

From Conflict to Terrorism: The Case of ADF Rebel Group in the Eastern DR-Congo

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من الصراع إلى الإرهاب: حالة جماعة قوات التحالف الديمقراطية المتمردة (ADF) في شرق جمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية

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Abstract

In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a wind of terror has been blowing in the Beni territory since November 2019, when a series of mysterious massacres resumed. This movement is attributed to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF/ADF-Nalu), which operate in this region. For two decades, the eastern territory of the DRC has been the main target of several bloodiest conflicts, the last of which concerns the ADF. Moreover, the resurgence of ADF massacres was accompanied by a propaganda campaign built around the jihadist discourse. Terrorism represents a real threat to the DRC, but not in its Islamist form as envisaged by the Congolese government. This article examines the instrumentalization of terrorism in the DRC as well as the steps that transformed the conflict into terrorism.

Keywords: DR-Congo, rebel group, Terrorism, Instrumentalization, Massacres.

المخلص

في الجزء الشرقي من جمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية، هبّت رياح الإرهاب في إقليم بيني منذ نوفمبر 2019، عندما استؤنفت سلسلة من المجازر الغامضة. ويُعزى هذا النشاط إلى قوات التحالف الديمقراطية (ADF/ADF-Nalu)، التي تنشط في هذه المنطقة. وعلى مدى عقدين من الزمن، كانت الأراضي الشرقية لجمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية الهدف الرئيسي للعديد من الصراعات الدموية، وكان آخرها الصراع المرتبط بقوات التحالف الديمقراطية.

وعلاوة على ذلك، تزامنت عودة مجازر قوات التحالف الديمقراطية مع حملة دعائية بُنيت حول الخطاب الجهادي. ويمثل الإرهاب تهديداً حقيقياً لجمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية، لكنه لا يظهر بالصيغة الإسلامية

التي تتصورها الحكومة الكونغولية. تبحث هذه المقالة في توظيف الإرهاب كأداة في جمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية، وكذلك في المراحل التي أدت إلى تحول الصراع إلى ظاهرة إرهابية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جمهورية الكونغو الديمقراطية، جماعة متمردة، الإرهاب، توظيف الإرهاب، المجازر.

Introduction

A blowing of terror has been felt in Beni, the eastern part of the DRC since November 2019, when a series of mysterious massacres attributed to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF or ADF-Nalu) movement relapsed. For two decades, the eastern territory of the DRC has been the target of several bloodiest conflicts, the latest of which is that of the ADF. This time, the resurgence of attacks was accompanied by a propaganda campaign built around the jihadist discourse (Andrea B. Urs, 2020).

In the literature, various attempts have been made to distinguish types of terrorist activities (G. Martin, 2017). However, it is essential to keep in mind that there are many types of terrorist movements and no single theory can cover all of them. Not only are the beliefs, goals and membership of groups engaged in terrorism extremely diverse, but also the political contexts of their campaigns are. A popular typology identifies three major classes of terrorism: revolutionary and sub-revolutionary¹ (John P. J. 2022). Although this typology has been criticized as non-exhaustive, it provides a useful framework for understanding and evaluating terrorist activities. Revolutionary terrorism is perhaps the most common form. Practitioners of this type of terrorism seek the complete abolition of a political system and its replacement with new structures. Modern examples of such activity include the campaigns of the Italian Red Brigades, the German Red Army Fraction, the Basque separatist group ETA, the Peruvian Shining Path, and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as the name of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (G. Martin, 2017). Sub-revolutionary terrorism is rather less common. It is used not to overthrow an existing regime, but to alter the existing socio-political structure. Since this modification is often accomplished by the threat of overthrowing the existing regime, sub-revolutionary groups are somewhat more difficult to identify. An example can be seen in the ANC and its campaign to end apartheid in South Africa.

The DRC political context is prolific with the appearance of terrorist movements. This study aims at analyzing the instrumentalization of terrorism in the DRC as well as the steps that transformed the conflict into terrorism. It argues that terrorism represents a real threat to the DR-Congo, but not in its Islamic form as envisaged by the government.

This study is divided into three sections apart from this introduction and the conclusions. The first section sets the theoretical framework and addresses the concept of terrorism. The second section offers a historical overview of the ADF movement in order to contextualize the issue addressed. The third section analyzes the instrumentalization of terrorism by deciphering the Islamist terrorist rhetoric so often used by the Congolese government, the international community and the media. With regard to the methodology, the article relies on qualitative tools to both investigate official documents and analyze experts' opinions on the subject.

¹ John Philip Jenkins, "Types of Terrorism". Online URL <https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism/Types-of-terrorism> , Accessed June 28, 2022

Literature Review

Theoretical Approach To Terrorism

The attacks of September 11, 2001 mark the appearance of a form of hyper terrorism with planetary dimensions and Western countries are truly aware of a permanent danger. After September 11, 2001, worst-case scenario logic dominates. The worst scenario justifies the use of practices prohibited by democratic values and serves as a security argument in the name of prevention. This argument leads to a devaluation of police action in favor of a so-called proactive or preventive activity, not in the sense of eliminating structural factors, but rather a deterministic reading of behavior. Suspicion and urgency will be at the heart of these logics which will lead to the identification of threats such as Muslim or migrant. Paradoxically, this suspicion can lead to radicalization when there was none originally.

Over time, however, several definitions and theories have been formulated according to the context and the priorities of each, there is no single internationally accepted definition of what constitutes terrorism. According to the *Larousse* [online Dictionary], terrorism is “the set of acts of violence (attacks, hostage-taking, etc.) committed by an organization or an individual to create a climate of insecurity, blackmail a government, satisfy a hatred towards a community, a country or a system”¹. P. Andrew describes terrorism as the threat of violence and the use of fear to coerce, persuade or attract public attention (P. Andrew, 1984). Paul Wilkinson exposes terrorism as coercive intimidation, premeditated acts, or threats of violence designed systematically to install such fear in the target that it will compel the target to modify their behavior in the sense desired by the terrorists (P. Wilkinson, 1993).

Terrorism also represents the use of violence for political purposes by unauthorized non-governmental actors, in violation of accepted codes of conduct regarding the expression of disaffection, dissent or opposition to the pursuit of political objectives by legitimate governmental authorities, to indicate what they consider to be unsuitable for the needs of certain groups of people (Okereke, Jennifer *et al.*, 2016).

Generally speaking, it is observed that terrorism is widely regarded as an attack on the fundamental principles of law, order, human rights and the peaceful settlement of disputes. However, courses taken by specific terrorist groups are in some cases deemed fair and defensible by adherents. It must be stressed that the most alarming aspect of terrorism is that it often strikes victims who are not directly linked to the political system or the ideology towards which these attacks are in fact directed. Terrorist acts have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victims or targets. Furthermore, terrorist acts are usually carried out by organized non-state actors who often operate through coordinated cells. Today, the phenomenon of terrorism has metamorphosed into a great monster which, according to Antonio Maria Costa, “seeks to destabilize, demoralize and paralyze the apparatus of a declared adversary, to create anarchy, fear or the general feeling of insecurity or to force individuals to carry out the wishes of terrorists” (UN, 2005). Finally, terrorism is not just a very limited aspect of the broad spectrum of human violence.

Terrorism in Africa

Terrorism-related trauma is an exponential problem in Africa. While the phenomenon of terrorism is not new to the continent, its upward trend has become a significant political concern. Africa offers a fertile culture for terrorism as a result of, inter alia: extremist ideologies

¹ *Larousse* Dictionary, online, URL: <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/terrorisme/77478> , Accessed June 28, 2022.

of groups pushing to dismantle old states and establish new ones; persistent political and regional instability; ethnic and tribal tensions and religious fundamentalism. Terrorist incidents are manifested in the form of bombings, kidnappings, tortures, murders and assassinations, arson, sabotage, mysterious phone calls, hijackings, intimidation and thefts, the hostage taking, toxic pollution, arms smuggling, occupation of facilities and poisoning (C. Nna-E. Okereke, 2010). These manifestations complement the political instability, armed conflict, corruption, underdevelopment, hunger, disease elements that encompass the continent's security realities.

While everyone's focus is on the Middle East, Africa is another part of the world where Islamic extremism is thriving and becoming increasingly radicalized. Notable examples of such groups that have increased in size and sphere of activity include: Boko Haram in Nigeria; Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Al-Shabaab in Somalia. The phenomenon is indeed very widespread in Africa in a form internal to States. It is practiced by rebel movements National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita) in Angola, Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) in Mozambique, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, Movement for Democracy in Liberia, etc. but also government forces: Liberia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Sudan, etc. In 2011, the number of terrorist attacks in Africa remained dangerously high, especially with the rise of Boko Haram and Ansar-Dine militants in Nigeria and Mali (*Ibid*, p. 2).

Various reasons have been put forward as causal factors for terrorist attacks in Africa. Some of these include problematic governance such as the incidence or perceived incidence of political tensions, oppression and repression, socio-economic exploitation, and especially deprivation and discrimination resulting from intergroup consciousness along ethnic, religious or class lines. Others include political instability (as in Mali), a lack of direction, a growing sense of betrayal. Such governance failures breed deep-rooted grievances against the state and cast gullible young people to recruit for acts of terrorism.

Jakkie Cilliers explains that, with regard to the root causes (J. Cilliers, 2004) of the phenomenon, political behavior in Africa derives directly from the continent's poverty situation. Indeed, in the event of precariousness of resources, the main goal of political competition is to guarantee economic consumption, a goal which, in turn, is optimally achieved by capturing central power or by substituting this of a new local power.

This political system tends to degenerate into a life-and-death struggle for personal access to always limited state resources; this zero-sum game also forces putative political leaders to reap material benefits in order to obtain support and defeat their competitors¹.

In such a system and at the limit, state and sub-state actors have an interest in favoring war and disorder since these can provide them with additional opportunities to accumulate resources allowing them to better establish the various patrimonial networks on which they rely.

In the absence of other possibilities for the heritage system and in conditions of resource scarcity, associating political life with the reign of disorder, war or criminal activities becomes an irresistible temptation. Violence appears necessary to acquire or maintain one's share of the profit.

¹ Terrorism in Africa: from the weakness of African States to the vulnerability of Western countries September 4, 2014. <https://corbeaunewscentrafrique.com/terrorisme-en-afrique-faiblesse-etats-africansvulnerabilitywesterncountries/?fbclid=IwAR0Vw6zirbmt7mCUkkUZYomYIDPrVGtVop6OUdkOtOrjm8xEDQMI4PcwCRU>, Accessed 25 May 2022.

Essentially, terrorism in Africa is a real phenomenon with a national dimension and this is the point on which we will build our analysis. Most African terrorist activities are limited to one state.

Methodology

Historical Overview Of The Adf-Nalu

The Allied Democratic Forces-Ugandan National Liberation Army (ADF-Nalu) is one of the oldest and least known armed groups in eastern DRC and the only one in this region to be considered a terrorist organization belonging to the Islamist *Nebula* of East Africa.

Although they do not constitute a destabilizing threat like the M23 (a group which has been also categorized as a terrorist), they have nevertheless stood up to the Congolese army (FARDC) since 2010. The ADF operate in Rwenzori mountainous areas, difficult to access, especially in the triangle of death: Oicha, Kamango and Eringeti.

The Beni region, located in the Congolese province of North Kivu, and its surroundings have always been under the influence of their Ugandan neighbor. In September 1995, Yusuf Kabanda, one of the leaders of the armed Ugandan Muslim opposition, sealed with Commander Ali Ngaimoko of the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (Nalu) an alliance called the Allied Democratic National Army Forces for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-Nalu). Without prior ideological or operational ties, these two movements located on Congolese soil, have in common to be opposed to the Ugandan regime. Supported by the Ugandan army, the ADF-NALU movements found refuge in the Congolese neighbor where they merged and formed a hybrid rebellion which radiated strongly in the DRC.

What is essential in understanding the ADF is their Muslim component. After the fall of Amin Dada in 1979, Ugandan Muslims were oppressed by the regimes of Milton Obote and then Yoweri Museveni (Congo Study Group, 2018). In the 1980s, the Muslim religious movement Tabligh used this oppression and financial support from the Sudanese government to recruit Ugandan youth and become an important structure in the local Muslim community.

The Tabligh sect is a Muslim movement that emerged in the Indian subcontinent in 1920 that advocates a very literal and orthodox interpretation of Islam. This sect was established in the 1970s in Uganda. In their demands, there is no mention of the installation of the caliphate or the establishment of Islam as the state religion and their leaflets very rarely refer to Islam – only the leaflet distributed in 2012 explicitly refers to passages from the Quran. The immediate environment of the ADF does not show signs of religious radicalization. Muslims in the DRC representing 1% of the population. The Muslim communities of Beni and Bunia, among which the group has recruited, have long-standing relations with Sudan and Kenya, but the radical Muslim organizations present in these two countries have not established themselves in these two Congolese cities.

The ADF threat has been exploited particularly in the context of the globalized rise of international jihadism. On July 11, 2010, the explosion of two bombs in Kampala killing 80 people, was claimed by Al-Shabaab in reaction to the commitment of the Ugandan army in the African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM). For the Ugandan government, the ADF was part of international terrorism cooperating with Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa and Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb. As early as 2001, the United States (UN) included the Ugandan ADF-NALU and LRA on the list of terrorist organizations.

The movement goes beyond its Ugandan-Congolese dimension and begins to internationalize with the transactions of *Jamil Mukulu*¹. On October 12, 2011, the United Nations Security Council placed it on the list of persons targeted by the sanctions of resolution 1533, followed by the European Union on December 2, 2012.² Jamil Mukulu was in contact with the government of Khartoum and since then he was suspected of having established links with the Al-Shabaab movement in Somalia (International Crisis Group, 2012).

The Ugandan government has always systematically presented the ADF as a terrorist movement threatening its existence, in 1999 it created a 'Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force' with the mission of tracking down the ADF. The vision is shared by the MONUSCO mission. UN Expert Group reports from 2013, 2014 and 2015 found no proven evidence of links between ADF and Al-Shabaab or Al-Qaeda. Despite the lack of evidence, this does not prevent the Ugandan government from receiving American military support from the American fund against international terrorism, which from 2001 to 2014 increased from 77 million to 399 million US dollars of the ADF on Congolese territory is beneficial to the government in Kampala (K. Titeca and D. Fahey, 2016).

If the historical founders of the ADF (Jamil Mukulu, Yusuf Kabanda, Sheik Kamoga) are Muslims fighting against Kampala, this movement does not present the characteristics of an Islamist terrorist organization as described by the Ugandan authorities, a fact which will become increasingly further visible in the following paragraphs.

The ADF was responsible for 205 deaths due to terrorism in 2018, an increase of 136% compared to 2017 (Global Index for Terrorism, 2019). The populations of Beni and Butembo were excluded from the presidential elections of December 31, 2018. The 2019 comes with the resumption of massacres which intensify in November and December 2019. Given the scale and the atrocity with which they are perpetrated during these two months, an alarm signal is activated: it is obvious that a new ADF chapter begins at this time. This is moment zero for the ADF.

November 2019 was a particularly deadly month for civilians in Beni, the epicenter of terror, with the killing of 123 by armed groups documented by KST (Kivu Security Tracker, *Monthly Report*, 2019). Most of the massacres that took place in November 2019 occurred on the road between Beni and Eringeti, with ADF responsible for 15 of the 17 massacres perpetrated by armed groups in the territory. These massacres of civilians provoked major protests from November 22, mainly against MONUSCO, accused of inaction. On November 25, MONUSCO and the Congolese army agreed to relaunch joint operations against the ADF.

During the last thirty-one days of 2019, terror escalated in the territory of Beni. The massacres continued at an alarming rate in this territory, with 120 deaths recorded by the KST (*Ibid*). This heavy toll suggests that the operations launched by the Congolese army against this uprising on October 29, 2019 did not significantly reduce the ADF's ability to do harm and were not accompanied by measures effective protection of civilians. Thus, the city of Beni has

¹ Jamil Mukulu is the military leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces, a foreign armed group operating in the DRC, which is obstructing the disarmament and voluntary repatriation or resettlement of ADF combatants, as provided for in section 4 § b of the resolution 1857 (2008)

² Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 7/2012 of 5 January 2012 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1183/2005 imposing certain specific restrictive measures directed against persons acting in breach of the embargo on weapons imposed on the Democratic Republic of Congo", Official Journal of the European Union, 7 January 2012.

become the epicenter of terror in the DRC. At present, the massacres continue and their current tendency is to move towards Ituri, despite the efforts of FARDC.

Result And Discussion

From Conflict To Terrorism

Conflict remains the main driver of terrorism, with more than 95% of terrorism deaths occurring in countries already in conflict. When combined with countries with high levels of political terror, the number jumps to over 99%. Political terror involves extrajudicial executions, torture and imprisonment without trial. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the ten countries with the highest impact of terrorism are all engaged in at least one armed conflict: Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, India, Yemen, Philippines and lately the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Essentially, terrorist attacks in countries in conflict are more than three times as deadly on average as terrorist attacks in non-conflict countries. The eastern territories of the DRC endure endless conflicts, the living traces of a war that is never over. The actors involved in the bloody conflicts in North Kivu are multiple. They are simultaneously local, national and transnational, state and private; this is what makes the conflict complex and long-lasting. The DRC was politically and socially destabilized by an extremely brutal intra-state war between 1998 and 2003, which caused the death of around 5 million people. The exploitation of natural resources (and their mismanagement) has led over time to the outbreak of violence on several levels. Resources can also finance the conflict when the actors use them to enrich themselves and continue their struggle.

Terrorism is also correlated with the intensity of the conflict. There is a strong correlation between the number of combat deaths per year in a country conflict, and the number of terrorist attacks in the same year.

In the Kivu region, weak governance still allows armed groups to continue extracting gold, tin and other minerals despite an existing peace agreement. Of course, this exploitation has led to new tensions and widespread instability. In a country where objectives are achieved with arms in hand, private actors (rebel movements) use their positions and the context of instability to maintain or exercise control over mineral resources. There are currently more than 130 armed groups in the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu, which clash for countless reasons (Study Group on the Congo, 2019).

Most of the armed groups are directly interested in the issue of minerals, thus preparing the ground for the ADF: Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), Rally for Democracy (RCD) and March 23 Movement (M23).

On the Congolese public scene, conflicts and rebel groups followed one another and now the scene is fully absorbed by the ADF fighters. The ADF are considered terrorists by the Congolese state.

Throughout their existence, the state sphere offered them several frameworks: a serious danger for national communities, a group responsible for a series of massacres, the group that killed a national hero.

The official narrative of attributing ADF activities to Islamist terrorism was revived in 2014, just as spectacular crimes were taking place in Beni, such as the assassination of Colonel Mamadou Ndala followed by mass killings. As of 2019, the government reaction escalates and sees them as full-scale terrorists. In this sense, *Radio France Internationale (RFI)* paints them an image of Islamist terrorists. The rise of the ADF in 2019 sparked a series of accusations and suppositions that flooded the national and international public consciousness. Currently, the

ADF are strongly associated with possible scenarios such as the implementation of Islamism or the establishment of a caliphate in the eastern region, but are these associations well founded?

Outside the West, countries still found to be under the thumb of authoritarian regime variants, the US administration's launch of the all-out global war on terror was quickly turned into a wonderful opportunity for the ruling classes to discredit and to discredit their armed enemies (F. Sadiki Koko, 2017). On April 18, 2019, through a message from a propaganda agency, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for an attack in eastern DRC, in the village of Bovata, near Uganda (B. T. Stanis, 2019). If Daesh evokes a toll of three Congolese soldiers killed and five others wounded, a MONUSCO source confirms the death of two soldiers and a civilian in the attack on the night of April 16/17, 2019. This claim is a first for the country, a unique and isolated event that happened a few months before the rise of the ADF in November 2019. But despite these links, it cannot be said whether there is a connection between the Islamic State and ADF or that the Islamic State controls the ADF operationally. The press continually lends the ADF links to Daesh and Boko Haram but without a factual basis.

The Congo is confronted with an international Islamist terrorism of the same type as that which strikes Western capitals, asserted the DRC government on several occasions. The successor of Joseph Kabila relied on the anti-jihadist discourse. Visiting Washington in early April 2019, Felix Tshisekedi demanded that the UN include ADF-Nalu in the register of terrorist organizations. The president said the Islamist threat is a constant concern for him and his desire is for the country to be a member of the coalition against the fight against terrorism. He also confided his fear of seeing an attempt to install a caliphate in the Beni and Butambo region. But this fear is deeply mistaken, arising from an interest. Radical Islam has become a practical tool for dictatorial regimes that need to justify their internal repression and attract the good graces of the powers of the North (T. Vircoulon, *Ifri Note* 11). Thus, Islamism represents a pretext to please America.

The ADF does not present itself as a fundamentalist organization. The immediate environment of the ADF does not show signs of religious radicalization. The French historian Gérard Prunier speaks of "social Islamism" (G. Prunier, 1999) to underline the weak Muslim imprint of this organization. The ADF do not operate in a logic of recruiting believers and expanding a sanctuarization of the territory.

The thesis of the installation of a caliphate in the eastern regions, especially in North Kivu is not possible since these provinces are mainly Christian (Catholics and Protestants). Muslims are a sociological minority there, they represent 1% of the population.

Congolese Muslims are not extremists, there are no sociologically rooted brotherhoods in the eastern provinces. Asked about a possible establishment of a caliphate in the region, Mr. Banywesize opines:

I do not believe in the thesis of the installation of a caliphate in the eastern regions of the Congo. Christians, non-believers and Muslims live in the same neighborhoods, attend the same schools, their places of worship are often close together. I think there are a few people who are exploiting the natural resources of the region with some support from outside forces including the extremist forces with an Islamist audience (after all, these forces need access to the natural resources that allow them to bail out their pockets), but I do not believe that there is an anthropo-sociological and political

anchoring (there is no political party with an Islamist audience in the Congo). This anchor does not exist at the moment¹.

The Islamism of the ADF remains superficial, especially after the break in 2014 following the arrest of Jamil Mukulu. Moreover, investigations carried out in this direction attest that the killers are not interested in the religion of their victims before killing them, and that there has been at least one case of a Muslim being killed. The ADF have never explicitly claimed such a project. On the contrary, there is a strong nationalist consciousness affirmed in North Kivu and South Kivu. It has been noted that it is thanks in particular to the resistance, nationalism and patriotism of the populations of these two regions that the disastrous projects of the rebellions have always failed. The reaction of the people is revealing. As massacres cause chaos, the only form of structuring life in insecurity is to make tribal logic the way of life and sometimes even to equip oneself with self-defense forces which will be tempted to turn into a power of attack to avoid being invaded by the presence of foreigners who are accused of all evils. We decide to defend our land, to defend our identity and to defend our parcel of power. Thus, at all times, the massacres are attributed to the aggressors who come from elsewhere (Ugandan, Rwandan) or who belong to other spheres of life (Islamists, Westerners): the spheres of the enemies that we will also seek to massacre thereafter, in this logic we must understand the ADF attacks.

Deeply concerned about their continued survival in the DRC, the ADF operate under the ideology of death. In order to understand this logic, it is necessary to look from the inside out. Regarding the interior, the ADF do not show Muslim symptoms, all these have been attributed to them by external factors MONUSCO and the current government. Houses burned and others looted, wounds, people lynched and killed, children kidnapped for ransom are really terrorist acts, which the media adds the description Islamist terrorists; the Ugandan terrorists; Ugandan Muslims. This humanitarian disaster maintained by the ADF is the direct consequence of the struggle for mining and forestry resources.

With regard to the outside, the ADF would be part of a transnational network of Muslim fundamentalists that extends to the Sahel, via the Somali Al-Shabaab. This version was relaunched from the confidences of a mysterious character who presented himself as a defector from the ADF, the famous 'Mr. X'. Mr X claimed that the ADF works with half a dozen terrorist groups including Al Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Hezzbolah and Boko Haram. For months the 'Mr. X' was the attracted informant of MONUSCO on the ADF which resulted in false and fabulous reports. MONUSCO has not verified the information received, the truth is revealed by Fahey who lists in his article "The man who cheated the UN" (D. Fahey, 2016, p. 95) the litany of lies about the ADF. Mr X's credibility was ruined after he could not recognize the photo of Jamil Mukulu that Daniel Fahey presented to him (Ibidem).

Contrary to the image built, this group is not subject to any terrorist organization, it resorts to terror in order to increase their profit, financing remains essential. The ADF do not attack the government, they attack the populations whose main activities are agriculture (production of cocoa or coffee, beans and palms) and trade. By attacking them, the ADF push them to leave their villages, to abandon their fields in order to obtain supremacy in the territory to continue economic activities.

¹ Interview with Emmanuel Banywesize, Sociologist and philosophy professor at the University of Lubumbashi, April 10, 2021.

Conflicts can provide an excellent context for a wide range of political and economic actors to pursue “violent, profitable and politically advantageous strategies with great impunity” (D. Keen, 2012).

Of course, there is a tension between the forces of change and the desire for change. Thanks to their terrorist strategy, ADF have developed mechanisms to control a large part of the local economy and obtain illicit private gains, to win the intense struggle for access to natural resources and land.

On reflection, the ADF is no longer linked to Islamism, but its rise encompasses two considerable struggles: their struggle for survival in the territory and the struggle for resources; the struggle for resources does indeed depend on their existence. The ADF today represent the tree that hides the forest full of wealth and behind which other actors try to escape their responsibility.

Conclusion

Once with the reversal of the ADF in 2019, we can speak of a conflict exacerbated until terrorism. The massacres of the ADF respond to terror, therefore to terrorism, but it is not a question of terror in the name of religion, but rather in the name of profit from which the actors take advantage to settle accounts so that everyone draws from it partition. Their image as fanatics served by the media is specially designed to distract attention from the disappearance of coltan and other mining and forestry resources. In short, a large part of the problems already existing on the territory have been retouched and replaced in the current context of the ADF. This whole mix is actually a deliberate diversion. The ADF are a motley group. The ADF are neither Islamists, nor Ugandans, nor even Islamist terrorists in the truest sense of the term. Currently, they are purely Congolese. The ADF constitute an armed and mafia-like organization which benefits from several local, national and transnational complicities in a context of public impotence in the DRC, but an organization which does not have the capacity to conquer a country and reverse a regime and which, in order to survive, must resort to terrorist methods, massive crimes and plunder and looting exercised on vulnerable and innocent populations. In the DRC, the mode of operation represents a life and death struggle for access to resources. Of course, access to resources means money for financing the group. It is obvious that the tunics of the Muslims help the diversion which tends to mask the commercial face of the crisis to advance the Islamist thesis which has never succeeded in convincing any Congolese. The hunt for the ADF allowed the Congolese government to arrest its opponents who were supposed to collaborate with the rebels and to muzzle the media supposed to carry out their propaganda. However, terrorism remains a real threat to eastern DRC, which is why it is necessary for the army to mobilize in order to produce new strategies, which are less predictable for any enemy.

In the DRC, terrorism is a poorly understood and exploited concept, but which at the same time describes a real threat. The political context is favorable to the emergence of terrorist movements. The instrumentalization of the terrorist concept by Congolese political actors contributes to preventing a better understanding of the phenomenon and thus contributes to its amplification in the targeted territory.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

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