



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

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UN peacekeepers patrolling on the ground in Goma, eastern DRC. Source: [United Nations](#)

A camp for displaced people in Goma, the capital of North Kivu, housing those fleeing violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Source: [United Nations](#)

Shelter Camp for internally displaced people in Goma, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Source: [United Nations Peacekeeping](#)

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African Pulse:

Eastern DRC: Conflict, Mediation and Competing Interests

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Eastern DRC: Conflict, Mediation and Competing Interests

by

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj & Arshiya Chaturvedi

Executive Summary

Earlier in December 2025, US President Donald Trump hosted the leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in Washington in an effort to broker a peace agreement between the two countries, whose relations have been strained by decades of conflict. The first effort, orchestrated in June 2025¹, failed to alter ground realities, as offensives by both Rwanda-aligned and Congolese-aligned armed groups continued unabated.

The December 4th agreement, which President Trump described² as “historic” and “a great day for Africa”, appears to be faltering. In the days following the agreement, the alleged Rwanda-backed armed group M23 intensified its operations in eastern DRC and seized control of Uvira, a strategic city near the DRC-Burundi border. This marked the third major city captured by M23 since the start of 2025, following the takeover of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, in January, and Bukavu, South Kivu’s capital, the following month.³

Both sides have accused each other of aggression and of violating the peace accord. The President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has publicly accused Rwanda of blatantly breaching the newly signed, US-brokered peace agreement, citing continued attacks and significant advances in eastern DRC by the M23 and allied armed groups. Rwanda, however, has rejected these allegations, described in media reports as “ridiculous”, arguing that they are an attempt to deflect responsibility.⁴ Kigali has, in turn, justified its actions as defensive operations against Congo and its

¹ Bureau of African Affairs . “Peace Agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda - United States Department of State.” United States Department of State, June 27, 2025. <https://www.state.gov/peace-agreement-between-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-the-republic-of-rwanda>.

² Makumeno, Emery. “Trump to Host DR Congo’s Félix Tshisekedi and Rwanda’s Paul Kagame to Sign Peace Deal.” BBC, December 4, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjrn88jqn4o>.

³ Farouk Chothia. “DR Congo-Rwanda Peace Process: Can Trump’s Shattered Plan Be Glued Back Together?” BBC, December 13, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gk34k9k23o>.

⁴ Staff, Al Jazeera. “DRC Accuses Rwanda of Peace Deal Violations as M23 Advances in the East.” Al Jazeera, December 9, 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/9/drc-accuses-rwanda-of-peace-deal-violations-as-m23-advances-in-the-east>.

ally Burundi, including coordinated drone and artillery strikes that have reportedly targeted villages across North and South Kivu.⁵

The US State Department has voiced concern over the recent offensive, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio issuing a strong rebuke to Rwanda for violating the peace agreement and warning that the United States could take action to ensure it is upheld. More recently, Corneille Nangaa, leader of the Congo River Alliance (AFC) – the rebel coalition that includes M23 – announced that its forces would withdraw from Uvira as a goodwill gesture. He said the move was in response to US-mediated requests and intended to give the Qatar-brokered peace process the best chance of success. Nangaa did not specify a timeline for the withdrawal but called for the deployment of a “neutral force” to monitor the ceasefire and prevent the Congolese army from retaking lost territory.⁶

The conflict is deeply multi-layered. It involves the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the Congo River Alliance, a rebel coalition in which the M23 armed group plays a central role; Rwanda, accused of backing M23 while firmly denying involvement; Burundi in support of Kinshasa; and a complex array of local militias operating across eastern DRC. Mediation efforts span African-led mechanisms under the African Union, facilitation by the United Nations, active U.S. diplomacy, and Qatar’s quiet bilateral engagement. This brief examines these intersecting dimensions of a protracted conflict, one of Africa’s longest-running, before concluding with strategic considerations for the way forward.

Chronicles of the Conflict⁷

The history of the strained relationship between the two neighbouring African countries, the DRC and Rwanda, dates back more than three decades. The 1994 Rwandan Genocide was the genesis of this, when extremists from the majority Hutu ethnic population killed nearly one million members of the minority ethnic Tutsi group, as well as moderate Hutus in Rwanda. This triggered an exodus of refugees into today’s eastern DRC region, comprising both the targeted Tutsi minority as well as extremist Hutu groups, catalysing the organisation of rival militias and the escalation of the conflict within Congolese territory.

⁵ Supra Note 2

⁶ Makumeno, Emery. “DR Congo Conflict: Rebels Say They Will Withdraw from Uvira City at Trump Administration’s Request.” BBC, December 16, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c871528ljevo>.

⁷ Center for Preventive Action. “Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” Global Conflict Tracker. Council on Foreign Relations, June 9, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>.

Further, following the shift in Rwanda's political landscape with the establishment of a Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government, Rwandan military operations under President Paul Kagame expanded into eastern DRC, aimed at neutralizing extremist Hutus armed groups. These operations were conducted alongside, and at times in coordination with, Congo-based Tutsi militias, contributing to the escalation and the regionalization of the conflict.

This escalation culminated in Rwanda waging the First Congo War against Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) in 1996, in alliance with Uganda and Angola, and with support from other regional actors. Rwanda justified its intervention on the grounds that extremist Hutu armed groups operating from eastern DRC continued to pose a serious threat to the Tutsi population, and that the then Zairian leader, Mobutu Sese Seko, was harbouring these groups. Other African states were motivated by concerns over their own national security and broader strategic interests, given the spillover effects of Mobutu's political instability and his tolerance of hostile factions operating near their borders. The Rwanda-backed alliance prevailed in 1997, overthrowing Mobutu and installing opposition leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila as head of state of the newly renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This arrangement, however, failed to secure lasting peace. Soon after taking power, Kabila moved to curb Rwanda's influence by removing ethnic Tutsis from key government positions and ordering the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Congolese territory. He also failed to dismantle Hutu armed groups operating along the DRC-Rwanda border. In response to these policies, which Rwanda viewed as a direct threat to its security, Rwandan forces invaded the DRC in 1998, triggering the Second Congo War. Rwanda was backed by Uganda and Burundi, while the Congolese government received support from Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. The conflict continued until the assassination of Laurent Kabila in 2001, after which his son, Joseph Kabila, assumed power. Despite formal peace agreements culminating in 2003, eastern DRC has since experienced a protracted but intermittent conflict marked by the proliferation of armed groups and repeated, largely unsuccessful efforts to establish durable peace.

The Growing Role of Critical Minerals

The DRC-Rwanda conflict, which began as an ethnic and political struggle in the 21st century, has evolved into a contest over the control of strategic mineral resources in eastern Congo. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is exceptionally resource-rich, possessing substantial reserves of critical minerals and metals, including cobalt,

copper, lithium, gold, diamonds, and rare earth-linked inputs such as coltan.⁸ While the country's most valuable copper and cobalt deposits are concentrated in the south, eastern and parts of central Congo are rich in high-value minerals such as gold, tin, tantalum, and tungsten, which are often mined artisanally and are harder to regulate. Despite this abundance, active mining is concentrated in a relatively limited portion of the country, leaving large areas of mineral potential untapped.⁹ The concentration of valuable, easily exploitable resources, particularly in eastern DRC¹⁰, has attracted a growing number of local, regional, and international actors, contributing to the conflict's persistence and increasingly globalised character.

Globally, countries have recognised critical minerals and access to these as a political imperative for supporting their technological advancement, economic growth, and national security. To this end, many are actively employing different strategies and policy frameworks, including China, the EU, the US, the UK and others. China currently controls a dominant share of foreign-owned cobalt assets in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is also a major player in the country's copper sector. Several Chinese-backed mining projects have come under scrutiny over allegations of corruption and opaque contracting practices during the Kabila era, contributing to broader governance concerns that marked the period preceding the country's political transition in 2019.¹¹ The US is also vigorously pursuing secure access to critical minerals, a theme reaffirmed in its 2025 National Security Strategy published in December 2025. The document highlights supply chain security and resilience – including access to strategic minerals – as a core national security objective. It also invokes a modern interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine, sometimes referred to in commentary as a "Trump Corollary," which prioritises the Western Hemisphere as a strategic sphere of interest. While the NSS does not explicitly single out Africa as a priority region, its emphasis on critical materials and reducing dependence on foreign sources underscores a broader strategic focus that has implications for US engagement in Africa and beyond.¹²

The Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity, signed on 4 December 2025 between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and hosted by the United

⁸ Hanai, Kazuyo. "Conflict Minerals Regulation and Mechanism Changes in the DR Congo." *Resources Policy* 74 (December 1, 2021): 102394. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2021.102394>.

⁹ International Trade Administration. "Democratic Republic of the Congo - Mining and Minerals." International Trade Administration, October 11, 2021. <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/democratic-republic-congo-mining-and-minerals>.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Supra Note 6

¹² The President of United States of America . "National Security Strategy of the United States of America." *White House* , 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

States, comprised a package of political and economic instruments. These included a core peace understanding, a Regional Economic Integration Framework, and strategic cooperation frameworks between the United States and the DRC. The US-DRC framework places strong emphasis on economic cooperation in critical minerals, energy, infrastructure, technology-enabled initiatives, and the development of local value chains and beneficiation capacity, with the aim of fostering sustainable and mutually beneficial growth.¹³ These strategic efforts reflect a layered U.S. approach aimed at securing access to critical resources while simultaneously reinforcing political influence and long-term security interests.

The AU Angle

In line with the principle of African solutions to African problems, the African Union has supported diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, most notably through the Luanda Process, led by Angola. This initiative has focused on ceasefires, disengagement of forces, and dialogue between the DRC and Rwanda.¹⁴ The AU has also backed regional mediation tracks, particularly those led by the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).¹⁵ Despite these layered efforts, outcomes have been limited. The parties have remained largely intransigent, armed groups have continued operations on the ground, and ceasefires have repeatedly collapsed. Against this backdrop, Angola stepped back from its direct mediation role in 2024-25¹⁶, underscoring the constraints facing African-led diplomatic initiatives in the absence of sustained political will from the principal actors.

UN Stabilisation

The United Nations' engagement in eastern DRC has been centred on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), deployed since 1999¹⁷, making it one of the UN's longest-running

¹³ Media Note. "Signing of the Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda - United States Department of State." United States Department of State, December 5, 2025. <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/12/signing-of-the-washington-accords-for-peace-and-prosperity-between-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-rwanda>.

¹⁴ Hoinathy, Remadji . "Eastern DRC Peace Processes Miss the Mark." ISS Africa, February 8, 2023. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/eastern-drc-peace-processes-miss-the-mark>.

¹⁵ Handy, Paul-Simon . "Diplomacy without Deterrence Won't Bring Peace in Eastern DRC | ISS Africa." ISS Africa, August 15, 2025. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/diplomacy-without-deterrence-won-t-bring-peace-in-eastern-drc>.

¹⁶ Reuters Staff. "East Congo Ceasefire in Trouble as Rebels Stay in Strategic Town." *Reuters*, March 24, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/angola-end-east-congo-conflict-mediation-role-presidency-says-2025-03-24/>.

¹⁷ United Nations. "United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC)." [peacekeeping.un.org](https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/monuc/), n.d. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/monuc/>.

peacekeeping operations. MONUSCO has focused on civilian protection, support to state authority, and stabilisation, but has faced sustained criticism over its effectiveness amid persistent insecurity. In response to Congolese concerns, a phased drawdown was announced in 2023, beginning with the withdrawal from parts of South Kivu.¹⁸ Nevertheless, recognising the continued volatility, the UN Security Council has extended MONUSCO's mandate until December 2026.¹⁹ India remains a long-standing Troop-Contributing and Police-Contributing Country (TCC/PCC) to MONUSCO, with its role centred on peacekeeping, civilian protection, engineering, and medical support.²⁰ The UN's role remains indispensable but constrained—focused on stabilisation and facilitation rather than conflict resolution.

Together, AU and UN efforts highlight the limits of mediation and peacekeeping in the absence of durable political settlements and effective regional cooperation, reinforcing the need for sustained international engagement alongside African leadership.

Outlook and Strategic Considerations

While the DRC's vast natural endowment holds transformative potential to drive economic development, industrialisation, and improved living standards for its population, persistent conflict and instability continue to act as structural barriers. Armed groups' control over mining areas, revenue losses from illegal extraction and smuggling, and entrenched corruption divert wealth away from public development. At the same time, foreign governments, multinational corporations, and investors seeking to engage in the sector face significant constraints arising from weak governance, insecurity, regulatory uncertainty, and high economic risk. Despite numerous attempts over the past several years to resolve the conflict, none have succeeded in delivering lasting peace in the region.

As a complex and multi-dimensional conflict shaped by historical, ethnic, geopolitical, and economic factors, its resolution requires a comprehensive, inclusive, and African-led approach, building on existing continental and regional mediation efforts. Deep-rooted grievances and ethnic divisions have fuelled cycles of violence, making a credible mechanism for acknowledging past atrocities, shared trauma, and unresolved injustices essential to any process of genuine reconciliation. Equally, the long-standing distrust between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda

¹⁸ Media . "Security Council Adopts Resolution on Withdrawal of MONUSCO." United Nations (UN), March 10, 2024. <https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun71018425>.

¹⁹ News. "Security Council Renews DR Congo Peacekeeping Mission amid Renewed M23 Offensives in the East." United Nations (UN), December 19, 2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/116643>.

²⁰ Ministry Of External Affairs . "India's Legacy in UN Peacekeeping: Leadership, Commitment, and Sacrifice." Press Information Bureau (PIB), the Government of India (GOI), March 9, 2025. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2109587®=3&lang=2>

underscores the need for sustained confidence-building measures. These could include joint border security arrangements, structured intelligence-sharing on armed groups, and deeper economic integration and development initiatives, alongside other bilateral mechanisms aimed at rebuilding trust and preventing renewed escalation. African institutions including the African Union (AU) and sub-regional bodies such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) could play a more prominent and sustained role in efforts to resolve the conflict. Their engagement carries political and social legitimacy and reflects a continuity of African-led attempts to address the crisis. With a deeper understanding of local dynamics and societal sensitivities, such initiatives may be better positioned to engage local communities, traditional authorities, and civil society, improving the prospects for implementation and durability of any agreement. Recent mediation efforts, including those supported by Qatar, reflect this inclusive approach by facilitating dialogue among state actors and key armed groups.

As peace efforts continue, attention has also turned to strengthening the DRC's capacity to contain ongoing violence and prevent escalation that could undermine negotiations. In this context, India's long-standing engagement through UN peacekeeping and its experience in complex security environments position it as a constructive contributor to stability-supporting efforts.

Conclusion

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, like many resource-rich African countries, stands at a critical juncture where its natural wealth could potentially propel long-aspired national development. However, prolonged tensions with neighbouring Rwanda continue to complicate stability and development prospects. The growing strategic importance of critical minerals, and the concentration of many of these resources in the DRC, has transformed what was once a largely ethnic and interstate dispute into a broader geopolitical contest. Multiple external actors now intervene to advance their own interests, further complicating an already fragile situation. In this context, any durable resolution of this long-running and evolving conflict will need to be holistic: grounded in local realities, attentive to affected communities and armed groups, and responsive to historical grievances and entrenched mistrust. Strengthening national capacity to manage armed violence, secure borders, and protect civilians will also remain central. Only through such an integrated approach could the DRC begin to move beyond recurring cycles of conflict and realise its wider developmental potential.



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