

THE EAST AFRICAN  
COMMUNITY REGIONAL FORCE  
IN THE DR CONGO:  
A REGIONAL RETROSPECTIVE

# THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY REGIONAL FORCE IN THE DR CONGO: A REGIONAL RETROSPECTIVE

First published November 2024 by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

ISBN 978-2-490093-48-9

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Editor: William Ham

Authors: Fred Bauma, Ngala Chome, William Ham, Dastan Kweka, Anna Reuss, Kristof Titeca

Layout by: Michael Lusaba

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# Foreword

Between April 2023 and July 2024, FES offices in DR Congo, Uganda, and South Sudan jointly organized three regional civil society exchanges focused on the now-defunct East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), which was deployed in Eastern DR Congo from August 2022 to December 2023, and its successor from Southern Africa, the SADC Mission in DR Congo (SAMIDRC). These discussions brought together civil society representatives, researchers, and academics from DR Congo and the troop-contributing countries, providing a platform for exchange and shared learning. The primary aim was to strengthen civil society's engagement with policy processes surrounding regional peace and security.

The exchanges highlighted how decisively national interests influenced the deployment of national contingents within the EAC Regional Force. However, like-minded civil society actors often lacked a comprehensive understanding of the motives, processes, and perceptions that shaped each country's engagement in DR Congo. This publication aims to provide a comprehensive view by presenting national perspectives within a regional retrospective on the EAC Regional Force.

**Dr. Anna Reuss**

Director, Peace and Security Competence  
Centre, FES Africa Department

# Introduction

By William Ham\*

The East African Community's (EAC) first and only military intervention is over. Soon after the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) joined the regional block in March 2022, the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) deployed to defuse the rapidly escalating war in the eastern Congolese borderlands. The Congolese invited in the EACRF to push back the Movement 23 du Mars (M23) rebellion, but the mission instead took a passive role supporting various ceasefires. Delays, lack of external funding, and differing expectations of the mission's purpose culminated in the EACRF's expulsion from the country sixteen months later in December 2023.

The following essays will reflect on the East African Community Regional Force from the perspective of each of its troop contributing countries (TCCs). While nominally directed by the EAC headquarters in Arusha, the priorities of each of these individual TCCs dominated the mission. The EACRF must be understood through the individual national politics of its troop contributors. These essays will do this through reflections on the EACRF from perspectives in Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, as well as the DRC.

## A mission without a mandate

Any peacekeeping mission going into the eastern DRC faces enormous challenges. Over 28 years of constant warfare resulted in dozens of intersecting local, national, and regional conflicts. Repeated military interventions by the Congo's neighbors, the United Nations, and the European Union left the Congolese deeply distrustful of the intentions of outsiders.<sup>1</sup>

1 Congo Research Group, *Sondage GEC Ebuteli: Deuxième Note Thématique sur la Force Régionale*, February 2023. <https://www.congoresearchgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/version-anglaise-sondage-gec-ebuteli-deuxieme-note-thematique-force-regionale.pdf>.

On top of these challenges, the EAC lacked an official mandate. Although the contents of a "mandate" were revealed in a later communique, the legal basis of the mission was a classified "Status of Forces Agreement" never seen by the public. The communique based its mandate on Articles 124 and 125 of the EAC treaty, although these articles primarily address law enforcement cooperation and do not explicitly cover peace operations. The disparate actions of the TCCs illustrate this confusion over the purpose of the EAC mission. While the government in Kinshasa sought to replicate the success of offensive UN operations against the previous M23 rebellion in 2013, Kenya and South Sudan conducted a "traditional" peacekeeping mission that prioritized monitoring ceasefires between M23 and FARDC allied forces. Burundian troops took the fight to rebel forces, while Congolese accused Ugandan elements of assisting M23<sup>23</sup>. Tanzania never deployed under the EAC banner. While nominally under a single Kenyan commander, the mission acted as a series of parallel bilateral operations under a single EAC flag.

## Why the EACRF matters

Despite its short and bitter deployment, the Regional Force is important to explore for three reasons. First, while the EACRF may be over, a follow-on intervention facing similar challenges was already deployed to replace it. Dissatisfied with the EAC, in May 2023, the Congolese invited the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to deploy a more aggressive force<sup>4</sup>. The SADC mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) faces the same complex conflict and weary population confronted by the EAC.

2 "M23 Go for Burundian Troops in DRC Clashes," *The East African*, August 22, 2022. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/m23-go-for-burundian-troops-in-drc-clashes-4430598>.

3 "They Talked via Walkie-Talkie: In DRC, the Links Between Uganda and the M23 Rebellion Are Raising Questions," *Le Monde Afrique*, July 22, 2022. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/07/22/they-talked-via-walkie-talkie-in-drc-the-links-between-uganda-and-the-m23-rebellion-are-raising-questions\\_5991073\\_124.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/07/22/they-talked-via-walkie-talkie-in-drc-the-links-between-uganda-and-the-m23-rebellion-are-raising-questions_5991073_124.html).

4 "SADC Prepares to Go Back to the Future in Eastern DRC," *Institute for Security Studies*, August 29, 2023. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/sadc-prepares-to-go-back-to-the-future-in-eastern-drc>.

\* For personal reasons, the editor has chosen to write under a pseudonym.

Second, the mission highlights larger shifts in peace operations amidst an international system in transition. Increasing conflict within the Security Council threatens UN peace operations, and African multilateral organizations are stepping up to fill the gap. While the UN hasn't authorized a peace support operation since 2014, African multilateral organizations have deployed 17 missions over the same period.<sup>5</sup> These African-led missions rely on external funding from predominantly Western donors. However, as these donors' security priorities shift toward conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, the funding available shrinks. The EACRF and SAMIDRC struggled to find financing and deployed at considerable cost to the TCCs.

Third, the EACRF offers a window into understanding the intersection of regional and national politics. Each

contributing country's different understanding of the mission fueled suspicion, confusion, and misinformation. Only by examining each in detail does a clearer image of the EACRF emerge. These dynamics persist even after the EAC mission ended, as the former TCCs remain important players. As Burundi and Uganda continue to deploy their forces bilaterally into the DRC, Tanzania is contributing troops to SADC, and Kenya recently reinforced the existing UN mission.

As national politics and regional politics become deeply intertwined, there is a greater need to engage at the regional level. By bringing together diverse regional voices to discuss the EACRF, the following pages equip the reader to better engage ongoing regional security issues across East Africa.

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5 "African-Led Peace Operations: A Crucial Tool for Peace and Security," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, August 9, 2023. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-led-peace-operations-a-crucial-tool-for-peace-and-security/>.

# Lost in translation in the DR Congo?

By Fred Bauma

On December 5, 2023, Kenyan troops announced the start of their withdrawal from the DRC, marking the rapid end of the East African Regional Force (EACRF). In just a few days, the withdrawal of contingents from Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and South Sudan was complete. For the force commander, General Kiugu, the EACRF achieved positive results, notably the protection of the towns of Goma and Sake. However, for the Congolese government, the EAC mission was a failure marked by “laxity” and an inability to implement its offensive mandate.

The Congolese government would not long mourn the loss of the force it had so earnestly hoped for. It was soon replaced by the SADC force (SAMIDRC), which began operations in December 2023. The failure of the EACRF marks the beginning of the DRC’s *strategic reorientation* away from East Africa towards SADC, which it had abandoned at the start of Félix Tshisekedi’s first term in office.

Despite this change, the security situation has not improved - quite the contrary. Both the Congolese government and the M23 rebels along with their Rwandan backers embarked on an arms race, with both sides acquiring combat drones and ground-to-air missiles. M23 expanded into a broader political alliance (the Alliance Fleuve Congo) and the Congolese government armed local militia groups known as *Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie*, or VDP. According to the last UN Group of Experts report<sup>6</sup>, the Rwandan military is providing massive support to M23, with the number of Rwandan troops matching or outnumbering M23 in eastern DRC.

Clashes between the M23/RDF and the Congolese army and its supporters continued, resulting in massive population movements. To date, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates the number of internally displaced people in eastern DRC at 7.3 million, of which

more than one million are due to clashes with the M23 over the past three months. The towns of Goma and Sake (the latter nearly emptied of its population) are under siege by M23, which succeeded in extending the territory under its control beyond Lubero and Kalehe in South-Kivu province. M23 now controls more territory than at the height of its previous campaign in 2012-2013.

Worse still, East Africa finds itself on the brink of a regional crisis, with growing tensions between Rwanda and Burundi, in addition to bellicose rhetoric between the DRC and Rwanda. Mediation efforts led by the EAC led Nairobi Process stalled, while the Luanda Process is struggling to find solutions. On 8 July 2024, Tanzania organized a ministerial retreat to analyze the conflict in the region, the meeting resulted in a controversial post on social media between the Rwandan MOFA and their DRC counterpart over “decisions... to reinvigorate Luanda and Nairobi peace processes”<sup>7</sup>. Such an incident illustrates the lack of trust between the actors.

Before taking a retrospective look at the defunct EAC force from the various capitals of the troop-contributing countries, this paper looks back at the context that led to the establishment of the EACRF and the reason for its failure. I argue that the EAC involvement in the DRC conflict was a consequence of a triple dynamic. The controversial arrival of President Félix Tshisekedi led him to seek legitimacy and new allies abroad, leading to Kenya’s growing influence. This first dynamic inflamed the second dynamic of regional tensions between Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. Finally, the pre-electoral dynamic in the DRC encouraged a hard stance and ultimately doomed the EACRF.

6 Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN Security Council, 4 June 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/118/80/pdf/n2411880.pdf>

7 “RDC Minafet,” Twitter, March 25, 2023. [https://x.com/rdc\\_minafet/status/1809930001707401626?s=46](https://x.com/rdc_minafet/status/1809930001707401626?s=46).

## Tshisekedi, the fragility of contested power

On January 24, 2019, Felix Tshisekedi came to power in a widely contested presidential election. To form a government, Tshisekedi negotiated an agreement with previous president Joseph Kabila's *Front Commun pour le Congo* (FCC) coalition, who held a majority in the National Assembly and maintained control over critical spheres of the state apparatus, including the security services. The government resulting from this coalition was headed by Ilunga Ilunkaba, a technocrat close to Joseph Kabila. Both chambers of parliament and all 26 provinces of the DRC were won by the FCC. In addition, key power-controlling institutions such as the Constitutional Court and the Congo Business Federation were also in Joseph Kabila's hands. On a regional level, Joseph Kabila's regime had deep roots with SADC member states South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia with which it felt ideologically and politically close. These states had provided significant political support to Kabila at various moments of crisis.

Félix Tshisekedi's first two years in power were therefore characterized by a struggle against his predecessor for effective control of the state. This culminated in a change of government in 2020 and Tshisekedi's apparent victory. This internal political struggle led to a strategic reorientation away from SADC and towards the EAC.

## Kenya involvement, normalization with Rwanda, and EAC integration

To counter Joseph Kabila's influence, the DRC turned away from SADC, its traditional ally, to draw closer to East Africa through Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. Felix Tshisekedi enjoyed close relationships with Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, then respectively President and Vice-President. Kenya is often cited as one of the "guarantors" of the political agreement between Joseph Kabila and Felix Tshisekedi that allowed Tshisekedi to rise to power in the DRC. The rapprochement is particularly beneficial for Kenya which makes no secret of its economic ambitions for the DRC and its potential market of over 100 million inhabitants. Subsequently, Kenyan companies started setting up in the DRC through Equity Bank, which has

acquired BCDC, the oldest bank in the Congo. KCB, another Kenyan bank, has acquired Trust Merchant Bank (TMB) and its extensive network across the DRC. Kenya also attempted unsuccessfully to invest in the mining and energy sector in the DRC. Most importantly, Kenya pushed for accelerated DRC membership in the EAC. As a result, in March 2022, less than three years after applying for membership, the DRC's accession was confirmed. Kenya extended this political and economic support to the military sphere by contributing peacekeepers to the UN DRC mission MONUSCO's Quick Reaction Force.

In addition to drawing closer to Kenya, the DRC normalized its relations with Rwanda during the first years of Tshisekedi regime. Between 2019 and 2020, with the support of FARDC, Rwanda conducted covert operations in Virunga National Park and South Kivu against the FDLR and RNC, two Rwandan armed groups- the former constituted by 1994 genocidaires and the latter of allies-turned opponents of the Rwandan president<sup>8</sup>. These operations led to the assassination of several FDLR leaders, including Sylvestre Mudacura, its military chief<sup>9</sup>. The resumption of cooperation with Rwanda also extended into the economic sphere, with the opening of flights by Rwandan airline Rwandair to Kinshasa, and the signing of contracts in the mining sector and infrastructure. In the same period (2019-2021), in its efforts to combat armed groups, the Congolese government undertook efforts to set up an integrated regional military command made up of officers and special forces from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania. Meetings held in September and October resulted in a plan proposed by the Chief of General Staff of the Congolese army (FARDC) suggesting a deployment in three phases between November 15 and May 15, 2020. However this initiative faced opposition from Uganda, and then Burundi amid tensions between the two countries and Rwanda. Congolese civil society and parliamentarians also criticized a military intervention that would involve Rwandan troops on Congolese soil. The force never deployed.

8 «Militaires Rwandais en RDC: Kigali Mène-t-elle une Guerre Secrète?» *Radio France Internationale*, April 22, 2020. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200422-militaires-rwandais-en-rdc-kigali-me-t-elle-une-guerre-secrete-12>.

9 "DRC Army Says Rwandan Hutu Rebel Commander Mudacumura Killed," *Al Jazeera*, September 18, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/18/drc-army-says-rwandan-hutu-rebel-commander-mudacumura-killed>.



## Uganda's Operation Shujaa and the resurgence of M23

The DRC has also undertaken to normalize its relations with Uganda. In 2021, the DRC signed an agreement with Kampala for the construction of 223 kms of roads linking Uganda and North Kivu<sup>10</sup>. Dott Services, a company close to the Ugandan regime, was contracted to build these roads and awarded mining contracts in eastern DRC<sup>11</sup>. At the end of 2023, to counter the threat of ADF terrorists, the Congolese and Ugandan governments launched Operation Shujaa and began road construction. Both initiatives seemed to threaten the vital interests of Rwanda, whose economy depends on cross-border trade. At the same time, M23, isolated for several years in the Chanzu hills of eastern DRC, resumed its activities. In just a few months, this rebel group expanded into several localities in the Rutshuru territory of North Kivu.

Initial efforts by the DRC and Ugandan governments to contain the group's advance and resolve the crisis led to the launch of the "Nairobi process" in March 2022. However, this process, designed to encourage the surrender of members of armed groups, excluded the M23 from the outset. Officially, the DRC alleges they have excluded M23 for continuing to attack the FARDC while still on the negotiating table. In reality, the pressure of popular opinion in the DRC and the divergences within the Congolese negotiators strongly influenced the sidelining of the M23. Two senior advisors of president Tshisekedi, Serge Tshibangu and Claude Ibalanke, disagreed on their policy toward M23 in the first Nairobi meeting. In the end, M23 was excluded.

During the second conclave of EAC Heads of State in Nairobi, the block committed to the creation of the Regional Force. The force's proposed mandate was to "contain, defeat and eradicate negative forces operating in the DRC" (ConsOp, June 2022). Three months later, the contract for the establishment of this force (SOFA) specified a mandate based on four main points: (1) "To plan and conduct operations with the FARDC in the joint area of operations

to defeat elements of armed groups in eastern DRC"; (2) "To support the FARDC in achieving and maintaining law and order"; (3) "To support the DRC... in continuing to assist populations affected by the activities of armed groups"; and finally (4) "Support for the disarmament, demobilization, community rehabilitation and stabilization program". Understood as an offensive force to combat the M23, this force raised hopes within the Congolese government. In an interview with RFI and France 24 in September 2022, Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi suggested that Kenyan troops could attack M23 in Bunagana<sup>12</sup>.

However, the force deployed several months later showed little inclination to fight M23 or any other armed group. Disagreements over the force's mandate arose between various contributing countries. Kenya and Uganda asserted that their mission was to create conditions to enable the political process and create a buffer zone between the Congolese government and M23, in accordance with the Luanda protocol. This passive stance, influenced by the regime change in Kenya, increasingly frustrated the DRC as M23 extended its territory to the outskirts of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. At a meeting of EAC heads of state in Nairobi, Félix Tshisekedi threatened to terminate the East African force if it failed to implement its offensive mandate. The Kenyan forces' tolerant stance towards the M23 was a source of tension with both the government and civil society, leading to the resignation of the EACRF force commander.

On the eve of running for reelection, President Tshisekedi was forced to demonstrate military results in the face of continued M23 expansion and Rwanda's growing support for the rebellion. As a result, the Congolese government adopted a hardline stance towards the EACRF and mobilized local armed groups as well as foreign military contractors to hold back the rebels.

Finally, on the eve of the 2023 elections, the DRC demanded the departure of the EAC forces. The mission was criticized as friendly towards M23, the buffer zone perceived as an attempt at balkanization, and the EACRF unable to stop Rwandan intrusions into the areas it occupied (Kibumba & Rugari). The DRC protested the force's overall passive attitude and failure to implement its offensive mandate (SADC, May 2023). To replace this mission, Tshisekedi would soon be forced to come full circle and look to the SADC for support.

10 «Construction des Routes Kasindi-Beni-Butembo: 40 % de la Main-d'Œuvre Sera,» *Radio Okapi*, June 4, 2022. <https://www.radiookapi.net/2022/06/04/actualite/societe/construction-des-routes-kasindi-beni-butembo-40-de-la-main-doeuvre-sera>.

11 GEC Ebuteli, *Operation Shujaa: Ouganda-RDC - Combattre l'ADF ou Sécuriser les Intérêts Économiques?* (New York: Center for International Cooperation, October 2022). <https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/rapport-gec-ebuteli-operation-shujaa-ouganda-rdc-combattre-adf-ou-securiser-interets-economiques-1.pdf>.

12 «Élections en RDC en Décembre 2023: J'y Crois,» Affirme le Président Félix Tshisekedi,» *Radio France Internationale*, September 23, 2022. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/invite-afrique/20220923-elections-en-rdc-en-decembre-2023-j-y-crois-affirme-le-president-felix-tshisekedi>.

# The Nairobi process and Kenya's recent ambitions in the DR Congo

By Ngala Chome

A few minutes after 5 AM on Sunday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2023, Kenyan soldiers loaded themselves into a Kenyan Air Force plane and took off from the eastern DRC town of Goma, bound for Nairobi. Not long after, troops from Uganda, Burundi and South Sudan would each complete their own exodus, although many would soon return. These troops had made up the defunct East African Community Regional Force (EACRF). The East Africa Community (EAC) mandated the EACRF alongside the "Nairobi Process" in November 2022 to disarm the 120 armed groups operating in eastern DRC. Before the assignment barely begun, and less than a year into the EACRF's deployment, the Congolese government refused to renew its mandate<sup>13</sup>. The regional force had to leave the Congo.

The Congolese expected that the EACRF would confront the March 23 movement (M23), a rebellion that rapidly overpowered the Congolese army and seized much of North Kivu province<sup>14</sup>. Millions were displaced by the renewed violence, which began in late 2021, creating a humanitarian catastrophe. When the EACRF arrived, Tshisekedi would be disappointed. Kenya, whose general served as the force commander, avoided combat with all rebel groups, including M23<sup>15</sup>. Kenyan President William Ruto voiced his misgivings about the mission without unforthcoming Western funding<sup>16</sup>. The 'Nairobi process', which birthed the EACRF, quickly stalled with neither side willing to

budge<sup>17</sup>. The DRC government refused to negotiate with M23 directly, fearing it would legitimize the group, which the DRC continues to see as nothing more than a Rwandan puppet. The Congolese government claimed that the EACRF was ineffective at best, and complicit with M23 at worst.

Tshisekedi blamed his Kenyan counterpart, William Ruto, for the EACRF's lack of resolve, in fact, claiming that he had sided with Rwanda<sup>18</sup>. An unlikely announcement by M23 made at Serena Hotel, Nairobi, during the run-up to the DRC presidential elections in December 2023 complicated matters even further<sup>19</sup>. Flanked by the spokesman of the M23 rebel group, the former head of DRC's electoral commission, Bertrand Bisimwa, and Tshisekedi's opponent, Corneille Nangaa, announced the establishment of the 'Congo River Alliance', which included the M23 and eight other armed groups<sup>20</sup>. Kinshasa responded by recalling its ambassador to Kenya and its representative in the EAC<sup>21</sup>.

The decision to deploy the EACRF and the 'Nairobi process' were initiated by Kenya's former President and Ruto's predecessor, Uhuru Kenyatta, only two months before Kenyatta left office<sup>22</sup>. At the time, Kenyatta was the Chair of the Heads of States' Summit of the EAC. Tshisekedi's

13 "EACRF Completes Exit from Eastern DRC," *The East African*, October 16, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/eacrf-completes-exit-from-eastern-drc-4471016>.

14 "East Africa's Troops Are Leaving the DRC: What Went Wrong and What Comes Next," *The Conversation*, October 13, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/east-africas-troops-are-leaving-the-drc-what-went-wrong-and-what-comes-next-219500>.

15 "Military Deployments in East DR Congo," *The Citizen*, October 14, 2023. <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/africa/military-deployments-in-east-dr-congo-4009492>.

16 "AU Summit: Ruto Pushes for Money, Other Resources to DRC," *The East African*, February 18, 2023. [https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/au-summit-ruto-pushes-for-money-other-resources-to-drc-4128538#google\\_vignette](https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/au-summit-ruto-pushes-for-money-other-resources-to-drc-4128538#google_vignette).

17 "EACRF Completes Exit from Eastern DRC. *The East African*, December 21, 2023, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/eacrf-completes-exit-from-eastern-drc-4471016>

18 "Ruto Mismanaged Nairobi Peace Process, Tshisekedi Says," *The East African*, October 14, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/ruto-mismanaged-nairobi-peace-process-tshisekedi-says-4704180>.

19 "Kenya Says It Disassociates with DR Congo Rebels Alliance," *The East African*, October 15, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenya-says-disassociates-with-dr-congo-rebels-alliance-4468872>.

20 <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/dr-congo-opposition-figure-announces-alliance-with-rebels-4465608>

21 "Kinshasa Recalls Ambassador to Nairobi over Row with Kenya," *The East African*, October 15, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kinshasa-recalls-ambassador-to-nairobi-over-row-with-kenya-4468720>.

22 "Communiqué: The Third Heads of State Conclave on the Democratic Republic of Congo - The Nairobi Process," East African Community, November 21, 2023. <https://www.eac.int/communiqué/2504-communiqué-the-third-heads-of-state-conclave-on-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-the-nairobi-process>.

claim that Ruto, Kenyatta's successor, was siding with Rwanda, tapped into a familiar, but dizzying constellation of competing regional interests that have continued to shape conflict dynamics in eastern DRC since the 1990s<sup>23</sup>.

While such peace and security issues may have informed Kenya's entry into such a volatile theatre of conflict, a close reading of Kenya's intentions in the DRC may reveal other, more economic considerations.<sup>24</sup> When expected Western funding did not materialise, there was little motivation to take an aggressive posture. Inadvertently, latent expectations by the Kenyans of commercial reward for their intervention in eastern DRC may explain the dismal performance of the EACRF under Kenyan command.

To replace the EACRF, Congolese President Tshisekedi turned to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a task made easy by his position as Chair of SADC's Heads of States' Summit. Burundi, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa responded to Tshisekedi's request and deployed forces to eastern DRC in December 2023 to fill the void left by the departure of the EACRF<sup>25</sup>. The resulting direct combat with the M23 came at the cost of intense fighting and more fatalities<sup>26</sup>. At the time, Tshisekedi had reserved little hope in the existing United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC, known by its French acronym MONUSCO. After two decades of UN peacekeeping without significant improvement, public opinion had turned against the mission and led Tshisekedi to fast-track the withdrawal of MONUSCO in 2024. The hasty establishment of the EACRF (as it shall be shown below), was driven by the need to quickly replace MONUSCO and inherit its budget.

Just as the EAC regional force was tied to the Nairobi process, the SADC deployment is closely-associated with the 'Luanda process', kick-started by Angolan president Joao Manuel Gonçalves Lourenco. While the Nairobi process focused on the demobilisation of the up to 120 rebel groups known to be operating in eastern DRC, the Luanda talks seek rapprochement between the capitals of Kinshasa and Kigali.

Of the four EAC member-states that contributed troops to the EACRF, only South-Sudan (which faces a serious post-conflict situation at home) remains disengaged from eastern DRC. Kenyan forces re-entered the conflict under MONUSCO in August, 2024. Needless to state, UN funding for MONUSCO, needed more now than ever, is assured and more certain than was the case with the EACRF. Burundi and Uganda continue to deploy forces under bilateral agreements. Unsurprisingly, the DRC refused to let Rwanda participate in the EACRF mission. Tanzania, which abstained from the EACRF despite being an EAC member, deployed under the SADC arrangement in early 2024.

## Kenyan diplomacy in recent years

Casting Kenya's latest forays into the DRC within a wider framework requires an examination of the country's aggressive foreign policy stance in recent years. Kenya's list of international assignments, from Somalia, South Sudan to far-flung Haiti, have quadrupled following the country's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2021.

Kenya is able to build from its success in brokering Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that saw South Sudan's peaceful transition to independence in 2011. Now Kenya's long-running political opposition figure Raila Odinga has offered his candidature for the African Union Commission Chair position, becoming the first Kenyan to vie for the post. Kenya is not shying away from delicate and complex peace and stabilisation projects in the region. Even as these projects multiply, Kenya's Foreign Policy continues to be motivated primarily by economic interests.

Facing massive domestic debt – the *raison d'être* behind recent youth-led protests across the country – the deep relationship between economic motivations and Kenya's foreign policy makes sense. This motive was most visible during William Ruto's recent State visit to the US. On the first such visit by an African Head of State since 2008, Ruto inked multiple trade and investment agreements<sup>27</sup>. Kenya's contribution of 1,000 police officers to Haiti for a multinational security intervention makes sense given the

23 "Conflict in the DRC: 5 Articles That Explain What's Gone Wrong," *The Conversation*, December 6, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/conflict-in-the-drc-5-articles-that-explain-whats-gone-wrong-195332>.

24 "Kenyan Peacekeepers Arrive in DRC's Volatile East." *The Africa Report*, October 27, 2023. <https://www.theafricareport.com/259540/kenyan-peacekeepers-arrive-in-drcs-volatile-east/>

25 "DRC President Tshisekedi Takes Over from Chakwera to Lead SADC," *Africa News*, August 18, 2022. <https://www.africanews.com/2022/08/18/drc-president-tshisekedi-takes-over-from-chakwera-to-lead-sadc/>,

26 <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/sadc-forces-engage-rebels-in-eastern-dr-congo-4651312>

27 "President Ruto Seals Multibillion Deals in White House," *Business Daily Africa*, October 14, 2023. <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/economy/president-ruto-seals-multibillion-deals-in-white-house--4633790>.

\$380 million pledged by the US to support the mission<sup>28</sup>.

Closer to home, the 2019 election of Félix Tshisekedi followed a political détente in Kenya between Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga. Odinga was a long-term ally of Tshisekedi's father Etienne. Kenya's then president leveraged this connection to pursue economic opportunities in the DRC. Kenyan firms began eyeing DRC's population of 99 million and economy of nearly \$50 Billion<sup>29</sup>.

## The M23 and renewed tensions in eastern DRC

Much of the renewed violence in eastern DRC is attributed to the resurgence since late 2021 of the M23 rebel group, led by Sultani Makenga. M23 ranks are predominantly filled by Congolese Tutsis, Makenga's co-ethnics. M23's sophisticated weaponry and tactics are frequently turned on their arch-nemesis, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a majority ethnic Hutu group opposed to the government of neighbouring Rwanda<sup>30</sup>. M23 also confront the Mai-Mai, local Congolese militia opposed to what they see as foreign Tutsi influence in eastern DRC.

The divisions between M23 and FDLR originate in the 1994 Rwandan genocide against ethnic Tutsis. In the aftermath of the genocide, millions of Hutu fled to eastern DRC, fearing retributory violence by the new regime led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Along with these refugees, were the Interahamwe, the Hutu militia that carried out the genocide. Many founding members of the FDLR were members of the original Interahamwe, and continued their war against Tutsi communities in eastern Congo. Their most formidable opponent, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (French acronym: CNDP), would later form the nucleus of M23.

While the US, France and a Group of UN experts established that the Rwandan regime trained, supplied and supported M23 (claims that Rwanda has denied), M23 accused

the Congolese military for supporting the FDLR and the Mai-Mai. Rwanda has gone further to state that the Congolese Army has even incorporated the FDLR into its ranks<sup>31</sup>. Human Rights Watch independently reported that the Congolese military gave direct support to Mai-Mai and FDLR in 2022 in order to use their forces as proxies against M23. A 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 peace deal between the DRC government, then led by President Joseph Kabila, and the CNDP agreed to incorporate members of the CNDP into the Congolese Army. Three years later, on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2012, 300 former members of the CNDP, led by General Bosco Ntaganda, mutinied, citing poor working conditions and the government's unwillingness to fully implement the March 2009 peace deal. It was from this mutiny, and the 2009 peace deal, that established M23 and gave the group its name<sup>32</sup>.

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2012, M23 took control of Goma, but significant regional and international pressure led the group to abandon the city and engage in negotiations with the DRC government. In February 2013, regional governments and guarantors, including the United Nations and the African Union, signed the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF), a set of principles for implementation that they hoped could address persistent violence in eastern DRC and associated regional instability. The agreement had come just months after the M23 embarked on their first major rebellion. The PSCF remained in place following the M23's 2013 defeat at the hands of the Congolese Army and UN blue helmets under MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade, a force made up of SADC member states. Unfortunately, over time the PSCF came to be regarded as a process-driven and lofty mechanism that failed to address the root-causes of instability in the Great Lakes Region.

In its rebound since late 2021, M23 demanded that the DRC government honours the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009 peace deal. The UN group of experts believes this is a red herring. The UN 2022 report concludes that M23 resurfaced in November 2021 to showcase Rwandan influence in eastern DRC<sup>33</sup>.

28 "Months After Kenyan Police Deployed to Haiti, Security in the Country Has Not Improved," *Movimento Sem Terra*, September 11, 2024. <https://mst.org.br/2024/09/11/months-after-kenyan-police-deployed-to-haiti-security-in-the-country-has-not-improved/>.

29 "DRC Has Bad History, but Its Future Is Bankable," *The East African*, August 10, 2022. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/drc-has-bad-history-but-its-future-is-bankable-4429516>.

30 "Rwanda, DR Congo Differ on M23 Threat," *The East African*, December 24, 2022. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/rwanda-dr-congo-differ-on-m23-threat-3960162>.

31 "DRC-Rwanda Crisis: What's Needed to Prevent a Regional War," *The East African*, December 10, 2022. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/drc-rwanda-crisis-what-s-needed-to-prevent-a-regional-war-4541690>.

32 "M23: Four Things You Should Know About the Rebel Group's Campaign in Rwanda-DRC Conflict," *The Conversation*, December 6, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/m23-four-things-you-should-know-about-the-rebel-groups-campaign-in-rwanda-drc-conflict-195020>.

33 United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," UN Doc. N2275786, July 18, 2022. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/757/86/pdf/n2275786.pdf?OpenElement>.

Rwanda, it is said, felt its national security and economic interests were threatened by the presence of Ugandan and Burundian troops in eastern DRC. Tshishekedi had allowed Uganda and Burundi to operate in the Congo in late 2021, ostensibly to root-out rebel groups – namely, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Ituri and North Kivu provinces, and the Reb-Tabara in South Kivu province, respectively. The violence unleashed by the M23 since, and the resultant tensions between Kinshasa and Kigali, would complicate not only Kenya's newfound interests in the DRC, but the effectiveness of the 'Nairobi process' as well.

## Kenya in the DRC

In March 2018, Kenya's former president Uhuru Kenyatta, and his challenger for the presidency during the 2013 and 2017 elections, Raila Odinga, shook hands in front of T.V cameras<sup>34</sup>. This handshake ended five years of hostility between Kenyatta's administration and the opposition. In the context of their newfound partnership, Odinga introduced Felix Tshishekedi to Kenyatta, after which Tshishekedi announced his presidential candidature whilst in Nairobi<sup>35</sup>.

Odinga had known Tshishekedi's father – both had earned their mark as respected opposition figures in their home countries. Once introduced, Kenyatta helped fund Tshishekedi's campaign<sup>36</sup>. After attending Tshishekedi's inauguration as President in 2019, Kenyatta conducted Kenya's first Presidential State visit to the DRC. Everything that followed – admission of the DRC into the EAC, the 'Nairobi process', the establishment of the EACRF – was done hastily in the second half of 2022<sup>37</sup>.

As a result, only 28 out of 120 rebel groups operating in eastern DRC were represented at the first round of talks held in April 2022<sup>38</sup>. During the third round of talks in late November, the number rose to 42; while 52 groups were

represented during the second round held in the DRC<sup>39</sup>. At the insistence of the DRC government, M23 was excluded in all deliberations. When Tshishekedi signed the Treaty of Ascension into the EAC on 8th April 2022, the DRC parliament was only granted 6 months to undertake internal and constitutional processes for the ratification of the treaty<sup>40</sup>.

Kenyatta's term was coming to an end, with no guarantee that his preferred candidate, Raila Odinga, would win the 2022 elections in August. Private discussions this author had with a senior advisor of the Kenyatta administration at the time revealed that Odinga's victory would have allowed Kenyatta to carry on his interests in the DRC, that is, massive investment opportunities.

Once listed by Forbes as amongst Africa's top 40 richest individuals, Kenyatta is heir to one of Kenya's wealthiest families, with investments spanning banking, manufacturing, and agribusiness sectors<sup>41</sup>. In a November 2023 interview with the East African, Kenya's former ambassador to the DRC stated that with less than 10% of the Congolese population banked, the country's large population provided Kenyan banks with huge opportunities<sup>42</sup>. At the time of the interview, Kenya's Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) and Equity bank had opened branches in the DRC<sup>43</sup>. Equity would take over BCDC, the oldest and most established Congolese bank.

Tshishekedi's controversial electoral victory in 2019 left him with a very thin political base at home, and his predecessor Kabila's supporters maintained control of parliament along with significant swathes of the Congolese Army. Tshishekedi's initial turn to the EAC was informed by the fear that SADC heads of state kept their loyalties with Kabila.

But it was EACRF's performance – refusing to attack M23 positions – that spooked Tshishekedi. Continued violence during the first half of 2023, some of it attributed to the

34 "Kenya's President and Opposition Leader Pledge to Heal Divisions in Surprise Meeting," *The Telegraph*, March 9, 2018. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/09/kenyas-president-opposition-leader-pledge-heal-divisions-surprise/>.

35 Crisis Group, "End of Season Special: Ethiopia, Kenya, DRC, and Drought," *Crisis Group*, October 12, 2023. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/end-season-special-ethiopia-kenya-drc-and-drought>.

36 Ibid.

37 "DRC Is Set to Become 7th Member of the East Africa Trading Bloc: What's in It for Everyone?" *The Conversation*, March 31, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/drc-is-set-to-become-7th-member-of-the-east-africa-trading-bloc-whats-in-it-for-everyone-179320>.

38 "DRC Eastern Rebels Wrap Up First Round of Peace Talks in Kenya," *TRT World*, March 29, 2023. <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/drc-eastern-rebels-wrap-up-first-round-of-peace-talks-in-kenya-56741>.

39 "Third Round of DRC Peace Talks Convene in Nairobi," *Voice of America*, December 20, 2022. <https://www.voafrika.com/a/third-round-of-drc-peace-talks-convene-in-nairobi-6853280.html>.

40 "DR Congo Formally Joins EAC," *The East African*, March 29, 2022. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/dr-congo-formally-joins-eac-3775584>.

41 Mfonobong Nsehe, "Africa's 40 Richest: The Dropoffs," *Forbes*, November 20, 2012. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2012/11/20/africas-40-richest-the-dropoffs/>.

42 "DRC Has Bad History, but Its Future Is Bankable," *The East African*, November 11, 2023, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/drc-has-bad-history-but-its-future-is-bankable-4429516>

43 "DRC Makes Slow Steps in Integrating with EAC States," *The East African*, May 13, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/drc-makes-slow-steps-in-integrating-with-eac-states-4363160>.

M23, didn't help. Burundian forces claimed to have come under M23 fire while Kenyan EACRF forces watched on<sup>44</sup>. The EACRF insisted on dialogue and observing a November 2022 ceasefire that Tshisekedi believed the M23 constantly violated.

Tshisekedi's election as Chair of SADC Heads of State Summit in August 2022 presented him an opportunity for an alternative. It enabled him to consolidate his position amongst the DRC's southern neighbours and by mid-2023, he invited Angolan forces to eastern DRC to combat M23. More troops from SADC would follow in late 2023 and early 2024. In June 2024, Tshisekedi boycotted the EAC Heads of State summit<sup>45</sup>. His focus turned south, away from the EAC.

## Frosty relations and an uncertain future

On 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024, Lydia Mbotela, Kenya Airways' station manager in Kinshasa, and her Congolese colleague, Olivier Lufungula, were arrested at N'Djili International Airport in Kinshasa by officers from DRC's military intelligence unit<sup>46</sup>. They were arrested for accepting cargo containing bank notes from a Congolese bank destined to the US. Kenya Airways responded by suspending its flights to the DRC, compounding a diplomatic tiff that begun when the DRC recalled its ambassador to Kenya in December 2023. Mbotela and Lufungula were released over a week later,

and Kenya Airways resumed its flights to DRC, but only after Kenya's Prime Cabinet Secretary, Musalia Mudavadi, visited Tshisekedi to seek a resolution to rising diplomatic tensions between Nairobi and Kinshasa<sup>47</sup>.

While DRC's ambassador to Kenya resumed his duties in Nairobi, and Kenya's newly appointed ambassador to the DRC was allowed to take station in Kinshasa, the falling out between Kenya and DRC over the EACRF continued. Shortly after Mudavadi's visit to Kinshasa, President Ruto gave a media interview to *Jeune Afrique* where he claimed that M23 is a Congolese issue, absolving, in the same breath, Rwanda from any accusations that it supports the rebel group. Two months later, Tshisekedi, while speaking at a Brookings panel, stated that William Ruto 'managed [the Nairobi process] very badly' by siding with Rwanda<sup>48</sup>. Ruto's remarks, and Tshisekedi's intimations, appeared to have handed the death certificate to the 'Nairobi process'.

Denied the Western funding sought by Kenyan leadership, the EACRF had no stomach for combat. Despite making Kenyatta the official facilitator of the 'Nairobi process,' William Ruto's regime replaced many of the diplomats who worked under the Kenyatta presidency on designing Kenya's forays into the DRC. Short of those diplomats, and as a result of the EACRF's failure to meet Congolese expectations, Ruto found it increasingly difficult to appease a restive Tshisekedi. Without the backing of Tshisekedi's government, it's unlikely that Kenya's commercial ambitions in the DRC will be fulfilled.

44 "M23 Go for Burundian Troops in DRC Clashes," *The East African*, September 10, 2023. [https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/m23-go-for-burundian-troops-in-drc-clashes-4430598#google\\_vignette](https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/m23-go-for-burundian-troops-in-drc-clashes-4430598#google_vignette).

45 "Félix Tshisekedi Boycotts EAC Heads of State Summit," *Africa Intelligence*, June 7, 2024. <https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-africa/2024/06/07/felix-tshisekedi-boycotts-eac-heads-of-state-summit,110245828-art>.

46 "Kenya Airways Protests Detention of Its Staff in Kinshasa," *The East African*, September 24, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenya-airways-protests-detention-of-its-staff-in-kinshasa--4605280>.

47 "Kenya-DRC Relations Begin to Thaw After Ruto's Special Message," *The East African*, October 1, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenya-drc-relations-begin-to-thaw-after-ruto-special-message-4620182>.

48 "Ruto Mismanaged Nairobi Peace Process, Tshisekedi Says," *The East African*, October 12, 2023. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/ruto-mismanaged-nairobi-peace-process-tshisekedi-says-4704180>.

# Burundi's stake in the EAC Regional Force

By anonymous Burundian civil society representative

## Burundi and Rwanda: a tumultuous relationship

Burundi, Rwanda, and the DRC are neighbouring states deeply connected by history and their shared border. Relations between the former sister kingdoms of Burundi and Rwanda, since independence, have been marked by cross border refugee movements that ebbed and flowed from one country to another, depending on the nature of the ongoing violence. This dynamic contributed to the overlapping civil wars in Rwanda, Burundi, and DRC in the 1990s, which dealt a serious blow to relations between the three states. Recent relations between Rwanda and Burundi dramatically deteriorated after the 2015 political crisis, when President Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term sparked domestic unrest, an attempted coup, and the creation of multiple armed rebel movements. Many of Nkurunziza's opponents fled to Rwanda and Congo.

Burundi accuses Rwanda of supporting the Congo-based RED-Tabara rebellion, the largest rebel faction that emerged from the crisis, and demands the extradition of the 2015 putschists protected by Rwanda. RED-Tabara claims responsibility for multiple deadly attacks inside Burundi, the last of which left nine dead in February 2024. In reaction to Rwanda's alleged support for the group, Burundi suspended diplomatic relations and closed its border in January. Rwanda denied the accusation and, in turn, accused Burundi of supporting Rwandan rebels. It is in this context of heightened tension that the M23 rebellion emerged and Burundi would join the East Africa Community's intervention in the DRC.

## The reemergence of M23

The Congolese March 23 Movement emerged in 2021 with extensive Rwandan support. The Rwandan government provided unprecedented quantities of weapons to the

rebels. "We've probably never really been as close to the potential for real war between Rwanda and the DRC as we are now," fears analyst Stephanie Wolters of the South African Institute of International Affairs. "All of the elements are at their peak, which is incredibly bad for eastern Congo and for the region as a whole."<sup>49</sup> According to UN reports, Rwanda also reached out to RED-Tabara to support its proxy war in the DRC. Rwanda's support for the M23, involvement with RED-Tabara, as well as accusations that Burundian refugees are being conscripted by Rwanda, further soured tense relations between the two states.

At the UN Security Council, the Burundian representative urged the international community to be even more attentive to the "legitimate demands" of the Congolese government, and support the withdrawal of Rwandan troops from its territory and the cantonment of the M23 rebels. When the East Africa Community formed what initially promised to be a robust military mission to push back against M23, Burundi was eager to join.

## The legal process in Burundi for the EACRF deployment

Normally, whether in a bilateral or multilateral peacekeeping framework, the presence of a national army on the soil of another country must emerge from a debate within Parliament. The Constitution of Burundi in its article 255 al.3, the Burundian Constitution of June 7, 2018 specifies that "within the limits determined by the Constitution and the laws, only the President of the Republic can authorize the use of armed force in fulfilling international obligations." Article 256 of the same law states that "when the national defense force is used in any of the cases cited

49 Geoffrey York, "Rwandan Meddling Is Deepening Congo's Deadly Conflict," *Financial Post*, October 24, 2023, <https://financialpost.com/pmn/business-pmn/rwandan-meddling-is-deepening-congos-deadly-conflict>.

in the paragraph above, the President officially consults the competent authorized bodies and informs Parliament promptly and in detail on: the reason(s) for the employment of the national defense force; any place where this force is deployed and the period for which this force is deployed.” The deputies were informed of the EACRF deployment through a letter from the Head of State.

## Deployment to the DRC

On August 15, 2022, the Burundian contingent officially entered the DRC to join the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF). The Burundian contingent was the first contingent deployed, and initially was placed under the command of the armed forces of the DRC. Their stated mission was to dismantle all armed groups and restore peace. Eventually, the contingent was placed under the emerging EACRF command, led by a Kenyan officer. In contrast to most of the other EACRF contingents, the Burundian forces were willing to engage in combat.

At the EAC summit on November 25, the regional organization announced that the DRC would not renew the mandate of the regional force beyond December 8, 2023. The DRC considered the EACRF mission ineffective and refused its renewal. To replace it, Kinshasa is counting on troops from the Southern African Community (SADC).

Despite the end of the EACRF, Burundi’s soldiers would remain in the Congo. The Burundian armed forces present in the DRC were deployed under three overlapping interventions, causing much confusion. Firstly, soldiers

and Imbonerakure, members of the ruling party’s youth league, were bilaterally deployed in the DRC to track down RED-Tabara in 2021. The Burundian authorities and the Congolese government deny that this operation exists, despite independent reporting. The second intervention was the Burundian deployment with the EACRF. In the third ongoing intervention Burundian troops continue to be bilaterally deployed against M23 through an undisclosed defense pact with the Congolese authorities. According to the Burundian President, “if you do not help your neighbour to put out the fire when his house is burning, tomorrow, if it is your turn, he will not come to help you.” This pact was not made public and aroused discontent among the troops. Burundian soldiers, regulars of internationally funded missions in Somalia, did not receive the expected heavy paychecks to reward their efforts.

According to unofficial sources, many Burundian soldiers have fallen on the battlefield, with significant consequences for morale. As a Burundian soldier testified anonymously, “for a professional soldier to engage in combat, there must at least be a reason for the conflict; he must also measure his strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the enemy. But in the current situation, we are asked to go and fight blindly.” Fighting in an unknown area alongside the poorly trained and unprofessional Congolese army further worsened the morale of the Burundian army. Burundi detained dozens of soldiers for refusing to be deployed against M23.

Despite these numerous challenges, Burundi remains on the frontline long after the departure of the EACRF. For now, at least, Burundi will stay in the Congo.

*The civil society member from Burundi who authored this section in early 2024 remains anonymous for security reasons.*



# Uganda in the EACRF: contributions, challenges, and controversies

By Ahmed Hadji

Uganda has a long history of involvement in regional peacekeeping, driven by geopolitical interests<sup>50</sup>. Notably, Uganda played a key role in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) from 2007, fighting against al-Shabaab for the past 17 years. As a major contributor to the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), Uganda's participation in the peacekeeping mission exemplifies its commitment to regional stability and security. However, recent UN reports alleging Uganda's support for the M23 rebel group have cast a shadow over its peacekeeping efforts<sup>51</sup>.

This paper provides an analysis of Uganda's roles and contributions within the EACRF, examining its motivations, mandates, funding, performance, and domestic public perception, while addressing these allegations. By scrutinizing Uganda's involvement and the broader implications of its peacekeeping missions, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the EACRF's impact on regional peace and security.

## Motivations

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a complex and enduring crisis, characterized by decades of violence driven by political instability, ethnic tensions, and fierce competition for natural resources<sup>52</sup>. The resurgence of the M23 rebel group exacerbated this instability,

necessitating a coordinated and robust regional response to restore peace and security. The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) was established to address this resurgence of violence, reflecting the collective security interests of East African states<sup>53</sup>.

Uganda's primary motivation for contributing to the EACRF was to prevent cross-border insurgencies. The country has faced significant security threats from groups like the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), who use the DRC as a staging ground for terrorist attacks. From late October to mid-November 2021, three ADF suicide bombers killed at least four people in Kampala. Founded in Uganda, the group formally aligned with the Islamic State in 2018. Forced into the DRC, the ADF continues to terrorize villages, kill civilians, and forcibly recruit children. Stabilizing the DRC is crucial for preventing armed groups like the ADF from using its territory as a base for further attacks on Uganda.

In addition to alleviating Uganda's security concerns, participation in the EACRF enables Uganda to bolster its regional influence and diplomatic ties within the East African Community (EAC). By contributing to regional security, Uganda enhances its political leverage within the region and on the international stage. This involvement signals Uganda's commitment to regional stability, showcasing its role as a security provider to Western donors and international partners. It also demonstrates solidarity and cooperation with other EAC member states, reinforcing alliances, and fostering mutual trust.

Stability in the DRC also benefits Uganda economically, by promoting trade and providing access to valuable resources. Uganda's economic interests in the DRC are multifaceted

50 "Assessment of Uganda's Peace Support Operations and Its Impact on Regional Peace and Security," *Center for African Peace and Security Studies*, 2023. <https://thecfma.org/Assessment-of-Ugandas-Peace-Support-Operations-and-its-Impact-on-Regional-Peace-and-Security.pdf>.

51 "Uganda Provided Support to M23 Rebels in DR Congo, UN Report Says," *The East African*, October 5, 2023.

52 "A Guide to the Decades-Long Conflict in DR Congo," *Al Jazeera*, October 8, 2023.

53 "EAC Regional Force," *East African Community*, accessed October 14, 2024. <https://www.eac.int/eac-regional-force>.

and include providing a market for Ugandan products, opportunities for contracts for Ugandan companies, and access to natural resources<sup>54</sup>. Uganda is well positioned to expand exports into the DRC, registering the highest trade surplus with the DRC amounting to \$53.07 million (Ush208.9 billion) in January, according to the 2024 Ministry of Finance Performance of the Economy report. Stabilising the region ensures that trade routes remain open and secure, allowing for the free flow of Ugandan goods and services.

By contributing to the EACRF, Uganda helps create a conducive environment for its businesses to operate in the DRC. Prior to the EACRF, this was demonstrated during Operation Shujaa in 2021 when Uganda's Dott Services Limited was contracted to construct 223 km of roads in eastern Congo, connecting Uganda to the DRC cities of Beni, Goma, and Butembo. This infrastructure development not only enhanced the ability of troops and trade to move, but also bolstered economic ties between the two nations.

While the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has concluded, the stability and enhanced security it established remain pivotal in unlocking significant opportunities for Ugandan and Kenyan enterprises. The EACRF's success in improving security and boosting regional connectivity laid a robust foundation for continued economic engagement in the DRC, particularly in the high-growth sectors of infrastructure, mining, and agriculture. If the region stabilises, Ugandan and Kenyan companies are well-positioned to capitalise on the momentum, driving forward the economic transformation of the DRC. Finally, Uganda's involvement in the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) opens access to the DRC's vast natural resources, including minerals like gold and timber. This access can significantly benefit Uganda's industries, particularly in sectors such as gold refining and export. Uganda has already seen a surge in gold exports due to refining operations that process gold from the DRC. Such economic activities not only bolster Uganda's economy but also strengthen trade ties within the region, positioning Uganda as a key player in the East African economic landscape.

However, it's essential to recognize that this access is viewed with caution by many Congolese, who recall the period from 1998-2003 when the Uganda Peoples' Defence Force (UPDF) was accused of plundering the DRC's resources. Therefore, Uganda's current engagement must be approached with transparency and respect for Congolese sovereignty to ensure that this economic cooperation benefits both nations and avoids the pitfalls of the past.

## Funding

Initially, the EACRF operations were funded by contributions from EAC partner states and significant financial support from the African Union. Notably, African leaders welcomed a \$2 million agreement between the AU and EAC to facilitate EACRF operations, with Gabon contributing \$500,000 and Angola and Senegal each providing \$1 million.<sup>55</sup> For sustained operations, additional funding was sought from the UN peacekeeping fund.<sup>56</sup> Discussions with the UN Security Council about reallocating funds from the MONUSCO budget to the EACRF were crucial for troop sustainability and capacity expansion. The mission's projected annual budget was \$250 million.

Uganda allocated significant resources from its own national budget to support its role in the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF). However, the details of this budget allocation are classified and not available in public documents.

## Mandate and performance

Uganda played a complex role in the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF). Ugandan forces were strategically stationed in conflict zones such as Bunagana, Chengerero, and Rutshuru/Kiwanja. They were tasked with protecting civilians, securing the Bunagana-Rutshuru-Rumangabo-Goma supply route, and enhancing humanitarian support<sup>57</sup>.

54 "How Is Uganda Likely to Benefit from DRC's Membership in the EAC Bloc?" *Economic Policy Research Centre*, accessed October 14, 2024. <https://eprcug.org/publication/how-is-uganda-likely-to-benefit-from-drcs-membership-in-the-eac>

55 "Líderes Africanos Elogiam Contributo Financeiro do Gabão," *Angola Press*, October 12, 2023. <https://angop.ao/en/noticias/politica/lideres-africanos-elogiam-contributo-financeiro-do-gabao/>.

56 "UN Security Council Agrees to Fund EACRF in DR Congo," *The East African*, June 4, 2023. <https://www.theestafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/un-security-council-agrees-to-fund-eacrf-in-dr-congo-4382726>.

57 "Ugandan Contingent Troops Deployed in Mabenga," *East African Community*, accessed October 14, 2024. <https://www.eac.int/nairobi-process-activities/military-track/2942-ugandan-contingent-troops-deployed-in-mabenga>.

The decision to deploy the Uganda Peoples' Defence Force (UPDF) to the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was made by the executive branch. However, it required and received parliamentary approval to ensure legal compliance under Ugandan law. Uganda's military presence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) included an additional 4,000 troops under the existing bilateral "Operation Shujaa" to combat the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Uganda deployed 5,000 troops under the EACRF, bringing its total DRC deployment to approximately 9,000 troops<sup>58</sup>.

Operational disparities within the EACRF revealed significant challenges, as each national contingent followed different mandates, causing confusion. Kenyan forces were known for their relatively passive "traditional peacekeeping" role, focusing on maintaining peace and stability without aggressive engagement. Conversely, Burundian forces were noted for their aggressive posture against M23, actively engaging in combat operations. This contrast in operational tactics among the troop-contributing countries (TCCs) exacerbated the lack of cohesion within the EACRF<sup>59</sup>. While Kenyan and Burundian forces engaged M23, Ugandan troops occupied M23-vacated positions under a mutual M23/DRC government agreement. This divergence in TCC objectives contributed to the EACRF's failure. Uganda's passive stance towards the M23 contrasts sharply with the aggressive strategy of Burundi, leading to a lack of unified action.

The perceived temporary quietude of the M23, mistaken for lasting peace, was disrupted on June 30, 2024, when the M23 moved into Kirumba, North Kivu. The attack on Kirumba, a major commercial center with over 120,000 residents, highlighted the fragility of the region. Notably, the M23 positions during the EACRF deployment were nearly all within the Petit Nord (North Kivu, south of Lake Albert), far from the ADF's main camps in Beni and Ituri. The spatial separation of M23 and ADF positions further complicated the EACRF's operational dynamics, as different UPDF forces had divergent primary objectives based on geographic considerations.

Uganda's neutral stance proved insufficient to maintain peace amid shifting dynamics, emphasizing the urgent need for a cohesive and coordinated approach to stabilize

the region effectively. Furthermore, allegations by the United Nations in 2024 suggest that Uganda supported M23, casting doubt on Uganda's proclaimed neutrality and complicating the perception of their role in the conflict<sup>60</sup>.

## Ugandan public opinion

The Ugandan public's view of their country's role in the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) is mixed. A section of the public is proud of the accomplishments, such as disarming armed groups, including elements of the ADF, and stabilizing the country from any ADF related terror attacks. They see these efforts as proof of Uganda's commitment to peace and support the ongoing mission. However, some Ugandans are concerned about the lack of transparency and limited media coverage of the EACRF. They feel that the narrative has been largely shaped by the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), which has led to a one-sided view of the mission. This has created a gap in public understanding and engagement. Improving public engagement and broadening media coverage of Uganda's peacekeeping efforts is necessary to foster greater public support and awareness.

In June 2024, a United Nations report found that Uganda provided support to the M23 rebel group through its military and intelligence networks. The report names Andrew Mwenda, a prominent Ugandan journalist, as a key figure involved in securing diplomatic cover for the insurgents. Both Mwenda and the Ugandan government have strongly denied these allegations<sup>61</sup>. The controversy highlights the complexities of regional dynamics and underscores the urgent need for a thorough and impartial investigation. The report implicates the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and its intelligence arm, the Defence Intelligence and Security (DIS), in actively supporting M23. The Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (since renamed the Defense Intelligence and Security) led by Maj Gen James Birungi, is named in the report. The report states that Ugandan military intelligence officers were present in M23-controlled areas, provided logistical support, and transported M23 leaders. Additionally, the UN reported that M23 is recruiting refugees from Ugandan settlements, including minors, and report multiple sightings of Ugandan soldiers in the DRC.

58 "Ugandan Forces Exert Pressure on Rebel Groups in Eastern DRC," *African Defense Forum*, April 2023. <https://adf-magazine.com/2023/04/ugandan-forces-exert-pressure-on-rebel-groups-in-eastern-drc/>.

59 "Impact of Conflicts on the Development of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *International Journal of Political Science*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2023): 15-28. <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijps/v10-i1/3.pdf>.

60 "Uganda Provided Support to M23 Rebels in Congo, UN Report Says," *Reuters*, July 8, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/uganda-provided-support-m23-rebels-congo-un-report-says-2024-07-08/>.

61 "UN Experts Link Uganda Mwenda to M23 Rebels," *Daily Monitor*, October 9, 2023. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/un-experts-link-uganda-mwenda-to-m23-rebels-4655238#story>.

A memorandum of understanding signed between Ugandan and Rwandan intelligence heads in 2022, facilitated by Muhoozi Kainerugaba, was intended to improve Uganda-Rwanda relations<sup>62</sup>. Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs claims their involvement was focused on ending the conflict by encouraging M23's engagement with the DRC government and denies any direct provision of arms or support.

The leaked report's findings rekindle Congolese memories of the 1996-2003 Uganda-Rwanda invasions of the DRC and could have political repercussions for Uganda. These findings strain regional relations, increase scrutiny from the international community, and potentially impact Uganda's diplomatic and economic standing. These allegations, if left unaddressed, could undermine Uganda's credibility and efforts of promoting and maintaining regional peace and security in the region.

## Final thoughts

Uganda's participation in the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) demonstrated a strategic commitment to regional peace and security. The country's significant contributions were instrumental in stabilising conflict-ridden areas and supporting humanitarian efforts.

However, recent allegations against Uganda highlight the complexities of regional peacekeeping. Addressing these issues transparently is crucial for maintaining Uganda's integrity and effectiveness.

With the EACRF deployment concluded, the future stability of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) depends on continued efforts from regional and international actors to address the root causes of conflict, support political processes, and protect civilians. Lessons learned from Uganda's EACRF involvement can inform future peacekeeping strategies, emphasising coordinated approaches and robust diplomatic efforts.

Regional cooperation remains crucial. Uganda should collaborate closely with East African partners to enhance future peacekeeping efforts. Clear and unified mandates will be essential to avoid operational dissonance and ensure effective action against armed groups like M23. The deployment of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the DRC on December 15, 2023, underscores the importance of regional collaboration. Coordinated efforts between East African and Southern African partners are vital for lasting stability and addressing complex security challenges. Uganda's commitment to these principles will enhance its standing and contribute to sustainable peace and development in East Africa.

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62 "Rwanda, Uganda Sign Military Intelligence Sharing Agreement," *APA News*, October 10, 2023. <https://apanews.net/rwanda-uganda-sign-military-intelligence-sharing-agreement/>.

# Professionalization and economics

## 2.0: A historical view of Ugandan military operations in the DRC

By Kristof Titeca

This piece explains the evolution of Uganda's military operations in the DRC since the Congo Wars of the 1990s. This historical perspective illuminated the shifts in intertwined military, political and economic goals that drive Uganda's interventions.

The civil war and genocide in Rwanda triggered the first Congo war of 1996-1997. Led by Paul Kagame, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) emerged victorious from the vicious Rwandan civil war. The RPF invaded Congo (then Zaire) to attack rebel remnants of the old regime consisting of former genocidaires. Uganda, a longtime partner of the RPF, joined Rwanda in this operation that overthrew Zaire's President Mobutu in under seven months. It was the longer Second Congo War (1998-2003) that is the key to understanding Uganda's military involvement in the DRC. This episode determined the way in which Uganda and its military operations are seen in the DRC up to today. The onset of this war was the falling out between the new Congolese President Laurent Kabila and the Rwandan-Uganda alliance who brought him to power. The Second Congo War became a massive conflict with a multitude of rebel groups often acting as proxies for neighboring countries. The war was characterized by quickly changing alliances, in which former allies, such as Rwanda and Uganda, rapidly turned against each other.

Uganda claimed it entered the DRC to fight a Ugandan rebel group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).<sup>63</sup> However, economic interests in natural resources played a crucial role as well. Whereas some of this dynamic was already present in the first Congo war, it became systematized in the second conflict. The Ugandan army's activities evolved

into what Vlassenroot et al described as an outburst of an "entrepreneurial logic of conflict economy", which linked Congolese mines with international traders<sup>64</sup>. The Ugandan military were doing so both directly, and through the use of proxies<sup>65</sup>.

In a landmark 2022 judgment<sup>66</sup>, the International Court of Justice ordered Uganda to pay \$325 million to the Democratic Republic of Congo for its role in the Second Congo War, finding the country guilty of exploitation of natural resources such as gold, diamonds and timber.

These activities of the Ugandan military in the DRC left a major imprint on the way in which Uganda's military actions are perceived by Congolese and international observers. In the DRC, this led to distrust and any Ugandan political or military action is seen as an excuse to exploit the country's national resources. There often is major opposition within the Congolese military and political circles against any Ugandan deployment.

Since the Congo wars, there have been two major Ugandan military operations in the DRC: Operation Lightning Thunder against the Lord's Resistance Army (2008 – 2011); and Operation Shujaa ('hero' in Swahili) against the Allied Democratic Forces (since November 2021). Since Operation Shujaa is discussed in detail in the previous section, I will only discuss Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT) here.

63 Kristof Titeca and Daniel Fahey, "The many faces of a rebel group: the Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *International Affairs* 92, no. 5 (2016): 1189-1206.

64 David B. W. Chappell, "The Political Economy of Peacekeeping in Africa: The Case of the African Union Mission in Sudan," *African Security Review* 21, no. 2 (2012): 24-39.

65 William J. B. D. M. Kaarsholm, "The Impact of Conflict on Development in Africa," *African Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2011): 123-136.

66 BBC, "ICJ orders Uganda to pay \$325m for DR Congo occupation," 10 February 2022.

OLT was a military operation directed against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), launched in December 2008 after the failure of the 2006-2008 Juba peace talks between LRA and the Ugandan government. On paper, this was to be an intelligence-led joint military operation, with participation from Uganda, southern Sudan, the CAR, and the DRC, with support from US advisers. In practice, the UPDF was the main actor. The LRA escaped the initial OLT offensives practically unharmed and launched a series of retaliatory massacres. Between 24 December 2008 and 17 January 2009, the LRA killed at least 815 Congolese civilians. However, the sustained military pressure across the DRC, CAR, and southern Sudan, in combination with a defection campaign, seriously weakened the LRA.

Officially, Ugandan involvement in OLT ended on 14 March 2009, with an informal agreement allowing a 'limited number' of UPDF to remain in the DRC. This 'limited' number turned out to be 3000 Ugandan soldiers. In the context of a weakened LRA, this led to tensions between the Ugandan and suspicious Congolese armies.<sup>67</sup>

Operation Lightning Thunder was the first Ugandan deployment on Congolese soil since the second Congo war. Yet, it continued to be seen through the lens of that earlier conflict: the Congolese authorities considered the LRA to be an excuse for the UPDF to again profit from Congolese natural resources – although no proof of this was found. These tensions impacted how the LRA was framed by the Congolese government and Kinshasa actively downplayed the LRA threat to push the Ugandan troops out of the DRC. From October 2011 onwards, no more UPDF elements were present on Congolese territory. Since then, the Congolese government and army consistently opposed Ugandan presence on their territory.

## The lasting impact of history

There are four key takeaways revealed in this short historical overview. First of all, history matters, especially the history of the Second Congo War. This was particularly the case for OLT, when Congolese distrust impacted collaboration. US pressure on the Congolese government allowed the UPDF to enter Congolese territory but it didn't stop these hostile feelings. The US, in turn, was under pressure from domestic lobbyist groups including Invisible Children and the Enough Project.

Second, the changing national political context also matters. The UPDF was ultimately allowed again into the DRC during Operation Shujaa because the political situation inside the DRC changed. The new Congolese President Tshisekedi wanted to establish better relations with neighboring countries, including Uganda, in an attempt to solve the conflict in Eastern DRC. This policy involved allowing these neighboring countries – not only Uganda, but also Burundi and (to a limited extent) Rwanda – in conducting military operations on Congolese territory. While these plans initially met resistance – particularly from within the Congolese military, for the reasons mentioned above – they were ultimately allowed on Congolese territory.

A third key dynamic is the changing role of the UPDF over the years, particularly the professionalization of the Ugandan army. The UPDF underwent a long professionalization effort; and wants to project this image both domestically and abroad. The UPDF grew out of the National Resistance Army rebellion which brought President Museveni to power, and initially relied on these revolutionary credentials. This has changed. Today the UPDF uses its image as a professional army as a disciplining and legitimating force for the government.

This effort was largely successful. Internationally, the UPDF is seen as one of the most disciplined and best-equipped armies in the region; as well as an important contributor to peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping missions serve a range of military and political ends.<sup>68</sup> Militarily, they allow the army to train and professionalize itself while gaining income from foreign donors. Politically, these missions tap into the priorities of the international community. Support to the African Union Mission in Somalia presented Uganda as an important player in the war on terror.

OLT served this political function as well. As previously mentioned, domestic pressure made the LRA an important priority for the US government. Through OLT, the Museveni government showed itself a loyal ally of the US. At the same time, this professionalization should also be nuanced and contextualized: professionalization doesn't mean that military operations are flawless. A major criticism of both OLT and Shujaa has been the insufficient attention for civilian protection.

67 Kristof Titeca and Theophile Costeur, "An LRA for everyone: How different actors frame the Lord's Resistance Army," *African Affairs*, 114, no. 454 (2015): 92–114.

68 Jonathan Fisher, "Managing donor perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 intervention in Somalia," *African Affairs*, 111, No. 444 (2012): 404–423.

The final dynamic to watch is the changing role of economic interests. Professionalization is influencing the role of economic interests in Uganda's military operations. The operations in the DRC are a good example: the structural exploitation of natural resources has disappeared. Doing so would ultimately hurt Uganda's other interest in maintaining international support. This doesn't mean economic interests have vanished, rather they have transformed into 'economic interests 2.0'. Ugandan military interventions seek more indirect, macro-related, economic interests. Operation Shujaa is a good example. As documented in a report of the Congo Research Group<sup>69</sup>, Operation Shujaa ultimately aimed to protect Ugandan oil installations in Western Uganda (for which the ADF is the most important threat, and which Operation Shujaa aims to terminate) and Ugandan trade interests in the DRC (through the construction of roads in Eastern DRC, which the military operation explicitly wanted to protect).

## Conclusion: The EACRF and beyond

Uganda's participation in the EACRF can be seen as an illustration of the above dynamics. On the one hand, the

UPDF was seen as a natural candidate for participating in this operation, given its experience in peacekeeping missions. Similar to other missions, this participation also allowed Uganda to bolster its images on international platforms – this time the Eastern African Community. In theory, doing so also plays in Uganda's 'Economics 2.0' incentives: a stable Eastern DRC is beneficial for Uganda's internal and external business interests – respectively its national oil infrastructure and export to the DRC. On the other hand, history also played a role here: there was a widespread distrust of the presence of these foreign troops – including Ugandan troops – in this mission. Whereas analysts expressed caution, arguing the participating countries might primarily be interested in protecting their economic interest; civil society leaders have been more outspoken. As Edgar Mateso, a civil society leader from North Kivu province, argued in *The New Humanitarian*: "They are executioners who want to come as saviors," he said. "They will not have the support of the people." This also explains why, in January 2023, there were protests against the EACRF in Eastern DRC. In other words, while the Ugandan troops might have professionalized, the weight of history – Uganda's involvement in the Second Congo War – still plays an important role.

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69 Congo Research Group and Ebuteli, "Uganda's Operation Shujaa in the DRC. Fighting the ADF or Securing Economic Interests?," New York University, Center on International Cooperation (2022).

# South Sudan: conflict at home, keeping peace abroad

By Anna Reuss

South Sudan is no stranger to peacekeeping. After all, for the last 19 years, the country continuously hosted large UN peacekeeping missions.<sup>70</sup> Sending South Sudanese troops abroad as peacekeepers, however, was a first for the world's newest state. By contributing troops to the East African Community Regional Force, South Sudan became the first nation to send peacekeepers abroad while relying on their presence at home.

South Sudanese officials claim they contributed to the mission out of regional solidarity.<sup>71</sup> When flagging off the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) troops, the defense minister Angelina Teny said, "We are very proud today because the flag of the republic of South Sudan is going to be flying as a region continuing to contribute to stability and peace." She stressed that, "This is a great opportunity for us to change the image of this country."<sup>72</sup> While eager to demonstrate commitment to the EAC through the deployment of troops, Juba's commitment to the EAC's economic integration were less enthusiastic.<sup>73</sup> At the time of deployment, South Sudan had yet to implement the Customs Union or Common Market protocols, two basic pillars of the EAC.<sup>74</sup>

South Sudan declared it allocated almost \$7 million to the EACRF deployment<sup>75</sup> at a time when the government

was bemoaning the lack of funds to implement the 2018 revitalized peace deal and the payment of civil servant salaries. While dignitaries waved off 750 well-equipped troops in Juba, tens of thousands of soldiers across the country awaited the unification of erstwhile foes into one national army as required by the 2018 peace agreement. This process remains far behind schedule. The government blames the delays on a shortage of military hardware and funds. Neither the deployment of South Sudanese peacekeepers or funding for the operation were mandated by the national transitional legislature in Juba.

With much fanfare, President Salva Kiir sent off a battalion of South Sudanese peacekeeping troops to DRC on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2022. The South Sudanese peacekeepers were to make their way into DRC by road where they originally intended to be deployed in the northeastern part of the country. The force intended to target the South Sudanese rebel National Army of Salvation (NAS), who maintain rear bases in the DRC. Unfortunately, these troops did not make it very far. Ten days after their departure from Juba, reports emerged of the troops being stuck in Mundri, Western Equatoria State.<sup>76</sup> An army spokesman conceded that many of them lacked proper documentation and thus couldn't cross the border.<sup>77</sup>

Eventually, a Kenyan military aircraft on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2023 airlifted 300 of the South Sudanese troops from Juba to Goma.<sup>78</sup> No additional subsequent deployment of troops

70 United Nations Peacekeeping, "United Nations Mission in Sudan," accessed September 22, 2024, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unmis/>; United Nations Security Council, Security Council Resolution 1590 (2005), March 24, 2005.

71 VOA News, "South Sudan Sends 750 Troops to DRC," December 28, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/south-sudan-sends-750-troops-to-drc/6895421.html>

72 Ibid.

73 Eye Radio, "EAC Affairs Minister Deng Alor Absenteeism Offends Us, Says EALA Speaker," March 2, 2022, <https://www.eyeradio.org/eac-affairs-minister-deng-alor-absenteeism-offends-us-says-eala-speaker/>

74 The East African, "South Sudan Fails to Pull Its Weight in EAC," December 4, 2022, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/south-sudan-fails-to-pull-its-weight-in-eac-4041852>

75 Sudans Post, "South Sudan Deployment of Troops to DR Congo Shows Commitment to EAC Obligations—Yakani," accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.sudanspost.com/south-sudan-deployment-of-troops-to-drc-congo-shows-commitment-to-eac-obligations-yakani/>

76 Eye Radio, "DR Congo-Bound SSDF Battalion to Be Airlifted from Mundri—Army," January 9, 2023, <https://www.eyeradio.org/dr-congo-bound-sspdf-battalion-to-be-airlifted-from-mundri-army/>

77 Radio Tamazuj, "South Sudan Soldiers Yet to Arrive, DRC Army Says Due to Logistical Delays," January 11, 2023, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/south-sudan-soldiers-yet-to-arrive-drc-army-says-due-to-logistical-delays>

78 Radio Tamazuj, "South Sudan Sends 300 Additional Peacekeeping Troops to DRC," accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/south-sudan-sends-300-additional-peacekeeping-troops-to-drc>; Kenya Mission in South Sudan, "KDF Airlifts South Sudan People's Defence Troops (SSPDF) to Goma DRC for Peace-Keeping Mission," April 5, 2023, <https://kenyamissionjuba.org/kdf-airlifts-south-sudan-peoples-defence-troops-sspdf-to-goma-drc-for-peace-keeping-mission/>



was reported. Kenya continued to facilitate the logistics of the South Sudanese contingent which ended up co-locating with the Kenyan forces in Rumangabo. According to an official at the Kenyan embassy in South Sudan, the logistical support offered by Kenya was agreed by the two heads of state during President Ruto's December 2022 visit to Juba.<sup>79</sup>

The deployment of the South Sudanese peacekeepers would end up lasting only eight months. Barely one month after South Sudanese President Salva Kiir took over as Chair of the EAC in November 2023, the EACRF began its withdrawal from the eastern DRC after the Congolese government and public lost confidence in the mission.

South Sudan might be regarded as the only EACRF troop contributor without a strong vested interest in the DR Congo. Unlike the other EAC peacekeeping troop contributors like Burundi, Kenya, or Uganda, South Sudan has no history of military missions in the DRC. Perhaps the motive for this

disinterested intervention was more about South Sudan's relationship with Kenya, who spearheaded the EACRF. Kenya has a long history of diplomatic engagement in the South Sudan and demonstrated its appreciation of the SSPDF's contribution by airlifting and co-habituating with them in the DRC. Some security analysts suggested that South Sudanese disinterest helped Kenya legitimize the EACRF as a regional force rather than a re-hatting of bilateral military deployments.

With no South Sudanese journalists on the ground, and public debate of defense and security matters barely existent, the public knew little about the performance of the peacekeeping mission in DRC. Overall, the SSPDF deployment overall garnered little attention in Juba, and even less scrutiny. When 301 troops were returned home by Kenyan aircraft on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023 as EACRF withdrew from DRC<sup>80</sup>, few seemed to take note of the end of a historic mission for South Sudan's national armed forces.

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79 Eye Radio, "Kenyan President William Ruto in Juba for Bilateral Talks," December 3, 2022, <https://www.eyeradio.org/kenyan-president-william-ruto-in-juba-for-bilateral-talks/>; Radio Tamazuj, "South Sudan Sends 300 Additional Peacekeeping Troops to DRC," April 4, 2023, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/south-sudan-sends-300-additional-peacekeeping-troops-to-drc>

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80 Sudans Post, "South Sudan Troops Deployed to DR Congo Returns," December 8, 2023, <https://www.sudanspost.com/south-sudan-troops-deployed-to-dr-congo-returns/>

# Tanzania's diplomatic and military engagement in the DR Congo

By Dastan Kweka

## Motives and national interest

There is a long history of Tanzanian involvement in the fractious politics of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Julius Nyerere, the founding Prime Minister of Tanzania, knew the first Prime Minister of Congo Patrice Lumumba, as a fellow nationalist and Pan-Africanist.<sup>81</sup> In the years following the death of Lumumba in 1961, Tanzania sought to assist the following Lumumbist rebellion in the DRC by rendering diplomatic support and allowing materiel from communist benefactors to transit through its territory.<sup>82</sup> Even the fabled Marxist revolutionary – Che Guevara – transited through Dar es Salaam in his bid to assist Congolese nationalists.<sup>83</sup> However, by 1965, leftist Pan-Africanists considered the Congolese struggle lost. The Tanzanians took away the lesson that capitalist powers would, whenever possible, seek to obstruct or manipulate impending political change across Africa.<sup>84</sup> With this understanding and recognition of the weak nature of the African states,<sup>85</sup> Tanzania sought strength and protection in unity and solidarity. To achieve this, they devised a foreign policy that emphasised four key principles: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, promotion of African unity, support for liberation of other countries, and support for the United Nations (UN) in its search for international peace and security. Although the application of these principles varied with time, they remain central

to any attempt to understand Tanzania's contribution to peace and security in the Great Lakes region.

Unlike Southern Africa, where Tanzania has had a continuous history of direct diplomatic and military engagements, its involvement in DRC declined significantly from the mid 1960's and only begun to rise from the second half of 1990s, particularly after the second Congo war led to an intervention by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).<sup>86</sup> As a consequence of the war, Tanzania received a large number of Congolese refugees, the majority of whom – about 87,000 – have remained in the country till today.<sup>87</sup> Tanzania currently hosts about 234,000 refugees from Burundi and DRC. This large number of refugees is associated with insecurity on Tanzania's north-western border, and creates significant pressure on local resources.<sup>88</sup> On top of the imperative to fulfil its obligation in maintaining international peace and stability, Tanzania views its engagements in the DRC as central to addressing the refugee question within its borders. In addition, troop deployments abroad are a key source of combat experience for an army that last fought a war more than forty years ago<sup>89</sup>. Multilateral deployments are also a lucrative opportunity for Tanzanian soldiers, thanks to relatively high U.N subsidized salaries.

SADC remains a favourite regional vehicle for Tanzania's engagement with the DRC issues due to both the community's long history of intervention in the Congo,<sup>90</sup>

81 Both Nyerere and Lumumba attended the All African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana, in 1958.  
82 "Tanzanian Support for the Congo Rebels", Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00472A001100020001-7.pdf>  
83 "Inside Che Guevara's Secret Visit to Dar es Salaam", The Citizen, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/magazines/political-reforms/inside-che-guevara-s-secret-visit-to-tanzania-2-2676316>  
84 Ally Bashiru et al., Miongozo Miwili: Kupaa na Kutunguliwa Kwa Azimio la Arusha (Dar es Salaam, University of Dar es Salaam, 2013).  
85 Issa Shivji.; Pan-Africanism in Mwalimu Nyerere's Thought, *Third World Resurgence*, No 227 (2009).

86 "The Role of External Actors in the DRC Crisis", Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2017), <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/role-external-actors-drc-congo-crisis-sadc-au-icglr-un-eu/>  
87 Interview with a key informant, July 7, 2024, Dar es Salaam; UNHCR data for Tanzania <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/tza>  
88 Adventina, Laurent & Laurean Ndumbaro., "Refugees Integration and National Security Risks in Tanzania – A Case of Katumba Old Settlement", *Journal of African Politics* 3, 16-30 (2023).  
89 Dastan, Kweka., A "Question of National Honour" – Status Concerns in Tanzania's Response to the Invasion by Uganda in 1978, *The African Review*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889x-bja10135>  
90 "SADC interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo", *Conflict Trends* 3, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/sadc-interventions-democratic-republic-congo/>

and its tested frameworks for authorising and managing multi-country troop deployments. Tanzania also enjoys a significant level of deference within SADC based on its historical contribution to liberation efforts.<sup>91</sup> In contrast, the East African Community lacks a track record of successful engagement in DRC. In addition, Tanzania faces subtle competition from Kenya, while mutual suspicion between Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda often undermined cooperation among EAC member-states. Although not often said aloud, there is a significant degree of suspicion within Tanzania's security and political establishment that Rwanda's meddling in DRC could be replicated elsewhere in the region if not challenged.<sup>92</sup>

## National-level mandate for deployment, financing, and performance

Troops from the Tanzania Peoples Defence Forces (TPDF) have been actively deployed to the DRC under the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) since 2013. Tanzania indicated its commitment to a revitalised intervention force in late 2012, and when the U.N. Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) was created through SADC in early 2013, its troops became the first to deploy.<sup>93</sup> Tanzania's swift reaction can be attributed to its centralised mandating arrangement. As the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, the president of Tanzania has the authority to deploy troops within and outside the country's borders, for national security purposes.<sup>94</sup> Unless the deployment is preceded by a declaration of war, the law does not require authorisation by the National Assembly.<sup>95</sup> However, the National Assembly ratifies international treaties, and in the specific case of SADC, it ratified the community's Mutual Defence Pact in 2010. In exercising the powers of the Commander in Chief, the president is advised by the National Security Council (NSC).<sup>96</sup> This Council serves as a supreme advisory organ on matters of national security. Apart from consulting the NSC, the government tends to notify the National Assembly

and brief the parliamentary committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security about any impending international deployments.

At the peak of the Force Intervention Brigade's operations in DRC, Tanzania had deployed about 1200 troops. Recent United Nations figures suggest Tanzania has about 900 troops still serving under MONUSCO.<sup>97</sup> The FIB achieved early success, notably defeating the March 23 (M23) rebellion while under the leadership of a commander from Tanzania, but performed poorly in its operations against other rebel groups such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Critics were quick to claim that the FIB had a selective mandate from its outset, partly because Tanzania earlier proposed dialogue as the best approach for resolving the FDLR issue.<sup>98</sup> However, analysts have pointed out that the FIB's performance staggered because it was not created to confront unconventional forces such as the FDLR and ADF, and the casualties the force sustained in its attempt dampened morale.<sup>99</sup> Tanzania's participation in the FIB was largely funded by the United Nations within the MONUSCO framework.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, it remains unclear how much of the pre-deployment costs, especially for physical fitness and refresher training on equipment, are covered by the United Nations. This information is missing in the Ministry of Defence budget.<sup>101</sup>

Although Tanzania remains a notable contributor to MONUSCO, the situation was different for the now defunct East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), and the ongoing Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC). The limited participation of Tanzania in the EACRF (November 2022 – December, 2023) was affected by two important developments. The first development was a delicate leadership transition following the death of President John Magufuli in March 2022, while the second was the need to prioritise the threat of terrorist insurgency from Mozambique. Regarding the latter, Tanzania deployed about 300 troops to Mozambique under

91 Temu, Arnold & Tembe, Joel., "Southern African Liberation Struggles, Contemporaneous Documents (1960 - 1994)", Book 1, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota.

92 Interview with a senior retired ruling party leader, November, 2023.

93 "The UN Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of Congo", International Peace Institute, 2013, [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi\\_e\\_pub\\_un\\_intervention\\_brigade\\_rev.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_un_intervention_brigade_rev.pdf)

94 The 1977 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, article 148.

95 The 1977 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, article 44.

96 The National Security Council Act (2010), article 4 & 5.

97 "Protecting civilians and consolidating peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo", MONUSCO Fact Sheet, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/monusco>

98 "Kagame speaks out on Kikwete's call for negotiations with FDLR rebels", The East African, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kagame-speaks-out-on-kikwete-s-call-for-negotiations-with-fdlr-rebels-1316922>

99 Peter, Fabricius, "Reinventing the Force Intervention Brigade", <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/reinventing-the-force-intervention-brigade>

100 "Ushiriki wa Tanzania Katika Operesheni ya Ulinzi wa Amani DRC", <https://www.michuzi.co.tz/2013/09/ushiriki-wa-tanzania-katika-operesheni.html?m=1>

101 Ministry of Defence Budget Speech, May 2024.

a bilateral arrangement in December 2022, exactly at the same time when the EACRF was deploying to the DRC.<sup>102</sup> Uninterested in committing troops but keen to demonstrate its commitment to the EAC's initiative, Tanzania seconded a senior general officer to the EACRF headquarters in Goma in 2023. If anything, the EACRF's forced withdrawal amplified Tanzania's concerns about the reliability of EAC as a vehicle for intervention initiatives.<sup>103</sup>

Tanzania's decision to participate in SAMIDRC can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, the approval and deployment of SAMIDRC took place in the second half of 2023, when the country had already succeeded in stemming the infiltration of insurgents on its southern border with Mozambique. Secondly, the conception of SAMIDRC was preceded by a period in which President Felix Tshisekedi of DRC had succeeded in painting his country as a victim of Rwanda's aggression. This framing of the conflict played into Tanzania's belief in the respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of other countries as the basis for peace and stability. Sources suggest that Tanzania has contributed between 300 and 500 troops to the SAMIDRC initiative. In contrast to the Force Intervention Brigade, which achieved significant success in its early days, the M23 rebels have expanded their operations and captured strategic sites, despite the presence of SAMIDRC.<sup>104</sup> This performance issue is considered a result of limited financial, technical and logistical resources. In a bid to address these challenges, the Security Council authorised MONUSCO support for SAMIDRC in early August.<sup>105</sup> This significant change is expected to have a positive effect on SAMIDRC's performance, and could possibly persuade Tanzania to increase its troop contribution.

## Public perceptions, transparency, and accountability

Tanzanians have historically been supportive, and notably proud, of their country's efforts to contribute to regional peace and stability. However, deaths of soldiers serving in international missions tend to provoke critical questions from citizens, particularly those with access to social media.<sup>106</sup> Despite the need to reduce unwanted questions, the Tanzania People's Defence Forces (TPDF) is uniquely secretive to the extent of being unwilling to even claim its successes. Its secrecy is implemented largely through over-classification.<sup>107</sup> The Ministry of Defence budget is often approved by the National Assembly after light engagements, most of which tend to be congratulatory. It remains rare for the TPDF to brief journalists about its international operations, and most of the publicly available information tends to come from international media outlets. To illustrate how secretive the TPDF is, Tanzania lost three soldiers serving under SAMIDRC in April 2024 and did not disclose the names of the dead, nor their burial even after it had happened.<sup>108</sup> Despite its secrecy, the TPDF enjoys a high level of trust that no other public institution has been able to attract.<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusion

Tanzania views persistent security problems in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo as a threat to its national security, and the stability of the entire Great Lakes region. However, the country's participation in various DRC-focused interventions is informed by a complex set of motives, some of which are never acknowledged publicly. SADC remains the preferred avenue for Tanzania's engagement with DRC issues because of its good record of facilitating interventions in the country. Engagement in the DRC is seen as imperative to address security risks on the north-western border, fulfil obligations to international peace and stability, and for the army to gain experience and financial benefits. Tanzania will sustain its contribution to the regional body's DRC agenda as long as it aligns with these interests.

102 Dastan, Kweka., "Tanzania Weighs Its Options as SADC Troops Leave Mozambique", The Chanzo (2024), <https://thechanzo.com/2024/05/16/tanzania-weighs-its-options-as-sadc-troops-leave-mozambique/>

103 "Briefing on the Situation in Eastern DRC and deployment of the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), The Amani Institute (2024), <https://amaniafrica-et.org/briefing-on-the-situation-in-eastern-drc-and-deployment-of-the-sadc-mission-in-the-drc-samidrc/>

104 Robert Muhereza., "UPDF deploy heavily on Congo border as M23 captures Ishasha", The Daily Monitor, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/updf-deploy-heavily-on-congo-border-as-m23-captures-ishasha-4715490>

105 "MONUSCO Welcomes the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2046", <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/monusco-welcomes-adoption-security-council-resolution-2746-2024-authorizing-its-support-samidrc-forces-democratic-republic-congo>

106 Analysis of posts on Jamii Forums, a popular Tanzanian digital space. July, 2024.

107 Interview with a senior retired TPDF General, March 2024.

108 "Miili ya Wanajeshi wa Tanzania Waliofia Congo kuwasili nchi", <https://www.mwananchi.co.tz/mw/habari/kitaifa/miili-ya-wanajeshi-wa-tanzania-waliofia-congo-kuwasili-nchini-4588254>

109 Afrobarometer survey data, round 9 (2021/2023), <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

# Conclusion

By William Ham

If there is a theme to the EACRF story, it is unmet expectations. The Congolese government expected an ally to crush M23, but instead got a passive peacekeeping force. The Kenyan government expected their troops and commerce to be welcomed by the Congolese, but instead were met with suspicion. Most strikingly, all the troop contributing countries expected to receive hefty western or UN financing. This last miscalculation was the root cause of all the others. Without significant western backing, the core of the EACRF was unwilling to fight.

Unsurprisingly, it was the DRC's close neighbors – Burundi and Uganda – who were the least fazed by the lack of funding. They remain intimate parties to the conflict, with Burundi committed to the fight, regardless of the cost, and Uganda's passive stance reflecting a fragile detente with Rwanda. Nevertheless, without funding, Kenyan and South Sudanese troops were unwilling to take offensive action and turned toward traditional peacekeeping. This became untenable without any meaningful progress in the Nairobi or Luanda peace talks. While the EACRF could support temporary ceasefires, neither M23 nor the Congolese state were ready for peace. Without a viable peace process or path to military victory, the mission was orphaned, rudderless, and doomed from the start.

The SADC force sent to replace the EACRF committed to aggressive peace enforcement – yet faced the same rude fiscal awakening. Neither mission replaced the UN mission, inherited its budget, or gained funding elsewhere from the usual donors (the US, UK, or EU). While SADC is willing to fight, the lack of funding impacts their ability to do so. South African airpower remains grounded due to insufficient funds<sup>110</sup> and the overall force is relatively small - 5,000 soldiers. If the UN's 14,000 troops under MONUSCO lacked the firepower to push back the reported M23-Rwandan combined force of 8,000, it is difficult to imagine that SADC will have a decisive impact<sup>111</sup>.

The financial difficulties faced by the EACRF and SAMIDRC are not isolated cases, but part of a larger trend. Lack of funding is forcing the AU mission in Somalia and SADC mission in Mozambique to scale down or withdraw<sup>112</sup>. Since the AU interventions in Sudan (2004) and Somalia (2007), African interventions could rely on western financing. This is no longer true. The same geopolitical shift toward multipolarity that inhibits UN Peacekeeping and necessitated the rise of African-led peace operations now redirects donor purses toward immediate security concerns in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Asia. Political elites across the region are struggling to adjust their expectations to this new reality.

Despite these difficulties in financing, the demand for peace operations persists. While the era of large and aggressive internationally financed interventions that enabled the defeat of M23 in 2013 is over, a more restrained and practical approach may be emerging<sup>113</sup>. The EACRF is an extreme example of that adaption in practice. The mission stabilized the conflict and contributed to temporary easing of hostilities. While these efforts could not bring a lasting peace, they did contribute to a pragmatic slowing of the conflict.

This systematic and institutional environment was the backdrop rather than the driver of the EACRF. Ultimately, it was an interplay of specific regional and national politics which resulted in the disjointed force. In each troop contributing country, this was an elite process. Heads of state drove the process without much public involvement. Many of the heads of state involved knew each other personally. Kagame and Museveni fought alongside each other in Ugandan Bush War and the Kenyetta and Tshisekedi found common ground as members of political dynasties.

110 "Scale of SADC's DRC Mission Raises Concerns." *African Defense Forum*, March 2024. <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/03/scale-of-sadcs-drc-mission-raises-concerns/>.

111 "About 4,000 Rwandan Troops Are in Congo, Operating with the M23 Rebel Group: UN Experts," *Africa News*, July 11, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2024/07/11/about-4000-rwandan-troops-are-in-congo-operating-with-the-m23-rebel-group-un-experts/>.

112 International Crisis Group, *What Future for Military Intervention in Mozambique*, Report No. 1, October 27, 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/ne/node/23438>.

113 Duntun, Caroline, Marion Laurence, and Gino Vlavonou. 2023. "Pragmatic Peacekeeping in a Multipolar Era: Liberal Norms, Practices, and the Future of UN Peace Operations." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 17 (3): 215–34. doi:10.1080/17502977.2023.2217579.

The challenges faced by the EACRF signify a critical turning point for African-led peace operations and highlight the dynamic nature of regional politics. As the geopolitical landscape shifts and funding constraints become increasingly pronounced, understanding these challenges will be essential for future missions. Despite its significance, the EACRF remains poorly understood. This retrospective addresses that gap by providing the first comprehensive

examination of the EACRF, focusing on the positions and motivations of each troop-contributing country. By exploring the nuanced dynamics at play, we can gain valuable insights into the broader implications for peace operations. Only by reflecting on the EACRF can we fully grasp the ongoing evolution of peace operations and the truly regional politics that increasingly drive them.

## About the authors

**Fred Bauma** is a human rights activist and Executive Director of Ebuteli, a research institute based in Kinshasa, DR Congo.

**Ngala Chome** holds a PhD in history from Durham University. A Kenyan writer and analyst, Ngala is also a research fellow at the University of Ghent.

**William Ham**, writing under a pseudonym for personal reasons, is an independent researcher studying politics and conflict in East Africa.

**Dastan Kweka** is a development professional, analyst and writer based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

**Anna Reuss** heads the Peace and Security Competence Centre of the FES Africa Department based in Dakar, Senegal.

**Kristof Titeca** is full professor at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, where he works on governance and conflict in East and Central Africa.