

Rebel Governance and Resource Control: The M23 Movement's Quasi-State Structures in Eastern DRC

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Abstract- This research, “Rebel Governance and Resource Control: The M23 Movement’s Quasi-State Structures in Eastern DRC,” examines the protracted crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Eastern provinces, highlighting Rwanda’s alleged involvement. It identifies illicit mineral exploitation (coltan, cobalt, gold) as a primary conflict driver, enabling the M23, reportedly backed by Rwanda, to seize resource-rich territories and establish quasi-state structures. These rebel administrations, while attempting governance, exacerbate insecurity and undermine state authority. The conflict persists due to complex political dynamics, economic incentives, and neighboring states’ involvement in illicit trade. Diplomatic efforts often fail, characterized by muted international responses that inadvertently embolden rebels. The study concludes that effective peacebuilding requires confronting rebel governance and its economic underpinnings. Recommendations include disrupting illicit financial flows, holding external actors accountable, strengthening Congolese state authority, enhancing humanitarian response, and addressing underlying structural issues.

Index Terms- Rebel Governance, Resource Control, M23 Movement, Quasi-Structure, Eastern DRC.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since late 2021, the Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has once again experienced the resurgence of the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebel group that had previously been declared defeated in 2013. By 2022, the group had rapidly regained control of significant portions of southeastern North Kivu province. The M23 originally emerged in 2012 following a mutiny within the Congolese national army by former rebels who

had been previously integrated into its ranks. The reemergence of the group in 2021 centered on grievances strikingly similar to those from its inception, chief among them, accusations that the Congolese government had failed to uphold the 2013 Nairobi Declarations, which had marked the cessation of the earlier insurrection.

In addition to their initial demands, the M23 has introduced new concerns, including calls for the protection of the Tutsi ethnic minority and broader reforms within the Congolese military structure. While the backing of the Rwandan military has been widely cited as a critical factor in the group's resurgence, this support does not entirely define the M23's motivations. Rather, the group appears primarily driven by its internal ambitions and strategic goals. A field-based study conducted by ASSODIP, incorporating perspectives from 57 local stakeholders across North Kivu province, provides vital insights into the localized dynamics and societal consequences of the M23 rebellion (ASSODIP, DIIS, & IPIS, 2024).

The resurgence of the M23, allegedly supported by Rwanda, has frequently been interpreted through the lens of resource-driven conflict, particularly regarding the control of Eastern DRC's rich mining zones. Since restarting its offensive in 2021, the rebel group has captured large swaths of southeastern North Kivu, surrounding the provincial capital, Goma. This region is rich in vital minerals such as tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold, often cited as the basis for conflict (Matthysen & Schouten, 2024).

The territorial ambitions of the M23 rebel movement, backed by Rwanda, have escalated significantly, raising alarms across the Great Lakes region. Should the M23 successfully gain control over the full extent of the mineral-rich Kivu provinces, spanning

approximately 124,000 square kilometers, Rwanda would effectively wield influence over a territory nearly five times its own geographical size. This expansionist momentum has begun triggering tensions well beyond North Kivu, extending to regions like Kisangani and Lubumbashi, with threats of advancing toward Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025).

The recent capture of Goma by M23 rebels, with backing from Rwanda, marks a major escalation in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) ongoing conflict. This seizure, reminiscent of the 2012 takeover, underscores the group's growing influence and strategic focus on securing mineral-rich zones and essential supply lines. Analysts note that M23's continued advancement, enabled by Rwanda's support, reflects an effort to increase bargaining power over the Congolese government, particularly as no negotiation has yet addressed their sweeping demands. Beyond battlefield gains, certain factions within the M23 political alliance, the Alliance Fleuve Congo (AFC) have even expressed ambitions of regime change in Kinshasa, raising alarms over a broader regional escalation, especially given the competing interests of neighboring Burundi and Uganda (Karr & Ford, 2024).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study made use of Realism, a foundational theory in international relations, centers on the primacy of state interests, survival, and power within an anarchic international system. States are considered rational actors that seek to maximize their power and security. Realism assumes that conflict and competition are natural consequences of this system, and that power, especially military and economic power, determines outcomes in international and regional affairs (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979).

This framework offers critical insights into Rwanda's involvement in the DRC conflict. From a realist perspective, Rwanda's support for M23 can be seen as a strategic pursuit of national interest, particularly access to valuable mineral resources in Eastern Congo and the creation of a buffer zone to counter perceived threats from hostile groups like the FDLR

(Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), many of whom are remnants of the 1994 genocide regime (Stearns, 2012). Realism also sheds light on the geopolitical calculations Rwanda makes in navigating international diplomacy, sanctions, and regional military coalitions. By supporting a proxy actor like M23, Rwanda exercises power projection without formal military occupation.

Additionally, Realism explains the persistent failure of international responses. Since states prioritize their national interest, their interventions in the DRC have often been inconsistent, selective, and driven by strategic calculations rather than humanitarian concern. This self-interest-based logic aligns with the limited enforcement capacity observed in the responses by regional bodies like the East African Community (EAC) and global actors like the United Nations Security Council.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered from official reports and publications released by directly involved parties, including the United Nations (MONUSCO, UN Security Council), the Government of Rwanda, and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo. These documents provided authentic, first-hand insights into the dynamics of the conflict. Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, think-tank publications, and expert analyses, were also consulted to provide context, support interpretations, and enrich the analysis.

IV. THE RETURN OF M23: REBELLION REIGNITED IN EASTERN DRC

Since its resurgence in November 2021, the M23 rebellion has significantly intensified instability in North Kivu, Eastern DRC, contributing to the displacement of nearly 1.7 million people and worsening the already dire humanitarian situation. While the DRC hosts numerous armed factions, M23 has emerged as a key actor in a complex geopolitical standoff involving Rwanda, Uganda, and the Congolese state. The rebellion has drawn disproportionate attention due to its political and

military implications, with many analysts suggesting that sustainable peace in the DRC is nearly impossible without addressing the M23 threat directly (Walker, 2024).

In parallel, Uganda's Operation Shujaa, initially aimed at countering the ADF insurgency affiliated with ISIS, appears to overlap with M23's expansion. Notably, Uganda acts as a broker between M23 and several Ituri-based militias, raising concerns over its broader intentions in the conflict. The combined presence of Ugandan and Rwandan forces has tipped the regional balance, threatening further destabilization in Ituri, Lubero, and North Kivu (African Security Analysis, 2025).

By early 2024, the M23 movement, bolstered by direct support from Rwanda's military forces (RDF), had intensified its campaign against the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and their loosely coordinated allies. Despite the involvement of private military contractors and the Burundian army, the coalition of M23 and RDF proved overwhelmingly powerful. The group's territorial control increased by over 70% compared to the previous year, reflecting not a spontaneous escalation but a strategic and premeditated campaign, as confirmed by UN Group of Experts' testimonies and satellite imagery. By April 2024, estimates placed the total M23-RDF force at around 4,000 troops, strategically deployed across Rutshuru, Masisi, and Nyiragongo, regions immediately threatening Goma (Biden, 2025).

V. QUASI-STATEHOOD IN THE JUNGLE: M23'S REBEL GOVERNANCE AS DE FACTO AUTHORITY

In Goma, the primary city of North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), residents are adapting to transformed environment weeks after the M23 rebels seized control. Although some essential services persist, public endorsement of the rebel authority appears to be compelled as the M23 continues its advance. These efforts include community sanitation projects, and the immigration service is now facilitating the issuance of travel documents. Katembo stated, "We are progressively working to establish peace in Goma. We're taking it slowly." Achieving this objective will be challenging,

given that the city remains inundated with weaponry and military gear following confrontations with the DRC's armed forces. (Ngutjinazo, 2025)

International peacebuilding efforts are increasingly focusing on the role of formal political structures in resolving violent conflicts. Following the end of the Cold War, the decline in financial and military support for proxy insurgencies led to a shift in international interest towards ending civil wars. During the Cold War era, peacebuilding often involved limited interventions, with UN missions, such as the one in Cyprus, adopting narrow roles focused on peace enforcement and monitoring buffer zones. However, after the Cold War, policymakers became more proactive, engaging in brokering peace accords and facilitating negotiations between warring factions. Consequently, civil wars more frequently concluded with negotiated settlements rather than military victories, which raised important questions about institutional design in relation to security priorities. (Sweet, 2020)

The resolution of this conflict is further complicated by historical grievances concerning land and authority, as well as the military's involvement in governance, underscoring the necessity of comprehensive community engagement for achieving lasting peace. In essence, the conflict involving the M23 rebel group in the Eastern DRC should not be oversimplified as merely a competition for mineral wealth. Instead, it encompasses an intricate interaction of long-standing land disputes, struggles for control, and the manipulation of the local economy. (Nguyen, 2024)

According to rebel officials and traders who have disclosed this information for the first time to Reuters, the M23 now imposes a 15% tax on the value of coltan production. Rebel administrators are also introducing other forms of taxation. Private businesses and humanitarian organizations have received tax demands. They are levying duties as high as 20% on small-scale vendors selling essential items such as bananas, fabric, and cooking charcoal, even as consumers, facing financial hardship, are reducing their spending. Rachele Monimpo, a cloth vendor in a Goma market, expressed the difficulty, stating, "Customers don't come any more. It's

becoming very complicated for us to get the money to pay this tax.” (Lewis et al., 2025)

However, the circulation of weapons abandoned by fleeing FARDC troops, coupled with the widespread and deliberate escape of prisoners just prior to the M23/AFC's arrival, has intensified this phenomenon. A nascent urban guerrilla movement is also emerging, exemplified by grenade attacks that resulted in at least 13 fatalities and disrupted the inaugural public assembly of the newly formed M23 government in Bukavu at the end of February 2025. In response to this escalating insecurity, the rebel authorities have implemented hotlines for reporting criminal activities. Further concerns have been raised regarding the M23/AFC's administrative capabilities in the regions it controls. A considerable number of recently appointed administrators lack experience in public affairs management, which further amplifies doubts about the new regime's competence. (Verweijen et al., 2025)

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, also known as the Addis Ababa Agreement, was signed in February 2013 by 11 African nations, with two additional signatories joining in 2014. This agreement continues to serve as the primary political and diplomatic reference point for the Great Lakes region. Supported by the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the United Nations, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the agreement was intended to conclude what was known as the Second Congo War. (Kennes & Wilén, 2024)

VI. WAR ECONOMY AND RESOURCE CAPTURE: MINERALS AS THE ARTERIES OF ARMED POWER

Rwanda's consistent backing of various armed factions in the region, including the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie (RCD), Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP), and currently the M23, has led to a proliferation of such groups. A 2023 report by the UN Group of Experts indicates that Rwanda has provided direct military assistance, including troops and weaponry, to the M23, despite official denials from Kigali. These

actions have further destabilized border areas and intensified tensions with and among Kinyarwanda-speaking communities within the DRC. (Dizolele, 2025)

The Congolese government also bears the responsibility of internal reform. Its continued support for allied militias will jeopardize the agreement. Throughout this crisis, we have also documented instances of the Congolese army's coordination with and support for the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, some of whose combatants and commanders were involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. This collaboration must end, and Congo should permanently dismantle this group. Ethnic tensions remain highly volatile in the region. The Congolese government should genuinely endeavor to curb hate speech that risks inciting further violence. (Mudge, 2025)

The recent M23 attacks in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have been driven by the desire to control natural resources. In 2025, M23 rebels, with support from neighboring Rwanda, seized the cities of Goma and Bukavu. This M23 offensive has resulted in the deaths of over 7,000 civilians since January 2025. The control over conflict minerals has had extensive consequences for interregional relations, global commerce, and the future of the DRC. (Zungu, 2025)

VII. DISORDER AS DESIGN: HOW REBEL STRUCTURES UNDERMINE STATE LEGITIMACY

Since its re-emergence in 2021, the M23 rebel group has taken control of significant portions of North Kivu province and, more recently, South Kivu, capturing economically vital towns in the process. In every area they establish a presence, the group's fighters implement systems of parallel criminal governance and exploit the existing economic framework. The M23's economic objectives also underpinned their May 2024 capture of Rubaya, a strategically important mining town near Goma. Rubaya is responsible for producing 15 percent of the world's coltan, a crucial material in the production of electronic devices. Since gaining control, the armed group has secured substantial revenue from

overseeing mineral production and trade. (Behalal, 2025)

The Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are offering minimal resistance to the M23's advances. Reports indicate that Burundian forces, numbering approximately 10,000 in South Kivu, have started to withdraw after M23 rebels overran Kavumu Airport and the adjacent air force base en route to Bukavu. The close proximity of the fighting to Bujumbura, just across the DRC border, raises the risk of a direct confrontation between Burundian and Rwandan troops. Meanwhile, Ugandan forces have also entered the DRC and seized Bunia (population 900,000), the capital of Ituri Province.

The already dire humanitarian situation in the DRC has worsened due to population displacements caused by M23 advances. Over 500,000 people in the Kivus were displaced as a result of the M23's latest offensive. Currently, an estimated 7 million Congolese are displaced within the country, with the majority residing in the Eastern provinces. (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025)

Rwanda's military operations have faced increasing scrutiny. Previously, donors and governments reacted with surprising leniency to Rwanda's occupation of DRC territory, a serious violation of international law. However, Western nations now appear to be adopting a firmer stance, a shift likely reinforced by changes in government in France and the United Kingdom, both formerly staunch supporters of Rwanda. A new round of sanctions is highly probable from the European Union, the USA, and the UN, this time targeting higher-ranking officers of the Rwanda Defense Forces operating in Eastern Congo. Renewed funding for the RDF's operation in Mozambique by the European Union (which effectively frees up Rwandan funds for the DRC operation) was halted because some countries made it conditional on Rwanda's withdrawal from the DRC, while Belgium refused to provide funding. Unfortunately, there seem to be no measures in sight comparable to those in 2012, when aid to Rwanda was cut, compelling Kagame to force the M23 to vacate Goma, which they had occupied. Despite increased pressure on Rwanda, economic agreements

continue to be signed, irrespective of the ongoing conflict in the DRC. (Kennes, 2024)

The Bibatama Mining Concession, recognized as the largest coltan mine in the African Great Lakes region, has been under the control of the M23 since April 2024. This area was previously visited by the UN Special Representative [MONUSCO]. For decades, the Eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been embroiled in a state of internal conflict that has frequently escalated into open warfare. (Mier y Teran, 2025)

VIII. DIPLOMACY AT A DEADLOCK: THE MUTED RESPONSES OF INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTORS

Today, the region continues to be plagued by increasing tensions, and a lasting solution remains uncertain despite the gravity of the situation, which involves neighboring countries (Uganda and Burundi) and the entire regional environment. The DRC, exercising its legal right under international law but in a position of weakness, demands the withdrawal of Rwandan troops, while Kigali conditions any dialogue on negotiations between Kinshasa and the M23. The issue of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan Hutu armed group active in the DRC, composed of ex-genocidaires and their descendants, further complicates the situation. (Aubert, 2025)

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the United Nations (UN) accuse Rwanda of providing military support, including troops and weapons, to the M23 rebel group, an allegation Rwanda denies. According to an Al Jazeera count, at least nine peacekeepers, including two from the UN's MONUSCO peacekeeping force, have been killed in the ongoing conflict in Eastern DRC. (Aljazeera, 2025)

The UN stated that "Essential personnel remain on the ground, sustaining critical operations such as food distribution, medical assistance, shelter, and protection for vulnerable communities. "The M23 is one of roughly 100 armed factions vying for control in the mineral-rich Eastern DRC, along the border

with Rwanda. This decades-long conflict has led to one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. Since 1998, an estimated six million people have been killed, and approximately seven million have been internally displaced. More than 237,000 individuals have been displaced by the fighting in Eastern DRC since the beginning of this year, according to the UN's refugee agency. (Aljazeera, 2025)

Since its re-emergence in 2021, the M23 rebel group and its Rwandan allies have been subjected to diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and legal actions both individually and collectively for their violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws. For example, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), operating under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and in line with its primary mission of maintaining global peace and security, has actively addressed the M23 insurgency and its breaches of international law. The UNSC adopted Resolution 2641 in 2022, which renewed the arms embargo against non-governmental entities and individuals operating in the DRC. Subsequently, Resolution 2773 of 2025 condemned the M23's offensive and its alliance with Rwanda, demanding an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of M23 and Rwandan troops from occupied territories.

Furthermore, the UNSC exerted diplomatic pressure on the governments of the DRC and Rwanda, as well as on regional powers and the international community, to pursue a peaceful resolution to the crisis by fostering dialogue and political discussions. Similarly, in February 2025, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed a resolution establishing (1) a fact-finding mission to investigate severe human rights violations and abuses, along with breaches of international humanitarian law, occurring in the DRC's North Kivu and South Kivu provinces; and (2) an independent commission of inquiry to continue the work of the fact-finding mission. Unfortunately, these measures and initiatives adopted by the UNSC and UNHRC have so far proven ineffective, as the M23 continues to seize new territories and regional peace talks remain at a standstill. (Liwanga, 2025)

In a similar vein, the United States and the European Union have implemented significant diplomatic, economic, and security measures in response to the M23's resurgence. On March 17, 2025, the EU imposed sanctions on high-ranking M23 members and the Rwandan military for their role in perpetuating violence in the DRC. The EU also censured Rwanda's state mining agency for its involvement in facilitating the illegal extraction of resources from conflict zones. A month prior, the US Treasury similarly sanctioned Rwanda's Minister and a senior M23 militant for related reasons. (Liwanga, 2025)

Within the African continent, the African Union (AU) is collaborating with the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to de-escalate tensions between the DRC and Rwanda and to advocate for peace negotiations that include the M23. Unfortunately, a joint EAC/SADC summit in Dar es Salaam in January 2025 concluded without an explicit agreement. Furthermore, direct talks between the DRC government and the M23 in Luanda in March 2025 were boycotted by the rebels following the EU sanctions. These developments indicate that regional peace process initiatives are currently stalled, further exposing civilians to ongoing atrocities. (Liwanga, 2025)

IX. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The protracted crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly in its Eastern provinces, is a multifaceted conflict deeply intertwined with the region's vast mineral wealth and complex geopolitical dynamics. The research indicates that the exploitation of critical minerals such as coltan, cobalt, gold, tin, and tungsten serves as a primary driver of conflict, transforming these valuable resources into both a prize and a curse for the Congolese people (Zungu, 2025). Armed groups, notably the M23, have leveraged control over mining sites and trade routes to finance their operations, establishing sophisticated systems of illicit taxation and resource extraction.

Rwanda's alleged involvement in supporting the M23 rebel group emerges as a significant factor exacerbating the conflict. Despite denials from

Kigali, numerous reports and analyses suggest direct military support, including troops and weapons, to the M23 (Dizolele, 2025). This external backing has enabled the M23 to make substantial territorial gains, seizing economically strategic towns like Goma and Bukavu, and extending their influence over key mining areas such as Rubaya. The M23's military successes not only highlight the DRC's internal security weaknesses but also underscore a broader regional strategy aimed at undermining Congolese authority and controlling vital economic lifelines.

The M23's establishment of parallel governance structures in occupied territories represents a critical aspect of the conflict. These rebel administrations attempt to manage public affairs, issue travel documents, and even impose new taxes, creating a semblance of order while simultaneously exploiting the local economy (Okeri Ngutjinazo, 2025). However, these attempts at governance are often characterized by a lack of experience among appointed administrators and a failure to provide genuine security for the population, leading to continued violence, banditry, and a pervasive absence of economic opportunities. The conflict's economic dimension is further complicated by the involvement of other regional actors like Uganda and Burundi, who are also implicated in the illicit mineral trade and cross-border movements, often under the guise of counter-terrorism operations.

The humanitarian consequences of this prolonged conflict are catastrophic. Millions of Congolese have been displaced internally, facing severe human rights abuses, including indiscriminate shelling, killings, sexual violence, and forced recruitment of children. The conflict perpetuates violence where influential actors benefit economically and politically from ongoing instability, while the Congolese people bear the brunt of the suffering (Mier y Teran, 2025).

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have faced significant challenges, often reaching a deadlock. Despite numerous regional peace agreements, such as the Lusaka Agreement, the Sun City agreements, and the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement, enduring instability persists (Aubert, 2025; Handy, 2025). Mutual accusations between the DRC and Rwanda, coupled with the resurgence of M23 and the

documented collaboration of the DRC army with militias, have rendered previous agreements ineffective (Handy, 2025). International and regional actors, including the UN Security Council, the UN Human Rights Council, the African Union, EAC, and SADC, have intervened with diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and legal actions (Liwanga, 2025). However, these measures have often been muted or strategically aimed at limiting rebel bargaining power rather than fundamentally altering the military balance, leading to continued territorial seizures by M23 and a stalemate in peace talks.

The international community's response has been criticized for its inconsistency and lack of decisive action. While some sanctions have been imposed on individuals involved in abuses, there is a perceived reluctance to exert full pressure on all warring parties, including high-level Rwandan officials and Congolese military figures implicated in violations (Kennes, 2024). This muted response has, in some instances, emboldened the M23 and its backers, allowing the conflict to escalate and further destabilize the Great Lakes region (Mudge, 2025). The intertwining of peace and mineral interests, often leading to economic agreements being signed despite ongoing conflict, further complicates efforts to achieve a lasting resolution.

CONCLUSION: RETHINKING PEACE THROUGH THE LENS OF REBEL GOVERNANCE

The persistence of the conflict, despite numerous diplomatic efforts and international interventions, suggests that a critical flaw lies in the failure to adequately address the economic incentives and political structures that sustain rebel groups. The continued flow of mineral wealth, laundered through neighboring countries like Rwanda and Uganda, provides the financial arteries for these armed powers, allowing them to maintain their military operations and expand their influence (Behalal, 2025; Harris et al., 2025). This economic dimension transforms the conflict from a purely political or ethnic struggle into a highly profitable enterprise for those involved, creating a powerful disincentive for genuine peace (Mier y Teran, 2025).

Furthermore, the muted and often inconsistent responses from international and regional actors have inadvertently emboldened rebel groups and their state sponsors. While sanctions and diplomatic pressures have been applied, their limited scope and perceived lack of resolve have failed to alter the balance of power or compel all parties to adhere to peace agreements (Liwanga, 2025; Mudge, 2025; Kennes, 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To foster lasting peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach is essential, moving beyond conventional peacebuilding paradigms to directly address the realities of rebel governance and the economic interests that perpetuate conflict. The following recommendations are crucial:

Disrupt Illicit Financial Flows and Mineral Exploitation

Enhanced Sanctions and Enforcement: Implement more stringent and targeted sanctions against individuals and entities, including high-ranking military officials and political figures in Rwanda and other neighboring countries, who are directly involved in supporting the M23 and other armed groups through illicit mineral trade. These sanctions should extend to businesses and corporations that knowingly benefit from conflict minerals (Mudge, 2025; Liwanga, 2025).

Hold External State Actors Accountable

Impose Diplomatic and Economic Pressure: International and regional bodies, particularly the UN, AU, EU, and the US, must exert consistent and unified diplomatic and economic pressure on Rwanda and other implicated states to cease all forms of support for armed groups in the DRC. This includes conditioning aid and trade agreements on verifiable compliance with international law and peace agreements (Kennes, 2024; Mudge, 2025).

Strengthen Congolese State Authority and Governance

Security Sector Reform (SSR): Prioritize comprehensive and inclusive security sector reform within the DRC, focusing on professionalizing the

FARDC, improving discipline, and ensuring accountability for human rights abuses. This includes dismantling alliances between the FARDC and local militias (International Crisis Group, 2025).

Enhance Humanitarian Response and Protection of Civilians

Protect Civilians: Implement stronger measures to protect civilians from violence, including establishing safe zones, deploying well-mandated peacekeeping forces with robust protection mandates, and holding all perpetrators of human rights abuses accountable (Mudge, 2025).

Reinvigorate Diplomatic Efforts with Accountability

Unified International Front: Encourage a more unified and consistent approach from international and regional actors, overcoming internal disagreements and biases that have historically undermined diplomatic efforts (Aubert, 2025; Handy, 2025).

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