

Slow military reform and the transition process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Introduction

After nearly three years and a number of delays, the transition period in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is now set to come to an end by 31 July 2006. A new constitution was adopted by a referendum held in late 2005, paving the way for presidential and legislative elections which are now set to take place on 30 July.

This will be the first Congolese government to have been elected in free and fair elections since the first post-independence government of Patrice Lumumba in 1960. It is not only

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for this historical reason that expectations are high, however; over 4 million people have died over the last eight years of war and turmoil, most of them because they had been displaced from their homes, were too poor to pay for proper medical care, or because the health infrastructure has simply collapsed. Millions of people are displaced or living in refugee camps in neighbouring countries; the formal economy has disintegrated and is not yet sufficiently recovered to absorb the country’s vast unemployed population. Life has been unbearably difficult for most Congolese and they are waiting desperately for things to finally take a definitive turn for the better. Unfortunately, the holding of elections – however free and fair they may turn out to be – is unlikely to usher in the new era of peace, stability and economic recovery that the country and its people so desperately need.

On 30 June 2006, it will have been exactly three years since the transition government embarked on its assigned task of guiding the country to national elections. According to the All-Inclusive Peace Agreement signed by all parties in December 2002, the transition government had a period of two years to organise elections, but could, if necessary, extend this by two additional six-month periods. In early 2005, it became clear that neither the transition government nor the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) had taken any of the necessary steps to organise elections by the original June 2005 deadline, and the election timetable was postponed. The announcement of the postponement was met with widespread popular disapproval and, for the first time, there was real pressure on the transition government to take concrete action.

The organisation of elections has not been the only transition objective to be delayed significantly. Another key task of the transition process was the creation of a new, unified national army out of the various armed groups that had fought one another during the five-year war. While it was stressed consistently that this was a priority, in reality the transition government did almost nothing to move this process forward until early 2005. Although the former belligerents have been sitting in the same government in the capital, Kinshasa, the animosity between them remains largely intact, and they have made few real efforts to cooperate with one another. This is not really surprising, as there is little reason for them to do so; as long as they maintained their military power in the areas they controlled during the war, they could happily play at ruling the country for the sake of the international community and the Congolese general public without relinquishing any real power.

This piece addresses a number of serious problems that will impact on the military integration process. These activities will be discussed against the background of the upcoming election and the threat to the transitional process.

Overview of the status of military reform

It was not until May 2005, nearly two years after the inauguration of the transition government, that the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) elaborated a strategic plan for

the military integration process. In its first phase, the plan envisaged the creation of 18 light infantry brigades, which would help to secure elections. The second phase would involve the formation of a rapid reaction unit, and the third phase, due to be finalised by 2010, would see the formation of a new defence force.

During phase one troops were to be transported to one of six integration centres in the country: Kisangani (Orientale province), Kitona (Bas Congo province), Kamina (Katanga province), Mushaki and Nyaleke (North Kivu) and Luberizi (South Kivu) where they were to be disarmed, undergo retraining and regrouped into standard-size brigades composed of 4,200 troops. According to the May 2005 plan, a total of 12 integrated brigades were to have been formed by late 2005, three integrated brigades were to be deployed to Ituri, three to North Kivu, three to South Kivu, one to Kinshasa, one to Bas Congo province, one to Mbuji Mayi, the capital of Kasai Occidental province and one brigade as a reaction capability. Unfortunately there have been additional delays, and to date only three brigades have been formed and deployed.

In addition, the entire integration process has been severely abridged as a result of organisational and financial constraints. According to the original plans, combatants were supposed to be regrouped in 25 orientation centres around the country, where they would have undergone

Table 1: Current status of the 18 integrated brigades

Waves	Brigades	Training	Deployment
1 st wave	1 st	January–June 2004	Ituri
	2 nd	January–May 2005	North Kivu (Rutshuru)
	3 rd	February–June 05	South Kivu (Bukavu)
	4 th	April–August 2005	Ituri border
	5 th	July–September 2005	To be re-deployed, deployment area not yet decided
	6 th	July–September 2005	Ituri mining areas
2 nd wave	7 th , 8 th and 9 th	May 2006	Ready and awaiting deployment, no equipment to deploy
	10 th , 11 th and 12 th	May 2006	Not yet decided
3 rd wave	Next six brigades	?	Not yet decided

an orientation and selection process. As a result of capacity constraints, however, the orientation centres were never set up, and combatants have instead been channelled directly into regroupment centres. However, these centres, which the FARDC has been setting up gradually since 2004, were severely under-funded and lacked basic hygiene and medical facilities, as well as food supplies and proper shelter. As a result, between March and August 2005, several thousand troops deserted from the Mushanki and Luberezi camps alone.

Since then, the Belgian and Dutch governments, as well as the European Union (EU), have provided funding for upgrading facilities and payment of salaries to the troops in the centres. South Africa, Angola and Belgium are also providing military training.

Additional training will be provided by the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) once the brigades have been deployed to their areas of operation. MONUC will engage in six-week training exercises with nine brigades, which will subsequently engage in joint operations with MONUC. This has already been the case in Ituri, where the first integrated brigade is now regularly involved in joint operations with MONUC against recalcitrant militia. It is hoped that the training and subsequent joint operations will enhance these elements' tactical skills, as well as improve overall respect for the civilian population.

At the same time, however, the FARDC faces serious logistical and organisational hurdles, which further complicate the integration process and negatively affect military operations. These problems include inadequate food distribution, poor water supplies, poor medical care, inadequate shelter, insufficient vehicles and the irregular or non-payment of salaries.

Completing DDR and starting SSR

It is clear from the evaluation of the current status of the FARDC and the integration process that the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process will not be completed before the election, planned for 30 July. At most, nine brigades can be deployed based on the level of training and equipment available. In the interim the rest must be kept at the *brassage* centres and under control. The daunting task after the elections is to complete the process of DDR and security sector reform (SSR). For this to happen there needs to be political will and commitment from the new government. The coordination between all role players needs to improve. The FARDC must take responsibility to lead the process. The planning and structures for the DDR process are in place and must be completed after the election. Security sector reform is one of the most important outstanding reforms that any country emerging from conflict should implement to align all security related structures and instruments with that of governmental vision and policies undertaken to build peace. The generic strategy of SSR is easier explained than implemented, but a proper understanding of SSR reform and what this entails is required.

A strategy for SSR in the DRC must be addressed by generic business principles: to evaluate the current and future situation internally as well as externally; then to plan and design an appropriate and affordable solution to the situation; to structure to task; to implement, coordinate and monitor progress; and finally to evaluate progress and implement change where required. These activities must take place in an environment where the DRC government agencies accept responsibility and the donor community provides technical support (knowledge and financial support) to the process to enhance capacity and to establish international principles.

Conclusion

It is very clear that difficult tasks await the new DRC government and the international community. The DDR process is incomplete and will not be completed before the election. The DRC government, MONUC and the international community must manage this situation in the interim until after the election to ensure that the integrated brigades do not become a threat to the election process. After the election, DDR of the military groupings must be completed as soon as possible. The existing structures and plan of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration must be used for that. It is vital that immediately after the election the new government appoint officials from the Department of Defence and the FARDC to be part of the MONUC SSR planning and coordination structure. The Congolese government must take the lead and in cooperation with all the role players, MONUC, the European Military section, the Contact group and bi-lateral partners start working on an SSR strategy.

If these very important activities, that of DDR, are not completed and SSR do not start, the new government may soon find itself facing serious challenges. The international community must take note of these crucial issues. This will need a medium- to long-term commitment from the new Congolese government and the international community.