

## Security Summary: DRC – Kinshasa 23 March, 2007

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## Background



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Jean Pierre Bemba



Pres. Joseph Kabila

Following the successful elections in the DRC last year, Jean Pierre Bemba has manoeuvred in order to ensure his own safety and continued political influence. Achieving an appointment to Senator, which comes with immunity from prosecution, was seen as solidifying his continued presence on the Congolese political stage. He and other opposition leaders, however, had ignored an order to disarm their personal militias, particularly those acting as “bodyguards” in Kinshasa itself, by 15 March 07. In the case of Bemba, this personal bodyguard numbered in the hundreds (some estimate as high as 800) and were housed largely in the grounds of his residence in Gombé. Move by the *Forces Armées de République Democratique de Congo* (FARDC) to disarm Bemba’s militia on the morning of 22 March, 2007, led to fighting in Gombé. Subsequent to this fighting, charges of treason were laid against Bemba, heightening the stakes.

Further information regarding the background to the current fighting in Kinshasa can be found at the Safer Access website in the documents section, at [www.saferaccess.org/documents](http://www.saferaccess.org/documents).

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## Events of 22 March, 2007

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### Timeline

Late Morning – FARDC move forces up Avenue de 24e Novembre towards Bemba's residence.

1119 hrs – First small arm fire in the area of Bemba's residence, followed shortly by RPG fire.

1515-1600 hrs – Some MLC troops move east from Bemba's residence into the city centre along Avenue de Lcol Lukusa and Blvd de 30 Juin.

Mid Afternoon – MLC militiamen fires on UNDP compound in the Losonia Bldg, damaging two vehicles. The UNICEF compound is evacuated.

Evening – Situation quiet in the city, Bemba has taken refuge in the South African Embassy and is requesting talks with the government. The government made public statements refusing.

Some reports received have indicated that FARDC had deployed a T-55 tank in the attack on the compound.



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## Events of 23 March, 2007

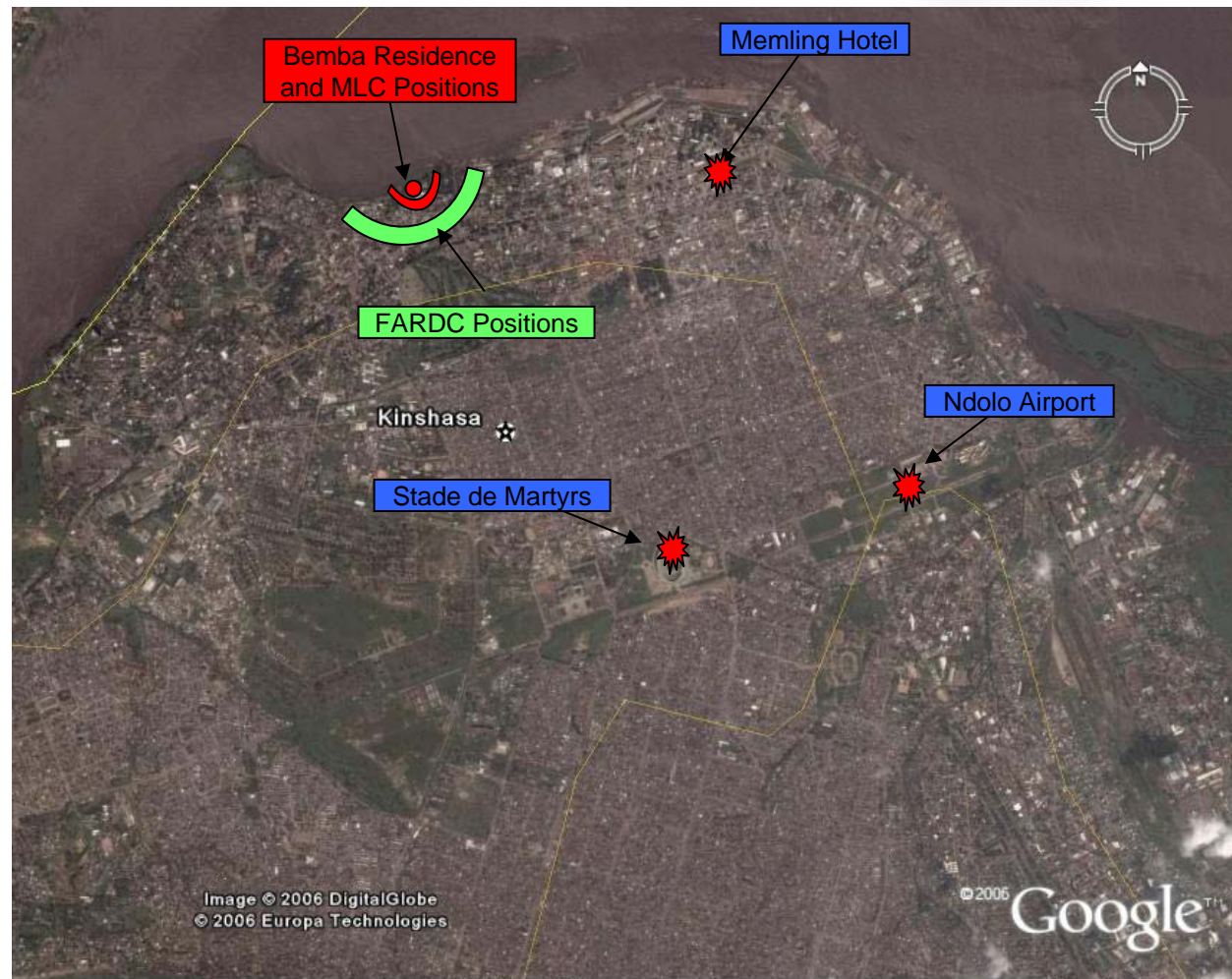
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### Timeline

Approx 0400 hrs – Fighting begins again in the vicinity of Bemba's residence. Small arms, RPG and mortar fire reported.

Early Morning – FARDC reinforces positions surrounding the MLC. MLC fight in an attempt to secure local positions of advantage, including portions of the local beach. This may represent a desire for an extraction by water. Some FARDC soldiers in Gombé are reported to be drunk and there have been reports of looting and the extortion of money from the local population. Fighting also reported in the vicinity of the Memling Hotel.

Afternoon - Heavy fighting reported in the vicinity of the Ndolo airbase (believed to be controlled by the MLC), as well as farther out from the city centre around the Stade de Martyrs and in Matonge precinct. The city centre and Gombé are reported to be quieter. Bemba and other MLC members surrender themselves to the protection of MONUC.



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## Threat to Brazzaville

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The fighting in Kinshasa is very unlikely to spill over into Brazzaville itself, but there have been reports of rounds fired in Kinshasa landing in Brazzaville. Although the width of the river puts Brazzaville outside of the the effective range of most small arms fire, rounds that miss their intended target may continue to travel beyond their effective (aimed) range and land in Brazzaville. Caution should be exercised along the shore of Brazzaville, especially in buildings facing towards Kinshasa. The maximum ranges of some of the weapons being used in the Kinshasa fighting are shown below for reference.

RPG-7



1100 metres

AK-47  
& RPK



3500 metres

DShK



6800 metres

T-55 Tank  
(MainGun)



8200 metres

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## Future Events



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The conflict between Kabila and Bemba is long standing, and this is not the first time that it has resulted in open fighting. The presence of Bemba's troops in Kinshasa has been a long standing issue. Much of the hope that stemmed from the recent election and Bemba's acceptance of the results hinged on the need for the new government to continue to be inclusive and not attempt to completely negate the powers of opposition groups. Given the recent charges of treason laid against Bemba, it seems unlikely that he will be able to continue to exert legitimate influence on the Congolese political scene. This may mean that should he survive the current conflict that he will return to his former role of guerrilla leader (perhaps in exile) and have a destabilizing influence on the country.

The recent fighting also sends a clear signal to other leaders of armed opposition parties, particularly in the East, regarding the means that the central government will use to bring them to heel. Although some militias in the East have disarmed (notably the FNI), their leaders have been reticent to place themselves within the reach of the Central government and have sought assurances of immunity from prosecution. The example of Bemba, who was widely seen as having achieved this, may convince them that gaining immunity or other assurances from the government is not a viable option.

There also remains the possibility of violence or other unrest in Equateur province, where Bemba has traditionally had much support (although it is by no means politically homogenous).

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## Recommendations



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Safer Access continues to advise that agencies with offices in Kinshasa must maintain fully stocked hibernation kits in their homes and offices, and must read local events in order to ensure that their state of readiness for evacuation changes to match the threat.

Agencies with offices currently in Kinshasa whose staff remain in the city should continue to hibernate as long as the building they are in remains safe. Should a hibernation location become untenable due to fire, a decision will have to be made about whether to evacuate to a safer location. It should be understood that this movement itself is not without attendant risks. If possible, this movement should be made in coordination with MONUC forces.

Although there is obviously a threat due to the fighting between FARDC and MLC, once this fighting has ended there will remain a threat of extortion, demonstrations and possible violence as long as there is a heavy troop presence in the streets. Agencies should continue hibernating until this troop presence has stabilized.

Many areas of the city, particularly in Gombé and the city centre remain possible flashpoints for violence. Government buildings, buildings related to political parties, media outlets and others should be avoided. UN facilities remain as a potential flashpoint, for a number of reasons, but also due to the fact that Bemba has come under their protection.

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## About Safer Access



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**Safer Access is a network of humanitarian safety expertise formed to better enable the provision of humanitarian and development aid. It is our overall objective to improve the capacity of relief and development organisations working in insecure and complicated environments to deliver life-saving assistance to those most in need.**

**Our work is first and foremost beneficiary-focused, innovative and aims to have an impact across the aid sector. Our belief is that the best way to ensure continued access to beneficiaries in even the most complex and fluid situations is for organizations to institutionalize effective security planning and procedures from the outset. Our intent is always to teach and facilitate best practises – practices which both safeguard staff security while also enabling access to those most in need. Our passion is to help enable safer and more effective operating practices, from those employed in management to those used by the teams in the field**

**We understand and are experienced in the challenges that aid workers, both national and international, face everyday. Safer Access is a platform for the collection and distribution of expertise and information to those that need it most. To that end, we are committed to the free and open sharing of critical information – including analysis and best practices – amongst humanitarian and development organisations so as to enable them to better manage their operating risks.**

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**Should you have any questions regarding this report, or about what Safer Access can do to help you achieve your goals in difficult operating environments, contact us at [enquiries@saferaccess.org](mailto:enquiries@saferaccess.org) or visit our website at [www.saferaccess.org](http://www.saferaccess.org).**

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