

Rwandan-backed M23 advance into DR Congo threatens regional war

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The M23 militia, supported by 4,000 Rwandan troops, having seized Goma—the largest city in the mineral-rich northeastern province of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—and are now advancing toward Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu and the second-largest city in eastern DRC.

At least 700 people have been killed and more than 2,800 injured, according to the United Nations, and hundreds of thousands of Congolese have been forced to flee.

M23 now controls nearly all of North Kivu and the province's vast mineral wealth—including tin (cassiterite), tantalum (coltan), tungsten (wolframite), and gold, which are critical for global electronics and industrial production. South Kivu is similarly rich in these resources and boasts fertile land in coffee, tea, quinine, and palm oil.

M23 leader Corneille Nangaa has vowed, “We will continue the march of liberation all the way to Kinshasa”, DRC's capital.

The advance towards Bukavu, home to two million, threatens to escalate into a full-blown confrontation between M23 and Rwandan forces on one side, and DRC troops, Burundi soldiers and pro-DRC government militias on the other. According to Reuters, these forces have been deployed to defend the town of Nyabibwe some 50 km (30 miles) north of Bukavu. UN sources estimate there are several thousand Burundian soldiers while a Burundian official told Reuters they numbered 8,000 to 10,000.

Tensions between Rwanda and South Africa are also escalating after 13 South African soldiers, deployed under the UN peacekeeping mission, were killed by M23. At a press briefing last week, South African Defence Minister Angie Motshekga warned Rwanda, “If you are going to fire at us, we will take it as a declaration of war and we'll have to defend our people.”

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame hit back, accusing South Africa of being part of a “belligerent force” involved in “offensive combat operations” to help the DRC government “fight against its own people.” The Rwandan government claims it is intervening to eradicate militias in the DRC linked to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It has accused the Congolese military of joining with the ethnically Hutu-led Democratic Liberation Front of Rwanda (FDLR)—which emerged from the

remnants of forces responsible for the massacres. Many analysts view this as a pretext for moves to control the mineral-rich region in North and South Kivu.

Rwanda's Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungerehe said Thursday, “We are ready to defend ourselves if we are attacked by a coalition including South African forces.”

Uganda, an ally of the US and UK under President Yoweri Museveni, which maintains troops in eastern DRC under the pretext of defending against anti-Museveni militias, announced that it would “adopt a forward defensive posture” in response to renewed fighting between Congo's army and M23 rebels. Like Rwanda, Uganda has been plundering the DRC's mineral wealth for decades.

The unfolding disaster is inseparable from the broader descent of African states into wars orchestrated by imperialist powers and the cliques that emerged from the post-independence processes of the 1950s and 1960s.

It is a poisoned legacy of bourgeois African nationalism, which, in its pursuit of capitalist independence, upheld the artificial colonial borders imposed during the Scramble for Africa in the 1880s. Some of these nationalist movements were backed by the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy in its manoeuvres with imperialism and celebrated by anti-Trotskyist Pabloite forces, which lent them an “anti-imperialist” and even Marxist veneer.

Meanwhile, the imperialist powers have waged wars across the continent to secure control over its vast resources—an effort that has intensified with the growing competition from capitalist China, which is now the largest investor and trader in Africa.

On Sunday, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US condemned the Rwanda-backed M23 offensive and urged “M23 and the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) to cease their offensive in all directions. ... This offensive constitutes a flagrant disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC. We also condemn M23's intention to continue expansion into South Kivu.”

The US and its G7 allies preach sovereignty and territorial integrity while having systematically interfered in the DRC for over a century to secure control of its vast mineral wealth. The

CIA orchestrated the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961, the DRC's first prime minister, and backed Mobutu Sese Seko's brutal regime for decades. When Mobutu fell out of favour in the 1990s, Washington backed regime change, using Uganda and Rwanda as proxies to install Laurent-Désiré Kabila in power.

The African governments involved and the imperialist powers are not trying to maintain peace, but are using the crisis to improve their strategic position in the war over minerals and resources and as a means of diverting mounting domestic social tensions outward against a foreign enemy. They are all led by regimes that are deeply unpopular and hated by the masses.

Rwanda's Kagame has maintained power for over three decades through a police state that outlaws political opposition. He is backed by Western patrons, including the US, Britain, and France, who provide substantial foreign aid making up a third of Rwanda's budget. Yet the country remains deeply impoverished, ranking in the bottom third of African nations in per capita GDP, at just \$966 annually. Nearly half of Rwandans live in poverty, a fifth face food insecurity, and nearly a third of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Kagame and his cronies have amassed enormous wealth, much of it plundered from neighbouring DRC's minerals. Kagame controls Crystal Ventures Ltd--the ruling party's investment arm--with assets estimated at over \$500 million, including stakes in construction, real estate, manufacturing, and telecommunications.

DRC is run by President Félix Tshisekedi—in office from 2019. He went from a 73 percent favourability rating among Congolese citizens to 30 percent in less than a year. He was re-elected in December 2023 in a process marred by allegations of irregularities and fraud.

DRC remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the world, despite natural wealth valued at \$23 trillion. Two-thirds of the population live below the international poverty line, with millions struggling to access basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water. Meanwhile, the elites with close ties to international corporations and the imperialist powers have illicit networks that facilitate the plundering of resources through warlords and militias. Forbes documented that the wealth of former president Joseph Kabila, whose presidency was backed by the US, totalled an estimated \$2 billion.

Tshisekedi is now using the war to shore up his dwindling support under the flag of national unity. He has bemoaned the imperialist powers for not supporting him, blasting the “silence and inaction” of the “international community.”

In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) has been in power for three decades since the end of the despised apartheid regime. Yet today, more than 55 percent of South Africans live below the national poverty line, and over 30 million people (roughly half the population) survive on less than 67 dollars per month. The unemployment rate remains one

of the highest in the world, at 32 percent, while youth unemployment affects nearly 60 percent. Millions lack secure access to electricity and running water, with rolling blackouts—so-called “load shedding”—worsening in recent years, crippling businesses and daily life.

While white South Africans continue to control the bulk of the country's wealth, the ANC's Black Economic Empowerment programme has benefited a narrow elite of black businessmen, politicians, and trade union leaders who have amassed significant fortunes. Among them is President Cyril Ramaphosa, a former miners' union leader turned businessman, whose personal wealth is estimated at \$450 million.

The ANC recently committed a horrific crime at the Stilfontein mine, where at least 78 bodies were recovered after months of a government blockade denying thousands of impoverished miners food—as part of the ANC's crackdown on 30,000 so-called “illegal” miners.

Burundi remains one of the world's poorest countries, with over 70 percent of its population living below the poverty line. The rural masses face even greater hardship due to reliance on subsistence farming, land scarcity, and climate shocks. A small elite linked to the ruling Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie, in power for over two decades, enjoys wealth and privileges, controlling key sectors like the extractive industries linked to nickel, rare earth elements, coltan, tin, and tungsten deposits.

Once again, the African continent is being transformed into a battleground where rival corporations, imperialist powers, and their local proxies wage increasingly bloody conflicts. The looming threat of a Third Congo War—following the two devastating conflicts of the 1990s that claimed six million lives, mostly civilians, through mass starvation and disease—underscores the need to break free from imperialist domination. Such a struggle cannot be left to the African ruling elites who act as middlemen for imperialist interests. It must be led by the working class, in alliance with the rural masses, through a revolutionary struggle for power.



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