CENTER FOR CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN STUDIES

From Rebel Alliance to Political Front

Kabila's FRN and the Future of the DRC Peace Process

AUTHOR
Dany K. Ayida

PUBLISHED
11 November 2026

TOPIC
Democratic Republic of the Congo

IN BRIEF

Under a former head of state, the FRN turns an eastern rebellion with national aims into a declared national challenge to Kinshasa. This assessment examines the implications of Kabila's move and sets out three possible trajectories: a narrowed Doha process, a prolonged negotiation freeze accompanied by political hardening, or military escalation towards the Katanga region.

Dany K. Ayida
International Expert and Senior Program Advisor at CHS Doha

Executive summary

On 12 October 2026, former President Joseph Kabila announced the creation of the Front pour la Refondation de la Nation (Front for the Refoundation of the Nation, FRN), which he leads, in Goma, North Kivu. The move dissolved the Alliance Fleuve Congo (Congo River Alliance, AFC) political coalition and incorporated its political and military structures, including those of its primary armed constituent, the March 23 Movement (M23), although the FRN's founding declaration does not specify M23's own status.[1] The FRN pledged to 'put an end to tyranny by any means necessary, including the use of force'.[2] In a subsequent communiqué, FRN Secretary-General Freddy Kaniki noted that the FRN inherits all of the AFC's 'rights, obligations and commitments', particularly under the Doha peace process.[3] The aim of overthrowing the government predates the FRN; in April 2026, the United States Department of the Treasury had already described the AFC as seeking 'regime change in Kinshasa'.[4] Under a former head of state, the FRN turns an eastern rebellion with national aims into a declared national challenge to Kinshasa.

The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) accused Kabila of formalizing a 'general attack'[5] against the Republic and suspended the activities of 13 political parties linked to Kabila and opposition allies.[6] Belgium condemned his resort to armed force, while the African Union (AU), without naming him, restated its rejection of power being taken by force. Both reaffirmed their support for the existing diplomatic tracks.[7] Kinshasa has not closed the Doha channel, but has narrowed its reading of the process to security and technical issues.[8] This assessment examines the implications of Kabila's move and sets out three possible trajectories: a narrowed Doha process, a prolonged negotiation freeze accompanied by political hardening, or military escalation towards the Katanga region.

[1] TV5MONDE and AFP, 'RD Congo: Joseph Kabila Prend La Tête D'un Nouveau Mouvement Politico-Militaire Incluant Le M23' [DR Congo: Joseph Kabila takes the lead of a new politico-military movement that includes the M23], TV5MONDE, 12 October 2026, https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/rd-congo-joseph-kabila-prend-la-tete-dun-nouveau-mouvement-politico-militaire-incluant-le-m23-2841346; Actualite.cd, 'RDC : Roger-Claude Liwanga appelle le Qatar à solliciter une clarification écrite sur le statut et la capacité du FRN de Kabila quant au processus de paix de Doha' [DRC: Roger-Claude Liwanga calls on Qatar to seek written clarification of the status and capacity of Kabila's FRN in the Doha peace process], Actualite.cd, 13 October 2026, https://actualite.cd/2026/10/13/rdc-roger-claude-liwanga-appelle-le-qatar-solliciter-une-clarification-ecrite-sur-le

[2] Shola Lawal, 'Ex-DRC President Kabila's Alliance With M23 Rebels: Why It Matters', Al Jazeera, 14 October 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/14/ex-drc-president-joseph-kabila-joins-hands-with-m23-rebels-why-it-matters

[3] Al Jazeera, 'Fears Grow in DRC as Former President Joseph Kabila Joins Rebellion', Al Jazeera, 18 October 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/18/fears-grow-in-drc-as-former-president-joseph-kabila-joins-rebellion

[4] U.S. Department of the Treasury, 'Treasury Sanctions Former Democratic Republic of the Congo President for Ties to Armed Conflict', U.S. Department of the Treasury, 30 April 2026, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0480

[5] AFP, 'DRC Accuses Ex-President Kabila of Planning "General Attack" on the Country', Africanews, 18 October 2026, https://www.africanews.com/2026/10/18/drc-accuses-ex-president-kabila-of-planning-general-attack-on-the-country/

[6] AfricaNews and Malaika Élysée, 'DR Congo Bans Activities of 13 Political Parties Linked to Joseph Kabila as Opposition Cries Repression', Africanews, 16 October 2026, https://www.africanews.com/2026/10/16/dr-congo-bans-activities-of-13-political-parties-linked-to-joseph-kabila-as-opposition-cri/

[7] Radio Okapi, 'La Belgique Condamne L'engagement De Joseph Kabila À La Tête Du FRN' [Belgium condemns Joseph Kabila's assumption of the leadership of the FRN], Radio Okapi, 21 October 2026, https://www.radiookapi.net/2026/10/21/actualite/politique/la-belgique-condamne-lengagement-de-joseph-kabila-la-tete-du-frn; Radio Okapi, 'Crise Politique Et Sécuritaire En RDC : l'Union Africaine Soutient Le Dialogue Inclusif Et L'ordre Constitutionnel' [Political and security crisis in the DRC: the African Union supports inclusive dialogue and constitutional order], Radio Okapi, 20 October 2026, https://www.radiookapi.net/2026/10/20/actualite/politique/crise-politique-et-securitaire-en-rdc-lunion-africaine-soutient-le

[8] AfricaNews RDC, 'M23 New Look, FRN, Kabila: Kinshasa maintient les pourparlers de Doha, Muyaya explique pourquoi' [M23 new look, FRN, Kabila: Kinshasa keeps the Doha talks, Muyaya explains why], AfricaNews RDC, 19 October 2026, https://www.africanewsrdc.net/actu/m23-new-look-frn-kabila-kinshasa-maintient-les-pourparlers-de-doha-muyaya-explique-pourquoi/

Background

The FRN's emergence marks a significant shift in the DRC's security and political trajectory, rooted in the M23 resurgence in late 2021. Between 2022 and 2024, M23 expanded its territorial control across North Kivu. It captured Goma in January 2025 and Bukavu shortly thereafter. These gains precipitated diplomatic strain between Kinshasa and Kigali. The Congolese government — backed by successive reports of the UN Group of Experts and by several Western governments — accuses Rwanda of providing troops and operational coordination to M23, allegations that Kigali consistently denies.[9]

Domestic politics were reshaped by the collapse of the governing coalition between President Félix Tshisekedi and former President Joseph Kabila. After Kabila left office in January 2019, his relations with the authorities deteriorated steadily. On 30 September 2025, a military court in Kinshasa sentenced Kabila to death in absentia on charges including treason and war crimes, for alleged collusion with the AFC/M23 rebel movement.[10] On 30 April 2026, the US Treasury sanctioned him for materially supporting the AFC/M23 alliance.[11] Corneille Nangaa had launched the AFC in December 2023 as a national political-military platform opposed to President Tshisekedi.[12]

The United Nations Group of Experts on the DRC, in its final report (transmitted on 5 June and issued on 11 June 2026; S/2026/466), reported that a restructuring of the AFC/M23, including a change of name and a leading role for Kabila, was in preparation.[13] The report found AFC/M23 'maintained objectives of regime change and federal restructuring',[14] estimated the coalition's strength at approximately 30,000 combatants, and identified James Kabarebe, a senior defence adviser to President Paul Kagame, as the principal liaison with both the AFC/M23 leadership and Kabila.[15] In an address to the nation on 9 October 2026, Kabila accused the government of pursuing a war it had 'neither the will nor the means to win', citing violations of the Doha ceasefire and continued collaboration with Wazalendo militias and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR),[16] and declared the country to be 'in peril'.[17] This address followed President Tshisekedi's announcement on 27 August of a national dialogue from which armed groups are excluded,[18] and preceded the formal launch of the FRN.

[9] United Nations Security Council, 'Final Report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2026/466', 11 June 2026, https://docs.un.org/en/s/2026/466

[10] AfricaNews and AFP, 'DRC: Former President Joseph Kabila Sentenced to Death for Treason', Africanews, 30 September 2025, https://www.africanews.com/2025/09/30/drc-former-president-joseph-kabila-sentenced-to-death-for-treason/

[11] U.S. Department of the Treasury, 'Treasury Sanctions Former Democratic Republic of the Congo President'.

[12] Kristof Titeca, Benjamin Muhoza, and Jacques Mukena, 'The Return of Joseph Kabila: What It Does – and Doesn't – Mean for Congo's War', Democracy in Africa, 16 October 2026, https://democracyinafrica.org/the-return-of-joseph-kabila-what-it-does-and-doesnt-meanfor-congos-war/

[13] United Nations Security Council, 'Final Report'.

[14] United Nations Security Council, 'Final Report', summary.

[15] United Nations Security Council, 'Final Report', para. 98.

[16] Actualite.cd, 'Joseph Kabila : « Le Congo est en péril », il annonce de prochaines initiatives' [Joseph Kabila: 'The Congo is in peril', he announces forthcoming initiatives], Actualite.cd, 9 October 2026, https://actualite.cd/2026/10/09/joseph-kabila-le-congo-est-en-peril-il-annonce-de-prochaines-initiatives. Author's translation.

[17] AfricaNews, 'Former DR Congo President Says the Country Is "In Peril"', Africanews, 10 October 2026, https://www.africanews.com/2026/10/10/former-dr-congo-president-says-the-country-is-in-peril/

[18] Reuters, 'DRC President Calls for National Dialogue Excluding Rebels', TimesLive, 28 August 2026, https://timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2026-08-28-drc-president-calls-for-national-dialogue-excluding-rebels

The FRN: Structure and stated aims

The FRN was established on 12 October 2026 as a 'politico-military front'. It integrates Kabila's political apparatus with the armed and administrative framework of the AFC/M23. Its founding declaration commits the front to ending 'tyranny' by any means, including force, combining political mobilization with armed struggle against the authorities in Kinshasa.[19]

Joseph Kabila heads the front as its president. Corneille Nangaa (former electoral commission president and leader of the AFC) and Bertrand Bisimwa (political head of M23) were named vice-presidents. General Sultani Makenga, chief of staff of the armed wing (the Armée révolutionnaire congolaise, Congolese Revolutionary Army), is described by some sources as a third vice-president and by others as military chief with vice-presidential rank.[20] Administrative functions are headed by Freddy Kaniki as secretary-general, while the launch declaration was read by Claude Ibalanky,[21] a former adviser to President Tshisekedi who had joined the AFC/M23 in January 2026.[22] The FRN's leadership structure is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1 **FRN leadership structure**

Joseph Kabila President, Front pour la Refondation de la Nation (FRN)		
Corneille Nangaa	**Bertrand Bisimwa**	**Gen. Sultani Makenga**
Vice-president Ex-AFC leader / political wing	**Vice-president** M23 political head	**Chief of staff (vice-presidential rank)** M23 military commander
Freddy Kaniki — Secretary-general (executive administration)		

On 15 October 2026, Secretary-General Kaniki issued a communiqué clarifying that the FRN assumes all 'rights, obligations and commitments' previously held by the AFC,[23] including those under the Doha Framework for a Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 15 November 2025.[24] By presenting itself as the AFC's successor, the FRN seeks to retain its standing in international peace negotiations.

Analysts suggest that Kabila's arrival, backed by his direct relationship with Kigali, shifts the balance of power with M23's military command under Makenga and could sharpen differences between commanders focused

[19] TV5MONDE and AFP, 'RD Congo: Joseph Kabila Prend La Tête D'un Nouveau Mouvement'; Al Jazeera, AFP, and AP, 'Former DR Congo President Kabila Joins M23 Rebels in a New Coalition', Al Jazeera, 13 October 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/13/former-dr-congo-president-kabila-joins-m23-rebels-in-a-new-coalition

[20] Jesca Mutamba, 'DR Congo: Kabila Leads New Movement With Ex-AFC/M23 Leaders as Deputies', The New Times, 12 October 2026, https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/39623/news/africa/dr-congo-kabila-leads-new-movement-with-ex-afcm23-leaders-as-deputies; AfricaNews, 'Former DRC President Kabila to Lead New Group Replacing AFC/M23', Africanews, 13 October 2026, https://www.africanews.com/2026/10/13/former-drc-president-kabila-to-lead-new-group-replacing-afcm23/

[21] Mutamba, 'DR Congo: Kabila Leads New Movement'.

[22] Serge Ouitona, 'RDC: Claude Ibalanky Un Ancien Pilier Du Pouvoir Rejoint l'AFC/M23' [DRC: Claude Ibalanky, a former pillar of the regime, joins the AFC/M23], Afrik, 30 January 2026, https://www.afrik.com/rdc-claude-ibalanky-un-ancien-pilier-du-pouvoir-rejoint-l-afc-m23

[23] Jesca Mutamba, 'Kabila-Led FRN Takes Over Doha Peace Talks With Kinshasa', The New Times, 15 October 2026, https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/39695/news/africa/kabila-led-frn-takes-over-doha-peace-talks-with-kinshasa

[24] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar, 'Signing of the Doha Framework for Peace Between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congo River Alliance (M23 Movement)', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar, 15 November 2025, https://mofa.gov.qa/en/latest-articles/statements/signing-of-the-doha-framework-for-peace-between-the-government-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-the-congo-river-alliance-(m23-movement)

on holding the Kivus and Kabila's broader goal of regime change in Kinshasa.[25] A nationwide survey conducted by Ebuteli and GeoPoll in April 2026 found that only 3 per cent of respondents named Kabila as their preferred political figure, against 35 per cent for Tshisekedi.[26] This underlines a disparity between the coalition's military force in the east and its political resonance across the broader Congolese electorate.

Kinshasa's response

Kinshasa responded to the FRN through political and administrative measures. Government spokesman Patrick Muyaya characterized the FRN's launch as formalizing a 'general attack' against the Republic, describing it as a strategic rebranding of an existing armed rebellion operating with foreign state support.[27]

In administrative terms, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Jacquemain Shabani announced on 15 October 2026 the immediate suspension of the activities of 13 political parties.[28] These include Kabila's own Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy), and opposition parties now aligned with him, including former Prime Minister Augustin Matata Ponyo's Leadership et Gouvernance pour le Développement (Leadership and Governance for Development). The announcement specified neither its grounds nor its duration and did not dissolve the parties. The targeted parties and independent analysts criticized the measure as a restriction of political space.[29]

The national dialogue initiative announced by President Tshisekedi on 27 August 2026, a process of up to three months intended to ease political tensions, explicitly excludes armed groups and those acting on behalf of foreign powers.[30] Tshisekedi stated that the Doha process 'remains the appropriate framework for dealing with AFC/M23' and that the national dialogue 'will not replace' it.[31] Kinshasa describes the FRN as a 'proxy' movement (mouvement supplétif) and excludes it from domestic political consultations, while maintaining that questions relating to it are to be dealt with in Doha.[32]

Implications for the peace architecture

The restructuring of the rebel alliance under Kabila's leadership introduces friction across the diplomatic process seeking to resolve the Great Lakes crisis. The Doha process, the Washington track, the Luanda framework, and African Union-led initiatives are at risk of disruption as Kinshasa hardens its stance towards the new leadership, although it has not withdrawn from Doha.[33] Table 2 summarizes the main peace tracks, their status since the FRN's launch, and the principal risk facing each.

[25] Titeca et al., 'The Return of Joseph Kabila'.

[26] Ebuteli and GeoPoll, 'Près de 60 % des Congolais pensent que le pays va dans la mauvaise direction, mais épargnent leurs dirigeants' [Nearly 60 per cent of Congolese think the country is heading in the wrong direction but spare their leaders], Ebuteli, June 2026, https://www.ebuteli.org/api/files/6b42427d-23ba-4d66-8e06-d661a13c53e7

[27] AFP, 'DRC Accuses Ex-President'.

[28] AfricaNews and Élysée, 'DR Congo Bans Activities'.

[29] AfricaNews and Élysée, 'DR Congo Bans Activities'.

[30] Reuters, 'DRC President Calls for National Dialogue'.

[31] Actualite.cd, 'Dialogue national : Félix Tshisekedi maintient Doha pour les discussions avec l'AFC/M23 et ouvre une voie de réintégration à ceux qui renonceront sincèrement à la lutte armée' [National dialogue: Félix Tshisekedi keeps Doha for talks with the AFC/M23 and opens a path to reintegration for those who sincerely renounce armed struggle], Actualite.cd, 28 August 2026, https://actualite.cd/2026/08/28/dialogue-national-felix-tshisekedi-maintient-doha-pour-les-discussions-avec-lafcm23-et. Author's translation.

[32] AfricaNews RDC, 'Kinshasa maintient les pourparlers de Doha'.

[33] AfricaNews RDC, 'Kinshasa maintient les pourparlers de Doha'.

TABLE 2 Status of peace tracks after the FRN's launch

Peace track	Signatories/lead framework	Status since the FRN's launch (12 October 2026)	Primary risk factor
Doha track	DRC government & AFC/M23 (facilitated by Qatar)	**High vulnerability**: FRN claims succession; Kinshasa keeps the channel open but limits it to security and technical issues.	Dispute over the FRN's status and the scope of talks stalls the six outstanding protocols.
Washington track	DRC & Rwanda state-to-state (US facilitated): peace agreement of 27 June 2025; Washington Accords of 4 December 2025	**Operational**: Focuses on bilateral security commitments and withdrawal of Rwandan forces.	Decoupling from domestic political developments.
Luanda / AU-Togo track	Regional mediation (AU / Togo facilitation)	**Active**: AU backs President Tshisekedi's national dialogue format.	Exclusion of primary armed actors on the ground.
Great Lakes / security	Regional defence ministers (Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania)	**Procedural**: Endorsed procedures on foreign combatant repatriation (18 October).	Lack of enforcement mechanisms in the Kivus.

The Doha track, under way since April 2025 and structured since 15 November 2025 by the Doha Framework for a Comprehensive Peace Agreement,[34] is the mechanism most directly affected. The FRN now claims the AFC's place in the process,[35] but Kinshasa remains engaged. In an interview on 19 October, government spokesman Patrick Muyaya stated that 'all questions relating to the renewed M23, the M23-Kabila, are dealt with within the framework of Doha', while the Rwandan dimension is handled through Washington.[36] Nonetheless, one analyst regards Doha as the track most exposed to paralysis as Kinshasa hardens its stance against Kabila.[37]

Kinshasa's statements and the FRN's claim of full succession point to divergent readings of the process. Muyaya described Doha as 'the framework agreement, the missions of the ceasefire mechanism, the release of prisoners', and the movement as 'an armed group destined to disappear at the end of the discussions'.[38] This matches the protocols already signed on detainee release (14 September 2025) and ceasefire verification (14 October 2025).[39] Six of the framework's eight protocols remain to be negotiated,[40] including the one on 'Restoration of State Authority, Reforms, and National Participatory Governance Arrangements', the most likely vehicle for the FRN's national demands. The framework has no succession clause and requires 'the written consent of both Parties' for amendments.[41] Recognizing the FRN as successor would therefore, in practice,

[34] Mutamba, 'Kabila-Led FRN Takes Over Doha Peace Talks'; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar, 'Signing of the Doha Framework for Peace'.

[35] Mutamba, 'Kabila-Led FRN Takes Over'.

[36] AfricaNews RDC, 'Kinshasa maintient les pourparlers de Doha'. Author's translation; original: 'Toutes les questions liées au M23 rénové, au M23-Kabila, sont traitées dans le cadre de Doha'.

[37] Lawal, 'Ex-DRC President Kabila's Alliance'.

[38] AfricaNews RDC, 'Kinshasa maintient les pourparlers de Doha'. Author's translation; original: 'Le processus de Doha c'est l'accord-cadre, les missions du mécanisme de cessez-le-feu, la libération des prisonniers' and 'un groupe armé qui est appelé à disparaître au terme des discussions'.

[39] Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and AFC/M23, 'The Doha Framework for a Comprehensive Peace Agreement', Doha, 15 November 2025, PA-X Peace Agreements Database, University of Edinburgh, https://www.peaceagreements.org/view/2857/

[40] Security Council Report, 'Great Lakes Region (DRC)', Monthly Forecast, October 2026, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2026-10/great-lakes-region-drc-10.php

[41] Government of the DRC and AFC/M23, 'Doha Framework'.

require Kinshasa's agreement. One legal scholar has urged Qatar to seek written clarification of the front's status and its capacity to honour existing commitments.[42] By contrast, the state-to-state Washington track, comprising the DRC–Rwanda peace agreement of 27 June 2025[43] and the Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity of 4 December 2025,[44] may continue independently of these political developments, since Kigali is likely to remain engaged in the US-led process.[45]

On 18 October 2026, defence ministers, or their representatives, from Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania met in Lusaka, Zambia, within the Contact and Coordination Group. They endorsed draft standard operating procedures for the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration of foreign combatants, which now go to heads of state for adoption.[46] However, implementation remains dependent on political stabilization in North and South Kivu.

Domestic debate over constitutional reform has intensified. A referendum law adopted by parliament in June 2026 was validated by the Constitutional Court in July with interpretive reservations, re-adopted by the National Assembly on 23 October and now returns to the Senate before promulgation.[47] Members of President Tshisekedi's coalition have backed constitutional changes that critics say could allow him to seek a third term beyond 2028.[48] Opposition coalitions, including the C64 platform linked to Martin Fayulu, Moïse Katumbi, and Delly Sesanga, organized public protests on 15 September 2026 that were dispersed by security forces.[49] While the main opposition coalition has kept its distance from Kabila's armed alliance,[50] government party suspensions risk blurring the distinction between peaceful constitutional opposition and armed rebellion.

[42] Actualite.cd, 'Roger-Claude Liwanga appelle le Qatar'.

[43] Actualite.cd, 'RDC : l'ONU alerte sur l'écart entre les accords de paix et la situation sécuritaire dans l'Est' [DRC: the UN warns of the gap between the peace agreements and the security situation in the east], Actualite.cd, 14 October 2026, https://actualite.cd/2026/10/14/rdc-lonu-alerte-sur-lecart-entre-les-accords-de-paix-et-la-situation-securitaire-dans

[44] U.S. Department of the Treasury, 'Treasury Sanctions Rebel Commanders Driving Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2 June 2026, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0518

[45] Lawal, 'Ex-DRC President Kabila's Alliance'.

[46] Jesca Mutamba, 'Nduhungirehe in Zambia for Great Lakes Security Meeting', The New Times, 19 October 2026, https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/39814/news/security/nduhungirehe-in-zambia-for-great-lakes-security-meeting; Jesca Mutamba, 'Great Lakes Ministers Endorse Foreign Combatant Disarmament Plan', The New Times, 19 October 2026, https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/39790/news/security/great-lakes-ministers-endorse-foreign-combatant-disarmament-plan

[47] Afrik, 'RDC : la loi référendaire à nouveau adoptée par l'Assemblée nationale' [DRC: the referendum law adopted again by the National Assembly], Afrik, 24 October 2026, https://www.afrik.com/rdc-la-loi-referendaire-a-nouveau-adoptee-par-l-assemblee-nationale

[48] Reuters, 'DRC Police Break Up Protests Against Proposed Constitutional Changes', TimesLive, 15 September 2026, https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2026-09-15-drc-police-break-up-protests-against-proposed-constitutional-changes/

[49] Reuters, 'DRC Police Break Up Protests'.

[50] AFP, 'DRC Accuses Ex-President'.

Regional and international positions

AU Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf issued a statement, on 19 October 2026, reaffirming the AU's policy against unconstitutional changes of government and armed seizures of power.[51] The Commission supports President Tshisekedi's national dialogue framework and Togo-led mediation efforts, notably omitting direct reference to Kabila.[52]

On 21 October 2026, Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot characterized Kabila's assumption of leadership over an armed front as 'deplorable, incomprehensible and unacceptable', while reaffirming support for both the Doha and Washington diplomatic tracks.[53] France restated its commitment to the territorial integrity of the DRC[54] and, at the Security Council briefing of 13 October 2026, urged the Council to maintain pressure on actors obstructing peace, while Denmark and Latvia called for the withdrawal of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) and an end to support for M23.[55]

The United States referred to the FRN's formation in its remarks to the Security Council on 13 October urging the DRC and FRN to conclude the remaining Doha protocols.[56] On 28 October, the US Treasury sanctioned Rwanda's Ministry of Defence and the Zigama Credit and Savings Society for supporting M23, noting the FRN's announcement that it succeeds the AFC and stating that Rwanda 'must halt its support for M23 and withdraw its troops from eastern DRC'.[57] On 30 October, the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region, which includes the United States and is chaired by France, 'categorically' rejected the pursuit of political objectives through violence 'as advocated by the FRN.' It also recalled the parties' obligations under Resolution 2773, including the withdrawal of the RDF, the dismantling of illegitimate parallel administrations and FDLR neutralization.[58] Rwanda denies supporting M23 and maintains that the conflict is an internal Congolese political struggle.[59] The UN Group of Experts, however, assessed in June that Kabila's growing prominence in the rebellion 'appeared intended to obscure Rwanda's role', reinforcing the narrative of a 'Congolese movement' addressing a 'Congolese problem'.[60]

[51] Radio Okapi, 'Crise Politique Et Sécuritaire En RDC'.

[52] Radio Okapi, 'Crise Politique Et Sécuritaire En RDC'.

[53] Radio Okapi, 'La Belgique Condamne L'engagement De Joseph Kabila'.

[54] Radio Okapi, 'Est de la RDC : la France réaffirme son soutien à l'intégrité territoriale congolaise après la restructuration de l'AFC/M23' [Eastern DRC: France reaffirms its support for Congolese territorial integrity after the restructuring of the AFC/M23], Radio Okapi, 13 October 2026, https://www.radiookapi.net/2026/10/13/actualite/securite/est-de-la-rdc-la-france-reaffirme-son-soutien-lintegrite-territoriale

[55] AFP, 'UN Official Says "Window of Opportunity" for Peace in DR Congo', Al Jazeera, 14 October 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/14/un-official-says-window-of-opportunity-for-peace-in-dr-congo; Actualite.cd, 'L'ONU alerte sur l'écart'.

[56] United States Mission to the United Nations, 'Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Great Lakes Region', 13 October 2026, https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-the-great-lakes-region/

[57] U.S. Department of the Treasury, 'Treasury Sanctions Rwandan Ministry of Defence and Financial Institution Supporting M23', U.S. Department of the Treasury, 28 October 2026, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0668

[58] International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region, 'Déclaration conjointe du Groupe de contact international pour la région des Grands Lacs (GCI)' [Joint statement of the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region], France Diplomatie, 30 October 2026, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/presse-et-ressources/decouvrir-et-informer/actualites/declaration-conjointe-du-groupe-de-contact-international-pour-la-region-des-grands-lacs-gci-0 Author's translation. For the group's membership, see International Contact Group for the Great Lakes Region, 'Joint Statement from the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes region (ICG)', France Diplomatie, 13 August 2026, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/presse-et-ressources/decouvrir-et-informer/actualites/declaration-conjointe-du-groupe-de-contact-international-pour-la-region-des-grands-lacs-gci

[59] Al Jazeera, AFP, and AP, 'Former DR Congo President Kabila Joins M23 Rebels'; Titeca et al., 'The Return of Joseph Kabila'.

[60] United Nations Security Council, 'Final Report', para. 59.

Security and humanitarian situation

Although the primary front lines in eastern DRC have remained relatively stable since early 2025, military engagements have continued, at times intensely, through artillery exchanges, armed drone operations, and localized offensives.[61] Active combat persists in the Masisi territory of North Kivu and parts of South Kivu, where the Congolese armed forces (FARDC), operating alongside local Wazalendo militias and Burundian military units, regularly engage FRN/M23 positions.[62]

This military posture unfolds amid an acute humanitarian crisis. United Nations agencies estimate that over 7.8 million people are displaced within the DRC,[63] while more than 26.5 million people are struggling to meet basic food needs, according to a May 2026 assessment by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP).[64] Compounding the crisis, health authorities are confronting a major Ebola outbreak that, as of 18 October 2026, had caused 9,552 confirmed cases and 4,602 related deaths across eight provinces, including North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri.[65] Ongoing hostilities obstruct humanitarian aid routes and impede epidemic response teams. These conditions also bear on the peace process, since humanitarian access is the subject of one of the Doha protocols still under negotiation,[66] and the spread of Ebola in provinces divided by the front line raises the cost of any breakdown in ceasefire monitoring, giving the parties and facilitators an incentive to preserve at least the technical dimension of the Doha track.

Outlook: Scenarios

The DRC peace process can be assessed through three conditional, indicator-based scenarios over the coming 6 to 12 months. They are not mutually exclusive, and may shift as the next Doha round and the national dialogue unfold.

SCENARIO A

A narrowed Doha process

Kinshasa continues to engage in Doha but confines talks to the agenda its spokesman has set out: the ceasefire monitoring mechanism and detainee release.[67] Facilitators treat the FRN as the functional counterpart under the November 2025 framework, possibly following written clarification of the kind proposed by one legal scholar,[68] without Kinshasa recognizing Kabila's personal status. Front lines broadly hold, while the political protocols, notably on state authority and governance, are deferred.

[61] AFP, 'DRC Accuses Ex-President'.

[62] AfricaNews, 'DRC: New Fighting in Masisi as AU Delegation Rushes to Save Ceasefire', Africanews, 8 October 2026, https://www.africanews.com/2026/10/08/drc-new-fighting-in-masisi-as-au-delegation-rushes-to-save-ceasefire/; John Ngono, 'Former DRC president forms rebel alliance with M23 — what does this mean for peace in Congo?', ACLED, 16 October 2026, https://acleddata.com/expert-comment/former-drc-president-forms-rebel-alliance-m23-what-does-mean-peace-congo

[63] Lawal, 'Ex-DRC President Kabila's Alliance'.

[64] FAO and WFP, 'Millions Trapped in Deepening Hunger Crisis in the DRC as Needs Far Outpace Humanitarian Response', Joint news release, 14 May 2026, https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/millions-trapped-in-deepening-hunger-crisis-in-the-drc-as-needs-far-outpace-humanitarian-response/en

[65] European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), 'Updates for Ebola Disease Outbreak Caused by Bundibugyo Virus – Multi-country – 2026', 20 October 2026, https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/public-health-events/2026-EIP-00026

[66] Government of the DRC and AFC/M23, 'Doha Framework'.

[67] AfricaNews RDC, 'Kinshasa maintient les pourparlers de Doha'.

[68] Actualite.cd, 'Roger-Claude Liwanga appelle le Qatar'.

This scenario would contain the conflict rather than resolve it: the FRN's political demands and its parallel administration in the Kivus would persist.

KEY INDICATORS TO WATCH

An FRN delegation received at the next Doha round; a written understanding on its status; continued ceasefire verification meetings and detainee releases.

SCENARIO B

Talks stall, conflict entrenched

Disagreement over the FRN's status and the scope of talks leads to an indefinite postponement of Doha. The Washington track continues, focused on Rwandan withdrawal and the FDLR, but without a channel to the armed movement that controls territory. Political space in Kinshasa narrows further through party suspensions and arrests, while the national dialogue proceeds without the actors most able to affect the conflict.

Front lines remain largely static, but attrition through drones, artillery, and clashes involving Wazalendo militias continues in Masisi and South Kivu. Each month without a working channel weakens the ceasefire mechanism and entrenches the rebel parallel administration.

KEY INDICATORS TO WATCH

Formal postponement of Doha; a written rejection of FRN representation; suspension of ceasefire verification meetings; further party bans or arrests.

SCENARIO C

Escalation and expansion

To show that it is more than a rebranded AFC/M23, the FRN seeks to extend its reach. With northward expansion constrained by Ugandan forces in Ituri and North Kivu, the most plausible axis runs south along the Uvira–Kalemie corridor towards Katanga, the heart of copper and cobalt production and Kabila's historical political base,[69] combined with efforts to court FARDC defections.

This is the highest-risk scenario regionally. Burundian troops already fight alongside the FARDC in South Kivu, and the UN Special Envoy has highlighted persistent Burundi–Rwanda mistrust;[70] fighting near Uvira could draw the two states into more direct confrontation. It would also test Angola, which borders the former Katanga, and the United States, whose pressure contributed to AFC/M23 withdrawals from Walikale and Uvira[71] and whose minerals partnership with Kinshasa gives it a direct stake in Katanga.[72]

[69] Titeca et al., 'The Return of Joseph Kabila'.

[70] Actualite.cd, 'L'ONU alerte sur l'écart'.

[71] Titeca et al., 'The Return of Joseph Kabila'.

[72] Council on Foreign Relations, 'Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo', Global Conflict Tracker, accessed 28 October 2026, https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo

KEY INDICATORS TO WATCH

Armed incursions into Tanganyika and Haut-Katanga; renewed fighting around Uvira; verified high-level FARDC defections; Burundian or Rwandan troop movements near their common border.

Provisional assessment

On current evidence, the near-term trajectory most plausibly lies between Scenarios A and B: a Doha channel that survives in narrowed, technical form, with periods of suspension. Kinshasa has kept Doha as the venue for FRN-related questions, front lines have been broadly stable since early 2025, and US pressure has so far constrained territorial expansion.[73] Scenario C is less likely in the next 3 to 6 months but carries the highest cost; its likelihood would rise if Doha collapses or the FRN fails to secure political returns from its new leadership.

COPYRIGHT

© 2026 Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS). All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of CHS. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of CHS.

[73] Titeca et al., 'The Return of Joseph Kabila'.