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UPTICK IN KILLINGS AFTER STATE OF SIEGE ANNOUNCED

MONTHLY REPORT N°43 - MAY 2021

251 violent deaths (↑14% from April)
112 abducted or kidnapped (↓13%)
80 clashes (↓24%)

After the President of the Republic announced on April 30 that the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu were to be placed under a state of siege, the number of civilians killed markedly increased in May.

Most of this increase occurred in three neighboring territories: Beni, Irumu, and Mambasa, where a total of 181 civilian deaths were recorded. The Boga and Tchabi killings during the night of May 30 to 31 played a significant role in this death toll, since they account for the deaths of 55 civilians--the deadliest night ever recorded by KST.

It may be that some of these killings were due to a reaction by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) to the announcement of a state of siege. In the past, this group, the deadliest in eastern DRC, has reacted to the launch of military operations against it by retaliating against civilians.

As regards the FARDC, this first month of the state of siege was essentially used [to place new military authorities at the head of the provinces](#), territories, and towns of North Kivu and Ituri, as well as to rotate officers heading several FARDC units. This did not lead to an immediate and significant increase in the intensity of the FARDC's operations against armed groups (their involvement was recorded in 37 clashes in May for the whole area, compared with 36 in April). Nevertheless, the FARDC was implicated in many more civilian deaths in May: 36 (in 19 incidents), compared with 17 (in 12 incidents) in April.

The situation also deteriorated in the territories of Fizi and Uvira, in South Kivu, a province unaffected by the state of siege, where there was a marked uptick in kidnappings for ransom and abductions. The continuing attacks against villages mostly populated by the Banyamulenge may suggest that forced displacement is at play in the area.

However, as a whole, the state of siege also coincided with a relative drop in the number of clashes between armed groups and in the victims of kidnappings for ransom and abductions. This has been fairly well distributed (it has occurred across each of the three

provinces monitored by KST). It is possible that, despite the absence of an increase in the number of FARDC operations, the announcement of a state of siege has resulted in a wait-and-see approach, redeployments, or tactical changes by some armed groups to adapt to the new situation. Djugu territory, the deadliest of all in April, saw a genuine respite, especially along National Road 27 (RN27). However, such relative and localized progress did not go hand in hand with the mass arrest or surrender of members of armed groups. This raises concerns that such progress will not be long-lasting.

Djugu: Respite along RN27

After a particularly deadly month of April for civilians (66 killed), the number of killed markedly dropped in May, with 13 deaths. This respite was particularly marked along RN27, [one of the FARDC's priority operational trunk roads since the state of siege came into force](#).

Also, [Thuwo, the leader of the CODECO-BTP faction was killed on May 11 by fighters belonging to a rival faction, the CODECO-URDPC in Kilo](#). Thuwo was accused of particularly serious abuses, including against the Lendu community, from where he comes.

It remains uncertain whether the respite will last. According to some reports, some of the fighters of the various CODECO factions are reported to have hidden arms following the state of siege announcement, with the aim of using them at a later date. Although some ten CODECO-URDPC militia members were killed by the FARDC, most of its members have left the Congolese army's area of operations and gone to the chiefdoms of Bahema North and Bahema Badjere.

Lastly, the FARDC killed four civilians in this territory in May (compared with one in April), which might adversely impact good relations with the inhabitants—something that is required for the success of the operations in the long term.

Mambasa, Irumu, and Beni: Uptick in Killings

KST recorded the deaths of 181 civilians in these three territories in May, more than double the toll for April (89 killed).

The coordinated killings of Boga and Tchabi, two villages in the territory of Irumu some ten kilometers apart (55 deaths during the night of May 30 and 31 alone, which makes this night the deadliest ever recorded by KST) was largely responsible for this uptick.

The ADF probably played a role in this killing. However, the Nyali community was particularly impacted, with the deaths of some thirty of those displaced and the attack on the residence of the chief of the chiefdom of Banyali-Tchabi. It is therefore likely that the conflicts between the members of the various communities present in the territory of Irumu played a role. In this area, [community-oriented killings had already occurred, particularly in September 2020](#), between members of the Nyali and those of the Hutu communities, also known as the "Banyabwisha" (literally, from the Bwisha chiefdom, in Rutshuru territory).

Additionally, the ADF carried out killings near Biakato, in Mambasa territory, with the help of members of the local communities according to some local sources. Their presence was unknown in this area since at least March 2020.

Such events might indicate that the ADF reacted to the state of siege decree by continuing their retaliatory acts against civilians and extending their scope of action, [an ongoing](#)

[process since the start of “large-scale” operations against the group in October 2019](#). The broader geographical range of the killings could help it to take advantage of the weak positions of the FARDC and compel them to dilute their presence within a larger territory. The sites for the displaced of Boga and Tchabi were particularly poorly supplied with members of the FARDC.

Killings also increased in Beni territory, where the historical strongholds of the ADF are located: 74 civilians were killed in May compared with 47 in April. Military operations only increased slightly: of the ten clashes recorded in May, only [four were launched by the FARDC](#) (compared with one in April). There was no increase in FARDC troop size.

Also, the month of May was marked by two assassinations which targeted the Islamic community. [On May 2, Sheik Ali Amin, imam of the Beni mosque, was killed by persons unknown during morning prayers at the mosque](#). He was known for denouncing the killings in Beni. [On May 19, another imam, Sheikh Moussa Djamali, was killed in similar circumstances](#). He was in charge of the mosque in the village of Mavivi in Beni territory and Vice-President of the village’s civil society.

The conflict surrounding the ADF is not solely responsible, however, for the increase in the number of civilians killed in these three territories. The number of FARDC victims also increased from 7 to 25. Most of this increase was related to the operations against the Chini ya kilima-FPIC group in the Marabo area, in Irumu territory, which started on May 2. At least 15 civilians were killed by law enforcement agencies in this area between May 2-to 15 during combing operations.

Walikale, Masisi, and Rutshuru: The FARDC bets on the carrot

In the three territories of the “Petit Nord,” armed group activity remained practically unchanged compared with April. The number of armed clashes even decreased, from 38 to 31. The only observable consequences of the state of siege on the ground were changes to the heads of FARDC units. Colonel Munyakazi of the 3416th Regiment was replaced by Colonel Androso, Colonel Lumbu was replaced by Colonel Rusimbi at the head of the 3409th Regiment and Colonel Zaire of the 3412nd Regiment was replaced by Colonel Moke.

A FARDC delegation held discussions with the emissaries of the Coalition of Movements for Change (CMC), one of the most important alliances of Nyatura groups in the “Petit Nord,” with a view to surrendering, but this did not provide any immediate results.

The difficulties of managing fighters who have voluntarily disarmed also persisted, despite the visit on May 21 by the new military governor of North Kivu, Constant Ndima Kongba, to Rumangabo base, where several hundred former members of the [Nduma Defense of Congo-Rénové \(NDC-R\) have been based since August 2020](#). Four days later, [some of these fighters looted a neighboring village for food](#). Local people protested to demand that the Congolese government take charge and re-site them in a new area.

Nyiragongo and Goma: Violent Deaths Following the Eruption of the Nyiragongo Volcano

On May 22, there was a volcanic eruption in the territory of Nyiragongo. The lava flow reached the village of Buhene. A riot broke out in the town’s central prison, called Munzenze. Four prisoners who tried to escape were killed by the security services.

Fizi and Uvira: Forced Displacements in the Highlands

In the highlands of South Kivu, the offensive by the coalition comprising the Burundian rebellion, the RED-Tabara and the Mai-Mai Ilunga, which had already been reported in April in the north of Uvira territory, continued and expanded in May. It still essentially targeted the villages mostly populated by members of the Banyamulenge community.

On May 29, the village of Muranvya and its surroundings were the target of an attack by the Mai-Mai Ilunga, Yakutumba, Makanaki, René, and RED-Tabara. This led to the death of at least one civilian, [the abduction of 19 people](#) (mostly women and children) for several days, the deaths of four Twigwaneho fighters, many houses being set fire to and the theft of 500 cows. These repeated attacks could indicate that some actors want to force the Banyamulenge to leave their traditional homelands.

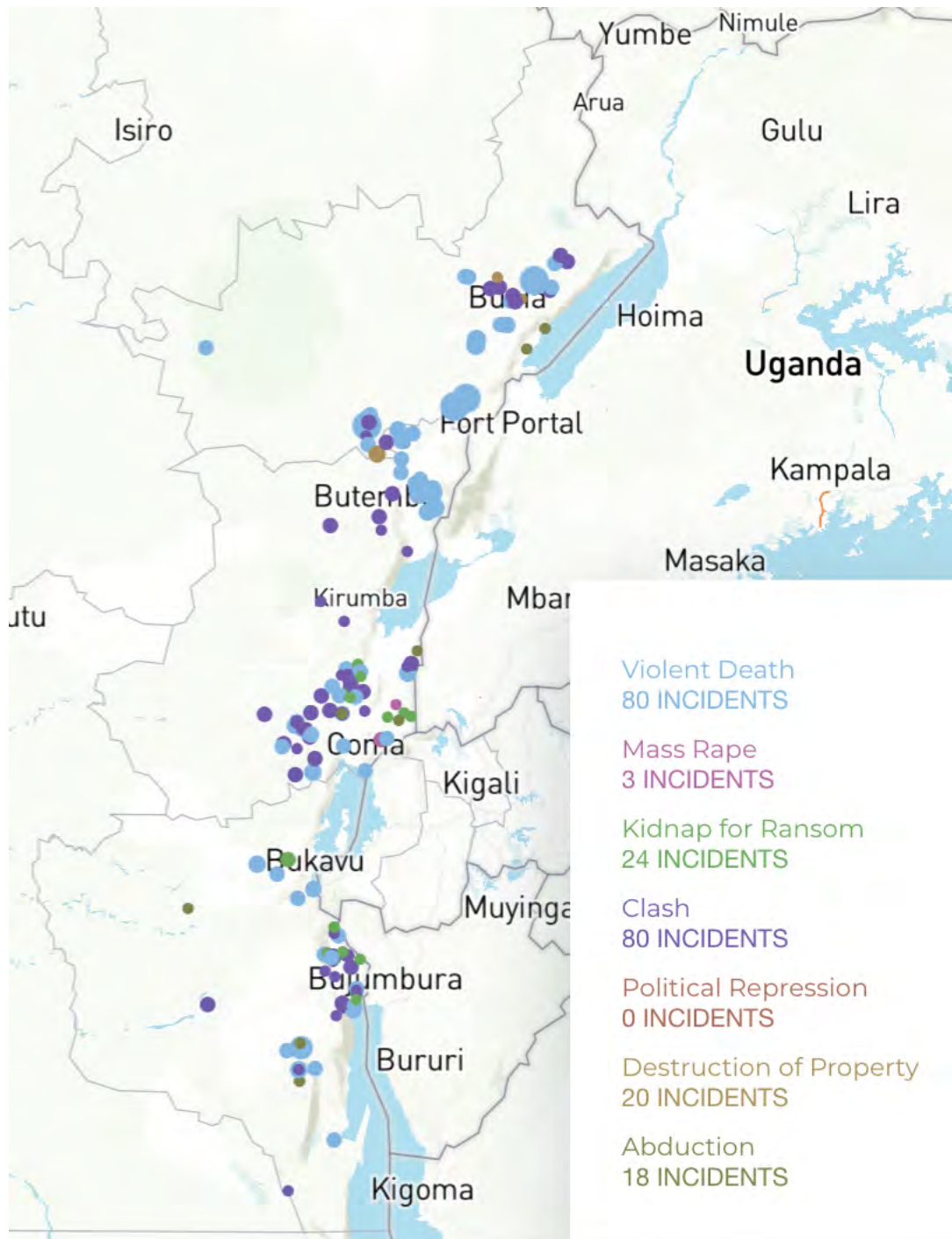
Also, several humanitarian workers were abducted in the area, including [four members of the NGO Action AID by the Twigwaneho on May 17](#) and [four members of the NGO Caritas by the Mai-Mai Mupekenya on May 24](#). These incidents contributed to the marked increase in the number of abductions in the territories of Fizi and Uvira: 33 people have been taken hostage, compared with two in April.

The uptick in violence in the highlands may be linked to an escalation in tensions between Rwanda and Burundi. On May 24, Kigali announced it had [killed two Rwandan rebels of the FLN group, who had come from Burundi](#). Both these countries have unofficial representatives in South Kivu, and particularly in the highlands. Incursions of armed men from Burundi have also been detected on several occasions since March.

General Dieudonné Muhima was also replaced at the head of the main FARDC force present in the highlands (the 12th Rapid Reaction Brigade, based in Minembwe) by General Patrick Opya. It is still too early to know whether this will have an impact on the attitude of the FARDC in the area, which have, by and large, remained passive in May: they have only been implicated in one clash in May.

The FARDC, on the other hand, have been very active in the Ruzizi Plain, along National Road 5, which links Uvira to Bukavu, taking part in eight clashes. In all likelihood, this is a reaction to the increase in insecurity: 16 people were kidnapped for ransoms in May, compared with 12 in April. FARDC's actions have unfortunately gone hand in hand with an escalation in abuses against civilians: four were killed by the Congolese army in Uvira territory, an unprecedented act since [the Sange killing in July 2020](#).

There was heightened tension between the Mai-Mai Yakutumba and the FARDC in the mining area of Misisi, in the territory of Fizi. The arrest of two "officers" of this armed group by the FARDC on May 26 and 27 caused a reaction on May 28 with the capture of two FARDC members.



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