



AFRICAN NARRATIVES

Future of Conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo After M23 Movement's Control of Goma



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Main Ideas

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is facing a complex crisis with the resurgence of the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group, supported by Rwanda, and the escalating activities of the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP).

M23 has made significant territorial advances in North and South Kivu. The capture of the key city of Goma on January 26 is an escalation that risks exacerbating the ongoing humanitarian crisis, which has already displaced over 400,000 people.

Rwanda's support for M23, driven by economic interests in the mineral-rich regions of eastern

DRC, and the involvement of neighboring Uganda and Burundi, heightens the risk of further regional escalation.

ISCAP has leveraged the security vacuum resulting from intensified clashes between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and M23 to escalate attacks and reclaim territory. The group's global jihadist ambitions indicate that regional expansion remains a tangible threat as the security situation in the DRC deteriorates further.

Abstract

Following the March 23 Movement's (M23) capture of Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on January 26, the conflict appears to have entered a new, more dangerous phase. Supported by Rwanda, the M23 movement has made significant advances in North and South Kivu, demonstrating its increased strength in the area. The capture of Goma, the main city in North Kivu province, is likely to worsen the existing humanitarian crisis, with previous conflicts already having displaced over 400,000 people. The continued presence of the M23, with Rwanda's support, highlights economic interests in the mineral-rich areas of eastern Congo, further complicating the conflict, particularly with the involvement of neighboring countries like Uganda and Burundi. This escalation increases

the risk of a wider regional conflict.

Simultaneously, the Islamic State (ISIS) has exploited the security vacuum created by the clashes between the Congolese Armed Forces and the M23, intensifying its attacks in the region. With the growing threat from jihadist groups such as the Islamic State Central Africa Province, the security situation in the DRC is poised for further deterioration.

Consequently, the future of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains uncertain, largely dependent on how the Congolese government and the international community address the rising regional tensions and the growing security threats from armed groups.



Introduction

On Saturday, February 8, 2025, the Tanzania Summit was held in Dar es Salaam to seek solutions to the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This conflict, which threatens the stability of the entire region, has turned the Congo into a battleground, marked by violent bloodshed and the intensified activity of the March 23 Movement (M23). The movement has seized control of the strategic city of Goma, a major gateway to the rich natural resources of Congolese land.

Goma is strategically important due to its geographical and economic location, making it a focal point in the ongoing conflict. Its capture by M23 rebels significantly threatens the region's security, particularly given the ongoing battles over the control of natural resources.

The summit included representatives from various countries involved in the conflict, as well as regional and international organizations, all aimed at devising strategies to resolve the dispute. The repercussions of this conflict are increasingly affecting the local population, with reports of mass displacement and civilian suffering due to the ongoing violence.

As confrontations intensify on Congolese soil, human suffering is accelerating alarmingly. Hospitals are overwhelmed with the wounded and the dead, while hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced, forced to flee in search of safety. Compounding this is the long-standing political tension between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, which clouds the horizon in the absence of quick solutions to the ongoing conflict.

Based on this context, this analysis seeks to answer the following question: What is the








future of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after the March 23 Movement (M23) took control of the strategic city of Goma? The movement's control of Goma raises crucial questions about the future impacts of this conflict on the stability of the region.

Tanzania Summit 2025:

Regional Efforts to End the Conflict in Eastern Congo

 Date: February 8, 2025	 Location: Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
 Participants: Leaders from East and Southern African blocs	 Objective: Finding solutions to the conflict in Eastern Congo

Key Participants

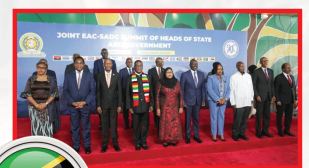
 Samia Suluhu (President of Tanzania)	 Yoweri Museveni (President of Uganda)	 Cyril Ramaphosa (President of South Africa)	 Paul Kagame (President of Rwanda)
 Felix Tshisekedi (President of Congo, via video)	 William Ruto (President of Kenya)	 Evariste Ndayishimiye (President of Burundi)	

Key Decisions

- Call for an immediate ceasefire
- Encouraging negotiations between Congo and the M23 movement
- Emphasizing the withdrawal of foreign forces from Congo

Main Challenges

- The Congolese government's refusal to negotiate with M23
- Continued Rwandan support for the rebels and its impact on regional stability



¹ Paul Nantulya, Risk of regional conflict following fall of Goma and M23 offensive in the DRC, 1st February 2025, Defense Web, <https://2u.pw/laVS3wi8>

The escalation of the conflict in eastern the Democratic Republic of the Congo has created a complex landscape of violence, characterized by:

- **The Control of Goma by the March 23 Movement (M23):**

On Sunday, January 26, 2025, the March 23 Movement announced its control over Goma, the largest city in eastern the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the capital of North Kivu province. This sparked widespread concern about the escalation of the conflict and the worsening humanitarian crisis. The takeover occurred gradually after intense battles that ended with the movement gaining control of Goma's airport, leading to a mass displacement of local residents and increasing fears that the conflict could escalate into a regional war. The clashes resulted in the deaths of 13 foreign soldiers, including three peacekeepers. In response, the Congolese government recalled its diplomats from Kigali, accusing Rwanda of attempting to seize the city. In the capital, Kinshasa, protesters organized attacks on several embassies in protest against the escalating violence.

- **Unilateral Ceasefire:**

In an official statement released on Monday, February 4, 2025, the coalition of rebel groups in eastern Congo, known as "Congo River," which includes the March 23 Movement, announced a unilateral ceasefire for humanitarian reasons after their takeover of Goma. According to United Nations reports, the bloody clashes resulted in the death of 900 people and the injury of 2,880 others. The coalition accused the Congolese army of killing civilians by bombing areas

under their control from the air. The coalition also confirmed that it did not intend to advance towards the city of Bukavu (the capital of South Kivu province) or seek to control additional areas.

- **Mutual Accusations Between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda:**

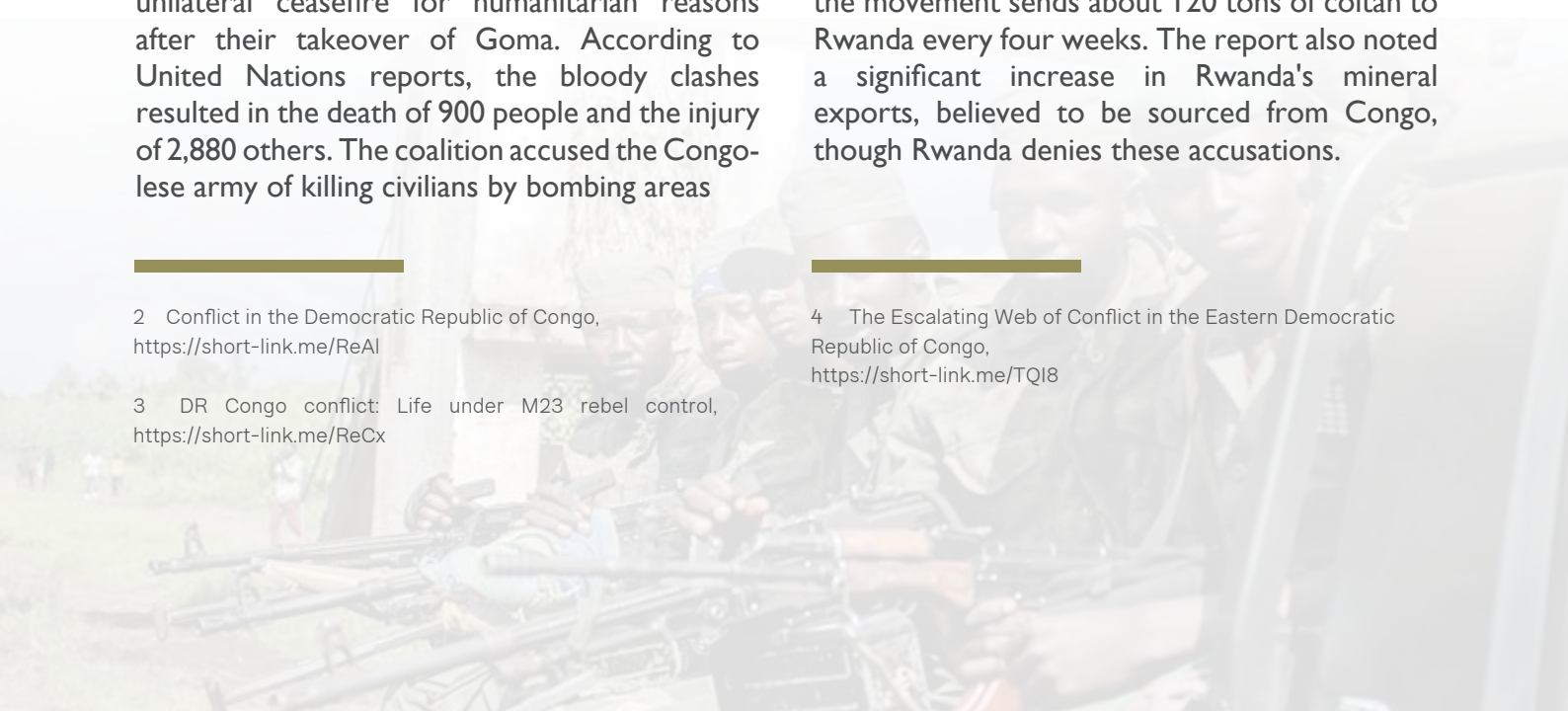
The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) accuses Rwanda of fueling the conflict in eastern Congo by supporting the March 23 Movement (M23). These accusations are based on a 2022 United Nations expert report that provided strong evidence of Rwandan forces participating in attacks alongside the M23 rebels. In response, Rwanda denies these allegations, claiming it has taken defensive measures and accuses the DRC of collaborating with the "Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda" (FDLR), which is accused of launching attacks against the Tutsi ethnic group.

Additionally, the DRC and United Nations reports have accused Rwanda of exploiting the ongoing conflict to seize valuable minerals such as gold and coltan (used in mobile phone and electronic device manufacturing). In recent years, the M23 movement has extended its control over rich mining areas. A report published by the United Nations in December 2024 revealed that the movement sends about 120 tons of coltan to Rwanda every four weeks. The report also noted a significant increase in Rwanda's mineral exports, believed to be sourced from Congo, though Rwanda denies these accusations.

2 Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo,
<https://short-link.me/ReAl>

3 DR Congo conflict: Life under M23 rebel control,
<https://short-link.me/ReCx>

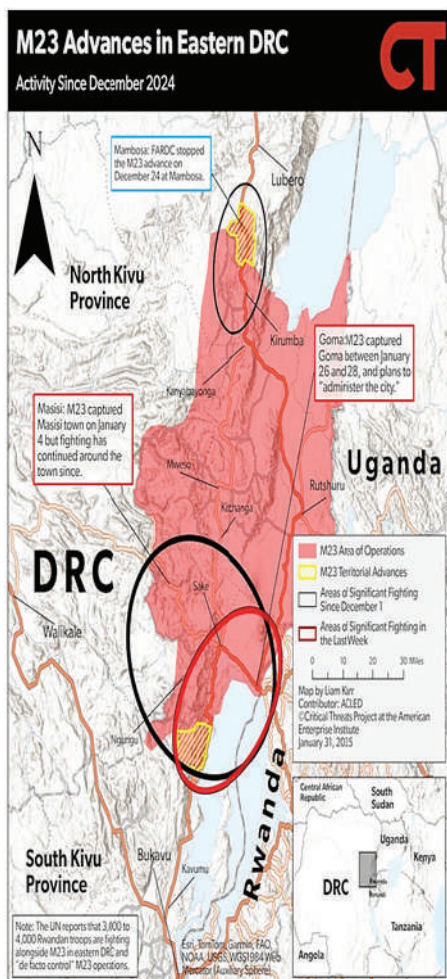
4 The Escalating Web of Conflict in the Eastern Democratic
Republic of Congo,
<https://short-link.me/TQl8>



• The Tragedy of Displacement and Human Rights Violations:

Jeremy Lawrence, spokesperson for the United Nations Human Rights Commission, pointed to the escalating violence in eastern Congo as the March 23 Movement (M23) advanced toward Bukavu. He stated that cases of mass executions and assaults on civilians have been documented,


and highlighted the forced recruitment of civilians and the use of schools and hospitals as military sites. The International Organization for Migration also expressed its deep concern over the mass displacement in Goma due to ongoing violence, which has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the region.



• Warnings and Condemnations of the Escalating Crisis:

During the opening of the 37th extraordinary session on Friday, January 7, 2025, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, warned of the worsening violence

in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, expressing deep concern over the escalation and stating that the worst might still be ahead. The G7 countries and the European Union condemned the March 23 Movement's attack on Goma, considering it a blatant violation of Congo's sovereignty.




Goma Under Fire

Bloody Toll of the Conflict

Human Losses and Violations

- Executions:** 12 people were summarily executed by the M23 movement between January 26th and 28th, 2025.
- Rape:** 52 women were raped by Congolese forces in South Kivu. 165 women were raped by escaped prisoners during the attack on Goma on January 27th, 2025.



The Humanitarian Crisis

- Displacement:** 300,000 displaced people were partially or fully evacuated from displacement sites in Goma.
- Urgent Needs:** Thousands urgently need shelter, food, clean water, and medical care.
- Disease Outbreak:** Outbreak of cholera, malaria, acute watery diarrhea, respiratory diseases, skin diseases, and monkeypox. 21 African countries were affected by the spread of monkeypox from the Goma epicenter.

Security Collapse and Repercussions

- Diplomatic Tension:** Attacks on the French and US embassies exacerbated international tensions.
- Prison Escape:** More than 4,000 prisoners escaped from Munzenze Prison in Goma on January 27th, 2025.



• Regional Diplomatic Efforts:

During a joint summit in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on Friday and Saturday, February 7 and 8, 2025, leaders from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC) met, with the presence of Democratic Republic of Congo President Félix Tshisekedi and Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, to discuss ways to de-escalate and resolve the ongoing conflict in eastern Congo. The summit aimed to make progress after the failure of peace processes in Luanda and Nairobi, focusing on urgent priorities such as a ceasefire and opening supply routes.

These developments demonstrate the complexity of the crisis in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with ongoing regional tensions and escalating humanitarian and security challenges.

The ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo embodies deep historical, geopolitical, and economic complexities. The difficulty of the situation can be attributed to several long-standing factors and causes that continuously resurface, among the most prominent of which are:

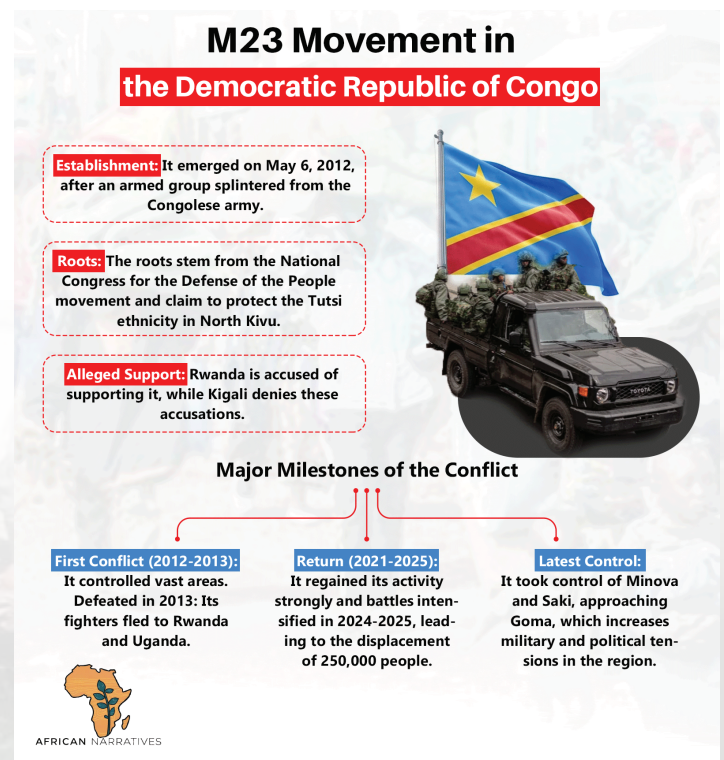
• Historical Factors:

The history of military intervention between Uganda and Rwanda in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains a key element in understanding the current conflict in the Great Lakes region. During the First Congo War (1996-1997), both countries collaborated to overthrow the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. However, this alliance turned into hostility during the Second Congo War (1998-2008), when each supported competing armed groups to overthrow Laurent Kabila's government. These ongoing conflicts left deep tensions between the two countries, complicating the security situation in the DRC to this day. The escalation of the conflict in the Kivu regions and the emergence of the March 23 Movement, alongside recent communications between the

military leaders, remain influential factors in fueling the conflict and perpetuating instability in the Congo.

• Ethnic Conflicts and Legacy Rivalry:

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is considered an "ethnic powder keg," with numerous competing ethnic groups coexisting, most notably the Hutu and Tutsi. This rivalry is politically and militarily exploited by local and regional actors. When examining the parties involved in the conflict, it is evident that the March 23 Movement is primarily composed of Tutsi and enjoys implicit support from Rwanda, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo supports Hutu militias, such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda. These fragile balances periodically fuel violence, with each group attempting to solidify its military and political presence.



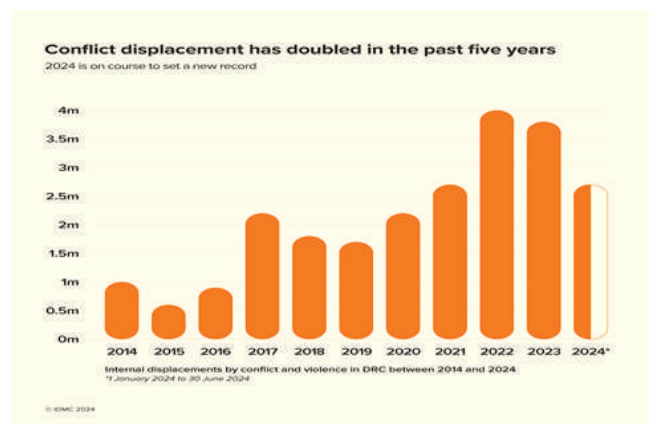
• Economic Competition over Resources:

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is rich in vast mineral resources, making it a focal point for international and regional competition. It is the world's largest producer of diamonds, possesses the second-largest copper reserves, and holds 60% of the global cobalt supply, along with massive reserves of lithium, zinc, and tungsten. Additionally, the Congo is one of the richest countries in uranium, positioning it as a key player in the nuclear energy sector, alongside the rare mineral coltan, of which it also controls production. This extraordinary wealth, amidst fragile political stability, has fueled external interventions and ethnic conflicts. Instead of these resources being an economic blessing, they have become a curse, with armed groups fighting over them, supported by multinational companies and international actors, all vying for control of the mines and smuggling routes. The black economy in the Congo serves as a model for resource plundering and smuggling through Rwanda and Uganda, eventually selling them in global markets. This system keeps the conflict ongoing, as militias find in illicit trade a sustainable source of financing.

• Changing Patterns of Displacement in a 25-Year-Long Crisis:

Over the past eight years, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has listed the Democratic Republic of the Congo as one of the world's most neglected crises in terms of displacement. More than 25 million people across the country, nearly a quarter of the population, are suffering from conflict, violence, and disasters. However, the DRC has received only 41% of the required humanitarian funding. The report highlights the lack of media and international political attention to the situation. The displacement crisis is an ongoing issue that traces its roots back to the First Congo War in 1996. While the armed groups involved change regularly, the affected populations rarely recover from the continuous violence, living in constant fear of displacement. In fact, by the end of 2023, 6.9 million people were living in internal displacement within the country.

In 2023, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported 3,772,000 cases of internal displacement due to conflict and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 3,464,000 cases occurring in the eastern regions of the country, including the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika. More than 120 active armed groups are operating in these four provinces, causing harm to local populations and leading to significant displacement.



• Intersection of Interests in the Great Lakes Region:

The current conflict in the region is rooted in the changing and complex regional alliances between Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose security and geopolitical interests are deeply intertwined. Rwanda has accused both the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi of collaborating with opposition armed groups, such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda and the FDLR militia. Additionally, Bukavu and the Ruzizi Plain are major hotspots of tension between rebel groups and the Burundian military, reflecting the complex nature of the conflict in the region.

With the M23 Movement controlling North Kivu province and advancing into South Kivu, tensions are rising even further, threatening to ignite a broader regional conflict. These military dynamics are fueling the conflict in the Congo, as the movement seeks to achieve strategic goals by seizing more territory and building new alliances, further complicating the security situation in the region.



The dynamics that shaped the security partnership between Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the factors that led to the controversial relations between the two countries

The underlying reasons for Kenya's security involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Kenya and intervention in the DRC crisis

Kenya has played an important role in attempting to resolve the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in the eastern region, where armed conflicts continue to significantly impact security and stability. Kenya's intervention in the Congo encompasses a series of political and military initiatives launched to promote regional peace and stability.

Background of Kenya's Intervention

Kenya began influencing the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in the 1990s when the region was in chaos due to civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and armed groups. Given Kenya's geographical and political ties with countries in the region, it was keen to ensure that the conflict did not spill over into its own territory. Additionally, Kenya sought to strengthen its national security by committing to peace initia-

tives in the DRC, especially in the eastern region, which had witnessed an escalation of armed violence.

The Nairobi Process and its Role in Peace

One of the prominent initiatives led by Kenya in its intervention in the Congolese conflict is the Nairobi Process, launched in April 2022. The goal of this process was to secure stability in eastern Congo through a mix of politics, diplomacy, and military intervention led by the East African Community (EAC), with the aim of providing support in fighting armed groups such as the March 23 Movement (M23) and other factions.

Despite its good intentions, the Nairobi Process faced significant challenges from the outset. Primarily funded by Kenya, the process struggled with issues related to comprehensive representation and the call for genuine political dialogue between the Congolese government and armed groups. The process was unable to create effective frameworks for involving all the key actors in the conflict, leading to a lack of trust among the concerned parties and creating tensions between Kenya and the DRC.

Kenya's Internal Conflict and its Impact on Intervention

One of the factors negatively impacting the effectiveness of Kenya's intervention was the internal conflict in Kenya between the current president, William Ruto, and his predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta. Kenyatta had initiated the mediation process in the DRC during his presidency, while local politics in Kenya after Ruto took office influenced the support for the process in the Congo, causing confusion in handling regional crises.

Furthermore, some politically provocative statements made by Ruto regarding the Congolese caused significant damage to relations between the two countries. On one occasion, he referred to them as "wearing high-waisted pants and having nothing," which sparked a wave of anger among the Congolese population and further escalated tensions.

Security and Economic Challenges

While Kenya's intervention aimed to resolve the conflict and help enhance security, some analysts believe that security solutions may not be effective unless the root causes of the conflict are addressed. For instance, the armed groups operating in eastern Congo have their own political and economic agendas, and it is not easy to change their behavior through military interventions alone.

On the other hand, there was an important economic aspect to Kenya's intervention. Kenya benefitted from the growth of economic investments in the DRC, such as acquisitions in the banking sector, including the acquisition of the Congolese Commercial Bank by the I&M Bank Group in 2020. This economic growth provided an additional motivation for supporting stability in the DRC, as Kenya hoped to further enhance its investments in a region rich in natural resources.





Outlook and Recommendations

Despite the significant challenges surrounding Kenya's intervention in the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the doubts it raises, Kenya remains an important ally for the DRC. This is evident in the continued growth of Kenya's economic interests in the DRC, as well as the broader economic benefits the DRC continues to gain from the relationship. Additionally, the bilateral military cooperation between the two countries remains intact, particularly through the presence of Kenyan Defense Forces infantry trainers in Kisangani, along with the participation of Congolese military personnel in training programs in Kenya.

To maximize these opportunities and contribute to achieving peace, cooperation, and justice in the region, the following recommendations are made:

- Re-establish and activate direct political dialogue between the heads of state of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya to ensure political engagement at the highest levels.
- Resume discussions on judicial cooperation related to the regional and international judicial mechanisms for the DRC and encourage countries in the region to demonstrate strong commitment to this. Only this can halt the cycle of impunity that fuels conflict and instability in the region, as highlighted in the Framework Agreement for Peace, Security, and Cooperation for the DRC and the region.
- Develop a stronger bilateral defense and security partnership between the two countries to help rebuild the security sector in the DRC.
- Take into account the fact that opening borders within the framework of the East African Community (EAC) adds a new level of complexity to combating cross-border crime and terrorism in the region. This requires strengthening cooperation, improving intelligence-sharing, and enhancing regional capabilities, with additional support from global actors such as the United States.