Contributor Profile: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

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<th>Active armed forces</th>
<th>Helicopters and fixed-wing transport</th>
<th>Defense Budget</th>
<th>UN Peacekeepers</th>
<th>UN Contribution Breakdown</th>
<th>Other Significant Deployments</th>
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<tr>
<td>134,250</td>
<td>Attack: 6</td>
<td>2014: $456m (1.39% of GDP)</td>
<td>944 (20 women)</td>
<td>MINUSCA 925 (807 troops, 118 police)</td>
<td>Military backing of the UN-led international brigade in MONUSCO fighting negative forces in the eastern part of DRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Ranking (size): 82</td>
<td>Transport: 6 (Medium: 1, Light: 3, Pax: 2)</td>
<td>2013: $427m (1.43 % of GDP)</td>
<td>30 Nov. 2015 Ranking: 28th</td>
<td>MINUSMA 6 police</td>
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<td>Army: 103,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>2012: $232m (0.84 % of GDP)</td>
<td>(18th largest African contributor; 17th largest African Union contributor)</td>
<td>UNOCI 13 police</td>
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<td>Air force: 2,550</td>
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<td>Navy: 6,700 inc.</td>
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<td>6,000 marines</td>
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<td>Republican Guard: 8,000 (responsible for President’s security)</td>
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Defense Spending / Troop: US$3,403 (compared to global average of approximately US$65,905 and regional average of approximately US$537)

Part 1: Recent Trends
In September 2014, the DRC deployed its first battalion of troops and Formed Police Unit (FPU) to a UN-led peacekeeping operation: MINUSCA in Central African Republic (CAR). During Mobutu’s rule over Zaire/DRC, its troops were deployed in Chad during the 1980s as part of an external intervention to support the president of Chad and then later as OAU peacekeepers; but these deployments were down to Mobutu’s ambition to play a role in the Central Africa region and were a failure, according to Crawford Young and Thomas Turner (1985). The DRC’s deployment in its neighbor CAR (with which it shares a 1,577km border) stems from an earlier peace operation led by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) known as the Peace Consolidation Mission in CAR (MICOPAX). As a member of ECCAS the DRC sent troops to MICOPAX and also provided the Force Commander, General Prosper Ngoie. MICOPAX was subsequently transitioned into MISCA, the African Union Mission in CAR. The DRC is also currently providing police officers in MINUSMA and UNOCI. In early January 2016, however, the UN told the DRC to withdraw its contingent from MINUSCA because of poor performance and an inability to meet UN standards (the withdrawal of the DRC’s contingent in MINUSCA is reflected in Fig. 1).
Part 2: Decision-Making Process
The DRC is ruled through a presidential regime. All the state powers are centralized and held close to the president of the republic. Decisions concerning defense, security and peace issues are highly centralized by the president even if there is collaboration between the president and the government (see Article 91 of the current DRC Constitution). Officially, the Senate and the National assembly each have a commission in charge of defense and security issues. All the bills and propositions submitted to the parliament are supposed to be assessed by the two chambers’ commissions. However, the predominance of the president is telling. It is the president who is the commander in chief of all the armed forces and presides over the high council of defense (Article 83 of the DRC constitution). Indeed, the conduct of the state’s security and defense policy depends on the president and some advisers close to president’s cabinet. According to one Congolese analyst, “all key military and security questions were handled in total secrecy by the president and other civil and military personalities trusted by him.” The decision-making process is very much under the President’s control.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political Rationales: The DRC’s constitution commits the country to promote African solidarity. The deployment of peacekeepers from the DRC to other African countries is a way of supporting this process. A spokesman for the DRC government explained the decision to deploy peacekeepers as part of “respecting its international commitments to providing troops so as to help stabilize a country which belongs to a region we are member of.” Providing peacekeepers is therefore expected to strengthen the country’s national prestige and to enhance the DRC’s international image. The quest for national prestige and international image accounts for the attempts the DRC government is doing in starting deploying peacekeepers, be it in the CAR, Cote d’Ivoire, or in Mali. It remains to be seen how detrimental the withdrawal of its MINUSCA contingent will be for the DRC’s international image.

Security Rationales: Security rationales are among the main motives behind the DRC’s provision of peacekeepers to African, especially neighboring, countries. The main concern is about containing conflict within neighboring countries so as to limit the spillover effects and secure borders, notably to prevent large-scale population movements of refugees to the DRC. The sensitivity of DRC to such security concerns stems from the fragility of the country and
the lack of infrastructures for the settlement of refugees should they come to cross Congolese borders in disorder.

Economic Rationales: Given the novelty of the DRC sending troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions, economic rationales are not very important. Nevertheless, it is important to assess their effects in the long run. For the individual peacekeepers, deployment on these missions ensures they are well paid. The DRC’s government receives UN compensation payments that are then given to uniformed personnel (now approximately US$1,020 per soldier, per month). It remains unclear how much of this money is retained by the DRC government. Since the UN compensation payments are sent to the Congolese government this provides an opportunity for Kinshasa to gain experience managing extra-budgetary revenues.

Institutional Rationales: Deploying peacekeepers helps rehabilitate the DRC’s security forces, giving them an acceptable role in the region. The armed forces of the DRC (the FARDC) badly need to improve their image. In addition, deploying as peacekeepers can provide valuable operational experience for the military and the police. In doing so it can enhance the professionalism of the force. In the field, the DRC’s peacekeepers receive support from donor countries like France, Belgium and the United States. These three partners are supporting the DRC to implement reforms of the FARDC through a program called Plan de Réforme de l’Armée (PRA). This plan is renewed year by year and is funded through an action program framed and jointly signed by the Ministry of Defense and Veterans of the DRC and the EUSEC mission in DRC in January 2010.

Normative Rationales: When it comes to providing peacekeepers, the DRC’s government is not motivated by any particular normative rationale beyond a vague aspiration to enhance African solidarity. In large part, this is because there is not yet any explicit accounting or much public debate about the normative reasons and benefits of deploying DRC troops and police as peacekeepers.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Alternative strategic priorities: two considerations should be taken into account at this level. First the government is under pressures for regaining legitimacy after the contested elections in 2011. If the political context becomes unstable and if instability grows then this will impact negatively upon contributing peacekeepers to UN or AU missions. Second, if the conflicts in the east of DRC become more intense again, or if they spread elsewhere (for example, clashes over contested elections), then this would be a major barrier to providing peacekeepers.

Financial costs: Even with the central government reporting stable economic growth rates of 8% and a very low inflation rate, it is worth recalling that the DRC finds it difficult to bankroll its participation in UN operations from its limited national resources, in part due to the high startup equipment costs and time lag between deployment and receipt of UN reimbursements.

Lack of equipment: The DRC’s military equipment is limited, with many reports concluding much defense equipment is “not operational or are suffering from low serviceability” (Bayart, 1989). For instance, the Air Force has neither attack helicopters nor military transport airplanes. The same lack of equipment is observed in the navy. It is expected that when the MONUSCO mission ends some of its military equipment may be bought or given to the FARDC.
**Difficult domestic politics:** Given the centralized decision-making discussed above, public opinion plays a very limited role, if any, in the decision to deploy DRC peacekeepers abroad. While there are still many pockets of insecurity within the country it is very difficult for the Congolese government to get public support for sending troops outside the country.

**Damage to national reputation:** Damage to the DRC’s national reputation is growing following allegations of scandals, including sexual violence and abuse by Congolese soldiers. The DRC’s government reacted angrily when various media sources made such allegations about DRC peacekeepers deployed in the CAR. However, much damage has now been done with the UN’s decision to withdraw the DRC contingent from MINUSCA for failing to meet UN standards and poor performance.

**Resistance in the military:** It is important to recall that the FARC has not yet developed the sustained habit of deploying in peacekeeping operations. As such there is generally indifference from the military. More negatively, some elements within the military are keen to focus on dealing with domestic challenges rather than deploying to peace operations abroad.

**Legal obstacles:** There are no legal obstacles to deployment. Indeed, certain clauses in the DRC’s constitution oblige the country to sustain the quest of peace and African solidarity.

**Lack of Experience:** After long being considered as a failed army, what one analyst called “institutionalized chaos,” the Congolese military gained experience in combating rebels with diverse fortunes. Outside the country, their strategic acumen and operational capacity to respond to evolving threats and conflicts may be limited. Yet this could change over time. The FARC came to show a high degree of efficiency in combating rebels with the logistical support of MONUSCO’s Force Intervention Brigade in the eastern part of the country during 2013. At present, the FARC remains far from monolithic with different levels of capabilities and experience evident across its ranks.

**Part 5: Current Challenges and Issues**
The government’s decision to provide peacekeepers abroad in African-led and UN missions is intertwined with its attempts to resolve the many challenges related to reforming the army and improving its weaknesses and reputation.

**Conflicts and insecurity inside the country:** The DRC faces many domestic challenges, some of which raise big questions about the effectiveness of the army. In the eastern part of the DRC there are many pockets of insecurity. These stateless spaces send a signal of lack of state authority and therefore to some extent the ineffectiveness of the security forces.

**Influxes of refugees from neighboring states:** Refugees from Burundi and from CAR are flowing into DRC with numerous consequences, including putting additional pressure on accommodation and food supplies. The ongoing crises in Burundi and CAR have generated significant population movements and the lack of functioning government structures in the DRC only exacerbates the problems. This puts significant limits on how many peacekeepers the DRC can deploy abroad.

**Reforming the FARC:** The DRC’s defense and security forces have a poor reputation internationally, even if the force is slowly becoming more professional. The FARC’s image
is still one that is often depicted as “institutionalized chaos,” according to Georges Berghezan. The FARDC is accused of “arbitrary arrests, rapes, robbery, and other crimes, and these human rights violations are ‘regularly’ committed by both officers and members of the rank and file. Members of the Army also often strike deals to gain access to resources with the militias they are meant to be fighting.” All external donors, including the international financial institutions are pushing the government to implement security sector reform. Three countries are currently involved in building the FARDC’s capabilities: France, Belgium and the United States. The FARDC’s role in defeating the M23 rebel movement alongside the MONUSCO FIB in late 2013 demonstrated the army’s potential.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents
The DRC does not yet have a tradition of sending peacekeepers abroad. As such it is hard to find any champions of peacekeeping. The decision to deploy peacekeepers depends on the DRC’s top political leaders. It is likely that there is opposition on this issue but there is little public debate and the few discussions that do occur are focused on UN peacekeeping in DRC not deployments abroad. Within universities, a great deal of research is being done on the presence and impact of UN peacekeepers in DRC. In fact public consciousness in the DRC is more focused on the country’s position as a longtime host of peacekeepers rather than a provider of them.

Some external critics have argued that the FARDC’s record of human rights violations should exclude it from providing peacekeepers for UN missions. For example, a report on “grave violations committed against children, including recruitment and use of child soldiers and rape and other forms of sexual violence” committed by the FARDC was released in August 2014 which called on the UN to exclude the DRC forces from becoming peacekeepers in CAR.

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats
The Congolese army has new integrated brigades that have been formed following externally-supported training. These brigades have relatively high mobility vehicles. Furthermore, some weapons have been bought in Ukraine (the UN arms embargo does not cover transfers to the government of DRC). However, the Congolese army is dependent on external partners for airlifts, especially MONUSCO, in accordance with the UN’s Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. FARDC troops have also regularly been accused of perpetrating, rape and sexual violence. This is why the US government funded a program to sustain the Congolese army’s ability to prosecute the perpetrators of such violations. Another important operational caveat for the FARDC is that it is almost entirely French-speaking: this makes it particularly well suited to deploying on some UN operations but not others, where the inability to speak English might pose problems for communication.

With regards to gender balance, the Congolese army still has a long way to go. In the electoral law adopted before the 2006 elections it was stipulated that gender balance should be supported within all public institutions. Consequently, female soldiers and police officers were recruited and are growing in number, with more female police officers than female soldiers. Interestingly, the DRC’s Formed Police Unit deployed in MINUSCA was led by a female colonel in the police force.

Part 8: Further Reading


