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Introduction and Background

In December 2023, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) experienced violent and disputed national elections, further destabilizing the country. Armed clashes between the military and insurgent groups, including M23 and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), have intensified, particularly in eastern DRC. Specifically, M23 is a Tutsi rebel faction alleged to have ties to Rwanda and Uganda. On the other hand, the ADF is linked to the Islamic State (ISIS); these two groups are among the over 100 armed groups in the region. The violence surged in early 2024, creating dire humanitarian conditions. By March, the UN reported that the number of internally displaced people had reached 7.2 million, ranking DRC among the countries with the highest displacement figures globally.

The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, during which ethnic Hutu extremists massacred approximately one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus. As Rwanda's new government, led by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), pursued the remaining Hutu perpetrators, nearly two million Hutus fled to eastern DRC. Among them were armed extremists who later organized militias, prompting retaliatory actions by Tutsi groups. This environment catalyzed the First Congo War (1996–1997), a multinational effort led by Rwanda, Uganda, and Congolese opposition leader Laurent Kabila, which toppled the Mobutu Sese Seko regime.

The subsequent Second Congo War (1998–2002) erupted when relations between Rwanda and Kabila soured. Kabila expelled Rwandan forces and allied with Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia to counter a new Rwandan invasion. This war, involving numerous state and non-state actors, claimed millions of lives. Laurent Kabila's assassination in 2001 led to the presidency of his son, Joseph Kabila, who oversaw peace agreements and a transitional government by 2003. Despite formal peace, instability persisted, particularly in mineral-rich eastern regions.

The March 23 Movement (M23) emerged in the early 2000s as a Tutsi-led rebel group. Backed by Rwanda, M23 launched significant offensives in eastern DRC but faced setbacks after the UN authorized an offensive brigade in 2013. Despite these efforts, tensions between Rwanda and DRC remained unresolved, and M23 resurfaced in 2022, seizing parts of North Kivu province by mid-2023. Rwanda denies supporting M23 but accuses DRC of backing Hutu extremist militias.

DRC's abundant mineral resources, including cobalt, copper, and rare earth elements critical for electronics and clean energy, have globalized its conflict. While Chinese companies now dominate mining operations, the Congolese government has deployed troops to protect Chinese assets. This operation has drawn further international attention due to its alleged use of child labor and due to accusations of corruption. Yet, the relationship between China and the DRC are unlikely to end due to the United States' restriction on conflict minerals, thereby limiting the United States' trade with the DRC¹.

Following the 2023 elections, the Eastern DRC experienced political unrest and violence, leading to the United Nations and the East African Community (EAC) attempting to mediate any such conflicts². Furthermore, the South African Development Community (SADC) would deploy troops to support the country's stability before the elections. However, anti-intervention sentiment has grown due to perceived inefficacy, leading President Félix Tshisekedi to request the withdrawal of UN peacekeeping forces under the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). While MONUSCO's mandate was extended through 2024, EAC forces exited the region, creating security gaps.

MONUSCO refers to the U.N. peacekeeping mission that was started in 2009. Before MONUSCO, the UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC) started in August 1999. However, these two missions have existed as one continuous entity within the DRC, rising significantly throughout separate episodes. The first was to observe a ceasefire after the Second Congo War. Second was to facilitate the democratic elections, which were held in 2006. However, this was not successful as instability would persist, especially in the Eastern DRC. Yet, this instability would not dissuade the DRC's government from its belief that the U.N. had been encroaching on its sovereignty, thereby leading to the creation of MONUSCO, which was restructured to help the DRC's government in stabilizing its Eastern regions and prepare for the UN's withdrawal.

Here arrived the core issues within the Congo, specifically the limited resources held domestically, combined with the immense size of its geography, similar to that of continental Europe, and the tasks required to build its institutions up to a satisfactory level, such as rebuilding the stability of its political systems. This issue has been exacerbated by the

¹ "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in the DRC." Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), Mar. 2019, igarape.org.br. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

² USAID. "East African Community." U.S. Agency for International Development, www.usaid.gov/east-africa-regional/fact-sheet/east-african-community. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

peacekeeping force receiving increasingly inadequate funding in the face of rising destabilization.

This is especially so considering the risk of direct conflict between the DRC and Rwanda, which remains a risk due to rising tensions between the two states. Despite an agreement between the two countries that stipulated a reduction in military presence and inflammatory rhetoric, which was aided by the United States, clashes that have risked rising tensions have continued. This is in combination with a rising number of attacks by the ADF, which has led to further instability in the region. For the people of the region, this had led to mass displacement. Specifically, over 358,000 people had been displaced in the area by early 2024, with 80% being linked to armed conflict as those mentioned above. This has simultaneously been correlated with a dramatic rise in human rights abuses, such as violence against children.

In further relation to the region's humanitarian crisis, food security has become a significant issue. Nearly 23.4 million Congolese face insecurity, leading to over 1.1 million seeking refugee status abroad. The aforementioned populations who have become displaced need more medical aid, security, and other necessities, which have been challenging to gain. These humanitarian issues are further exacerbated by mining expansions, armed groups, and extreme poverty in the North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces³.

Definition of Key Terms

Tutsi⁴

In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Tutsis, often referred to as Banyamulenge, are a minority ethnic group primarily concentrated in the eastern provinces near the borders with Rwanda and Burundi. Historically, Tutsis have faced discrimination and marginalization within the DRC, stemming from their perceived ties to Rwanda and association with cattle herding. This divide runs deep, originating from the minority Tutsi population ruling over Hutus before the 20th century. Then, these ethnic groups were further exacerbated by colonial rule, which set the ethnic groups against

³ Council on Foreign Relations. "Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo." Global Conflict Tracker, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

⁴Meisler, Stanley. United Nations: A History. Grove Press, 2011.

each other to consolidate their rule. The tensions between Tutsis and other ethnic communities within the DRC were exacerbated by the influx of Rwandan refugees following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Here, Tutsis were targeted by Hutu extremists, leading many to seek refuge in the Eastern DRC. These Tutsis would clash with Hutu groups and local Congolese factions within the DRC.

Tutsis in the DRC became more prominent during the Congo Wars (1996–1997 and 1998–2002). The First Congo War was partly driven by Rwandan and Tutsi-led efforts to eliminate Hutu extremist groups in eastern Congo. This involvement fueled local resentment and perceptions that Tutsis were aligned with foreign powers, particularly Rwanda. During the Second Congo War, Tutsi militias, often backed by Rwanda, played a significant role in the conflict. This entrenched the association between Tutsis and foreign powers, which has persisted with the M23 group being alleged to have Rwandan support. The resurgence of M23 in 2022 has reignited tensions, leading to widespread violence and displacement.

Hutu⁵

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Hutus are an ethnic group with roots in the Great Lakes region, particularly Rwanda and Burundi, and they form part of the complex ethnic mosaic of eastern DRC. The Hutu presence in the DRC significantly increased after the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, during which Hutu extremists killed an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Following the genocide, nearly two million Hutu refugees fled to eastern DRC, many of whom were civilians, but others included members of the defeated Rwandan military and extremist militias, such as the Interahamwe, responsible for orchestrating the genocide. This mass influx destabilized the region, particularly in North and South Kivu provinces, where the Hutu refugee camps became hubs for regrouping and organizing armed groups.

During the First Congo War (1996–1997), Rwandan forces and Congolese Tutsi militias targeted Hutu refugee camps in eastern Congo, aiming to eliminate the remnants of Hutu extremist groups. This campaign resulted in thousands of deaths, not only of armed Hutu militants but also of civilians. The continued presence of Hutu militias, such as the

⁵ Meisler, Stanley. *United Nations: A History*. Grove Press, 2011.

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), has fueled ongoing instability. The FDLR, which claims to protect Hutu interests, has been accused of committing atrocities against civilian populations and exploiting the region's rich natural resources to fund its activities⁶.

Hutus in the DRC are caught between militant groups and the broader ethnic and political conflicts that dominate the region. Many Hutus have integrated into Congolese society over generations, but their identity remains closely tied to the history of displacement and conflict. They often face hostility from other ethnic groups, particularly Tutsis, due to the lingering impact of the Rwandan Genocide and the role of Hutu militias in regional violence.

Armed Groups

Armed groups are non-state actors that use force to achieve political, economic, or ideological goals. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), these groups include militias, rebel factions, and extremist organizations, many of which exploit the country's weak governance and vast natural resources. Over 100 such groups operate in the eastern provinces, contributing to violence, instability, and a severe humanitarian crisis.

Prominent armed groups in the DRC include the **March 23 Movement (M23)**, a Tutsi-led militia with alleged support from Rwanda and Uganda, and the **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)**, an ISIS-affiliated group responsible for massacres and abductions. Many other groups, including ethnic militias like the Mai-Mai, engage in resource exploitation, controlling mines to fund their activities.

These armed groups exacerbate displacement, poverty, and insecurity while undermining government authority. Despite military campaigns, peacekeeping efforts, and regional agreements, their persistence highlights the need for stronger governance, equitable resource management, and community reconciliation.

⁶ MONUSCO. "Timeline." United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, www.monusco.unmissions.org/en/timeline. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

Displaced People

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), displaced people are individuals or communities forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, natural disasters, or human rights violations. The country has one of the largest populations of displaced individuals globally, with over 7.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of 2024. These displacements are primarily concentrated in the eastern provinces, such as North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, where ongoing armed conflicts between various groups, including the Tutsi-led March 23 Movement (M23) and the Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), continue to devastate communities⁷.

Displacement in the DRC can take two primary forms. The first is internal displacement, where people flee their homes but remain within the country's borders. Internally displaced persons often seek refuge in makeshift camps, host communities, or remote areas where access to necessities like food, clean water, healthcare, and education is severely limited. The second form involves refugees who cross into neighboring countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania to escape violence, further straining resources and creating regional challenges.

The causes of displacement in the DRC are complex and multifaceted. Armed conflicts between militias and government forces, inter-ethnic violence, and targeted attacks against civilians have driven millions from their homes. Additionally, competition over the country's vast natural resources, including minerals like cobalt and gold, exacerbates tensions and displaces mining communities.

Political Stability

Political stability refers to the degree to which a government functions effectively, maintains control over its territory, resolves disputes peacefully, and ensures consistent governance without significant interruptions from internal or external crises. A politically

⁷ Amnesty International. "Why Is the Democratic Republic of Congo Wracked by Conflict?" Amnesty International, 24 Oct. 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2024/10/why-is-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-wracked-by-conflict/. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

stable nation typically experiences minimal violence, a functioning legal system, and trust in institutions, enabling economic growth and social development.

In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), political stability has been elusive, largely due to its history of weak governance, contested leadership transitions, and persistent conflict. Since gaining independence in 1960, the DRC has endured coups, dictatorship, civil wars, and widespread corruption. The absence of strong, inclusive institutions has undermined the government's ability to maintain territorial control, particularly in the eastern provinces where armed groups like the March 23 Movement (M23) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) operate.

Elections in the DRC, a key marker of political stability, have often been contentious. For example, the December 2023 elections were marred by allegations of fraud and irregularities, sparking violent unrest and intensifying tensions between ethnic and political groups. The weak enforcement of election outcomes and a lack of faith in democratic processes have perpetuated cycles of instability. Furthermore, the government's inability to deliver essential services or address the needs of its diverse population exacerbates dissatisfaction, leaving regions vulnerable to insurgent control and external interference.

The DRC's vast natural resource wealth, including cobalt and gold, adds another layer of complexity to its political stability. Competition over these resources often fuels corruption and conflict as various domestic and international actors vie for control. This dynamic undermines governance and diverts attention and resources away from critical issues like infrastructure development and social welfare.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The DRC government, led by President Félix Tshisekedi, acknowledges the ongoing instability in the eastern region, largely caused by armed groups like M23 and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). While the government strives to maintain control and sovereignty, it faces significant challenges, including accusations of inadequate protection for civilians and failure to curb armed militias. Despite efforts to negotiate

peace with neighboring Rwanda and Uganda, political divisions within the government and military hinder effective responses. The government relies on both regional and international support, including UN peacekeepers and East African forces, to address the escalating violence and humanitarian crisis⁸.

Republic of Rwanda

The Rwandan government, led by President Paul Kagame, maintains that its involvement in the DRC's instability is driven by security concerns, particularly the threat posed by Hutu extremist groups like the FDLR operating in eastern DRC. Rwanda accuses the DRC government of supporting these militias, which are viewed as a continuation of the 1994 genocide against Tutsis. Rwanda has also been accused of backing the M23 rebel group, a claim it denies. Rwanda emphasizes the need for regional cooperation to address the instability, but its military presence and support for armed groups have strained Rwanda's foreign relations.

Republic of Uganda

The Ugandan government, led by President Yoweri Museveni, views the instability in the DRC through the lens of regional security concerns. Uganda has long been involved in the eastern DRC, both in combatting militia groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which have carried out deadly attacks in Uganda and in securing economic interests, particularly in mining regions. Uganda has deployed troops to support the DRC's military against armed groups, but it has also been accused of exploiting the DRC's natural resources. However, Uganda faces criticism for its military involvement in the conflict.

Timeline of Events

Historical Contexts⁹

- **1960:** The DRC (then called the Republic of Congo) gains independence from Belgium, and tensions immediately rise over political control, with various ethnic groups and factions vying for power.

⁸ USAID. "East African Community." U.S. Agency for International Development, www.usaid.gov/east-africa-regional/fact-sheet/east-african-community. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

⁹ Abbott, Peter, and Raffaele Ruggeri. *Modern African Wars (4): The Congo 1960–2002*. Osprey Publishing, 2014.

- **1965:** Mobutu Sese Seko takes control through a military coup, establishing a dictatorial regime until 1997.
- **1971:** Mobutu changes the country's name to Zaire, promoting a nationalization policy and authoritarian rule.

The Congo Wars

- **1994:** The Rwandan Genocide occurs, with ethnic Hutu extremists massacring an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Two million Hutu refugees flee to neighboring countries, including the DRC, where they create instability.
- **1996:** The First Congo War begins when Rwanda and Uganda, along with Congolese Tutsi rebel groups, invade Zaire to overthrow Mobutu, citing the need to combat Hutu extremists.
- **1997:** Mobutu is overthrown by Laurent Kabila, who becomes president and renames the country the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rwanda and Uganda initially supported Kabila but later clashed with him.
- **1998:** The Second Congo War breaks out after Kabila expels Rwandan troops, and Rwanda and Uganda invade again, supporting rival factions. Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia intervened on Kabila's side.
- **2001:** Laurent Kabila is assassinated, and his son, Joseph Kabila, becomes president.
- **2002:** The Second Congo War officially ends with the signing of peace agreements, though conflict and instability persist in the east.

Transitional Governments¹⁰

- **2003:** The DRC implements a transitional government, but local militias and rebel groups, particularly in the east, continue fighting for control over resources and territory.
- **2006:** The first post-war elections occur, and Joseph Kabila is officially president. Tensions over electoral results lead to violence.

¹⁰ MONUSCO. "Timeline." United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, www.monusco.unmissions.org/en/timeline. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

- **2008:** Conflict intensifies in the east as rebel groups, including the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), led by Laurent Nkunda, gain ground. The UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC) is heavily involved in quelling the violence¹¹.

Violence and Foreign Intervention

- **2012:** M23, a rebel group made up of Congolese army defectors, seizes Goma's provincial capital. The UN deploys an intervention brigade to fight M23.
- **2013:** MONUSCO's intervention brigade helps the DRC army push back M23, which eventually surrenders, but many of its leaders flee to neighboring Rwanda and Uganda.
- **2016:** President Kabila refuses to step down after his mandate expires, causing nationwide political unrest and violent protests.
- **2017:** Continued instability in the east and political opposition to Kabila leads to violent clashes between government forces and armed groups.
- **2018:** Ebola outbreaks complicate the already fragile security situation, especially in the eastern provinces.
- **2018:** Kabila's successor, Félix Tshisekedi, is declared the winner of the controversial December election, marking the first peaceful transition of power in DRC's history, though the election's legitimacy remains in dispute.
- **2021:** The security situation in eastern DRC remains volatile as M23 and other armed groups continue fighting, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an ISIS-affiliated group.
- **2022:** M23 resurges, capturing significant territory in North Kivu, reigniting tensions with Rwanda, which is accused of supporting the rebels.
- **2023:** The DRC enters further political turmoil, with ongoing clashes between the Congolese army, M23, and other militias. MONUSCO, after years of criticism for failing to protect civilians, faces protests and calls for withdrawal¹².

¹¹ Meisler, Stanley. *United Nations: A History*. Grove Press, 2011.

¹² Human Rights Watch. "DR Congo Chronology." Human Rights Watch, 21 Aug. 2009, www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/21/dr-congo-chronology. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

- **2023:** The East African Community (EAC) deploys a regional military force to combat armed groups in eastern DRC, but foreign troops, including Rwanda's military, complicate the situation further¹³.
- **2023:** The UN Security Council agrees to extend MONUSCO's mandate through 2024, despite calls for a gradual withdrawal.
- **2024:** Continued violence in eastern DRC leads to the displacement of millions of people, and the humanitarian crisis worsens, exacerbating the already dire conditions in the region.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

MONUC and MONUSCO's Attempts

MONUSCO's early years focused on implementing peace agreements between the DRC government and various armed factions. Its role included providing protection for civilians, supporting the disarmament and reintegration of rebel groups, and overseeing the transition to democratic governance after the war's formal end in 2003. By the mid-2000s, MONUC's mandate was expanded to include electoral assistance, security sector reform, and human rights monitoring. The mission's presence was intended to foster peace, but it was often hindered by limited resources, political disagreements, and the complex dynamics of armed groups operating in the country.

In 2010, the mission became MONUSCO, reflecting a shift toward a more robust stabilization role. MONUSCO was tasked with preventing the resurgence of large-scale violence, supporting the DRC government's authority, and assisting in the fight against armed groups. One of the mission's most significant actions came in 2013, when the **UN Security Council** authorized the creation of a special **intervention brigade** within MONUSCO. This brigade was designed to conduct offensive operations against armed groups, including the M23. However, the group's resurgence in 2022 and ongoing instability in the east showed that MONUSCO's efforts were not a permanent solution¹⁴.

¹³ USAID. "East African Community." U.S. Agency for International Development, www.usaid.gov/east-africa-regional/fact-sheet/east-african-community. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

¹⁴ "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in the DRC." Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), Mar. 2019, igarape.org.br. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

EAC's Attempts

The **East African Community (EAC)**, a regional intergovernmental organization comprising six member states (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda), has also been involved in attempts to stabilize the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The EAC's engagement in the DRC is primarily driven by the ongoing violence and instability in the eastern provinces, which armed groups, militias, and regional conflicts have plagued. The EAC's involvement has largely focused on peacekeeping, mediation, and regional cooperation to address the DRC's security challenges.

In 2022, the EAC took significant steps toward addressing the situation in the DRC when the organization agreed to deploy a regional military force to help combat armed groups in the eastern provinces, including the notorious M23 rebels. This decision was part of a broader effort to support the Congolese government's attempts to regain control over these areas and improve security. The EAC force, composed mainly of troops from member states like Uganda and Kenya, aimed to provide additional military support to the Congolese army (FARDC) and assist in stabilizing the region.

In addition to military engagement, the EAC has been involved in diplomatic efforts to facilitate dialogue between the DRC and its neighbors. This includes efforts to mediate tensions between the DRC and Rwanda and between various armed groups operating within the country. The EAC has supported peace talks and called for the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts, with mixed results. In December 2023, the EAC announced that its forces would withdraw from the DRC after a year-long mission¹⁵.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening International Peacekeeping Efforts

Experts argue that a stronger, more coordinated international response is crucial to resolving the instability in the DRC. This includes ensuring that peacekeeping forces like MONUSCO are more effective in protecting civilians and assisting the Congolese government in stabilizing the country. Some experts advocate for enhanced mandates for peacekeeping forces, with greater resources and operational flexibility to address the increasingly complex security situation in the

¹⁵ USAID. "East African Community." U.S. Agency for International Development, www.usaid.gov/east-africa-regional/fact-sheet/east-african-community. Accessed 3 Dec. 2024.

east. These efforts would aim to curb the power of armed groups and provide protection to displaced populations.

Regional Cooperation and Diplomatic Engagement

A key component of resolving the DRC's instability is regional cooperation, particularly with neighboring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda. Experts argue that both Rwanda and Uganda must be involved in diplomatic efforts to reduce their military and financial support for armed groups in the DRC. This would require fostering dialogue between the DRC and its neighbors to build mutual trust and establish agreements to stop cross-border militia activity. Several experts suggest the establishment of a regional peace framework to address shared security concerns in the Great Lakes region.

Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures

Many experts point to the DRC's governance challenges, such as corruption and weak public institutions, as key factors fueling instability. To resolve this, experts propose a focus on improving governance at all levels. This could include strengthening political accountability, improving public service delivery, and ensuring that the government's resources are directed toward the needs of the people rather than being siphoned off by corrupt elites. Transparent and inclusive governance practices are seen as essential to achieving sustainable peace and rebuilding trust between the government and the population.

Research Report vetted by Deputy Secretary-General Aryav Bhesania

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