Monthly report: October 2017

The month was marked by major clashes between a new Mai-Mai coalition and the national army (FARDC) in South Kivu, as well as by a rise in attacks by the ADF and their allies in the northern edge of North Kivu. In general, major FARDC operations have been largely suspended; it is armed groups that have taken the initiative, by attacking the FARDC or by fighting among each other.

<table>
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<th>146 violent deaths</th>
<th>62 victims of mass rapes</th>
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<td>106 people abducted and 114 kidnapped</td>
<td>102 clashes between belligerents</td>
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There has been a large increase in mass killings and rapes over the past two months, as also documented by the United Nations. The most significant human rights incidents this month include the killing of 25 civilians by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and unidentified allies on the Mbau-Kamango road; a series of clashes between the FARDC and the Mai-Mai Mazembe west of Lake Edward that killed fourteen civilians; and several FDLR-FOCA attacks against civilians in Rutshuru territory.

The military situation in October 2017

In general, the security situation in the two Kivu provinces is characterized by the fragmentation of armed groups—now totaling 120—and by the creation of coalitions among these groups (for our analysis of broader conflict dynamics, see this essay.) In the meantime, the FARDC appear to have for the most part suspended their major operations (Sukola I and Sukola II) against armed groups, reacting to attacks instead of going on the offensive.

The flashpoints over the past month have been:

- Between Bunyakiri and southern Walikale, where at least a dozen factions of Raia Mutomboki and Mai-Mai Kifuafua are fighting among each other and with the FARDC;
- In southern Lubero and northern Masisi and Rutshuru, where factions of Mai-Mai Mazembe are fighting with the FARDC and with various Nyatura factions, as relations between Hutu and Nande communities continue to deteriorate;
- A complex of armed groups in Beni territory that includes ADF, local militia, Mai-Mai, and former RCD-K/ML rebel officers;
- In the southern reaches of South Kivu province, where a large Mai-Mai coalition has launched operations against the government.

The aftermath of the Yakutumba offensive: between breathlessness and reinforcement

Over the past several months, a broad coalition of at least twelve armed groups has emerged in the southern part of South Kivu, with Mai-Mai Yakutumba at its head. This National People's Coalition for the Sovereignty of Congo (CNPSC) launched an offensive in June 2017, attacking
the mining site of Misisi and important FARDC positions at Force Bendera and Lulimba. On September 23, 2017 it began an assault on Uvira, the second largest city of South Kivu, taking control of the Mboko, Kabumbe, Mukwezi, Kasekezi, and Makobola I in Fizi and Uvira territories. It took a full week of counterattacks for the FARDC and MONUSCO to recapture the village that had fallen to the Mai-Mai. These operations were costly: both the FARDC and the CNPSC suffered casualties, while a UN peacekeeper was wounded, six civilians were killed and five were wounded. Clashes continued throughout October; the FARDC conducted search operations and looted villages, while both sides targeted civilians, accusing them of collaborating with the enemy.

*Revival of massacres and confusion in the Far North*

In Beni territory, where large-scale massacres had declined over the past year, major attacks on civilians and FARDC positions resumed with a massacre of 25 civilians on the Mbau-Kamango road on October 7, 2017, as well as with attacks on Beni town. These attacks rekindled the controversy over the identity of the perpetrators. While media and officials have blamed the ADF for the attacks, credible witnesses report that other armed groups were also involved. The Congo Research Group has documented the responsibility of several groups, including the FARDC, in previous rounds of massacres in 2014 and 2015.