



# Taking Back Eastern Congo

Comprehensively Addressing the FDLR and M23 Rebel Groups

By Timo Mueller and Fidel Bafilemba      October 2013



**enough**

The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

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**COVER PHOTO**

A rebel FDLR fighter in Masisi territory, North Kivu province, surveys the nearby hills in August 2013. Many armed groups move through Masisi, which is also a transit route for weapons and minerals in eastern DRC. SIMONE SCHLINDWEIN

## Executive summary

Over the past 19 years, one of the most intractable symptoms of mass violence in Congo's eastern regions has been the proliferation of armed groups that threaten security, perpetrate horrific human rights abuses, and undermine economic development. Two of these armed groups—the M23 and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, or FDLR—not only have committed some of the worst atrocities in the conflict, but they have also internationalized it in multiple ways. The FDLR is headed by some of the perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and it has attacked Rwanda in the past year. Kigali believes the FDLR poses an existential security threat. The M23 is an offshoot of several previous rebel groups, and the United States and other groups have linked it to the Rwandan government, but Kigali denies the link.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, dealing with these two groups addresses one of the most destabilizing factors in the Great Lakes region: the relationship between Congo and Rwanda. The Allied Democratic Forces, or ADF, is also becoming a destabilizing force in Congo and threatens Congolese communities and Uganda.<sup>2</sup>

With the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2098, the United Nations created a 3,000-troop Intervention Brigade with a mandate to “carry out targeted offensive operations” against armed groups in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC.<sup>3</sup> The brigade is the United Nations' first offensive combat unit.<sup>4</sup> Nearly five months after its creation, and against a backdrop of growing popular frustrations that sparked massive demonstrations and stoning of U.N. cars, the brigade joined the Congolese army in fighting the M23<sup>5</sup> between August 21 and August 30, 2013.<sup>6</sup> The U.N. Intervention Brigade's first public operation exposed the well-documented complexities of the area, the actors, and the problem that the force was designed to address.

In the aftermath of the fighting, on September 10, 2013, the DRC government and M23 agreed to resume peace talks in neighboring Uganda. At this stage, the Congolese government seems reluctant to offer amnesty and reintegration to M23 members suspected of committing the worst human rights crimes. But it is unlikely that M23 leaders would sign a peace agreement without an amnesty option. One possible way to pressure M23 into conceding to an agreement is to step up pressure on and provide new incentives to its alleged ally, Rwanda.<sup>7</sup> Refocusing international attention on Rwanda's adversary, the FDLR, could provide a means of gaining the necessary political buy-in from Rwanda to help end the M23 rebellion and address a persistent source of insecurity to the Congolese people.

With that said, to incentivize Rwanda to help convince the M23 to sign a deal requires far more than a refocusing on the FDLR alone. With the Kampala talks unable to address Congo's and Rwanda's security and economic interests, it is important to bring the discussions to a swift conclusion, opposing any amnesty for M23 rebels implicated in war crimes. For the worst violence in Congo's east to end, the Kampala talks should transition into a regional peace process on security and economic interests.

Complementing the Enough Project's forthcoming report on regional economic integration, this field report discusses the prominent security concerns of Congo and Rwanda. It provides analysis of recent and historical developments, evaluates a range of options for addressing the M23, and advances a new strategy for containing and neutralizing the FDLR. The elements of such a strategy would ideally include a beefed-up effort to increase defections, a vastly upgraded mediation effort involving regional and internal Congolese actors, a revamped security-sector-reform initiative, and a more effective military strategy led by the Intervention Brigade.

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## Recommendations

1. U.N. Special Envoy Mary Robinson, U.S. Special Envoy Russ Feingold, and envoys from the European Union and African Union should help bring the Kampala talks to a swift conclusion, respecting principles of accountability and justice. Envoys should also help develop and promote the necessary political arrangements to offer security guarantees and a step-by-step disarmament plan for M23, even before the FDLR is addressed.
2. The four envoys should work closely with African leaders on kick-starting the next part of the peace process: negotiations between regional states on critical security and economic issues. The envoys should also demand that regional states avoid further escalations and cease any support for rebel groups, especially the M23.
3. MONUSCO should ensure that the U.N. Intervention Brigade addresses Congo's, Rwanda's, and Uganda's primary security threats—M23, the FDLR, and the ADF—in order to de-escalate regional tensions. U.N. Special Representative Martin Kobler and MONUSCO leadership should expand the operational effectiveness of the peacekeeping mission and Intervention Brigade by promoting the use of better sources of intelligence and pressing the Congolese army to sever local-level linkages with the FDLR and other militias, and conducting military operations with utmost care for the safety and humanitarian concerns of local civilians.

4. Special Representative Kobler should expand the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration, and resettlement program, or DDR/RR, for foreign-armed rebels and swiftly conclude negotiations over a new disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, or DDR, program for Congolese armed rebels. The U.S. and EU envoys should work with Kobler on securing funding for both programs. The programs should promote more robust outreach and sensitization campaigns and work with Congolese churches, whose networks have allowed them to make a significant contribution to sensitization campaigns.
5. The UNHCR should devise, in close coordination with Special Envoy Robinson and Special Representative Kobler, a comprehensive plan to provide durable solutions on the issue of refugees in Congo and Rwanda. Special Representative Kobler should increase public outreach on the U.N. brigade in order to better manage expectations. Kobler should emphasize to the Congolese government that the U.N. brigade will not be a silver bullet to the myriad of problems in Congo and that Kinshasa bears the primary responsibility to launch necessary institutional reforms, in particular security-sector reform.
6. MONUSCO and the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations should request a small contingent of U.S. Special Operations advisors to MONUSCO to assist in strategic planning and operational support to address the threat posed by spoiler armed groups such as the M23, the FDLR, and ADF.

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### A military solution for M23?

Recent outbreaks of violence involving M23 suggest that the group has grown weaker in recent months. These circumstances have renewed talk in Congo of a military solution for containing and extinguishing M23.

After fighting stopped on August 30, 2013, M23's military strength reached an all-time low. In late July, the U.N. Group of Experts on DRC reported that the movement was "unable to control its entire territory and suffers from poor morale and scores of desertions," underscoring the rebel group's "current inability to carry out large-scale coordinated military operations."<sup>8</sup> Confrontations with the Congolese army, or FARDC, between July 14 and July 26 as well as August 21 and August 30 inflicted another blow on the M23 movement.<sup>9</sup> That does not, however, imply that M23 cannot recover in due time. Worryingly, during a press conference in Goma on October 9, Force Commander dos Santos Cruz said M23 is already reinforcing its troops.<sup>10</sup>



In its weakened state, M23 relies on vital support from Rwanda, according to the United Nations.<sup>11</sup> Kigali denies this support, however. U.N. officers who witnessed the fighting in late August firsthand from the frontlines and who are also aware of M23's limited capacities told the Enough Project that M23 alone could not have withstood the heavy bombardment without external support.<sup>12</sup> Briefing the U.N. Security Council on August 29, 2013, U.N. Assistant Secretary-General Edmond Mulet reportedly said that the United Nations had "consistent and credible reports" that Rwandan troops had entered the Congo in recent days.<sup>13</sup> In an interview with the Enough Project in mid-September, a high-ranking Rwandan government official denied the allegations.<sup>14</sup>

Because it seems that M23 alone can no longer conduct large-scale military operations, some inside Kinshasa's power circles and a great number of Congolese people in the east believe that M23 can be crushed by military force alone.<sup>15</sup> Those who favor a political process over a military approach are branded as supporters of M23, as some Congolese people have labeled Special Envoy Robinson.<sup>16</sup>

The impulse, however, to forgo political efforts and confront M23 on the battlefield will not result in a sustainable solution and might provoke serious confrontations with Rwanda. During the fighting in late August, when 38 shells reportedly fell in Rwanda, Kigali issued a public warning. Blaming the shelling on the Congolese army and the FDLR, Rwanda's Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo stated that "[Rwandan] troops are not in DRC (yet); when they are, you will know, and no more need for erroneous reports."<sup>17</sup> A high-ranking Rwandan official later told the Enough Project that "we were at the brink [of shooting back]."<sup>18</sup> In response, Congolese army spokesperson Oliver Hamuli said that "if Rwanda invades, we'll cross [into Rwanda] as well."<sup>19</sup> In Goma, the anger of many Congolese against Rwanda drew international attention. Wary of an escalation, diplomatic heavyweights swung into action and initiated a flurry of activities to mediate the crisis. Special Representative Kobler visited Kigali, and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called Rwandan President Paul Kagame directly.<sup>20</sup>

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### A political solution for M23?

On September 10, 2013, the DRC government and M23 rebels agreed to resume peace talks in neighboring Uganda. M23 has provided two conditions for disarmament: neutralizing the FDLR rebels and facilitating the return and reintegration of Congolese Tutsi refugees. These demands concern deeply systemic problems and require a long time to resolve. Offering amnesty only for crimes of mutiny in limited cases may facilitate negotiations with the M23, but addressing M23's stated core concerns with the FDLR will require a more comprehensive process. That said, M23 needs to lay down arms before the FDLR is neutralized, because it is too lengthy and complicated a process, and M23 has little to no legitimacy in making such demands. To clarify, the M23 did not rebel because of the FDLR. Officially, their rebellion was about dissatisfaction with an earlier peace agreement in 2009. Unofficially, they defected from the army in the face of Kinshasa's growing intentions to dismantle their parallel command structures.

To strike a deal with M23 rebels, Kinshasa may offer amnesty for the act of rebellion in April 2012 and general amnesty and reintegration to rank-and-file soldiers that are not implicated in serious human rights violations.<sup>21</sup> However, amnesty and reintegration alone will not suffice, as one cannot simply expect M23 to lay down their arms if no real security guarantees are provided. The idea that M23, even in its weakened state, can possibly disarm shortly after the ending of peace talks is too optimistic. Special Envoy Robinson, together with Special Envoy Feingold and other special envoys from the European Union and African Union, should help negotiators in Kampala develop the terms of security guarantees and a step-by-step disarmament plan for M23, even before the FDLR is neutralized.

Both Kinshasa and the international community are adamant in their refusal to provide domestic amnesty for war crimes and serious human rights abuses and to offer reintegration to the suspected worst human rights offenders among M23.<sup>22</sup> Without an amnesty option, however, it is unlikely that the leaders of M23 would sign an agreement. To address this impasse with M23, the international community should bring the Rwandan government into the discussions. Rwanda's persistent denial of its vital support to the M23 has been the big elephant in the room of direct talks between Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC. What can one possibly offer Kigali so that it helps pressure M23 into laying down their arms? Among other things such as a regional economic-integration component to the peace process, one part of the answer lies in a more comprehensive strategy to deal with the FDLR.

In interviews with the Enough Project in August and September 2013, high-ranking Rwandan government officials repeatedly underscored the need to address the FDLR because, as they say, it is unacceptable that FDLR continues to carry out sporadic attacks against Rwanda.<sup>23</sup> (President Kagame and Foreign Minister Mushikiwabo made similar remarks to the U.N. Security Council when visiting Rwanda on October 8.)<sup>24</sup> Consequently, they argued, “we need to see enough action to prevent them from harming us. We’ll be happy with that,” mentioning as the first priority the need to sever linkages between the Congolese army and the FDLR. “There will never be an absolute military victory. ... We won’t have a day without FDLR.”<sup>25</sup>

That said, some Congolese and outside analysts believe that Rwanda has at times manipulated the threat of the FDLR for a variety of purposes. The Congolese army, in turn, has repeatedly used the rebel group as proxy to meet its own ends. While atrocious in its operations, the FDLR has served the interests of many players in the region, making it all the more difficult to end the insurgency.

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## FDLR: A status update

In 2009, Congo and Rwanda conducted military operations against the FDLR in earnest, delivering a blow to the rebel group.<sup>26</sup> The operations were a mixed blessing, however, as they exacted incredible costs on local communities, causing large-scale displacement.<sup>27</sup> Also, linkages between the Congolese army and the FDLR undermined some of the operations.<sup>28</sup>

Two years later, in 2011, local enemies stepped up their military confrontations with the FDLR,<sup>29</sup> deliberately targeting their families and employing a series of targeted assassinations against the high command of the FDLR.<sup>30</sup> These attacks triggered a large number of defections and led to the loss of key local networks for protection and access to basic commodities and mines. The loss of market access created a significant decrease in trade revenues.<sup>31</sup>

In early 2012, the group was in a deep state of crisis with seriously disrupted command and control structures and dwindling troop morale. But at a time when FDLR was seriously weakened, the Congolese army ceased offensive operations against FDLR because it was focused on the outbreak of the M23 rebellion in April 2012. M23, by drawing in all the attention from the Congolese army, actually offered FDLR a much-needed reprieve. When M23 became a greater threat, some Congolese army elements reportedly stepped up their collaboration with the FDLR, a longstanding enemy of M23, and engaged in local-level collaboration, according to the U.N. Group of Experts.<sup>32</sup> However, FDLR continued to suffer from fierce attacks by local adversaries.

In July 2013, the U.N. Group of Experts concluded that “[t]he FDLR suffers from internal divisions and a weak hierarchy that lacks the capability to command and control the organization’s entire operations,” adding that “FDLR continued to weaken during the first half of 2013.”<sup>33</sup> The majority of the FDLR rebels deployed in eastern North Kivu continue to be disconnected by some 250 miles from their compatriots in southern South Kivu.

The FDLR remains a shell of its former self, with its numbers estimated to have dwindled to 1,500 to 2,500 troops.<sup>34</sup> While the group no longer poses a major national security threat to the Rwandan government, it continues to carry out sporadic attacks against the country and has alleged genocidaires among its leaders.<sup>35</sup> According to one analyst, however, the FDLR’s most recent attacks were not designed to destabilize Rwanda, but rather to boost dwindling morale among its combatants.<sup>36</sup>



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## Tactics to engage and neutralize the FDLR

Effectively neutralizing the FDLR will require pursuing a comprehensive approach that addresses the complexity of the threat FDLR poses and factors in the group's unique capabilities. The overall approach should engage a broad range of actors and leverage new tools and technology. A multifaceted strategy would feature more robust grassroots partnerships to promote defections together with a mix of targeted military operations in due time and with dramatically improved humanitarian measures during and after forthcoming military operations. These efforts may be pursued in concert or sequentially as necessary.

A comprehensive approach that engages a broader range of actors to more effectively target and neutralize the FDLR begins with better information that could be gleaned by tapping new sources of information and building analytical capacity. Military operations against the FDLR stand or fall with the quality of intelligence. Rwanda, in particular, has a wealth of information on the group, and the international community should redouble its efforts to secure Kigali's cooperation. Similarly, MONUSCO and the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations should request a small contingent of U.S. Special Operations advisors to assist in strategic planning and operational support to address the threat posed by spoiler armed groups. MONUSCO's new unmanned aerial vehicles could provide another source of information.<sup>37</sup> In an interview with the Enough Project, MONUSCO staff has cautioned, however, that they currently do not have the manpower to process all of the information.<sup>38</sup>

Isolating the FDLR from its partners and allies will also enhance efforts to neutralize the group. For instance, the FDLR maintains ties, though not systematic in nature, with rebel groups Nyatura and Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo, or APCLS. These connections should be considered when conducting operations against FDLR.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the international community must exert more pressure on the Congolese army to sever its local-level, nonideological linkages with the FDLR,<sup>40</sup> which have at times rendered military operations against the FDLR ineffective. Some of these relationships have helped the FDLR garner tactical intelligence, allowing them to relocate their troops days or weeks before military offensives. "Military operations [in 2009] were more to annoy the FDLR than to fight them," a senior U.N. DDR officer told the Enough Project.<sup>41</sup>

As part of the strategy of isolating the FDLR from its supporters and other armed actors, MONUSCO must pay very close attention to the vetting of the DRC government army units with which they work. In eastern Congo, elements of the armed forces frequently expose the population to grave risks.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the years, tens of thousands of former rebels from a wide range of ethnic groups have been reintegrated into the army without any vetting or human rights training, further exacerbating the fragmentation of an ill-functioning organization ridden by competing interests at all levels. With little to no payment, often frustrated by a lack of adequate equipment, housing, and general bad management, and in an environment where the threshold for violence has dropped

dramatically, soldiers often use their own weapons to make ends meet. The frequency of the human rights violations are worrisome and merit serious and careful vetting and institutional overhaul of the security sector as a whole.<sup>43</sup> If necessary, leaders should make operations of the brigade contingent upon reform initiatives by the Congolese government. MONUSCO should also be warned that the army might solicit the help of several armed groups such as Sheka, Raia Mutomboki, and the Congo Defense Forces, or FDC, which are notorious enemies of the FDLR.<sup>44</sup>

Better intelligence and a more clear separation between the FDLR, Congolese army, and U.N. forces could enhance the strength and effectiveness of counter-FDLR military initiatives. The strategy of combining surgical operations that directly target the FDLR hard-line leadership<sup>45</sup> with measured joint FARDC and U.N. Intervention Brigade operations in important FDLR strongholds can help neutralize the FDLR. The Intervention Brigade could focus operations on FDLR positions in border areas between Masisi and Walikale; Walikale and Lubero territories; as well as Kabare, Walungu, and Mwenga in South Kivu.

Increased targeted military operations against FDLR can only yield tangible results if troop-contributing countries to the brigade remain committed to the mission. As of September 27, 2013, two Tanzanian soldiers have already died as a result of fighting with M23,<sup>46</sup> and India has already voiced concerns about the brigade's implications on its role in the country.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, targeted military operations against the FDLR must go hand in hand with renewed efforts to disarm, demobilize, repatriate, reintegrate, and resettle FDLR combatants. Currently, efforts are underway to develop a new DDR/RR program, but questions of funding remain. Similarly, there is currently no national DDR program for Congolese armed groups, which is a significant gap in the peace process. Contrary to widely held Congolese opinion, many FDLR members were born or grew up in the DRC and need national-level solutions such as nationalization and relocation. While the concept note for a new DDR program is close to being finalized, there are still outstanding questions about funding.<sup>48</sup> It is important that donors demand greater transparency from the Congolese government, whose financial management of former DDR programs has been problematic.<sup>49</sup>

Existing DDR/RR initiatives for armed groups need greater outreach and coordination with local communities and grassroots organizations. To increase defections, MONUSCO must step up its outreach and sensitization campaigns. However, after joint operations with the Congolese army, MONUSCO enjoys little confidence from FDLR. This will likely not improve given that rebels will not differentiate between the Intervention Brigade and the peacekeeping mission at large. One possible avenue is for MONUSCO to support and help shoulder the burden of Congolese churches, whose networks have allowed them to make a significant contribution to sensitization campaigns. MONUSCO could capitalize on the local knowledge, acceptance, and rich experience that the churches offer.<sup>50</sup> MONUSCO should also pursue more strategically direct negotiations with moderate FDLR commanders.<sup>51</sup>

To facilitate defections, support local efforts, and expand capacity of the overall approach on ex-combatants, MONUSCO could relocate and expand safe reporting sites to areas more accessible to FDLR combatants. The difficulties of accessing MONUSCO disarmament bases proved to be a major stumbling block in 2012 as combatants feared reprisal attacks from FDLR commanders, civilians, other armed groups, and national security forces.<sup>52</sup> Defectors also need long-term support to reintegrate. Viable economic alternatives coupled with real security guarantees are needed to convince them to lay down their arms. With the right incentives, this should not be too daring an endeavor. According to an FDLR expert, “life in the forest is terrible.”<sup>53</sup>

Promoting defections and resettlement will require close cooperation with Rwanda. It is pivotal that the Rwandan government make public an updated and realistic list of FDLR members it wishes to prosecute for the genocide in 1994. A shorter list that targets those most responsible for the worst acts in 1994 could entice other FDLR members to defect. If FDLR members are in doubt about their future, some will likely not defect or seek available resources. Those who do repatriate to Rwanda deserve better monitoring of their post-repatriation treatment. In general, however, as one DDR expert noted, “DDR is a technical solution to a stubbornly political problem. Unless the political dynamics improve, there is little to be hoped from DDR. DDR/RR is similar and will not work in an environment that keeps generating new recruits.”<sup>54</sup>

That said, the fate of Rwandan Hutu refugees that have nothing to do with the FDLR in Congo must certainly not be forgotten and merits renewed attention by the UNHCR.<sup>55</sup> The issue is very important and has in recent years been much neglected, even though it is a core driver of the conflict, fueling, among other things, land disputes—mainly in the Lubero, Masisi, and Rutshuru territories of North Kivu. Any potential large-scale return has to be mitigated, however, as Rwanda has little interest in a massive return of refugees, fearing this might be a destabilizing factor. UNHCR should devise a comprehensive plan to voluntarily repatriate Congolese and Rwandan refugees, in coordination with MONUSCO and the U.N. Intervention Brigade.

Albeit weakened, the FDLR remains resilient and capable of rebuilding its forces. In its reduced state, it might actually be more dangerous to the local population, as the group might fear for its survival.<sup>56</sup> The FDLR uses sophisticated guerilla tactics and has the ability to disperse quickly into small, independent groups. It also has knowledge of the terrain and a network of local support systems. It has diaspora networks in Europe, North America, and Tanzania, whose funding and ideological influence remains an important factor to consider when gauging FDLR’s strength.<sup>57</sup> Considering FDLR’s military capabilities and sources of support with a broad perspective can enable political and military policymakers to make decisions that help minimize civilian casualties and limit retaliatory attacks.

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## Other armed groups

While M23 and FDLR pose strategic threats and are two of the most prominent armed groups in eastern Congo, there is a wide range of other armed groups whose human rights violations are often equally worrisome and merit attention from the Intervention Brigade.<sup>58</sup> To name just a few, in Pinga, Walikale territory, the rebel group NDC/Mai-Mai Sheka has clashed with its enemy, APCLS, causing large-scale displacement.<sup>59</sup> Further north, in Beni territory, the rebel group ADF has clashed with the national army, causing the displacement of 66,000 people.<sup>60</sup> In Ituri, Orientale province, the rebel group Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri, or FRPI, led by Cobra Matata, is increasingly active.<sup>61</sup> When addressing armed groups, it is important to pay close attention to the sequencing of activities so as to prevent security vacuums that might be filled by negative elements.

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## Considerations for the Intervention Brigade

Before addressing armed groups, it is pivotal that the Intervention Brigade address the following challenges.

### Manage expectations and improve communication with the Congolese public

After nearly two decades of conflict, the Congolese public is justifiably frustrated with the current status quo. The deep-seated grievances boiled over on August 24, 2013, following the repeated shelling of Goma reportedly at the hands of M23. Exposed and vulnerable, citizens took their anger to the streets in protest. The Enough Project witnessed massive demonstrations in many parts of the town. Large groups of young men roamed through Goma, setting up roadblocks and lighting tires on fire. With the United Nations a primary target, many staff remained indoors fearing mob violence and retaliatory attacks. The police and U.N. military personnel later confronted the protesters with force, dispersing the crowds with tear gas and batons. Hours later, life slowly resumed in downtown Goma, albeit missing its notorious bustling beat.<sup>62</sup>

The latest shelling of Goma at the hands of M23 was a bitter reminder that life is fragile in spite of the presence of the United Nations' largest peacekeeping mission. In eastern Congo, where U.N. agencies and international NGOs assume primary responsibility for many services usually assigned to the state apparatus, Congolese often hitch their hopes for the future to MONUSCO rather than their own army. Many Congolese are skeptical of the ongoing peace talks in Kampala and favor a military confrontation with M23. Cognizant of earlier failures, many want a victory on the battlefield rather than a compromise at the negotiation table.<sup>63</sup> With frustrations at an all-time high, MONUSCO needs to manage the public's expectations about what the Intervention Brigade can achieve. Visiting the Congo from October 4 to October 6, ambassadors of the U.N. Security Council found "excessive expectations" for the force among Congolese officials and civil-society leaders.<sup>64</sup>

The new vigor and energy that the new head of MONUSCO, Martin Kobler, brings to the table is much needed and welcome. Special Representative Kobler should pursue his commendable approach with caution and consideration for the possibility that early momentum and success may further raise the bar and fuel the hopes of Congolese who have too often faced disappointment.<sup>65</sup>

To tame expectations and clarify MONUSCO's role, Special Representative Kobler should continue his efforts to talk to local media. One idea might be to organize a televised public debate where head figures such as President Kabila, Special Representative Kobler, and senior army commanders discuss ways forward and take questions from the public.

### Better reconcile military and political efforts

One of the key mandates of the U.N. Intervention Brigade is to assist in creating space for ongoing political processes to proceed. However, while the United Nations promises to find equilibrium between military and political efforts,<sup>66</sup> it is internally divided on the right balance and sends mixed messages to the public. For instance, MONUSCO's efforts to enforce a security zone in and around Goma in August 2013 have been ill prepared, mismanaged, and poorly communicated to the Congolese public.<sup>67</sup> With little explanation at hand, rumors and expectations abounded. When MONUSCO failed to live up to the expectations, demonstrations followed and frustrations intensified.

The U.N. Intervention Brigade also risks being seen, or being used, as a pawn of Kinshasa. If the brigade secures victories against armed groups, Kinshasa will claim victory on its behalf. Conversely, if the brigade suffers embarrassing defeats at the hands of armed groups or causes large-scale humanitarian fallout, Kinshasa will blame MONUSCO. Cognizant of humanitarian risks, numerous nongovernmental organizations have already expressed concerns about the brigade's potentially negative effects and/or the possibility of its being used as a scapegoat.<sup>68</sup> Worryingly, a U.N. briefing dated September 7, 2013, noted that "MONUSCO is delivering false reassurance—maintaining the illusion of protection—through static presence and consuming significant resources to little enduring effect."<sup>69</sup>



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## Conclusion

The international community's commitment to a peace process in Congo has reached an all-time high and has stimulated discussions about a more comprehensive approach to containing armed movements. This momentum coincides with battlefield dynamics that could result in reduced force size and capacity of rebels and also affect M23's incentives to negotiate for peace. M23 has recently suffered losses on the battlefield, and it faces an empowered Congolese army battalion that has secured public support and assistance from the new U.N. Intervention Brigade. Pressure is mounting on M23's reported ally, Rwanda. On the other hand, the FDLR is in a weakened state that the international community should exploit. The group is licking its wounds from a series of targeted assassinations, attacks by local adversaries, and a growing number of defections.

Both M23 and the Rwandan government consider the FDLR a significant national security threat. While some argue that the FDLR serves as a red herring for Rwandan engagement and influence in eastern Congo, it must be addressed nevertheless to end the war in eastern Congo. As long as the FDLR is able to harm Rwanda, albeit on a smaller scale than previously, Kigali feels it has legitimate cause for armed engagement in eastern Congo. Until that threat—real or perceived—is re-addressed, Rwanda and/or its proxy forces will cite national security interests to justify their actions to the international community. The FDLR itself, and the issues with which it is associated, present critical obstacles to regional peace and stability. Addressing FDLR in due time is an opportunity to secure the necessary political buy-in from Rwanda to help contain the M23.

There is a window of opportunity for a more effective campaign to neutralize the FDLR. Increased sensitization campaigns and robust DDR/RR programs could be part of an effective and lasting solution. Resolving these issues will not happen overnight. The new U.N. Intervention Brigade alone will certainly not provide the silver bullet for solving the problems of armed groups in the Kivus, though it can serve as one tool in a broader, comprehensive approach that includes political and economic efforts. In the same vein, a military approach to neutralizing the M23, FDLR, and ADF rebel groups by itself may not directly affect the activities of other dozens of armed groups wreaking havoc on the population. Efforts to reform the security sector as a whole and improve DDR/RR programs will be essential. Addressing M23, the FDLR, and the ADF through a comprehensive process now, however, would be a critical step in the right direction.

## Endnotes

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- 4 U.N. Security Council, "Intervention Brigade' Authorized as Security Council Grants Mandate Renewal for United Nations Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo," Press release, March 28, 2013, available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc10964.doc.htm>. For a brief historical review and analysis of U.N. peacekeeping missions with offensive dimensions, see David Bosco, "When Peacekeepers Go to War," *Foreign Policy*, April 1, 2013, available at [http://bosco.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/03/28/when\\_peacekeepers\\_go\\_to\\_war](http://bosco.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/03/28/when_peacekeepers_go_to_war).
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- 7 U.N. Security Council, "Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the DRC submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 2078 (2012)," S/2013/433, July 19, 2013, available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/433](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/433).
- 8 U.N. Security Council, "Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the DRC submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 2078 (2012)," S/2013/433, paras. 11, 32, July 19, 2013, available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/433](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/433). For background and analysis of M23, see Jason Stearns, *From CNDP to M23: The evolution of an armed movement in eastern Congo* (Nairobi, Rift Valley Institute, 2012); Jason Stearns, "From the CNDP to M23," *Congo Siasa*, November 12, 2012, available at <http://congosiassa.blogspot.com/2012/11/from-cndp-to-m23.html>; U.N. Security Council, "Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the DRC submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 2078 (2012)," S/2013/433, paras. 9-71, July 19, 2013, available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/433](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/433); U.N. Security Council, "Final report of the Group of Experts on the DRC submitted in accordance with paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2021 (2011)" (2012), paras. 3-93.
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- 26 The Congolese government has conducted three military operations against the FDLR in eastern Congo since early 2009. The first military offensive, "Umoja Wetu," started on January 20, 2009, and was conducted by Congolese and Rwandan coalition forces in the southern part of North Kivu. It lasted 35 days. The second military operation, "Kimia II," started in March 2009, was conducted by Congolese forces with support of MONUSCO in North, as well as South Kivu, and ended in December 2009. The third offensive, "Amani Leo," began in January 2010 in North and South Kivu. Support from MONUSCO was made conditional, and the offensive slowed down by the end of 2011. These military operations have helped to disrupt the FDLR, but they have failed to eliminate their threat. Nevertheless, the offensive helped weaken the FDLR.
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- 31 U.N. DDR/RR reports made available to Enough Project, March 2012. A nonexhaustive list of FDLR officers who have defected since November 2011: Capt. Nduwamungu Jean Marie of the Concorde Battalion was injured by the FDC in Kimua on November 26 and was evacuated to a military hospital before he was repatriated to Rwanda; Capt. Joseph Tuziyaremye, also known as Gedeon, of the FOCA HQ 00; Capt. Theonest Ndayambaje, also known as Jagwar Ngabonzima, of the Bahamas Battalion; and Capt. Akizimana Benjamin of Sosuki Fourth Battalion surrendered in the second half of January 2012. Two officers from South Kivu, Major Kizingkiko Ildephonse, also known as Nkiko, company commander of the protection force for the FDLR Reserve Brigade at Shario and Lt. Nayahoyo Enoch, also known as Kayira, deputy of the military prosecutor for the Second Battalion at Nyabaleke, as well as Major Asante Joseph Emmanuel, commander of the FDLR Reserve Brigade at Mashaki, Walikale; Lt. Hakizimana Cyprien of the Zodiak Battalion; and Capt. Gahamanyi from the Second Battalion in South Kivu surrendered mid- to late February 2012. Capt. Gahamanyi Félicien of the Sosuki Battalion and Major Ryangarirora Emmanuel of the Reserve Brigade surrendered early March 2012. Lt. Col. Idrissa Muradadi, commander of the Second Battalion, turned himself over mid-March 2012.
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- 34 U.N. Security Council, "Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the DRC submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 2078 (2012)," S/2013/433, para. 97; On May 31, 2013, Rwanda's Defense Minister James Kabarebe tweeted that "today it's [FDLR] about 2000 minus!" Tweet from @KabarebeJames, May 31, 2013, 11:44 p.m., available at <https://twitter.com/KabarebeJames/status/340765677352787970>.
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