



**Congressional
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Democratic Republic of Congo: Background and U.S. Relations

Updated March 25, 2022

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R43166

Summary

Regional security, humanitarian needs, and global health are longstanding concerns for U.S. policymakers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The country's vast mineral resources and history as a venue for global strategic competition have further fueled U.S. interests. Since President Félix Tshisekedi's inauguration in 2019, U.S. policymakers have sought to support stabilization in conflict-torn eastern DRC; encourage respect for human rights and fair electoral contests in the future; respond to outbreaks of Ebola, COVID-19, and other global health issues; and challenge China's dominance in DRC's mining sector. The Biden Administration also has elevated attention to forest conservation in the Congo Basin as part of its global climate policy.

The United States and other donors have focused substantial resources on stabilizing DRC since the early 2000s, when "Africa's World War"—a conflict that drew in multiple neighboring countries and reportedly caused millions of deaths—drew to a close. Enduring violence in the east—both a symptom and a cause of festering regional tensions—has engendered grave human rights abuses and an ongoing humanitarian emergency. One local rebel group claimed affiliation with the Islamic State in 2019 and has since pursued increasingly sophisticated attacks. Security threats, corruption, local distrust of state actors, and mismanagement impeded containment of a 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak, which grew to become the world's second-largest on record.

President Tshisekedi, a former opposition figure, succeeded Joseph Kabila in DRC's first-ever electoral transfer of power. Tshisekedi has pledged to counter corruption, reform the abusive state security apparatus, and improve social services. While historic, the 2018 elections that brought him to office were marred by delays, political repression, proliferating conflicts, and alleged manipulation of the official results under Kabila. Political space has since expanded, but local activists continue to face threats and, in some cases, legal prosecution. Having initially governed in an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with Kabila, Tshisekedi reshaped the political landscape in 2021 by forging a new majority in parliament with the support of defectors from Kabila's political alliance. The coalition is likely to be tested ahead of elections slated for 2023, when Tshisekedi is expected to seek reelection. Some political opponents, civil society activists, and religious leaders have questioned Tshisekedi's commitment to a fair and timely electoral process.

U.S. officials welcomed Tshisekedi's presidency and have pledged to support his reform efforts. U.S. relations had deteriorated toward the end of Kabila's rule, as the Obama and Trump Administrations sought to deter electoral delays, human rights abuses, and corruption by applying coordinated diplomatic pressure and designating top state officials for sanctions. The United States is a top donor to DRC. Congress provided "not less than" \$325 million in aid for DRC under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103), as it did in FY2021 (P.L. 116-260). The United States also is the top financial contributor to the U.N. peacekeeping operation in DRC (MONUSCO, to which the United States allocated an estimated \$313 million in FY2021) and the largest country donor of humanitarian assistance (\$443 million provided in FY2021).

Congress has shaped U.S. policy toward DRC—often focusing on human rights, regional security, and democracy concerns—through legislation, oversight activities, and direct engagement with Congolese stakeholders. Legislative restrictions on aid to countries that use child soldiers or do not adequately address human trafficking have framed some U.S. engagement with DRC. Congress also has sought to deter neighboring Rwanda and Uganda from involvement in proxy warfare in eastern DRC, through appropriations restrictions and other measures. See also CRS Report R45933, *Ebola Outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Emergencies or Enduring Threat?*; CRS Report R44402, *Rwanda: In Brief*; and CRS Report R42618, *Conflict Minerals in Central Africa: U.S. and International Responses*.

Contents

Introduction	1
Historical Background	3
Politics	5
Conflicts in the East	6
Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	9
Wildlife Trafficking.....	10
U.N. Peacekeeping: Current Issues	10
The Economy	11
Mining Sector: Corruption Concerns	12
China’s Role in DRC’s Mining Sector and Strategic Competition.....	13
U.S. Relations and Aid	14
Foreign Assistance	16
Selected Congressional Actions	18

Figures

Figure 1. DRC at a Glance	2
---------------------------------	---

Tables

Table 1. U.S. Foreign Assistance and Funding for U.N. Peacekeeping in DRC	17
---	----

Contacts

Author Information.....	19
-------------------------	----

Introduction

President Félix Tshisekedi's inauguration in 2019 represented DRC's first-ever electoral transfer of power and reset DRC's relations with the United States and other Western donors. These had grown acrimonious under Tshisekedi's predecessor, Joseph Kabila, once hailed as a peacemaker, who in his later years in office oversaw election delays, violent suppression of opposition protests, allegedly extensive corruption, and burgeoning conflicts throughout the country. U.S. officials heralded Tshisekedi's presidency despite stated concerns about the electoral process that brought him to office, and Tshisekedi has since pursued close ties with the United States.

President Tshisekedi has sought donor support to reform state institutions and improve social services, launched a review of state mining contracts, pursued a diplomatic rapprochement with neighboring countries, and sought to position DRC (with its extensive tropical forests) as a global player on climate change issues. Whether his stated goals are likely to advance or stall ahead of elections slated for 2023 is uncertain; progress to date has been slow.¹ Observers debate whether the president and key supporters are motivated primarily by a commitment to reforms, or by a desire to capture the state and its resources, as previous heads of state arguably did.²

DRC's challenges are stark. The country is rich in minerals, forest resources, and agricultural and hydroelectric potential, but most Congolese live in poverty. DRC ranks near the bottom of the U.N. Human Development Index (175 out of 189 countries in 2021) and its per-capita GDP, at \$594, is among the world's lowest. Complex conflicts in the east underlie one of the world's worst humanitarian emergencies. Donors have long sought to address instability in the east through relief efforts, U.N. peacekeeping, regional conflict mitigation, and state-building support. Then-President Kabila's efforts to defy term limits, which fueled new conflicts and political violence between 2015 and 2018, also preoccupied international policymakers. Global health security is another focus: DRC is among the world's least-vaccinated countries against COVID-19 and has had four outbreaks of Ebola since 2017,³ along with measles and cholera outbreaks.

Industrial mining is the mainstay of the formal economy, although most Congolese are farmers or work in the precarious informal sector (including artisanal mining). DRC has nearly half the world's known reserves of cobalt, an ingredient in electric car batteries, and provided over 70% of global cobalt production in 2021. It also tied with China as the third-largest copper mining producer.⁴ The Biden Administration has identified China's "dominant position" in DRC's cobalt sector as a U.S. supply chain concern.⁵ Global demand for cobalt fueled an economic rebound in DRC in 2021 after the COVID-19 pandemic quashed growth in 2020. DRC also produces other minerals, including gold and several others associated with "conflict" mining in the east.⁶

Eastern DRC is a longtime nexus of instability in Africa's Great Lakes region. Neighboring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda have backed rebel proxies at times, and a prevailing security vacuum has attracted foreign militias in search of safe-havens and resources. In 2021, the

¹ *The Economist*, "Congo's President Has Not Kept His Word," December 11, 2021.

² See, e.g., *Africa Confidential*, "Hostage to the Bad Old Ways," January 5, 2022; Paul Nantulya, "Power Shift in the DRC Cracks open a Door to Reform," January 22, 2021.

³ See CRS Report R45933, *Ebola Outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Emergencies or Enduring Threat?*

⁴ U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), 2022 Mineral Commodity Summaries, "Cobalt" and "Copper."

⁵ White House, *Building Resilient Supply Chains, Revitalizing American Manufacturing, and Fostering Broad-Based Growth: 100-Day Reviews under Executive Order 14017*, June 2021. See also *New York Times*, "Race to the Future: What to Know About the Frantic Quest for Cobalt," November 20, 2021.

⁶ See CRS Report R42618, *Conflict Minerals in Central Africa: U.S. and International Responses*, by Nicolas Cook.

United States designated the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan-origin armed group and Islamic State (IS) affiliate active in eastern DRC, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. DRC state security forces have been implicated in extensive abuses during operations to counter armed groups. Ugandan troops have deployed to DRC to help counter the ADF since late 2021.

Some 5.6 million Congolese were internally displaced as of late 2021 (one of the world’s highest figures); nearly a million more are refugees in neighboring states.⁷ Some 27 million people in DRC, or one in four, are reportedly in need of humanitarian aid.⁸ DRC also hosts over half a million refugees and asylum-seekers from neighboring countries, primarily long-term refugees from Rwanda and arrivals over the past decade from the Central African Republic.⁹

Figure I. DRC at a Glance



Population: 105 million
Languages: French (official), Lingala (lingua franca in the west), Swahili (lingua franca in the east), local languages
Religions: Catholic 30%, Protestant 27%, other Christian 37%, Kimbanguist (local sect) 3%, Muslim 1%, other/none 1% (2014 est.)
Infant Mortality Rate: 62.6 deaths/1,000 live births
Life expectancy / Median Age: 61.4 / 16.7 years
HIV adult prevalence rate: 0.7% (2020 est.)
Population below the poverty line: 63% (2014 est.)

Adult literacy: 77% (male 89%, female 67%) (2016)
GDP growth / per capita: 5.7% / \$594
Major exports / partners: copper, cobalt, crude petroleum, diamonds / China 53%, UAE 11%, Saudi Arabia 6%, South Korea 5% (2019)
Major imports / partners: packaged medicines, refined petroleum, sulfuric acid, stone processing machines, delivery trucks / China 29%, South Africa 15%, Zambia 12%, Rwanda 5%, Belgium 5%, India 5% (2019)

Source: CRS graphic, drawn from Esri map boundaries (2016). Figures from CIA World Factbook and International Monetary Fund (IMF); 2021 estimates unless noted.

⁷ U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), *République Démocratique du Congo: Personnes déplacées internes et retournées*, November 2021; and U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Refugees and Asylum Seekers from DRC*, October 31, 2021.

⁸ UNOCHA, DRC “Key Figures,” at <https://www.unocha.org/drc>.

⁹ UNHCR, “Monthly Statistics of Refugee and Asylum Seekers,” November 10, 2021.

Historical Background

DRC has long served as an arena of regional and international competition. Belgium's King Leopold II claimed "Congo Free State" as his personal possession in 1885. His administration grew notorious for its plunder of Congo's resources and egregious abuses, and the Belgian government transitioned the territory into a formal colony in 1908.¹⁰ Belgium granted Congo independence in 1960, with nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba as prime minister. The following years were plagued by instability, often fueled by external powers, including a secessionist rebellion in mineral-rich Katanga province and an army mutiny that led to Lumumba's murder in 1961.¹¹ One of the first ever U.N. peacekeeping missions deployed to Katanga in 1960.

Colonel Joseph Mobutu (aka Mobutu Sese Seko), who was involved in the mutiny against Lumumba, seized power in a coup in 1965 and instituted a more centralized and authoritarian regime. Mobutu's pursuit of an "authentic" national identity led him to rename the country Zaire. Mobutu's 32-year reign was backed by the United States and other Western powers in the context of Cold War rivalry in Africa.¹² He also used fraudulent elections, brute force, and patronage to consolidate and retain power, while allegedly appropriating massive state resources for himself.¹³ Petty corruption meanwhile came to constitute an economic safety net for many Congolese.

Civil and Regional Wars. Domestic and international pressures mounted on Mobutu as the Cold War drew to a close and as the aging president's health faltered. Mobutu agreed in principle to a multiparty democratic system in 1990 but repeatedly delayed elections. State institutions and the military fractured, while conflicts in neighboring states spilled into DRC. Ousted Hutu extremists who had led the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 fled to Zaire, where they mobilized against the new Rwandan government from refugee camps, reportedly with Mobutu's backing. Rwanda launched cross-border military operations in response, reportedly also targeting civilians on a large scale.¹⁴ Rwanda and Uganda then backed a 1996 rebellion against Mobutu led by Laurent Désiré Kabila, an exiled Congolese militant. The ensuing conflict came to be known as the "first" Congo war.¹⁵ With Mobutu's security forces and personal health in tatters, Laurent Kabila seized power in 1997 and renamed the country DRC. Mobutu died in exile in Morocco later that year.

¹⁰ See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, Mariner Books: 2006.

¹¹ On the role of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Lumumba's overthrow, see Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo*, PublicAffairs: 2007. A 1975 congressional investigation into U.S. foreign assassination plots concluded that the CIA had pursued plans to assassinate Lumumba but that available evidence did not point to a direct CIA role in his death. *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: An Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, U.S. Senate*, November 20, 1975, a.k.a. the Church Committee report, pp. 30, 48. See also State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, vol. xxiii, "Congo, 1960-1968."

¹² Notably, Mobutu's government reportedly served as a conduit for U.S. assistance to rebels fighting a Soviet-backed government in neighboring Angola. See, e.g., John Stockwell, *In Search Of Enemies*, New York: Norton, 1979.

¹³ See, e.g., Steve Askin and Carole Collins, "External Collusion with Kleptocracy: Can Zaire Recapture Its Stolen Wealth?" *Review of African Political Economy*, 57 (1993). For further analysis of the Mobutu era, see Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Zaire: A Country Study*, 1994, at <https://www.loc.gov/item/94025092/>.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/zrtoc.html>

¹⁴ U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), *Report of the Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003*, 2010 ("Mapping Report").

¹⁵ See Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*, PublicAffairs: 2011.

Tensions among the erstwhile allies soon erupted. In 1998, amid growing popular hostility toward Rwandan soldiers and Congolese of Rwandan descent who had comprised the core of his rebel army, Laurent Kabila attempted to expel these forces, provoking a mutiny. Rwanda and Uganda deployed troops into DRC and cultivated local rebel groups as proxies, this time against Kabila. They also fought each other. Angola, Zimbabwe, Sudan, and others intervened on the government's side. This conflict, dubbed "Africa's World War," sparked a major humanitarian crisis and is estimated to have caused (directly and indirectly) some 3.3 million deaths.¹⁶

Joseph Kabila's Presidency. In 2001, Laurent Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. His son Joseph Kabila assumed the presidency and advanced a U.N.-backed peace process. A 2002 peace accord called for foreign troops to withdraw and for Congolese rebels to be integrated into the military and government. Kabila headed a transitional government between 2003 and 2006 and oversaw the adoption of a new constitution by referendum. DRC's economy and mining sector rebounded from near-collapse and fragmentation during the war. In 2006, DRC held its first competitive multiparty elections since independence, which President Kabila won, following a tense and violent run-off against former rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba.

DRC's emergent institutions and fragile stability fractured in the years that followed. Cyclical Rwandan-backed insurgencies fueled insecurity in the east, while Kabila and members of his family were implicated in allegedly vast corruption and nepotism.¹⁷ Kabila was reelected in 2011 in a vote that many observers characterized as flawed to the point of lacking credibility.¹⁸ Ahead of elections due in 2016, and with Kabila facing term limits, uncertainty over his succession came to dominate national politics. The vote was repeatedly delayed, state security forces brutally suppressed opposition protests, polls were canceled in several opposition strongholds in the name of Ebola prevention, and conflicts erupted in several previously stable parts of the country. Under intense domestic, regional, and international pressure, the vote ultimately took place in late 2018. Kabila did not run for reelection, and opposition figure Félix Tshisekedi was declared the winner.

Regional Tensions. DRC's relations with Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Angola remain complex and volatile. Rwanda's occasional military interventions in eastern DRC have caused particular tensions with Kinshasa and within eastern DRC. Rwandan motivations appear rooted in several factors, including national security concerns, cross-border ethnic solidarity, and economic incentives.¹⁹ In 2012, Rwandan support for a rebel group known as the M23 sparked acute international condemnation and led donors, including the United States and some European countries, to curtail aid to Rwanda.²⁰ In 2013, the U.N. brokered a regional accord in which neighboring states agreed not to back DRC-based armed groups, while Kinshasa committed to institutional and security sector reforms.²¹ DRC's military, backed by a new "Intervention Brigade" within the U.N. peacekeeping operation, then defeated the M23. There has not been an evident Rwandan-backed rebel force in DRC since then, although Rwanda and other neighboring

¹⁶ International Rescue Committee (IRC), *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis*, 2007.

¹⁷ See Congo Research Group (CRG) and Pulitzer Center, *All the President's Wealth*, July 2017.

¹⁸ See The Carter Center, "DRC Presidential Election Results Lack Credibility," December 9, 2011, among others.

¹⁹ See Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*; U.N. *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 2001, U.N. doc. S/2001/357; and Howard French, "Kagame's Hidden War in the Congo," *New York Review of Books*, September 24, 2009.

²⁰ See, e.g., testimony of then-Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights, "The Devastating Crisis in Eastern Congo," hearing, December 11, 2012. On U.S. aid restrictions, see CRS Report R44402, *Rwanda: In Brief*.

²¹ *Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region*, February 2013.

states have reportedly deployed troops to the area. Kinshasa never fully implemented its 2013 commitments, however, and the M23 never fully demobilized.²² (See “Conflicts in the East.”)

Politics

President Tshisekedi was pronounced the winner of DRC’s 2018 presidential elections, succeeding Joseph Kabila in DRC’s first electoral transfer of executive power since independence. That Tshisekedi was an opposition candidate and son of the late opposition leader Étienne Tshisekedi—revered by many Congolese for his uncompromising attitude and role in DRC’s political liberalization in the 1990s—added potent symbolism.

Who Is Félix Tshisekedi?

Félix Tshisekedi (chee-say-KAY-dee), 58, is DRC’s fifth president since independence. He won election in 2018 with 39% of the vote, according to official results. (Under DRC’s electoral system, the candidate with the most votes wins, even if they fall short of a majority.) In his inauguration speech, Tshisekedi called for national reconciliation and vowed to improve DRC’s human rights record, release political prisoners, and advance peace and development.²³ Tshisekedi has also pledged to fight corruption and impunity, introduce greater transparency into state mining contracts, and expand free primary education.

A son of the late opposition leader and former Prime Minister Étienne Tshisekedi, the president grew up in Kinshasa and in his father’s political stronghold of Kasai (central DRC), before moving to Belgium from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s.²⁴ He was first elected to public office in 2011 as a member of parliament representing his father’s UDPS party. He followed the party’s directive to boycott his seat, however, after Étienne Tshisekedi refused to recognize incumbent Joseph Kabila’s reelection. Following his father’s death in 2017, the UDPS selected Félix Tshisekedi as its leader. He signed on to an intra-opposition agreement in 2018 backing Martin Fayulu as a unified opposition candidate, then backed out in order to run himself.

Following a lengthy and contested election process, many Congolese heralded Tshisekedi’s victory as preferable to alternative scenarios that could have fueled more violence, including further delays, a third-term bid by Kabila, or a win by Kabila’s chosen successor, a former interior minister implicated in human rights abuses.²⁵ Many observers, however, questioned the official results, suggesting they may have been rigged in Tshisekedi’s favor to deny victory to a more hardline opposition figure, Martin Fayulu.²⁶ Kabila’s coalition claimed sweeping majorities in simultaneous legislative and provincial-level elections, ensuring influence over the cabinet, state revenue streams and fiscal policy, and implementation of any new initiatives.

Reflecting these constraints, President Tshisekedi initially governed in an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with Kabila. In early 2021, however, Tshisekedi reshaped the political landscape by breaking with Kabila and forging a new majority coalition in parliament with the help of

²² Reuters, “Fighting in east Congo pushes 11,000 refugees into Uganda,” November 9, 2021.

²³ Colette Braeckman, “La main tendue de Félix Tshisekedi,” *Le Soir*, January 7, 2019.

²⁴ Biographical details drawn from *Jeune Afrique*, “Félix Tshisekedi, au nom du père,” June 15, 2017.

²⁵ Radio Okapi, “Présidentielle en RDC: scènes de liesse à Kananga à l’annonce de la victoire de Felix Tshisekedi,” January 10, 2019.

²⁶ See Reuters, “How Kabila’s Election Strategy Unravelling in Congo,” January 19, 2019; *Financial Times*, “How Joseph Kabila Lost Then Won Congo’s Election,” January 30, 2019; Tatiana Carayannis and Herbert Weiss, “Kicking the Can Down the Road,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 18, 2019; BBC, “How Does Felix Tshisekedi’s Poll Victory in DR Congo Add Up?” January 16, 2019; and Jason Stearns, “Who Really Won the Congolese Elections?” CRG, January 16, 2019. DRC’s election commission did not publish disaggregated results that could be checked against election observer data. Fayulu refused to recognize the official results.

defectors among Kabila's former political allies. The president did so after accusing Kabila loyalists of blocking his efforts to fight corruption, secure a new loan program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and advance a free national education initiative.²⁷ By realigning control in the legislature, Tshisekedi's new "Sacred Union" coalition has opened up opportunities to wrest control of the mining sector, central bank, electoral commission, and state security apparatus from figures associated with Kabila.²⁸

Whether Tshisekedi's presidency will deliver sustained institutional changes and benefits to the people of DRC remains to be seen. Whether his coalition survives the lead-up to the next elections—slated for 2023—is also in question. The appointment of a new electoral commission chairperson in mid-2021 proved contentious, as some local politicians, civil society activists, and religious groups accused the president of asserting undue influence over the process.²⁹ (The previous chairperson was accused of pro-Kabila partisan bias and personal corruption, and was designated for U.S. sanctions in 2019 for undermining democracy in DRC.³⁰) Tshisekedi's tenuous alliances with former Katanga governor Moïse Katumbi and former rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba, who were unable to run for president in 2018, may also come under increased strain as the three jockey for position ahead of 2023. Local-level elections that could bolster representation and accountability in rural areas have been delayed for decades.

Conflicts in the East

Civilians have been the primary victims of over 25 years of brutal violence in DRC's mineral-rich, agriculturally fertile, and densely inhabited east. Tensions over access to land and citizenship rights have helped drive myriad conflicts, along with localized disputes, criminal activity, patronage, political competition, and regional geopolitics.³¹ Illicit trafficking of gold and other resources, sometimes passing through neighboring states, has also reportedly fueled conflicts.³² The spillover of ethnic violence from Rwanda and Burundi in the 1990s was a key catalyst, aggravating tensions between and among those who view themselves as native to DRC and those whose origins (however distant) may be traced to neighboring countries.

Multiple armed groups are active in the area, including "Mai Mai" militias—disparate groups that operate variously as self-defense networks and criminal rackets—and foreign-origin groups seeking safe haven and resources. The Ugandan-origin Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which has claimed affiliation with the Islamic State, is one example (see text-box below). Others include the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), founded by perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and its various splinter movements and offshoots; Burundian-origin

²⁷ Bloomberg, "Two Years After Vote, Congo's President Gets His Own Government," April 12, 2021.

²⁸ Pascal Kalume Kambale and Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, "Power Shift in Congo," *Foreign Affairs*, February 2021. See also, e.g., *New York Times*, "Congo Ousts Mining Leader in a Cloud of Corruption Claims," December 3, 2021; AFP, "DR Congo's Tshisekedi reshuffles central bank," July 6, 2021; and France 24, "Kabila ally to quit as DR Congo PM as parliament rallies behind Tshisekedi," January 28, 2021.

²⁹ Reuters, "Congo swears in election chief after disputed nomination," October 27, 2021.

³⁰ U.S. Treasury Department, "Treasury Sanctions Congolese Officials Responsible for Undermining DRC Elections," March 21, 2019; see also International Crisis Group (ICG), *Electoral Poker in DR Congo*, April 2018; and Enough! Project, "Red Flags in DR Congo's Electoral Process," March 8, 2018.

³¹ See Séverine Autesserre, "What the Uproar Over Congo's Elections Misses," and Jason Stearns, Koen Vlassenroot, Kasper Hoffmann, and Tatiana Carayannis, "Congo's Inescapable State," both in *Foreign Affairs*, March 2017.

³² See, e.g., Treasury Department, "Treasury Sanctions Alain Goetz and a Network of Companies Involved in the Illicit Gold Trade," March 17, 2022.

armed groups; and the Ugandan-origin Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a small but brutal militia responsible for mass atrocities in multiple countries. The army (known as the FARDC) and other state security forces have reportedly committed extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and other atrocities during counterinsurgency operations and illicit involvement in mining.³³

Uganda and Rwanda were parties to conflicts in DRC in the 1990s and early 2000s, at which time their armies and local proxies were implicated in abuses and resource trafficking.³⁴ Both have reportedly supported local rebel groups at times since then (see "Historical Background," above). Ugandan troops have deployed to eastern DRC since 2021 to counter the ADF; U.N. sanctions investigators have also reported unacknowledged Rwandan and Burundian deployments.³⁵

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) aka "ISIS-DRC"³⁶

Founded in 1995 as an Islamist-inspired opposition group in Uganda, the ADF has been based in eastern DRC for over two decades. It is subject to U.N. and U.S. sanctions.³⁷ Group members are reportedly predominantly Ugandan and Congolese, with some recruits from Tanzania, Kenya, and Burundi.³⁸ The ADF has been implicated in large civilian massacres; at least 849 civilian deaths in DRC were attributed to the group in 2020 alone.³⁹ A 2017 attack on U.N. peacekeepers was reportedly among the worst in U.N. history.⁴⁰ In 2021, ADF attacks expanded from the group's stronghold in Beni district (North Kivu) into adjacent Ituri province. In late 2021, Uganda accused the ADF of a series of deadly attacks there. Some analysts have questioned authorship of some attacks attributed to the ADF, and the group's structure and ultimate aims remain opaque.⁴¹

Joint FARDC-U.N. operations in 2014 splintered the ADF, and in 2015, founder Jamil Mukulu was arrested in Tanzania and extradited to Uganda. His successor, Musa Baluku, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2019, although internal divisions reportedly endure. Baluku has overseen an increase in operational capacity (including growing use of improvised explosive devices against civilian and military targets), which U.N. global terrorism monitors attribute to the "reinforcement of trainers, tactical strategists and financial support remitted from the

³³ See, e.g., State Department, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, Democratic Republic of the Congo, March 30, 2021; and HRW, "Martial Law in Eastern Congo No Pretext for Abuse," May 7, 2021.

³⁴ See International Court of Justice, "Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)"; *Report of the Panel of Experts*, U.N. doc. S/2001/357; and U.N. Mapping Report.

³⁵ Reports by the U.N. Group of Experts on DRC, December 23, 2020 (S/2020/1283), and June 7, 2019 (S/2019/469).

³⁶ The State Department refers to the group as "ISIS-DRC," while global IS communications refer to affiliates in DRC and Mozambique as the "Islamic State Central Africa Province" (ISCAP). State Department, "Terrorist Designations of ISIS Affiliates and Leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique," March 10, 2021. On the ADF, see, e.g., Tara Candland et al., *The Islamic State in Congo*, George Washington Program on Extremism, March 2021; Abdulhakim Nsobya, "Uganda's Militant Islamic Movement ADF: A historical analysis," *The Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, no. 12/13, 2016; and ICG, *Eastern Congo: The ADF-NALU's Lost Rebellion*, December 2012.

³⁷ The ADF is designated under U.S. DRC and global terrorism sanctions programs, and under the U.N. DRC sanctions program. Six senior ADF figures are also designated under the U.S. "Global Magnitsky" sanctions program.

³⁸ U.N. Security Council, *Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities*, U.N. doc. S/2022/83, February 3, 2022.

³⁹ UN News, "Widespread attacks in DR Congo may amount to crimes against humanity," February 2, 2021.

⁴⁰ U.N. Public Information Service, "At Least 71 United Nations, Associated Personnel Killed in Malicious Attacks against Peacekeeping Operations during 2017," January 26, 2018.

⁴¹ Investigations by the Congo Research Group prior to the ADF's IS affiliation found that "several overlapping networks of actors were involved" in massacres attributed to the ADF, including other militias and DRC army personnel. U.N. DRC sanctions investigators have repeatedly stated that they were unable to document any direct ties between the ADF and global IS leadership. In contrast, U.N. global terrorism sanctions monitors reported in 2021 that ISCAP was "evolving into a dependable ISIL affiliate." CRG, *Mass Killings in Beni Territory: Political Violence, Cover Ups, and Cooptation*, September 2017; U.N. Security Council, *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, U.N. doc. S/2021/560, June 10, 2021; and U.N. Security Council, *Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities*, U.N. doc. S/2021/68, February 3, 2021.

[IS] core through [IS] networks and enablers in Somalia and other East African countries.”⁴² In early 2022, U.N. terrorism monitors noted ongoing debate over the degree of command and control linking the ADF to global IS leadership, but relayed member state assessments that “growing communication” between the two “serves to amplify local ADF status and propaganda while enhancing the image of the global footprint” of the Islamic State.⁴³

State of Siege. In May 2021, President Tshisekedi declared a “state of siege”—a form of martial law—in two eastern provinces, North Kivu and Ituri, in an effort to counter armed groups and stabilize the area. Parliament has since repeatedly extended the order. The top U.N. official in DRC reported in late 2021 that the state of siege had enabled the FARDC and U.N. peacekeepers to make some progress in countering armed groups and establishing state authority.⁴⁴ The U.N. Secretary-General subsequently reported, however, that armed groups had “intensified attacks against civilians notwithstanding the state of siege,” and that the two provinces continued to account for most human rights violations documented in the country.⁴⁵ Human rights activists assert that the state of siege has brought political repression and constraints on civil liberties.⁴⁶

Ugandan Deployment and Regional Diplomatic Outreach. Uganda deployed troops into eastern DRC to counter the ADF in late 2021, with President Tshisekedi’s consent, after accusing the group of masterminding a series of attacks in Uganda.⁴⁷ The full scope and likely duration of the deployment are uncertain. The deployment may have implications for regional stability and for the U.N. peacekeeping operation in DRC, which is mandated to protect civilians and support the FARDC in combating armed groups (see “U.N. Peacekeeping: Current Issues”).⁴⁸

More broadly, President Tshisekedi has pursued a diplomatic rapprochement, premised in part on increased military cooperation, with neighboring states to the east, including frequent antagonist Rwanda. Such outreach is politically sensitive within DRC, given past experiences with regional and proxy warfare.⁴⁹ Some analysts also warn that any stabilization strategy prioritizing military operations and counterterrorism objectives may fuel, rather than decrease, instability in the east.⁵⁰

Ebola Outbreaks.⁵¹ Security threats and deeply entrenched distrust of state actors and outsiders nearly stymied efforts to contain the 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC, despite significant advances in available vaccines and therapeutics. This was the first Ebola outbreak to occur in an area with active conflicts, and specifically in an area of ADF activity, complicating efforts to bring it to bay. Independent investigations also found that those leading Ebola response

⁴² U.N. doc. S/2021/68.

⁴³ U.N. doc. S/2022/83.

⁴⁴ U.N. Security Council meetings coverage, 8873rd meeting, October 5, 2021, U.N. doc. SC/14655.

⁴⁵ *United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, December 1, 2021, U.N. doc. S/2021/987. See also AFP, “UN Warns of Worsening Security in East DR Congo,” March 24, 2022; Kivu Security Tracker, “In Ituri Province, the FARDC are Unable to Distinguish CODECO Militias from Civilians,” November 15, 2021; HRW, “DR Congo: Massacres Persist Despite Martial Law,” September 15, 2021.

⁴⁶ LUCHA, “Nord-Kivu & Ituri: Il faut lever l’état de siège maintenant!” August 12, 2021; HRW, “DR Congo: Martial Law Brings Crackdown in East,” March 22, 2022.

⁴⁷ See *New York Times*, “Why Did Uganda Send Troops Into Congo?” December 31, 2021.

⁴⁸ See USUN, “Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” December 6, 2021.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., France24, “Campaign for DR Congo’s War Victims Puts Rwanda’s Kagame on Defensive,” May 20, 2021.

⁵⁰ ICG, *Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes*, 2020; Stearns, “Six Questions Regarding Ugandan Intervention in the Eastern Congo,” CRG, December 1, 2021, Judith Verweijen and Robert Flummerfelt, “Fixating on the ISIS Connection in Eastern Congo Will Make Things Worse,” *World Politics Review*, July 6, 2021.

⁵¹ See CRS Report R45933, *Ebola Outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Emergencies or Enduring Threat?*

efforts had engaged in abuse, exploitation, and collusion with armed actors.⁵² With World Health Organization support, DRC contained two much smaller outbreaks in 2021, both of which seemingly originated as relapse or latent transmission among survivors of previous infections.⁵³

Conflicts Elsewhere. Amid election delays and political uncertainty toward the end of President Joseph Kabila’s second term, new conflicts erupted in the central Kasai region (a stronghold of President Tshisekedi’s UDPS party, then in the opposition), southeastern Tanganyika province, and the rural district of Yumbi in western DRC.⁵⁴ Stability has since improved in most of these areas. Tshisekedi’s administration has struggled to demobilize and disarm local combatants, however, and has made little progress in prosecuting related human rights violations.⁵⁵ Rights advocates continue to call for justice in the case of two U.N. sanctions investigators—U.S. citizen Michael Sharp and Swedish-Chilean national Zaida Catalán—who were killed in Kasai, and four DRC nationals accompanying them who disappeared (see “U.S. Policy” below).

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Widespread sexual and gender-based violence in eastern DRC has drawn extensive concern amid reports of gang rape, child rape, mutilation, and other abuses by armed groups and state security personnel.⁵⁶ The prevalence of sexual violence in DRC’s conflict zones has been attributed to factors such as the eroded social status of women, an undisciplined military, impunity, and a breakdown in community protection mechanisms.⁵⁷ Attacks may be opportunistic and/or strategically designed to intimidate. While women and girls are the primary targets, men and boys have also been victims. Donor-backed efforts to improve accountability have produced some legal reforms and a few high-profile prosecutions, but legal gaps endure and rape remains “common.”⁵⁸ Survivors often face stigma and other challenges in obtaining adequate care.

⁵² See World Health Organization (WHO), *Final Report of the Independent Commission on the review of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the 10th Ebola virus disease epidemic in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)*, September 2021; and CRG, *Rebels, Doctors and Merchants of Violence: How the fight against Ebola became part of the conflict in eastern DRC*, August 2021. The WHO inquiry documented an “accumulation of incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse” by individuals overseeing Ebola response efforts, and particularly personnel recruitment. The CRG found that WHO officials oversaw direct payments to state security forces and armed groups in an effort to protect staff and advance containment efforts, with the unintended effect of undermining local trust in health workers and incentivizing armed attacks by some who sought to benefit.

⁵³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “History of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Outbreaks,” 2021.

⁵⁴ See IRIN, “Briefing: The Conflict in Kasai, DRC,” July 31, 2017; ICG, “Kamuina Nsapu Insurgency Adds to Dangers in DR Congo,” March 2017; UNHCR, “UNHCR warns of worsening displacement in Democratic Republic of the Congo,” October 24, 2017; and HRW, “DR Congo: No justice for 2018 Yumbi massacres,” December 19, 2019.

⁵⁵ Kivu Security Tracker, “Does the New Disarmament and Demobilization Program Stand a Chance of Success?” September 16, 2021; U.N. Human Rights Council, *Report of the Team of International Experts on the Situation in Kasai*, U.N. doc. A/HRC/48/82, August 20, 2021.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., UNOHCHR, *Progress and Obstacles in the Fight Against Impunity for Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, April 2014; Amber Peterman, Tia Palermo, Caryn Bredenkamp, “Estimates and Determinants of Sexual Violence Against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(6), June 2011; and HRW, “Soldiers Who Rape, Commanders Who Condone,” 2009. For a critique of donors’ focus on sexual violence in DRC, see Severine Autesserre, “Dangerous tales: Dominant narratives on the Congo and their unintended consequences,” *African Affairs*, 111(443), April 2012.

⁵⁷ See CRS Report R40956, *Sexual Violence in African Conflicts* [archived].

⁵⁸ State Department, 2020 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, DRC report, March 30, 2021.

Wildlife Trafficking

While wildlife poaching and trafficking are not limited to DRC’s conflict zones, insecurity has arguably enabled such activities and armed actors may profit from them. Ivory poaching in and around two national parks in eastern DRC—Virunga and Garamba—has notably threatened critically endangered forest elephants, and a number of local park rangers have been killed.⁵⁹ A range of actors have been implicated in the ivory trade, including state security forces from DRC and neighboring countries, local militias, Sudanese poaching syndicates, and foreign-origin armed groups.⁶⁰ Poachers are reportedly increasingly well armed, as are rangers.⁶¹ U.N. sanctions investigators reported as of 2016 that ivory poaching and trafficking presented a “catastrophic threat” to elephant survival in DRC, but that dwindling elephant populations had made such poaching “an ever-diminishing and increasingly marginal source of armed group financing.”⁶²

The State Department has designated DRC as a focus country and a “country of concern” under the Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt (END) Wildlife Trafficking Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-231).⁶³ In late 2021, State imposed visa restrictions on eight unnamed DRC nationals, citing involvement in wildlife trafficking.⁶⁴ In the explanatory statement accompanying the FY2022 omnibus appropriations act (P.L. 117-103), Congress directed \$2 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funds for “Virunga National Park security” programs.

U.N. Peacekeeping: Current Issues

The U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) is among the largest and longest-running U.N. peacekeeping operations.⁶⁵ The U.N. Security Council has long mandated MONUSCO to prioritize efforts to protect civilians and support stabilization and the extension of state authority in the east.⁶⁶ MONUSCO is authorized to support FARDC operations to counter armed groups, subject to human rights vetting of local commanders. Other enduring MONUSCO tasks include the protection of U.N. personnel and facilities and of humanitarian access, support for the demobilization of ex-combatants, and support for security sector reforms.

During the later years of Joseph Kabila’s presidency, a surge in political violence and conflicts in new areas prompted U.N. officials to warn that MONUSCO was becoming overstretched.⁶⁷ Under President Tshisekedi, many of those areas have stabilized, U.N. relations with Kinshasa

⁵⁹ See CRS In Focus IF11923, *Wildlife Poaching and Trafficking in Africa: An Overview*, and International Union for Conservation of Nature, Red List of Threatened Species, “African Forest Elephant,” 2021.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Reuters, “Congo detains alleged ivory trafficker blamed for killings of park rangers –statement,” June 10, 2021; Treasury Department, “Treasury Sanctions Lord’s Resistance Army Commanders Salim and Ali Kony,” August 23, 2016; *New York Times*, “Elephants Dying in Epic Frenzy as Ivory Fuels Wars and Profits,” September 3, 2012.

⁶¹ *GQ*, “The Bloody Toll of Congo’s Elephant Wars,” April 16, 2018.

⁶² U.N. Security Council, *Final Report of the Group of Experts*, May 23, 2016, U.N. doc. S/2016/466.

⁶³ See State Department, *2021 END Wildlife Trafficking Report*, November 4, 2021.

⁶⁴ State Department, “U.S. Imposes Visa Restrictions on Wildlife Traffickers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC),” December 13, 2021.

⁶⁵ In 2010, the U.N. Security Council renamed the U.N. Organization Mission in DRC (MONUC, established in 1999) as MONUSCO, to reflect changes in the mission’s mandate. As of December 2021 (latest available), the mission comprised 12,712 military and 1,626 police personnel, in addition to civilian staff, per U.N. data.

⁶⁶ Most recently, under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2612 (2021).

⁶⁷ *Special report of the Secretary-General on the strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, September 29, 2017, U.N. doc. S/2017/826.

have improved, and the Security Council has directed MONUSCO to work with the DRC government on a “joint strategy” for the mission’s eventual exit.⁶⁸ MONUSCO has reconsolidated its footprint in the east—withdrawing from temporary sites in Kinshasa, Kasai, and Tanganyika—in preparation for a future “gradual, responsible and sustainable drawdown.”⁶⁹ Reauthorizing the mission for another year in December 2021, the Security Council decreased MONUSCO’s troop ceiling to 14,160 military personnel (500 fewer than previously authorized) and 1,641 police personnel.⁷⁰ It was the first such decrease since 2017,⁷¹ although the authorized ceiling remained above the number of uniformed personnel actually deployed.

The mission’s wide-ranging mandate, logistical challenges, and troop-contributing countries’ limited capacity and political will have contributed to shortfalls. Human rights advocates have repeatedly accused MONUSCO troop contingents of failing to protect civilians from armed group attacks, and such challenges may increase as groups such as the ADF adopt sophisticated tactics.⁷² MONUSCO personnel also have repeatedly been implicated in sexual abuse and exploitation.⁷³ Security Council member states and troop-contributing countries continue to debate how MONUSCO should respond to threats to civilians posed by state security forces, as well as what conditions, if any, should be placed on any logistical support for future election cycles. MONUSCO’s mandate instructs it to support the DRC government in various ways, and its ability to operate arguably depends, in practice, on state acceptance.

Since 2013, the Security Council has authorized a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) within MONUSCO to directly counter armed groups, including unilaterally. In practice, FIB operations have been limited by troop contributors’ limited capacity and force protection, along with a possible decrease in interest in confronting local armed groups since the demise of the Rwandan-backed M23, in 2013.⁷⁴ The U.N. has sought to address capacity gaps by pressing existing contributors to deploy more capable “quick reaction forces” and by bringing in new FIB contributors, over the initial objection of African states that have comprised the unit’s forces.⁷⁵

The Economy

Industrial mining—concentrated in southeastern DRC—is the mainstay of DRC’s formal economy, although most of the workforce is employed in agriculture or precarious informal economic activity. DRC produces the majority of the world’s supply of cobalt, used in electric car

⁶⁸ U.N. Security Council, *Joint strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO*, October 27, 2020, U.N. doc. S/2020/1041; see “Transition Priorities and Benchmarks” in U.N. doc. S/2021/807, September 17, 2021.

⁶⁹ U.N. Security Council meetings coverage, “New Strategy for Mission Withdrawal from Democratic Republic of Congo Tailored to Provinces’ Security Needs, Special Representative Tells Security Council,” December 7, 2020.

⁷⁰ U.N. Security Council Resolution 2612 (2021). The Resolution also allowed the temporary deployment of up to 360 formed police unit personnel “provided they are deployed in replacement of military personnel.”

⁷¹ At that time, the decrease was advocated by the Trump Administration, which asserted that MONUSCO was propping up a “corrupt” government in DRC. USUN, “Ambassador Nikki Haley Addresses the Council on Foreign Relations,” March 29, 2017. The authorized troop ceiling was reduced by 3,700 military personnel that year.

⁷² Stimson Center, *Prioritization and Sequencing of Security Council Mandates: The Case of MONUSCO*, December 13, 2021.

⁷³ U.N. investigators reported 23 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by MONUSCO personnel in 2021. See U.N., “Conduct in UN Field Missions,” <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>.

⁷⁴ A U.N. investigation into a deadly ADF attack on a Tanzanian FIB contingent in 2017 found “gaps in the training and posture” of FIB troops. U.N. Secretary-General, “Note to Correspondents on the findings of the Special Investigation on recent attacks against MONUSCO peacekeepers,” March 2, 2018.

⁷⁵ Institute for Security Studies, “Reinventing the Force Intervention Brigade,” December 4, 2020.

batteries and other industrial applications, and is also a top global copper producer. DRC also produces diamonds and zinc, along with tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold. The latter, known as the “3TGs,” are largely produced via artisanal mining in the east and have been termed “conflict minerals” due to their association with armed group financing. DRC also produces some oil, and the energy sector is thought to have significant untapped potential.⁷⁶

DRC’s economy grew by an anemic 1.7% in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic suppressed global mineral prices and trade, before rebounding to 5.7% in 2021 amid a spike in global demand for cobalt and other minerals. IMF economists reported in early 2022 that the economic rebound had allowed DRC to improve its fiscal balances, but expressed concern about the potential risks posed by anticipated higher food and energy prices, along with “mineral price volatility.”⁷⁷ Despite DRC’s resources and vast potential, an estimated 73% of the population lives on less than \$1.90 per day and development indicators are very poor; about 43% of children are malnourished.⁷⁸

Poor transportation and electricity infrastructure, security threats, corruption concerns, regulatory restrictions and uneven regulatory enforcement, slow resolution of investment disputes, and “a weak and corrupt bureaucracy” have constrained private sector growth and investment.⁷⁹ President Tshisekedi has pursued some pro-investor legal reforms, anticorruption efforts, and private sector outreach, with a particular emphasis on attracting U.S. investment, according to the State Department.⁸⁰ In 2020, General Electric (GE) agreed to invest in a range of infrastructure projects in the electricity and health sectors.⁸¹

In 2021, Tshisekedi’s administration reached an agreement with the IMF for a \$1.5 billion, three-year concessional lending program—nine years after the IMF halted its programs in DRC due to a lack of mining contract transparency.⁸² The new IMF program, which seeks reforms of the central bank, taxation system, and mining sector, also unlocked additional funding from the World Bank and other donors.⁸³ This may enable President Tshisekedi to advance some of his top electoral campaign pledges, including free universal primary education, while arguably providing an incentive for structural reforms—although progress has been slow.⁸⁴

Mining Sector: Corruption Concerns

Corruption concerns have long dogged DRC’s mining parastatal, Gécamines, which issues mining permits and partners with foreign firms in mining operations. Gécamines revenues reportedly fueled political patronage during the Mobutu era, and the transparency advocacy

⁷⁶ See U.S. International Trade Administration, “Democratic Republic of the Congo – Country Commercial Guide,” October 11, 2021. Current oil production, all of which is exported, is located offshore along DRC’s small Atlantic coast. The government has also approved oil and gas exploration in the east. Exploration permits near Virunga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, have prompted concerns from some conservationists; see, e.g., Bloomberg, “Gorilla Refuge, Rainforest May Be Opened in Congo Oil Search,” July 27, 2018.

⁷⁷ IMF, “IMF Staff Concludes Visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” March 7, 2022.

⁷⁸ World Bank, DRC overview, at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview#1>, as of October 27, 2021.

⁷⁹ State Department, 2021 *Investment Climate Statements*, DRC, July 21, 2021.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ GE, “Government of Democratic Republic of the Congo and General Electric Sign Infrastructure Agreement,” February 13, 2020.

⁸² Reuters, “IMF Halts Congo Loan Over Mining Contract Concerns,” December 3, 2012.

⁸³ IMF, “IMF Executive Board Approves US\$1.52 billion ECF Arrangement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” July 15, 2021.

⁸⁴ World Bank blog, “Free Primary Schooling in the DRC? Where we are on the road to reform,” August 3, 2021.

organization Global Witness deemed the firm a “regime cash machine” under President Joseph Kabila.⁸⁵ Dan Gertler, an Israeli businessman with close ties to Kabila, drew particular attention due to deals in which he flipped state-held mining concessions for large profits. An independent investigation in 2013 assessed that DRC had lost over \$1.36 billion in potential revenues from underpricing mining assets sold to firms linked to Gertler.⁸⁶ Firms with reported ties to Gertler have been targeted in corruption probes in the United States, Canada, and the UK.⁸⁷

U.S. “Global Magnitsky” Sanctions. The Trump Administration designated Gertler, one of his business partners, and various associated firms for financial and entry sanctions under Executive Order 13818 (“Global Magnitsky”), asserting that Gertler had “used his close friendship” with Kabila “to act as a middleman for mining asset sales in the DRC.”⁸⁸ Gertler asserted that he was being unfairly targeted, and that his success reflected his appetite for political risk and unique focus on DRC.⁸⁹ In January 2021, at the end of the Trump Administration, the Treasury Department issued a license to Gertler that effectively unblocked his assets and enabled U.S. firms to conduct business with him, under certain conditions.⁹⁰ The Biden Administration revoked the license in March 2021, characterizing it as “inconsistent with America’s strong foreign policy interests in combatting corruption around the world.”⁹¹ The Biden Administration made additional Gertler-related sanctions designations in December 2021.⁹²

In March 2022, after years of litigation stemming in part from issues related to U.S. sanctions enforcement, the DRC government and Gertler reached a settlement agreement in which Gertler reportedly rescinded permits for oil exploration, gold mining, and iron ore mining. In exchange, DRC reportedly agreed to reimburse Gertler for some expenses and allowed him to retain valuable royalty streams from three copper and cobalt projects.⁹³ Whether the deal is likely to assuage U.S. concerns is unclear.

China’s Role in DRC’s Mining Sector and Strategic Competition

While security threats, corruption, poor infrastructure, and an unpredictable regulatory environment have suppressed Western investor appetite, firms from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have pursued a growing role in DRC’s mining sector. The PRC is the largest consumer of Congolese copper and cobalt ore and is DRC’s largest trading partner; PRC-based

⁸⁵ Global Witness, *Regime Cash Machine*, July 2017. See also Carter Center, *A State Affair: Privatizing Congo’s Copper Sector*, November 2017; and Michela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the brink of disaster in Mobutu’s Congo*, HarperCollins: 2002.

⁸⁶ Africa Progress Panel, *Equity in Extractives: Stewarding Africa’s Natural Resources for All*, 2013. See also Franz Wild, Michael J. Kavanagh, and Jonathan Ferziger, “Gertler Earns Millions as Mine Deals Fail to Enrich Congo,” *Bloomberg Markets Magazine*, December 5, 2012.

⁸⁷ *Jeune Afrique*, “RDC: Les zones d’ombre de l’accord avec Dan Gertler,” March 1, 2022.

⁸⁸ Treasury Department, “United States Sanctions Human Rights Abusers and Corrupt Actors Across the Globe,” December 21, 2017; see also “Treasury Sanctions Fourteen Entities Affiliated with Corrupt Businessman Dan Gertler Under Global Magnitsky,” June 15, 2018. See CRS Report R46981, *The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act: Scope, Implementation, and Considerations for Congress*.

⁸⁹ Bloomberg, “Congo Bribery Probe Puts Israeli Billionaire’s Future on Hold,” February 22, 2018.

⁹⁰ See *New York Times*, “Trump Administration Quietly Eased Sanctions on Israeli Billionaire,” January 24, 2021.

⁹¹ State Department, “Revocation of License Granted for Dan Gertler,” March 8, 2021.

⁹² Treasury Department, “Treasury Targets Corruption Linked to Dan Gertler in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” December 6, 2021.

⁹³ Bloomberg, “Congo to Sell Israeli Billionaire’s Oil, Gold, Iron-Ore Permits,” March 4, 2022.

firms reportedly control the majority of DRC copper and cobalt mining projects and output.⁹⁴ A 2021 *New York Times* series on U.S.-China competition over DRC's cobalt supply found that 15 of DRC's 19 cobalt-producing mines were "owned or financed by Chinese companies," and that these firms had received billions of dollars in loans and financing from PRC state-backed institutions.⁹⁵ The Biden Administration in 2021 identified China's "dominant position in cobalt mining and processing of materials extracted from the DRC" as a U.S. strategic supply chain concern.⁹⁶ With U.S. encouragement, President Tshisekedi has initiated a review of mining contracts with Chinese firms, focusing on corruption concerns.⁹⁷

The influence of PRC-based mining firms grew amid a crash in global prices in 2015-2016, at which time several Western firms—already facing a challenging business climate—divested from their DRC assets. DRC's adoption of a new mining code in 2018 that increased royalty rates and taxes, and removed a stability clause protecting investors from new fees or taxes for ten years, may have further deterred investors.⁹⁸ In 2016, U.S.-based Freeport McMoRan sold its controlling stake in DRC's largest industrial mine, the Tenke Fungurume cobalt and copper concession, to China Molybdenum Co., Ltd (aka CMOC), in an effort to alleviate its global debt.⁹⁹ In 2020, Freeport McMoRan sold its majority stake in another, undeveloped copper-cobalt mine to the same firm. The *New York Times* analysis characterized the sales as central to China's global effort to control global production of "resources critical to a green future."¹⁰⁰

China emerged as a key player in DRC's economy in 2007, pledging \$6 billion in loans for infrastructure as DRC emerged from war, to be repaid through minerals from a joint production venture.¹⁰¹ An independent investigation later asserted "clear evidence of corruption" in how the deal, known as Sicominex, was brokered between Chinese state-owned enterprises and key figures in then-President Kabila's government and family.¹⁰² According to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, PRC-based entities committed approximately \$2.1 billion in loans to DRC between 2000 and 2019.¹⁰³

U.S. Relations and Aid

The Biden Administration, like the Trump Administration, has characterized Félix Tshisekedi's presidency as an opportunity to improve U.S. relations, and has pledged to work with him to counter corruption, improve respect for human rights, stabilize eastern DRC, promote economic

⁹⁴ *Globe & Mail*, "China Wants to Dominate the Global Electric Vehicle Market – and It's Using Congolese Minerals to Do It," October 29, 2021.

⁹⁵ *New York Times*, "Race to the Future: What to Know About the Frantic Quest for Cobalt," November 20, 2021.

⁹⁶ White House, *Building Resilient Supply Chains, Revitalizing American Manufacturing, and Fostering Broad-Based Growth: 100-Day Reviews under Executive Order 14017*, June 2021.

⁹⁷ *Jeune Afrique*, "Mines en RDC : Washington dénonce des contrats chinois « opaques » et propose un « modèle différent »," January 30, 2022; *New York Times*, "Chinese Company Removed as Operator of Cobalt Mine in Congo," February 28, 2022.

⁹⁸ Bloomberg, "Congo's Miners Face Harsh New Reality as Mining Law Finalized," June 13, 2018.

⁹⁹ CMOC is the PRC's largest molybdenum producer and is based in Luoyang, Henan, where the city government owns a stake in the firm by way of the wholly state-owned Luoyang Mining Group Co., Ltd.

¹⁰⁰ *New York Times*, "How the U.S. Lost Ground to China in the Contest for Clean Energy," November 21, 2021.

¹⁰¹ IMF Trade Data and Stefaan Marysse and Sara Geenen, "Win-Win or Unequal Exchange? The case of Sino-Congolese cooperation agreements," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47, 3 (2009): 371-396.

¹⁰² The Sentry, *The Backchannel: State capture and bribery in Congo's deal of the century*, November 2021.

¹⁰³ China-Africa Research Initiative, Chinese Loans to Africa database, <https://chinaafricaloandata.bu.edu/>.

growth and U.S. investment, preserve the environment, and enhance global health security.¹⁰⁴ Achieving a transfer of power from former President Kabila to an elected successor was a top regional policy priority during the Obama and Trump Administrations, and the Trump Administration heralded President Tshisekedi's victory, notwithstanding previously stated concerns about the electoral process that brought him to office.¹⁰⁵ U.S. diplomats have since characterized U.S.-DRC cooperation as a "Privileged Partnership for Peace and Prosperity."¹⁰⁶ Tshisekedi's chairmanship of the African Union (AU) in 2021 elevated his role in regional crisis response and related U.S. engagement.

The Biden Administration has engaged with President Tshisekedi at high levels, including a presidential meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit in October 2021.¹⁰⁷ Administration officials have emphasized DRC's potential role in global policy priorities related to climate change, "diverse and resilient" global supply chains, and pandemic response and preparedness.¹⁰⁸ The Administration has not appointed a Special Envoy on DRC and the Great Lakes as the Obama and Trump Administrations did, perhaps reflecting the decrease in tensions between DRC and neighboring states, as well as a broad effort to reduce the use of special envoys.

The 2023 elections, in which President Tshisekedi is expected to run for a second term, may deepen or test the U.S. relationship with him. Biden Administration officials have called for "on-time, free, and fair" elections, in accordance with constitutional deadlines.¹⁰⁹ As noted above ("Politics"), some in DRC have questioned Tshisekedi's commitment to a free and fair process.

Search for Accountability in the Murder of U.S. Citizen Michael Sharp

U.S. officials have called for justice for the murders of two U.N. sanctions investigators, U.S. citizen Michael Sharp and Swedish citizen Zaida Catalán.¹¹⁰ The two were killed in 2017 while investigating human rights abuses in Kasai. The DRC government blamed members of an antigovernment militia group for the killings, but independent investigations suggested that state security personnel were involved.¹¹¹ Under then-President Kabila, DRC's cooperation with U.N. experts tasked with assisting the government's investigation was reportedly "deficient" and subject to interference by state personnel.¹¹² The State Department has reported improved cooperation under

¹⁰⁴ State Department, "Secretary Blinken's Call with DRC President Tshisekedi," July 20, 2021; and State Department press briefing, March 26, 2019. See also Ambassador Michael A. Hammer, "Seizing a Historic Opportunity: the U.S.-DRC Privileged Partnership for Peace and Prosperity," *American Ambassadors Live*, November 3, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ State Department, "U.S. Response to Constitutional Court Decision in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," January 23, 2019; RFI, "Tibor Nagy: 'Ce que je retiens, c'est que Kabila n'est plus au pouvoir,'" March 6, 2019. See also *Foreign Policy*, "How Washington Got on Board With Congo's Rigged Election," February 1, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ State Department, "Secretary Blinken's Call with DRC President Tshisekedi."

¹⁰⁷ White House, "Readout of President Biden's Meeting with President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," October 30, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ See White House, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on Senior Administration Official Travel to the Democratic Republic of the Congo," January 26, 2022, "Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Pershing's Travel to South Africa, Namibia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, and Senegal," September 27, 2021; State Department, "Secretary Blinken's Meeting with DRC President Tshisekedi," September 23, 2021; and Vice President Harris, statement on Twitter, February 26, 2021, 9:24pm.

¹⁰⁹ State Department, "Acting Assistant Secretary Peterson's Travel to Democratic Republic of Congo," June 14, 2021.

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., U.S. Embassy Kinshasa, "Visit by U.S. AFRICOM Brigadier General deMilliano Advances the U.S.-DRC Privileged Partnership for Peace and Prosperity," June 20, 2019; USUN, "Statement by Ambassador Haley on the Board of Inquiry Report on the Deaths of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan," August 17, 2017.

¹¹¹ HRW, "DR Congo: Probe State Role in UN Experts' Murder," March 12, 2019; RFI, "Congo Files: l'ONU reconnaît une «potentielle implication d'agents de l'Etat»," December 19, 2018. See also Marshall King, *Disarmed: The radical life and legacy of Michael 'MJ' Sharp*, Herald Press: 2022.

¹¹² U.N. Security Council, *Final Report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, June 4,

President Tshisekedi.¹¹³ In January 2022, a DRC court convicted dozens of suspects, including a military colonel, for the murders, but some observers continue to assert that the full extent of state involvement has yet to be probed; Human Rights Watch referred to the trial as a “sham.”¹¹⁴ The explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 117-103 requires the Secretary of State to brief the Committees on Appropriations within 90 days on efforts to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for Sharp and Catalan’s deaths.

Foreign Assistance

U.S. aid programs seek to strengthen DRC’s health system, mitigate conflicts, promote economic growth, encourage good governance and respect for human rights, expand access to education, and build the capacity and professionalism of state security forces. Congress provided “not less than” \$325 million in aid for DRC under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103), as it did the previous year (under P.L. 116-260). In 2021, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) signed a five-year, \$1.6 billion development cooperation strategy.¹¹⁵ The United States also is the top country donor of humanitarian assistance for DRC and the top financial contributor to MONUSCO’s budget (as with all U.N. peacekeeping operations).¹¹⁶

U.S. bilateral aid, and particularly health assistance, has increased over the past six years (**Table 1**). DRC receives additional U.S. health aid through global pandemic preparedness programs. Humanitarian aid has also grown as DRC’s internal displacement crisis has expanded. The United States has expanded some security assistance activities since 2020, after most military aid was halted for a year due to legal restrictions linked to human trafficking (see below); a U.S. special operations forces team deployed to DRC in 2021 to assess the capacity of the FARDC and park rangers.¹¹⁷ Military aid focuses on engineering, civil-military operations, strategic communications, and English-language training.¹¹⁸ Human rights concerns, which underpin enduring aid restrictions and sanctions designations of Kabila-era security officials, have constrained U.S. support for FARDC efforts to counter the ADF and other armed groups.¹¹⁹

Legislative Restrictions. In 2020, the State Department upgraded DRC’s ranking under the Trafficking Victims Prevention Act of 2000 (TVPA, Div. A of P.L. 106-386) from Tier 3 (worst) to Tier 2 Watch List, thereby lifting related aid restrictions imposed in FY2019.¹²⁰ The Trump

2018, U.N. doc. S/2018/531.

¹¹³ State Department, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, March 30, 2021.

¹¹⁴ HRW, “DR Congo: Sham Trial for Murders of UN Experts,” February 7, 2022; RFI, “51 condemned to death in DRC for 2017 murder of UN researchers,” January 31, 2022.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Embassy Kinshasa, “United States Renews Development Cooperation Strategy with the Government of the DRC totaling \$1.6 Billion Dollars Over 5 Years,” July 20, 2021.

¹¹⁶ UNOCHA Financial Tracking Service, *DRC 2021 Country Summary*; CRS In Focus IF10597, *United Nations Issues: U.S. Funding of U.N. Peacekeeping*.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Embassy Kinshasa, “U.S. Africa Command special operations forces team completes evaluation mission in the DRC in support of the U.S.-DRC Privileged Partnership,” September 9, 2021.

¹¹⁸ State Department, “Facilitating Security Cooperation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” February 21, 2021, and “Digital Press Briefing on U.S. Efforts to Combat Terrorism in Africa,” March 11, 2021.

¹¹⁹ The Obama and Trump Administrations sanctioned a total of seven DRC state security officials under E.O. 13413, as amended by E.O. 13671, in an effort to deter security force abuses and obstruction of democracy under President Kabila. Some designees remain in positions of command or influence. Other U.S. designations target non-state actors.

¹²⁰ See State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020 and 2021*; and CRS Report R44953, *The State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Report: Scope, Aid Restrictions, and Methodology*. DRC had long ranked as Tier 3, but successive Administrations waived aid restrictions, in part or in full, under the Act. In FY2019, in a departure from previous practice, President Trump fully applied the restrictions to DRC, affecting some security assistance as

Administration also reinstated DRC’s eligibility for trade benefits under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).¹²¹ DRC remains subject to some security assistance restrictions under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA, Title IV of P.L. 110-457, as amended), although the Biden Administration has partially waived these in FY2022 to allow for the provision of International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) funds, the two main sources of U.S. military aid for DRC.¹²² Congress also has made IMET and PKO funds available for DRC in FY2022 “notwithstanding any other provision of law,” other than human rights vetting requirements (see “Selected Congressional Actions”).

Table I. U.S. Foreign Assistance and Funding for U.N. Peacekeeping in DRC

\$ millions, allocations by year of appropriation unless noted

Account	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022
DA	-	-	-	-	80.0	95.0	95.0
GHP-USAID	174.1	192.0	181.5	129.0	136.0	TBD	TBD
GHP-State				68.2	82.1	TBD	TBD
ESF	63.8	75.2	75.2	75.2	5.0	TBD	TBD
IMET	0.6	-	-	-	-	TBD	TBD
INCLE	2.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	6.0	≥ 2.0
NADR	0.5	2.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	TBD	TBD
PKO	14.0	10.0	5.0	5.0	3.0	3.0	TBD
Subtotal, bilateral aid	255.0	281.2	268.6	284.4	313.1	≥ 325.0	≥ 325.0
Add'l Humanitarian Aid (obligations)	162.9	190.7	327.5	343.9	418.2	442.5	TBD
CIPA for MONUSCO	480.0	440.6	345.5	312.8	340.2	313.4 (est.)	TBD

Source: Congressional Budget Justifications for State and Foreign Operations, FY2018-FY2022; P.L. 116-260 (FY2021) and P.L. 117-103 (FY2022) and respective explanatory statements; USAID humanitarian fact sheets. Regional and global programs, other than humanitarian assistance, are excluded.

Notes: Figures may not sum due to rounding. DA = Development Assistance; GHP = Global Health Programs; ESF = Economic Support Fund; ESDF = Economic Support and Development Fund (proposed by the Trump Administration); IMET = International Military Education & Training; INCLE = International Narcotics Control & Law Enforcement; NADR = Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining & Related Programs; PKO = Peacekeeping Operations (military aid); “Humanitarian Assistance” = funds administered by USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace office, and by the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Migration, and Refugees; CIPA = Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities; TBD = to be determined; N/A = not applicable. FY2020 ESF allocation includes COVID-19 supplemental funds.

well as some development and health aid implemented with government participation.

¹²¹ White House, “Proclamation to Take Certain Actions Under the African Growth and Opportunity Act and for Other Purposes,” December 22, 2020. President Obama had terminated DRC’s AGOA eligibility in 2010, citing governance concerns. See CRS In Focus IF10149, *African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)*.

¹²² Presidential Determination No. 2022-01 of October 8, 2021; see CRS In Focus IF10901, *Child Soldiers Prevention Act: Security Assistance Restrictions*.

Selected Congressional Actions

Some congressional engagement has focused on human rights challenges in DRC, notably sexual and gender-based violence,¹²³ child soldiers, and the trade in “conflict minerals.” In the later years of Joseph Kabila’s presidency (during the 114th and 115th Congresses), the House and Senate considered resolutions that sought to deter electoral delays, human rights abuses by state officials, and corruption.¹²⁴ As noted above, restrictions on aid for countries that, like DRC, use (or back armed groups that use) child soldiers (CSPA, Title IV of P.L. 110-457) or exhibit a poor record on human trafficking (TVPA, Div. A of P.L. 106-386) have affected U.S. engagement with DRC.

Appropriations Legislation. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division K), contains several provisions on U.S. aid to DRC, which are substantially similar to provisions in the FY2021 appropriations measure (P.L. 116-260, Division K).

- §7042a restricts certain IMET programming for any country in Africa’s Great Lakes region until the Secretary of State reports that it is not involved in “destabilizing activities in a neighboring country.” For over a decade, Congress has placed conditions, via foreign aid appropriations measures, on U.S. military aid to states bordering DRC—at times naming Rwanda and/or Uganda—in an effort to deter proxy conflicts in DRC.¹²⁵
- §7042c makes unspecified funds available for aid to areas affected by the LRA or other “illicit armed groups” in eastern DRC and the Central African Republic.
- §7042d makes “not less than” \$325 million in aid available for DRC to support “stabilization, global health, and bilateral economic assistance, including in areas affected by, and at risk from, the Ebola virus disease” and also makes funds available to support “security, stabilization, development, and democracy” in eastern DRC.
- §7042d also provides that IMET and PKO funds may be made available for DRC “notwithstanding any other provision of law, except section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961,” which pertains to human rights vetting.

In addition, the explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 117-103 requires the Secretary of State to brief the Committees on Appropriations on “efforts to protect minority communities in the DRC, including the Banyamulenge.”¹²⁶

Conflict Minerals. Members have continued to debate the impact of §1502 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (P.L. 111-203, enacted in 2010). It mandated

¹²³ In some prior years, Congress has provided foreign assistance funds specifically to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence in DRC. Such provisions were not included in the FY2022 omnibus (P.L. 117-103). See CRS Report R40956, *Sexual Violence in African Conflicts*, for background on congressional engagement in this area.

¹²⁴ In the 115th Congress, H.R. 6207, which passed the House, would have codified U.S. sanctions on DRC (imposed under Executive Orders). The Senate agreed to S.Res. 386, which called on President Trump to use “appropriate means” to assist elections in DRC and “deter further electoral calendar slippage and abuses against the people of Congo,” among other provisions. In the 114th Congress, the Senate and House each passed resolutions (S.Res. 485 and H.Res. 780, respectively) expressing concern over DRC election delays and calling for punitive measures against those responsible for abusing human rights or undermining democracy.

¹²⁵ See also CRS Report R44402, *Rwanda: In Brief*.

¹²⁶ The Banyamulenge are a community in South Kivu that many consider to be of Rwandan descent, although group members consider themselves to be Congolese. On Banyamulenge persecution and complex local conflict dynamics, see Delphin Rukumbuzi Ntanyoma, “Democratic Republic of Congo: Rising Concern about the Banyamulenge’s Situation,” U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, July 21, 2021; and U.N. Security Council, *Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2019/974, December 20, 2019, pp. 9-10.

the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to require U.S. firms to disclose their use of designated “conflict minerals” and, if such minerals originated in DRC or neighboring states, to report on due diligence measures taken to prevent any benefits to armed groups.¹²⁷ The SEC issued a rule on the matter in 2012, as required under §1502, but a court challenge partially stayed a portion of the rule in 2014. In the 117th Congress, the Prioritizing Information for Investors Act (H.R. 3276, Rep. Huizenga), as introduced, would repeal §1502, among several other provisions of P.L. 111-203. Critics in Congress assert that the provision has imposed burdensome compliance costs on U.S. firms and/or is harming the Congolese people by deterring trade and investment, while supporters counter that the provision is an important contribution to international efforts to stabilize DRC.

Other Issues. Strategic competition over DRC’s mineral production is an emerging area of congressional engagement. For example, a tabled amendment to the United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 (S. 1260), titled “Securing United States Supply Chains of Strategic Metals and Minerals,” would have expressed concerns that China’s “increasing control over cobalt (and other mineral) resources” in DRC could pose a threat to U.S. firms and supply chains (S.Amdt. 1827, Sen. Booker).

A tabled amendment to the FY2021 budget resolution (S.Con.Res. 5) would have allowed revisions to budget allocations and adjustments to the pay-as-you-go ledger for any legislation “relating to ensuring development assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo is contingent on anti-corruption and democratic reforms ... provided that such legislation would not increase the deficit” (S.Amdt. 722, Sen. Risch). Also in the 117th Congress, S.Res. 344 (Sen. Risch) would thank President Tshisekedi for his role, as African Union Chair at the time, in the AU’s decision to grant observer status to Israel in 2021.

Author Information

Alexis Arief
Specialist in African Affairs

¹²⁷ The law also set out a range of other policy, monitoring, and reporting measures intended to help break links between trade in minerals and conflict and human rights abuses in eastern DRC. See CRS Report R42618, *Conflict Minerals in Central Africa: U.S. and International Responses*, by Nicolas Cook.

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.