2014).

23 See for example Vogel (2014).

24 International Crisis Group (2010).

25 UNSG report on the implementation of the PSCF (2014).

year's delay, in December 2014, it was filled with the president's political allies, the same people who have blocked these reforms over the last decade. Reform of the army is a painful example of what is perhaps the most critical reform for peace consolidation in the eastern DRC. Despite all the initial post-M23 talk of rightsizing the armed forces, President Kabila informed SRSG Martin Kobler, the head of the peacekeeping mission, that he is not interested in outside support beyond the provision of equipment and training.[26]

Instead of engaging with the political issues underlying the conflict, the government seems to have spent most of its energies in the post-M23 period on finding ways to consolidate the power of the president and his party as the end of his elected mandate in 2016 approaches. Various stalling manoeuvres for the elections have been used: an unclear electoral calendar, the formation of a government of national unity, attempts to change the constitution to allow the president to run for a third term, holding a nationwide census, and re-drawing electoral boundaries to hold local elections.[27] At the time of writing, it is unclear where the process is heading and how far the ruling coalition is willing to go to hold on to power, but Kinshasa's electoral machinations are creating resentment with many Congolese.

Finally, in late 2014 and early 2015 the government made it very clear to its international partners that it would no longer tolerate what it sees as interference with its sovereign prerogatives. Public speeches lambasted the idea that 'external solutions' were valid for national issues.[28] The collected ambassadors of the Congo's donor states were given to understand that the country 'will never be co-managed with a club of diplomats'.[29] The tone is as sharp as anything experienced in 2011. MONUSCO was singled out for special treatment. The discussion around the drawdown of the mission, supposedly because of lower security risks, had begun in 2014 but was given extra impetus by the mission's decision not to support anti-FDLR operations.[30] MONUSCO was accused of hypocrisy, of trying to blackmail the government and of holding the army back in its fight against armed groups.[31] To add insult to injury, the head of MONUSCO's human rights division was declared *persona non grata* for supposed anti-government bias in his section's reports, making it clear that a critical tone towards Kinshasa would no longer

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26   UNSG report, 30 June 2014.
27   International Crisis Group (2015).
28   President Kabila's speech to parliament on 15 December 2014.
29   Government spokesperson Lambert Mende, press briefing on 15 February 2015.
30   Quote by the Congolese ambassador to the UN, UNSC discussion on the DRC, 7 August 2014.
31   Government spokesperson Lambert Mende, press briefing on 15 February 2015.

be tolerated.[32] At the time of writing, relations between the peacekeeping mission and Kinshasa are worse than ever.

It is important, at this point, to take a step back and focus on the background story: why didn't the various military offensives against the armed groups achieve the expected results? And why does the government engage in such a short-term way with the political problems in the east? We shall turn to this next.

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32 Human Rights Watch (2014). MONUSCO had just released a report that mentioned summary executions by elements of the police during operation 'Likofi' to clear youth gangs from the streets of Kinshasa.

2 The background story: local violence, governance and the instrumentalisation of peacebuilding

Considering the previous chapter, it is important to clarify why the eastern provinces of the DRC have remained so fertile for conflict, despite outside attempts to remedy it, and why the government takes such a hands-off approach to conflict resolution. This will require a deeper understanding of the drivers of conflict, which are often locally specific and related to security, land and identity. Although expressions of the conflict have changed over the years, the underlying incentive structure of the Congolese political system has not changed much, which explains why government engagement with the east has been cyclical in nature. The politico-military elites do what they do because of a complex mix of neo-patrimonialism, capacity deficits and the co-optation of civil society. This has led to a technocratic way of defining the crisis and prioritising peacebuilding activities to strengthen state control, without supporting actual social transformation. This chapter will outline some of the key issues that stand out in terms of local violence and Congolese governance. Finally, it will also take a closer look at the ways in which the government has instrumentalised outside support for peacebuilding.

Drivers of conflict in eastern DRC

Although most international attention has been focused on the 'major cleavage' – the fight between the government and the larger foreign-supported armed groups such as the M23 and the FDLR – conflict in the east is multi-layered and actual violence is often a result of local drivers of inter-community tensions. The wider conflict is a result of a decade of regional dynamics interposing themselves on a weak state and community tensions. As Autesserre (2010) puts it: '…the causation went both ways: local tensions created national cleavages, but, at the same time, national factors set the stage for local conflict to erupt into large-scale violence'.[33] These local tensions are rarely engaged with in a sustainable, context-specific manner, and as a result eastern Congo has remained fertile ground for outside-supported rebellions.

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33   Autesserre (2010), pp. 126-178

There is a complex interplay of drivers of local conflict.[34] An all-pervasive issue in Congo is neo-patrimonialism.[35] Everyone, at all levels of the country, needs to use whatever means they have available, be it through political clout, weapons, labour or money, to feed their mutually obliging support networks. This has led to a fierce, zero-sum competition for resources. The state itself is a prized resource – with positions in the army and police particularly valued as they hold the means of violence – and the state is used by these support networks for personal gain. This process has hollowed out the state and security forces, and it is in the interest of elites to keep institutions as weak and divided as possible to be better able to manipulate them. The state, in the end, may hold many of the solutions to the conflict but is also part of the problem and an actor in the generation of violence. The years of dog-eat-dog competition and war have led to a particular mindset among the population. As people live in a constant state of insecurity and cannot rely on the state, they grab chances to survive wherever they can, and rely on small, ethnic networks of trust. The more a group is threatened (or perceived to be threatened), the more it will define its identity in exclusive terms and, potentially, in opposition to others. Feelings of humiliation are common and easily manipulated by political entrepreneurs. As many people believe that violence has become the only effective means of change in the DRC, violent inter-ethnic mobilisation can come very quickly.[36] These tensions are further worsened by socio-economic pressures and poverty. Few Congolese have the opportunity to make more than a subsistence living through agriculture, and with demographic growth, the pressure on land is increasing. Many of the tensions above crystallize around land and identity: fertile land is not only a means of survival but also considered a sensitive tribal heritage, yet it is divided by elites for clientelistic purposes. Armed groups and political entrepreneurs use these tensions around land and identity to mobilise people against 'interlopers' from other communities. The availability of valuable natural resources can provide further impetus to this dynamic.

Critically, the way in which this interplay of neo-patrimonialism, people's mindsets, socio-economic pressures and the availability of natural resources interacts and leads to violence differs fundamentally from one zone to the next. Conflict in eastern Congo can be different, literally, every square kilometre. People's resilience to violent mobilisation depends on the history of the area, the role local communities play in the distribution of power, their relationship to the state and sometimes on supposedly small issues such as whether the commander of the local army contingent is from the 'right' tribal group

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34   This paragraph is based on the assessment of root causes and drivers of conflict in the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy 2013-2017, pp. 5-17.

35   Booth (2007), p. vi: 'Patrimonialism (…) refers to the blurring or absence of a distinction between the public (state) and the private wealth of the ruler. The prefix neo indicates a system that combines patrimonial and legal-rational or bureaucratic features.'

36   Moufflet (2009), p. 129; Vinck and Pham (2014), p. 42

or not. It also depends on how these local tensions interact with the 'national cleavage': whether a community has traditional ties to either the 'Rwandophone' CNDP or the M23, or the by now largely localised FDLR; whether these groups, or the government, has done the community wrong in the past; or, more often, whether one of these organisations is willing to support the people in question with access to land, resources, financial means and weapons. In the end, people fight for a wide variety of reasons, whether they are in the FDLR, the CNDP, the armed forces or a local self-defence group. Some do it to help their communities. Some are pressured into fighting, particularly in the FDLR. Many do it because they see few ways to gain access to resources other than through violence. In other words, mobilisation is a highly context-specific process.

This makes it all the more remarkable, as we shall see later in this chapter, that a one-size-fits all approach of 'restoring state authority' has been proposed by the government and its partners as a solution to these widely differing contexts.[37] The idea is that where the state provides protection and services, people are less likely to rely on armed groups for the same.Yet this ignores the individual experiences people have had with the state. People do not automatically prefer armed groups to state actors – this is highly context-specific, and many Congolese would prefer not to have to rely on non-state actors for services and protection.[38] However, the state they would like to see 'restored', is one that actually functions. People are not 'pro-state' or 'pro-armed group'; they are rather consistently 'pro-themselves', and in an insecure environment, they will grab chances where they can to survive – even if this means resorting to violence themselves. Kalyvas (2006) and Verweijen (2013) have shown how local people, customary authorities and businessmen actively collaborate and make use of armed groups and the army and police, depending on who is in control of an area. Violence is a faster solution than going through legal channels, and people have engaged in illegal business and protection rackets with armed actors to safeguard their positions and generate incomes.[39] Few of these issues will be solved by a technical state- and security-focused approach. As we shall see, however, the government has its reasons to propose exactly that.

Governance: neo-patrimonialism, institutions and civil society

The Congolese political system, as mentioned, is structured along neo-patrimonial lines: personalised networks use the state for their personal gain in a zero-sum competition with other groups, and the state is purposely kept weak and divided so it can more easily be manipulated. There is a tendency to equate neo-patrimonialism with a complete lack of political willingness to make any changes or reforms, or even care very much about

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37   For an in-depth analysis, see Quick (2015).

38   Morvan (2005); Pole Institute (2010); Oxfam (2012); Feeley and Choukri (2012)

39   Kalyvas (2006); Verweijen (2013); Marijnen (2014)

what happens outside elite circles in Kinshasa. In reality, this situation is not quite so black-and-white. There is no general unwillingness for any type of reform or change.[40] The status quo harms the government in some cases as well: for example, the lack of capacity inside the army has seriously damaged the popularity of President Kabila in the east.[41] Depending on particular interests, there can be 'good enough political willingness' to make incremental changes here and there, although the system is so opaque that it is difficult for an outsider to see where these changes could be made. The stereotype of aloof politicians in Kinshasa who care about little other than their own pockets needs to be nuanced. Many power brokers are not oblivious to the harsh circumstances in which their countrymen and women live, but their options to change the system are limited. The first and overarching interest of elites is to keep the system divided for their own benefit and expand the influence of their networks – and *only then* do they have the opportunity to do things for the general good. It is more important that the boat stays afloat than that it goes somewhere, as it were. This is a dog-eat-dog system, and elites are unlikely to risk their hard-won positions for abstract ethical ideas.[42]

Although neo-patrimonialism is an all-pervasive influence in Congolese governance, there are nuances: first, there is a shortage of capacity to administrate the Congo's territory; and second, 'ordinary Congolese' are not merely victims of elite machinations, but also play a role in neo-patrimonial governance.

The fundamental lack of capacity to manage the eastern provinces plays out at the institutional as well as the professional level. At the institutional level, the DRC is not really a controlled, coherent geo-administrative entity but rather exists in a sort of 'archipelago statehood', with the central government directly controlling mainly urban population centres and high-value economic enclaves such as mining centres across its vast territory. With the costs associated with distance and few means of communications, the government has little reliable information about what is happening at local level, and vice versa. Moreover, even if the government knew exactly what was happening, they would not have the resources to address the situation. The 2014 national budget was around US$9bn, positively tiny for a country the size of the DRC.[43] Public finances seem to exist mainly on paper: disbursements are impossible to track and corruption is rampant. The Congolese bureaucracy is highly centralised, which has

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40 As Eriksson Baaz and Verwijen (2013) note, 'political will' is not a dichotomous variable that either exists or does not. It is contextual, shifting and variable, depending, among others, on agents' positions, personalities, and the reform issues at hand.

41 Kets and De Vries (2014)

42 Stearns (2011), pp. 3-12

43 UNSC report, 5 March 2014 . To put this in perspective, this is roughly the same as the 2014 budget of the city of Chicago (US$8.9bn).

removed any sense of initiative from the lower levels of the state apparatus. It often seems that no one is able to take a decision without having it checked off with a higher level of authority first: the buck is constantly passed. As most forms of executive power have been concentrated in the offices of the President and Prime Minister, few ministries dare take the initiative to push through complicated activities that require long-term planning or cross-ministerial coordination.[44] As a result, there are enormous bureaucratic delays in getting anything done.

These problems of institutional capacity are compounded by professional capacity issues. State officials have few incentives to do 'proper' government work. They wouldn't really know where to start: there is little strategy-making or priority-setting in government institutions. Ministers and other officials bring their own entourage with them and make all the decisions, often with little regard to what their predecessors might have agreed to. When ministers change, they take their institutional memory with them. There is not much of a financial incentive to do proper government work either. State officials are barely paid, but salaries are too low to live on in any case, and mainly serve as a 'bonus' that buys loyalty to the state.[45] State positions are mainly coveted because they provide a stable platform from which to make an illegal income: Congolese need to pay to have their documents stamped, to get married or simply to not get arrested on bogus charges. Staff are not judged on their performance, but on how much money they kick back to their superiors, who keep them in their position in exchange, a system the Congolese refer to as *rapportage*.[46] This has led to a pronounced 'short-termism': officials try to get as much as they can out of their position for as long as it lasts, so are more focused on day-to-day gains rather than long-term vistas, which they may never be a part of. Congolese officials also tend to have fundamentally different mindsets from their international partners, which is a constant source of cross-purpose communication and frustration. This is often a matter of background and education. Many of the government's experts are part of the urban elite, are not always knowledgeable about conditions in the countryside, and have had little training in conflict transformation or innovative development solutions. International partners tend to come to the government with complex theoretical frameworks in a society where communication is primarily spoken rather than written, and implicit rather than explicit. Officials have few incentives to 'rock the boat' and risk their positions by actually naming sensitive issues on paper – better to keep things open to interpretation. Dealing with these communication problems takes time and patience, and international partners are often plagued by deadlines. They often feel that unless they take state officials by

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44   Boshoff et al (2010), p. i

45   Blundo and De Sardan (2006), pp. 15–68; Trefon (2011), p. 87-106. Salaries are estimated to make up only 5-10% of a civil servant's income.

46   See for example Eriksson Baaz's (2011) study into the Congolese police force, which moves its officers to 'wet' (lucrative) or 'dry' areas depending on how much they manage to make for their superiors.

the hand and push them hard, or work around them, nothing gets done. This makes Congolese counterparts feel patronised and only worsens their disengagement.[47] In all, the very system that is supposed to be in charge of reconstructing the country and building peace, and the foremost partner of international organisations, the government, is one of the least objectively capable of doing so.

It is also important to understand that what happens in the DRC happens not only because of elite interests, but because of the participation of many 'ordinary' Congolese in the maintenance of neo-patrimonial governance. The somewhat romantic notion of a 'bad government versus innocent people' needs to be deconstructed. We have already seen how Congolese are involved in the generation of violence at local level, but they also play a role in sustaining conflict because of what they do *not* do, which is to act as critical citizens and as a civil society counterweight to elite ambitions. There is little that elites cannot co-opt or bribe their way out of quite easily. The media is starved of resources and writes on demand for political interests. The Congolese rumour-mill and conspiracy-thinking is given a free rein.[48] Congolese non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are often not much better in holding elites to account. Many supposedly independent NGOs are part of clientelistic structures, act as springboards into politics or are mouthpieces for ethnic groups.[49] Some of the most critical NGO representatives have gone over to the government's side when offered official positions. The wild growth of NGOs in eastern Congo is not always a reflection of a sense of civic duty towards suffering compatriots, but an economic reaction to the sizeable 'development industry' that has grown over the years. Congolese NGOs elbow their way into meetings and adapt their mandates and (sometimes purely hypothetical) activities depending on the development craze of the day to find a way to get access to international funds. None of this is likely to make civil society a strong counterweight against elite ambitions. A notable exception is the Catholic Church, one of the most powerful institutions in the country, which has taken a critical position against the centralising tendencies of the government.[50]

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47   Autesserre (2014), pp. 68-95. There is something of an international empathy deficit with Congolese offi-cials sometimes (which I was certainly not immune to myself). These are not 'bad people'; they are people who grew up in circumstances where you use your elbows, your community or family connections to manoeuvre yourself into a position from where you can survive and, possibly, thrive. Development projects (and staff) are pawns in this game, so Congolese actors will logically try to get as much as they can out of them.

48   A particularly long-running rumour is that foreign powers want to carve up the eastern provinces of the DRC – the 'Balkanisation' theory. See for example Radio Okapi (2013); and Kets and De Vries (2014).

49   Blundo and De Sardan (2006); Pouligny (2006); International Alert (2010)

50   International Crisis Group (2015). The Catholic Church organised mass protests against changing the constitution to allow President Kabila to run for a third term.

Finally, democracy has not done much to improve elite accountability either. There are few political parties that run on a policy agenda and are not ethnically based, and votes are often bought.[51] In general, people have very few expectations from their politicians; the general consensus seems to be that fraud is inherent in the political process.[52] This is perhaps why the anger over the 'stolen' elections of 2011 led to resigned shoulder shrugging rather than large-scale demonstrations. Up until early 2015, there had not been much of a culture of protesting against the state. People seem to have had little confidence that they were capable of changing things by themselves and preferred to wait for outside forces to change the system.[53] Outside the (co-opted) NGO structures, there are few social networks that can mobilise people across communities, and an independent middle class, that usually forms the nexus of protest movements, hardly exists. The elites, despite their internal differences, are also united in maintaining the status quo. As such, a 'Congolese spring'is quite unlikely.[54] A notable exception was the large-scale protest that broke out against the government's attempts to change the constitution in early 2015. The protest movement was student-dominated and de-centralised, and a promising sign of critical citizenship. However, it's too early to say whether it has set a precedent. One of the reasons the movement had such an impact was because there were strong divisions in the governing coalition at that time, and some of these elites openly backed the protesters in parliament.[55] The government has cracked down on any sign of civic protest since then.[56]

'Peacebuilding' to strengthen state control

The incentives and dynamics above have largely influenced how Congolese authorities define solutions to the crisis. As there is little capacity or willingness across all levels of government institutions to develop transformative solutions to the crisis in the east, and civil society is too divided or co-opted to provide pushback, agenda setting is undertaken from the top down and largely dominated by the elites' patrimonial incentives, which are not always aimed at having real societal impact. Over the last few years the government has produced several overlapping frameworks and strategies for stabilization, peace consolidation, disarmament and demobilisation, and security sector reform. Taking the most relevant of those frameworks, a few telling similarities

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51   Vlassenroot and Romkema (2007), p. 12

52   Feeley and Choukri (2012); Vinck and Pham (2014)

53   Vlassenroot and Romkema (2007), p. 11

54   Stearns (2012)

55   Stearns (22 and 27 January and 11 February 2015). The changing of the constitution was also a symbolic rallying point that may not come again: other electoral changes can happen gradually and behind closed doors, giving people less 'ammunition' for protest.

56   Sawyer (2015)

stand out.[57] First, none of the frameworks has a conflict assessment or theory of change worth mentioning. They briefly mention the presence of armed groups and then launch into a long list of required activities. Second, there is an emphasis on expanding the state into administrative and security 'vacuums'. And third, support is requested mainly in terms of development hardware (roads, buildings, energy), equipment (transport, communications, agricultural inputs) and training, rather than for socially transformative issues such as inter-community dialogue, civil society strengthening, and oversight or improving state-society relations. As we shall see, these frameworks serve not to generate positive social change but to steer international support towards expanding the state's territorial control and influence.

A first priority of the central government is to eliminate by force anything it perceives as a threat to regime stability. The clearest threats are what the government considers to be 'foreign' rebel forces, which it cannot easily control through patronage, for example the Ugandan-led ADF, and especially the 'Rwandan' CNDP, and later the M23. The activities of these groups have a negative effect on the government's legitimacy across the east. There can be no discussion of the (sometimes legitimate) grievances these groups represent as these may shed a negative light on the nature of the state's engagement with the area; they can only be stamped out militarily.[58] The former Rwandan *genocidaires* of the FDLR are a special case, as they are formally an illegal armed group but in practice are long-time collaborators of the Congolese army, and a tool against Rwanda and its supposed interests in the east.[59] Other security issues are less urgent and can be dealt with in other ways. Grassroots grievances that local self-defence groups claim to represent are rarely taken seriously, and these groups are sidelined as 'bandits'. These groups can be bought off, integrated into state security structures or, in times of crisis, kept on hand to mobilise against 'foreign' armed groups.[60] The emphasis on military operations also provides a way to control the FARDC. The armed forces hold the means of coercion, and need to be 'fed' so their political sponsors do not lose control over them. An effective way to do so is to give the army a role in controlling lucrative terrain in the eastern provinces.[61] Military commanders do not answer to civilian authorities in the provinces and operate with practical impunity.

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57 In this case, the STAREC stabilization strategy (2009); the Integrated Programme for humanitarian, stabilization and development support (2014); the PNDDR-III programme for the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants (2014); and the various reform plans for the army and the police (2008).

58 Giustozzi (2011), pg 75-104, shows how this is a common approach by patrimonial states: recognizing the grievances of an opposition movement would risk turning it into a coherent counter-elite, which must be avoided at all costs. Using military force or individually tailored patronage agreements are a safer bet.

59 International Crisis Group (2009); Marijnen (2014); SSRC (2014)

60 *Le Figaro* (2013) for example reported how the Congolese government armed mayi-mayi groups like FPD and Shetani to fight the M23.

61 Stearns (2011), pp. 307-326; Deibert (2013); Verweijen (2013)

Discussions about military checks and balances are muzzled by presenting the east as existing in an open-ended 'state of emergency' that requires the FARDC to operate at full strength, with no time for reforms. This way the armed forces are kept content within the clientelistic system, not too weak, but not too strong either. Commanders may compete among each other, but there are no threats of the army uniting or perhaps even attempting a coup. In the meantime, the government is kept safe by the Republican Guard, which consists largely of loyal Katangans from the President's clan and is well equipped and paid.

In line with these interests, the government has requested security sector support from the international community mainly in terms of training, material and logistics. The army reform plan of 2008 (which is still active) reads like a US$686m shopping list for army, navy and air force equipment, and says little about improving command-and-control, parliamentary oversight, civil-military relations, or fighting impunity.[62] The internal reform of the army is considered to be a no-go area for foreign partners.[63] The government seems to tolerate the peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, largely for the support it gives the FARDC with logistics, rations, transport and, when required, fire support from its artillery and helicopters. Donor coordination around security issues is actively countered and the presidency has prioritised army training with separate bilateral donors. This 'train-and-equip' approach to army reform has had little impact on the continuing low combat capacity of the FARDC so far.

A second priority is to expand the state into the countryside, opening up the hinterland to state services and making a singular administrative model take root across the country. This is, of course, a legitimate goal: a state should be in control of its own territory and cannot be administered through a patchwork of different local governance models. There is, however, a flipside to this ambition. By expanding into isolated parts of the country, the GoDRC may also be trying to increase its control over sources of patronage and income, making customary local authorities more dependent on the formal political-bureaucratic chain of command.[64] Customary authorities have significant authority and legitimacy at community level, raise their own taxes and divide land between tenants. Depending on where they are in the patrimonial system, they use their competencies to leverage their power vis-à-vis the state. It is only logical that the state

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62 See Kets and De Vries (2014). The reform plan asks, among other requests, for US$241m for the air force, and US$211m for the navy. Only US$2.7m (or 0.39%) has been requested for civil-military cooperation. At this time, most 'soft' activities to improve army-civilian cohabitation are funded by international partners like EUSEC and UN-Women.

63 Boshoff et al (2010); Oxfam (2010); Kets and De Vries (2014);

64 Giustozzi (2011), pg 131-145, refers to this as 'sub-altern coalition-building', where local authorities are forced into a subordinate position to weaken their bargaining position and make them more dependent on the ruling elite.

reacts against this tendency, but it seems Kinshasa is trying to force a singular model on very different communities, who have their reasons not to trust the state as a neutral arbiter.[65] A gradual approach may have been better received, but the government is not wasting any time. 'Peace consolidation' means, more than anything else, 'consolidation of the state' to Kinshasa.

This interest in strengthening control over sources of patronage has shaped the government's discussion with its development partners. Like security sector support, the restoration of state authority is presented in a technical manner, requiring infra-structure, equipment and training more than oversight and monitoring. A phased approach is promoted: first roads to rural centres, then buildings and equipment, then training; once these preconditions have been met, state agents can be deployed.[66] The government dictates the pace and preconditions for the roll-out of the state this way and can speed up or delay the process where it sees fit. For example, Kinshasa has often moved faster on deploying the police across the countryside, an armed branch of government influence, than it has done on judges and judicial staff.[67] The need for better infrastructure is legitimate, as state agents often operate out of little more than shacks in the countryside and have few means of transport and communication. However, the emphasis on infrastructure and equipment perhaps also serves the purpose of visibly underlining the state's presence to local communities and showing 'who is in charge'. The government prioritises the *presence* of the state over the *content* of that state; once buildings are constructed and training has been given, there seems to be little attention paid to how state functionaries will actually engage with local citizens. The point is rather to add layers, structures, decision-making bodies, offices and staff functions – each layer with the possibility of multiplying transactions, increasing control and deriving revenues from the process.[68]

A third priority is to present broad socio-economic development programmes as a catch-all solution for a range of complex problems. Providing jobs to as wide a swathe of the population as possible is supposed to be the solution for all types of conflict, as armed groups can arise wherever there is unemployment.[69] Kinshasa has been hesitant about donors' emphasis on small-scale recovery programmes that target local conflict dynamics in the eastern provinces, as being 'discriminatory' against the rest

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65   Vinck et al (2008); Vinck and Pham (2014)

66   For example, in the STAREC framework, roads, infrastructure and logistical support to the deployment of state officials make up some US$500m, a little under half of STAREC's total requested budget.

67   ISSSS quarterly reports, 2009-2012

68   Trefon (2011), pp. 19-48

69   Government of the DRC (STAREC,). The same STAREC was changed in 2014 from an eastern-only stabiliza-tion programme to a nationwide programme for economic development. See also Chapter 4.

of the country's suffering people.[70] In principle, the government's plea for jobs and the spreading of benefits is understandable. Again, however, there are subtle differences to note. At a technical level, the government's development priorities usually take the form of 'hardware' (transport, agriculture, schools, water pumps, etc) but do not clarify *how* such infrastructure will create jobs and subsequently strengthen cohesion and reduce conflict, especially as discussions do not take place with the communities that are meant to benefit from these works. There are few labour market analyses that project objectives are based on, let alone context-specific theories of change. Moreover, and perhaps more urgently, at a political level, development programmes have been used as a tool to buy loyalty from certain groups. There have been frequent attempts to push development projects into areas that are important for electoral or strategic reasons, or where there are strong customary authorities to co-opt. This was particularly apparent when the I4S (about which more in Chapter 4) started developing new projects in 2011, an election year. Various authorities pushed the strategy hard to develop projects for areas that were chosen more to give them a chance at an electoral seat than because there were urgent stabilization needs there.[71] The government is happy to receive funds for post-conflict recovery activity but is less keen to actually use them for that purpose.

It is difficult to see how Kinshasa plans to ensure that these activities contribute to peace: whether there will be a government budget to operationalise or maintain structures, how international programmes will 'fill gaps' or how impunity and corruption will be curbed. However, it is not easy to have a discussion about 'proper' development planning with the central government. The international community has little leverage to change the way the government operates, something what will be seen in the next chapter. Tough-sounding measures like cutting back development funds are more likely to negatively impact on the local population than on the elites who call the shots but personally do not feel the sting of aid conditionality. The government doesn't need Western donors the way some other fragile states do: Congolese elites make a good income from their patrimonial networks and international corporations are happy to invest in the mineral sector without asking difficult questions about human rights and political reforms.[72] Kinshasa is also good at 'talking the talk': all the laws and frameworks for post-conflict engagement are there, but implementation dies a death by a thousand

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70 See, for example, the Integrated Programme (Government of the DRC, Concept Note, 2014). This feeling was shared by people at local level. There were frequent comments from people in areas such as Idjwi, Maniema and Butembo that they were discriminated against because they were at (relative) peace, and that perhaps they should start fighting in order to receive development support.

71 Discussion with a former UNDP staff member, October 2013. For example, in South Kivu the government insisted on projects in Mboko (a Babembe stronghold, which tended to vote for the opposition candidate Tshisekedi), Miti (the hometown of the minister of Interior), and Idjwi Island (which had strong traditional authorities).

72 See for example Trefon (2011), pp. 19-48; Curtis (2013); and Englebert (2014)

cuts: the government adds framework upon framework, does not attend working groups, prepare budgets or share information, leading to endless delays. Kinshasa also uses the international partners' aid commitments against them. Quoting the Paris Principles for national ownership of development aid, the government says it has repeatedly informed donors of its priorities (special interest-serving as they may be); therefore, if donors do not provide funds to implement those priorities, it is donor's fault if the peace process loses momentum.[73]

The particular neo-patrimonial interests behind the government's agenda for stabilization and peacebuilding are further revealed when Kinshasa's priorities are compared with those of some communities in the eastern Congo. Population surveys by the Harvard Humanitarian Institute over 2013-14 have shown how these communities promote a more holistic approach to peacebuilding than the government does.[74] The origins of the conflict were seen by many people as exploitation of natural resources and poverty (so far in line with the government) but they also emphasised struggles for power at local level, ethnic divisions, and access to land: a notably more 'localised' conflict assessment than that of Kinshasa. To bring about lasting peace, people also prioritised 'soft issues' more than the Kinshasa-preferred military response: i.e., encouraging inter-ethnic dialogue (as a first priority), establishing the truth about the conflict, fighting corruption, and promoting accountability and justice. Having a dialogue with the armed groups is mentioned as well as using force against them. Projecting state authority across the eastern provinces may not receive an unequivocal welcome either: communities doubted the government's commitment to improving security and bettering their lives, a trend that had actually worsened since 2008. Communities are in favour of a bottom-up prioritisation process rather than broad frameworks 'parachuted' in from Kinshasa which they never had a hand in developing.[75] Not surprisingly perhaps, local people's voices have largely been left out of the discussion.

To summarise, the government sets out a technical and non-political approach for peacebuilding that mainly serves the purpose of extending its control over sources of political and economic patronage and have little to do with the root causes and drivers of conflict in the east. Very importantly, *these incentives have not fundamentally changed over the last years*. There is little willingness to change the status quo, even if it is harmful to many people in the eastern provinces, as it touches upon too many interests of decision-makers inside the country. This is why the cyclical engagement with the eastern provinces should not come as a surprise to longer-term Congo watchers, nor should the new cycle of disengagement and power consolidation after the defeat of

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73   For example, the Integrated Programme states that stabilization didn't work in the east because international partners didn't sufficiently follow the government's priorities and didn't coordinate.

74   Vinck and Pham (2014). Harvard's research was based on a sample of 5,166 people in the Kivus and Ituri.

75   Oxfam (2012)

the M23. The foremost international 'victim' of these cycles of disengagement is the long-embattled peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO. Over the last few years, the mission has been pushed back and forth by the government, and has been heavily criticised by civil society and NGOs for it supposed lack of effectiveness. Why isn't MONUSCO more pro-active, innovative and tougher with the GoDRC? This has everything to do with the enormous constraints the mission has to deal with. We will turn to this next.

3 MONUSCO's constraints-driven strategy

Two things should be clear from the previous pages on the complexity of the conflict and the incentive structure of the Congolese political system: first, that outside interveners can play only a very limited role in 'solving' the conflict in the east; and second, that they have very little leverage with the Congolese authorities to change the way things are done. This puts MONUSCO, which is supposed to be the international 'lead' for peacebuilding and political dialogue, in a very difficult position.

MONUSCO has to deal with three types of constraints. The first are international constraints. These relate to the lack of political support and the way in which the mission is left out on a limb in dealing with the Congolese government. The second are contextual constraints. The mission is effectively forced to support what is part of the problem because of the nature of the DRC's political system. Finally, there are institutional and professional constraints, which are ingrained ways of responding along pre-established formats in peacekeeping missions. These three types of constraints have led to a largely supply-driven strategy which has been defined more in terms of the mission's own means than its contextual ends or impact. Despite MONUSCO's aggressive post-M23 discourse, the mission's approach post-2013 has not changed much, guided as it is by the same set of constraints.

International constraints

A UN peacekeeping mission is never a single organism with a clear top-down command-and-control chain. It's an amalgam of competing state interests and agendas, held together by a Special Representative (the SRSG). It can only do what the international community, through the Security Council, allows it to do. That, in turn, depends on the strategic interests in the country where the mission is deployed. These strategic interests are unclear in the case of the DRC, and as a result MONUSCO is left in limbo when it comes to the political and military support it needs to do what its mandate stipulates.

There is a general lack of understanding of the conflict in the Congo and what to do with it, which has an important impact on what the mission is allowed to do. As Pouligny (2006) puts it: 'A peace operation is largely conceived in the antechambers of international organizations (…) according to parameters that often have very little to do

with the local and regional context.'[76] The situation in the Congo is ever-changing and it is difficult to keep track of what is happening on the ground for staff based out of New York, Kinshasa or any of the capital cities. The reports they receive from embassies, UN agencies and MONUSCO tend to be diplomatically phrased, often focusing on incidents rather than trends and highlighting positive developments. They are also kept as short as possible, as complex, long reports are cut down when they go 'up the line', or are simply not read. To get a grip on the complexity of the crisis, headquarters staff tend to simplify the situation to an understandable storyline that fits existing models of intervention. Autesserre (2012) shows how these 'tales' usually centre around the exploitation of minerals as the principal cause of conflict, sexual violence as a consequence, and the restoration of state authority and the filling of 'state vacuums' as a solution.[77] The lack of understanding is not helped by the high turnover of international staff, who usually leave their post after two years. This leaves little institutional memory, and leads to a recycling of the same old approaches for 'solving' the conflict in the eastern DRC.

Moreover, even if international actors understood the conflict dynamics in detail, it is questionable whether this would lead to more coordinated political engagement with the DRC and the region. There is little strategic interest in the Congo. Quick (2013) shows how Security Council attention on the DRC peaks in times of crisis (i.e., in 2003, 2008 and 2012), with long periods of little interest in between; roughly the same cyclical engagement, ironically, as the Congolese government has taken. Compared to strategically important crises such as Afghanistan or Syria, the DRC crisis has been a long-running sideshow.[78] In donor states, Congo policy is usually delegated to Africa bureaus of foreign ministries.[79] There seems little willingness to escalate pressing issues in the DRC to a higher political level and have a tough discussion with the government. The traffic light is more or less always on orange: the Security Council is worried about the situation and will cling to every good news story coming out of the country, but is unwilling to do much more or become more political about what is going on.

Nowhere is the lack of strategic interest in Congo better reflected than in the composition of the MONUSCO brigades and in the caveats for the use of force they have been given by the troop-contributing countries (TCCs), particularly India, Pakistan,

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76   Pouligny (2016), pp. 1-14

77   Autesserre (2012). Journalism in the DRC follows the same lines. If anything is written on the Congo, it tends to be when a crisis erupts (such as in 2008 and 2012), and on the basis of a one-sided conflict analysis, usually 'armed groups fight over valuable minerals'.

78   Quick (2013). This is not just true for the UNSC: both the African Union's and the US's Special Envoys for the Great lakes Region, Boubacar Diarra and Russ Feingold, have ended their mandates without being replaced. There is currently no EU Special Envoy for the region, only a senior coordinator.

79   Stearns (2013)

Bangladesh and Uruguay. First of all, there are not enough troops to perform the job the mission is supposed to do. The military assets of the mission, its 20,000 soldiers, its helicopters and armoured vehicles, are deceptive: the peacekeeping mission actually has a limited footprint. There is roughly one peacekeeper for every 725 Congolese people and per 10km^2 of largely inaccessible terrain in the eastern provinces, so armed groups have free play for logistical reasons alone.[80] The sheer size of the eastern DRC and the lack of road access mean blue helmets are restricted to patrolling around small, 'Fort Apache'-style outposts in the countryside. Second, even if they had the means to do what they should, operational caveats get in the way. Most troop contributors stick to the 'traditional mechanisms of peacekeeping' including the use of military force only in defence of the 'mission' or the 'mandate' – both rather ambiguous concepts that can be translated as liberally or conservatively as the troop contributors choose.[81] These caveats have led to confusion, risk-averse behaviour, mixed command and reporting lines, and slow reaction speed.[82] MONUSCO has been heavily criticised over the last few years about incidents of blue helmets 'hiding' in their bases and not reacting when nearby villages were being attacked.[83] FARDC soldiers deployed with MONUSCO have also complained about the mission's unwillingness to patrol and fight on foot on the frontlines, while they take all the risks themselves.[84] The troop contributors have been criticised by the same Western countries that are unwilling to deploy their own troops as peacekeepers in the DRC. This has led to slow deliberations about the rate of troop reimbursements, and as a result, even more foot-dragging by the TCCs.[85] In other words, even if MONUSCO had the mandate and means to go after armed groups, its own troop contributors would probably still not let it do so.

The one-sided understanding of the crisis in the DRC, coupled with the lack of strategic interest, has left MONUSCO in a difficult position. Its mandates symbolise the lowest common denominator between Council members' positions and that of the Congolese government, and do little about the political drivers of conflict. Mandates emphasise a (limited) military approach to keep out armed groups and protect the population,

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80   Author's calculation, based on 20,000 peacekeepers for the (estimated) 14.5 million Congolese and
     190,211km2 of North and South Kivu and Ituri, where most of the troops are deployed. In reality, the division
     is much starker: many of the peacekeepers are not deployed in the field, but on guard duty or in other
     supportive roles, and a few hundred of them are deployed in Maniema and North Katanga as well.

81   Pouligny (2006), pp. 96-154. For a good overview of MONUSCO troop contributors' positions, see the
     UN Security Council debate 'New Trends in Peacekeeping', June 2014.

82   See, among others Pouligny (2006); Kjeksrud and Ravndal (2010); and Doss (2011)

83   The reality is often more complex than these criticisms suggest: MONUSCO forces also frequently suffer
     from communication problems, or do not have the means to reach the sight of an accident in time.

84   Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen (2012)

85   Bosco (2013). Every blue helmet gets a bonus of some US$1,000 per month. This rate has changed little
     since the early 1990s, when peacekeeping missions were considerably less risky.

support army reform, demobilise armed groups, support elections, restore state authority to 'stabilize' the east, and fight sexual violence: in all, a fairly standard and technical peacekeeping menu that has been more or less recycled every year between 2008 and the present day. MONUSCO is also left largely on its own to work with the government, as New York offloads politically difficult discussions on to the mission. MONUSCO is a fig leaf for a lack of international willingness, and is sometimes praised, but mainly blamed for anything that happens in the country by the same states that prefer not to get their own hands dirty. In this way, the peacekeeping mission is left in political-military limbo.

Contextual constraints

The contextual constraints of working in the DRC are not difficult to see. MONUSCO is in the paradoxical position that it is supposed to support a government and a wider political system which, because of the way it functions, is effectively part of the problem. The central government's agenda may not always be shared by the people of the eastern DRC, who are meant to be the main beneficiaries of MONUSCO's support, but it is nevertheless the government of a sovereign UN Member State and, as such, the mission's foremost partner. MONUSCO is only active in the DRC because the government has requested its presence – and this invitation can be withdrawn at any moment. This puts the mission in a difficult position: as the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) guidance puts it, 'a UN peacekeeping mission can only succeed if the parties on the ground are genuinely committed to resolving conflict through a political process', which, as we have seen, is rather doubtful.[86] MONUSCO has had to support poorly executed military operations, support fraudulent elections, help roll out a predatory state system, and push for reforms with the very people whose interests are directly opposed to changes in the status quo. It has done so partly because it hoped to have a positive impact or, barring that, to achieve some damage control, but also because it did not have nearly as much choice in the matter as some UN critics seem to believe. MONUSCO is a multilateral tool to support states; it does not have the 'luxury' of standing on the sidelines and working around the government the way that NGOs or humanitarian agencies can.

Moreover, even if it knew exactly where to start, MONUSCO has little leverage to change the way the Congolese government works. The mission doesn't necessarily have a lot to offer that the government needs, except for logistical support for elections or occasional military support in times of crisis. The mission dares not push the government too far: if it should be asked to leave, it might well be the ordinary Congolese in the east who would suffer the most, as the mission could no longer protect them or exert any damage

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86 United Nations (2012) p. 6

control around the FARDC's military operations. As MONUSCO is the world's biggest peacekeeping mission, being asked to leave could also seriously damage the reputation of peacekeeping operations in general. Kinshasa knows MONUSCO's lack of leverage very well, and has a long history of more or less ignoring the mission's diplomatic overtures and advocacy.[87] The relationship between MONUSCO and the government has always been strained, and the mission has had to walk on eggshells in criticising human rights abuses and the absence of reforms.[88] The government has generally left MONUSCO to do what it likes, as long as these are harmless technical interventions, and has slapped it on the fingers as soon as the mission seemed to impede on what the government considered its sovereign prerogatives. It has rarely pro-actively come to the mission to ask for help, except in times of crisis. A 'realist' would perhaps see these crisis moments, such as the fall of Goma, as the time to put the thumbscrews on Kinshasa and demand reforms in exchange for support. However, this not only fundamentally misunderstands the relationship between the UN and the government (the UN is, more than ever, meant to support a government unconditionally in times of crisis), but also underestimates the resilience of the political system to outside pressure: the government couldn't change its system if it wanted to and political survival trumps other considerations. A confrontational approach would likely have backfired. Understandably, MONUSCO may have thought it better to prevent these sorts of clashes and instead re-position itself with every new turn of government policy.

Institutional and professional constraints

Besides having its freedom to manoeuvre curtailed by a lack of Security Council support and the inherent paradox of working with the Congolese government, MONUSCO also has to work within serious institutional and professional constraints. These constraints have naturally influenced priority setting and implementation: the most innovative ideas in the world could not be realized if staff doesn't know how, or when they aren't motivated.Institutional and professional constraints are not particular to MONUSCO: researchers like Pouligny (2006), Hochschildt (2010) and Autesserre (2014), and even the most recent World Development Report (2015), have shown that dominant institutional practices, narratives and biases within most peacekeeping missions and development organisations dictate how they respond to challenges.[89]

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87 Stearns (2014): 'In private, some Kabila allies speculate that the bark of those diplomats will be much worse than their bite. "After all, what will they do? Cut humanitarian aid? Withdraw their peacekeeping mission?" One told me.'

88 Stearns (2013), for example, shows how MONUSCO had to keep silent on the treatment of members of the opposition, human rights abuses and governance issues between 2009 and 2012.

89 Pouligny (2006); Hochschildt (2010); Autesserre (2014); World Bank Group (2015); Walkup (1997)

A first institutional constraint is the mission's set of rules and regulations. MONUSCO, like any peacekeeping mission, is subject to a stupendous bureaucratic system that cripples the mission's flexibility. Budgets need to be approved on the basis of outcomes expected a year in advance, which makes forward planning an exercise in crystal-ball gazing.[90] Mission sections are chronically understaffed as the human resource system has slowed to a crawl. Particularly destructive to the mission's effectiveness are its restrictive security rules. Armed convoys are required to take staff to areas where security incidents have occurred in recent months, which limits their flexibility and response speed. Security rules tend to alienate the local population, whose main interaction with peacekeepers seems to consist of seeing them drive by in armoured convoys.[91] Longer-term deployments in fragile areas can only be done out of a UN military base, which makes it hard for civilian staff to be seen as neutral interlocutors.[92] MONUSCO bases look like fortresses with barbed wire, meant to keep people out. All this makes the Congolese wonder whether the peacekeepers are not more concerned about their own security than that of the people they are trying to protect. This has led to frustration and anger.[93] The mission may have all sorts of valid reasons for their security rules, but at the end of the day they create distance from the very people the mission is trying to help.

A second problem is complexity bias. Field staff suffer from cognitive overload: there are too many complex, opaque processes going on around them to make sense of. Because of time and security constraints, interaction with Congolese communities is limited to short field visits and discussions with formal authorities, so only limited information is gathered. Field staff are under constant pressure from headquarters to provide ready-to-go solutions to complex problems. There seem to be some different perceptions of priorities between field staff and headquarters, with the latter thinking their field colleagues are too focused on 'local issues' instead of the bigger picture; and field staff thinking their colleagues at HQ are too optimistic about government rhetoric and 'paper progress', which does not make the slightest difference to Congolese in the eastern provinces.[94] This tendency for simplification is strengthened by the UN's preference for thematic knowledge over country-specific knowledge. To allow staff to be moved from one mission to the other, peacekeeping staff specialise over the years in certain themes ('job families' like DDR or human rights), which are supposed to be

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90 Quick (2013)

91 Pouligny (2006), pp. 96-154; Autesserre (2014), pp. 216-246

92 Autesserre (2014), pp. 115-158

93 Pouligny (2006); Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen (2012); Vinck and Pham (2014); and Autesserre (2014)

94 Autesserre (2014), pp. 20-56 and 115-158

more or less universally applicable across contexts, based on ready-to-use templates.[95] Such templates are particularly attractive in complex situations when staff are under pressure to deliver, as they provide quick 'answers' that are familiar to the hierarchy. A process known as 'confirmation bias' naturally sets in: selectively focusing on information that supports previously held beliefs.[96] In the case of MONUSCO, this results in the overt emphasis on the restoration of formal state authority to achieve peace at the local level. Whether the mission is building up or phasing out, the emphasis is always on support for military action, and building up the army, police and administration. The use of this 'state authority' language has become so ingrained in the organisation that it may not realise how alien some of it sounds to Congolese, who clearly have different experiences with their own government. Confirmation bias is more likely to happen and lead to 'groupthink' in organisations with top-down priority setting, such as a military organisation or, indeed, a peacekeeping mission. Thematic specialisation and confirmation bias helps staff to have quick 'answers' ready, but also leads to short-term, technical solutions being proposed for long-term and highly complex problems.

Third, falling back on top-down, rapid fixes, in its turn, is strengthened by upward accountability for results. Staff are responsible to their direct superiors and the broader mission plan, not to the local population.[97] The mission emphasises 'visible impact', so staff and reports will naturally emphasise quantifiable results (number of training sessions organised and patrols undertaken, kilometres of roads rehabilitated, etc.) without trying to assess what the impact of such activities could be on the broader peace process or whether local communities appreciate such activities.[98] This dynamic is reinforced by what is known as 'sunk cost bias'. This is the tendency to continue projects or activities once initial investments have been made, as changing tactics mid-course is not only administratively difficult, but would also be recognition that past activities have been wasted.[99] As to sunk cost bias, MONUSCO is in a difficult position: the mission has stressed that the 'old' way of peacekeeping didn't work the way it should have and got in the way when Goma fell, but as we shall see in the rest of this chapter, this has not led to a fundamental change in mission tactics.

Finally, there is an increasing body of literature that examines the impact of stress on the way international organisations work. Walkup (1997) shows how stress leads to overwork, detachment, blaming others for a lack of results and, finally, reality

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95 Autesserre (2014) pp. 68-96; Quick (2015), p. 149, quotes a 2010 donor-led stabilization evaluation which states that, 'MONUC and the UN system are not organized to regularly and systematically analyze local, shifting realities and to assess the implications'.

96 World Bank Group (2015), pp. 182-183

97 Hochschildt (2010), p. 65; Autesserre (2014), pp. 194-215

98 Autesserre (2010 and 2014); Quick (2015)

99 World Bank Group (2015), pp. 185-186

distortion: staff start to believe that despite what they see and hear, what they do *must* have a positive effect on peace and development somewhere, as the thought that all that work was for nothing is just too painful to imagine. These stress-based dynamics are, not surprisingly, found in MONUSCO, which has to deal with an unwilling government and is blamed by all sides for its deficiencies. Mahoney (2013) captured the resulting frustration well: 'One of the most powerful impressions the author got during this field research [in DRC] was the deep sense of sadness, impotence and hopelessness shared by so many of the most committed people trying to help. These emotions seem warranted by the consistently bad news they live with. Nevertheless, a sense of impotence is one of the worst inhibiting forces against any level of collective strategic thinking and planning (…) Creativity also suffers: if we don't believe that solutions exist, we are less able to look for them.'[100]

These international, contextual, institutional and professional constraints put MONUSCO in a very difficult situation. First, it is mandated to support what is effectively part of the problem, i.e., the Congolese political system. It has few bargaining chips, so can be pushed around with practical immunity. Second, through the combined effects of institutional and professional culture, biases and stress, standardised, simplified approaches are promoted for extremely complex problems, and do not have the effect they should. Finally, as there is a short international attention span and little strategic interest in the DRC, MONUSCO could have the best ideas in the world but would not be able to get the political support and military means needed to put them into practice. Perhaps not surprisingly, the strategy MONUSCO has chosen for eastern DRC is based on what it thinks it can do *despite* these constraints.

The result: a supply-driven, open-ended strategy

'Strategy' is a concept that means different things to different people, but Simpson (2013) gives a useful summary: 'Strategy is the calculation of objectives, concepts and resources, within acceptable bands of risks, to create more favourable outcomes than might otherwise exist (…) strategy must understand a problem on its own terms, not through dogmatically applied conceptual structures (…) pragmatically drawing upon doctrine to create a tailored approach (…) a dialogue between the product and the relevant technique.'[101] In other words, strategy is about understanding the political problem and the potential end game, focusing your means towards that end, and flexibly adapting the approach whenever required. As we shall see, MONUSCO has never had the leeway to develop such a game plan and follows an approach based more on means than on ends.

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100 Mahoney (2013)
101 Simpson (2013) pp. 1-14 and pp. 111-156

Considering the constraints mentioned in this chapter, any MONUSCO strategy would have to stay within certain boundaries. First, the causes of conflict related to the predatory nature of the state or ethnic issues need to be handled carefully, as it is unclear how to engage with these to begin with, and raising the issues might provoke Kinshasa into speeding up the mission's withdrawal. Second, the mission's end-goal needs to remain open and ambiguous. That way, options remain on the table to either scale-up the mission, should the east come apart at the seams again, or to slim down. MONUSCO needs to keep emphasising progress, as this will maintain morale and consistency, keep the government content, and prevent doubt and navel-gazing in the UN Security Council. The easiest way to show progress is to focus on activities the mission knows how to carry out and which the central government accepts – so nothing too complicated and with uncertain effects. These considerations have made MONUSCO define its approach in a particularly constant way: despite the ever-changing context of eastern DRC and the re-branding of activities, on closer observation, MONUSCO has undertaken the same sort of work for the last five years or so.

As to the causes of conflict: the mission seems to pick and choose among the complex interplay of root causes, drivers and multipliers of conflict those that it wants to address. Security Council reports and mandates have mostly defined the 'root causes' of conflict as state vacuums, impunity, regional interests in minerals and 'governance', without really explaining what those mean or how they relate to each other.[102] Considering the activities it has put in place for protection of civilians and training of state agents, MONUSCO seems to be addressing the consequences of violence more than the causes of it. This limited analysis has two obvious benefits though: first, it avoids difficult discussions about the predatory nature of the state, so it is palatable to the mission's host and will lead to less interference; and second, the way the conflict is defined fits well with the traditional toolkit of a peacekeeping mission. If problems are thought to be caused by faltering military operations and capacity shortfalls of administration, police and justice, then the mission's traditional tools of support for military operations and training, equipment and support for the deployment of state actors fit well.
The mission's conflict analysis is supply-driven this way: instead of basing activities on an analysis of conflict, it bases the analysis of conflict on the type of activities it has available. Ferguson (1990) would call this an example of 'DevSpeak': 'a distinctive style of reasoning, implicitly (and perhaps unconsciously) reasoning backwards from the necessary conclusions (…) to the premises required to generate those conclusions.'[103] Or, less prosaically: if you have a hammer, all your problems start to look like nails.

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102 See, for example, the Secretary-General's report of 27 February 2013, which more or less heaps together the 'root causes' as security vacuums, natural resources, the role of neighbouring countries, impunity for perpetrators, intercommunity feuds and weak state capacity.

103 Ferguson (1990), quoted in Walkup (1997)

Despite the many changes in the DRC context, MONUSCO's goals have remained remarkably similar from 2011 to 2015. They are summed up by a 2013 Security Council report as: 'the reduction of armed violence, violence against civilians and sexual violence to a level that can be effectively managed by national security and justice institutions; stabilization through the establishment of functional state institutions in conflict-affected and mining areas; and a functioning democratic order that reduces risks of instability, including adequate political space, observance of human rights and credible elections, on a regular basis.'[104] These goals are not only clearly linked to the activity-driven analysis mentioned above, they are also very ambitious: they seem to list all the things the country hasn't got, and has never had, and turns them into a strategy. They are also highly ambiguous. The theory of change behind these goals is never specified: for example, how will expanding the state help to stabilize it? Who defines when a democratic order is 'functional'? How do you measure whether that point has been reached and the time is right for an exit of the mission? Instead, progress seems to be defined by the number of activities the mission implements. Most Security Council reports start by saying that there 'has been progress, but challenges remain' and sketch the political situation, then spend many paragraphs outlining what MONUSCO has done, without linking these activities (or 'inputs') to concrete outputs in terms of peace and security or to the political analysis which the report started off with. There seems to be an assumption that the mission has a positive impact *because* it is active. None of this is particularly 'SMART' but that, of course, is the point: if there is no clarity about the end game for the mission, and there was no 'bar' or baseline set to begin with, then it is also impossible to define benchmarks for what objectively constitutes success, leaving it up to MONUSCO and the government to fill in how they see fit.[105] The mission and the government undertake a yearly evaluation of the situation in the eastern provinces to decide on the required size and scope of the mission, but the results of these evaluations are kept classified. This ambiguity leaves all the options on the table to either withdraw or strengthen MONUSCO – whatever option works at that point for the GoDRC and the Security Council.

To sum up, and to go back to Simpson's definition of a strategy: instead of developing goals and an approach based on an assessment ('the political problem on its own terms') and undertaking tailored activities linked to it ('a dialogue between product and relevant technique'), MONUSCO has more or less inverted this idea: it sets out what it feels it can do first, and then deducts goals and an overall approach out of it. MONUSCO

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104 Secretary-General's Special Report on the DRC, 27 February 2013. For other examples, see Resolution 1991 (June 2011), Resolution 2053 (June 2012), Resolution 2098 (March 2013) and Resolution 2147 (March 2014), which all more or less state the same end goals. Most of them also define the benchmarks for an exit of the mission as a reduction of the threats to the population and the restoration of state authority.

105 SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. Basically, a standard to ensure programmes do not get carried away by their own ambitions.

defines its strategy in terms of its means rather than its ends, which makes it supply-driven and, as such, not really a strategy in the original sense of the word. What little strategy the mission has, seems to be focused more on 'internal' audiences – New York and Kinshasa – than on contextual impact. Considering the complexity of the conflict and the many constraints on the mission, the lack of an in-depth strategy cannot be entirely surprising. In many ways, MONUSCO is doing what it can in an impossible situation. Still, it is hard to escape the feeling that efforts are going to waste this way.

Post-M23: the FIB instead of a strategic re-assessment

The fall of Goma at the end of 2012 would seem to be the perfect outside 'shock' to break through the mission's ingrained thinking. That MONUSCO had stood aside to let the M23 enter the most strategic town in eastern Congo led to a crisis atmosphere inside the Security Council. Some outside observers thought that MONUSCO's days were numbered and that the mission would have to fundamentally overhaul its approach if it wanted to survive this crisis.[106]

The mission initially seems to have got exactly the overhaul it needed. The new special representative, Martin Kobler, energetically set the mission in overdrive in 2013, 'talking the talk' on addressing the political causes of conflict and being a constant presence in the eastern provinces and the media. The mission also outlined what seemed to be a new approach, dividing into pillars of support for confidence-building and reforms related to the Peace Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF); protection of civilians through more risk-taking patrolling and early warning networks; and stabilization with quick-impact 'Islands of Stability' to compliment the ongoing works under the I4S (more about which in the next chapter).[107] By far the most visible new element of the mission was the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), which was set up to pro-actively take the fight to the armed groups and was at the time widely hailed as a new type of aggressive 'peace enforcement'. In line with the renewed focus on the east, a substantial part of the mission was re-deployed to the eastern provinces as well. As Kobler put it: 'fourteen years of a static approach have proven insufficient. (…) We are not in the DRC to react but to act, we are not here to deter but to prevent, and (…) we must make peace a long term reality.'[108] These were hopeful words indeed.

However, one should be careful to look beyond this energetic new rhetoric, the mission's thematic re-structuring and the flurry of activities, at what is actually being done

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106 For example, Boutelis (2012), *Will MONUSCO fall with Goma?*
107 *Peace It!* MONUSCO mission concept (2013); UNSC Resolution 2098
108 SRSG speeches to the UN Security Council, 'Turning promises into deeds', 13 January 2014 and 'Building on the Momentum', 14 March 2014

differently than before. In the context of the Congo post-M23, a genuine strategic re-assessment would mean that partners would have taken the time to reflect on what the situation was on the ground, how (and whether) the parties' incentives had changed, and what the mission could realistically do with the means at its disposal. Instead, the mission seems to have rushed on as fast as it could, re-branding what is, on closer observation, not that different an approach from before. The end goals of the mission are the same as in earlier mandates: reduction of the threat of armed groups, protection of civilians and restoration of state authority. Neither does the mission necessarily do things differently than before, as it still has the same toolkit at its disposal: support for military operations, training and equipment, support for elections, et cetera.[109] The amped-up discourse around national reform and the need for 'politics first' looks good but is rather deceiving and, as we have seen, remains steadfastly ignored by the central government. This is not to say that MONUSCO's new energy has no inherent value, but it may go a bit too far to credit the mission for boldly going in a new direction. Considering the mission's constraints, this cannot be entirely surprising: even with the best intentions in the world, MONUSCO can only operate within the boundaries discussed earlier in this chapter.

To understand how constrained the mission still is by international agendas post-M23, it is useful to take a closer look at the much-discussed Force Intervention Brigade, the FIB. The UN has presented the FIB as a means to create space for the political process, and time for the Congolese army to take over operations.[110] The FIB has been hailed by the wider international community as a break with the past: a peace enforcement brigade that fights hand in hand with the FARDC to 'mop up' the last remaining armed groups and force them to disarm. On closer inspection, there are three problems with this type of discourse. First, the FIB is not that new because of *what* it does: it is more of a robust support-giver than an offensive force. Second, the FIB isn't new because of *why* it does what it does: troop-contributing state interests guide the FIB's agenda as much as any other MONUSCO battalion. And third, the FIB may not have had the game-changing impact on the perceptions of eastern Congolese as the discourse would like.

First, the Intervention Brigade is not that new because of *what* it does, supposedly aggressively fighting back armed groups. The UN has something of a history of operating aggressively against armed groups in other peacekeeping theatres, but what is different this time around is the FIB's mandate to undertake *unilateral* military operations, without

109 See all UNSC reports from 2013 onwards.
110 UN Security Council Resolution 2147 (2014), pp. 5-7

being in support of the national army.[111] However, SRSG Kobler has made it clear that this will not happen, as unilateral operations cannot ensure that the FARDC could 'hold' the zone 'cleared' by the Brigade – not to mention the diplomatic problems this would probably cause with Kinshasa.[112] More importantly, however, looking beyond the aggressive rhetoric, the FIB's actual tactics on the ground show it to be more of a robust support-giving force than an offensive military force. It more or less does what other MONUSCO forces do, except, on occasion, more 'robustly' so. This is shown in what is arguably the brigade's greatest feat of arms, its role in the defeat of the M23. The FIB acted as a three-front defensive blocking force, allowing the Congolese army to free troops to surround M23 positions in a pincer movement. The FIB took substantially more risks than MONUSCO normally would have, in some cases engaged its infantry directly with the rebels, and provided robust fire and logistical support to the Congolese armed forces, which made a big difference in defeating the rebellion. In the end though, the M23 was defeated because it decided to fight in regular infantry formations instead of using guerrilla tactics, and because the Congolese army deployed troops capable of combined arms operations, which were properly equipped, fought hard and were led by specially selected commanders not linked to patrimonial military networks in the east.[113] Most critically perhaps was that due to strong international pressure, Rwanda decided not to intervene on the M23's side this time.[114] This should nuance the Brigade's role a little. More than anything else, the FIB is a force multiplier; it is not an aggressive front-line force. That role has always been played by the Congolese army.

Second, the Intervention Brigade isn't that new because of *why* it does what it does. Its activities show that it is an extension of state interests as much as other MONUSCO brigades are, except that these interests are more regional this time. This is clear from the way in which the force was set up after the fall of Goma.[115] The FIB was a creation of the South African Development Community (SADC), as South Africa, Tanzania and Angola have strong strategic and business ties with Kinshasa, and a more difficult

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111 Both UNPROFOR in Bosnia (1992-95) and UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone (1996-2006) undertook 'peace enforcement' operations against armed groups. In the DRC, MONUSCO attack helicopters bombarded rebels outside Sake in 2006 and Goma in 2008, and MONUC's Guatemalan Special Forces hunted LRA-fighters in Province Orientale in 2006.

112 Martin Kobler in *Deutsche Welle* (2014)

113 Olivier (2013). Many of the FARDC's eastern commanders were re-deployed to Kinshasa so they would remain out of the way.

114 Olivier (2013). Stearns (2012) quotes a Rwandan insider saying that Kigali was aware that if a single South African soldier was killed by the M23, Kigali would have all of SADC against it.

115 Lamont and Skeppstrom (2014); Hogg and Charbonneau (2013); Stearns (2013)

relationship with Rwanda.[116] President Kabila held off an earlier suggestion for a regional force, in which Rwanda and Uganda would play a role, preferring to work directly with his allies instead. The FIB was originally meant to be a regional African brigade working in parallel to MONUSCO, and it was only after discussions between UN peacekeeping-chief Ladsous and the African Union that the brigade was finally integrated, despite strong doubts from other MONUSCO troop contributors.[117] The way in which the Brigade has targeted its opponents since its formation makes it hard to escape the conclusion that it reflects the limited strategic goals of its troop contributors and the Congolese government more than those of broader peacebuilding. The FIB was praised for its robust support in getting the M23 out, a Rwandan proxy force, which was a direct threat to SADC's ally, the Kinshasa government. Since then, the Intervention Brigade's momentum seems to have petered out. It provided support to army operations against the rebels of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) on the border with Uganda, but this support was apparently not nearly as robust as it was against the M23. There was no joint planning involved, and no FIB involvement in ground operations either.[118] As the ADF is not nearly as urgent a strategic threat to the government as the M23 was, this lack of interest is understandable. There was an even bigger lack of FIB enthusiasm to go after the FDLR, which is not exactly surprising considering the rebel movement's role as a tool used by the FARDC against Rwanda.[119] The appointment of two UN-blacklisted Congolese generals as the head of anti-FDLR operations, thereby letting the Brigade off the hook, serves the FIB so conveniently that rumours are going around that there was some sort of deal made between South Africa, Tanzania and the DRC. Whatever the situation may be, the Brigade's foot-dragging around the FDLR has proven to be quite an embarrassment to MONUSCO, as SRSG Kobler has consistently emphasised the need to go after those rebels. If the limited strategic interests of Kinshasa and SADC dominate the Intervention Brigade's considerations, then the question is whether the defeat of the M23 means it hasn't outplayed its role by now. Kinshasa's 2015 request to slim down MONUSCO by 6,000 troops certainly seems to point to this conclusion.

Had the Intervention Brigade's purpose indeed been to contribute to a broader peace consolidation process, then the removal of the M23 could have provided political

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116 The DRC has been edging ever closer to the SADC bloc as a strategic partner over the past few years. South Africa has become a big investor in the DRC mineral and energy sectors and has had a difficult relationship with Rwanda since the assassination of Rwandan dissident ex-general Nyamwasa in 2010 in South Africa, which it blames on Kigali (Stearns, 2013). Tanzania has an even more difficult relationship with Kigali, and has referred to the FDLR as 'freedom fighters' (International Crisis Group, 2014, pp. 13-15).

117 During a UNSC debate in 2014 on new trends in peacekeeping, the Uruguayan ambassador stated that the FIB was set up without prior consultations with MONUSCO's other TCCs.

118 Mueller (2014) quotes a MONUSCO officer saying operations were not really joint and that 'the FIB later joined in. That's it.'

119 Vogel (2014)

breathing space to address some of the local grievances that have made eastern Congo such a fertile ground for foreign-backed rebellions. The defeat of the M23 meant that mayi-mayi groups and the FDLR had fewer excuses to mobilise to 'protect their communities'. It could have paved the way for multi-track peacebuilding and addressing national reform – originally a *quid pro quo* for the roll-out of the Brigade. A regional dialogue, focusing on cross-border communities and the (legitimate) security interests of the regional states could have begun. As we have seen, none of this has happened; in fact, as soon as discussions around the establishment of an intervention brigade started, Kinshasa lost interest in further negotiations with the M23 or addressing local grievances. In a way then, the FIB may have actually *hastened* the current cyclical downturn of government engagement. The deployment of the Intervention Brigade may have closed a window of opportunity for peacebuilding in the east as much as it opened one.

Third, and finally, it is not certain that FIB deployment has given many eastern Congolese new confidence in the future. Harvard's community perception surveys in the Kivus and Ituri, which were mentioned earlier, were undertaken *after* the UN-supported defeat of the M23, and MONUSCO was still perceived very negatively, with most (77%) of the interviewees saying the mission made little to no difference to them and was rarely seen, even in areas where it had actually deployed bases nearby.[120] The exception was in Niyaragongo and Rutshuru territories, where the FIB was seen as an active combatant on the side of the Congolese army. This lack of 'credit dividend' is perhaps not that surprising: the brigade is still a relatively small part of the wider MONUSCO force: some 3,000 soldiers out of a total of 20,000, or 15%. The majority of MONUSCO blue helmets operate with the same caveats as before, so most eastern Congolese have the same experiences with the mission they have always had. Despite MONUSCO's best intentions and the many sensitisation sessions about its mandate, it is simply unexplainable to local people why a mission with armoured cars, artillery, attack helicopters and trained soldiers is not more aggressive towards the armed groups.[121] This chimes with Pouligny's (2006) research, which shows that what people want from a peacekeeping mission is not a neutral intervener but an ally who will risk its own security to fight armed groups for them: '(…) Refusal to adopt a position, or mere inaction, is seen as taking a de facto position.'[122] The Intervention Brigade may have actually created expectations that the other MONUSCO brigades should go out and fight too: if the FIB can (supposedly) do it, why not the other blue helmets? These negative perceptions may be one-sided, but this is irrelevant for a mission whose effectiveness relies on the support of local communities. As Simpson (2013) notes about counter-insurgency operations: 'If you think you are doing well, then think again: for it is not what you think, it is what they

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120 Vinck and Pham (2014), p. iii

121 Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen (2012)

122 Pouligny (2006), pp. 155-188

[the population] think that matters – if they think you are doing badly, then you probably are.'[123]

None of this is meant to belittle the efforts of the Brigade, or the sacrifices it has made in fighting the M23. It is not a criticism of MONUSCO either. The FIB and its accompanying agenda were the best the UN could have achieved under the circumstances. But it goes too far to call the Brigade a tool for peace consolidation, or 'new' or 'aggressive', and it is too early to know whether it has served a broader peacebuilding purpose. As the government is asking MONUSCO to slim down and the post-M23 downturn inevitably gains momentum, it is unlikely that we will know what a more long-term, nuanced military approach could have looked like.

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123 Simpson (2013), pp. 67-90

4 Test case: the International Stabilization Strategy

This report has discussed the drivers of conflict in the DRC; the incentive structures of both the Congolese government and MONUSCO and they have influenced the way government and MONUSCO interact with the conflict and with each other; and the cyclical dynamic of conflict and disengagement in the east, of which we may currently be seeing a post-M23 downturn. This chapter will use the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, the ISSSS or I4S ,as a test case. The I4S has been the largest undertaking for peacebuilding in the eastern DRC over the last few years and has tried to bring UN agencies, donors and MONUSCO together around a joint agenda.

By taking a closer look at what happened with the strategy over 2008-15, this chapter intends to provide an evidence base for three of this report's core assumptions. It will show, first, that technical interventions, particularly for the restoration of state authority, have little impact on conflict dynamics; second, that the government of the DRC is un-willing to engage with political, or socially transformative activities for the east; and third, that MONUSCO is only capable of engaging with 'peace consolidation' in the east on the basis of a limited agenda.

The I4S: assumptions, approach and revision

The I4S was developed during the positive 'upswing' of 2008-09 as a support strategy for the 2008 Goma accords, when a large number of armed groups laid down their arms and decided to reintegrate after years of war. The country was supposedly moving towards 'normalcy' and there was a strong sense of international urgency to roll out activities under an integrated framework to support this transition, bring the state back in, and, in the process, serve as an exit strategy for MONUC. The mission brought the full weight of its military and civilian sections behind the design and roll-out of what would become the I4S. In 2009, after the joint GoDRC-Rwanda operations against the FDLR, Kinshasa drafted its own stabilization strategy, the STAREC, for which the I4S formally became the support strategy.

The original I4S, which ran from 2008 to 2012, was based on the principles of counter-insurgency operations, of 'clearing, holding and building' to restore the state and build

its capacities to manage conflict.[124] In North and South Kivu and Ituri, six strategic geographical axes were identified where there was the threat of a return to conflict. Along these axes, army-led, MONUC-supported military operations would 'clear out' the last remaining pockets of armed resistance. Roads would be rehabilitated and in strategic centres along these roads the administration, police and justice would be supported with buildings, training and equipment so the area could be demilitarised and state services restored. Along the axis, activities for socio-economic recovery, health, sanitation and education would be set up to provide a 'peace dividend' and economic alternatives to groups at risk of mobilisation. In the meantime, a DDR programme would set up camps across the east and support the reintegration of armed groups, and new efforts would be made for security sector reform and training of the army to take over from the peacekeeping mission where possible. Most of the programmes were managed by UN agencies with support from MONUC sections and a smaller number of NGOs.

What stands out, is that the I4S was exactly in line with what the government had been asking international partners to support, and what MONUC/MONUSCO and the Security Council had been emphasising as a viable solution for a post-conflict society: roll out the presence of the state and provide jobs for people who might otherwise join armed groups. It was never clear what the end goal of the I4S was, or what was actually meant by 'stabilization'.[125] It was more about *what* would be done than *why*. The I4S was a classical example of a 'top-down' product as well: it had been developed rapidly in Kinshasa, between MONUC and the central government with little input from the provinces.

The results of the I4S between 2008 and 2012 were somewhat ambiguous. The technical progress of the strategy was undeniable: more than 60 projects worth some US$368m were implemented.[126] Tens of thousands of ex-combatants were demobilised, a network of infrastructure was built with hundreds of kilometres of roads rehabilitated, more than 90 buildings constructed and training provided for more than a thousand police officers, administrators and others. Socio-economic support was provided to close to half a million people. However, a (rough) situation and impact assessment of the I4S in 2011 brought home what many working with the strategy already knew at this point: despite all those projects, the actual *impact* of the strategy in terms of peace consolidation was

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124 Between 2008 and 2009, the strategy was known as the UNSSSS, and was adapted to become the I4S when STAREC was launched. As the strategies were practically the same, and to prevent confusion, references throughout this chapter are to the I4S.

125 The ISSSS programme framework (p. 7) states that its objective is to '…support national efforts to promote a secure and stable environment (…) to address specific root causes and consequences of conflict, support the implementation of peace initiatives at the local level, and help stabilize areas where conflict has recently ceased'.

126 ISSSS quarterly result reports, 2009-2012

quite limited.[127] The post-2009 cyclical downturn was in full swing, insecurity was rapidly worsening, and the government was disengaging from the east, all circumstances under which any international strategy could only have limited effect. Moreover, there were growing doubts that the sort of programmes which had been set up were actually doing much about the drivers of conflict in the eastern provinces.

This led to some serious soul searching among the I4S partners and, subsequently, a fundamental revision of the stabilization strategy between 2012 and 2015, through a series of inclusive workshops with government and international and civil society partners.[128] The revised I4S turned into a much more detailed and developed strategy than its original incarnation. The new strategy defined what was meant by 'stabilization', that is, a process of building the capacity of state and society to mitigate local drivers of conflict.[129] This made the I4S let go of top-down, state-centred interventions and gave it a more context-specific, damage control-focused approach. This was reflected in its thematic pillars as well, with security and state authority activity emphasising the building of relations between state actors and local communities, and socio-economic recovery work the need to specifically target conflict dynamics. Most importantly, the revised I4S would use community dialogue as a basis for activities. Theories of change and a new M&E framework that put the perceptions of communities at the centre further supported the new structure. Finally, a series of conflict assessments for the two Kivus and Orientale province were undertaken by NGO partners, which in turn led to provincially specific priority plans, drafted with the government. International donors re-engaged with the I4S as a strategy that had clearly learned from past shortcomings. At the time of writing, early 2015, the revised I4S is starting to be implemented.

The I4S experience between 2008 and the present day illustrates three points. First, that technical interventions for peace consolidation, popular as they are with the government and MONUSCO, do not 'stabilize' the east. Second, that the central government is not interested in political peacebuilding or social transformation. And third, that MONUSCO is not capable of engaging with stabilization and peace consolidation in a manner that is not in line with its limited strategy.

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127 ISSSS Situation Assessment (2011). On two of the I4S's six priority axes the situation had improved, on two others, it had stayed the same, and on the final two, things had become worse. Measuring impact was extremely difficult though, as there was no baseline set before activities started and M&E frameworks looked at quantitative outcomes more than qualitative impact.

128 The revision of the I4S was formally requested by the UN Security Council, but had actually started months before on the initiative of the MONUSCO Stabilization Unit and some of its partners.

129 ISSSS 2013-2017. Stabilization was defined under the revised I4S as 'an integrated, holistic but targeted process of enabling state and society to build mutual accountability and capacity to address and mitigate existing or emerging drivers of violent conflict, creating the conditions for improved governance and longer term development'.

How technical interventions did not 'stabilize' the east

The experience of the I4S showed that, even while the Congolese government and MONUSCO have been promoting this as a solution, technical, 'blueprint' interventions to support military operations and demobilisation, the deployment of state officials and the creation of jobs have little impact on conflict transformation..

As the peace process fell apart after 2009, military operations seemed to only worsen the situation in the east. The serious human rights violations that resulted from them even led MONUSCO to put in place a conditionality principle so as to not be too closely associated with the FARDC. Training and equipment of the army had clearly not had much impact. The construction of army barracks became an issue as well; instead of the originally proposed construction of temporary camps close to the frontlines, the FARDC insisted on having large (relatively) luxurious barracks close to major towns. Once these were constructed, a struggle began between competing army factions over who would occupy them.[130] The demobilisation and reintegration programme simultaneously ran into trouble: the government kept the programme open-ended, which led to armed groups actually mobilising to take advantage of the reintegration packages it offered.[131]

Experiences with the roll-out of the state into the countryside through roads, buildings and training also had rather dubious results. If assessments had looked more closely at existing state-society interactions, it would have been more careful to put in place technical blueprints for the restoration of what was still a predatory state. Wherever roads were rehabilitated, barriers for illegal taxation mushroomed, usually manned by the army, the police and assorted state officials.[132] State officials were trained and deployed across the countryside but as they were rarely paid and not mentored, they subjected the population to new forms of abuse with impunity.[133] Newly installed courts were sidelined by traditional authorities, who saw them as a threat to their customary right to judge cases.[134] Many of the newly deployed police officers came from armed groups, and brought their own (often ethnically biased) agendas with them. There was

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130 ISSSS quarterly progress reports

131 Oxfam (2012); Eriksson Baaz and Verweijen (2013); ISSSS security pillar (2014)

132 Oxfam (2012). In 2011, the Stabilization Unit and UN police (UNPOL) mapped a total of 46 barriers on the main rehabilitated axes in South Kivu province, of which perhaps three or four were legal. The majority of the barriers were manned by military intelligence (ANR), police or state services (like tourism or mining), which had no business being there. They usually claimed to be controlling passers-by for illegal substances and weapons.

133 Bailey (2011); Paddon and Lacaille (2011)

134 Oxfam (2012). This was driven home when the *mwami* (king) of Walungu territory in South Kivu gave a speech during the opening of the new *tribunal de paix* there in 2011, questioning the need for a formal tribunal, as the people were supposedly content with him dispensing justice for them.

simply no causal relationship between training and equipment and better behaviour, and little solidarity between the deployed state agents and the population. A fitting example is what happened in Luvungi in 2012, when the town's contingent of specially selected, trained, armed and actually paid police officers ran away from a small group of mostly underage mayi-mayi Cheka.[135] There were many experiences like this, which debunked the idea that salary, training and equipment creates enough *esprit de corps* for officials to do their job. Paddon and Lacaille (2011) quote an official saying, 'How can the UN have a mandate both to protect civilians and stabilize the state, when it is agents of that state that need stabilizing in order to bring about protection?'[136]

Experiences with rather generalised development activities claiming to promote socio-economic recovery and conflict prevention were not always positive either. Programmes for agriculture, health and education were put in place to support development 'as such', without defining how this would diminish conflict. They took place in different, usually safer, zones from where there were security and state authority interventions, and were aimed at 'low-hanging fruit' – activities that would have quick and visible small-scale impact.[137] As Bailey (2011) notes about one of the integrated UN programmes for socio-economic recovery: 'An observer would not be able to distinguish it from any "normal" intervention to support reintegration and a transition to longer-term development (…) There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the impact of assistance to basic services and livelihoods on security and conflict transformation.'[138] This is not to say that the resulting increase in crops, schools and water pumps didn't help people, but it was not primarily aimed at conflict transformation and therefore not really 'stabilization' either.

The government's disengagement with stabilization

Experiences with the stabilization strategy also show the government's cyclical disengagement from the east, and its interest in expanding state structures and undertaking countrywide projects instead of engaging with the political drivers of instability.

The central government barely took an interest in its own stabilization programme, STAREC, nor in the I4S, which was supporting it, despite the frantic activities of international partners.[139] STAREC had been set up in 2009 to make the government look

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135 ISSSS quarterly progress report 1, 2012

136 Paddon and Lacaille, 2011, p. 12

137 Izzi and Kurtz (2010); Oxfam (2012); ISSSS Return, Reintegration and Socio-Economic Recovery pillar (2014)

138 Bailey, 2011, pp. 7–8

139 Oxfam (2012); International Alert (2012)

committed to the east, but it was never really a stabilization strategy, more a long list of humanitarian and development activities worth US$700m, for which Kinshasa had barely budgeted.[140] STAREC's proposed activities were focused on expanding the state through infrastructure and equipment, and undertaking classic development work for the entire eastern DRC as well as the western province of Equateur. Kinshasa was wary of what it saw as the I4S's 'discriminatory' approach, with its focus on only a few axes, moving resources down to local level and becoming increasingly vocal on the political preconditions for stabilization to succeed. This made the I4S increasingly popular with provincial governments: they saw funds coming in and were put in the driving seat for coordination, but that led to disengagement from Kinshasa. However, the strategy was no threat, and as it mobilised resources Kinshasa let it be, though it certainly did little to support it. While high-level coordination meetings ground to a halt,[141] the I4S was helping the government do what it wanted to do, in terms of expanding the visibility and control of the state over sources of patronage. However, that was not a process which Kinshasa saw as requiring further financial resources from their side, particularly not at a time when the main security challenges to the state had temporarily been taken care of.

The gap between the expectations of national and international partners around stabilization in the east is likely to widen in the coming years. A presidential decree of May 2014 made STAREC a nationwide programme, and added even more development infrastructure and humanitarian activities to it.[142] On top of that, an 'integrated programme' has been proposed, which is supposed to act as an umbrella for all inter-national humanitarian, stabilization and development activities across the country. As usual, neither of these programmes includes a conflict assessment, theories of change or proposals for many activities beyond technical development. The revised I4S is digging more and more downwards, into local conflict systems and proposing context-specific solutions, when, at the same time, the government is changing the few programmes it has for the eastern provinces into national programmes with broad outcomes.

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140 Government of the DRC (STAREC, 2009), pp. 15–41; Demetriou and Quick (2012); Oxfam (2012). In the end, the government had budgeted some US$320,000 for STAREC activities versus the US$368m of the ISSSS, and even what that money had been spent on was unclear (ISSSS quarterly progress report 1, 2012).

141 ISSSS quarterly progress reports 2009-2012

142 At the same time, the provincial STAREC teams presented the I4S revision as being part of STAREC revision as well, even though the processes went in opposite directions. STAREC's only chance at mobilising funds lay in staying as close as possible to the revised I4S, no matter what Kinshasa thought about the matter.

Beyond MONUSCO's comfort zone

Finally, the I4S brought home the limitations of MONUC/MONUSCO's support for stabilization in the east. As we have seen, the pressured peacekeeping mission mainly works on short-term, technical activities to 'restore state authority'. The I4S has always been a rather uncomfortable framework for the mission.

The I4S was meant to be a mid- to long-term undertaking for the UN, but when in-security worsened after 2009, MONUC let go of 'holding' the stabilization priority axis and went back into a more standard peacekeeping mode, deploying forces in reaction to the activities of armed groups. The military and civilian wings of the stabilization strategy grew apart: few MONUSCO-staff nowadays would be aware that support for military operations, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) were once an integral part of the I4S.[143] The mission more or less lost interest in the strategy after 2009, with constant pressure from New York to focus on military operations, elections and other 'politically relevant' issues rather than stabilization. The strategy practically ceased to exist in reports to the Security Council, except under the 'state authority' banner, when it built a road or trained police – and even then, the I4S was rarely mentioned as the organising framework.[144] This is perhaps not surprising. Even when the I4S was undertaking the sort of activities MONUSCO promoted between 2008 and 2012, such as technical interventions for state roll-out, buildings, roads and training, the strategy became increasingly vocal about the fact that security and state authority interventions were not working in the absence of Kinshasa's willingness to budget for their operationalisation, and discipline their troops, police officers and officials. Yet these were issues that MONUSCO was fundamentally incapable of addressing. After 2009, the mission retreated into its shell in many ways, battered into a corner by the government, and fell back on short-term technical interventions and 'quick, visible results' while the I4S raised questions about the very essence of what MONUC/MONUSCO had been supporting in the Congo up until that point. In this scenario, even the I4S strategy's US$368m worth of visible results was not enough to emphasise its importance.

The peacekeeping mission's declining interest in the I4S impacted directly on the strategy's success and also had an important spillover effect, as several UN agencies started to (informally) de-couple their programmes from it. To some of the agencies, the I4S had always felt restrictive, specific as it was as to where and how things should be done, and as its donors mainly cared about visible results as well, it became easier

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143 Oxfam (2012)

144 UN Security Council reports, Secretary-General's reports and MONUC/MONUSCO mandates between 2008 and 2012

to go back to 'development business as usual'.[145] The I4S gradually became one of the many development frameworks in the country rather than a special undertaking for the east. In this environment, the small MONUSCO coordination unit for the strategy, the Stabilization Support Unit, struggled to keep the partners together.

A critical piece of evidence of how stuck MONUSCO was to its limited strategy of rolling out the state came in 2013/14, when the revised I4S strategy was forced to compete with a new concept of the peacekeeping mission, the 'Islands of Stability'. The exact meaning of 'Islands of Stability' seems to have shifted over time: from an end state (when a territory is liberated from an armed group, it becomes an Island of Stability), to a methodology, deploying staff to the field for short-term support of the deployment of police, administration and justice.[146] Quick-impact projects were used for the rehabilitation of buildings and for putting people to work through manual labour projects. The 'Islands' were presented as a first step towards stabilization, but it is difficult to see their direct links with the revised I4S. Island works are set up where military operations push out armed groups, so are based on political necessity and focus on towns or population centres, whereas the I4S zone selection is based on an analysis of local conflict drivers and targets wider zones.[147] Moreover, the Islands approach carries out the sort of activities which the I4S has shown have limited impact, and in some cases may even do harm: e.g., rolling out the state without support for state-society relations and dialogue with the government to monitor and follow up.[148] It is unclear how Island activities are meant to have an impact, when the I4S, working on a much larger scale, failed to do so. Worryingly, judging from formal reports and other communications, the Islands of Stability seem to have replaced the I4S as the mission's main stabilization effort.[149] This is quite remarkable: MONUSCO's own Stabilization

145 Channel Research (2011); Demetriou and Quick (2012); Oxfam (2012); International Alert (2012). Quick (2015), pp. 21-22, mentions how donors were '…not asking hard questions about relevance. They wanted clean processes that would stand up to audits, occasional success stories that could be fitted into newsletters. Quick (2015), p. 132, also describes the 'abbreviation soup' of international support frame-works, particularly the HAP (Humanitarian Action Plan), the PAP (Priority Action Plan), and the UNDAF (UN Development Assistance Framework). Agencies could always find a framework that would fit. STAREC came in particularly handy: although international agencies were meant to be coordinated under the I4S, some of them referred to STAREC instead, which was conveniently broad and vague.

146 UN News Center (2014); MONUSCO, *Echos de la MONUSCO* (2014)

147 This prompted Cooper (2014) to warn that the Islands may result in a 'shift from basing assistance on needs to a kind of geographical lottery'.

148 In fact, Quick (2015), pp. 31-33, notes that during the first I4S, the geographically integrated way of working on state authority was even referred to as creating 'Stability Islands'.

149 To give just one concrete example: the special edition of MONUSCO's magazine, *Echos de la MONUSCO*, of November 2014, which focused on the 'stabilization of the East' barely mentions the I4S and speaks non-stop of the Islands. Shabunda town is used as an example of an Island of Stability, whereas in fact the road, infrastructure and training of officials in that location were done under the I4S.

Support Unit revised the I4S on the basis of a Security Council request, the new strategy provides novel ideas about the peacekeeping operation, provincial governments support the strategy and donors are willing to fund it, yet *still* the mission backs away from it in favour of more of the same things it has always done.

The Islands are, however, a much more comfortable concept to the mission than the I4S is. They play to the mission's traditional capacities, fit into the work plans of its sections, are straightforward, provide quick little results that look good in reports, and do not ask difficult questions about impact, theories of change or political preconditions for success. With the pressure the mission is under from New York and the knife-edge it has to walk across in Kinshasa, it is perhaps not surprising that MONUSCO has focused on rapid and visible activities, even if their impact is doubtful. The 'stabilization' label has, once more, come to mean everything and nothing.

Conclusion: What to do?

To summarise, this report has argued that instead of seeing the DRC on a 'war to peace' continuum, the situation could perhaps more usefully be seen as cyclical. Because of a mix of incentives, Congolese elites have consistently promoted technical 'solutions' to conflict, mainly to protect their own interests. Brief spells of positive activity are followed by long periods of disengagement and consolidation of power, during which the situation would worsen. The current post-M23 period is likely turning into another one of these cyclical downswings, and could have been anticipated quite some time ago. The international community, MONUSCO first and foremost, has been unable to counter these dynamics, due to a number of constraints, which have led to an overt reliance on inefficient and technical, rather than political, formats for interventions, spurred on by an overwhelming sense of urgency to obtain 'visible results'.

This chapter serves to, very carefully, look ahead. If the conflict is indeed cyclical, and international responses have not changed much, it should be possible to have an idea (the word 'predict' would go too far) of what may happen next – or at least of what is *not* likely to happen. This chapter will also provide some ideas for the international community, which could work differently despite the constraints mentioned in the previous pages.

What is next?

On the security front, the picture for the future is rather bleak. The FDLR cannot really be defeated militarily to begin with, and it serves a strategic interest for the Congolese army to keep them at hand. The only durable way in which the FDLR may be handled would perhaps be to start a dialogue with its leaders to return, but Rwanda is unlikely to mollify its position there. Considering the past, it is likely that the FDLR will just disappear into the forest again, and the dynamic will start all over from the beginning. Whether the M23 will re-mobilise is impossible to say, but it is unlikely that Rwanda will stand by and do nothing if it perceives that the FDLR is re-mobilising across the eastern provinces. Rwanda needs a security buffer on its border with Congo. If the M23 can no longer function as a proxy, some other force could be constituted to safeguard those interests. Kigali's earlier threat to leave the PSCF clearly shows that its strategic interests trump regional collaboration, especially if it increasingly sees the PSCF as an attempt by the DRC-SADC bloc to gang up on them. Whatever happens to the FDLR and the M23, as long as the east is in turmoil, as long as the FARDC has the limited capacity it has always had, and as long as there is no in-depth political dialogue around local grievances, local mayi-mayi groups will continue to mobilise, and violence will continue.

On the political front, the presidential coalition is likely to focus its efforts on staying in power, disorganising or co-opting the opposition where it can. As we have seen, 'downswings' of the cycle have always been used to reinforce the powers that be, and the post-M23 period is not likely to be an exception. The new focus of the governing coalition may well be the local and provincial elections planned for the second half of 2015 – replacing elected positions at grassroots level with allied politicians and increase sources of patronage. This may lead to new tensions about the division of public re-sources. As there is no more real pressure on the government, Kinshasa's involvement in the PSCF and the reforms required under the National Oversight Mechanism are likely to grind to a halt.

The question, then, is will this situation 'explode'? If, indeed, the government has returned to the same old approach to deal with the eastern provinces, and long-term threats remain unaddressed, will there be a crisis, as there was in 2006, 2008 and 2012, and what form will it take? This is impossible to say, although it is not an entirely unlikely scenario. However, there is something to be said about the likely international reaction to any forthcoming crisis.

If developments in the eastern DRC are difficult to predict, then, unfortunately, the reaction of international partners is not very likely to change. As before, partners are likely to continue financing a string of technical post-conflict interventions. Strategic interest in the DRC has remained unchanged, so it is unlikely that there will be a stronger discussion with Kinshasa, preconditions for further support, or more risk-taking peacekeeping operations in the near future. MONUSCO is likely to keep the door open to the government as long as it can; DPKO chief Ladsous recently stated that a full drawdown of MONUSCO could take three to five years, enough time to see whether there will indeed be another crisis, and scale the mission back up if required.[150] The mission's approach will likely remain tilted towards military operations and elections, and to state authority to 'stabilize' the east. It is quite likely that whether the country will actually start to stabilize, remain in the current situation, or come apart at the seams, the deployment of state officials to 'fill vacuums' will remain the solution – either to 'strengthen the gains made' and allow for an exit strategy, or to 'strengthen the state's grip' if the situation goes downhill.

In the meantime, development officials will change functions, institutional memory will be lost, and interest will remain lukewarm. If a crisis erupts, everyone will be surprised, and if a peace agreement is signed, everyone will cheer and pretend, once more, that a 'page has been turned'. And after that, it may well be back to business as usual.

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150 *Tempete des Tropiques* (2015)

What are the alternatives?

The central point this report has tried to make is that the way in which the Congolese government and the international community have responded to the crisis in the east of the country is a result of a number of (partly self-inflicted) constraints. The choices made are products of a wider 'system', a set of incentives and strategies. As such, when we look at what can be done differently, it is important to not merely come up with 'should haves' – ideal but unlikely scenarios ('the Congolese government should move forward with SSR') – but with 'could haves' – things that could be done differently *despite* the fundamental constraints on the Congolese and international side.

Perhaps the most important move that international partners could make would be to take a step back and a deep breath, and fundamentally re-think the situation instead of rushing forward. There are all sorts of issues that cannot be dealt with, but the one thing international actors are not forced to do is succumb to lazy thinking. Good practice requires good theory, and judging from the standardised formats and solutions that have been proposed so far, good theory seems to be rather lacking at the moment.

It would be worthwhile to bring the main international partners together and question their assumptions through an extensive political economy analysis. How do 'we' (the international partners) define the drivers and the root causes of conflict? Which of these drivers could potentially be addressed, and how? By whom? When it comes the GoDRC, what do we think it wants at various levels and within various elite coalitions, and why? A neo-patrimonial state is not against any form of change; it can support change where there is an interest, and we currently do not know what those interests are or what 'coalitions of the willing' with leverage exist. Taking the time to understand the common ground between the government and the international community will make for a firmer basis on which to build peace than if both sides mistrust the other's intentions and work past each other. A critical question to ask is whether the expansion of a largely predatory state can have a positive impact on peacebuilding and if so, how? What are the existing positive dynamics (increasing citizen voice, for example) that can be built on? At regional level, what are the legitimate concerns of regional power brokers, such as Angola, Rwanda and Uganda, and where can they be accommodated? On the international side, which partner can address which sort of driver, or rather support which sort of process to address which conflict driver, and how? What are the constraints for them to do so, in terms of willingness, time and money? Can the burden be shared? This political economy analysis is not about producing the ever-dreaded 'more paper', nor is it about uncovering facts no one knew yet; a lot of what the analysis will bring up will be known already, although a mapping of elite coalitions may be a

first.[151] Rather, the exercise would be about building joint understanding to force the partners to face a few uncomfortable truths about their role and the impact of their interventions, create some sort of shared vision, and get all noses pointing in the same direction.

It is on the basis of such a joint analysis that the international partners could start working on an *actual strategy*: not a set of well-meant catchphrases about 'restoring state authority', but an agreed-upon idea about what a relatively minimal 'end state' could look like, what the process to get there could be, what positive dynamics to support and what negative ones to mitigate. Once this is done, scenarios could be worked out, with a series of options to deal with them and a corresponding division of labour. It is only then, once this work is done, that it makes sense to start thinking about peacekeeping priorities and stabilization and development frameworks, and only after that, about actual projects. A single plan, based on clear scenarios, would aid coordination and prevent partners from going all over the place. The strategy needs to be closely guarded – international partners need to be forced back into the framework if they seem to 'stray'. Should partners disagree with elements of the strategy, that would be fine – but it would need to be openly discussed instead of partners going off by themselves. Keeping the group together will require strong leadership, perhaps through a committee made up of some of the more prominent donors, together with MONUSCO.

A realistic strategy for the DRC may well be a very minimalist one. The conflict is too complex and the political actors too difficult, for international partners to achieve more than damage control at local level, capacity building and support for positive dynamics where they exist. This will no doubt have to be clothed in development wording like 'stabilization' and 'restoring state authority', as long as the partners, through the strategy, know what they are really working on and keep their eyes on that (granted, rather minimal) prize.

Unfortunately, there are some processes that the international community, mainly MONUSCO, will have no choice but to support, as they are the price of remaining in the DRC. The peacekeeping mission will be required to continue supporting military operations. The way these are currently conducted is often harmful to conflict dynamics and leads to displacement and human rights violations, but MONUSCO can at least exert some small damage control. Should MONUSCO decide to step back from military operations, the government is likely to speed up the process of pushing the mission out, as we are currently seeing. Second, MONUSCO will likely be forced to support the elections. These may well be fraudulent and further alienate many eastern Congolese from their national government, but again, Kinshasa will put the thumbscrews on if it

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151 In particular, the revised I4S's conflict- and needs assessments for the eastern provinces and the works of that strategy's partners in the field of local dialogue could play an important role.

doesn't. If the international community doesn't support the elections, Kinshasa is likely to use a lack of funds as an excuse for even further delays. Third, MONUSCO and the wider international community must support the DDR process; it is a flawed process, but as long as the camps are not functional, the M23 and the government have an excuse to drag their feet. None of these processes can be fully 'steered' – they touch too closely on the political incentives of the government to allow for much outside guidance. MONUSCO will unfortunately have to grit its teeth and bear it, and develop a good communications strategy to deal with the unavoidable negative fall-out.

If the strategic re-assessment suggested above seems like too much work, there is another alternative. MONUSCO could undertake an assessment of how much its presence is actually changing the situation on the ground. Are people really being protected? Is the mission's presence deterring violence and creating political space? If this is not the case, or if the difference is not enough to warrant an annual US$1.6bn for a peacekeeping mission, then MONUSCO could decide to pull out. Should the mission decide to push the agenda for a drawdown, it might change the existing dynamic. As we have seen, at the moment there is a sort of status quo. Provided the regional states will not step in to take over MONUSCO's tasks (which is not an entirely unlikely scenario, as the deployment of the FIB has shown), Kinshasa would be on its own to provide security in the east. It may go wrong and lead to more suffering, but continuing down the current path, without a strategic re-assessment as described above, does not seem to be much of a solution either. If MONUSCO cannot keep people as safe as they thought they could, there is no shame in a withdrawal: 'ought implies can', and there is no moral obligation to do what you cannot do.[152] At the same time, that would be a serious loss and a sign of international defeat: MONUSCO has a critically important role to play in the DRC, and it could do so if it and the wider international community changed its strategy, as discussed above.

Are the above scenarios, of a fundamental strategic re-assessment or the more extreme option of MONUSCO pushing the drawdown agenda, likely to happen? Not really. A strategic re-assessment would have to be spearheaded by the same coalition in the Security Council that in the past has shown little interest in the DRC, and it would take a brave Special Representative indeed to commission an independent evaluation of the impact of his or her own peacekeeping operation, and the effort, funds and lives invested in it. The institutional interests against changing course are legion. As Machiavelli put it: 'There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under

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152 Taken from Stewart and Knaus (2012), Chapter 1

the new.'[153] It is a sad note to end on, but if there is one thing that the DRC has taught us over the last few years, it's that the status quo has a habit of beating the progressives. We may be going around in circles for quite some time to come.

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153 Machiavelli, quoted in Ashdown (2007), p. 179

Epilogue: 'Lessons learned' – assumptions about stabilization and peacebuilding

As the renowned diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi put it, 'When you go from one place to another, you go with experience, you don't go with prescriptions. No two situations are alike.'[154] There is reason to be sceptical of 'lessons learned' exercises which attempt to draw broad lessons for very different countries – they often do little credit to the complexity of social dynamics. Intervening in fragile states is not a science, and there have been few unambiguous success stories that could easily be copied to other contexts.

However, the experiences of MONUSCO and the I4S have taught a few important lessons about the mind-set of international interveners, which differs significantly less from one country to the next than conflict dynamics do. As such, this epilogue will not make recommendations for 'what should be done', but rather 'what to be wary of': a few assumptions that seem to come up in different (post-) conflict contexts and which should be handled with some care. These assumptions relate to the need for phasing, speed, definitions, strong institutions, state ownership and coordination. They are more or less as follows:

'*We need a phased approach, security comes first.*' There is little doubt that security is the first priority for people in post-conflict environments, but security is a political matter as well. It may be better to say that 'politics comes first'. Before decisions are taken about what an area needs, there should be an assessment; this could be a relatively rapid assessment of how communities interact with the state and with each other, followed by a plan that targets particular sensitivities. Deploying troops and police always changes the local balance of power and can sometimes do more harm than good. There is no single right format for phasing interventions.

'*We need to go in fast, to show a peace dividend.*' Rapidly rolling out activities in an area that has recently been liberated can certainly help, but only if those activities have been discussed in some depth with the communities in question. A 'peace dividend' is perceived between people's ears, and communities may react badly to outside support if they do not feel they have been consulted. This may take time, but speed is *not* more

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154 Brainyquote.com

important than impact. Haste is often a bad counsellor, as it makes international partners fall back on simple formats, which may be inappropriate – see the Islands of Stability discussion. As you're likely to be in the area for a while, you may as well take some time to think it over: what is the conflict really about, what is at stake, and what are people's perceptions of how it all works? If so, where is our added value?

'*If it helps, it stabilizes.*' No, it really doesn't. Good practice requires good theory, and if you do not define how you want to go about diminishing tensions and preventing conflict, you are not going to do so. To have effect, stabilization should be based on an in-depth analysis of harmful as well as positive dynamics, and an approach should be crafted that addresses the first and builds on the second. Stabilization programmes should be clear about assumptions, what they want to achieve, why and how. Only then can one begin to define what 'stabilization' means, which will be different for every context. If this sounds like a lot of work, it is. Having an impact on complex conflict dynamics is not supposed to be easy, otherwise people would have solved it by themselves. 'Stabilization' is an ambitious-sounding 'development word', but may in reality very well mean minimalistic, targeted and localised support for conflict prevention, confidence building and damage control, more than anything else.

'*Fragile states need strong institutions.*' What fragile states perhaps need more than anything else are institutions that are responsive to their people's needs, and these may not be the same as the ones we are used to in donor capitals. We have a natural tendency towards mirroring in the international community, thinking that for a state to get from A (bad) to B (good) it requires the same sort of institutions that we in the West are used to. Western institutions, however, have had centuries to become inclusive. As we have seen in the case of the DRC, fragile states' institutions are mechanisms for patronage. Simply expanding the range of that system, through a blueprint of infrastructure and training, without trying to make it more responsive to people's needs, can be harmful. Substance does not automatically follow form.

'*The government owns the process.*' It does, and most activities stand or fall with the government's engagement, but that is no excuse to be naïve about what ownership means. Congo is not the only fragile state where the government plays a role in the conflict and has a particular agenda that may not chime with what communities want. International partners need to find a balance between understanding and working with the government and keeping them engaged, while also ensuring that programmes target local people and build on locally grounded positive dynamics. If you are unwilling to do so and either implement just those programmes the government tells you to implement, or only undertake (humanitarian) activities requiring minimal government engagement, then you may not be ready to engage in 'stabilization', which requires a constant dialogue between the government, affected communities and outside partners.

'*Stabilization requires a coordinated approach.*' It does indeed, but there are different ways of defining 'coordination'. Too often it takes the form of rubber-stamping, with partners implementing programmes as usual – adding a few indicators to a joint monitoring and evaluation framework. That, however, is not coordination: someone needs to be *fully* in charge. Stabilization will run into all sorts of ingrained institutional interests. Ideally, you would have one single framework and one person, or one unit, with the authority and the power to force partners back into the framework if that's required. Such a unit could be composed of mission staff, agencies, NGOs and donor-seconded staff and be under the authority of a mixed committee consisting of those groups and the government. But whatever its composition, it must be given the authority to keep the programme in hand. If partners complain (and they will) that such a section is there to control them and slap them on the fingers, then yes, that is exactly why it is there. They should (pro-actively) *coordinate*, and not (reactively) *facilitate*, which are two fundamentally different functions.

Just to be clear, the assumptions above may not at all be wrong – some cases may very well require a fast roll-out of activities, and fragile states do require technical support for state institutions, but the point here is not to *automatically* assume that this is the case or that there is a standard format to do so.

Abbreviations

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces, Ugandan-led supposedly Muslim-extremist rebel movement
CNDP	*Congres National pour le Défense du Peuple*, 'Rwandophone' rebel movement
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants
DPKO	UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FARDC	*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, Congolese armed forces
FDLR	*Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda*, former *interahamwe* extremist Hutu movement originating in Rwanda
FIB	UN Force Intervention Brigade, composed of South African, Tanzanian and Malawian troops
FNL	*Forces Nationales pour la Libération*, Burundian rebel movement
GoDRC	Government of the DRC
I4S/ISSSS	International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy
M23	*Mouvement du 23 Mars*, 'Rwandophone' rebel movement named after the 23rd March 2009 accords between the DRC and Rwanda
Mayi-mayi	Collective name for Congolese community-based 'self-defence' groups
MONUC	*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies au RépublIque Démocratique du Congo*, UN peacekeeping mission (1999-2010)
MONUSCO	*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation de la République Démocratiquee du Congo*, successor of MONUC (2010-present)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PNC	*Police Nationale Congolaise*, Congolese police force
PNDDR	*Programme National pour le Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réintégration*, for the DDR of ex-combatants
PSCF	Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, signed in 2013 between the states that make up the Great Lakes Region
SADC	South African Development Community
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, head of the peacekeeping mission
SSR	Security Sector Reform
STAREC	*Programme de Stabilisation et de Reconstruction des zones sortant des conflits armées*, Congolese government's stabilization plan
TCCs	Troop contributing countries to peacekeeping missions

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