

**THE IMPACT OF PARAMILITARY GROUPS ON SOVEREIGNTY AND STATE SECURITY:  
A LOOK AT THE WAZALENDU IN THE DRC****<sup>1</sup> \*Kambale Tsongo Eric and <sup>2</sup>Tumana Maseka Lopez**<sup>1</sup>Department of International Relations, University of Kinshasa, DR Congo<sup>2</sup>Central China Normal University and Kwango University**Received 14<sup>th</sup> August 2024; Accepted 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024; Published online 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024**

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**Abstract**

During the end of the Cold War, the conceptual debate revolved around mercenary activity, and as academic evolution progressed, it was split to give rise to a derivative, entrepreneurial form, thus avoiding the controversy surrounding the concept, thus giving way to a more moderate and more acceptable scholarly formulation in the international community, a paramilitary force that responded to an obvious fact in a world where the boundaries between open and secret warfare are more and more nebulous ones requiring multifaceted intervention. It is in this perspective of multifaceted conflict that the Democratic Republic of Congo, a sovereign country since its accession to independence on June 30, 1960, has been for more than 25 years. The M23. This reflection aims to contribute to the debate around a security issue around a propagandist decision instituting the former militias as Wazalendu patriots, on the future of sovereignty, on a post-war improvement against the M23, triggering a circumstantial fardc-Wazalendu union, and how the Congolese government would develop its preventive strategy aimed at effectively controlling the armed groups allied to the FARDC, during and after the war.

**Keywords:** Wazalendu, Mai-Mai, groups paramilitary, security, sovereignty.

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**INTRODUCTION**

A paramilitary force is an armed force whose function and organization are similar to those of a national army but which is not considered part of the armed forces of a state<sup>1</sup>. Thus we must know that since the end of the Cold War, the conceptual debate has revolved around mercenary activity which, as academic evolution progressed, was split to give rise to a derivative, entrepreneurial, matured form, thus avoiding the controversy that reigned around the concept of private soldier, thus giving way to a more moderate and more acceptable scholarly formulation in the international community. A paramilitary force in a world where the boundaries between open war and secret war are increasingly blurred. This debate encourages us to reflect on the future of the state armed forces in the face of the multiplication of private paramilitary companies and the valorization of their powers on the international scene, to the point of looking at the reality of its use, increasingly widespread since the end of the twentieth century, of what remains of state sovereignty in a globalized environment in the past, security was the exclusive prerogative of a sovereign state. Today it should be noted that there is a trend towards the privatization of conflicts and security at an early stage, crises and conflicts are multiplying, leading to governments calling on paramilitary armed groups to play the role of auxiliaries or instructors of national armies, military advisors or, quite simply, executors of secret operations. opportune actors in the context of missions for which States do not want to openly assume responsibility, in order to avoid any international and diplomatic tension that often leads to sanctions. As a result, whether we accept it or not, the phenomenon of paramilitary societies has crossed the ages and

is coming back to the forefront of the evolution of military societies, in the service not only of great powers, state governments but also of multinationals. Clearly, and even if international law tends to prohibit mercenary activity, in a certain confusion of genres, the reality is quite different, between the opportunity for peace and the respect of international rights, the paramilitary concept seems to be a parade to the mercenary concept prohibited by international conventions, but in any case, we are moving towards an accelerated privatization of state security, including the paradoxes of a multifaceted conflictuality, thus threatening one of the important elements of the international recognition of a state, sovereignty. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, being a sovereign country since its accession to independence on June 30, 1960, has been for more than 25 years in a conflictual, multifaceted situation, thus calling for multiple forms of theories of conflict resolution, through collective security, thus involving the strength of the United Nations Mission for Peace and Stability of the Congo, through the theory of sub-regional integration with the implementation of the secondly, the place of a sub-regional force of the East African Community and finally, without forgetting the diplomatic theory involving negotiation and cooperation with the declared actors of the conflict in the Eastern Congo region. Not only has the situation on the ground not changed today, the eastern area of the country remains one of the deadliest areas in Africa, not to say in the world. Faced with this complexity and the perpetuation of the conflict, the Congolese government has opted for a path that it considers pragmatic and patriotic, from the use of groups once considered militias, rebels to the rebels to the São Paulo group, which the Congolese government now considers to be a Wazalendu (patriotic) group, to stop the advance of the M23 rebel group, which the Congolese government considers to be supported by its neighbor Rwanda. However, this reflection hinges on the methodical understanding of the spectacular transition from rebel groups that killed, raped and looted peaceful Congolese citizens to patriotic groups, financially and logistically

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<sup>1</sup>*Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, June 2005; online version June 2011, 3<sup>e</sup> éd.

supported by the government in complicity with Congolese political elites who find in them, a patriotic resistance force capable of protecting territories to the detriment of the loyalist armed force and its impact on sovereignty, the security traditionally of the panage of the central government by trying to provide a relative objective analysis of what could be the situation after this war between the Congolese government and the M23 rebellion.

### Presence of paramilitary groups in eastern Congo

For a good understanding of the paramilitary concept, the methodology requires us to make a small demarcation with the regular army of the state by exposing functional elements between the two groups, which is how it must be understood before anything else that the regular army is an organized force of a state, led by military authorities and having a precise legal framework, while paramilitaries, on the other hand, are civilian formations that do not belong to the official army but adopt a structure and methods similar to that of the regular army, often to support or oppose military or political actions in a given state. They may act independently or be integrated into the armed forces in certain contexts, as is the case with a circumstantial alliance, such as the DRC's regular force and Wazalendu in North Kivu province. In addition, it should be noted that most of the armed groups currently grouped in the Wazalendo movement present in eastern DRC are the direct result of the First (1996-97) and Second (1998-2003) Congo Wars and the ensuing transition period (2003-2006), which ended with the 2006 elections.<sup>2</sup> Today, eastern DRC is home to more than 260 local and foreign armed groups present and active in five provinces in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika, as stated by the coordinator of the disarmament, demobilization, community recovery and stabilization program (P-DDRCS). Emmanuel Tommy Tambwe Ushindi, during a press briefing on Tuesday in Kinshasa<sup>3</sup>. The resurgence of the M23 has led to the legitimization and proliferation of armed groups in North Kivu. These are old and new ethno-tribal armed groups that claim to be fighting against any foreign occupation, and in particular against what they describe as "Rwandan" aggression through the M23<sup>4</sup>. These armed groups have unified under the name of "Wazalendo", except that they are made up of several small Mai-Mai or Nyatura groups with different commands.

### The Wazalendu paradox

In order to avoid any conceptual misunderstanding concerning the armed groups that pollute the eastern zone of Congo and the confusion arising from the name that is now vague in the political and security discourse of the Congolese elites, it should be recalled that this question deserves a particular understanding that is not based on the logic but rather on the pragmatic politics of the Congolese government in a situation in which an enemy of yesterday can be a friend of tomorrow in the face of an enemy common to all of us, identify as such. This is an explanatory logic of a Wazalendu appellation as patriots while for a long time qualifying rebels to the

government instead. This name only responds to one circumstance, the war against the M23, thus calling for a circumstantial union of forces to fight the common enemy. We are entitled to ask ourselves the many questions relating to pragmatism:

How did the rebels of yesterday become patriots? Have these demands of yesterday already found a lasting solution? From rebels, militias, to the reservist groups of the national government? The answers to all his questions answer on the circumstance and not on a well-thought-out government program. The offensive against the M23 rebellion being a triggering element, the story begins with a great resistance that the groups that were once militias in Kinshasa government opposed to the very powerful M23 rebel group in the face of their expansionist tendencies, preventing them from conquering so easily the territories already abandoned by the Congolese national army, in the face of this commendable act, The Congolese authorities, elites and public opinion give credit to their voluntary bravery, thus deserving recognition from the government. not to lose its political notoriety in public opinion favorable to the multiple Mai-Mai groups that protect the national territory better than the regular force, this is how, on April 20, 2023, the National Assembly adopted the bill establishing the armed reserve of defense in the DRC<sup>5</sup>. by making civilian volunteers and various Mai-Mai groups engaged in the defense of the country and its territorial integrity in the face of an external threat or aggression as part of the constituent component of the reservists of the Congolese army, the irony is that nothing was done upstream as a pragmatic procedure, identification and registration of members of this multiple groups thus allowing the government to control it during and after the offensive against the Congolese army. M23. One thing that seems to be ignored even by the Congolese elites is the question of why all these groups took up arms against his own government? If this question had a sincere answer beforehand, the government would try to find a solution beforehand before any other decisions are taken so as not to try to solve a problem by keeping another persistent problem on it, as Jean Pierre Szymaniak says, that a political crisis is like a toothache, cavities must be treated before infection occurs<sup>6</sup>.

In response to the resurgence of the M23 in 2021-2022, a number of armed groups set aside their differences and joined forces with the Congolese army to fight the M23. Some of the armed groups in North Kivu have formalized a mutual non-aggression pact: The Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS), Nduma Défense du Congo – Rénové (NDC-R), Collectif des mouvements pour le changement/Forces de défense du peuple (CMC/FDP) and Mai-Mai Kifuafula, formed the Alliance of Resistance Fighters of the Fatherland (ARP) in May 2022, renamed in September 2023 Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP). They are provided by the FARDC with military uniforms, ammunition, and armbands of different colors for their identification, each group keeping its pre-alliance command, a strategic mistake of the Congolese government. According to the UN group of experts, more than 28,000 combatants are integrated into the Volunteers for the Defence of the

<sup>2</sup> Armée nationale et groupes armés dans l'est du Congo : Trancher le nœud gordien de l'insécurité, projet usalama publié à 2012 par l'institut de la vallée de rift, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/rvi/2013/fr/98049>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rtn.ch/rtn/Actualite/Monde/RDC-266-groupes-armes-actifs-dans-cinq-provinces-orientales.html#>

<sup>4</sup> ONU (juin 2023), S/2023/431, op. cit., §41, et 71-78

<sup>5</sup> Projet de loi instituant la réserve armée de la défense en RDC 20/04/2023, <https://talatala.cd/panorama-des-lois/363/>

<sup>6</sup> Voir sur <https://citations.ouest-france.fr/citation-jean-pierre-szymaniak/crise-politique-comme-mal-dent-139274.html>.

Homeland<sup>7</sup>, and even though some armed groups try to control what should be understood as "real" Wazalendo, the term has since been used to refer pell-mell to volunteers, uncontrolled citizens and members of armed groups, whether or not they are allied with the FARDC. In the end, the Wazalendo movement does not constitute a united bloc, coordinated by a leader rather than a coalition of circumstance constitutes several groups, each keeping its autonomy and its former name.

### A propagandistic decision?

As the French dictionary La Rousse indicates, propaganda is a systematic action exerted on public opinion to make it accept certain ideas or doctrines, particularly in the political or social field<sup>8</sup>. As a result, the nature of this decision appointing former rebels to Wazalendo patriot is political propaganda aimed at popular adherence to the vision of the head of state in office Mr. Felix Tshisekedi for his re-election in the 2023 elections, taking advantage of the circumstance on the ground. Three elements justify this propagandistic hypothesis.

**The defeat of FARDC :** Since late 2021, the M23 rebel movement backed by Rwandan army troops has been advancing in North Kivu province, routing the Congolese army and installing a parallel administration in areas under their control in eastern DRC. Faced with this alarming situation, the President of the DRC is the guarantor of the nation and as indicated in the Constitution of the DRC in its article 83 that the President of the Republic is the supreme commander of the Armed Forces and he chairs the High Council of Defense<sup>9</sup>. Made the call on November 3, 2022 asking Congolese youth to organize vigilante groups and support the Congolese army against the M23. Following a September 2023 decree legalizing the presence of militias within the Armed Forces of the Republic of Congo (FARDC), many of the 120 armed groups in eastern DRC, previously fought by the Congolese army, allied themselves with the latter under the banner of the Wazalendo, including the Mai Mai the Nyatura, and according to a UN report, the FDLR, an armed group opposed to Rwandan President Paul Kagame<sup>10</sup>. The government's objective did not seem to be to resolve the security issue on the ground, except to take advantage of the popularity and notoriety that the former militias have in the conflict zone for having put up a fierce resistance against the advance of the M23 group, which the national army has not been able to stop.

**Decision-making:** True propagandists who never miss the opportunity for popular adherence to their political discourse, the call of the president of the republic after having had a favorable echo in national public opinion was followed by other maneuvers justifying today that the objective was just to win the elections and then the rest did not concern him. After this magical mutation from militia groups to patriot groups, another populist measure was initiated by the Kinshasa government to hinder its Minister of Higher and University Education (ESU), Muhindo Nzangi, who had launched, on Thursday, January 26, 2023, the campaign to prepare students

for military service. The official ceremony for the launch of this activity took place at the esplanade of the administrative building of the University of Kisangani. On this occasion, Muhindo Nzangi explained that this training intends in particular to strengthen patriotism in the hearts and actions of the students, although specifying that they will not go to combat, they will be trained in patriotic notions, respect for human rights in the conduct of war operations, except that those who will be called upon to join the army will receive practical training and will join the armed forces while for all the others, it is a training to give them the capabilities that will allow them to be ready at any time, they can be called up by the government for the defense because they will constitute the reservists...»<sup>11</sup>. A year after the elections, no one is talking about this story of compulsory military service for students because the objective was achieved (the election).

**Follow-up actions :** This last element is crucial for an understanding of the objectivity pursued by the governments of the DRC by legalizing militias such as the Wazalendo patriots, the measures of follow-up of patriotic groups by governments after the adoption of the decree by the national assembly in 2023 should imperatively be taken for a good cohabitation and for possible integration of these groups into the national army etc... Faced with a glaring lack of follow-up measures, the situation in the cities under the mixed control, farde and the Wazalendo reign an unprecedented insecurity, no one is responsible for security, the former criminals of the city who have now become patriots have the right to move freely in the cities without being disturbed, as a result, murders, robberies, rapes are becoming commonplace, as testified by a member of the civil society of the city of Goma, Mr. Christian Kalamo, that not a night goes by without a burglary, not a night without the crackling of bullets for at least three hours, in this city of Goma. For him, this insecurity contrasts with the militarization of the city: he adds by saying that "It is here in the city of Goma where there are many soldiers, many brigades, many units, there are the FARDC, there is the police, there are the Wazalendo, but why, in a city of two communes, we can lack security, and why are there shootings every day in this city of Goma? »<sup>12</sup>. this insecurity is caused not only by bandits who are now officially authorized to carry arms, but also by the many uncontrolled soldiers who circulate in the city of Goma, because freedom reigns as a principle of management following the militarization of the city and without a homogeneous and coordinated command of operations on the ground. Faced with the multiplication of crimes, the population is beginning to replace the security and judicial services. In February 2024, in the Lushagala camp, after the murder of one of their members, the displaced people decided to do justice by capturing the alleged perpetrator of the crime (an alleged Wazalendo), whose body had been burned before acts of cannibalism were perpetrated on his body. In addition, faced with this bleak picture, Mubaya Nickson believes that the insecurity in Goma is the result of the irresponsible distribution of weapons to anyone and in any way, without taking into account their supervision. He identifies three major problems,

<sup>11</sup> Kisangani : lancement de la campagne de préparation des étudiants au service militaire

<https://www.radiookapi.net/2023/01/27/actualite/societe/kisangani-lancement-de-la-campagne-de-preparation-des-etudiants-au>

<sup>12</sup> Goma : le meurtre d'un jeune relance le débat sur la crise sécuritaire dans la ville

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<https://www.radiookapi.net/2024/09/12/actualite/securite/goma-le-meurtre-dun-jeune-relance-le-debat-sur-la-crise-securitaire>

<sup>7</sup> ONU, Rapport à mi-parcours du groupe d'experts sur la RDC, S/2023/990, 30 décembre 2023, annexe 19

<sup>8</sup> La rousse <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/propagande/64344>

<sup>9</sup> Constitution de la RDC du 2006

<sup>10</sup> Nafissa Amadou, « Les wazalendo sont devenus les alliés de l'armée congolaise [archive] », sur *Deutsche Welle*, 6 mars 2024 (consulté le 8 juillet 2024)

the first is that the Wazalendo, without salary, but armed to the teeth, without ethics or prior training, the second, the Military: endowed, trained, but with a derisory salary, without taking into account the cost of living, while they are also fathers of families and finally the Infiltration of bandits disguised as Wazalendo. For his part, Mr. Chesar Obrigado thinks that the time has come for: "The authorities seriously rethink the city's security systems. Otherwise, they facilitate the work of the enemy who prowls around Goma. The enemy seeks to tire the consciences of the population in order to facilitate a triumphant welcome as the savior of a people abandoned by its authorities. There you have it, there is sufficient evidence that this decision, far from being well thought out, only met the electoral need.

### **Wazalendu Effects on Sovereignty**

It should be noted that sovereignty is the supreme power recognized to the State, which implies the exclusivity of its jurisdiction over the national territory and its absolute independence in the international order where it is limited only by its own commitments<sup>13</sup>. Thus, on the political level, sovereignty is the absolute right recognized to the State to exercise authority, whether legislative, judicial or executive, over a given territory, a country or a people, and finally, national sovereignty characterizes the independence of the nation-state in relation to other states or international bodies. It is exercised through sovereign functions, such as internal security (police), external security (diplomacy and national defence), justice, finance, etc. as defined in the country's constitution. All the states of the world, proud of their sovereignty and do their best to prevent it from being violated, this is so, for a good protection of the territory, the government serious, train, equip its authorized services for the security of the national territory, today, it seems to us that the Congolese government is incapable of exercising its authority over the entire territory and maintaining order, the security of citizens and infrastructure in the face of the threats posed by the Wazalendu paramilitary groups with a negative impact on the stability and security of the political and administrative institutions of the region under their occupation. Indeed, today all the debates revolve around the not insignificant role that the Wazalendu plays in the evolution of hostilities on the battlefield by opposing a fierce resistance to the M23 rebel group supported by Rwanda according to an official version of the government in the face of the manifest weakness of the regular armed forces of the DRC without asking existential questions about the survival of the state in the near future being given that these Wazalendu, who are now patriots, would risk becoming rebels against the government again tomorrow in a post-war perspective against the M23. However, the effects of the Wazalendu on sovereignty can be apprehended by two objectively verified facts, the first which is the over-arming of the former militias by the Congolese government and the second fact is the public opinion favorable to the Wazalendu for their security than by the regular Congolese army.

### **Over-arming**

First of all, it must be said that, the over-arming of the former militias, called by the Congolese government as patriotic Wazalendu response on a strategic evidence responding to the

theory of containment which consists in containing the significant advance of the M23 rebels, which is a total success, two years later, the rebels do not manage to achieve its manifest objectives such as the capture of the city of Goma. The city of Sake, as Mr. Katembo Faustin states, that: "If we managed to repel the M23, we united with the government and we, the Wazalendu, we came together to repel the enemy, that's what happened. But I have to guarantee you that no day the M23 will arrive here yet. We do everything we can to protect Sake<sup>14</sup>." Therefore, the progress in other provinces of the country to finally hope to arrive at the capital Kinshasa to change the power in place as they often declare in their speeches. However, the question arises, if it happens that the Congolese government with its army supported by the Wazalendu wins this battle to the point that the M23 is neutralized, and its Wazalendu refuses to disarm because having an objective other than to fight only the M23 which is not yet resolved, all this force will remain in their hands, As a result, would the government be able to neutralize it? The answer seems to be no. Look, before being in coalition with the government army, these Wazalendu were part of several armed groups that were already laying down the law under the impotence of the government with their means at hand, with the financial support and logistics offered by the Congolese government, the future of peace in the east remains uncertain.

### **Public opinion**

The eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo is an area in which the population suffers from the horrific cycle of recurrent wars dating back more than a decade, therefore, the population hopes for a life of peace. As a result, she sees in the Wazalendu this torchbearer of radiant hope to the point that everyone identifies with the Wazalendu as well as with the republic, a threat to the sovereignty of Congo. Public opinion regarding the presence of the Wazalendu armed group is complex and varies by individual and region. It is difficult to give a simple answer to this question. Some see the group as a threat to security and stability, while others perceive it as a local advocacy group. Opinions are often influenced by the current political and economic situation, as well as personal experience with the group. After observing the situation on the ground in eastern DRC, there are two different opinions regarding the presence of Wazalendu in their areas, favorable and unfavorable

### **The post-war period against M23**

This question is more crucial in the post-war period involving the M23 rebel in eastern DRC, as the future of armed groups, including the Wazalendu groups, remains uncertain and complex. Hold on, because of multiple possible scenarios such as :

### **Demobilization and reintegration**

Some members of these armed groups may decide to lay down their arms and join demobilization and reintegration programs supported by the government or international organizations. This would offer them a path to a peaceful civilian life, the consequence is that, these rebels who have become civilians,

<sup>14</sup> RDC : les Wazalendu, jeunes combattants unis contre le M23, <https://fr.africanews.com/2024/06/25/rdc-les-wazalendu-jeunes-combattants-unis-contre-le-m23/>

<sup>13</sup> Selon les définitions du Robert ou du Larousse,

can become rebels again at any time, as explained by Mr. Amani Kakimba<sup>15</sup>, that "There were Mai-Mai militiamen, Nyatura and others who had responded favorably to the call of the Head of State to surrender and dissociate themselves from the armed groups, but unfortunately their support did not succeed to the point that there were even deaths among them because of starvation. Faced with this situation of a bad policy of care, they often make decisions to return to the bush, being used to it. It should be noted that the presence of armed groups alongside the Congolese armed force is not only based on patriotism but also on a question of interest and positioning, as indicated by the self-proclaimed colonel Mr. Luc Safari Bishori of the Patriotic Self-Defense Movement (MPA)<sup>16</sup> suggested in an interview that many of the Wazalendo joined with the hope of obtaining a position in the army as a reward, in addition to patriotic reasons, this already informs us of a possibility that our patriots of today may resume with their rebellions once their objectives are not taken into account by the Congolese government.

### Reconfiguration of movements

Indeed, another convincing scenario would be the ambition of certain armed groups to seek to reorganize, form new movements or join other groups to strengthen their position. This could lead to changes in the dynamics of ongoing conflicts in the region, prolonging instability and conflict in the region. This could lead to further violence and disrupt stabilization and development efforts. The dynamics of the conflict in the east of the DRC inform us that the armed groups that pollute the region are always the same people, either often with the same name or by changing the name of the movement, as is the case today with the M23 rebel group, in fact, In March 2009, this group, which called itself the CNDP, signed a peace treaty with the Congolese government. in which it agreed to become a political party in exchange for the release of its members in prison and some of its members were integrated into the Congolese regular armed force, unfortunately 3 years later, including on April 4, 2012, it was reported that the former rebel leader Bosco Abaganda and 300 members of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) had deserted and clashed with government forces in the region from Rutshuru to the north of Goma<sup>17</sup> to create another group in the same area but with a new name alluding to the agreement signed with the Congolese government on March 23, CNDP became M23. As it would seem that the strategy is to perpetuate insecurity in the eastern area of the DRC, after more than a year of clashes between the DRC armed force and the new rebellion, in 2013, the Congolese army chased the M23 fighters from their last positions in the mountains of North Kivu, on the border of Rwanda and Uganda, on 5 November, the M23 declared that it was laying down its arms<sup>18</sup> and two days later, about 1,600 M23 members surrendered to

Ugandan authorities<sup>19</sup>. After the failure to draw up a first joint document on an agreement in early November, the DRC and the M23 finally signed a peace agreement on 12 December in Nairobi that confirmed the dissolution of the M23, defining the terms of demobilization and conditioning the abandonment of violence and the recognition of the rights of its members. In 2021, the group reconstituted itself and made its return, which was accentuated in 2022, with the capture of the town of Bunagana, bordering Uganda<sup>20</sup>. Until the time of writing, the confrontation continues between the M23 and the Congolese army with its Wazalendo allies. In addition, support for armed groups, including the Wazalendo, risks precipitating a cycle of violence that will survive the current crisis. As an illustration, on October 23, 2023, an altercation between two factions of Wazalendo occurred in Kanyaruchinya, about 8 km north of the city of Goma, creating panic among the population of Goma<sup>21</sup>. Far from being a panacea, the Wazalendo, and in particular their fragmentation, risk being a thorn in the DRC's defense strategy.

### International and regional pressure

International and regional pressure to disarm and demobilize armed groups in the DRC could influence the future of the Mai-Mai Wazalendo. Diplomatic efforts and joint actions by neighboring countries and the international community could help reduce their influence in Wazalendo by promoting peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. For more than 25 years, the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo has been an area where a multitude of local armed groups and groups from neighboring countries operate, sowing violence against civilians in this region rich in natural resources whose direct or indirect impact affects the proper functioning of neighboring countries. It is important to point out that the eastern region of the DRC is also of considerable international and geopolitical importance, with its strategic location sharing borders with Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and Sudan makes it a focal point for regional stability and security, its continuous destabilization, negatively impacts regional integration within the framework of the East African community and also slows down development of the African Great Lakes region. Faced with this sub-regional reality of the Great Lakes, the presence of Wazalendo with the uncontrolled rambling of the armed in the region, thus constituting a threat to peace in the region, the international community must put pressure for an effective management up to the eradication of its Wazalendo groups.

### Conclusion and proposal

The Wazalendo groups, legitimized by their alliance with the Congolese government, the armed groups that make them up have diversified their already existing sources of income. We can mention for example the illegal exploitation of materials and especially the collection of illegal taxes so by exploding the number of road barriers in the areas still under their authorization, the M23 offensive seems to be used as a pretext by the armed groups to intensify their sources of funding and also allow them to expand their role in local governance, by

<sup>15</sup> En RDC, le processus de démobilisation en panne, Zanem Nety Zaidi ,30/09/202230 septembre 2022, <https://www.dw.com/fr/miliciens-brousse-prise-en-charge-rdc/a-63292783>

<sup>16</sup> Depuis aout 2023, des autres membres du MPA auraient accusé le colonel autoproclamé Luc de collaborer avec le M23. Depuis ce temps, on entend plus parler de lui. (Source : Entretiens téléphoniques avec des acteurs de la société civile de Rutshuru, 5 mars 2024.)

<sup>17</sup> Congo-Kinshasa : Général Ntaganda et des loyalistes désertent les forces armées [archive] sur AllAfrica.com, 4 avril 2012

<sup>18</sup> « RDC : le chef militaire du M23, Sultani Makenga, aux mains des autorités ougandaises [archive] », sur Radio France internationale, 7 novembre 2013 consulté le 23 septembre 2014

<sup>19</sup> « La RDC et le M23 signent un accord de paix », Le Monde avec agence Reuters, 12 décembre 2013 (lire en ligne [archive])

<sup>20</sup> Célian Macé, « Human Rights Watch accuse les rebelles du M23 de « meurtres et de viols » en RDC [archive] », sur Libération, consulté le 23 Septembre 2024

<sup>21</sup> Mediacongo.net, Une altercation entre deux factions des Wazalendo à la base des tirs près de Goma, 23 octobre 2023

appropriating all the prerogatives formerly reserved exclusively for state sovereignty. The Congolese government's support for the former Mai-Mai rebel groups, now integrated into the Wazalendo movement, raises complex and critical questions in light of the post-war period against the M23. While this integration can be seen as a strategy to contain the advance of the M23 in regions affected by protracted conflict, major challenges remain. Mistrust persists among local communities, and the violent history of these groups continues to presage future tensions. An inclusive and transparent approach is therefore essential to build trust between the government, veterans and local populations. Looking ahead, after reviewing all possible scenarios for effective management during and after the war against the M23, we suggest the following:

#### **-To the Congolese government**

As he often says that it is easy to know when and how the war began but so difficult to predict its exact end, faced with this dilemma of the unknown, the Congolese government must develop a strategic prevention policy consisting of proceeding at the time of the outbreak of hostilities with a procedure for the identification, registration and integration of the Wazalendu armed groups into the national army under a single command authority in proceed by mixing between the Wazalendu patriots in various groups.

In the face of Wazalendu's multiple abuses of power, engaging communities in constructive dialogue is vital to strengthen reconciliation and establish sustainable peace mechanisms. Serious efforts must be made to include all voices, including those of victims of past violence. The government must also invest in local development initiatives that provide economic alternatives to the population, thus reducing dependence on armed groups and violence. Strong governance and respect for human rights are crucial to establishing a secure environment where old groups like Wazalendo can evolve into more peaceful and constructive entities.

#### **-To the Congolese elites**

To avoid in the near future in the face of a given situation populism taking a populist decision by trying to solve a present problem but to think downstream before any other decisions that may have negative repercussions on peace and security in the future. We have noticed that everyone is satisfied with the result on the ground, yes it is a logic, except that the management of a state requires a broad vision, so we should start now to think about what will be the post-war period against the M23 since the former rebels of a source of additional funding, of a logistical support of the Congolese government to the M23 make fear a strengthening of milicianization and the perpetuation of the cycle of conflict in the area. Being powerful could be difficult to control in the perspective of a direct confrontation against the fardc in the near post-war future against the M23. In sum, while challenges remain, a thoughtful and multidimensional approach could catalyze positive and lasting change in the region, fostering genuine peace and social cohesion.

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