

DR Congo President’s “Revolution of Modernity” is starting to look like “business as usual”

As President Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo starts a second term in office, Marta Iniguez de Heredia and Romuald Adili Amani analyse what course his presidency will take over the next five years.

Several important developments have taken place in DR Congo in the last few weeks: the appointment of Augustin Matata Ponyo as Prime Minister, and subsequently, the government; the final nominations for National Assembly posts and the decision to restructure the army and military operations in the East.



Despite the dispute over election results and a recent report, released by the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO), about human rights violations committed during the election campaign, these developments only point to a coalescing of political power around President Joseph Kabila. His “Revolution of Modernity” can be seen as an increasingly centralised and technocratic way of governing, with little room for political dialogue. However, despite the hype, the opposition, international donors and even MONUSCO arguably want to draw a thick veil over the electoral results. Simultaneously, faced with the first significant military crisis since the elections, Mr Kabila’s response has illustrated that his strategy is one of balancing different factions within the army, and not stopping the conflict. Continuity, rather than change, let alone “revolution”, seems a more plausible way of seeing the current political, social and economic environment in the DRC.

A Technocrat à la tête: Augustin Matata Ponyo

For some, the nomination of Augustin Matata Ponyo as Prime Minister is viewed as Mr Kabila’s attempt to strengthen his position in government, after the highly-competitive polls of November 2011. At one point, there were fears that certain donors would withdraw their aid as a result of the ongoing dispute over the elections. Therefore it was crucial that the new Prime Minister have a relatively low political profile and spotless reputation. Matata Ponyo, who as finance minister presided over the cancellation of DR Congo’s debt, is considered more a technocrat than a politician and, hence, fit the required profile. Additionally, Matata Ponyo, a strong ally of Mr Kabila, is seen as a replacement for Augustin Katumba Mwanke, formerly the President’s closest adviser and a centrepiece in mining contracts, who died recently in a plane crash.

However, Matata Ponyo’s nomination, and his formation of a government, indicate that Mr Kabila has not followed the path of dialogue and inclusion demanded by the opposition, the UN and a

number of diplomatic missions to redress the post-election crisis. Matata Ponyo's priority does not appear to be to reach out to the opposition, who are portrayed as disorganised and weak, but to re-establish the confidence of international donors and the popularity of Mr Kabila.

Final Composition of the Government and the National Assembly

Matata Ponyo has gone on to form a government in his own image. The majority of the new cabinet is made up of little-known individuals on the Congolese political scene. This could be seen as an attempt to avoid the problems that former Prime Minister Adolphe Muzito encountered in managing a team of ministers made up of "heavyweights". Additionally, it marks a fresh start to Mr Kabila's own *Revolution*, while increasing his own prominence.

Above all, it is a government of supporters of Mr Kabila, made up of family members and close allies. This can be observed in the political and provincial composition of the government. First of all, the President's satellite parties have been rewarded with cabinet posts (his own PPRD with eight ministries, MSR with three, PALU with two, and others like ADH and PDC with one each). Secondly, the provincial distribution of the government reflects the provinces which supported President Kabila. Out of the 28 post-holders, nine are from Katanga, four from Orientale Province and three from South Kivu and Kasai Oriental respectively. Thus, the distribution of government posts serves not just as a reward to allies and supporters but also as a punishment for the opposition.

There was further evidence of the exclusion of the opposition from influential posts when the leadership of the National Assembly was decided. Although National Assembly deputies are directly involved in the selection process, nominees Timothée Kombo Nkisi of UDPS and ADR's Tshimanga Bwana, elected second vice-president and deputy reporter respectively, are considered closer allies of the government coalition than the opposition parties they represent. It is also surprising that no MPs from the second largest opposition party, MLC, were selected.

The opposition went as far as interrupting proceedings on the day of the National Assembly nominations. However, the attempt of the opposition to boycott the process of forming a post-election government seems to have lost momentum. This further signals the weakness of the political opposition (which although sometimes overstated has hardly been proved otherwise) as well as the fact that none of the opposition parties have been successful in acquiring popular support.

Reorganisation of the Army and Renewed Fighting in the East

As politicians quarrel in Kinshasa, fighting has intensified between the Congolese army and the rebel forces of Bosco Ntanganda. This follows a series of defections from the army to Ntanganda's troops and the attempt to regain control of certain villages in North Kivu by Ntanganda's troops. Mr Kabila's response to this crisis has been his commitment to prosecute the ICC-indicted Ntanganda on Congolese soil, and to declare the end of Operation Amani Leo (the main government military strategy against armed groups operating in the East).

Mr Kabila says that his intention is to improve the army's effectiveness. However, it could also be seen as an attempt to shift military alliances in the East and undermine Ntanganda's power while also impeding his prosecution by the ICC and its possible domino effect. It is no coincidence that the army is being reorganised at the same time as a new government is being formed and it should not be seen as the sole outcome of the renewed fighting in North Kivu. Rather it should be viewed in a broader context of attempting to strike the right alliances in the government and in the army.

Conclusion

This brief analysis shows that the President is strengthening his position, despite election disputes and the escalation of hostilities in the East. Matata Ponyo's appointment as Prime Minister is evidence that a strategy of boosting Kabila's popularity, through a cabinet of low profile ministers and by distributing power among family and political allies has taken precedence over a dialogue and power sharing with the opposition.

Similarly, the response to the military crisis in the war-torn Eastern provinces illustrates Mr Kabila's own attempt at managing forces and alliances and not at actually solving the crisis. His announcement of his willingness to prosecute Ntanganda could also be seen as impeding the domino effect that the rebel warlord's prosecution in the ICC could have. Kabila's "Revolution of Modernity" may promise increased institutionalisation, investment of capital and greater infrastructure, but these recent developments point to an increasing Kabilisation at the centre of power and a sense of business as usual.

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May 22nd, 2012 | [International Affairs](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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