

Security sector reform in the Democratic Republic of Congo: The status of military reform

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On 25 February 2008 the long-awaited round table on security sector reform (SSR) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was finally held in Kinshasa. The aim was to bring about a reform of the Armed Forces (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, FARDC) and the national Congolese police (*Police Nationale Congolaise*, PNC).

The round table brought together some 200 participants, including international and national experts. The meeting was organised around four committees, each with a focus on armed forces, justice, police and cross-cutting issues. It was an important opportunity for the government of the DRC to present its approach to security sector reform to its international partners.

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The meeting principally focused on the government's presentation of a new master plan for army reform and a road map based on the four pillars of dissuasion, production, reconstruction and excellence. The master plan makes provision for three overlapping phases spanning 12 years. The short-term phase, from 2008 to 2010, is based on:

- The training and deployment of 12 battalions of a rapid reaction force drawn from elements yet to undergo *brassage*, as well as from the 18 existing integrated brigades
- The establishment of the legal framework necessary for army reform
- The completion of the transitional disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and army integration programmes

This master plan is not new and is based on the Congolese government's strategic vision which had already been discussed at a contact group meeting on security sector reform, held in Kinshasa on 12 and 13 July 2007. The SSR contact group in the DRC comprises the DRC and its programme partners: Belgium, South Africa, Angola, the United States, Egypt, Morocco, Tanzania, China, India, Greece, Portugal, Italy, the United Nations and the European Union, as well as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. The Minister for National Defence and Ex-combatants, Chikez Diemu, opened the meeting and presented the Congolese government's strategic vision for the new Congolese army to be established in the future, an overall plan of army reform, around four principal areas.

A rapid reaction force

In the short term, in preparation for the progressive withdrawal of MONUC forces, the Congolese government suggests the creation of a rapid reaction force up to 2009. This force of two or three battalions will be 'correctly equipped, well supported, trained and commanded'.

'Excellence' ideal

The new army should also be built around an 'excellence' ideal. According to the government plan, this entails provision for continuous individual and collective training, as well as an HIV/Aids programme for this lethal disease that is prevalent in army barracks. The excellence ideal includes justice and discipline capacity building in the army. For this purpose the government will recruit 500 supplementary magistrates to fight against crime. Controlling the army through biometric data and honourable retirement was also suggested.

Reconciliation of the army with the population

This is the third part of the government's plan, as there is a potential and permanent tension between the army and the population. On the matter of how to reconcile the two, the government suggests that the armed forces be involved in concrete and visible activities that contribute to the country's reconstruction. The military must be kept in barracks, but could be used on civil engineering projects such as bridge, road and hospital construction. It is hoped that this re-conversion of the army will have a positive effect on the consolidation of democracy and sustainable peace in the country.

A 'development' army

The last aim of the government's army reform plan is to set up a development army. Thus, in times of peace, the army would participate in economic development through its involvement in production activities such as agriculture, breeding and fishing. This will ensure each soldier has daily food, explained the Minister of Defence.

The realisation of this overall plan in the medium and long term entails setting up territorial forces between 2007 and 2012, with a principal defence force in place by 2011.

Before reaching that step, experts suggest that it is necessary to complete the national DDR programme. To date, 186 468 combatants have been taken into the programme, comprising 99 750 demobilised persons, including 30 219 children. A total of 53 427 integration volunteers and 44 816 demobilised personnel have been trained.

So far, 15 new mixed brigades of government and former rebel forces have been created and deployed in the field. Another 80 000 fighters remain to be disbanded, according to an estimate last year by the Congolese Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion.

While the international partners observed that the plan presented at the round table did not adequately address the overall structure and management of the defence sector, the government maintains that army reform is solely a national prerogative, to be dealt with through decision-making and action at a national level.

With regard to reform of the FARDC, the round table agreed that a Congolese coordination plan be adopted to study suggestions for a programme of reform for the army. It also adopted the programmes that are already being implemented, in particular those on the training of FARDC battalions by MONUC, the training and equipping of the general purpose engineering units, and the control of manpower through a biometric census. MONUC successfully completed the pilot phase of its main training project

in March 2007, as well as the training of a FARDC-integrated battalion. MONUC has also delivered two additional basic training programmes for ten FARDC-integrated battalions.

In spite of logistical deficiencies and the lack of weapons and equipment for the FARDC, the second main training project was successfully completed, with the units entering service in the FARDC-integrated brigades. MONUC expects to conduct similar courses for the rest of the year and intends to enhance the training programme with supplementary training courses to develop the operational effectiveness and planning ability of FARDC officers. The introduction of mortar and engineering courses into the programme will enhance specific combat-support capabilities.

With the new plan in place it will be interesting to see to what extent the Congolese government will implement it, in view of the continuing conflict in the East DRC.

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