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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program and the Africa Security Initiative at Brookings in Washington, D.C. And we are honored and privileged today to be hosting an event and discussion on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, now two years into the presidency of President Tshisekedi and two years after a difficult election and yet one that certainly could have turned out worse, so it's generally peaceful.

The former President Kabila was not able to necessarily find a way to get his own preferred candidate into office, although there were still doubts about the outcome anyway. But since that time there has been an ongoing effort by Congo to try to work on issues of governance, stability, challenges like Ebola, not to mention COVID-19, and the anti-corruption agenda which is so crucial to the Congo's long-term future political and economic development.

So, with me today we have a remarkable panel. And in just a moment I'm going to turn things over to my good friend Sasha Lezhnev at The Sentry, who will frame a little bit more of the substance and context of our discussion. But I'll just briefly say that in addition to the fact that it's an honor for me at Brookings and as a Brookings scholar to be emceeding this event, if you will, it's also a privilege as a former Peace Corps volunteer in Kikwit, back when DRC was known as Zaire.

And we're very glad to have all of you part of this discussion. We'll be including your questions in the last 20 minutes or so of the hour and you'll be able to send those to events@brookings.edu if wish. They'll then be fed to me.

In addition to Sasha, who, again, will speak next, we are very honored today to have coming live from Kinshasa Ambassador André Wameso of the DRC. And he will speak and frame his thoughts on how his country's doing right after Sasha.

We will then have another Congolese, but one who's now living in the United States, and a proud and distinguished member of the International Republican Institute's team of researchers and activists, if you will, because they're so important around the world in helping develop democracy and strengthen democracy in civil society. This is Mvemba Dizolele, a good friend of mine now for two decades standing.

In addition, and then following Mvemba, we will have Alexis Arieff at the Congressional

Research Service, who was just showing off her French during the pre-game warm-up a few minutes ago. And I know that she has, therefore, a wide background in the continent in English- and French-speaking Africa and perhaps beyond, as well. And she's going to frame a little bit of the broader congressional agenda and discussion on issues concerning DRC and maybe more broadly issues concerning Africa are being viewed as we now get ready for a major political transition to the 117th Congress and a new president in the United States.

J.T. Tomaszewski used to be at the International Republican Institute. He is now a staff member for Senator Jim Risch of the great state of Idaho, and one of Congress' most diligent and knowledgeable professionals on the broader question of governance in Africa. I've had the privilege of working with him before in his previous job at IRI and he's been doing a lot of very good work, largely bipartisan work, on Capitol Hill trying to help DRC in particular get to the next level of its progress and development.

And then, last but certainly not least, we're honored today to have former Congressman and former Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa Thomas Perriello joining us. And he'll be contributing his thoughts, as well.

So, thank you for being here. And Sasha, over to you, my friend.

MR. LEZHNEV: Thank you so much for organizing this event, Mike and Adam and your team at Brookings, at a very interesting moment for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United States just after Tshisekedi's big announcement and, of course, after U.S. elections. I would just like to say -- and also thank you for giving us all an excuse to put on a tie, at least myself.

I would just, first of all, like to say that there are so many creative, courageous Congolese activists and reformers, whether they be in civil society, in government, or business, who are working tirelessly to change their country for the better. I think that often gets lost in all of our reporting about the negatives in Congo.

That said, those creative, courageous Congolese are undermined at so many different steps by a system of corruption and oftentimes violence that has existed for decades that personally benefits certain elites, both inside and particularly actually outside the country. Many bribes are passed up the chain and dissenting voices have often been repressed.

During Kabila's regime it's estimated that up to \$4 billion a year went missing or was stolen due to the manipulation of contracts and budgets. And, of course, we all witnessed the deeply flawed election two years ago.

But there is now some hope that Congo may be starting to turn around with some initial reforms by President Tshisekedi after significant pushes by Congolese civil society, the International Monetary Fund, the United States, and others. So, for example, the removal of certain abusive generals or the changes to the boards of state-owned mining companies, and there have been other reforms, as well. So, for example, returning some politicians in exile who were able to return to the country. And this political window for reform may actually begin to widen now that there will be a new governing coalition to be determined in the coming weeks.

But the reality, of course, is the overall what we would call kleptocratic system remains intact and many elites continue to profit from it. And so whether real reform will succeed in the next year or so or after that will depend, in part, on the next U.S. administration and Congress. The U.S. has significant leverage it can use to reinforce the reform effort, in part because Congo is heavily dependent on the U.S. dollar and the U.S. banking system.

And I think it's very interesting that it's become abundantly clear from the last couple of years that U.S. policy has shown strong bipartisan support for focusing on combating corruption and supporting democratic reform, including holding some of the most corrupt actors and human rights abusers accountable. This includes a recent strong letter authored in part by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and my friend J.T. Tomaszewski here and Congress writ large, as well as legislation and important efforts by Ambassador Mike Hammer in the Treasury Department. For example, sanctioning international tycoons who have gotten rich off of the backs of the Congolese people.

I would advise that the U.S. should focus on combatting this system of corruption over the next year in three main ways to reinforce Congolese reformers in civil society on the ground.

Number one by creating consequences for the spoilers of reforms by using financial leverage, network sanctions and anti-money laundering measures in particular. The best way to really deter corruption is to establish the credible threat that perpetrators will face consequences, and that's a direct quote, by the way, from the Senate letter. These efforts need to step up in 2021. It's been nearly

two years since the last U.S. financial sanctions. And key spoilers and their companies continue to operate with impunity or are finding ways to evade sanctions.

The second main focus area I think should be supporting transparency reforms, which the United States has been doing, but can do more robustly with technical assistance and others. I'm talking about the Central Bank, the Electoral Commission, state-owned companies, and mining regulations -- ensuring that financial audits are conducted of these institutions, contracts are published, and corrupt actors are removed from them.

And lastly, supporting an accountability mechanism for high-level perpetrators of human rights abuses, including the military. Dr. Denis Mukwege has called for action along these lines and we would strongly support that.

So, with that, I will turn it over to Ambassador Wameso, who's ambassador at large for the President Tshisekedi. And it's an honor to introduce you, sir. Thank you so much.

AMBASSADOR WAMESO: Thank you so much, Sasha, for giving me the floor. I will start by thanking a lot Michael to invite me on this prestigious conference at the Brookings Institute. I will also apologize for -- already apologize for my English. I was not as fluent as yours.

But, first of all, I will try to talk about the vision of the President Tshisekedi. This vision could be summarized in four axes, but at the center, the central point of his vision is the Congolese people. He really thinks that a well-educated people with good ethic values is the key for the development of the country and for the better life of all Congolese people.

But for that it must put in place good governance in the country. That implies justice for everybody, equal access to justice for everybody, state of law, progress in terms of human rights. And you can remember that when he came into power in 2019, the first decision of the President Tshisekedi was regarding human rights. There is no more politicians in jail in our country. All politicians who were in exile came back into the country. The last one was General Munene, who was in exile in Congo-Brazzaville since many years. And if there is fundamentals in terms of good governance, the Congolese people can be the real actor of the development of the country.

And there's a reason why. There is also another reform that the President Tshisekedi implemented last year at the beginning of his power is to free fundamental education for everybody. That

decision leads to the come back into the educational system of 4 million children in Congo. We can link this decision, also, in terms of security. You know that when people don't go to school, it's easy for an army group to hire them in guerilla or something else.

But now the real challenge in economic reform. And you can remember that the first trip the President Tshisekedi outside Africa was to the United States, when he met both American administration, Congress chambers, and also IMF. It was not only for looking for financial assistance for the country because you know that we don't have some money to push the development of the country, but it's also because he wanted to have the assistance both of the U.S. administration in terms of setting up good governance in the country by fighting against corruption, but also with IMF because we know that besides financial assistance there is also a strong framework that IMF now put in place to support the implementation of good governance in the country.

And I can say that we are at the corner now when we can see that political majority is changing in the country. I hope that it will help the President Tshisekedi now to implement economic reform that will help the development of the country by Congolese first themselves. And he always say that he really wants the revenge of agriculture to a mining sector. And I think it's the way we want to go. And at the end I can say that.

I can say thank you. Thanks to the United States for being beside the President Tshisekedi, who believes at the beginning of its presidency to this reform, and we can see that we have some good results. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. And now I'd like to go to Mvemba Dizolele.

And, Mvemba, in addition to any specific comments you want to make just at this point in the conversation and speaking to the agenda of good governance and anti-corruption efforts, I'd also welcome your thoughts on where we stand two years into the Tshisekedi presidency. You're a very thoughtful observer of Congo and you have realistic expectations, but you also have high expectations about what presidents and governments should be delivering for the Congolese people, as well as a keen awareness of just how far Congo has to go to deal with all of its many challenges.

So, I would just love to get sort of a, you know, a temperature check from you, if you will,

a two-year snapshot of just how you think things are going for the Tshisekedi government relative to realistic expectations of what could have been hoped for at this stage. Over to you, my friend.

MR. DIZOLELE: Thank you very much, Mike. Thanks to Brookings for hosting us and for organizing this.

I think Congo is finding itself in a very tricky situation, hopeful, for sure, but tricky. We know, of course, the situation that we are in today was very predictable. The alliance between President Tshisekedi and President Kabila is what Congolese call (speaks in French). In other words, it shouldn't have happened.

Be that as it may, it did happen and that caused the situation in which we find ourselves today and that means an implosion. And in that implosion we have three rings.

The first ring is the PPRD ring, which is Kabila and his associates, who ruled the country for 18 years, but really based their model on the zero-sum approach. We win, the country loses. And that's how they led the country for 18 years.

Fortunately, after the transition, once they made a deal with Tshisekedi and he became president, they decided they will continue in that sense, and that's the second wing with Jeannine Mabunda in the parliament. And the mantra was pretty much obstruct, obstruct, obstruct, which meant ensuring that President Tshisekedi will not succeed, which means the people will not succeed and allow for the return of the PPRD and Kabila to power. That dealt a big blow to them because it really undid themselves.

Discontent in the parliament led to the ousting of the president of the parliament. But that obstruction meant that no consequential law was ever passed in the Congress, in the parliament, during those two years or 18 months that Mabunda presided. So, the loss for the country is humungous. There was just nothing that moved anywhere. There were about three small laws that were passed, but nothing of consequence for the country, for the economy.

So, the result is two things for the third ring, which is Tshisekedi himself. He could not really deliver. There was a lot of discontent. A hundred years, he had the program called the Hundred-Year Program [*sic*] and that program ended in a tremendous failure. This is the big infrastructure program in Kinshasa, (inaudible) and others. It ended up in charges of corruption with the chief of staff

being arrested and others, of course, being arrested.

And then it goes to the next round. He had to use his prerogative, his constitution prerogative, to try to dissolve the parliament, which he did successfully. And that led to the grievance solution -- I mean, the ousting of Jeannine Mabunda. So, that's where we find ourselves today.

What does that mean for next? Congo is in tremendous need of reforms in two sectors: the security sector, where we think Tshisekedi missed some opportunities specifically for the mobilization of some of the militia groups in the East in the last two years. He was too busy jousting with Kabila and his allies in the parliament that he missed some opportunities that were very key to moving the country forward.

The second bucket is economy. Economy, economy, economy. The mining industry, the other sectors, the ports, and other areas of the economy have been really paralyzed in part due to the cronyism that -- inherited from the Kabila years. Those need to be dismantled.

So, now there's tremendous pressure to change, both on the security front and on the economy front. If he fails to deliver, he will only have himself to blame because at this point he is going to have a majority in parliament that will serve him, which means he will a government that will reflect his will.

This also means he has to clean his own house. You know, the 100-year – 100-day corruption charges came from this office. So, the Congolese will expect that he leads by example.

As far as Kabila is concerned, we are only at a crossroads with him, but his options are very limited. No Congolese will go to the streets to fight for Kabila, that's for sure. No Congolese will go to the street to fight for the PPRD or the FCC. We've seen this with the migration of the FCC deputies through the Tshisekedi camp. No military will fight for Kabila. So, his options are very limited, which will mean to make another deal to start helping Tshisekedi in cleaning the house. It's a tall order to ask, but people will be expecting that.

I will rest my case here and we'll take it in the Q&A. Thank you very much, Mike.

MR. O'HANLON: Mvemba, that was fantastic. I'm just going to ask you one small clarifying question or additional question since we're still at the point of the conversation where we're framing some of the general state of play for those who may not be DRC experts. And I think you alluded

to this, but in theory, former President Kabila could run again, right? And that would be expected in the year 2023, when the next presidential election would likely be held. Could you just confirm those two facts for me, please, if I'm right?

MR. DIZOLELE: Yes, Mike. In theory, he could run again. But, unfortunately, the greed in ensuring his victory in '23 made it that his alliance with Tshisekedi to fall because they wanted to undermine Tshisekedi for them to come back and that was just not a winnable solution.

AMBASSADOR WAMESO: Excuse me, Michael, and excuse me, Mr. Mvemba. I would like to intervene because I don't think that it's possible because the constitution says that -- it don't say that the president has a right to have more than two mandates.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay.

AMBASSADOR WAMESO: So, it's not two mandates and you can come again. The constitution says two mandates and it's enough.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay.

AMBASSADOR WAMESO: And maybe it can be a debate with a constitutionalist, but the constitution is very clear. When you have done your two mandates, it's finished. You can't do --

MR. DIZOLELE: We can debate that later during the Q&A.

AMBASSADOR WAMESO: Yes. I just wanted to clarify my point of view.

MR. O'HANLON: Good, thank you. I appreciate that very much.

So, now I'd like to go to Alexis and Alexis is going to speak again about the broader state of play of congressional efforts in regard to DRC specifically, but perhaps even more broadly across Africa.

Alexis, thank you for joining us today and over to you.

MS. ARIEFF: Thank you. Thanks for doing this timely discussion, for convening this timely discussion.

So, to take a step back before I put U.S. policy and congressional engagement in context, what do we mean -- what do U.S. officials mean when they talk about concern with corruption in DRC?

First, they're referring to this pattern of state capture by leaders and their close

associates and family members, as Sasha and others have worked to document, that turns the state and the lucrative mining sector in particular into a money-making machine for a select few elites while tens of millions of Congolese struggle to feed their families and educate their children.

It's notable that nearly all Congolese heads of state through post-colonial history, with the notable exception of the current president, President Tshisekedi, have come to power via the army or an armed rebellion. So, this is one reason why many Congolese looked to Tshisekedi's inauguration, whatever the concerns with the electoral process, as a potential turning point for the country's history.

Secondly, when U.S. officials talk about concern with corruption they're referring to the fact that DRC is a global transit point for money laundering due to the dollarized economy and low state capacity or willingness to regulate the banking sector and other financial systems. And this concern is reflected, for example, in U.S. sanctions designations targeting alleged Hezbollah financiers in DRC, recent Sentry reporting on North Korea sanctions evasion, etc.

So, both of these patterns are linked to larger dynamics of governance and a lack of accountability. So, what do the recent political maneuvers in Kinshasa mean for these big picture dynamics?

Well, if we look at U.S. policy over the last several years, the U.S. Government has had a consistent stated goal of minimizing former President Kabila's influence and encouraging economic governance and military reforms, some of which have been embraced, at least rhetorically, by Tshisekedi. And a related goal has been to encourage a better environment for U.S. businesses and investors, including in the globally significant formal mining sector.

The broad thrust of these goals has been consistent, I would say, across the past two administrations and generally supported in Congress on a bipartisan basis. And one example of that is U.S. sanctions policies. So, since 2016, the United States has designated senior Kabila-linked officials, financiers, and security force commanders, and the Trump administration has continued and even expanded on this policy.

But there are nuances in this apparent consensus. U.S. messaging under the Trump administration around President Tshisekedi's contested electoral victory and in support of his administration has met with some doubt in Congress, in some corners of Congress, and has been

interpreted as backing Tshisekedi on a personal level at the potential expense of U.S. support for structural reforms that could outlast him or even of U.S. diplomatic credibility more broadly with regard to electoral processes in Africa.

A key question is whether President Tshisekedi is capable and committed to restructure the structural incentives of Congolese governance and regional geopolitics. And if so, whether he and those who are now backing him are motivated by a desire to make the state more accountable for future generations or by a desire to capture the state such as it is.

So, I would note a couple of tools of congressional engagement and areas of interest over the years. There's been a historic concern in Congress with human rights and conflict mitigation, with a particular focus historically on, of course, the conflict-affected East and particularly in stemming regional involvement in DRC's conflicts. And we can see this reflected in appropriations measures for foreign aid going back years and years, as well as other legislation.

Since 2015, there have been bipartisan efforts in Congress to deter Kabila first from clinging to power and to more broadly isolate his inner circle in response to this state capture pattern, as well as abuses of opposition and pro-democracy voices, you know, in 2015, 2016, going into 2018. So, we saw resolutions and legislation pass at least one chamber successively, you know, starting in 2014, calling for sanctions designations, seeking to codify U.S. sanctions regimes which have come via executive order, etc.

We've also seen aid appropriations in support of certain reform goals, for example, democracy promotion, military professionalization, along with broad support in Congress for development, health, and humanitarian programming in DRC. And then we also see Congress enacting conditions on certain types of U.S. aid and support for multilateral financing, in particular through legislation with global scope, such as the counter-human trafficking legislation under which -- and child soldiers legislation, both of which have resulted in aid restrictions on DRC at various times. And specifically restrictions on military aid and U.S. support for international financial institution aid, both of which remain powerful incentives for U.S. policy leverage -- or powerful grounds for U.S. policy leverage as the U.S. seeks to encourage state reforms.

So, with that, I'd leave it at that for now. And I'm interested in hearing J.T. elaborate.

MR. O'HANLON: Right. So, right over to you, J.T. Thank you for what you've been doing with Senator Risch. And we'd love to hear the state of play with congressional efforts towards DRC. Over to you, my friend.

MR. TOMASZEWSKI: Thanks, Mike, and thanks, Alexis. I can speak for many of my colleagues on the Hill in saying that we very often look to Alexis and CRS for the latest developments in the DRC and throughout Africa. If many of you don't know Alexis, many of you should. She guides a lot of thinking on Congo throughout the halls of Congress.

I'd like to thank you, Mike, the whole Brookings team, as well as Sasha and his colleagues at Sentry for putting this event together. I also just want to state that I'm here on my own personal capacity and my comments don't reflect the views of the committee or the Senate or the chairman.

This discussion comes at an important time in the DRC's democratic transition, as well as, you know, as we see an administration coming in, a new one, here in Washington. For Congo it's important to acknowledge the unwavering support the U.S. has given the presidential administration of Félix Tshisekedi. This support includes efforts to fight corruption, induce U.S.-Congolese two-way trade and investment, help strengthen democratic institutions, and support the Congolese government's tough work to secure the country while also trying to tackle major public health and governance challenges.

As Alexis noted in her comments, while many of us who follow DRC continue to have serious concerns with the way in which President Tshisekedi came to power, including striking an alliance with his predecessor, Joseph Kabila, it is indeed a different Congo under President Tshisekedi. I suppose what we will continue to debate here today is how different Congo is under Tshisekedi and if those differences reflect an overall positive or negative trajectory for the democratic transformation of the DRC. And certainly corruption issues are at the center of this.

President Tshisekedi is following a leader who destroyed democratic institutions, Joseph Kabila. Kabila oversaw serious human rights abuses and atrocities, crippled the economic and political aspects of the country. In short, President Tshisekedi really had nowhere to go but up.

President Tshisekedi's alliance with Kabila, however, has been a major complicating factor in all this. Now that President Tshisekedi has taken bold steps to change the arrangement, which

we will see if they work or not, he will hopefully have more room to do the work he has always said he wants to do. He will also have less of an excuse if he does not deliver what he has promised the Congolese people and his international partners, including the U.S.

This is where the U.S. needs to not only be a friend to the Tshisekedi administration, but a healthy critic when necessary to ensure our national interests and values are reflected. I'm still hard pressed to see where the U.S. has made any direct public criticism of President Tshisekedi and we could do more and he could do better at times. This is not necessarily a sign of a healthy relationship when we're not just -- when we're doing just the congratulating and the thanking and the cheerleading. We also need to do that healthy skepticism and be a friend that can also give frank advice.

Congress is watching developments in Congo with great interest and the way in President Tshisekedi and his administration is dealing with these myriad challenges and whether or not he's making good on his promises. The U.S. should also make good on its own promises. As Sasha noted in his opening remarks, in August 2020, Chairman Risch, along with a strong list of bipartisan senators, sent a letter to Secretary of Treasury Steve Mnuchin and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo encouraging the administration to use this historic opportunity to help address structural challenges in DRC, to curb high-level corruption, and end systemic violence against the Congolese people.

U.S. efforts, in partnership with the Congolese government and its people, should focus on dismantling the kleptocratic system of former President Kabila so that DRC's vast natural wealth benefits the Congolese people and not those who are stealing it. As the letter encourages the Department of Treasury and State to do work and work together, which is also an important factor here, we have to make sure our respective agencies are working together.

Moving forward we've got to advance electoral reform. We've got to support that process. We've got to look at ways to see how the sanctions regime is working or not working.

We've got to deploy tools that undertake anti-money laundering measures, make anti-corruption reforms a condition of IMF non-emergency lending, and very importantly, I know Sasha will want to hear this, address conflict gold.

You know, I believe this letter, and particularly those who signed it, was received well by those within Treasury and the State Department and the Tshisekedi administration, by the way, who I

think republished it in French. It demonstrates that Congress is ready to act, Congress is increasingly interested. And I think as we move forward and have these discussions on corruption, this is an area where everyone can work together.

So, we'll put it there for now. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: That's fantastic, J.T. Thank you again for your comments and for all you're doing.

Congressman Perriello, you've been working Congo issues for quite a long time and I would just be curious for how you see the state of play. So, I'm sure there's a lot on the table, also, that you'd like to respond to in addition from the other panelists, so over to you. We're honored to have you today.

MR. PERRIELLO: Well, thank you and happy holidays, everyone. I'll try to bring a little spirit to the table here. It's really an honor to be with all of you and particularly the ambassador and your leadership from Kinshasa. And really appreciate the bipartisan support that J.T. and Alexis and others have built on the Hill. And I think it has been essential for some consistency in U.S. policy despite administrations changing, that ultimately remains a very strong bipartisan desire to address corruption and to help with economic development.

First and foremost, I just want to say that President Tshisekedi has a very, very difficult job. It is difficult to be the president of any country. It's particularly difficult to be the president of a country as vast and diverse as the DRC and to come in really handicapped by the coalition that was put together. And I really think the international community deserves a lot of blame for blessing and encouraging what I think was really a delay of the opportunity for the DRC to start a new chapter.

And as J.T. noted, there's plenty to relitigate about that election and the outcome from it. But in many ways, it feels this week like President Tshisekedi is just becoming president for the first time, where he's going to have the opportunity to create a legacy that honors both himself and his father. And I think the opportunity there is vast.

It is a -- when we pushed before for a peaceful democratic transfer of power, that ended up happening at a glacial (phonetic) pace, but nonetheless has happened. It wasn't random. Countries that experience a democratic peaceful transfer of power are five times less likely to return to civil war or

violence and they are 10 times more likely to start to see real economic development.

When we pushed for more foreign investment in the DRC, most of the investments are very short-term because you don't make 10- and 20-year investments like we're in the 100-year plan if people aren't sure whether the government is going to stand for longer than few months, whether the next election cycle there'll be another attempt. So, the long-term push here is that economic development and democratic accountability are hand-in-glove. They must go together.

And when the international community supports stability, what they will say is stability over accountability, what they actually ensure is instability. And they ensure that the DRC continues to not get the kind of investment that can lift so many people out of poverty, bring power and infrastructure to folks.

So, I think that President Tshisekedi has an opportunity to leave an incredible legacy now that he will be in a stronger position to govern. And it really is on him. These are going to require courageous decisions. Every time you take on someone powerful who is corrupt, whether it's a Congolese actor or a foreign actor, there are political risks and personal risks. So, it is not an easy job to step into this position. But the fact is the Congolese people overwhelmingly want accountability and development. They want the armed groups dealt with. And whether that accountability is through domestic ports or international efforts, really those things need to be integrated.

And for the long term, we would love to see that capacity internally. When we worked on this in Sierra Leona it was a combination of domestic prosecutions, investigations, with some international efforts, as well.

So, I think -- and we do have the elections in a few years. And as we know, it takes a while to run a good election. And we still have local elections and other pieces of this. So, I think in the big picture I think the hope is that President Tshisekedi, who, again, comes from a long and proud legacy of resistance to the corruption that we've seen, could really make good on that here. We certainly know Congolese civil society is prepared, both in the country and in the diaspora, to stand in partnership. And I do hope the Biden administration, I'm not here speaking for them, will see this as an opportunity.

And I think this is one of these moments, and I'll just leave it here, where there's going to need to be a little bit of a leap of faith on both sides in the U.S.-Congolese relationship where there's a lot

of history for distrust. There are a lot of reasons, you know, very ugly parts of that history.

But the more President Tshisekedi is willing to put a bold accountability, development, anti-corruption, free education system on the table, I think the more you'll see the bipartisan support on the Hill ready to respond to that with serious investments and not just the sanctions on bad actors that's also important. And in return, I think if all the Congolese hear from the U.S. is sanctions and not development and investment, I think that doesn't land well either.

So, I really do think this combination of a new administration in the U.S. backed by longstanding bipartisan support on the Hill, with President Tshisekedi coming into his own, is a moment to go bold. And I really hope that he will go bold in this situation. I think the country is hungry for it. I think international actors are hungry for it. But I say that with the humility that it is a very, very difficult job to be the president of the DRC and when your predecessor is still hanging around and has powerful friends, and when there are just so many challenges to be faced.

So, really just want to give him the respect of this moment and our blessings and prayers that he has the courage to go bold and be the great leader that I think we all believe he's capable of being.

MR. O'HANLON: Congressman, thank you very much. Thank all of you. There's a lot on the table. We have about 20 minutes remaining and a number of questions, as well, from the audience. So, what I would propose is that I ask each of you to speak for two to three minutes in the same order that we just went, responding to whatever you've just heard and want to add from your earlier comments, but also if you've got a piece of paper to take notes, I'm going to recite quickly the three or four questions that we've received from the audience. And please don't each of you speak to each of those questions, but if one of them is naturally in your wheelhouse or relates to what you want to say anyhow, then you can feel free to include a response in your what will be final two to three minutes of remarks.

So, one set of questions has to do with a topic you've all touched on. We have a political transition coming in the United States: a Biden administration, 117th Congress. Above and beyond what's already been happening and what you've already said, is there room or an opportunity for a more decisive, innovative kind of Biden administration and new congressional policy?

I'm thinking, for example, of an event we had a couple years ago at Brookings with Senator Coons talking about various broader U.S. initiatives towards Africa, including the BUILD Act and other kinds of efforts to push development, push economic opportunity and investment. Is there room for something bigger or a reinforcement of what's already on the table, you know, especially as we see democracy struggling in some parts of the Continent. We see the Chinese trying to exert influence. That's not all bad, but it certainly is of some concern in a number of places.

Is there a role here for a big, new U.S. policy push beyond what you've already been discussing in regards to sanctions and accountability and transparency? That's one big set of issues.

Another set of issues from the questions from the audience concerns Congolese civil society and grassroots efforts among citizens more generally. And what can they be asked to do and in what ways can they be supported in their efforts? And since, Mvemba, IRI works with such groups quite a bit, I'm sure that's at least partly a question for you.

And then finally, at a level of politics within DRC, does anybody want to be more specific about, above and beyond what you've already said, new kinds of coalitions that may form, new specific efforts that may be warranted within Congolese politics today?

And I'll just add an additional dimension. J.T., I know in some of our previous events on Kenya, one of the things you taught me was just how much the local and provincial level of politics mattered in Kenya. And I wonder if, in addition to high-level Kinshasa politics, there is a role for more regional politics in DRC, as well?

So, that's a lot and I'm not asking each of you to speak to all of it. But, Sasha, maybe you can help lead the way and offer your thoughts here at this juncture. Over to you and then we'll go to the ambassador and follow down the line.

MR. LEZHNEV: Yeah, thanks a lot, Mike. I just, first of all, want to say like this is maybe the best panel I've ever been a part of. This is an amazing group of people and you all have had fantastic individual insights into all the this that I think add a lot. And we're also at a very exciting moment.

So, I want to tackle the first set of questions that you got about, you know, is there room for more decisive U.S. policy? Yes, I think on kind of two fronts.

I think number one, Tom, you hit on an area that is very important. There is room for a

more development push, let's say, in not just, you know, rhetorically backing some reforms. I know that Ambassador Hammer and others have backed a lot of these reform efforts with their personal initiatives, but the reality is U.S. assistance is far down and there's been trouble in trying to get more dollars for this stuff.

And, you know, a really key decision point next year, by the way, is whether the IMF is going to decide whether to go ahead with a large-scale loan to Congo. They're looking at something called an extended credit facility sometime in the spring or perhaps early summer. And that's a really big decision point.

And as, J.T., you very rightly highlighted, anti-corruption reforms need to be the condition, the precursor for that. And, you know, the IMF team has been making a good push, but they also -- you know, the United States and the IMF board members need to make sure that there's enough in that loan to make it worthwhile so that there is a very strong incentive. It's already led to some reforms and the Central Bank published its first-ever financial audit, which was very interesting and revealed all kinds of funny issues, like 50 subaccounts and \$50 million in some subaccount and the fact that the Central Bank where it was banking with a couple of banks that were part of major scandals, you know, is a big problem.

But the other part of, you know, in terms of U.S. decisive policies is let's put our money where our mouths are in terms of the financial pressure, particularly on spoilers reforms and certain people who have already been making press conferences out there saying, you know, oh, I'll help the Congolese people, blah, blah, blah, but actually, you know, I've been busted for sanctions -- or busted for corruption and, therefore, put under sanctions. Those people are starting to evade sanctions. They've started new companies, etc., etc. And Tshisekedi can try to sideline these people, but if they're under U.S. sanctions and their companies are under U.S. sanctions, it makes it a lot easier to politically sideline them.

So, I think those kind of two bolder steps would be very, very helpful for the U.S. to take. And I'll leave to others for the other questions. Thanks a lot.

MR. O'HANLON: Sasha, that's great. Mr. Ambassador, over to you for whatever additional comments you'd like to make today, sir.

AMBASSADOR WAMESO: Yes. Thank you a lot, Sasha, for your comments. I cannot

add more regarding what you say about the perception of corruption and what the international community can do also in terms of assistance to help the president to fight against corruption.

But I would like to comment a little bit regarding the starting point of the presidency of Mr. Tshisekedi. Yes, elections were contested. Yes, it was not well organized. But I can say that the candidate Fayulu hasn't been able to demonstrate that he won the election. And those wrong elections started at the president's -- the presidency was won by Tshisekedi and the parliament goes to the Kabila camp, and it's the reason of the coalition. It's not before election. It's the results of election. But in that circumstance, in that environment, you can see that President Tshisekedi was in line with his vision regarding corruption.

In this country we've never seen a chief of staff in jail, never seen a minister in jail for corruption, never seen many CEO of public companies in jail. But it's happened at the beginning of the presidency of President Tshisekedi. And it was done under the coalition with the former President Kabila.

But President Tshisekedi decided to end that coalition because he wanted to go further with the reform and he understood that the Kabila camp was blocking this major reform in terms of economy and in terms of more justice and more fight against corruption.

But what I can add that's for 2023, President Tshisekedi wants also to have transparent elections. And we have now a good opportunity for everybody with a president who is now under a coalition with the former opposition, his proper camp and a part of Kabila camp, to go to lead the country until 2033 *[sic]* and organize election, good election, fair election, transparent election, thanks also to the vigilance of the international community.

Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Mr. Ambassador, thank you. And let me also compliment you on your English, which is quite excellent and very clear.

So, Mvemba, over to you, my friend.

MR. DIZOLELE: Thank you, Mike. And I'd also like to thank everyone who has participated in this, all my colleagues on the panel for their comments so far, I think it's been very comprehensive; to Sasha and Sentry and Brookings for hosting us.

For us, as we consider the new government coming in, the new administration, Biden

administration, we think that as democracy and good governance implementers there are already things that we are doing in the field. You know, the NDIs of the world, the IRI, and others, our sister organizations, are really engaged on all kinds of fronts.

For us at IRI, we've been working a lot with grassroots organizations, civil society organizations at the grassroots level to give them the skills that they need to bring about transparency and accountability from the electoral government, so that they can start dealing with elected officials in promoting priorities of the citizen, in promoting the wealth of the citizen, but within the context of the legal framework in having this dialogue between both sides (inaudible), so giving them the skills at the provincial and also at the national level. So, we are in the provinces, but it's also in Kinshasa.

And in Kinshasa we're working also on the supply side. So on the demand side working with CSOs, giving them the skill they need for advocacy, for trackers, and for other priorities that will be important in bringing transparency in this process. But also on the supply side we've been working with the National Assembly in Kinshasa with reform-minded elected officials to bring about reform, to bring about electoral reform, to bring about transparency, to bring about trackers again. How do you manage resources in a country like DRC within the purview of the National Assembly? And the same process we repeat at the local level even in Kinshasa. We work with the Women Caucus in parliament, with the Youth Caucus, and also with Human Rights Caucus.

So, these are some of the issues that we're working on. But alongside this, beyond what the DNG (phonetic) community is doing (inaudible), I think the other group that we've not mentioned here, this is something that is dear and close to Sasha's heart, which is an auditing institution in DRC. We have the *Inspection Générale des Finances*. We have other organizations like this that are tasked with cleaning the mess that we find across the country, especially in institutions.

So, those institutions do not always have the means and the training they need. This is where the U.S. can really come strongly and putting our money where our statements are, so that we can actually leave it for the Congolese people. This is what Tom was referring to earlier on. And I think there's room there for us to do things. Otherwise, we will actually fail the Congolese people.

The Congolese are very resourceful, very determined, but a certain skillset that they do not have or at not adequate. So, law in the country, in Congo, for instance, is more geared in going after

small embezzlement schemes, but not for the bigger macro type of thing that we see at Gécamines and other institutions. The U.S. is more equipped, better equipped to help them with that kind of skillset.

So, those are the steps that I would like to put out there for the new administration for our friends at USAID, at State, and others to continue thinking of because we're already working in that space. We just need more to help the Congolese. They have the knowledge. We can help them get to the point I make.

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Mvemba. And, Alexis, now over to you, my friend.

MS. ARIEFF: Thanks. So, I guess I'll cautiously weigh in on the first set of questions. Cautiously because CRS does not make policy recommendations, so assuming an environment in which a new Congress wants to encourage reforms or support President Tshisekedi's reform efforts, assuming that desire is something I would watch on the congressional side is obviously the aid appropriations process. That's a very powerful tool to either provide targeted support for certain sectors or impose conditionality on U.S. aid pending certain structural reforms or exhibiting certain political will.

And then, of course, there's also the question of future U.S. support, financial and technical support for the electoral process. It's not remotely too soon to be thinking and talking about that. J.T. is the expert on how far out in advance some of these programs can take to have an impact, but certainly for Congolese politicians, 2023 is just tomorrow, you know, in terms of strategic calculations. So, that's something to watch, as well.

Secondly, Sasha mentioned the IMF negotiations. I think this is a crucial point. Now that Congo is no longer subject to U.S. legislative restrictions on support for an IMF package under the trafficking in persons legislation because the Executive Branch upgraded DRC's ranking on trafficking in persons, Congress' role there is a little bit more diffuse. But obviously Congress can influence and negotiate or encourage, you know, the U.S. sticking to conditionality around things like, you know, audits of state-owned enterprises, better leadership at the Central Bank, a more accountable governance structure for Gécamines, publication of mining contracts.

And there's a possibility at least of a virtuous cycle where if DRC were to undertake some of those structural reforms and unlock an IMF package, that that would in turn unlock sort of cascading

other donor support, including from the World Bank, which could in turn allow President Tshisekedi or enable him to deliver on some of his very popular pledges of improved state services around education and so forth. So, in an ideal world those two things can go together and mutually, you know, reinforce each other: state service delivery, President Tshisekedi's legitimacy and state reforms that could outlast his administration.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent, thank you.

And, J.T., I look forward to your thoughts. I also think of you as one of the embodiments of bipartisan serious work on Capitol Hill. And so even as we go into political transitions, I know there's a lot of continuity in what you're trying to do and look forward to your thoughts as to whether any kind of big, new initiatives on the U.S. side are warranted in addition to the various things we're asking from Congolese friends. Over to you.

MR. TOMASZEWSKI: Well, thank you. And it is true, you know, Africa remains generally a very bipartisan space. And it's something that needs to be used as an opportunity to really get folks together in a city of Washington, D.C., that is often racing to the other ends of the spectrum. And so there's an opportunity there.

And as I mentioned earlier, you know, sending a letter that had such bipartisan support in an environment such as this on Congo and on the types of bold issues that we were discussing reflects that there is opportunity to really do something. I know Sasha and others have in the past pushed for resolutions and bills on DRC that sort of died at the last moment. There is going to be opportunity in this next Congress to help get stuff over the finish line.

And, again, I think the partnership with the Tshisekedi administration is certainly there to watch and see how we can get behind it. And also, I think there's an increased hunger, I mean, it's always been there, but I think it's getting stronger, is to really hold the Kabila regime, the former Kabila regime, and a number of bad actors accountable for what they have done and continue to do.

Maybe just quickly, you know, on the foreign assistance point, while there are tons of challenges now that need to be dealt with, we need to have some future planning in place. I would, again, point to these upcoming elections. Upcoming because, as we know, in a country like Congo, it's going to take a long time to prepare to do it right. The Congolese people should not accept the excuse

that there's no time to do it, there's no money to do it, we're not prepared to do it. There are partners like the U.S., there's a government in place now that can do some of these reforms. And it would be important for us to think about how the U.S., how Congress can play a role in supporting that process.

In my previous life working at IRI, I was fortunate to see a number of elections, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria. The Congolese elections of 2018 were a disaster, were a catastrophe. They didn't even rise to even the closest of international norms. We got what we got. We've moved forward, but now what's next?

And then, you know, Mike, to your point about local, you know, local processes, local politics, that I've brought up with Kenya in the past, it's the same in Congo. You know, we have local elections in the Congo that have been delayed repeatedly. And we have local level leaders who are unelected, who are making decisions. And if you want to disrupt the culture of impunity, culture of corruption, you need to get people in there who are accountable to voters and citizens who can do that.

We saw the impact of that in the Ebola crisis. We see the impact of that in the security sector. So, where the U.S. can support, you know, some quick wins is the area of local governance, looking at community development. It was USAID intervention in the Ebola crisis to work at that community level, to really turn things around and turn the tide, get people connected back to what was going on there, so that changes could be made and the situation could improve.

Finally, on the corruption front, you know, I think a new administration, new Congress, it's going to be easier to look at things like sanctions, look at things like ways in which we can use tools, whether it's Treasury tools or tools within the State Department to, again, not just support the Congolese efforts, but also see where we can play a more active role in the accountability question.

Generally, those are my thoughts.

MR. O'HANLON: Sasha, I'm going to give you the last word here in a second. And my apologies that I was hoping to get the congressman to speak one more time, but he has another commitment. I want to thank everybody who's been part of this. It's been, as Sasha said, a spectacular panel and a hopeful panel.

I want to quickly observe from my own vantage point some of the things we haven't been talking about much today and I think that's pretty good news in most of these cases. Let me just cite

we're not talking a lot about violence or warfare in the East. I'm not suggesting everything's hunky-dory in the East, but it certainly does not strike me that it's as acute of a major crisis as it has been for much of the last 25 years, ever since the Rwanda genocide and various other destabilizing concerns and inputs in that region of the country.

We have not been talking about political violence very much. Yes, we all are aware that political transitions are recent and imperfect and ongoing. But it's, you know, for a person who's served in the Peace Corps during the Mobutu period and who knew the history of the '60s, as we all do, and we all now know the history of the '90s and 2000s, to have a whole session on Congo focused on politics and not be talking much about violence is very good news.

To the not talking a lot about the U.N. Peacekeeping Force. On the one hand, I'm grateful for it, but I'm also grateful that we don't have to be viewing that a top problem unto itself. And in the past, it's been accused of sexual violence. It still has imperfect, ongoing practices to be sure, but, you know, I think this is encouraging that we can focus now on Congo getting to the next level.

And two more things that haven't come up much are Ebola and COVID-19, which, I'm sure, continue and I know continue to concern Congo, but, nonetheless, are not necessarily weighting it down to the point where nothing else is even on the table for discussion.

So, Sasha, that's how I look at things and I just wondered if you had a final word as we sign off here today.

MR. LEZHNEV: I think just very quickly that I think we've all identified that this is a really interesting window right now. And we can't just wait and see what's going to happen. I think we all -- it paves the way for all of us to do something and play a role to help move Congo on a good trajectory again.

You know, I really liked what I believe you, J.T., who said that this is the first time maybe Tshisekedi is really coming into his own as a president. Well, you know, let's help make that succeed, but make the reforms that we want to see succeed that we know that can take Congo on the right trajectory.

And, you know, as the new U.S. administration takes shape, we from civil society need to push and make sure that they're focused on this and that Congo not get sort of sidetracked in Biden's first hundred days, so that there is good attention.

So, I'm very encouraged that we did this event today and get the congressional perspectives and those with links to the administration and others and civil society, you know, from Mvemba and myself, so that we can all think about ways to really tackle this system that has really been in place all the way since King Leopold up until the present. So, we can really begin attacking that system rather than just the Band-Aid over the effects and the consequences, so really get after that system.

So, thanks again, Mike and Brookings team, for organizing this event. And Ambassador, Mvemba, Alexis, J.T., it's been such an honor to be on a panel with all of you.

MR. O'HANLON: So, with that, thank you, everyone. Best wishes for the holidays and beyond. And we're honored that you were with today. Thank you, panelists. Thank you, audience. And farewell and happy 2021 from all of us here and at Bookings. See you.

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