



RESEARCH BRIEF 8/2024

Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa

[SIGLA @ Stellenbosch](#)

Author Professor T. Mandrup (SIGLA/RDDC)

Series Editor: Professor F. Vreÿ (SIGLA)

Up to the negotiating table and back again - what is the possibility of peace in the Eastern DRC after yet another ceasefire agreement?

A saying: "The DRC is a wounded elephant lying down, while Rwanda and others cut pieces off it to keep it lying down. If it got strong, the elephant would dominate the whole of central Africa, and the small neighbours would not want that."

Introduction

On 30 July 2024, an [Angola-mediated ceasefire agreement was reached](#) between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), effective 4 August 2024. The agreement followed months of political negotiations and intense military confrontations between the Rwandan-supported Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) rebel group and the DRC security forces, Wazelendo-armed elements, and elements from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional intervention force, the SAMIDRC. The ceasefire again created hope for a solution to the conflict in the Eastern DRC, which has been ongoing since the Hutu-dominated government escaped from Rwanda following the Genocide in 1994 and formed the Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda ([FDLR](#)). The 2024 ceasefire was met with skepticism since the agreement is just the latest of many and because the agreement was signed [between Rwanda and the DRC, not including the M23](#). By the time of writing, the ceasefire agreement had broken down, and fighting continued, leading to relatively large geographical gains by the M23-

The questions then are: what went wrong and what are the prospects for the SAMIDRC fulfilling its mandate, the chances for reaching sustainable peace and for the fragile Luanda peace process to achieve tangible results?

Discussion

More than nine months after the first elements SAMIDRC of the SADC arrived in Goma, Northern Kivu, a combination of intensive diplomatic activity and worrying information has emerged from the frontlines. A ceasefire agreement had once again failed, and fighting had broken out, leading to displacement and the M23 expanding its territorial control. Simultaneously the UN mission MONUSCO is in the process of implementing the mission's drawdown, which is scheduled to be achieved by the end of 2024. The UN Security Council Resolution, UNSCR 2746, noted that the DRC government must draw up a plan for a sustainable handover of the responsibility to the local security forces in especially North Kivu and Ituri provinces, following the withdrawal and closure of the MONUSCO presence in Southern DRC. The drawdown of MONUSCO has been tied to the security situation in the Eastern DRC, which at this stage does not support a closure of the mission. Apart from the continued fighting in North Kivu, MONUSCO continues to militarily engage the Islamic State-affiliated entity, the ADF, around Beni and has launched operations against a violent armed grouping, the CODECO, in the Ituri province. The national government, on 30 August 2024, decided, for the 80th time, to extend the emergency measures, the state of siege, for the conflict-affected regions of the DRC, i.e. North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, Haut Uele, Bas Uele, Ituri and Tshopo. These factors clearly illustrate the volatility of the security situation in Eastern DRC, that the local security forces cannot in any way control the situation, and that a withdrawal of the MONUSCO forces is premature.

Since signing the ceasefire agreement on 30 July 2024, which followed the 5 July US-brokered humanitarian ceasefire, the security situation has once more deteriorated. The Foreign Ministers of Rwanda and the DRC met in Luanda, Angola, on August 20-21 to discuss a peace agreement and sustainable peace while the security situation on the ground deteriorated. In the [ceasefire agreement](#), the DRC government committed to present a plan and timeline for the neutralisation of the FDLR. In addition, Rwanda committed to evaluating its defence and security posture, which basically focuses on stopping the support for the M23. However, it became clear that DRC President Tshiesikiedi is not happy with the progress of the negotiations and announced on 30 August 2024 that [Sumbu Sita Mambu was appointed as DRC's new High Representative for the Luanda process and regional economic organisations](#), in an ongoing pattern of replacing DRC officials appointed to resolve the conflict.

The DRC government's position remains that it would not meet with M23 and that there would be no amnesty for the members of M23. The DRC stance also explains why the M23, and other non-state armed groupings are not part of the Luanda Process. However, the importance of the Angolan-facilitated dialogue between the two governments should not be underestimated since failure to finding solutions to the key issues fueling the conflict creates an excuse for Rwanda to stay involved in Eastern DRC. The security situation in the Eastern DRC has long been closely interlinked with Rwanda and the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The relatively strong anti-Kigali insurgency movement, the FDLR, has continued to control sections of territory in the Eastern DRC and consequently provided Rwanda with a persistent excuse to interfere.

The neutralisation of the threat posed by the FDLR and its alliance partners in the Congolese Patriotic Resistance (CPR) is central to halting the continued Rwandan interference. [The UN group of experts have documented that the CPR operates alongside, in cooperation with and with the logistical support of the DRC army, the FARDC](#). The dialogue is thus important because the DRC government must show a credible willingness to disarm and disband the FDLR, which is yet to happen, and also provide security guarantees for the Rwandophone minorities in Eastern DRC. In this regard, the DRC government has time and again failed to live up to the protection of minorities promised during different peace [agreements over the years](#), while DRC security forces have even cooperated with FDLR against the Rwanda-supported militias. In addition, the DRC authorities must agree to implement the principles of [previous peace agreements](#), including providing security and minority

rights and protection for the Kinyarwanda-speaking minorities in Eastern DRC. Simultaneously, it has been [documented](#) repeatedly that Rwanda, for security and economic purposes, [continues to play a central negative role in the continued instability of Eastern DRC](#).

Enter SAMIDRC

In the Eastern DRC, the M23, continues to edge closer to the regional capital, Goma. The South African led SAMIDRC force continues to [experience various operational and logistical problems](#), including the lack of proper logistical support in securing equipment supply lines, ammunition, and foodstuff. The South African Air Force (SAAF) decision [to wet-lease four Il-76TDs](#) has alleviated some of the challenges experienced in getting logistic supplies into the operational area to the South African element of the mission, which constitutes the bulk of the SAMIDRC forces.

SAMIDRC has yet to reach full operational capacity for equipment and personnel, and casualties have started to occur on the ground. The early April 2024 statement that the M23 took South African National Defence Force (SANDF) personnel prisoner added to the uncertainty. While the SANDF has deployed a full contingent of 2600 soldiers, the lack of proper medical facilities and extraction and medical evacuation capabilities is alleged [to have resulted in the loss of lives](#). At the time of writing, the SANDF [has lost ten soldiers in the DRC since the deployment of the SAMIDRC](#) in December 2023. More than 40 soldiers have been wounded, stressing that the SAMIDRC mission is a dangerous military operation deployed in very difficult terrain without the needed capabilities to operate efficiently. The UNSC decision in August 2024, via Resolution 2746 to allow for MONUSCO to provide support for the SAMIDRC forces, could alleviate some of the challenges that the mission has faced in terms of individual capabilities and even whole capacities. This shift also offers welcome progress on the potential for new forms of cooperation and distribution of labour between the UN and African partners and the constructive role the UN can play in African peacekeeping in the future.

Concluding remarks

Another cease agreement relating to the ongoing conflict in the Eastern DRC has seemingly broken down. The gains on the battlefield strengthens the hand of the M23 (and indirectly that of Rwanda) at the negotiating table. The problem is of course that the M23 is not part of the negotiation, since the DRC government refuses to negotiate with what it considers an illegitimate rebel group. The lack of direct and official involvement of insurgent groups like the M23 and the FDLR points to a structural risk in the Luanda ceasefire and peace process. The core of the problem of continued conflict in Eastern DRC is vested in Rwanda and the DRC through their support and cooperation with the rebel movements that help to keep the armed groups active to operate as spoilers. Juxtaposed to this is a hindrance more local in nature – that of local dynamics of access and right to land, lack of security and a broken social contract between the citizens and state, as well as the operation of disruptive identity politics of whether the Rwandaphones are Congolese or newcomers?

The role of the SAMIDRC might also be futile since it does not, in size and terms of configuration, have the capacity to militarily contain a Rwanda-augmented M23. The question is whether the situation is similar to what was seen in 1998, where there was a state-to-state negotiating track, i.e. the Lusaka agreement, and then the so-called Sun-City process in South Africa accommodating all parties. There is a need for a two-tracked approach such as that found in the suspended Nairobi peace process, which allows for both political and security consultations.

However, the problem remains wider and deeper than that of Rwanda: the international community should pressurize the DRC and Rwanda into a solution, i.e. stop their support and cooperation with

the armed groups as a first step. It must also call for an extension of the MONUSCO, albeit in a transformed role, in the Eastern DRC, since the UN seems to be the only actor that could be able to play the impartial role that is needed. Based on the former two conditionalities, the SADC initiatives such as SAMIDRC have greater attraction to contribute to the peace building process with its regional political clout and augmented with its limited military means for a successful intervention force.

Professor Thomas Mandrup is an Extra-ordinary Associate Professor with SIGLA, Stellenbosch University.

Email: thomasm@sun.ac.za

