III. Armed conflict and peace processes in Central Africa

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The Central Africa United Nations subregion comprises: Angola, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe. Five of the nine Central African states were involved in armed conflicts in 2020—Angola, Cameroon, CAR, Chad and the DRC—and those are the focus of this section. Cameroon and Chad were also discussed briefly in the context of the Lake Chad regional conflict nexus in section II.

Similar to the situation in West Africa (section II), Central Africa contains some of the world's severest and longest crises. Despite most of the countries in the region being resource rich, these natural resources have often been a driver for competition and corruption, leading to high levels of poverty and food insecurity. Rapid population growth and climate change also drive life-threatening levels of vulnerability.[1] Conflict in the region's hotspots in 2020 persisted (in CAR) or worsened (in Cameroon, Chad and especially the DRC).

Angola

In Angola in 2020 battle-related conflict deaths rose above the threshold for an armed conflict for the first time since 2017. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded 74 conflict-related fatalities for the year, of which 27 were battle related.[2] The Cabinda War (1975–present) in Angola was largely ended by a 2006 peace accord, but a low-level separatist insurgency waged by the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda against the government has continued with sporadic fighting. On 30 March 2020 Cabindan militias declared a unilateral ceasefire to help combat the Covid-19 pandemic, but new clashes occurred in June 2020.[3]

Cameroon

The two main unrelated armed conflicts in Cameroon continued in 2020: the anglophone separatist insurgency in the Southwest and Northwest regions and the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North region (part of the wider

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[1] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021* (UN OCHA: Dec. 2020), pp. 141–43.
[2] ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 5 Mar. 2021.
[3] 'Angola: Fatal clashes between separatists and military in Cabinda province June 2', Garda World, 4 June 2020; and Organization of Emerging African States, 'More African freedom fighters join Covid-19 ceasefire', ModernGhana, 3 Apr. 2020.

Table 7.8. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Cameroon, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	17	1 223	959	340	260	996	642	818
Explosions/remote violence	0	33	202	175	223	31	20	62
Protests, riots and strategic developments	1	0	0	11	48	7	2	41
Violence against civilians	14	110	278	195	186	496	568	668
Total	**32**	**1 366**	**1 439**	**721**	**717**	**1 530**	**1 232**	**1 589**

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 22 Feb. 2021.

Lake Chad crisis). Both worsened in 2020, and total conflict-related fatalities in Cameroon were at a slightly higher level than in 2019, with violence against civilians increasing for the third consecutive year (see table 7.8). The number of people requiring humanitarian support in Cameroon increased from 2.7 million in 2016 to 4.4 million in 2020 (out of a total population of 26.5 million).[4]

The conflict in the Lake Chad region

Cameroon remained the country that was second most affected by the Lake Chad crisis (discussed in section II) where, in the Far North region, Boko Haram and other armed groups intensified their attacks. In August 2020, for example, 18 people died and 15 were injured in a Boko Haram attack on a camp for internally displaced persons in the town of Nguetechewe.[5] The number of conflict-related fatalities in the Far North in 2020 increased from 465 in 2019 to 591 in 2020.[6]

The conflict in anglophone Cameroon

The origins of the anglophone crisis are in colonial-era divisions of territory between Britain and France. Today, 5 million people in the Northwest and Southwest regions—about one fifth of the country's population—speak mainly English and have their own legal and educational systems. The anglophone demand for an autonomous republic called Ambazonia, which dates back to at least 1985, turned violent in October 2017.[7] Protests by anglophone teachers and lawyers against the use of French in anglophone schools

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[4] UN OCHA (note 1), p. 147.

[5] 'Deadly jihadist attack targets Cameroon village hosting displaced people', France 24, 4 Sep. 2020.

[6] ACLED, Dashboard, accessed 7 Apr. 2021.

[7] International Crisis Group, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, Africa Report no. 250 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 2 Aug. 2017). On developments in 2018 see Davis, I. and Melvin, N., 'Armed conflict and peace processes in sub-Saharan Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 124–25.

and courts were harshly repressed and were transformed into an armed insurgency by separatist militias.

The conflict has now become a significant and complex humanitarian emergency that has displaced more than 700 000 people.[8] In 2020 education facilities continued to be targeted, and attacks on villages and the destruction of homes forced more than 10 000 people to flee in February 2020 alone.[9] There was also a wave of attacks on polling stations during parliamentary elections held on 9 February and again during regional elections in December.[10]

While difficult to estimate, the secessionist forces probably number between 2000 and 4000 armed fighters, largely divided into two rival, so-called Ambazonia interim governments (referred to as IGs): one led by Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, a former university administrator and engineer, who was imprisoned for life in 2019 on terrorism and secession charges, and the other by Samuel Ikome Sako, a former pastor based in the United States. Each IG is an umbrella group for a range of other factions.[11]

On 25 March 2020 one of the IG Sako-aligned groups, the Southern Cameroons Defence Forces (SOCADEF), announced a temporary ceasefire following the UN secretary-general's appeal for a global Covid-19-related ceasefire, but it was not reciprocated by other separatist armed groups nor the Cameroonian Government.[12] Although the largest opposition group (and IG Sisiku aligned) Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC) released a statement in which it supported the global call, it also declared that a ceasefire would be exploited by the government.[13] Nonetheless, in July 2020 tentative peace talks reportedly began between the Cameroonian Government and the leader of IG Sisiku—but it was unclear whether the AGC statement (or the initial ceasefire offer by SOCADEF, which is part of the rival grouping) helped to legitimize these negotiations.[14]

After a national dialogue in October 2019 (that excluded all separatists), in January 2020 the government announced a new 'special status' for the

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[8] 'Cameroon: North-west and South-west', Situation Report no. 26, UN OCHA, 31 Dec. 2020.

[9] 'Cameroon: North-west and South-west', Situation Report no. 16, UN OCHA, 29 Feb. 2020; and Lay, T., 'Regional overview: Africa, 12–18 July 2020', ACLED, 23 July 2020.

[10] 'Cameroon: Election violence in anglophone regions', Human Rights Watch, 12 Feb. 2020; Amnesty International, 'Cameroon: Rise in killings in anglophone regions ahead of parliamentary elections', 6 Feb. 2020; and UN OCHA (note 8).

[11] On estimates of the number of members attributed to a separatist groups and armed militias see International Crisis Group, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to get to Talks?*, Africa Report no. 272 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 2 May 2019), section IV; and Bone, R. M., 'Ahead of peace talks, a who's who of Cameroon's separatist movements', New Humanitarian, 8 July 2020.

[12] Miller, A., 'Call unanswered: A review of responses to the UN appeal for a global ceasefire', ACLED, 13 May 2020.

[13] Office of the Vice President, Buea Ambazonia Governing Council, 'Declaration of the responsibility to protect the people of Ambazonia during the Covid-19 pandemic', 27 Mar. 2020.

[14] Bone (note 11); and 'Cameroon holds first peace talks with main separatist group', Al Jazeera, 4 July 2020.

two anglophone regions.[15] However, questions remained over the government's commitment to engage in dialogue and grant political concessions to separatist groups. Thus, the ceasefire talks between government representatives and the most important representatives of the separatists (Tabe and another nine imprisoned separatist leaders) in July 2020 came as a surprise—and were condemned by other separatists and downplayed by the government. There were no follow-up talks, and despite a new round of Swiss mediation in August 2020, the security situation in the anglophone regions continued to deteriorate in the remainder of the year.[16]

The Central African Republic

Almost the entire territory of CAR has been affected by conflict and violence among shifting alliances of armed groups since 2013, despite the presence of multinational peace operations—the African Union-led International Support Mission in the CAR (Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous Conduite Africaine), 2013–14; the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA), 2014 to date and a French military intervention, 2013–16. Elections were held in 2016 and won by President Faustin-Archange Touadéra. A 2019 peace agreement and ceasefire between the government and 14 armed groups (the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, hereafter Political Agreement) curbed some of the violence.[17] Nonetheless, regular attacks against civilian populations, killings and other crimes and violations at the hands of the ex-Seleka and the anti-Balaka armed groups have continued.[18]

In January 2020 the Political Agreement was further strained by clashes between factions of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of the CAR (Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique, FPRC) in the eastern town

[15] Chimtom, N. K., 'Cameroon's conflict: Will the national dialogue make any difference?', BBC News, 5 Oct. 2019; and Bone, R. M. and Nkwain, A. K., 'Cameroon grants "special status" its restive regions. They don't feel special', African Arguments, 13 Jan. 2020.

[16] Jeune Afrique, 'Cameroon's anglophone crisis: Rivalries hamper peace talks', Africa Report, 11 Aug. 2020; and Reuters, 'Gunmen kill at least six children in attack on Cameroon school', *The Guardian*, 24 Oct. 2020.

[17] The agreement is annexed to United Nations, Security Council, Letter dated 14 February 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2019/145, 15 Feb. 2019. On developments in CAR in 2019 see Davis, I., 'Armed conflict and peace processes in Central Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, pp. 196–99.

[18] The Seleka, meaning an 'alliance movement' in Sango, was created in 2012. The anti-Balaka, a collection of 'self-defence' armed groups emerged in 2013. Since 2015 there has been a proliferation of armed groups in CAR as a result of divisions within the ex-Seleka and the anti-Balaka, mainly along ethnic lines and regional origins or based on economic interests. See Vircoulon, T., 'Note Institut Français de Relations Internationales, Écosystème des groupes armés en Centrafrique' [Note French Institute of International Relations, Ecosystem of armed groups in the Central African Republic], Apr. 2020.

Table 7.9. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in the Central African Republic, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	1 223	1 144	191	443	1 250	624	280	322
Explosions/remote violence	4	105	12	1	10	2	3	0
Protests, riots and strategic developments	122	105	56	8	14	25	4	5
Violence against civilians	1 210	2 265	266	287	555	520	286	101
Total	**2 559**	**3 619**	**525**	**739**	**1 829**	**1 171**	**573**	**428**

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 3 Mar. 2021.

of Bria that killed over 50 people.[19] While the security situation remained volatile throughout 2020 due to continued threats posed primarily by armed groups against civilians, humanitarian workers, government forces and UN peacekeepers, conflict-related fatalities fell for the third consecutive year (see table 7.9). The political situation also remained fragile, dominated by the preparations for the presidential and legislative elections in December 2020. The security situation deteriorated at the end of the year ahead of those elections.

Over half the population (2.8 million people) required humanitarian assistance and protection at the end of 2020, and approximately 2.3 million people suffered from acute food insecurity.[20] One in four of the population of the country was displaced, either within or outside CAR.[21]

The peace process and the response to the United Nations call for a global ceasefire

Implementation of the Political Agreement stalled in 2020 due to the elections and security context, and there were multiple setbacks in disarmament and demobilization, and in training and operationalization of the mixed security units.[22] The government, with the support of MINUSCA, did have some success with dialogue and reconciliation efforts at the local level.[23] In November 2020 the mandate of MINUSCA was extended for a further 12 months until 15 November 2021.[24] Two small new multilateral peace operations also started in 2020: the African Union Military Observers Mission to the CAR, which is mandated to help monitor the implementation

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[19] '50 killed in militia clashes in Central African Republic town', TRT World, 28 Jan. 2020.

[20] United Nations, Security Council, 'Central African Republic', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2021/146, 16 Feb. 2021, p. 6.

[21] UN OCHA (note 1), p. 150.

[22] United Nations, Security Council, 'Central African Republic', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/545, 16 June 2020, p. 15; and United Nations, S/2021/146 (note 20), p. 4.

[23] United Nations, S/2021/146 (note 20), p. 4.

[24] UN Security Council Resolution 2552, 12 Nov. 2020.

of the Political Agreement and specifically the establishment of mixed security units, and the European Union (EU) Advisory Mission in the CAR, which is mandated to support security sector reform in the country (and will complement the military EU Training Mission in CAR).[25]

On 25 March, two days after the UN secretary-general's Covid-19-related global ceasefire call, the UN secretary-generals' special representative for CAR and head of MINUSCA, Mankeur Ndiaye, called for a national ceasefire in the country. However, although the FPRC, the Democratic Front of the Central African People (Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain) and the Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation, known as 3R) armed groups publicly declared their support, this did not translate into adherence on the ground.[26]

In the north-east, violent clashes between rival factions of the FPRC continued; they exacerbated communal tensions in the region and led to mass population displacement. In the north-west, the 3R armed group continued to expand and challenge government forces and MINUSCA. On 15 June MINUSCA launched a military operation to reduce the threat posed by 3R and to encourage the group's compliance with the Political Agreement.[27]

In early December, after CAR's Constitutional Court rejected the candidacy of former president François Bozizé—still influential among anti-Balaka militia groups and the Gbaya community (the country's largest ethnic group)—some armed groups escalated attempts to obstruct the 27 December election.[28] On 17 December several armed groups announced the formation of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), which Bozizé publicly endorsed on 27 December. The electoral campaigning in December was disrupted by a surge in violence by CPC-affiliated armed groups.[29] At the request of the CAR Government, Russia and Rwanda deployed additional forces to support MINUSCA and government forces.[30] The temporary deployment of 300 Russian military instructors complemented existing Russian private military contractors that have been present in CAR since at least 2018.[31] The CAR and Rwandan governments accused Bozizé of backing the rebels and

[25] See chapter 2, section II, in this volume; and Hickendorff, A. and Acko, I., 'The European Union Training Mission in the Central African Republic: An assessment', SIPRI Background Paper, Feb. 2021.

[26] United Nations, S/2020/545 (note 22), p. 3.

[27] United Nations, Security Council, 'Central African Republic', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/994, 12 Oct. 2020, p. 5.

[28] 'Ex-president Bozizé and current president Touadéra seem set on a collision course while elections are in the balance', *Africa Confidential*, vol. 61, no. 15 (23 July 2020).

[29] United Nations, S/2021/146 (note 20), pp. 1–2.

[30] 'Rwanda bolsters force in CAR as rebels "held back"', BBC News, 21 Dec. 2020.

[31] Schreck, C., 'What are Russian military contractors doing in the Central African Republic?', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1 Aug. 2018; and 'Russia sends 300 military instructors to Central African Republic', BBC News, 22 Dec. 2020.

plotting a coup, which he denied—although Ndiaye subsequently confirmed collusion between Bozizé and the CPC.[32]

Only 35 per cent of the 1.85 million registered voters took part in the elections; due to insecurity the vote was not held in roughly 40 per cent of the 140 National Assembly seats. Provisional results for the presidential election confirmed Touadéra as the winner with over 53 per cent of the vote.[33] However, with CPC armed groups likely to continue to carry out attacks in 2021 the political and security situation remained fragile.

Chad

Chad has been one of the most important regional states in the fight against jihadist groups in the Central Sahel and Lake Chad regions (see section II). In 2020 the country was affected by growing insecurity within its borders and within neighbouring countries. In addition to attacks by Boko Haram and Chadian armed groups, intercommunal violence also occurred—particularly in eastern Chad.[34] These conflicts flowed partly from farmer–herder competition, but also from deeper identity-based rivalries over land and political power. There were over 738 conflict-related fatalities in 2020, which is a 30 per cent increase from 2019.[35] Chad is one of the largest refugee host countries in Africa with more than 915 000 refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and Chadian returnees. There were nearly 480 000 refugees in Chad, while food insecurity affected more than 2.3 million people in 2020.[36]

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

The DRC—the second-largest country in Africa with a population of about 80 million—is suffering from one of the longest and most complex crises in the world, where armed conflict, epidemics and natural disasters combine with high levels of poverty and weak public infrastructure and services. Competition over land and mineral resources is among the main drivers of

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[32] United Nations, Security Council, 'Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, Mankeur Ndiaye', S/2021/76, annex I, 27 Jan. 2021, p. 2.

[33] 'Central African Republic: Respect final results of the election, UN and partners urge', UN News, 5 Jan. 2021; and International Crisis Group, 'Picking up the pieces in the Central African Republic', *Watch List 2021* (International Crisis Group: Brussels, Jan. 2021).

[34] International Crisis Group, *Avoiding the Resurgence of Intercommunal Violence in Eastern Chad*, Africa Report no. 284 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 30 Dec. 2019).

[35] ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 22 Feb. 2021.

[36] 'Chad: New law safeguards 480,000 refugees', UN News, 24 Dec. 2020; and UN OCHA, 'More than 2.3 million people in food insecurity, including 450,000 in severe food insecurity in Chad', 24 Apr. 2020.

the conflict.[37] Since the end of the 1998–2003 Second Congo War, conflict has persisted in the eastern DRC, where there are still dozens of armed groups and a major UN peacekeeping force, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), has been deployed since 1999.[38] Since 2013 the governments of the DRC and neighbouring states have attempted to collectively address the threat of armed groups through a Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.[39]

While most of the DRC's 26 provinces were stable in 2020, several of the eastern provinces (particularly Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu) faced continued instability from external and Congolese armed groups engaged in multiple armed conflicts with the government, as well as a resurgence of intercommunal violence. These armed groups vary in capacity, size and objectives. Some of the most violent clashes were in North Kivu between government forces and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist armed group that originated in Uganda, with civilians often enduring ADF reprisals.[40] Also in North Kivu there was intense fighting between factions of the Nduma Defence of Congo-Renovated (Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové), which split in July 2020. The Nduma Defence of Congo's former leader, Ntabo Ntaberi 'Sheka', was sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court on 23 November 2020 for war crimes and crimes against humanity.[41] In the north-eastern Ituri province, the Cooperative for Development of Congo (CODECO), a loose association of ethnic Lendu militias, stepped up attacks, especially in the first half of 2020, mainly targeting the Hema community, in a conflict over natural resources and land. On 25 March 2020 CODECO's leader Justin Ngudjolo was killed by government forces, leading to a power struggle and splits within the group.[42] Although CODECO agreed and announced a unilateral ceasefire in August 2020, several factions within the group continued fighting.[43]

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[37] For detailed analysis of the armed conflict see the various reports of the group of experts on the DRC, e.g. United Nations, Security Council, 'Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo', S/2020/482, 2 June 2020.

[38] The UN Organization Mission in the DRC was deployed in 1999 and renamed MONUSCO in 2010. For details of the armed groups see Africa Intelligence, 'Felix Tshisekedi a hostage to armed groups', *West Africa Newsletter*, no. 798 (10 Apr. 2019); and United Nations, S/2020/482 (note 37), pp. 5–12.

[39] 'Peace, security and cooperation framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region', 24 Feb. 2013.

[40] 'DRC: Attacks by ADF armed group may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes', UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 7 July 2020; and Burke, J., 'Militia raids kill dozens as DRC plunges deeper into instability', *The Guardian*, 31 Jan. 2020.

[41] 'Democratic Republic of the Congo', Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 15 Mar. 2021.

[42] International Crisis Group, *DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri*, Africa Report no. 292 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 15 July 2020).

[43] AFP, 'Militias in Eastern DRC agrees to stop attacks', East African, 24 Aug. 2020; and 'Security Council report, Monthly forecast', Security Council Report, Dec. 2020, p. 9.

Table 7.10. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2013–20

Event type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Battles	1 093	603	748	898	1 364	1 787	1 978	3 254
Explosions/remote violence	77	10	13	4	108	9	15	1
Protests, riots and strategic developments	16	38	65	145	79	63	129	193
Violence against civilians	789	579	936	693	1 659	1 330	1 721	2 319
Total	**1 975**	**1 230**	**1 762**	**1 740**	**3 210**	**3 189**	**3 843**	**5 767**

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 5 Mar. 2021.

The overall scale of violence in the eastern DRC increased in 2020, as reflected in the conflict-related fatalities for the year being the highest recorded in the 2013–20 period (see table 7.10). Serious and widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continued to take place in the eastern DRC, including grave violations committed against children.[44]

As part of an ongoing acute, complex and multilayered humanitarian crisis, 21.8 million people faced acute food insecurity in 2020 (the highest absolute number ever recorded globally), while an estimated 5.2 million people remained internally displaced—the largest internally displaced person population in Africa—including 1.7 million people displacements in 2020.[45] Although the 10th outbreak of Ebola virus disease ended in June 2020 (having killed approximately 2300 people since 2018), a new outbreak began on 1 June 2020 and ended on 18 November 2020, causing a further 55 deaths.[46] The DRC also experienced growing numbers of Covid-19 cases and deaths (308 reported as of the end of October 2020), while measles and cholera remained serious concerns, causing 415 and 184 reported deaths, respectively, in 2020.[47] Attacks on health and humanitarian workers continued to impede efforts to deliver aid, especially in conflict zones in the east of the country.[48]

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[44] Bujakera, S., 'UN warns of possible war crimes in northeastern Congo', Reuters, 27 May 2020; United Nations, S/2020/482 (note 37), pp. 24–30; and United Nations, Security Council, 'Children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/1030, 19 Oct. 2020.

[45] United Nations, Security Council, 'United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/1150, 30 Nov. 2020, pp. 6–7; and UN OCHA (note 1), p. 156.

[46] 'New Ebola outbreak detected in northwest Democratic Republic of the Congo; WHO surge team supporting the response', World Health Organization, 1 June 2020; and '11th Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared over', World Health Organization, 18 Nov. 2020.

[47] UN OCHA (note 1), pp. 156–57.

[48] 'Security in the DRC and Yemen: Military conflict, disease outbreak and containment', Oxford Research Group, Nov. 2020.