



Forum: The Security Council

Topic: Question of Addressing the issue of the M23 offensive in
the Democratic Republic of the Congo

President

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a long and tumultuous history, from the Belgian King Leopold II's personal colony to the battleground of the First and Second Congo Wars – the deadliest conflicts since World War II. Many of these conflicts are spurred on by ethnic tensions, especially between the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups. This came to a head in 1994, when the extremist majority Hutu government killed nearly 1 million people, especially Tutsis, in only 100 days during the Rwandan Civil War; ending after the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi group, gained power.

Since the Rwandan genocide, Rwanda has repeatedly accused the DRC of harboring Hutu extremists such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Moreover, since the formation of the March 23rd movement (M23) in 2012, Rwanda has been accused by the United States (USA) and the United Nations (UN) of supporting M23. Since 2021, the M23 movement has begun to invade the DRC again, capturing cities in the provinces of North and South Kivu, with the express goal of taking over the capital of Kinshasa. Moreover, key mineral mines have been taken over, resulting in great profits. Currently, M23 controls key cities in the Eastern DRC.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethnic Tensions

Ethnic tensions are defined by conflicts and hostilities between separate groups based primarily upon their differing ethnicities. Most prominently in this topic is the violence between the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups.

Genocide

Genocide is defined as the deliberate killing or persecution of a large number of a particular national or ethnic group to destroy them.

Secession

Secession is the action of formally attempting to dissociate from membership of a particular state.

Mineral Smuggling

Mineral smuggling is smuggling minerals across borders to sell them to a broader market. This topic often refers to M23 fighters smuggling minerals such as Coltan from occupied mines to Rwanda to be sold.

General Overview

Decolonization of the DRC

The DRC during its colonial period is one of the most brutal examples of the horrors of imperialism and extractivism. During the Berlin Conference, the DRC was given as a personal colony to King Leopold II of Belgium to promote humanitarian work. However, the reality was starkly different. In order to maximize the volume of rubber extracted from the colony, incredibly high quotas would be imposed, and if one did not meet those quotas, they would often be maimed. During the early 20th century, the Belgian state was forced to take over control of the colony. The DRC continued to be an important source of materials for the war efforts of World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII). Notably, the Belgian state adopted a position of Paternalism, treating Africans like children who needed to be taught by Europeans, leading to an incredibly undereducated and underprepared populace for leading a postcolonial state.

After the Second World War, the Belgian Congo saw an increase in resistance towards Belgian rule. Reports of taunting officials, refusing to pay fines, and boycotts of Belgian goods. One of the most essential characters in this conflict was Patrice Lumumba, a Congolese citizen targeted by both American and French intelligence forces. These efforts succeeded, with the DRC gaining its independence in 1960; however, in retrospect, most experts claim this was too early. During the independence celebrations, Lumumba proudly proclaimed that the DRC and Belgium now stood on equal footing.

Yet, almost immediately, the DRC was engulfed in the Congo Crisis. Just a week after independence, members of the white militia “Force Publique” rebelled and spread throughout the entire country. Belgium quickly sent in military troops to protect Belgian citizens still residing in the DRC, but did not do much else; moreover, no Western nations or the UN offered any aid. Unable to handle the secessionists, Lumumba, the now prime minister, called for assistance from the Soviet Union (USSR), angering Western nations and fracturing the already unstable government. Lumumba was killed in September 1961, further stoking unrest.

After further foreign military intervention in 1965, the first democratic elections were held. However, after reaching a deadlock between two candidates, Mobutu Sese Seko took power in a coup d'état, ending the crisis.

Mobutu's government was rife with cronyism, corruption, and fear. Fears of being imprisoned, tortured, and killed for any rebellion were rampant. In the end, his government would not be overthrown internally but externally.

The Rwandan Genocide

"We saw the whole world closing their eyes and ears, leaving us alone to thugs and gangsters. The genocide took away a million people in 100 days."

– Paul Rusesabagina

Germany first colonized Rwanda in 1894, then by Belgium after WWI. Rwanda and the nation of Burundi were considered one administrative territory. It is estimated that the Hutus inhabited Rwanda before the Tutsis. Regardless, as both groups spoke the same language, scholars have deduced that they've been coexisting for centuries. Yet, during its colonization, ethnic tensions were exploited with eventually deadly effect. After gaining independence in 1961, Rwanda rid itself of its Tutsi monarch and was controlled by a Hutu government that became more radical and exclusionary of other ethnic groups. During colonial Rwanda, being a Tutsi or a Hutu was based on social standing only, with those with a higher social standing being Tutsi and those with a lower social standing being Hutu. As a result, Tutsis enjoyed many privileges: the highest wages, best jobs, and schooling. (The University of Kansas).

In the vacuum left by post-colonialism, a majority Hutu government formed, which wished to undo years of Hutu exclusion, resulting in limits on the number of Tutsis who could gain work in the government or go to school. This caused many Tutsis to move to other African nations during the 1960s and 1970s. Simultaneously, the RPF was formed as a Tutsi rebel group wishing to re seize power and capitalized on disenfranchised Tutsis in exile. In later decades, many repatriated Tutsis were refused reentry to Rwanda, bolstering support for the RPF (TED-ED).

In 1990, the RPF led an invasion of northern Rwanda through Uganda, and multiple ceasefires were signed. Throughout the conflict, Hutu extremists disseminated lots of anti-Tutsi propaganda through radio broadcasts and newspapers, such as the infamous *Kangura* newspaper. The propaganda being spread encouraged Hutus to kill Tutsis, regardless of whether they were acquaintances, friends, or even family.

The Rwandan Genocide was caused by the shooting down of a plane on August 6th, 1994, carrying President Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Ntaryamira of Burundi. Once the news was made public, Hutu extremist groups known as *Interahamwe* formed (literally “hunting together”) to kill moderate Hutus and Tutsis. Nearly 1 million people were killed in 100 days, and hundreds of thousands of women were raped. This horrific genocide caught international attention and led to the Civil war finally ending with a Tutsi victory.

The Congo Wars

The First and Second Congo Wars are often referred to as “Africa’s World Wars”; combined, they resulted in the deaths of over 5.8 million people. (Africa Center for Strategic Studies). The wars were often justified due to the DRC harboring Hutu extremists.

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, a substantial number of those who perpetrated the genocide fled to the DRC. This sympathy caused the Rwandan military to invade the DRC (then known as Zaire) in 1996, with support from neighboring Uganda and Burundi. With the backing from disgruntled Congolese rebel groups, they became known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). During the war, the AFDL itself perpetrated a genocide against Hutu refugees in the eastern province of Kivu, killing over 200,000 Hutus. (Reyntjens). Despite intervention by Sudan, Chad, China, and France, Mobutu’s regime quickly fell, leaving the DRC in anarchy until Joseph Kabila gained power. However, due to rumors of Kabila’s government unfairly favoring Tutsis, he overcompensated and expelled most Tutsis from his government, and by angering the AFDL by claiming that they had not fully withdrawn their troops, prompting a second invasion of the DRC in 1998.

Compared to the death count of the First Congo War of around 250,000, the Second Congo War killed more than twenty-one times that, at 5.4 million deaths (Africa Center...). Rwanda and Uganda had hoped for a government more sympathetic to Rwanda than Kabila’s government; therefore, on August 2nd, 1998, they began supporting democracy movements in the DRC. Afterwards, Operation Kitona was underway to march on Kinshasa to overthrow the government. Rwandan soldiers hijacked airplanes and crashed them into government bases in the town of Kitona. This war saw more extreme violence and malnutrition, with child soldiers being recruited and often kidnapped from schools. During the war, the Uganda-Rwanda relationship soured with frequent clashes between them during the early months of 1999 and 2000. In 2000, the anti-Tutsi FDLR formed in Hutu refugee camps, which posed an “existential threat” according to Rwanda. Eventually, in 2002, a ceasefire agreement was signed. During

this process, the single most significant UN peacekeeping force ever created, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), was established to monitor the ceasefire.

The M23 Movement

The M23 movement derived its name from the signing date of the agreement between its predecessor, the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), and the Congolese government, March 23rd, 2009. Founded in 2012, the movement was created over grievances of non-implementation of certain aspects of the agreement, specifically “Complaints about conditions in the army and rumors that soldiers were to be deployed beyond North Kivu and that Ntaganda would be tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court” (McKenna).

The M23 movement does recruit troops from defectors, however, they are often accused of forced conscription, especially of child soldiers. Other human rights abuses they’ve been accused of include extrajudicial killings as well as sexual assault. Rwanda was and still is supporting the movement, according to the USA and UN, supplying high-tech weapons and material support.

Rwanda has the highest ratio of aid to population in the region, moreover, more than 1/3rd of its money is generated from foreign aid. Therefore, when the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Kingdom, and the USA began to withdraw aid (Smith-Spark), Rwanda’s government began to panic. This caused them to withdraw much of their support for the M23 movement.

From 2013 to 2021, Rwanda increasingly made itself indispensable to the broader international community. Rwanda is one of the most significant contributors to the UN Peacekeeping Forces, committing over 5,000 troops since 2004 (Service born of...). Moreover, it has been vital in protecting the liquefying natural gas plants in Mozambique amid unrest for the French company Total Energies, as French forces being present had caused accusations of neocolonialism; in return, the European Union (EU) has provided millions in aid. In addition, Rwanda has positioned itself as a beacon of stability in a relatively unstable region, making Western allies rely on it. Furthermore, Rwanda has sponsored many sports teams and run many advertisements to promote tourism, such as sponsoring the English Premier League Team Arsenal (About the Partnership). This has paid off, with nearly 500,000 tourists visiting each year as of 2019 (Tourism in Rwanda). This has given Rwanda more leverage and made it easier to support the M23 movement in the future.

Since 2022, the M23 movement has begun to siege strategic towns such as Kitchanga,

Masisi, and Rwindi in North and South Kivu. Simultaneously, they have taken over lucrative mines such as the Rubaya coltan mines. The M23 movement has been accused of smuggling valuable mineral resources, such as Gold and Coltan, to Rwanda to be exported. In fact, despite having limited metal reserves, Rwanda's exports have increased from 334 million dollars to over 1.68 billion worth of metals from 2018 to 2023 (Country Profile: Rwanda). The Congo River Alliance (AFC), which the M23 movement is a part of, has also installed a civil administration headed by Corneille Nangaa. The AFC has announced plans to march on the capital of the DRC, Kinshasa.

Due to these invasions, the DRC has suspended all relations with Rwanda, expelling the Rwandan ambassador to the DRC. Despite cries for Rwanda to stop supporting the M23 movement, Kagame continues to act ignorant towards the situation. When asked if Rwandan troops were sent to the DRC in a CNN interview conducted on February 3rd, 2025, President Kagame of Rwanda replied: "I don't know." (Kagame).

During these military acts, both sides continue to perpetrate atrocities. Amnesty International (AI) has accused the M23 group of raiding hospitals, abducting both military and civilian patients, and then torturing them. Moreover, AI's report found concerted targeting of human rights defenders, journalists, and civil servants, which are all classified as war crimes under international law (DRC: M23's rampant human...).

The DRC's army (FARDC) is also certainly not innocent. For decades, the UN has described the DRC as the 'rape capital of the world', with up to 60% of all rapes being perpetrated by armed men. (UN official calls DR Congo 'rape capital of the world'). Child soldiers are also not uncommon; often, they are kidnapped from their schools or are orphans. This is all exacerbated by notoriously corrupt court systems delaying justice.

There is also the issue of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs). Since the beginning of 2024 alone, nearly 360,000 people have been internally displaced in the DRC, 80% of whom have been directly affected by armed conflict. As of March 2024, that leaves the total amount of IDPs in the DRC at 7.1 million (Democratic Republic of the Congo: Internally displaced ...)

Major Parties Involved

The March 23rd Movement (M23)

The M23 movement is the principal belligerent of the M23 offensive. They were formed from disgruntled former CNDP members who felt that the agreement signed on March 23rd, 2009, to include them in the DRC army was not respected. They're a pro-Tutsi group aided by Rwanda and are accused of numerous war crimes.

Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)

The FARDC is the main military unit of the DRC, and they are the main opposition to M23. Formed in 1960, they have been instrumental during the First and Second Congo Wars and in fighting against M23 in the current offensive.

The Congo River Alliance (AFC)

The AFC is a Congolese rebel coalition led by Corneille Nangaa. M23 is part of this organization. Founded in December 2023, it seeks to overthrow the DRC government. So far, it has captured Goma and wishes to continue to Kinshasa.

Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)

The RPF is the leading political party in Rwanda, headed by Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame. Founded by Tutsis in exile in 1987, it fought and won against the Hutu government in the Rwandan civil war. Officially, it does not claim to support M23 but does claim that the DRC is harboring dangerous Hutu extremists such as the FDLR (see below). The RPF is characterized by political repression, but is very politically stable.

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)

The FDLR is a pro-Hutu extremist faction active in the DRC, and one of the perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. Whilst once very powerful, they now only have a size of 1,500 members, down from their peak of 7,000 members in 2007.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
1959 / November	The Rwandan Revolution, also known as the Hutu Revolution, began with the goal of removing the Tutsi monarch, which caused many Tutsis to flee.
1960 / June	The DRC gained its independence from Belgium.
1960 / July	The white militia <i>Force Publique</i> rebels against the FARDC, unrest spreads throughout the rest of the country, beginning the Congo Crisis.
1961 / January	Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba died in a plane crash.
1962 / July	Rwanda gains independence and removes its Tutsi monarch for a majority Hutu government.
1965 / November	Mobutu Sese Seko launched a coup d'etat and gained control of the DRC, ending the Congo Crisis.
1987 / December	The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was founded by disgruntled exiled Tutsis living in Uganda who wished to return. The RPF's expressed goal was to overthrow the Hutu-led government.
1990 / May	The extremist Hutu anti-Tutsi magazine <i>Kangura</i> was founded, which stoked ethnic tensions and encouraged Hutus to kill Tutsis.
1990 / October	The RPF began its invasion of Rwanda to overthrow the Hutu government, starting the Rwandan Civil War. Two days into the invasion, Paul Kagame became the leader of the RPF after the former leader died.
1990 / April / 6	The RPF assassinated the Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana.

1990 / April / 7	The Rwandan genocide began; Hutu extremists began to execute any potential moderate Hutus or Tutsis who could gain power in a power vacuum. Hutu extremists formed killing squads to commit genocide against Tutsis. Stroked by propaganda, nearly 1 million people were killed in just over 100 days.
1994 / July	The RPF overthrew the Hutu government with French aid, ending the genocide and civil war.
1995 / January	Human Rights Watch warns that Hutu extremists and war criminals had joined refugee camps in the DRC to evade justice (Human Rights Watch).
1996 / October / 17	The AFDL was formed, consisting of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Eritrea. In order to bring the Hutus to justice and invade the DRC.
1996 / October / 24	The AFDL invaded the DRC intending to reach the capital of Kinshasa.
1997 / October - May	A genocide of Hutus was perpetrated, killing more than 200,000 people in the process (Reyntjens).
1997 / May	Mobutu's regime was successfully overthrown, and Laurent Kabila rose to power, ending the First Congo War.
1998 / August	After claims of President Kabila turning on his former allies of Uganda and Rwanda, the AFDL once more invaded the DRC, starting the Second Congo War.
1999 / November	MONUSCO was formed to monitor violence in the DRC.
2000 / September	The Hutu extremist FDLR was formed in refugee camps.
2001 / January	President Kabila was assassinated in Kinshasa. His son Joseph Kabila soon rose to power in

	his absence.
2002 / October	Operation Effacer le tableau began, which was a genocide killing 70,000 Pygmy people.
2003 / April	The Congo Transitional Government was formed, ending the Second Congo War.
2012 / May	The M23 movement was formed by current FARDC soldiers due to issues impeding the full implementation of their agreement to join the FARDC after the Second Congo War.
2012 / November	The M23 movement took control of the city of Goma. Committing many human rights atrocities, with the UN describing it as “horrifying in its scale and systematic nature” (Townsend)
2012 / December	Rwanda had stopped supporting the M23 movement and, thus, left Goma (Subcommittee Hearing: Developments in Rwanda).
2013 / February	A peace treaty was signed, and the M23 movement fled to Uganda.
2022 / March	The M23 movement launched a major offensive in North Kivu, and the FARDC would soon reject negotiations.
2022 / June	M23 captures Bunagana, forcing Congolese troops into Uganda.
2024 / April	The M23 movement captured the highly lucrative Rubaya Coltan mine.
2025 / January	Under increased Rwandan support, M23 began its Goma offensive and reclaimed all of Goma.
2025 / February	M23 captured Bukavu and announced their plans to march on Kinshasa.

Attempts to solve the issue

Extension of the mandate of (MONUSCO) until 30 June 2013, (2012/June/27),

(S/RES/2053)

This resolution, made after the initial M23 invasion in 2012, reaffirmed the importance of MONUSCO in ensuring stability in the region. The UN would repeat this in resolution S/RES/2765.

Condemning ongoing offensives by the 23 March Movement (M23), (2025/February/21). (S/RES/2773)

In this resolution, the UNSC condemned the offensives by the M23 and any external involvement in them, stressing the sovereignty of the DRC.

Possible Solutions

Promoting Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs

DDR Programs are well-tested and established operations created by UN peace operations. In fact, it was a main function of MONUSCO and yielded remarkable results, helping end the Second Congo War. (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration). However, M23 sprouted due to soldiers in FARDC not integrating correctly, and M23 has access to high-tech weaponry. (Pisenti). Therefore, it is essential to ensure that soldiers can leave military life if they want to and can reintegrate into society.

Targeted sanctions towards perpetrators

It is necessary that those who perpetrated war crimes are brought to justice through international systems such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) or national systems. Moreover, the economics of smuggled minerals exported through Rwanda must be heavily sanctioned. Economic incentives were one of the main motivators for the M23 invasion. Therefore, ensuring that these occupied mines don't make money can help bring peace.

Strengthening MONUSCO

MONUSCO can be reworked to enhance its capabilities from mostly reactionary peacekeeping to actively protecting civilians. This should be done by strengthening the military training and resources for MONUSCO in the region and territory through the UNSC's Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). And drone surveillance and rapid response units can be developed in tandem with the FARDC to respond to local threats.

Guiding Questions

1. Has your country made any speeches about this topic in the UN?
2. What evidence exists of Rwanda's support for M23, and how has Rwanda responded?
3. What role do ethnic tensions continue to play in this conflict?
4. How can those who committed War Crimes be dealt with effectively in the court systems?
5. Why has MONUSCO failed to stop the many wars in the DRC?
6. Has your country accepted any refugees from this conflict?
7. What role did the failed 2013 peace deal play in the resurgence of violence?
8. What challenges do women and children face in this conflict?

9. Why have past peace deals failed to prevent the return of violence?
10. What barriers exist to investigating and prosecuting war crimes in eastern DRC?
11. How do global powers' strategic interests in Africa influence their stance on the conflict?
12. What challenges exist in supplying foreign aid to civilians?
13. How can IDPs be best helped?

Appendix

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0N34UFbWpFk&>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MF7EbUGlaOU>
- <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4058819?ln=en&v=pdf>
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