Soldiers without an army? Patronage networks and cohesion in the armed forces of the DR Congo

Judith Verweijen

Abstract

This article analyzes the effects of patronage networks on cohesion in the armed forces of the DRC (FARDC). It shows that while patronage networks provide support to individual military personnel, they undermine both peer and commander-subordinate bonding. They promote unequal service conditions and statuses, and link these to extra-unit and extra-military forms of social identification, which are further reinforced by soldiers' living and generating revenue among civilians. Furthermore, they impair meritocracy, and frustrate the extent to which commanders live up to their subordinates' expectations. As they fuel internal conflicts, often around revenue generation, and foster bad service conditions and distrust towards the political and military leadership, patronage networks also undermine institutional cohesion. The article concludes that cohesion formation in the FARDC follows different patterns than in well-institutionalized and well-resourced militaries. Given that cohesion impacts combat performance and norm enforcement, these findings are relevant for defense reform efforts and military cooperation.

Key words: Armed forces; military cohesion; patronage; Democratic Republic of the Congo

Introduction

The burgeoning military sociological literature on cohesion, or bonding "between service members and their group, organization, and service institution" (Siebold, 2007: 288), has been criticized for being predominantly grounded in research on Western armed forces with high degrees of legal-bureaucratic institutionalization (Käihkö, 2016). Its premises may therefore not be fully applicable to armed forces in other contexts and with other characteristics. In particular, it may miss out on specific factors or processes shaping cohesion in these militaries. One such factor is patronage networks. Whereas patron-client relations can be found in most armed forces, they are much more salient in certain militaries than in others (Howe, 2001). A good example of a force where patronage networks shape military functioning to a considerable extent is the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC, Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo). In the FARDC, formal command chains intersect and overlap with patronage networks that tie military personnel via personal bonds of loyalty to particular patrons-cum-officers, who may or may not be their official superiors (Verweijen, 2013). While it is likely that such ties affect

relationships between military personnel, there is surprisingly little research on how they impact cohesion.

This article analyzes how patronage networks affect cohesion within the FARDC, looking at both the micro level of primary (sections, platoons) and secondary (battalions, brigades) groups, and the meso level of the armed forces as a whole. It also explores macro-level influences on cohesion, analyzing the wider socio-political order of which the armed forces form part. It finds that while patronage networks provide crucial support to individual military personnel, they tend to undermine bonding between military personnel of equal rank as well as between subordinates and their superiors. By fostering differential treatment and service conditions, patronage ties accentuate differences between same-rank military personnel, in particular when these ties connect to extra-unit forms of social identification (e.g. ethno-regional or ex-rebel backgrounds). Patronage networks also impair meritocratic appointments, and induce commanders to treat their troops unequally. Furthermore, they promote asymmetries in wealth between commanders and their subordinates, which the latter experience as disproportionate. At the institutional level too, patronage networks negatively affect cohesion. They reinforce parallel command chains, divided loyalties and competition, notably around access to positions and resources. Additionally, by promoting bad service conditions and antagonism towards the top political and military leadership, seen to be implicated in unscrupulous revenue generation due to patronage-related pressures, they also undermine soldiers' bonding with the military organization at large. Identification with the FARDC is also lessened by patronage networks' crosscutting character, implying they encompass both soldiers and civilians, and by the Congolese army's limited efforts to socialize its members into professional discourses and identities.

Grasping the effects of patronage on military cohesion is important for both theoretical and policy reasons. First, studying patronage networks deepens an understanding of the processes and factors commonly identified to impact cohesion in military settings, including their relative causal weight. It may also provide new insights into how other conditions that often combine with low levels of legal-bureaucratic institutionalization affect military cohesion, such as armed forces' involvement in economic activities; their not approximating a "total institution" (Goffman, 1961;, and processes of rebel-military integration. Second, understanding how patronage affects cohesion is crucial for guiding and assessing processes of defense reform, and military collaboration more widely. Cohesion shapes both military performance, and, by impacting norm enforcement, soldiers' behavior towards civilians, including their propensity to engage in abuses (Siebold, 2007). A better insight into these dimensions of military functioning may render reform efforts more effective, and may facilitate military-to-military cooperation, for instance, within the framework of peacekeeping missions.

The article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the concept of military cohesion, which is followed by a brief explanation of the employed methods. Subsequently, a snapshot is provided of the history of the FARDC. The next parts explore the effects of patronage networks on institutional cohesion, bonding between same-rank military, and commander-subordinate bonding, respectively. The concluding section offers reflections on the theoretical and policy relevance of the findings.

Cohesion in military settings

Within military sociology, views differ on how cohesion should be defined, operationalized and measured (Bartone et. al., 2002; King, 2013; Siebold, 1999; 2011). Attempting to synthesize decades of research into a broad general framework, Siebold (2007) proposes a "standard model of military group cohesion".[1] For Siebold, cohesion relates to a relationship structure with both affective and instrumental dimensions that establishes mutual trust and loyalty. This relationship structure impacts military conduct and motivation by facilitating collective action and promoting adhesion to group norms. It is (re)produced by both formal and informal social interaction, which may be either interpersonal or collective. Furthermore, it encompasses both task and social cohesion, seen to partly overlap (Siebold, 2011). Social cohesion relates to whether group members like each other, hence refers to the nature and quality of emotional bonds of friendship, as based on personal characteristics. Task cohesion, in turn, refers to commitment to a common mission that requires collective action to accomplish (MacCoun, 1993).

In Siebold's model, cohesion in military organizations consists of four interrelated components. The first two constitute primary group cohesion and consist of *horizontal cohesion* (ties between soldiers at approximately the same level of the hierarchy); and *vertical cohesion* (relations between subordinates and their immediate commanders). The second two constitute *secondary group cohesion* and relate to *organizational cohesion* (the relations between military personnel and their overarching unit of organization, like a battalion or brigade), and *institutional cohesion* (the relations between soldiers and their overall organizational branch or the armed forces in general).

Military sociologists and other scholars have identified a wide array of factors that shape cohesion, although views on the most relevant dimensions and causal mechanisms diverge (Bartone et al., 2002; Siebold, 1999). To facilitate the analysis of how these factors shape cohesion in the FARDC, and are influenced by patronage networks, they were regrouped into four clusters (for a further elaboration, see Verweijen, 2015).

The first cluster of factors, which shapes both peer and commander-subordinate bonding, is named after Shils and Janowitz' (1948) notion of "community of experience". It relates to the length and characteristics of troops' living, training and operating together, hence predominantly to social interaction. Contrary to Shils and Janowitz' interpretation (1948), it excludes "homogeneity of origins", based on the consideration that while social identification is shaped by social interaction, it cannot be equated by it. "Community of experience" encompasses the following factors: 1) exposure to common threats and shared hardships, including in the context of combat operations (Henderson, 1985; Wesbrook, 1980); 2) (the success of) carrying out common tasks, including during training (Cockerham, 1978; MacCoun et al., 2006); 3) extensive training in the same unit composition as during combat, which allows for developing shared systems of communication and routines (King, 2006); and 4) the extent to which troops need each other for survival and the provision of basic needs, like healthcare, food and clothing. As argued by Shils and Janowitz (1948), where soldiers depend on civilians for satisfying such needs, they are less oriented towards the primary combat unit.

The second cluster of factors, equally shaping both peer and commander-subordinate bonding, was labeled "commonality of identification and beliefs". It draws inspiration from Henderson's (1985: 26) notion of "commonality of values", which refers to commonalities in ethnic background, nationality, gender, and socio-economic standing (hence overlaps with Shils and Janowitz' "homogeneity of origins"). The terms "identification" and "beliefs" were found to be more analytically accurate than "values", in part as "beliefs" is seen herein as a wider category that encompasses worldviews and ideologies, which also shape cohesion (Moskos, 1970). In recent years, scholars have pointed to the diminishing relevance of pre-existing identities (such as masculinity, ethnicity, nationality) in the context of the increasing professionalization of the armed forces and a shift in emphasis towards task cohesion (King, 2013). These findings indicate that the relative importance of common forms of identification in shaping cohesion is contextual. For that reason, "commonality of identification and beliefs" is considered herein to relate to the "(perceived) salience" of homogeneity in terms of (ethno-regional) origins, language, worldviews, and political-ideological and other beliefs. "(Perceived) salience" indicates the extent to which similarities and differences are seen to "make a difference" within formal and informal social interaction. It is partly shaped by the relative strength and significations of pre-existing (i.e. before entering the current military group) civilian and military forms of identification. Certainly, the (perceived) salience of identities is also an outcome, and not only a driver of cohesion formation. Yet, it is plausible to assume that where soldiers experience certain shared traits to either bind or divide them, these traits have also contributed to that outcome.

In addition to "community of experience" and "commonality of identification and beliefs" bonding between troops and their superiors in both primary and secondary groups is also shaped by additional elements, here regrouped in the third cluster of factors. Since in secondary groups in the FARDC, this cluster has preponderant influence on setting "the unit culture and climate under which service members live and operate "(Siebold, 2007: 290), it is considered to importantly shape organizational cohesion herein. Its first component is the extent to which commanders' appointment is seen as legitimate, which is in part shaped by respect for meritocratic criteria (Wesbrook, 1980). The second component takes inspiration from Shils and Janowitz's (1948) approach to identify characteristics of commanders that subordinates find desirable. They observe that in the Wehrmacht, subordinates bonded sooner with commanders when the latter were trusted, competent and cared for the wellbeing of their troops, but also disciplined them when needed, thus displaying a combination of fatherly benevolence and sternness (Shils & Janowitz, 1948). Taking into account that soldiers of armed forces situated in different socio-cultural and military settings might value different command characteristics, it was decided not to depart from a preset range, but to first identify what FARDC soldiers perceive as desirable traits among commanders. Subsequently, it was explored to what extent commanders were experienced to live up to these expectations.

The fourth cluster of factors relates to institutional cohesion. As described above, Siebold (2007) interprets institutional cohesion as relating to soldiers' bonding with the military at large. Yet the term has also been used to refer to the coherence of the military organization as a whole (e.g. Mora, 2002). This second component is also taken into consideration herein,

and is seen to be shaped by 1) the extent to which the military's subdivisions and units collaborate rather than compete; and 2) the extent to which lower levels of the organization are directed by the official hierarchy. The first component, relating to soldiers' bonding, in turn, is influenced by five different factors. These include 1) service conditions, like training opportunities and arrangements for career progression, and 2) perceptions of the legitimacy of the top political and military leadership (Siebold, 2007; Wesbrook, 1980). Both these factors help give a sense of purpose and meaningfulness to soldiers, thus enhancing their commitment to the military organization, its mission and its norms (Siebold, 2007). Such commitment may also be reinforced by: 3) worldviews and ideologies, provided that those of soldiers and the military organization align (Wesbrook,1980; Moskos, 1970); and 4) active investment by the military organization in socializing their members into professional discourses and norms, and in promoting identification with and allegiance to the organization (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978). In order for soldiers to remain committed to the military organization, a final factor of importance is 5) that society demonstrates recognition of their service, for instance in the form of symbolic rewards (Henderson, 1985; Wesbrook, 1980).

In the following, it is explored how the cohesion-fostering factors regrouped in these four different clusters are impacted by patronage networks. Hence, the latter is not considered an additional factor herein, but a phenomenon that influences the different factors shaping cohesion. But before turning to this analysis, it is important to clarify what is meant by patronage networks. The latter are understood as social networks cemented by patron-client ties, which are asymmetric but reciprocal relations that have two overlapping dimensions: The first is a dyadic, personal relationship, which involves the granting of favors and assistance by a patron to an individual client in exchange for support and loyalty. The second dimension is a hierarchical relationship between a patron and a network of clients, and involves the exchange of collective goods, including symbolic ones such as "representation", for (political) support and loyalty (Erdmann & Engel, 2006). However, as pointed out by Utas (2012), patronage networks also contain more horizontal relations and social ties formed on other grounds, like ethnic, professional, religious or geographical background. We should therefore conceptualize such networks as complex, multidimensional webs of social relations. Moreover, within political orders qualified as "neopatrimonial", patronage networks infuse and intersect and overlap with formal bureacratic hierarchies (Bayart, 2006; Erdmann & Engel, 2006). In many cases, this applies to hierarchies in both political and military institutions, in part as there is a mutual influence between the two (Ikpe, 2000). For instance, rulers' efforts to maintain control over the armed forces often follows patterns of co-optation and coercion that are heavily shaped by patronage logics, which in turn reinforces the salience of patronage within the military institution (Howe, 2001). This illustrates how military cohesion is not only shaped by factors internal to the armed forces, but also by the features of the macro-political order of which they form part.

Note on methods

The data presented in this article were gathered during 14 months of ethnographic field research conducted between 2010 and 2012 in the eastern Congo's Kivu provinces for a

doctoral thesis on civilian-military interaction. Semi-structured interviews were held with at least 400 civilians and over 150 military personnel, 35 of whom were key informants that were also contacted via informal conversations. A part of this research focused on military cohesion, considered important for understanding the FARDC's behavior towards civilians. The choice to study the FARDC was informed by its egregious human rights record, and reports that its behavior towards civilians differed considerably per brigade/regiment and per deployment context, allowing for exploring the factors shaping military behavior through a comparative case study design. Furthermore, the author had lived and worked in the Congo prior to starting doctoral research, which was deemed to facilitate data collection and interpretation. The majority of the contacted military personnel belonged to the 14 different brigades or regiments that were selected as cases. In relation to each unit, a range of conditions shaping cohesion was studied, such as its trajectory in terms of genesis, training and combat deployment; its overall composition (military and ethno-regional background of personnel), and personnel's living patterns and revenue-generation practices. The selection of interviewees from the FARDC occurred partly via snowball sampling, as a degree of trust was required to discuss sensitive questions. Yet continuing efforts were made to balance military from different ranks and from various military, ethno-regional, and linguistic backgrounds. A more detailed description of the used methods and data collection process can be found in Verweijen (2015).

A brief history of a merged military

In 2003, the belligerents of the Second Congo War (1998–2003) adopted a peace accord based on political and military power-sharing. The main warring factions agreed to dismantle their military structures and send their troops and officers into the newly formed Integrated Brigades and integrated command chain. The military merging process was however marred by irregularities, as the different factions tried to retain a maximum of influence. They often came to constitute patronage networks within the FARDC, although some gradually dissolved or transformed (Verweijen, 2014). Another complicating factor was the ex-belligerents' widely diverging military backgrounds, encompassing, inter alia: government troops with decades of military education and training, including former members of the Forces Armées Zaïroises (FAZ), the army under President Mobutu Sese Seko (1965–1996); military from rebel armies with thousands of troops whose organization resembled that of government forces and who had received considerable training from instructors of foreign or former militaries; and troops from small-scale militias known as "Mai-Mai" with very local spheres of influence, who had mostly learned by doing (Verweijen, 2014; 2015).

The military integration process unleashed a scramble for ranks and positions. Within this competition, the bigger and more powerful rebel forces, notably the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), as well as government networks close to President Kabila, generally prevailed. Both appointments and the distribution of ranks followed political considerations rather than criteria of military experience and competence (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2010; Verweijen, 2014). Consequently, ex-rebel officers with limited experience and low levels of military and sometimes general education were awarded high ranks and command positions. The same applied to rebels who integrated after the initial

merger that created the FARDC, which was a regular occurrence up to 2013. These periodic influxes of rebels further reinforced non-meritocratic appointments, and the salience of patronage networks formed along ex-rebel lines (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013a).

Deficient meritocracy generates important frictions in the FARDC's day-to-day functioning, as experienced and well-educated military personnel are often placed under the command of younger officers with limited knowledge of military matters, some of whom are even illiterate (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2010). A Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) explained:

> I am very dissatisfied. I have had a good education, because I went to the EFO [basic officer education school during the Mobutu era], I know the *Règlement militaire* (military code of conduct) but my superiors have not had any education. They don't know anything, absolutely nothing. Even if I greet them, I feel a pain somewhere in my heart.

Another officer, similarly complaining about his superiors, said: "We call them *les profanes* (the uninitiated), since they haven't had military education. They are simply civilians." He and his colleagues also used the expression *grades brusques, commandement brutal* (abrupt ranks, brutal command) to describe ex-rebel commanders' alleged coarseness.

Aside from military background, the factions that integrated into the FARDC differed in terms of ethno-regional, linguistic and generational belonging. Many ex-government forces are well-educated ex-FAZ officers who speak Lingala and originate from the western part of the Congo. They distinguish themselves from a younger generation of ex-government soldiers consisting of Swahiliphones from the east who were first recruited into the insurgency that overthrew Mobutu in 1997, or entered the military in its wake (Verweijen, 2015). In relation to the ex-rebel forces, the main differences are ethno-regional and linguistic. Most ex-Mai-Mai troops are Swahiliphones from the east who belong to ethnic groups that define themselves as "autochthones" (the first/native inhabitants of the area). "Autochthones" have tense relations with "Rwandophones", who are speakers of Kinyarwanda language (encompassing both Tutsi and Hutu) and equally originate from the east (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013a).

Rwandophones dominated both the RCD and the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP), a rebel group that integrated into the FARDC in 2009. Due to their political and military weight, both these groups, which remained intact as patronage networks in the FARDC, were privileged in the distribution of ranks and positions. When the CNDP joined the FARDC, the Integrated Brigades were broken up, and replaced by brigades deployed under a new operational command created for the Kivu provinces, from 2010 onwards called "Amani Leo". The ex-CNDP had preponderant influence over the Amani Leo command, maintaining parallel systems of command, intelligence, logistics and armament (UNSC, 2010). An effort to reduce their influence in 2011 by breaking up the operational brigades and creating regiments largely failed. It was only in 2012, when a part of the ex-CNDP deserted and launched a new rebellion, that this network's influence in the FARDC waned (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013a).

While differences in treatment often result predominantly from asymmetries in political weight, FARDC personnel tend to ascribe them primarily to identity, understood in an essentialized manner. For instance, many former Mai-Mai and ex-government troops attribute their alleged marginalization in the FARDC to the command chain being "dominated" by Rwandophones (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013a). In the words of an NCO: "The Banyamulenge [a Rwandophone Tutsi group] officers always want to dominate the Bantu [considered autochthones]. They impose themselves, they always want to be the chief. This is why there are conflicts here in the east." Rwandophones, in turn, in particular Tutsi military personnel, also feel discriminated against in the military. A former FARDC company commander testified:

> When you get into trouble with your subordinates, it suddenly matters that you are a Tutsi. I was closely monitoring my soldiers. They were engaging in all sorts of illicit business like extortion and cheating, putting up barriers and producing alcohol (…) One evening I called them to explain they should change their behavior but they got angry. The next days they were whispering behind my back. Then one evening three of them came up to me saying: 'if you do not tone down, you Tutsi, we will shoot you'. How can I serve in such a military?

In sum, rebel-military integration reinforced the importance of patronage networks within the FARDC. The effects on cohesion were fourfold: first, being linked to power asymmetries, ex-rebel patronage networks created differences in treatment and service conditions, therefore affecting "community of experience"; second, this overlap with power asymmetries rendered the differences in identification that marked ex-rebel networks more salient, thus impacting "commonality of identification and beliefs"; third, rebel-military integration undermined the perceived legitimacy of the appointment of commanders of both primary and secondary groups; and fourth, by fostering power competition and parallel command chains, as well as undermining trust in the military top leadership, it weakened institutional cohesion (Verweijen, 2015).

Effects on institutional cohesion: conflicts, parallelisms and bad soldiering

Rebel-military integration is not the only factor contributing to limited institutional cohesion in the FARDC. In fact, the most important patronage network in the FARDC is not an ex-rebel force but emanates from the presidential military office, the *maison militaire*. This office controls much of the core general staff and ministry of defense functions, including procurement, logistics, military intelligence, the presidential guard and appointments to key positions. It also has "clients" among commanders of the most important brigades or regiments, occasionally giving them orders while bypassing the regular command chain (the general staff in Kinshasa and the commands of the defense zones and military regions) (ICG, 2006).

The *maison militaire* promotes measures that lead to constant re-appointments of command and staff functions, including frequent re-organizations (e.g. the creation of the Amani Leo structures and the regiments). The reasons for this are twofold. First, frequent rotations of office prevent officers from building up an autonomous power position, thus keeping them dependent on, and hence loyal to, the presidential circle. Second, the flux

resulting from constant changes in positions fosters ongoing competition between different patronage networks. This competition keeps the military divided, and therefore prevents it from becoming a threat to the president's power (Verweijen, 2015; cf. Bayart, 2006).

A key stake in this ongoing competition is access to income-generation opportunities. Many top officers in the FARDC are involved in a wide range of economic activities, like import/export trade, natural resources exploitation, or real estate (Verweijen, 2013; UNSC, 2010). Enrichment in the higher echelons encourages revenue generation lower down the command chain, in part as it leads to the embezzlement of funds destined for the rank and file, such as money for healthcare and rations. At the same time, soldiers' wages are very low (around $100 a month, which does not allow for maintaining even a small family), and there are no social services or benefits, like family assistance. Soldiers even have to partly pay for basic items and services themselves, such as transport for rotations and healthcare. Consequently, they solicit such services from civilians, but at much lower tariffs, and sometimes without paying. Due to the scarcity of barracks and tents, FARDC troops also have to arrange their own accommodation, generally staying in rooms and houses rented from civilians. To finance these expenses and maintain a basic standard of living, soldiers engage in revenue generation, both individually (e.g. petty trade) and with their units (e.g. illegal taxation at roadblocks and mining sites). Superiors commonly oblige their subordinates to cede a part of the collectively generated revenues. Each commander, in turn, has to transmit a share of that money to their own patrons higher up in the hierarchy. Not obeying this imperative is potentially costly, as it can lead to being dismissed or transferred to other, less lucrative jobs or areas (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013b; Verweijen, 2013; 2015).

The drive for revenue generation sparks conflicts between patronage networks. Patrons try to influence appointments of both themselves and their clients, striving for command positions and deployment to lucrative areas, like mining sites or border posts. However, they can withdraw their support for such deployment any moment, or be overruled by rivals, causing their clients to lose their position and income. The ever-present possibility of a sudden loss of position prompts military personnel to accumulate the maximum of resources while they can (Verweijen, 2013). Additionally, ongoing power struggles may drive officers to exploit their official position, for instance by manipulating the military justice system.[2] To be shielded against the resulting political and economic insecurity, military personnel are prompted to solicit protection from powerful patrons, who can influence the military leadership and military justice system (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013b; cf. Chabal & Daloz, 1999).

Conflicts and competition between patronage networks do not only undermine institutional cohesion, but also have detrimental effects on operational effectiveness, as they hamper collaboration and information-sharing. Moreover, the preoccupation with revenue generation diverts both attention and resources from military duties (UNSC, 2010). Additionally, the urge to promote factional influence and business interests often induces collusion with armed groups, leading for instance to information leaks and the conclusion of informal "non-aggression pacts" (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013a; UNSC, 2010). Enrichment by the higher echelons and superiors' collusion with enemy forces, in

combination with poor service conditions, also undermine soldiers' combat motivation. Many soldiers hesitate risking their lives for an institution that neglects them, or for superiors believed to be in cahoots with the enemy (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013a).

These sentiments point to military personnel's weak bonding with the military institution, the second form of institutional cohesion described above. An important cause of this weakness is discrepancies between idealized notions of soldiering and the lived experiences of serving in the FARDC. Congolese soldiers' conceptualizations of "good soldiering" revolve around dignity, morality, order and discipline, including respect for the hierarchy. Another central notion is patriotism, reflected in soldiers' understanding of their mandate as "defending the country's territorial integrity and protecting the population and their goods" (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008; Verweijen, 2015). These various ideals are to be realized through education, training and good living and service conditions. This idealized image of soldiering, however, is almost diametrically opposed to soldiers' lived realities (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008). In everyday life, FARDC personnel experience to belong to the poorest segments of society, to operate in disorganization and with variable discipline, to have limited access to training and education and few prospects of social mobility, and to serve in an organization where parochial interests rather than self-sacrifice for the fatherland dominate (Verweijen, 2015).

The discrepancies between soldiering as it is and soldiering as it should be cause FARDC personnel from all backgrounds to feel disappointed, disillusioned, neglected, and disrespected by the military organization (see also Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008). As a popular expression in the FARDC goes: *Nous avons des militaires, mais pas d'armée* (we have soldiers but no military). A substantial part of the FARDC personnel interviewed indicated they would rather leave military service, provided they had the means and possibility to find alternative sources of income – which most said they had not. In the absence of pensions (rules for which exist on paper, but are not implemented), the difficulty to find alternative income also keeps those ripe for retirement in active service. A 60-year-old ex-FAZ soldier explained: "The Congolese military is like *corvée* (forced labor) and one is forced to stay there until death." In spite of the alleged difficulties to leave the military, desertion rates appear to be high (Verweijen, 2015). This points not only to low institutional cohesion, but also to low levels of bonding with the primary and secondary group (Griffith, 2002; Henderson, 1985).

Another factor that undermines institutional cohesion in the FARDC is the experienced limited societal appreciation for the FARDC. As a corporal explained:

> Being a soldier is to sacrifice oneself. It is a work of sacrifice. You die because of people that you do not know. But civilians have an easy life. Despite the deaths, the population doesn't accept you, doesn't appreciate you. And if you quit, the population doesn't accept you either. We will always be seen like *malfaiteurs* [wrongdoers].

An important reason for civilians' disrespect for the FARDC is soldiers' penchant to extract money, goods and services from them (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008), which is an indirect consequence of patronage-induced duties to generate resources at different levels of the

hierarchy. Engagement in frantic resources generation is also at the root of soldiers' dislike of the political leadership in Kinshasa, held responsible for soldiers' miserable living conditions by embezzling funds, in collaboration with the highest echelons of the military. Additionally, both political and military elites, part of the same patronage networks, are believed to manipulate war for the purposes of self-enrichment. These beliefs, which are captured in the widely circulating expression *bakonzi basi bateki mboka na bango, bolingi biso tosala nini* (the leadership has sold out the country, what can we subordinates do?), indicate that political and military elites' objectives are perceived to be at cross-purposes with soldiers' professed ideology of patriotism (Verweijen, 2015). The result is feelings of purposelessness and alienation, which nourish hostility towards the political and military leadership. One way in which this hostility is expressed among officers is fantasizing about overthrowing the government. An intelligence officer stated:

> The current government is a disaster. We have to replace the current president. That cannot be too difficult. Me, I am ready. It takes nothing to take Bukavu [capital of South Kivu province]. Some rocket launchers, a bit of light artillery, and some disciplined troops. That's all.

Limited bonding with the military organization is aggravated by the FARDC's lack of efforts to socialize its troops into formal professional discourses and identities. Since the FARDC was formed, most soldiers have received little training and education, which is only for new recruits. Furthermore, soldiers rarely get into contact with FARDC personnel outside of their secondary group, as most brigades or regiments are permanently deployed on the frontlines. Additionally, medals or honors are rare, and there are no mottos or songs specific to the FARDC (Verweijen, 2015). At the same time, due to their embedding into patronage networks that encompass civilians, but also the dependency on and intermingling with civilians to fulfill needs like accommodation and revenue generation, military personnel is strongly exposed to extra-military forms of identification (Verweijen, 2015). Thus, they have spheres of living and working that are partially separate from the military unit, hence do not entail the co-presence of colleagues. This gives the FARDC a less "total" character as an institution (cf. Goffman, 1961). Patronage networks also contribute to this outcome in a more direct way, as they lower the influence of the formal, bureaucratic administration on regulating military personnel's lives, seen as a crucial feature of total institutions (Davies, 1989).

Effects on horizontal cohesion: survival solidarity and survival patronage

The patronage networks that FARDC soldiers are embedded in diverge in strength, scope, cohesiveness and the nature of the social interaction that they regulate. Where military patrons are powerful, they are able to provide significant services to their clients, like influencing their appointments and deployments. Where they are weaker, they may not be able to influence the military hierarchy on important decisions, but still help their clients, for instance by granting them access to revenue-generating opportunities in their personal businesses (Verweijen, 2015). Hence, patronage networks shape soldiers' living and service conditions, but not in equal degree. The result is inequalities between personnel serving in

the same unit, provided they are part of different patronage networks, which is most often (but not always) the case.

These inequalities, which are generally less pronounced among the lowest ranks, have an important impact on "community of experience", which in the FARDC largely centers on basic needs provision and sharing the hardships of daily life. FARDC soldiers in the same primary unit help each other with basic tasks like constructing shelter, searching for firewood and water, and small-scale revenue generation (e.g. charcoal production). Such social interaction generates forms of "despair solidarity" (Bilakila, 2004, p.23), or pragmatic and practically oriented solidarity that revolves around mutual assistance in the struggle for survival. Even though its effects are undermined by the frequent breakup of brigades due to reorganizations, such solidarity fosters horizontal cohesion. Commenting on the hardships they experienced in the camp where they were mixed with rebel forces, one NCO said: "Despite some difficulties, people always manage (…) People suffered, but that did not disturb the education. This is military endurance (…) It has contributed to developing *esprit d'équipe* (team spirit)." Hence, similar to what Moskos (1970) observed, cohesion in the FARDC has an instrumental dimension, being in part an outcome of self-interest in the struggle for survival. However, where self-interest requires loyalty to networks outside one's unit, attention from and commitment towards one's peers is deflected. Given the harsh conditions in the FARDC, support from such patronage networks, however limited, is often crucial to ensuring that soldiers remain committed to their job. Hence paradoxically, while patronage networks weaken institutional cohesion, they ultimately also help prevent the military from falling apart (Verweijen, 2015).

One reason why basic needs provision plays a central role in fostering cohesion among lower ranks in the FARDC is that the other two dimensions of "community of experience"(training and common tasks) have limited or ambivalent effects. As mentioned, training in the FARDC is rare. Furthermore, while troops regularly conduct military tasks together, including military operations, the impact on peer bonding is mixed (Verweijen, 2015). In some cases, frontline experiences reinforce comradeship. For instance, soldiers of a platoon who displayed a considerable level of mutual bonding highlighted their pride in having carried out operations against the rebel group Forces Républicaines Fédéralistes in the cold and impenetrable Bijabo forest in South Kivu. Aside from shared hardships, these operations promoted comradeship through common dislike of "the enemy", who was in this case of Tutsi origins, while the unit members identified themselves as "Bantu" (non-Tutsi). Yet in other cases, joint military operations were observed to sow discord and division, especially when ending in failure and when soldiers already distrusted one another. In such situations, mistakes and a (perceived) lack of efforts evoked the suspicion of backstabbing and betrayal. One soldier related for instance how his unit had lost the way during an offensive against a Mai-Mai group due to wrong directions given by an ex-Mai Mai unit member, which elicited suspicion he was in connivance with the enemy, even though he had belonged to a different Mai-Mai group.

Distrust among soldiers is particularly high where soldiers in the same primary unit are tied into competing patronage networks that are linked to antagonistically defined identity categories, a situation that impacts "commonality of identification and beliefs". Differences

in identification also become more salient where the associated patronage networks offer high levels of protection, causing pronounced inequality in service conditions and statuses among group members. In such cases, identities become markers of perceived favoritism and power inequalities, and start working as a divisionary mechanism (Verweijen, 2015). For instance, one NCO from the western Congo commented on his colleagues: "The soldiers [from the west] have now such a bad reputation that they [soldiers from the east] say 'Lingala is the language of thieves (*ya bavoyoux*)'. They have turned against the *basemalingala* (those who speak Lingala)". At the moment he pronounced these words, the regiment of which he was part was subject to important conflicts, as the members from one specific ex-rebel network used their dominance in the command to favor their own group.

Effects on vertical and organizational cohesion: *mauvais père de famille*

The factors constituting "community of experience" and "commonality of identification and beliefs" do not only undermine horizontal cohesion, but also affect bonding between subordinates and commanders both in primary and secondary units, albeit sometimes in slightly different ways or degrees. For instance, the frequent breakup of units harms community of experience even stronger in the case of commander-subordinate relations, as it forces troops to adjust each time to new command styles. In the words of a sergeant:

> All the time changes is not good, because we are not stable. A *chef* knows the behavior of his soldiers and the soldiers know their *chef* and that eases the work (…). There are many changes but one commander is soft, the other one is strict, so we do not know how to adapt ourselves.

Both "community of experience" and "commonality of identification and beliefs" interact in complex manners with the two other elements that shape superior-subordinate bonding. These are first, the perceived legitimacy of commanders' appointment and second, the extent to which commanders live up to their subordinates' expectations. Both of these are negatively affected by patronage. As described above, when commanders are appointed or promoted due to their patronage connections rather than due to merit, the perceived legitimacy of their appointment is undermined. One officer described it as follows: "The FARDC is still very hierarchical, ranks continue to be of influence, but they do no longer automatically give a certain respect".

The effects of non-meritocratic appointments on cohesion are aggravated by their impact on "community of experience". When commanders are perceived to be incompetent and inexperienced, joint tasks and activities might foster conflicts, distrust and irritations, rather than cohesion (Verweijen, 2015). This applies particularly to combat operations leading to defeat, failure, or casualties–negative experiences that are often blamed on commanders' lack of competence, or their doubtful loyalty and motivations. Suspect loyalty is most often invoked when commanders belong to certain identity groups that are distrusted, pointing to interaction effects with "commonality of identification and beliefs". Ultimately, such aggravated distrust may lead to insubordination (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013a). A former NCO explained:

It is extremely difficult to carry out badly given orders for professional military. We say: 'a badly given order might not be executed', especially when it causes many deaths. For example, if you fight against Rwandans [i.e. a certain Rwandan rebel group], you will know that at some point they will outflank: therefore you need to send two sections to the sides. However, if the commanding officer does not know, he will send all troops straight ahead but they will be encircled by the enemy. We know this from experience, but our commander went ahead and then many troops died. When this happened we rebelled against him and withdrew.

Causing unnecessary casualties frustrates the expectations that FARDC soldiers have vis-à-vis those enacting the role of "commander", which are largely the same for commanders of primary and secondary groups. For FARDC soldiers, commanders should uphold high moral standards, constitute role models– which also implies giving troops fair and equal treatment– and demonstrate commitment to the unit's common goals (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2008; Verweijen, 2015). As a corporal stated: "Being a good commander is like being a pastor, he is first a model for his troops". Furthermore, soldiers expect commanders to be educated and competent, not least to reduce risks on the battlefield. As a lieutenant said: "A commander must be educated. It is like in medicine, you first have to master the theory before you can do the practice. On the basis of practice alone you cannot make a diagnosis." Additionally, soldiers want commanders to have father-like and protective qualities, including by assuring subordinates' primary needs, but also by demonstrating sternness and disciplining troops firmly but fairly when needed. These expectations are often expressed in paternal metaphors, like that a commander should be a *bon père de famille* (good head of the household).

As has already become clear, FARDC officers rarely live up to these idealized expectations of commanding. In the words of one soldier, an FARDC commander is often a *"mauvais père de famille"* (bad head of the household). Patronage-related pressures are an important cause of such deficient performance. Commanders simultaneously have obligations towards their hierarchy, their troops, their clients and their patrons, having to provide the latter with regular financial contributions to maintain their position. Yet, they also use the resources appropriated from their subordinates for purposes of self-enrichment, causing immense asymmetries in wealth, and signifying limited commitment to soldiers' wellbeing, and to the unit and its goals. As a lieutenant stated:

> The wife of the deputy commander lives next to the wife of the colonel, because she has nothing to eat. And when he, who has a big house, gives orders, do you think that he who has nothing is going to obey? (…) The distances between the high-ranking and the low-ranking are simply too big (…) They cheat us. We have nothing, absolutely nothing (…) I have a bad cough but not even enough money to get medicine. They will not even give you a *paracetamol* [pain killer] when you are sick. No nothing, not even a single *Franc congolais* [Congolese currency]! They do not care if we die.

Another way in which commanders are seen to frustrate the expectations surrounding their role is unequal treatment of subordinates. Due to the high level of *de facto* decentralization

in the force, FARDC commanders, in particular at brigade, regiment and battalion level, have significant leeway to shape their subordinates' living and working conditions. They make for instance decisions on leave, assigned tasks (which determine levels of income), and transport possibilities. While there are formal rules and regulations to manage these dimensions of service, these are rarely enforced (Verweijen, 2015). Consequently, commanders can deploy the granting and withholding of what they consider "favors" (which in some other militaries would be defined as "rights") as bargaining chips in their relations with subordinates. Such a high level of discretion allows commanders to favor those in their personal patronage networks, instead of following predictable criteria of performance and compliance. The result is that the other subordinates feel disadvantaged. They often frame such perceived marginalization in identity-related terms, indicating that "commonality of identification and beliefs" is at play. For instance, after stating he was marginalized by his Rwandophone commander, an ex-FAZ officer declared: "I would no longer call this an army. Everything is negotiable. Openly, there is no tribalism, but behind the scenes, it is very strong".

The problem of preferential treatment can also be found in relation to practices of disciplining and punishment. Commanders may be more lenient towards their own favorites in the unit as well as towards subordinates that are embedded in other, more powerful patronage networks. The latter may interfere in commanders' disciplining practices to protect their clients, for instance by asking them not to refer a case to the military prosecutor's office (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013b). Such practices promote discontent not only towards commanders, but also towards colleagues, as those who have transgressed are not punished according to the rules. In this manner, patronage interference in disciplining also undermines horizontal cohesion.

Concluding remarks: Theoretical and policy implications

This article has analyzed how patronage networks that overlap and intersect with formal command chains undermine cohesion in the Congolese armed forces, both in primary and secondary groups and at the level of the military as a whole. The findings demonstrate that cohesion formation in the FARDC follows different patterns than in other militaries, both due to the relevance of patronage networks and a number of other conditions that enhance these networks' salience. For instance, due to poor and irregular work and living conditions, assistance with basic needs provision and regulating elementary dimensions of service has a pronounced impact on cohesion. The same applies to extensive engagement in revenue generation, which fosters internal conflicts, and promotes collaboration with enemy forces and civilians. Obviously, in well-resourced and well-institutionalized armies, and those that do not engage in economic activities, cohesion is not or less influenced by these factors.

Another particularity of the FARDC is that it less approximates a "total institution" than some other militaries. It possesses limited infrastructure and facilities of its own, causing soldiers to live among civilians, and undertakes minimal efforts to socialize its members into common discourses and identities. A final cohesion-impacting condition not always found in other militaries is rebel-military integration, which may reinforce parallel power structures and undermine meritocracy. While this combination of elements may be specific to the

FARDC, armed forces in many other contexts share at least some of these features. For instance both rebel-military integration and military-economic involvement occur in militaries across the world, and have in many cases demonstrated to have detrimental effects on military cohesion (Brömmelhorster & Paes, 2003; Licklider, 2014). Comparative research on the processes and conditions shaping military cohesion is therefore warranted.

Grasping these processes and conditions is not merely of theoretical importance, but is also relevant for defense reform efforts and military collaboration. Studying the effects of patronage on cohesion provides insights into wider power dynamics in armed forces and sheds light on soldiers' combat performance and behavior towards civilians. Understanding these dimensions facilitates military-to-military collaboration, like in the context of peacekeeping operations or joint security activities between peacekeeping forces and host-country military. For instance, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Congo conducts joint military operations and patrols with the FARDC–activities that do not always run smoothly in part because peacekeepers have limited insight into the workings of the Congolese army (Verweijen, 2017). Improving combat performance and behavior towards civilians also tends to occupy center stage in defense reform efforts (Howe, 2001). Yet these efforts do not always pay much attention to cohesion. In the FARDC, they have mostly been directed towards the training of a few rapid reaction battalions, with each donor training them according to their own military doctrines, which has undermined interoperability and institutional cohesion (ICG, 2006 ; Stearns, Verweijen & Eriksson Baaz, 2013).

To be more effective, defense reform initiatives must pay attention to strengthening cohesion through measures like reinforcing meritocracy (by codifying and enforcing clear criteria for appointments and promotions) and training units in the same doctrine and in the same composition as they will be deployed in combat (cf. King, 2006). Furthermore, defense reform should work towards regularizing and guaranteeing soldiers' service conditions, to reduce leeway for favoritism and insecurity among military personnel. This insecurity is a main incentive for soldiers to seek protection from patrons in the first place, leading them to reinforce the very patronage networks that are at the root of their predicament (cf. Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Ensuring soldiers' basic rights is therefore a precondition for breaking the vicious cycle of insecurity and patronage, although it is by no means a guarantee.

Notes

[1] For criticism on the "standard model" see King, 2007 and Siebold, 2011.

[2] Although the military justice apparatus is independent on paper, in reality, it is strongly influenced by the FARDC command (Eriksson Baaz & Verweijen, 2013b).

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