

Former FDLR executive secretary Callixte Mbarushimana attends the opening hearing of the confirmation of charges against him, conducted at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the Netherlands, September 2011. © Jerry Lampen/Reuters



# Waning Cohesion

## THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FDLR-FOCA

### INTRODUCTION

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In a declaration issued on 30 December 2013, leaders of the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, FDLR) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) ‘committed themselves to put down their weapons and rather undertake a political struggle’ (UNSC, 2014b, annexe 12). By mid-2014, some 200 combatants of the estimated 1,400-strong force had surrendered and turned in weapons, raising hopes that the claim was being followed by concrete action (Radio Okapi, 2014; UNSC, 2014b, para. 42; Vogel, 2014a). While the FDLR has not demobilized in its entirety—and was the target of new attacks by the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (Armed Forces of the DRC, FARDC) in early 2015—these figures illustrate the dramatic decline in the group’s strength, down from an estimated 11,500 men in 2002.

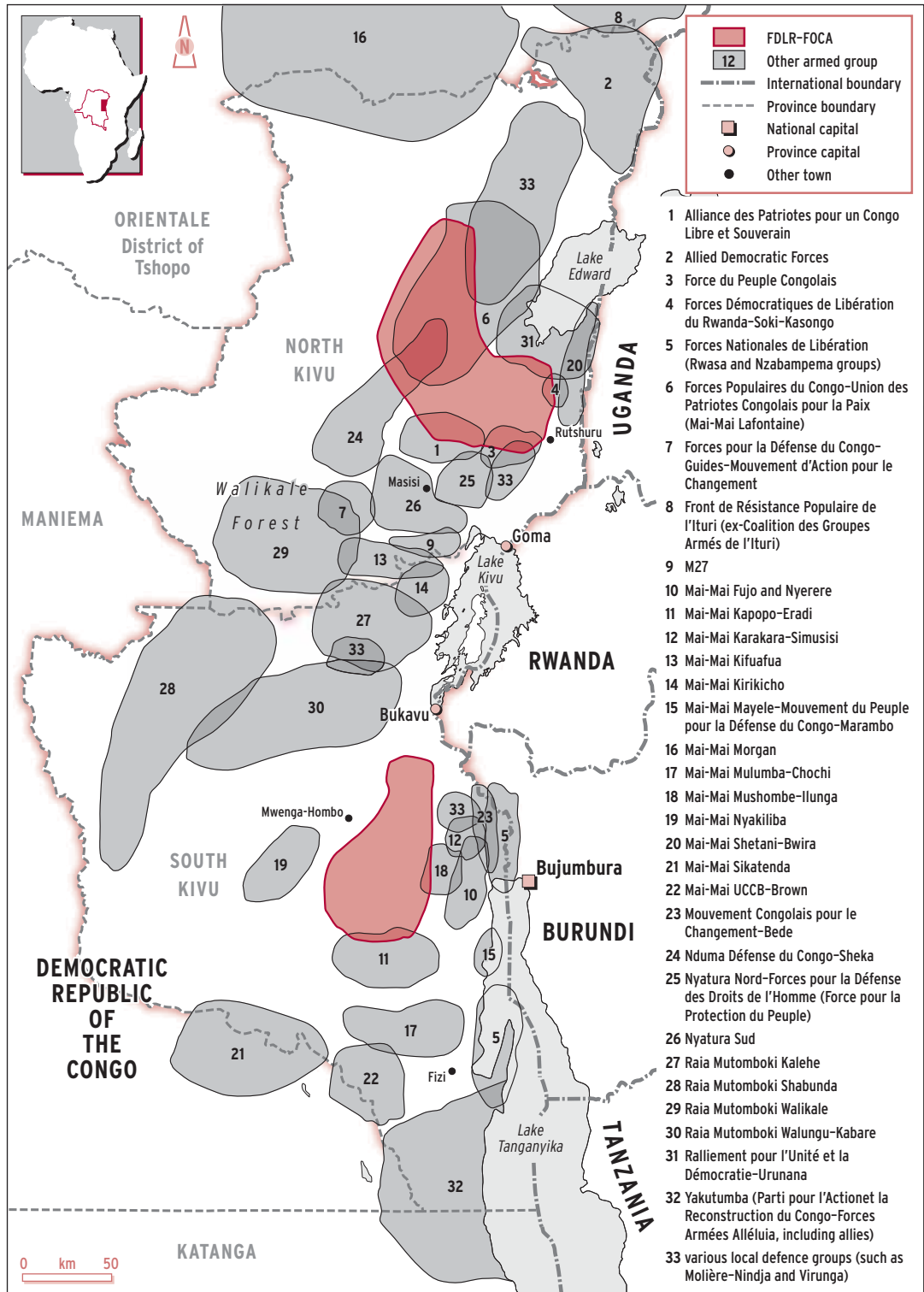
This chapter analyses armed groups’ internal cohesion and control mechanisms, including procedures for the acquisition, management, and use of weapons and ammunition. Specifically, it examines the FDLR and its armed wing, the Forces Combattantes Abacunguzi (Abacunguzi Fighting Forces, FOCA), arguably one of the most enduring and destabilizing of the many armed groups operating in the eastern DRC (Rodríguez, 2011, p. 176; Vogel, 2013). By studying the weakening of the group, the chapter attempts to document and provide a better understanding of some of the internal workings of armed groups, including from a demobilization and weapons recovery standpoint. More precisely, it seeks to answer the following questions:

- What were the key internal mechanisms put in place by the FDLR–FOCA to ensure cohesion and control over the areas it held?
- What mechanisms specifically address controls over weapons acquisition, management, and use?
- What factors, internal and external, have contributed to the recent weakening of the FDLR–FOCA?

The chapter’s main findings include:

- The FDLR–FOCA put in place state-like institutions and procedures to control territory and refugee camps in the DRC, while the structure of its armed wing resembled that of a regular army. Such unusually strong organizational control mechanisms were critical to the group’s ability to generate income, recruit new combatants, and carry out military operations.
- The FDLR–FOCA sourced its weapons primarily from other armed actors in the region—either through battlefield capture or support received from allies. Standing orders issued by the group’s military command placed great importance on the need for combat units to acquire new weapons and to use ammunition sparingly.
- The group’s small arms holdings are diverse but ageing. Little is known about the current size and state of its light weapons stockpiles, however.

Map 7.1 Approximate areas of influence of selected armed groups in the eastern DRC, October 2014



Source: Vogel (2014b)

- External interventions, including the military operations that targeted the FDLR-FOCA in 2009–11, and the UN’s demobilization programme, dealt severe blows to the group’s internal cohesion and accelerated its decline.
- While the current weakened state of the FDLR-FOCA represents an opportunity for regional peace efforts, the remaining force has gone into hiding by mingling with the civilian population, putting the latter at risk in the event of further military attacks.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first explains the relevance of analysing armed groups—beyond a focus on their sources of armaments—for the small arms control community. The second provides a general profile of the FDLR-FOCA. The third focuses on the group’s weapons holdings and the control mechanisms it placed over them. Finally, the last section examines internal and external factors that appear to have contributed to the movement’s decline.

The chapter relies primarily on an extensive study of the FDLR authored by Raymond Debelle, who served as a member of the UN Group of Experts on the DRC between 2009 and 2011 (Debelle, 2014). It also draws from research carried out by Debelle for the Small Arms Survey in 2013, including travel to Rwanda in May of that year. Overall, he conducted more than 250 interviews with former and active members of the FDLR-FOCA. In addition, the chapter includes information on weapons and ammunition that the group surrendered in 2014, based on photographs and identification of materiel provided by Conflict Armament Research (CAR, 2014).

## ARMED GROUP COHESION AND WEAPONS MANAGEMENT

Small arms analysts have long considered armed groups through the framework of diplomatic efforts to try to regulate international small arms transfers. As a result, armed groups have been seen mainly as controversial, if not illicit, recipients of such transfers. From the late 1990s and into the next decade, UN Panels of Experts monitoring compliance with Security Council sanctions such as arms embargoes led much of this work, including with respect to groups operating in Angola, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Vines, 2003, p. 248). Today, efforts to trace armed groups’ weapons back to their sources continue to mobilize the resources of UN panels, the diplomatic community, and non-governmental actors such as the Small Arms Survey.

Identifying the sources of armed groups’ armaments can reveal important information on their military capabilities, sources of support, and strategic alliances. Yet their arsenals represent policy challenges that go beyond controls of international small arms transfers, warranting scrutiny both during and after conflict.

Whether directly or indirectly, armed groups’ weapons holdings pose ‘real and diverse threats to civilians living in situations of armed conflict’, including the deliberate targeting of civilians, safety risks associated with the groups’ arsenals, and the further diversion of weapons to other entities that may misuse them (Florquin, 2010, p. 325). Improving the assessments of the size and nature of armed groups’ stockpiles, as well as command and control structures, can contribute to efforts to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate irregular fighters by establishing more reliable baselines for designing programmes and measuring their success (Richards, 2013, pp. 2–3). After the end of hostilities, armed groups may still possess large stockpiles of arms and ammunition, as was the case in Libya in 2012; given that such arsenals raise the risks of unplanned explosions and further arms diversion, they deserve targeted attention (McQuinn, 2012, p. 13; Schroeder, 2013, pp. 1–2).

A key element in understanding the threats posed by armed groups’ small arms during and after conflict relates to these actors’ levels of cohesion. Organizational cohesion can be understood as:

*1) the extent to which a central leadership of an organization exists that is able to reach decisions without internal violence or defection, and 2) the extent to which members of an organization (including commanders) comply with this central leadership in pursuit of shared political-military goals, engage in high-risk combat activities over long periods of time when ordered to do so, and do not defect with resources and manpower previously pledged to the organization* (Staniland, 2010, p. 34).

Closely linked is a group's capacity to remain united in times of stress:

*Splits, feuds, and defiance on the ground are all characteristics of a lack of cohesion, suggesting a disconnect between individual or factional perceptions of interest and those of the broader organization* (Staniland, 2010, p. 35).

**The FDLR initially adopted 'state-like' structures and regulations.**

A growing body of work is examining the cohesion of insurgent organizations as a factor that affects conflict dynamics in general and that influences their military effectiveness, patterns of violence against civilians (including gender-based violence), and the ability to negotiate and demobilize.<sup>1</sup> This approach inherently suggests that cohesion affects the way armed groups manage, control, and use their small arms in times of conflict, while also influencing the way they engage in post-conflict disarmament initiatives. Highly fragmented armed groups will find it challenging to ensure that fighters follow military tactics or a commitment to respect international humanitarian law while handling or using their weapons. In theory, a strongly united group will not undergo disarmament unless its leadership makes a political decision to that effect; in contrast, disorderly groups are only likely to disarm in response to complex strategies and incentives that target multiple levels in their loose chains of command.

Analysing armed groups' mechanisms for cohesion is challenging, yet a number of indicators provide important clues. Like regular armies, numerous groups have generated extensive written rules and regulations, including codes of conduct, standing orders, operation orders, and penal codes that provide important insight into their inner workings and capacity to remain united. While the more general regulations, such as oaths and codes, are usually short and too broad to address weapons issues directly, small arms-specific language is typically included into standing and operation orders (Bangerter, 2012, p. 3). Assessing whether these procedures are effectively enforced requires field observation and research, in particular through interviews with active or former combatants, and other first-hand witnesses. Reports by independent observers and human rights monitors can also provide important information.

As discussed below, the FDLR-FOCA was initially a strongly cohesive organization that adopted a number of 'state-like' structures and regulations, yet it suffered a remarkable decline over time. In particular, this case study highlights the impact of cohesion on weapons management and use, and the factors that may lead united groups to erode over time.

## PROFILING THE FDLR-FOCA

This section presents a broad profile of the FDLR-FOCA, including its historical origins, leadership and structure, objectives and ideology, sources of financing and support, territorial control, and record of abuses.

### Origins

From 1990, the Hutu-led Rwandan government and Forces Armées du Rwanda (Rwandan Armed Forces, FAR) fought a civil war with the insurgency of the Tutsi-led Front Patriotique Rwandais (Rwandan Patriotic Front, FPR) (Omaar, 2008, pp. 35–36; UNDPKO, 1994, p. 2). The assassination on 6 April 1994 of President Juvénal Habyarimana sparked a

genocidal wave, during which the Hutu-led Interahamwe militias and members of the FAR killed an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a period of only three months (UNSC, 1999, pp. 3, 15). The FPR gained control of the capital Kigali and of most of the Rwandan territory by July–August 1994. By that time, an estimated 1.7 million Rwandan Hutus had fled to Zaire (which became the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997), Tanzania, and other neighbouring countries (UNSG, 1998, para. 11). An estimated 34,000–37,000 members of the ex-FAR, presidential guard, gendarmerie, and Interahamwe, along with hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees, formed part of the exodus. Most of them gathered in two provinces in Zaire: 20,000 fighters and 850,000 refugees in Goma, North Kivu, and 5,000–7,000 fighters and 332,000 refugees in Bukavu, South Kivu (Prunier, 2009, p. 53; UNDPKO, 1994, pp. 2–3).

The ex-FAR and former Rwandan civil servants transferred a large part of the former Rwandan state security apparatus into exile in Zaire, where they built a quasi-state run by their ‘government in exile’. In April 1995, the *Rassemblement pour le Retour des Réfugiés et la Démocratie au Rwanda* (Rally for the Return of Refugees and Democracy in Rwanda) replaced the latter as the main political formation (Omaar, 2008, p. 36). The Hutu rebels exploited Rwandan refugees and local resources, taking advantage of the weakness of local authorities to consolidate their strength in these remote regions. For the rebel leaders, these refugees would become human shields, a pool for recruitment, and a source of income and political legitimacy (Omaar, 2008, pp. 37–38; Survie, 1996, p. 1).

Reports suggest that only about half of the ex-FAR and associated groups entering Zaire were disarmed (UNDPKO, 1994, p. 2). Although weakened by their defeat in Rwanda, the fleeing armed factions were able to keep a large part of their military capacity as they regrouped in the Zairian refugee camps. While they were based in ‘these areas, between mid-1994 and late 1996, tens of thousands of the [ex-FAR] and Interahamwe trained, rearmed and plotted to retake control of their country’ (UNSG, 1998, para. 11). These groups staged increasingly well-coordinated cross-border raids into Rwandan territory to attack the new authorities (para. 85).

In late 1996, the Rwandan government, working with its allies Burundi and Uganda, responded to the cross-border attacks by supporting the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques de Libération* (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation, AFDL), an alliance of Congolese rebel groups led by Laurent-Désiré Kabila that toppled President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire in May 1997 (Omaar, 2008, p. 39; Pole Institute, 2010, p. 20; UNSG, 1998, paras. 8–86). The Rwandan-led coalition attacked the refugee camps in North and South Kivu; these operations led to the dismantling of the refugee camps in October–November 2006 and the dispersion of Rwandan Hutu combatants and civilians (Omaar, 2008, p. 39).

While the 1996–97 war in Zaire caused the ex-FAR and Interahamwe to flee, their combatants were eventually able to regroup due to persistent fighting in the DRC and changing alliances. As President Kabila sought to free himself from Rwandan influence, a new Congolese rebellion formed under the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (Congolese Rally for Democracy, RCD), leading to the Second Congolese War of 1998–2003 (Pole Institute, 2010, p. 20). In a dramatic shift, Kabila, supported by Angola, Chad, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, allied himself with his former ex-FAR and Interahamwe enemies to fight the RCD rebels and their alleged sponsors, Rwanda and Uganda (UNSG, 1998, para. 87).

In 1997, an estimated 5,000 ex-FAR and Interahamwe rebels who had dispersed in North Kivu regrouped to create the *Armée de Libération du Rwanda* (Rwanda Liberation Army, ALIR) and its political branch, the *Peuple en Action pour la Libération du Rwanda* (People in Action for the Liberation of Rwanda, PALIR) (Omaar, 2008, pp. 40–41). Meanwhile, Rwandan Hutus who had fled to the western DRC, but also to Angola, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, and Sudan, formed ALIR-2. Its political branch—the FDLR—was created in 2000 out of the Kinshasa-based *Comité de Coordination de la Résistance* (Coordination Committee for Resistance). Contacts between ALIR/PALIR and ALIR-2/FDLR were initiated in 1999, with the support of Kinshasa (Debelle, 2014, pp. 100–11; ICG, 2003, p. 6; Pole Institute, 2010, p. 21).

The rebels exploited  
Rwandan refugees  
and local resources.

ALIR recognized the FDLR's political leadership in 2000, but ALIR and ALIR-2 combatants only joined their military forces in 2003 in South Kivu, thereby creating the FDLR's armed wing, the FOCA, a force comprising more than 10,000 men at that time (Debelle, 2014, p. 116; see Figure 7.1).

## Organization and structure

**The FDLR's political leaders also held key military positions.**

While the organization's political (FDLR) and military (FOCA) wings have their own distinct names and acronyms, they are actually closely intertwined and part of a single organization. Political leaders who held key military positions were integrated into the organization's decision-making bodies alongside the military leaders (Debelle, 2014, p. 128).

### Leadership

Until 2009–10, the FDLR's senior political leadership was based abroad, also exercising key military functions. Among them were the FDLR president and supreme commander of the armed forces, Ignace Murwanashyaka (based in Germany), the FDLR vice president and president of the military high command, Straton Musoni (also in Germany), and the FDLR executive secretary and vice president of the high military command, Callixte Mbarushimana (based in France) (UNSC, 2009, para. 91).

Murwanashyaka and Musoni were arrested on 17 November 2009 in Germany,<sup>2</sup> while Mbarushimana was arrested in France on 3 October 2010.<sup>3</sup> Mbarushimana replaced Murwanashyaka as president after the latter's 2009 arrest. The DRC-based FDLR second vice president, Brig. Gen. Gaston Iyamuremye (also known as Victor Byiringiro, alias Rumuli), became interim president after October 2010 and still holds that position. Ignace Nkaka, alias Laforge Fils Bazeye, is the group's current spokesperson. The FOCA commander, Maj. Gen. Sylvestre Mudacumura, took over from Musoni as first vice president, while Laurent Ndagijimana (also known as Wilson Irategeka or Rumbago) became executive secretary (Omaar, 2012, p. 15).

As a result of these developments, the political leadership, formerly led by civilians who were based in Europe, was quickly transferred to the military leaders in North Kivu. Other leaders based in France and Germany went quiet as judiciary persecutions in Europe continued (*Jeune Afrique*, 2013; Karuhanga, 2014; Omaar, 2012, p. 15).

### Political structure

Although the FDLR statute identifies a number of internal decision-making organs, in practice the FDLR's 32-member *comité directeur* (steering committee) meets once or twice a year and takes the most important decisions on war, peace, attack, and defence (FDLR, 2005, arts. 39–43; Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014). This committee includes the 15 highest-ranking FOCA commanders, the FDLR president and his two vice presidents, an executive secretary, as well as about ten executive commissioners responsible for defence, social affairs and reconciliation, status of women and promotion of the family, political affairs, mobilization and propaganda, legal affairs and human rights, information, finance and inheritance, external relations, and documentation and security. In case of an emergency, the statutes authorize the president to make decisions after consulting his two vice presidents and the FOCA commander (FDLR, 2005, arts. 36, 41).

### Military structure

The military force, FOCA, was formed through the union of ALIR and ALIR-2 forces in South Kivu in 2003. In 2006, it was reorganized into two operational sectors: former ALIR combatants formed the core of the FDLR–FOCA's Secteur Opérationnel Nord Kivu (SONOKI) while ALIR-2 was the basis for Secteur Opérationnel Sud Kivu (SOSUKI). Like a regular army, and until mid-2012, each sector comprised a general staff, a headquarters battalion, and four combat battalions (Debelle, 2014, p. 128).

The FOCA structure between 2006 and 2012 also included a reserve brigade, composed of a general staff, a headquarters battalion, and three combat battalions (Debelle, 2014, p. 128). Led to this day by Col. André Kalume (whose real name is Lucien Nzabamwita), the reserve brigade was responsible for protecting FOCA headquarters—it only deployed to the front for special operations (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014). In 2006–12 this brigade was deployed in the territory situated between the two operational sectors. Only one battalion from this brigade was based in South Kivu (Debelle, 2014, p. 128). The reserve brigade fell under the direct orders of the FOCA commander, Maj. Gen. Mudacumura, without coordinating systematically with the political leadership (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014). The preferential treatment it received is believed to have been a source of tension between Mudacumura and some of his commanders. In addition to the above units, the FOCA also comprised a military police battalion, a *groupement des écoles* (training camp), a close protection unit for the FOCA commander, and a number of support units (Debelle, 2014, pp. 128–29).

This structure was drastically changed after mid-2012, following the military operations led by the FARDC from 2009 to 2011, which weakened the FOCA militarily, as discussed below. SONOKI was renamed ‘Secteur 1’ (or ‘Secteur Nord’, also called ‘Apollo’), while SOSUKI became ‘Secteur 2’ (or ‘Secteur Sud’, also called ‘Columbia’), although the names SOSUKI and SONOKI were still commonly used as of late 2014. Each sector now comprises only two subsectors—Sinayi and Kanani in North Kivu, and Jupiter and Venus in South Kivu—all formed from the remains of the original battalions. The reserve brigade has been reorganized into a subsector called ‘Comète’ (Debelle, 2014, pp. 366–72);<sup>4</sup> it has also been fully redeployed to North Kivu.<sup>5</sup>

Leaders have tried to position the group as a political player in Rwanda.

## Objectives and ideology

The FDLR officially strives for peace and reconciliation in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region. It envisions that reaching that goal requires the establishment of inclusive dialogue in Rwanda—with the FDLR at the table—and the revelation of the truth about the Rwandan ‘tragedy’ (Romkema, 2007, p. 39). More recently, in the context of the FDLR’s dwindling military fortunes, its leaders have positioned the group as a political player whose main demand resides in its participation in the Rwandan political system. At a 26 June 2014 meeting hosted by the Sant’Egidio community in Rome, FDLR representatives met with UN special representatives Martin Kobler and Mary Robinson, the special envoys of Belgium, the United States, and the European Union, as well as government delegates from the DRC. The FDLR’s key demand at the meeting was the opening of ‘dialogue with the Rwanda government and reform of the Rwandan security forces permitting FDLR representation at a leadership level’ (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014). On 12 January 2014, shortly after its December 2013 commitment to lay down weapons, the FDLR announced the beginning of the activities of its new Front Commun pour la Libération du Rwanda (Common Front for the Liberation of Rwanda)–Ubumwe alliance with the Rwandan opposition Parti Social (Social Party)–Imberakuri (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014).

Behind the official narrative, argues Romkema, the group also has semi-official and hidden objectives (Romkema, 2007, p. 39). He maintains that in their communication with combatants and refugees, FDLR leaders have stated more clearly their intention to overthrow the Rwandan government, to pardon the actors of the genocide, and to create a Hutu-majority government. He reports that FDLR–FOCA combatants in North Kivu told Rwandan refugees that they were still Interahamwe and that the genocide was not over. He concludes that continuing the armed struggle is a necessity for leaders and members suspected of participation in the Rwandan genocide or subject to international sanctions: the FDLR protects them from prosecution while providing them with a source of income (Romkema, 2007, p. 40).

As the group is partially composed of former FAR and Interahamwe members, its narrative and ideology are centred around the ethnic and historical clichés that prevailed in Rwanda between independence and the FPR’s access to power in 1994. The following extracts of the FDLR’s website, which was active from 2000 to 2009, highlight discourse



used to present Hutus as victims, Tutsis as the ‘evil’ perpetrators, and violent action against the Rwandan government as the legitimate solution:

- ‘The Hutu people are persecuted, despised, and excluded. The FPR–Inkotanyi<sup>6</sup> restored pre-1959 ethnic discrimination and erected a social system similar to South Africa’s apartheid.’
- ‘The Rwandan tragedy finds its profound origins in the political philosophy of Tutsi monarchs whose most striking characteristics are their bloodthirsty spirit, genocidal practices, hegemonic tendencies, and expansionism.’
- ‘Rwandans rise up as a single man and fight the forces of evil incarnated by deceit, trickery, contempt, hatred, revenge, violence, and murder, which continue to be seen through the macabre crimes perpetrated in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region by the FPR–Inkotanyi and its accomplices’ (FDLR, 2009; as cited in Debelle, 2014, pp. 21–22, authors’ translation).<sup>7</sup>

**Several FDLR leaders are suspected of involvement in the 1994 genocide.** The group’s stated position on the genocide is marked by inconsistencies. Officially, as declared in the 2005 Rome Communiqué signed by President Ignace Murwanashyaka, the FDLR ‘condemns the genocide committed in Rwanda and its perpetrators [and] commits itself to fight against all ideologies of hatred and emphasizes once again its willingness to cooperate with international justice’ (Pole Institute, 2010, p. 24). Yet a 2003 International Crisis Group report notes that the FDLR questioned whether the 1994 genocide was planned, arguing that it was a spontaneous reaction of a population confused by the assassination of its president, and panicked by the FPR’s military attacks (ICG, 2003, p. 10). Several members of the FDLR’s top leadership are suspected of involvement in the 1994 genocide, including Callixte Mbarushimana, the former executive secretary; Gen. Apollinaire Hakizimana, alias Amikwe Lepic, defence commissioner; and Martin Gatabazi, alias Enock Dusabe (Omaar, 2008, pp. 65–66, 236–312).

## Sources of financing and support

### Kinshasa and the FARDC

Although Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s support to ALIR and the FDLR was key to the latter group’s formation, this relationship proved neither sustainable nor reliable, as regional alliances shifted once again. President Kabila was assassinated in January 2001; having replaced him, his son, Joseph Kabila, sought to improve relations with Rwanda. A meeting with President Paul Kagame in 2001 paved the way for political dialogue and for a UN-led peace process that contributed to end the Second Congolese War. A series of agreements followed, including the Pretoria Peace Agreement between Rwanda and the DRC, signed on 30 July 2002. The terms of the agreement included the withdrawal of the Rwandan army from the DRC, while the DRC committed to dismantling ex-FAR and Interahamwe forces on its territory (DRC and Rwanda, 2002).

The formation of the Government of Transition on 30 June 2003, led by President Joseph Kabila, marked the formal end of the conflict and Kinshasa’s support to the FDLR officially ended around the same time. Yet collaboration between the FDLR and the Congolese army—the FARDC—continued in the field. Specifically, the FDLR was found to collaborate with FARDC units in operations against the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (National Congress for People’s Defence, CNDP) in 2007 and 2008 (UNSC, 2008, paras. 102–13).

A new Congolese–Rwandan agreement sealed in December 2008 called for joint military action against the Rwandan Hutu rebels. The joint FARDC and the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) operation—known as ‘Umoja Wetu’ (Our Unity)—unfolded from 20 January to 25 February 2009 with the objective of dismantling the FDLR–FOCA in North Kivu (UNSC, 2009, paras. 13–15). From March to September 2009 ‘Kimia II’, an operation led by the FARDC and supported by the UN, also targeted FDLR–FOCA (UNSC, 2009, paras. 16–20).

Although official support from Kinshasa to the FDLR-FOCA had ceased, some reports point to continued assistance from and collaboration with some members of the FARDC, including the supply of arms and ammunition, during the 2009 operations and as late as April–May 2014 (UNSC, 2009, paras. 22–43; 2014a, paras. 97–98; 2014b, paras. 54–55).

### The diaspora

The FDLR could initially count on the external support of hundreds of Rwandans who had emigrated after 1994. The UN Group of Experts documented regular communications between the FDLR commanders' satellite telephones in the field and 25 countries in Africa, Europe, and North America between September 2008 and August 2009 (UNSC, 2009, para. 99). The diaspora supported the FDLR through fundraising, money laundering, and outreach activities (UNSC, 2009, para. 90).

The significance of this source of income was limited, however. A large portion of the funds collected by the diaspora was spent on communication (satellite phones), travel, and the organization of meetings (Debelle, 2014, pp. 325–26). In fact, the Group of Experts' 2009 report suggests that money also flowed in the opposite direction—from eastern DRC to Europe—to help finance the FDLR political leadership's activities (UNSC, 2009, para. 95).

As described above, the FDLR's top political leaders were based in Europe until 2009. In addition, the group relied on a network of eight *comités de résistance régionaux* (regional resistance committees) that were based abroad and acted as the movement's official antennae around the world. At least until 2009–10, such *comités* were present in the following regions: Central Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa, Western Europe, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Canada, and the United States (Debelle, 2014, pp. 309–12). It is unclear how many of them remain operational today, as foreign-based FDLR members became more prudent following the 2009–10 arrests of their European-based senior leaders.

### Exploitation of natural resources

As support from Kinshasa and the diaspora proved limited, the FDLR-FOCA essentially relied on income-generating activities within the DRC to meet its units' daily needs for subsistence, fund its combat operations, and support the costs of the entire organization (Debelle, 2014, pp. 184–90; Romkema, 2007, pp. 47–50). These activities often involved identifying and seizing entire economic sectors in the geographical areas where members of the group were deployed, as well as exploiting refugees and the local population. Estimates suggest the FDLR-FOCA controlled as much as 20 per cent of the territory of North and South Kivu in 2007, while directing as much as half of the region's trade in minerals (Romkema, 2007, pp. 49, 51). Each FOCA unit devoted more than 20 per cent of its human resources to generating income (Debelle, 2014, p. 185).

**Table 7.1 Redistribution of income generated through the FDLR-FOCA's 'unconventional logistics'**

Unit	War loot	Mining taxes	Market taxes	Other income
Company	20 per cent	Nothing	Self-managed	Self-managed
Battalion	40 per cent	60 per cent	Self-managed	Self-managed
Sector	20 per cent	20 per cent	Self-managed	Self-managed
FOCA command	10 per cent	10 per cent	Self-managed	Self-managed
Executive committee	10 per cent	10 per cent	Self-managed	Self-managed

Source: internal FDLR-FOCA documentation for the period 26 December 2008–4 April 2009, cited in Debelle (2014, pp. 189–90)

The resource-generating system emerged in the early days of the organization and was referred to internally as *logistique non-conventionnelle* ('unconventional logistics'). The FOCA command issued specific guidelines instructing all units in the field to generate income. Table 7.1 illustrates how the funds from various sources were to be redistributed within the different layers of the FDLR–FOCA structure in 2008–09. Logistics officers had to submit detailed quarterly, biannual, and annual reports on the financial gains their units had generated. These profits served not only to improve the officers' and fighters' daily conditions, but also to buy arms and ammunition, mostly within the DRC (Debelle, 2014, pp. 184–90).

As a result, commanders who controlled areas with natural resources—especially gold and cassiterite (tin ore)—tended to become the wealthiest (VIOLENCE AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION). The 2009 report of the UN Group of Experts estimates that the FDLR–FOCA may have generated several million US dollars from gold mining every year, and up to a few million US dollars from cassiterite (UNSC, 2009, paras. 124, 164).

In addition to their quasi-monopoly on mining activities in areas under their control, the FOCA also became involved in trading coal, wood, food, and other goods of first necessity; agriculture and cattle raising; fishing and poaching; trafficking of cannabis; taxing markets and main roads; and looting and kidnapping for ransom (Debelle, 2014, pp. 185–87; Pole Institute, 2010, p. 11; POACHING IN AFRICA). Before the joint FARDC–RDF operation 'Umoja Wetu' was launched, FDLR–FOCA units had become the primary production and control mechanism of the local economy in their areas of operation. Depending on their geographical location, each unit would generate USD 3,000–10,000 and sometimes up to USD 15,000 per month (Debelle, 2014, p. 190). As discussed below, this system was severely destabilized after the group lost influence over territory in 2009–11.



Miners handle cassiterite extracted at one of the many mines once run profitably by the FDLR, in Nampego, South Kivu, DRC, August 2009.  
© Dominic Nahr/Magnum Photos

## Control over territory and refugee camps

As it settled in eastern Zaire's refugee camps in 1994, the Rwandan 'government-in-exile' established an administrative structure similar to the one in place in the Rwandan state. The camps, made of tents, were divided into prefectures, communes, and sectors (Debelle, 2014, p. 316).

The FDLR created similar structures to administer the territory they controlled in the eastern DRC (Vogel, 2014a). The FDLR's second vice president, Gaston Iyamuremye (who also served as FDLR interim president) supervised the administration of territory and camps in the DRC, together with the group's commissioners for mobilization and propaganda, and for social affairs. Four regional committees were set up in the DRC: two in North Kivu (Rutshuru and Masisi) and two in South Kivu (Mwenga-Hombo and Fizi). Within the regional committees, administrative boundaries were inspired by the system used by the Congolese authorities. Each committee was divided into *groupements* (groups), which themselves contained *localités* (localities), and *notabilités*. The smallest unit was the *nyumba kumi*, corresponding to ten households (Debelle, 2014, p. 316).

In 2006, an estimated 20,000–25,000 Rwandan civilians were living in South Kivu, and at least as many in North Kivu. The majority had settled on territory controlled by the FDLR and were considered members of the movement (Romkema, 2007, p. 42). Groups of 50–100 refugees were supervised by the relevant head of *notabilité*, who reported to the above structure. A military structure called the *poste d'intervention populaire* (post of popular intervention) provided security to, but also monitored, the refugee population. Moreover, it provided military training to civilians, including children, in an effort to build a recruitment pool among the refugee population (Debelle, 2014, p. 317).

The *groupement* chief acted as the local administration official, recording births, marriages, and deaths every quarter. He also collected the monthly USD 1 dues to the FDLR from the refugees, or an equivalent in-kind 'contribution'. These resources were then redistributed to the corresponding *notabilité* (5 per cent), *localité* (5 per cent), and *groupement* (5 per cent), with the remaining portion divided between the regional committee and the executive committee. The *notabilités*, *localités*, and *groupements* used these resources mainly to purchase school supplies (Debelle, 2014, p. 321).

Rwandan refugees, along with Congolese civilians who lived in FDLR-FOCA-controlled areas, were thus kept under close watch. They played a part in generating income for the organization, while representing an important pool for voluntary and forced recruitment. According to data from the UN-led Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDR-RR) programme, 20 per cent of the 1,997 FOCA combatants who joined the programme in 2009 were Congolese. This figure increased to 30 per cent in 2010, illustrating the extent of recruitment from the Congolese population (Debelle, 2014, p. 297).

## Abuses

Conflict in the DRC has had a particularly devastating human toll. Based on a series of surveys, the International Rescue Committee estimates that a total of 5.4 million people died as a direct or indirect result of the conflict between 1998 and 2007 (Coghlan et al., 2007, p. 2), although this figure has been challenged.<sup>8</sup> The UN reports that the FARDC and various armed groups active in the eastern DRC perpetrated a large range of abuses against civilians, including summary executions; sexual and gender-based violence; torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest and detention; enforced disappearances; forced labour and extortion; child recruitment; forced recruitment; and pillage.<sup>9</sup>

An estimated  
5.4 million people  
have died due to  
conflict in the DRC.



A teenager who was kept as a sex slave, allegedly by the FDLR, awaits her fistula repair surgery, in a hospital in Goma, DRC, February 2009.  
 © Alissa Everett/Reuters

The FDLR is no exception and is often singled out as a particularly ruthless actor in the region, with combatants involved in rape and sexual violence, the killing of people of all ages, and the burning of schools, churches, and health centres (HRW, 2009; Rodríguez, 2011, p. 177; UNSC, 2009, paras. 317–20, 345–56). The group is on the UN's 2014 list of entities that recruit and use children, commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, and engage in attacks on schools and hospitals (UNGA, 2014, annexe 1).<sup>10</sup>

The 2009 'Umoja Wetu' and 'Kimia II' military operations led to particularly gruesome reprisal attacks planned and organized by the FDLR–FOCA against the local population, which it accused of aiding the enemy (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014; UNSC, 2009, paras. 347–56). The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against FOCA Maj. Gen. Sylvestre Mudacumura on 13 July 2012 for allegedly committing:

*nine counts of war crimes, from 20 January 2009 to the end of September 2010[. . .] including: attacking civilians, murder, mutilation, cruel treatment, rape, torture, destruction of property, pillaging and outrages against personal dignity (ICC, 2012).*

The UN Group of Experts documented 1,199 human rights violations committed by the FDLR between February and October 2009, including 384 killings, 135 cases of sexual violence, 521 abductions, 38 cases of torture, and 5 cases of mutilation (UNSC, 2009, paras. 345, 347). Human Rights Watch quotes victims who reported that, at the time, FDLR combatants had stressed that they would not leave Congo 'without first exterminating the Congolese people' (HRW, 2009).

## WEAPONS HOLDINGS AND CONTROL

This section reviews the FDLR-FOCA's military equipment, as well as the group's rules and regulations regarding the management and use of weapons.

### Sources

Over the years, the FDLR-FOCA acquired weapons through a variety of sources. The primary patterns of supply include:

- weapons brought by the ex-FAR from Rwanda in 1994;
- weapons provided by President Mobutu of Zaire and his allies in 1996;
- equipment provided by President Laurent-Désiré Kabila of the DRC and his allies between 1998 and 2001;
- purchases and transfers from the FARDC and, starting in 2002, other Congolese armed groups;
- weapons captured from enemy forces such as the Armée Patriotique Rwandaise (Rwandan Patriotic Army, APR), the CNDP, and the FARDC; and
- to a limited extent, supplies and transfers from allied foreign armed groups also operating in the Kivu provinces, such as the Burundian Forces Nationales de Libération (National Liberation Forces) and Forces de Défense de la Démocratie (Forces for the Defence of Democracy) (Debelle, 2014, pp. 274–75; Romkema, 2007, pp. 46–47).

In recent years, the FDLR-FOCA appears to have procured weapons and ammunition primarily from sympathetic segments within the FARDC. In its 2009 report, the UN Group of Experts cites 'evidence and testimony demonstrating that certain FARDC officers, particularly senior officials in control of the tenth military region (South Kivu), [were]



United Nations peacekeepers record the details of weapons recovered from FDLR members, surrendered in Kateko, DRC, May 2014.  
© Kenny Katombe/Reuters

implicated in the deliberate diversion of arms and ammunition to FDLR–FOCA and other armed groups (UNSC, 2009, para. 23). Ammunition supplies from the FARDC to the FDLR–FOCA gained further momentum in 2012, as the former were eager to count on the latter’s support to contain the new rebellion initiated by the Mouvement du 23 Mars (23 March Movement, M23) (SSRC, 2014, p. 5; UNSC, 2013, paras. 106–09). While this collaboration petered out in late 2013, after the defeat of M23, reports suggest individual FARDC soldiers continued to barter or sell their weapons, ammunition, and uniforms to the FDLR–FOCA as late as April–May 2014 (UNSC, 2014a, paras. 97–98; 2014b, para. 54).

### **Weapons holdings**

**The FDLR procured ammunition mainly through small-scale purchases and battlefield capture.**

Table 7.2 summarizes the models and types of weapons and ammunition known to be held by the FDLR–FOCA. It lists equipment held by FDLR–FOCA in 2009–11 as documented in Debelle (2014, pp. 275–84), based on interviews with former and active combatants and other confidential sources. It also shows the types and quantities of weapons and ammunition surrendered by combatants who demobilized in 2014, as reported in CAR (2014). On 30 May 2014, in the presence of the FDLR interim president, Gaston Iyamuremye, and other senior group leaders in Kateko, North Kivu, more than 100 FDLR–FOCA combatants from the SONOKI sector surrendered 102 weapons and limited quantities of ammunition (CAR, 2014; Schindwein and Johnson, 2014; Vogel, 2014a). Shortly thereafter, on 9 June in Kigogo, more than 80 combatants from the SOSUKI sector surrendered 83 weapons and some ammunition (CAR, 2014; Schindwein and Johnson, 2014).

As the FDLR–FOCA sourced its weapons mainly from diverted regional stockpiles, its diverse holdings contain a significant proportion of ageing and relatively unreliable weapons. These weapons suffered from years of exposure to unfavourable climatic and inappropriate storage conditions. Unsurprisingly, most weapons surrendered in 2014 were small arms in poor condition, including ageing AK-pattern rifles and several M-16 A1 rifles as well as other NATO-calibre weapons (see Table 7.2). The scarcity of NATO ammunition in the region helps to explain why FDLR–FOCA combatants abandoned a variety of NATO-calibre weapons in 2014, including the M-16, SAR-80, R4, and UZI (Debelle, 2014, p. 275; see Table 7.2).

Although the entire FOCA stockpile is ageing, it is clear that the weapons surrendered in 2014 were particularly old, and that the most functional weapons remain in the control of the group.<sup>11</sup> Only one rocket-propelled grenade launcher and two mortars were turned in during the 2014 ceremonies, suggesting the disarmament ceremonies did little to diminish the FDLR–FOCA’s holdings of light weapons. Since the FDLR–FOCA probably holds few heavy weapons, its ability to carry out large-scale operations, or to defend territory against a well-equipped opponent, may be limited (Debelle, 2014, p. 275).

Ammunition stockpiles are in particularly short supply. Until 2011, the FDLR–FOCA’s main strategic ammunition stockpile was located in the Nyamaboko refugee camp, near the group headquarters; it was guarded by the group’s military police. In addition to ammunition of the calibres described in Table 7.2, the holdings included 107 mm rockets. In April 2011, however, the FARDC attacked the refugee camp, leading FDLR–FOCA combatants to disperse with the ammunition they could carry. Reflecting the group’s difficulties in securing systematic procurements, combatants sourced ammunition primarily through small-scale purchases from the FARDC and Congolese armed groups, as well as battlefield capture (Debelle, 2014, p. 275).

With limited heavy equipment and ammunition stockpiles, the FDLR–FOCA’s ability to defend territory has always been weak. Yet the equipment under the group’s custody is adequate for guerrilla warfare and the conduct of targeted operations to capture materiel from its enemies.

Table 7.2 Materiel held and surrendered by the FDLR-FOCA

Calibre	Holdings in 2009-11		Weapons surrendered in May-June 2014	Ammunition surrendered in May-June 2014
	Weapon type and production	Sources and details		
9 x 19 mm	Belgian-manufactured Browning HP pistols	Multiple sources, including ex-FAR and FARDC; held primarily by officers or given as a reward for brave conduct	None	None
	UZI sub-machine guns of Belgian or Israeli manufacture	Sourced from ex-FAR, FARDC, and Forces Armées du Congo (Congolese Armed Forces, FAC)	1 machine gun dated 1971 (unidentified country of production) surrendered by SOSUKI	
7.62 x 39 mm	AK-pattern rifles manufactured in Bulgaria, China (Type 56), Romania, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia (M70 B1/B2)	Multiple sources, including FARDC; M70 sources also include APR, CNDP, and RDF; some of the CNDP and RDF M70 models feature grenade-launching adapters for firing anti-personnel and anti-tank grenades	12 Type 56-2 Chinese-manufactured rifles and 5 other AK-pattern rifles by SONOKI; 1 AKM- and 5 AK-pattern rifles by SOSUKI (including Chinese- and Russian- manufactured)	This calibre accounted for most rounds in the small piles of surrendered ammunition, with various headstamps indicating Albanian manufacture in the 1980s; Bulgarian manufacture in 1990-2001; Chinese manufacture in the 1970s and 1996-2007; East German manufacture in the 1970s; Iranian manufacture in 2003 and 2007; Sudanese manufacture in 2001 and 2007; Egyptian manufacture (no date); North Korean manufacture in the 1980s; Soviet/Russian manufacture in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1980s; Ukrainian manufacture (no date); Yugoslav manufacture in the 1970s and 1980s; and Zimbabwean manufacture in the 1990s
	Chinese- and Russian-made SKS rifles	Various sources	1 Russian-made rifle surrendered by SONOKI	
	Chinese- and Russian-made RPD machine guns	Undetermined source	surrendered by SOSUKI (unidentified country of production)	
	n/a		1 Czech-manufactured Vz. 58 rifle surrendered by SOSUKI; 1 Czech-produced Vz. 52/57 rifle surrendered by SONOKI	
5.56 x 45 mm	South African-produced R4 rifles	Originated from ex-FAR stockpiles	4 rifles surrendered by SONOKI, 2 by SOSUKI	Only 6 cartridges surrendered by SONOKI, with headstamps indicating French, Israeli, and Portuguese manufacture in the 1980s
	US-manufactured M16 A1 rifles	Originated from the special presidential division of ex-Forces Armées Zaïroises (Armed Forces of Zaire, FAZ) stockpiles	8 US-manufactured and US government-stamped rifles surrendered by SONOKI, 2 US-manufactured rifles surrendered by SOSUKI	
	Singapore-manufactured SAR 80 rifles	Originated from ex-FAZ stockpiles	2 rifles surrendered by SONOKI, 3 by SOSUKI	



Calibre	Holdings in 2009–11		Weapons surrendered in May–June 2014	Ammunition surrendered in May–June 2014
	Weapon type and production	Sources and details		
7.62 x 51 mm	South African-produced SS-77 machine guns	Captured from RDF	None	4 varieties of Sudanese-produced cartridges manufactured in 1997, 1999, and 2001, surrendered by SONOKI
	Belgian-produced FN FAL M2/M3 and FALO rifles	Originated from ex-FAR and ex-FAZ stockpiles	1 FN FAL rifle surrendered by SOSUKI	
	G3 rifles, country of production unclear	Sourced from ex-FAZ or the Uganda People's Defence Force, with fixed or telescopic stock	4 rifles surrendered by SONOKI, 3 by SOSUKI	
	Belgian-produced FN MAG machine guns	Originated from ex-FAR, ex-FAZ, and FARDC stockpiles	1 surrendered by SONOKI, 1 by SOSUKI	
7.62 x 54R mm	Russian-produced PKM machine guns	Multiple sources, including FARDC; sometimes nicknamed 'PIKA' by combatants	None	6 varieties of Egyptian, Chinese (produced in 1971 and 2001), Czech (produced in 1967), Iranian, and unidentified cartridges surrendered by SONOKI
	Vz. 59 machine gun manufactured in Czechoslovakia	Originated from FARDC stockpiles	None	
	Russian-produced SGM machine guns	Originated from FARDC stockpiles; sometimes nicknamed 'MILOU' (from <i>mitrailleuse lourde</i> ) by combatants	None	
12.7 x 108 mm	Soviet- and Chinese-produced DShK machine guns	Originated from FARDC stockpiles; often referred to as 'MIAA' (from <i>mitrailleuse anti-aérienne</i> ) by combatants	None	None
12.7 x 99 mm	Belgian- or US-produced Browning .50 machine guns	Originated from FARDC stockpiles	None	None
Other weapons	Russian-made 40 mm BG-15 grenade launcher for AK-pattern rifles	Originated from FARDC stockpiles	None	None
	US-produced Browning .30 machine guns	Originated from ex-FAZ stockpiles	None	None
	40 mm South African- or Croatian-produced multiple grenade launchers	Originated from APR, ex-FAR, and RDF; several were held by SOSUKI	None	None
	Rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers produced by the Russian Federation (RPG-2) or China (Type 56 RPG).	Undetermined source	None	None
	RPGs produced by the Russian Federation (RPG-7) and China (Type 69)	Multiple sources, including FARDC	2 Chinese-produced Type 69 variants surrendered by SONOKI;	None

Calibre	Holdings in 2009-11		Weapons surrendered in May-June 2014	Ammunition surrendered in May-June 2014
	Weapon type and production	Sources and details		
Other weapons			1 Chinese-produced Type 69 variant, 2 RPG-7Vs (1 Russian- and 1 Bulgarian-produced) surrendered by SOSUKI	
	Russian-produced RPG-18 launchers	Possibly donated in 1998 by the Chadian Army; only a few units are still in the possession of FOCA combatants	None	None
	60 mm mortars of various manufacturers, including South Africa and the United States	Originated from FARDC stockpiles	2 mortars of unidentified origin surrendered by SOSUKI	None
	Various 81 mm (NATO) and 82 mm (Soviet or Chinese) mortars	Originated from FARDC stockpiles	None	None
	Chinese-produced 107 mm multiple rocket launchers, with modifications made in Likasi, DRC, to single and dual tube launchers	Originated from FAC stockpiles during the 1998-2002 war	None	None
	Russian-produced SA-7 Strela man-portable air defence systems	Two such systems were captured by ALIR combatants in September 1998 during an attack on APR positions near Mount Ngoma, south of Goma; the possession of these weapons was kept secret and associated rules of engagement were under the strict authority of the FOCA commander; they were allegedly kept under custody at FOCA headquarters	None	None
	93 mm Soviet-produced RPO-A 'Shmel' launchers	Allegedly given to FOCA by Zimbabwean soldiers during fighting with APR; one rocket of this type was seized by the UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC) in October 2009, in the Goma area; only the FOCA units based in North Kivu possessed this armament	None	None

Calibre	Holdings in 2009–11		Weapons surrendered in May–June 2014	Ammunition surrendered in May–June 2014
	Weapon type and production	Sources and details		
Other weapons	Z1 anti-personnel mines	Allegedly originated from the stocks of the Zimbabwean army, deployed in the DRC until 2002 to repel Rwandan troops; this type of munition is usually centralized at the level of the general staff and used with parsimony; nicknamed 'chaponer' (phonetic spelling), apparently in reference to 'shrapnel'	n/a	None
	VS 50 anti-personnel mines	Undetermined source; nicknamed 'shoebox'	n/a	None
	Anti-vehicle mines, unknown models	Testimonies suggest possession of anti-tank mines at the unit level; they may have been supplied by foreign forces involved in the Second Congolese War	n/a	None

Notes: Information on holdings relies on interviews conducted by Raymond Debelle in 2009–11 with more than two dozen active and former FDLR–FOCA cadres and combatants, notably ex-FAR soldiers with specialized knowledge of the group's armaments; details were cross-checked through field observation, the analysis of equipment recovered by MONUC and the DDR-RR section of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), and a review of information collected by observers who had been in contact with the FDLR–FOCA, including journalists.

Sources: holdings: Debelle (2014, pp. 275–84); materiel surrendered: CAR (2014)

## Weapons control

The FDLR–FOCA can count on a number of internal regulations to guide the behaviour of its members, including a statute and manifest, a code of discipline, a penal code, internal order regulations, as well as guidelines for electoral processes. Not all of these regulations are relevant to weapons management or their use by the combatants; previous analysis suggests that standing orders and operation orders provide the most insight into the controls over the management and use of arms by fighters (Bangerter, 2012, p. 3). Standing orders 'specify which type of behaviour is expected of all group members in a given situation, though not necessarily at all times' (p. 17). Operation orders are guidelines issued for a specific military operation; it is worth noting that 'most armed groups are reluctant to write orders down, generally due to security concerns' (p. 19).

In the case of the FDLR–FOCA, the military command approves orders, which are then transferred to the two operational sectors and subsequently to the relevant battalions. Many of these orders focus on improving the efficiency of military operations against the enemy while limiting the risk of human and material loss. These guidelines tend to prioritize operations that could result in the capture of weapons and ammunition, communications equipment, and medicine. Fighters are expected to use ammunition sparingly, and units are ordered to submit detailed accounts of their arms holdings every three months. If units have a surplus of arms or ammunition, they hide it in caches, the location of which is known only by a restricted number of individuals (Debelle, 2014, pp. 206–11). Overall, the group's standing orders reflect the FDLR–FOCA command's concerns regarding the scarcity of weapons and ammunition.

In theory, orders emanating from the FOCA command are systematically transmitted to the units in the field. In practice, however, SONOKI and SOSUKI sector commanders are occasionally asked to adapt the orders to reflect local realities. These modified instructions are then submitted back to the FOCA command for approval. Units must also inform their superiors of the level of implementation of the orders (Debelle, 2014, pp. 211–12).

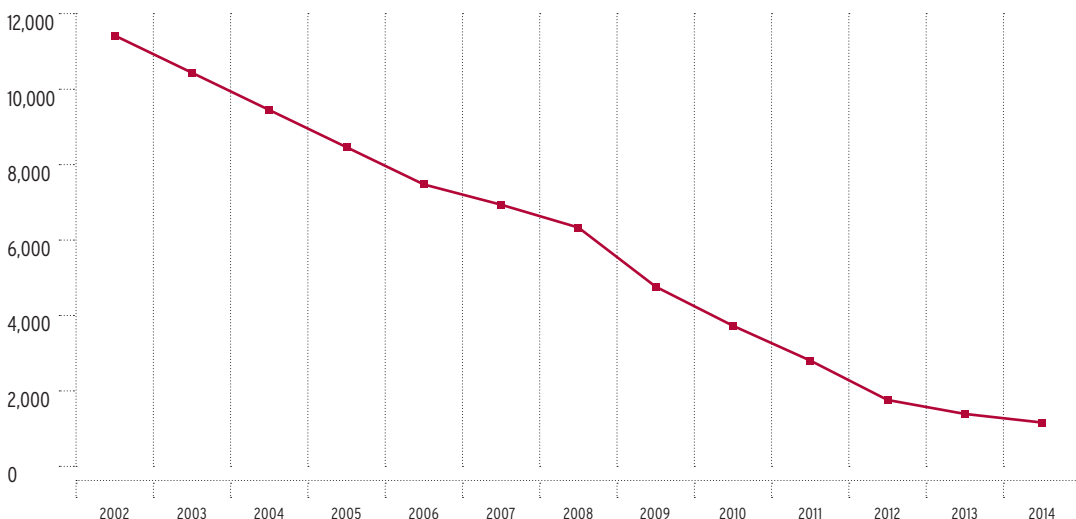
The military operations that targeted the FDLR–FOCA as of 2009 damaged this chain of command, in part by rendering the transmission of orders and guidelines from the FOCA command to the operational units more difficult. As a result, unit commanders have become more self-reliant and no longer execute the central command’s orders as systematically as they used to. Until the 2009 operations, the management and maintenance of the arsenal was the responsibility of a former low-ranking FAR officer in charge of the movement’s weapons maintenance service at FOCA headquarters; he had received armoury training from the Belgian army prior to 1994. The officer was also responsible for the two SA-7 launchers held by the group (Debelle, 2014, p. 275). The reliance on centralized structures and qualified human resources is unlikely to remain intact in the current context.

## THE DECLINE OF THE FDLR-FOCA

Over the past 15 years, the FDLR survived a number of military operations by the Rwandan army and other armed actors—including its former allies. Yet it has been severely weakened in recent years, its strength decreasing from about 11,500 troops in 2002 to fewer than 1,200 in late 2014 (see Figure 7.1). While the FDLR has declined continuously since its formation in 2000, it lost considerable strength from 2009 to 2012, a period during which the estimated number of FDLR combatants was cut to less than one-third of its 2008 strength. This section reviews some of the main external and internal factors that contributed to this trend and puts this numerical decline into broader perspective.

Figure 7.1 **Estimated number of FDLR combatants, 2002–14**

### NUMBER OF COMBATANTS



Source: MONUSCO DDR-RR data, provided in correspondence with Ines Rahmi Soued, DDR-RR officer, 21 January 2015

## External factors

### Targeted military interventions

Improvements in Rwandan–Congolese relations in late 2008 resulted in the joint 2009 FARDC–RDF ‘Umoja Wetu’ and the Congolese-led ‘Kimia II’ operations against the FDLR–FOCA, both of which severely weakened the group militarily (Debelle, 2014, pp. 291–93; Omaar, 2012, pp. 10–13). While the rank and file was not prepared to resist such large-scale operations, the high command’s response was chaotic and irrational. In late 2009, a member of the group’s executive committee reported that during the operations FDLR President Ignace Murwanashyaka had called on civilians and combatants to pray and fast, arguing that god was their only hope (Debelle, 2014, pp. 291–93). FARDC operations continued from 2010 to 2012 under the name ‘Amani Leo’ (Peace Today), sustaining the pressure on the group (SSRC, 2014, p. 10).

In 2012, FDLR–FOCA also came under attack by a number of Congolese militias—some of which, such as the Raia Mutomboki, formed self-defence groups to protect communities (SSRC, 2014, p. 11). One analyst observed that, ‘prior to 2009, no Congolese militia group would have contemplated an assault on the FDLR in its heartland’, highlighting the FDLR–FOCA’s new state of military weakness in 2012 (Omaar, 2012, p. 9). Other groups that targeted the FDLR–FOCA include the Forces pour la Défense du Congo (Congolese Defence Forces)–Guides, which was reportedly involved in a Rwandan-supported operation that led to the killing of the FDLR–FOCA chief of staff, Brig. Leodomir Mugaragu, in January 2012 (Stearns, 2012). Almost a dozen FOCA commanders were killed in commando operations in 2012 alone (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014).





Villagers, telling of the atrocities their community endured at the hands of the FDLR, include a youth who claims to have subsequently become a Mai-Mai recruit, in Walikale District, DRC, February 2009. © Susan Schulman/Getty Images

These operations took a significant toll on the FDLR. 'Umoja Wetu' reportedly claimed the lives of 153 FDLR–FOCA combatants, while 13 were wounded, 37 captured, and 103 deserted (ICG, 2009, p. 9). Casualties affected primarily elite units such as the reserve brigade, which was in charge of protecting the FOCA headquarters. Other units apparently abandoned their positions and dispersed with little resistance. While these operations did not result in the neutralization of the FDLR–FOCA, they strongly destabilized the group and triggered significant waves of desertions (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014). The operations also led the remaining FOCA military force to break up into units of six to eight men and go into hiding (SSRC, 2014, p. 10). Commanders abandoned the previously safe headquarters in the Walikale forests in 2012, as a diminished reserve brigade and headquarters battalion could no longer guarantee their protection. From mid-2012, sources reported significant restructuring of the FOCA. As noted above, the SONOKI and SOSUKI sectors were renamed and their battalions dissolved, with each sector keeping only two sub-sectors, while the reserve brigade was also downgraded to sub-sector level (Debelle, 2014, pp. 366–72).<sup>12</sup>

### Loss of territorial control

**FDLR units now have to secure resources for their own survival.**

The attacks left the FDLR–FOCA incapable of maintaining control over territory where it could generate income. The group lost much of its access to natural resources, while the civilians who had run their exploitation schemes fled the fighting. In practice, the operations helped to disrupt the group's 'unconventional logistics', keeping the FOCA away from areas that used to be key for the group's economic sustainability (Debelle, 2014, p. 292; Omaar, 2012, pp. 23–24).

The FDLR–FOCA has since become increasingly reliant on revenue-generating activities such as looting and cattle raiding, taxing markets and roads, and exploiting mining areas. In 2010, these activities only brought the group an estimated USD 5,000 per month in North Kivu and USD 4,000 in South Kivu—negligible amounts compared with the fortunes previously generated through the extensive unconventional logistics. Each layer of the group now has to secure resources for its own survival rather than for the overall organization (Debelle, 2014, p. 190).

Furthermore, the loss of territorial control meant that FDLR units in North and South Kivu became separated by a gap of several hundred kilometres, which created logistical challenges and isolated southern commanders who could no longer physically participate in high command meetings (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014; see Map 7.1). The FDLR's military schools have been relocated several times since 2009, hindering efforts to inculcate young Hutu recruits, who belong to a generation of exiles who know little about their country of origin (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014). The group also reportedly began recruiting combatants of diverse ethnic backgrounds and from other armed groups, further altering the FDLR's composition (SSRC, 2014, p. 10).

### DDR-RR

The DDR-RR programme of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) further contributed to weakening the FDLR. Some 12,000 Rwandan fighters, the majority from the FDLR–FOCA, participated in the programme and were repatriated to Rwanda between 2002 and 2013 (APDHU, 2014, p. 13). Large numbers of combatants appear to have been attracted to the programme in the context of the 2009–12 operations (see Figure 7.1). In 2009 alone, 1,564 FOCA combatants were repatriated to Rwanda.<sup>13</sup>

Part of the programme's success can be attributed to steady improvements in its outreach activities, which specifically targeted FOCA field commanders and cadres. By promoting the desertion of senior officers, the programme also affected the morale of FDLR troops, who were 'bound to ask themselves why they should believe there is a cause if their leaders do not' (Omaar, 2012, pp. 13–14). Furthermore, from 2009, the UN moved its DDR-RR transit centres closer to the FDLR–FOCA headquarters and increased its use of mobile teams, thereby reducing the distance combatants

needed to travel to find a MONUSCO post (Omaar, 2012, p. 13). Many of the combatants who took advantage of the DDR-RR programme used to play a role in the FDLR-FOCA's 'unconventional logistics'. Faced with the prospect of losing access to natural resources in the DRC, they were more easily enticed to defect and take their profits with them. Other combatants fled to be reunited with their families, many of which had been forced to return to Rwanda by the latest military operations (Debelle, 2014, p. 292).

The Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Commission's record in supporting combatants repatriated in Rwanda with training and reintegration packages also helped establish trust among FDLR-FOCA fighters. Although around a dozen individuals in the group's top leadership are genocide suspects, the vast majority of fighters are too young to have participated or were involved as children—meaning that they cannot be prosecuted upon return in Rwanda (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014; Waldorf, 2009, pp. 8, 26). Indeed, interviews conducted with ex-fighters repatriated in Rwanda suggest that they generally did not fear prosecution and trusted the Rwandan authorities to treat them fairly (Waldorf, 2009, p. 26). Although the Rwandan programme had some shortcomings,<sup>14</sup> the fact that it treated returning fighters fairly helped debunk the FDLR leadership's warnings that returnees were systematically arrested and tortured in Rwanda. It also encouraged FDLR elements, many of whom were already demoralized by hard living conditions in the DRC and a lack of employment prospects, to withdraw from the movement. Since many defectors who joined the demobilization programme maintained regular telephone communication with their former brothers-in-arms still deployed in the DRC, their testimonies served to erode the FDLR leadership's credibility among the rank and file.<sup>15</sup>



As part of their demobilization and reintegration process, former FDLR members set to return to civilian life in Rwanda attend classes on politics and history, including the 1994 genocide, held in Mutobo, Rwanda, April 2014. © Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images



## Internal factors

### Leadership issues

As the group's prospects for military success worsened, the morale among FDLR–FOCA combatants deteriorated, leading to desertion and participation in the DDR-RR programme. The situation of the FDLR's leadership in exile did not improve matters (Omaar, 2012, pp. 14–16). As of November 2005, FDLR leaders who were subject to sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council (a travel ban and asset freeze) included FDLR President Murwanashyaka and the FOCA commander, Maj. Gen. Mudacumura (UNSC, 2005). The number of FDLR leaders subject to UN sanctions has since grown to ten, and the FDLR as an entity was added to the list in December 2012 (UNSC, 2014c). As discussed above, key leadership members in Germany and France were arrested in 2009 and 2010 on charges of war crimes.

**The splintering of the FDLR illustrates the group's diminishing cohesion.** Back in the field, the 'unconventional logistics' backfired. Commanders took advantage of the system for their personal gain, by keeping some of the generated income for themselves, or by creating their own companies using their units' assets and, in some cases, loans from the FDLR–FOCA's central command (Debelle, 2014, p. 190). While the unconventional income-generating system had been created to help the organization grow, it ultimately distracted the different layers of the FDLR–FOCA's hierarchy from their military mission, creating internal tensions and irrevocably weakening the organization's cohesion.

### Splintering

The splintering of the FDLR–FOCA into a number of new armed factions further illustrates the group's diminishing cohesion. Some splinter groups formed after several senior FDLR leaders became disenchanted with the decisions of the top political leadership, including Murwanashyaka's commitment to aim for demobilization, which he made at the 2005 talks hosted by the Sant'Egidio community in Rome (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014). The main split occurred when senior leaders, including Vice President Jean-Marie Vianney Higiroy and Secretary General Félicien Kanyamibwa, formed the Ralliement des FDLR (Rally of the FDLR), which would later become the Ralliement pour l'Unité et la Démocratie (Rally for Unity and Democracy, RUD)—Urunana. Its armed wing, the Armée Nationale (National Army)—Imboneza, could count on more than 400 fighters in 2006 (APDHUD, 2014, p. 12; Debelle, 2014, p. 242). Other splinter groups include the 100-strong Soki (formed by a dissident RUD-Urunana member), the 50-strong Rastas (composed of deserted FARDC, FDLR, and Mai-Mai fighters), the 50-strong Mandevu (led by Gaston Mugasa 'Mandevu'), and the Commandement Militaire pour le Changement (Military Command for Change, formed in 2005 by dissident officers).<sup>16</sup> While seemingly limited in their military capabilities, several of the new groups reportedly became actively involved in illegal profit-making activities.

The external and internal factors discussed in this section point to an erosion of the FDLR–FOCA's pre-2009 'state-like' structure and cohesion. The nature of the threat posed by the group's remaining force remains poorly understood, however. Although diminished, the group's estimated strength has decreased only slightly since 2012, suggesting that a core of fighters, although in hiding, may still be able to regroup and reorganize.<sup>17</sup> In response to the FDLR's failure to meet a series of deadlines for demobilization, the UN Security Council and regional African governments threatened to carry out joint FARDC–MONUSCO military operations in January 2015 (ICG, 2014, pp. 11–14; RFI, 2014; UNSC, 2014d). After reportedly rejecting the UN's backing, the FARDC launched attacks against FDLR–FOCA positions in South Kivu in late February 2015. It remained unclear at the time of writing to what extent the operations would succeed in eradicating the FDLR in its current configuration. A key challenge will involve protecting civilians while seeking out FOCA units that are hiding among—and blending in with—the local population, having co-existed with them for two decades (Schlindwein and Johnson, 2014; Vogel, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

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Long considered one of the principal obstacles to peace in the region, the FDLR–FOCA appears severely weakened and no longer able to threaten the government in Kigali. The loss of Kinshasa as a key supporter, especially in the 2009–12 period, and international pressure on its leadership, followed by joint Congolese–Rwandan attacks on its positions, seem to have eroded the FDLR–FOCA’s cohesion and, consequently, its overall strength. The killing and arrests of many of the group’s leaders and commanders, along with the formation of splinter factions, constitute serious strains on the group’s decision-making processes. In response to its military retreat, the FDLR–FOCA has also lost control over much of the territory and resources it once held, poisoning morale and accelerating the desertion and repatriation of combatants to Rwanda. From a ‘state within a state’ with a unifying objective—reclaiming power in Rwanda—the organization has transformed into a loose grouping of armed factions in hiding that are essentially preoccupied with their daily survival.

Yet the current weakened state of the FDLR–FOCA should not be taken as the group’s epitaph. The structures it previously established could easily be revived should the region’s strategic alliances shift once more and become more favourable to the movement—as they have in the past. The international community and regional leaders will therefore need to maintain their efforts to neutralize the FDLR–FOCA through complementary military and diplomatic means. They would also do well to understand the factors that underpinned the group’s formerly high levels of cohesion, so as to be able to counter them again, should the FDLR–FOCA revive in the future. As this chapter describes, the aggressive international and military pressure on the FDLR leadership, combined with the implementation of credible demobilization and repatriation programmes that targeted commanders and facilitated the desertion of the rank and file, are policies that accelerated the group’s decline.

A disorganized FDLR–FOCA also presents new challenges. The group’s weapons holdings, perhaps ageing but largely unknown, have now dispersed with the combatants in hiding. This complicates prospects for a comprehensive demobilization and disarmament programme, as agreements with the group’s leadership may not translate into participation of the various small units that currently constitute the group. The FDLR–FOCA’s waning cohesion may also be bad news for civilians, who have already suffered greatly from the group’s reprisal attacks and criminal activities. With group commanders and combatants hiding in communities, civilians are at risk of being caught in the crossfire should attacks occur. Keeping military pressure on the FDLR–FOCA under these new conditions is a major challenge for the international community and the Congolese government. Maintaining the option for exiled Rwandan Hutus to return to Rwanda under good conditions will be crucial. ■

## ABBREVIATIONS

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AFDL	Alliance des Forces Démocratiques de Libération
ALIR	Armée de Libération du Rwanda
APR	Armée Patriotique Rwandaise
CNDP	Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple
DDR-RR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FAC	Forces Armées du Congo
FAR	Forces Armées du Rwanda

FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FAZ	Forces Armées Zaïroises
FDLR	Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda
FOCA	Forces Combattantes Abacunguzi
FPR	Front Patriotique Rwandais
M23	Mouvement du 23 Mars
MONUC	Mission des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)
MONUSCO	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation de la République démocratique du Congo (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PALIR	Peuple en Action pour la Libération du Rwanda
RCD	Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie
RDF	Rwanda Defence Force
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade
RUD	Ralliement pour l'Unité et la Démocratie
SONOKI	Secteur Opérationnel Nord Kivu
SOSUKI	Secteur Opérationnel Sud Kivu

## ENDNOTES

- 1 See, for instance, Bakke et al. (2012), Cohen (2013), Cunningham (2013), Staniland (2010), and Wood (2012).
- 2 In June 2002, Germany introduced a law to deal with genocide and other crimes against humanity, enabling prosecutors to try a civilian for command responsibility over atrocities committed outside Germany. German prosecutors acknowledged that Murwanashyaka and Musoni led the FDLR in a conflict in which hundreds were killed, women were raped, and children were enlisted; the trial was still ongoing as of December 2014 (Karuhanga, 2014).
- 3 Mbarushimana was arrested under an International Criminal Court warrant and transferred to The Hague in January 2011 (UNSC, 2014c).
- 4 Interviews by Raymond Debelle with former FOCA officers and combatants, Rwanda, May 2013.
- 5 Author correspondence with Christoph Vogel, DRC analyst, 20 November 2014.
- 6 *Inkotanyi*, which means 'invincible warrior' in Kinyarwanda, was a nickname given to the FPR's armed branch, the Armée Patriotique Rwandaise (Rwandan Patriotic Army).
- 7 In addition to its online presence, the FDLR communicated through a number of other means, including its own internal training, a magazine (*Umucunzi* or 'Liberator', published in 2000–02), flyers, and a Twitter account.
- 8 While experts disagree on the reliability of this total figure, there is no doubt that the conflict in the region was among the deadliest of the decade. See Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011, p. 71).
- 9 See, for example, UNGA (2010, paras. 18, 22–24) and UNSC (2009, paras. 317–20).
- 10 In addition to the FDLR, nine other DRC-based non-state groups and the FARDC also made the list by engaging in one or more types of violations of the rights of children in armed conflict (UNGA, 2014, annexe 1).
- 11 Author correspondence with an international source in the DRC, November 2014.
- 12 Interviews by Raymond Debelle with former FOCA officers and combatants, Rwanda, May 2013.
- 13 MONUSCO DDR-RR data, provided in correspondence with Ines Rahmi Soued, DDR-RR officer, 21 January 2015.
- 14 Some flaws were related to technical and management issues, including inadequate sensitization and a 'poorly implemented microcredit scheme' (World Bank, 2009, p. 6). There are also reports that the Congolese M23 rebel group recruited former FDLR fighters in Rwanda in 2013 (UNSC, 2013, para. 40).
- 15 Author correspondence with Claudio Gramizzi, senior field investigator, Conflict Armament Research, and former member of the UN Group of Experts on the DRC, 16 November 2014.
- 16 See APDHUD (2014, p. 12); Debelle (2014, pp. 266–74); Schlindwein and Johnson (2014).
- 17 See, for instance, Enough Project (2014).

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