

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	651
Land:	Den Demokratiske Republik Congo
Kilde:	Kivu Security Tracker
Titel:	Monthly Report, August 2020
Udgivet:	august 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	11. december 2020



HEIGHTENED RISK OF REGIONAL TENSIONS

MONTHLY REPORT N°34 - AUGUST 2020

119 violent deaths (↓8% from July 2020)
98 people abducted or kidnapped (↓1%)
55 clashes (↓16%)

After a particularly violent month of July, the Kivu Security Tracker (KST) recorded a drop in the number of incidents in August.

This drop is partly due to the split within the Nduma Defense of

Congo-Rénové (NDC-R), which controlled the largest rebel territory in the Kivus. This split led to the surrender of approximately 500 and the withdrawal of many more in several territories in North Kivu, where they had been actively engaged in many conflicts. Other groups, such as the Popular Patriotic Forces, People's Army (FPP/AP) of Kasereka Kasyano, also known as "Kabido" in Lubero territory, took advantage of this to impose themselves,.

The respite only went so far: the number of clashes (55) and above all the civilian killings (119) recorded by KST in August remain higher than the monthly average since June 2017. Among these victims were children. Two examination centers were damaged in the clashes, one in Ngoyi in Masisi territory on August 27 and the other in Mikenge in Mwenga territory on August 31.

In Beni territory, there was an upsurge in civilian massacres and clashes, despite a recent change in the head of the DRC armed forces (FARDC), against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Once again, this was the territory the most impacted by civilian deaths.

Moreover, based on the observed trends in August, there could potentially be heightened regional tensions. With the shrinking of NDC-R-held territory, the enemies of the Kigali government, such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and their allies such as the Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) were able to extend their control over Masisi and Rutshuru territories. Also, several units of the Resistance for Rule of Law in Burundi (RED-Tabara) appear to have left their South Kivu strongholds to carry out attacks in Burundi via Lake Tanganyika.

Beni: Difficult Start for the New Head of Sukola 1

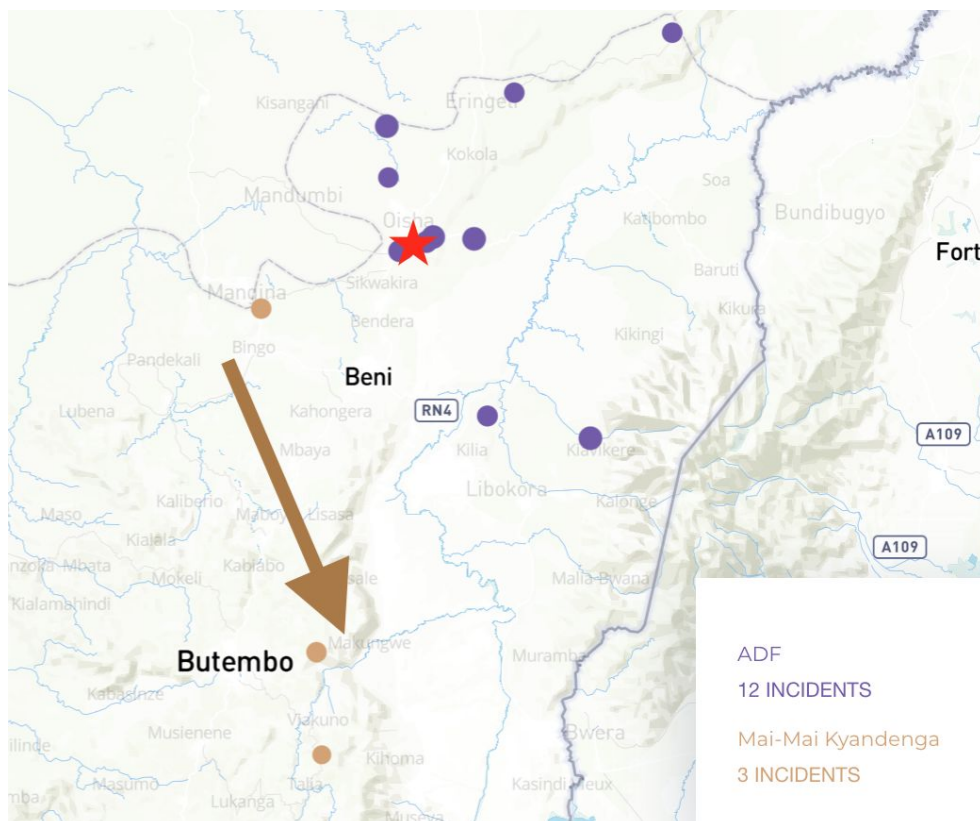
The number of ADF-attributed killings rose once again in August with 50 civilian deaths (compared to 29 in July).

The first month of Major General Peter Cirimwami's leadership of Operation Sukola 1 did not see any significant progress. This officer did however take some new initiatives, such as relocating his headquarters from the Beni-Kasindi trunk road to kilometric point 5 of the Mbau-Kamango road. This did not prevent five incidents from occurring in the area in August. Cirimwami's personal guard was even ambushed by the ADF at Tinameme, near Mbau, on August 28. Cirimwami was probably the target but was not present during the clashes. Eight FARDC soldiers were killed during the incident as well as two ADF fighters and three civilians.

In total, KST recorded eight clashes between the FARDC and the ADF. Only one of these was started by the FARDC. KST recorded a death toll of 17 on the FARDC side and two on the ADF side.

The Mai-Mai Kyandenga, the main allies of the ADF in the region, however, underwent a split. Self-proclaimed Colonel Matabishi, based in the region of Cantine where he levies taxes on artisanal gold miners, announced his independence from his chief, Kyandenga. He could reconnect with his former group, the Union des patriotes pour la libération du Congo (UPLC).

The remainder of Kyandenga's troops concomitantly crossed National Road No. 2 to set up camp in the chiefdom of Bashu. There they carried out two attacks in Kibwe and Kyondo on August 13 and 28 respectively, leading to four deaths among their ranks and two on the FARDC side.



Incidents involving the ADF (in violet) and the Mai-Mai Kyandenga (in brown) in August are displayed above. The new headquarters of Operation Sukola 1 is shown by a red star and the movements of the Mai-Mai Kyandenga in the Cantine region towards the Bashu chiefdom by a brown arrow.

Lubero: Kabido's New Supremacy

The number of incidents recorded by the KST fell significantly in August compared to July in Lubero territory (eight incidents compared to 16). This relative respite is due to the fact that the Popular Patriotic Forces, People's Army (FPP/AP) of Kasereka Kasyano, also known as "Kabido", no longer has any rivals of their standing in this territory.

The head of the Union des patriotes pour la défense des innocents (UPDI), Kitete Bushu, was killed between the night of July 16 and 17 in Miriki and most of his men surrendered ([see KST Report No. 33](#)). In regards to the NDC-R, it was considerably weakened by dissent at the start of July (see above). Kabido took advantage of the situation by attacking a poorly defended NDC-R position in Fatua on August 16.

Several groups could emerge or reappear in Lubero territory. The Lumumbist National Resistance (LNR), active in the 1990s and 2000s, appears to have returned for several months in the groupement of Bapakombe (west of Lubero territory) with Baraka Lolwako, the son of the late chief, at its head. They also call themselves "Thousand Rounds per Second."

Walikale and Masisi: Spectacular Surrender Within the Bwira Faction

Close to 500 fighters loyal to Gilbert Bwira, the commander of [a dissident faction of the NDC-R](#), surrendered to the FARDC on August 17 in Kashuga in Masisi territory. A ceremony, chaired by the acting commander of Operation Sukola 2 in the presence of several media outlets, was arranged for the occasion.

Since then, these fighters have been confined to the FARDC camp in Rumangabo. This location is unusual for members of an armed group that are being demobilized,, because under normal circumstances, the Mubambiro camp, in Masisi territory, would have been preferable.

This choice might suggest that FARDC's intention is to integrate these combatants in their ranks. In any case, that is what Bwira and his fighters want.

Bwira, however, did not surrender and instead gained leverage. He retained control of Kalembe which is a strategic position located at the crossroads with combatants in Masisi, Rutshuru and Walikale territories. Their numbers are difficult to estimate but there might be more than those who are in confinement.

The historical head of the NDC-R, Guidon Shimiray, retired to the groupement of Ihana (to the west of his historical Pinga base) where he continued his recruitment drive in his community (Nyanga), particularly in Kanga, Kingwe and Maninge, in an attempt to rebuild his troops.

Nevertheless, the surrender of Bwira's men left some areas of Masisi territory unoccupied. Most of the positions once occupied by this group, such as Mihara, Kibarizo, Busumba and Hembe, have been retaken by the APCLS, a group allied with the FDLR. The Kigali government, which is in conflict with the FDLR, could turn against APCLS's expansion.

Lastly, five civilians, including three schoolchildren, were killed on the fringes of a clash between the FARDC and armed men in the village of Ngoyi on August 27, the national end-of-primary-school exam day.

Rutshuru: The RUD Once Again Without a Leader

On August 28, "General" Léon Mpiranya, also known as Kagoma, head of the Rally for Unity and Democracy (RUD-Uranana, a Rwandan Hutu uprising), was killed during a shooting in Makoka village.

FARDC claimed responsibility for the killing but several local civil society sources state that Bwira was killed by one of his bodyguards. An assassination carried out by members of the group, possibly in league with external actors, has therefore not been ruled out.

In all cases, this is the third head of a Rwandan Hutu uprising to be killed in similar circumstances in Rutshuru territory since September 2019. Before him, Sylvestre Mudacumura (military head of the FDLR) and Juvenal Musabimana, also known as Jean-Michel Africa (Kagoma's predecessor at the head of the RUD), had been killed during FARDC operations, but in which the Rwandan army was also involved.

Also, the FARDC significantly stepped up their operations against the Nyatura FDP (*Forces du peuple*) militia in the Bwito chiefdom (north-west of Rutshuru territory) as they initiated six clashes in the area.

Shabunda: Mass Kidnapping

The number of people kidnapped rose sharply in Shabunda territory in August with 65 victims, compared to none the previous month. This sudden rise can mainly be explained by the Raia Mutomboki Blaise raid on the village of Kampemba on August 13 in which 50 people were abducted. They were freed two days later after the families of the victims paid 600,000 Congolese Francs (approximately 300 USD).

Also, Jean Musumbu, a veteran of armed groups in the Kivus, the creator of the first "Raia Mutomboki" group ("angry citizens" in Swahili) in 2005, surrendered with 55 fighters on August 19. They were confined at the FARDC camp in Kabulongo while awaiting the outcome of the negotiations.

Moyens and Hauts Plateaus of Fizi, Mwenga and Uvira territories: Still More Incidents

KST recorded 11 incidents on the mid-altitude and high-altitude plateaus of Fizi, Mwenga and Uvira territory. This is more than in July (eight incidents).

The worst incidents were the attacks in Bilalombili and Ngezi in Mwenga territory on August 31. A coalition of Gumino and Twirwaneho rebels as well as combatants of the former FARDC Colonel Mekanika attacked these villages at a time when schoolchildren were sitting the State exam (which gives access to University education) in the nearby Mikenge locality. At least seven civilians were killed including one child.

Additionally, the Mai-Mai René were responsible for the death of three civilians, two of which were attributed to the Mekanika group and the other one to Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke and Ebu-Ela. Eight civilians were also killed by an unknown group in Maheta (Uvira territory) on August 2.

The conflict between armed groups in the highlands of South Kivu has been ongoing for several decades. This conflict is mainly being fought between armed groups from the Banyamulenge community (Gumino and Twirwaneho) and armed groups from other communities present in the

highlands (Mai-Mai Ebu-Ela, René and Biloze Bishambuke). Each actor regularly commits abuses against civilians. The conflict considerably worsened in 2019 and has continued to worsen ever since, forcing most civilians to live in camps for the internally displaced.

The Ruzizi Plain and the Banks of Lake Tanganyika: Highly Active Burundian Rebels

Several detachments of RED-Tabara Burundian rebels appear to have left their bases in South Kivu for Burundi.

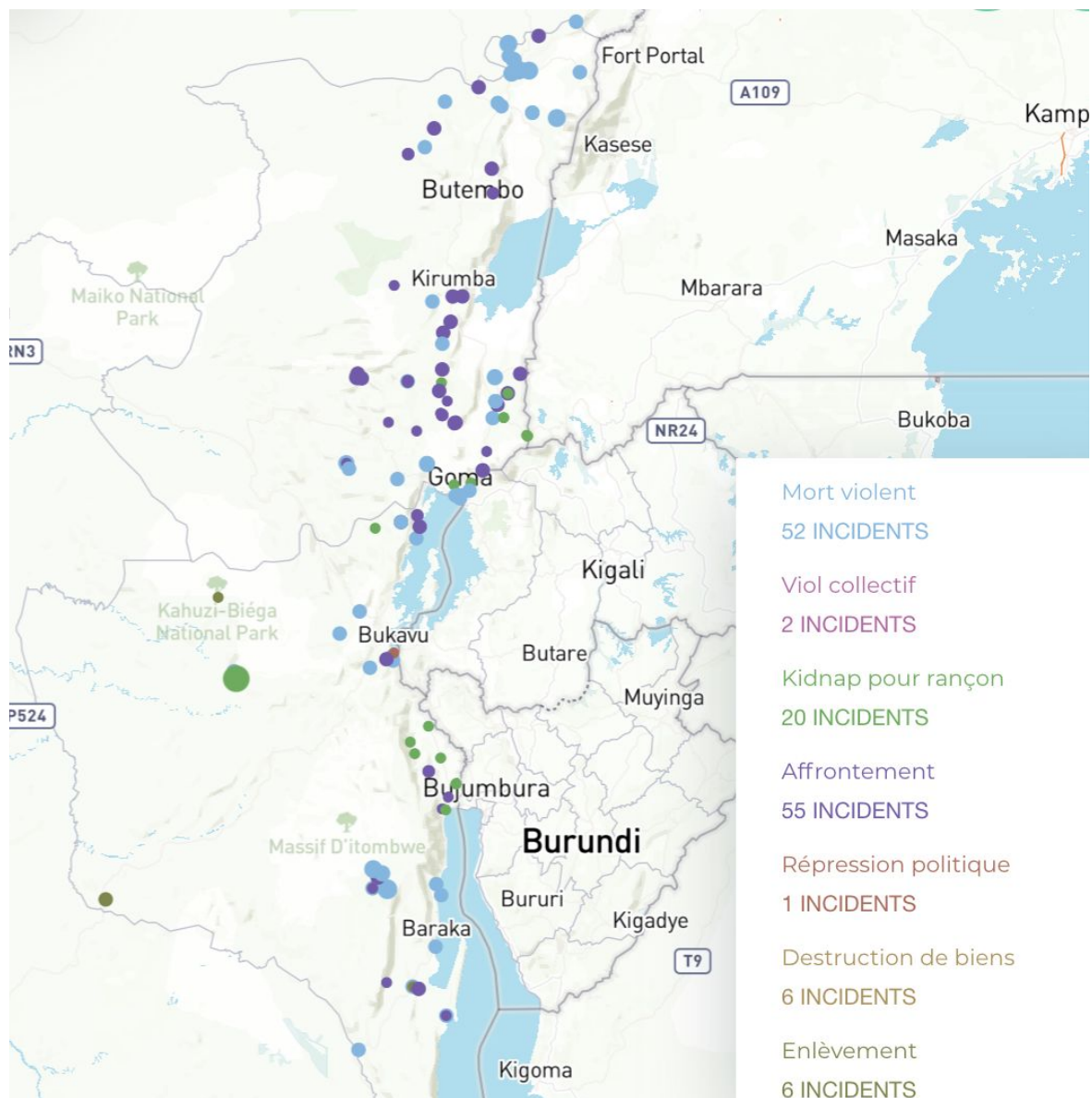
Four incidents, which occurred on the banks of Lake Tanganyika, could be related to these rebel movements. This is particularly the case in the attacks on the Katanga neighborhood in Baraka (a Kenyan village) on August 6 and that of Kibanga on August 24.

The Kenyan village incident, which claimed one civilian victim, appears to be linked to the rebels' departure. reports in Burundian media of an attack the following day by the RED-Tabara who came from South Kivu by boat which led to the death of 16 people in the Burundian town of Bagarama, located approximately at the same latitude on the other side of Lake Tanganyika (in French).

These infiltrations from Fizi territory could dampen relations between Burundi and the DRC, as well as between Burundi and Rwanda. The Burundian government has long suspected Kigali of supporting the RED-Tabara.

Additionally, the *Forces nationales de libération* (FNL-Nzabampema), another Burundian uprising, carried out kidnappings on August 4 in the Ruzizi Plain and joined the Mai-Mai Makanaki to fight the FARDC in the Kitundu neighborhood in Uvira on August 22.

Lastly, dissent emerged within the Mai-Mai Yakutumba group. This group is led by one of its commanders, called "Alide apa na pale," and resulted in an internal clash within the group on August 13 in Ekyengya.



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