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Security Sector Reform (SSR) Challenges to Peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Security sector reform (SSR) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been on the country's political agenda since colonial times.[1] It re-entered the public debate after the fall of the Mobutu regime (1997) following successive defeats of the Zairian Armed Forces (FAZ), which failed to defend the country against the invasion of Burundian, Ugandan, and Rwandan troops (1996).[2] These military defeats brought to light the need for the DRC to build an army capable of protecting its territory and guaranteeing peace for its people. Thus, SSR featured prominently during the Inter-Congolese Dialogue peace talks (Sun City) mandated by the 1999 Lusaka Accord. As the Accord stated: "At the end of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, a mechanism will be put in place to build a national restructured and integrated army (…) A meeting of chiefs of staffs…will be convened before the transitional government is installed."[3]

In this context, SSR was to start with the creation of a new army by merging the national army (the FARDC) with the various rebel forces.

> "All armed units would be regrouped under the instructions of the Chief of General Staff. Activities in the regrouping centers would include identification, leading to the separation of eligible and ineligible elements, and initial selection and orientation. Combatants would then be moved to centers de brassage (CBR).[4] This would be followed by final selection and placement of the new units."[5]

Passing through the CBRs was obligatory for all combatants identified in the units. But it was a risky and complex operation: "It foresees a sequence of activities, including mixing and recycling of units for eligible FARDC candidates, retraining of commanding officers in the brassage centers, and deploying mixed and recycled units to military regions."[6] However, the "Brassage" operation ultimately failed and, as a result, the attempt to orchestrate a stable political transition in the DRC was doomed. In the subsequent two decades, multiple attempts to build a new army or reform the existing one have had mixed results—and peace and stability have eluded the DRC. This paper examines how two decades of failure to disarm, demobilize, reintegrate, reinsert, and repatriate the country's combatants has undermined security sector reform and, ultimately, peace in the DRC.

Reform Trapped in an Unbalanced Peace Agreement

The 1999 Lusaka Accord was signed on one side by the official DRC government, backed by Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, and on the other side by Uganda and Rwanda. Witnesses to this agreement were Zambia, the African Union, the United Nations, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This agreement, signed when Kinshasa was in control of only half of the country, called for an end to the occupation of the country by foreign armies and established the Inter-Congolese Dialogue peace talks. Notably, the Lusaka Accord also mandated reform of the army and police, while granting equal status to the national army and the rebel groups created and sponsored by Uganda and Rwanda. As it stated: "The inter-Congolese political negotiations must include (…) the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Rassemblement congolais pour la democratie (RCD), the Mouvement pour la liberation du Congo (MLC), political opposition (…) All participants in the inter-Congolese political negotiations will have identical status."[7]

According to some analysts, this agreement was unbalanced due to putting the national army and foreign-backed rebel forces on equal footing, and thus became a trap for DRC leadership: "The accords presented in Lusaka are a trap for Kabila. (…) If Kabila refuses to sign (…) Rwandans will affirm that this is proof he does not want peace, whereas they are ready to sign and to restore peace. Americans will then give (…) the green light for the final attack on Mbuyi-Maji. (…) Signing by Kabila of these agreements (…) is humiliating and unacceptable to the Congolese people."[8]

The DRC's President Kabila, having few alternative options, signed the Lusaka Accord at a time when his army was under significant pressure.[9] Thus, from the start, security sector reform in the DRC was caught in this unbalanced international agreement.

The Challenge of Security Sector Reform in the DRC

The Inter-Congolese Dialogue ended with the signing on April 20, 2002 of the Sun City Agreement. The agreement included political power-sharing in Kinshasa, but fatally allowed each former rebel leader to retain parallel control of his men as they were merged into the national army. The unfortunate result was that between 2002 and 2006, the DRC was regularly shaken by clashes between different components of the "national" army, including soldiers supported by Uganda, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe. The UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC) could not control the clashes, so the DRC's international partners decided to create the EU Mission on Security Sector Reform in Congo (EUSEC), through which a team of experts in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration was sent to help reform the Congolese army.

French General Pierre-Marie Joana, who commanded EUSEC from 2005 to 2008, explained during a later speech in Paris why his mission had been an impossible one: "The DRC does not only have to (…) settle ten years of crisis and war (…) It must also settle thirty years of Mobutism which never succeeded (…) in giving the State control of coercion (…)"[10] After three years of work with national and international stakeholders, General Joana identified a number of obstacles to security sector reform in the DRC:

1. While the army was supposed to be a "national" army, it was actually composed of disparate troops from several politico-military movements, each having different motivations and answering to a separate, parallel command.

2. No one knew the exact location or armaments of these troops, which were estimated to number more than 340,000 men and women.

3. The first group of the "national" army was made up of the former FAZ. Since the beginning of the DRC's crisis in 1990, this force had ceased regular training and recruiting and, as a result, included elderly, chronically ill, wounded, and disabled soldiers.

4. A second group was the "kadogo" child soldiers, who were recruited by force during the 1996 war and comprised the majority of President Kabila's army.

5. A third group was made up of ex-rebels from the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD). This group was split into three separate movements (RCD-Goma, RCD-Kisangani, and RCD-National). Another rebel group in the "national" army was the Liberation Movement of the Congo (MLC).

6. A fourth group was composed of numerous ex-Mayi-Mayi local militias. Their original objective was to protect their villages against invading Rwandan and Ugandan forces. Many of them had no desire to be part of a national army.

7. The last group in the DRC's new "national" army was made up of Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers who were part of rebel movements and did not return to their home countries when, in 2002, the Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF) and the Uganda Patriotic Defense Forces (UPDF) withdrew from the DRC.

This array of diverse troops under separate commands presented tremendous challenges to security sector reform in the DRC, the goal of which was to *disarm* some of these groups, *demobilize* those fighters who were unsuitable for the military, *reintegrate* those qualified for the national army, *reinsert* former combatants into civic life, and *repatriate* foreign fighters to their home countries.

The Failure of Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, Reinsertion and Repatriation of Combatants

Successful reform of the DRC army would depend on the successful disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, reinsertion, and repatriation (DDRRR) of combatants. Unfortunately, the DRC has never fully attained these goals. Experts attribute this failure to the scale and complexity of the effort. Elements of the DDRRR effort included: "Information and sensitization activities (...), (…) regrouping combatants (…), disarmament (…), registration, safekeeping or destruction of combatants' weapons (…), transfer (…), placement into the FARDC or reintegration into society as a demobilized combatant."[11]

A further challenge was that all these DDRRR operations were guided by a complex legal regime and a multiplicity of hierarchical structures that included both national and international institutions. At the national level, at least three structures were created to carry out DDRRR, including the National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration (CONADER), the National Bureau for Demobilization and Reintegration (BUNADER), and the Military Integration Structure (MIS). DDRRR funds, however, were managed by international partners, who also had their own structure for administering DDRRR technical support: "A Contact Group was created as a relatively centralized forum for donor engagement (...) The EU also established the EUSEC to support the FARDC (…) Belgium, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom created the Contact Group in order to establish a common donor position on SSR in the DRC, and in particular to coordinate donor support for the process of army integration."[12]

Coordination of the various DDRRR operations between national and international structures became difficult. In order to avoid duplication, international partners, including the Second in Command of EUSEC (Belgium); FARDC General Staff (Portugal); SMI (Hungary); Army Staff (UK); CONADER (UK); and, CCOC (UK and Portugal); decided to integrate their national DDRRR operational structures.[13] However, this merely added to the complexity. The head of EUSEC, General Joana, identified a number of factors behind the difficulties encountered:[14]

1. The DDRRR process was entrusted to the World Bank, which according to General Joana, was not the best agency for managing security reform. The World Bank team was more interested in budget management issues than in DDRRR operations, and its efforts were oriented more toward demobilization than toward the formation of a new national security force.

2. DDRRR was based on the choice of individuals but ignored the weight of an armed group's social influence over these individuals.

3. The repatriation component was difficult to implement because, for soldiers who declared themselves to be non-DRC nationals, their countries of origin regularly refused to recognize them and blocked their reintegration into their original army.

4. Financial resources allocated to disarm and demobilize fighters were greater than those allocated to integrate soldiers into the new army.

5. Logistical support was inadequate to meet the challenge of implementing DDRRR in a country as vast and underdeveloped as the DRC. Troops who were intended to be merged were often separated by distances of up to 2,000 kilometers, and gathering camps were often far from the original position of troops.

Explaining why DDRRR ultimately failed in the DRC, General Joana questioned "How [do you] implement, without significant financial resources, without means of transport, without roads, without railways, (…)"[15]

DDRRR Afflicted by International Competition

Competition and lack of coordination among the international community have also contributed to the failure of DDRRR in the DRC. Donors did not react in concert with each other when DDRRR efforts started slowing down. Some donor countries decided to freeze their financial contribution while others decided to develop their own operational concepts. For example, in order to win some time, Belgium advised the DRC

government to change its strategy and train elite troops to fight new emerging rebellions. Their training camp was put in the Maniema region.[16] This lack of coordination added confusion to the program. Competing national interests among countries such as Belgium, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and South Africa also came into play. Some countries accused others of having harmful intentions toward the DRC's future national army. For example, tension arose between the Netherlands and United Kingdom, each of which had put substantial resources into DDRRR. Similarly, Belgium and France clashed over their concerns about training DRC forces and delays in FARDC efforts to address the rise of new security challenges in the eastern Congo.[17] These spats among international partners raised suspicion among the Congolese in charge of the DDRRR program, such that some started doubting the true intentions of the donors and accused them of using the DDRRR program to spy on the national army.

This crisis of confidence undermined the reform program, according to EUSEC's General Joana: "In matters of security, everything becomes sensitive and secret: (…) the inventory and therefore the identification of materials, armaments, and ammunition available to the country, the location of units, the level of staff training, etc. Under these conditions, wanting to protect this information from those who offer to help reform is legitimate. It is also a way to block any reform."[18]

Conclusion

Despite two decades of efforts to reform the DRC's security sector, not a single goal has been completely achieved. The troop census was a headache; leaders of some armed groups sought to downsize the number of their soldiers and hid military equipment in order to mask their true strength. Some armed groups would later engage in new rebellions, for example, the CNDP rebellion in the Kivu. Additionally, soldiers who qualified for the new national army were paid a low salary (USD$10 per month), which led many to engage in banditry and violence against civilians. The International Monetary Fund objected to calls for increasing military pay because of its impact on the national budget. Furthermore, some donors, such as France and Belgium, who had been called upon to help train and equip certain units[19] entered into a hidden war over the sale of military equipment to the DRC. Also, the DRC government, faced with recurrent security emergencies, opted to concentrate its efforts not on building a national, professional army, but rather on waging war with a disparate, unruly army.

Today, the various assessments[20] of security sector reform in the DRC are unanimous in recognizing that the work is unfinished. Beyond its technical shortcomings, the DDRRR process in the DRC has revealed the weakness of the country's political and military leadership, as well as the inconsistency of international cooperation. A recent report from the Institute for Security Studies concluded that: "SSR cannot be expected to progress quicker than efforts to restore a functioning state in the DRC."[21]

Today, the DRC suffers from chronic dysfunction of the military and security apparatus: "The different security services–defense, police, intelligence, etc.–operate with great autonomy from one another, while there is a range of other parallel or irregular security bodies (…) not governed by official laws or legislation but nonetheless under the control of the presidency or other senior political and military elites."[22]

It is encouraging that the country's parliament has passed all necessary laws for security sector reform, including measures legislating the reform plan, reform programming, and the status, organization, and operation of the military. Sadly, however, what is lacking is the political will to implement these reforms. In short, insecurity and instability in the DRC continue because of the failure of the DDRRR program. Achieving

lasting peace in the DRC will require the political will to make investing in security sector reform the highest national budgetary priority. According to a former senior official in the DRC's defense ministry: "The financial means that the country directs to the development and waterproofing of its defensive shield constitute a real investment for peace."[23]

In other words, investing in security sector reform is insurance for the country's peace and development. Thus, the cost of reforming national defense structures should be considered by the DRC as its highest priority investment for development, security, stability, and peace.

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Cover Image: MONUSCO and the Civic Education Service of the DR Congo Armed Forces are sensitizing almost 11,000 newly recruited soldiers of the DR Congo Armed Forces on civic education and behavioral change, in order to promote peace and security in the DRC. Photo by Yves Mashako and Joseph Tabung Banah courtesy of MONUSCO Photos via Flickr Commons. https://www.flickr.com/photos/monusco/27986392244.

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