INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION AND THE PERSISTENT SECURITY CRISIS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.

Policy Paper

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Photo description: Destroyed military tank.

Introduction

Peace in the eastern part of the DRC has remained severely disrupted for almost three decades. At the very least, it has remained a difficult objective for the Congolese government to achieve, despite the numerous diplomatic initiatives launched in recent years. Within a multidimensional landscape of geo-political and geo-economic issues, the peace processes in Nairobi, Luanda, Doha and Washington represent the outward expression of apparent regional and international support for de-escalation. Nevertheless, despite the multiplicity of these peace initiatives, violence persists, transforms and reveals the limitations of mechanisms often ill-suited to the rapid evolution of conflict situations.

In this context, mediation mechanisms, whether they stem from new diplomatic approaches, hybrid conflict resolution mechanisms, or reinvented forms of community engagement - are generating increasing interest both within the scientific community and in political decision-making circles, where they are now considered essential tools for conflict management and transformation. Analysing their relevance and effectiveness and consequently the conditions of their implementation, is therefore crucial for understanding the role played by different actors and identifying the levers of action they employ.

Problem Statement

This research aims to answer the following questions:

- To what extent are international mediations actually able to influence the dynamics of violence in the DRC?
- Correspondingly, which actors, at which levels, currently hold the most decisive levers to transform the security crisis that has become recurrent?

Main Idea

In a context of institutional fragility, mediation ceases to be an objective shared and becomes an instrument of influence: a true diplomatic lever for some and a smokescreen for others. The paradox of a contested peace. [1] The situation then became clear: promethean in its ambition, the DRC still struggles to establish effective military preeminence on the front lines. At the same time, the sustainable consolidation of gains resulting from successive negotiation processes remains an undertaking that has so far generated results contrary to the expectations of the various parties involved. This study suggests starting, as a priority, with peace from below (grassroots peace).

[1] Edward Azar, cited in Oliver Ramsbotham, 'The analysis of protracted social conflict: a tribute to Edward Azar', *Review of International Studies*, 31(1) (2005), pp. 109–126. doi:10.1017/S0260210505006327. Azar's approach to protracted social conflict emphasises that peace requires more than the cessation of hostilities; it also involves addressing underlying group needs, including recognition, equitable access to resources and political participation.



Photo description: Ugandan soldiers from the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) alongside Congolese forces.

Recent Attempts at De-escalation

From Nairobi to Washington, through Luanda and Doha, a cluster of mediation exercises have emerged as an attempt to contain the persistent security crisis in eastern DRC. These processes launched separately to restore peace have mobilised a diversity of state, regional and international actors. However, these mechanisms struggle to articulate themselves within a dynamic of complementarity, reflecting a form of veiled competition where each mediation framework presents itself as more legitimate, more effective or even more "neutral" than the others. Thus, the underlying peace remains contested and disputed by the strategic ambitions of each actor.

The Nairobi Process: a selective peace approach

The Nairobi peace process, launched in April 2022 under the aegis of the East African Community (EAC), reflects a regional willingness to find a negotiated settlement to persistent conflict in the eastern part of the DRC. Its stated objective was the eradication of all local and foreign armed groups.

In a PDDRC-S (Programme de Désarmement, Démobilisation, Relèvement Communautaire et Stabilisation) report made public during the second half of April 2023,[2] the program's coordinator stated that, in anticipation of launching the disarmament plan, they had mapped 252 local armed groups and 14 foreign armed groups, all active across five eastern provinces: Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, and Tanganyika. Among these, North Kivu and Ituri - provinces under a state of siege - accounted for 84 local armed groups and 9 foreign armed groups alone, none of which have been defeated to date. This is how, in the face of escalating violence, particularly due to the resurgence of the M23, the Nairobi process emerged as a mediation-driven alternative to the roar of cannons.

Although ambitious in terms of the future results it aimed to achieve, the Nairobi-format

[2] Radio Okapi (2023), 'Est de la RDC : 266 groupes armés locaux et étrangers recensés par le P-DDRCS', 18 April. Available at: https://www.radiookapi.net/2023/04/18/actualite/securite/est-de-la-rdc-266-groupes-armes-locaux-et-etrangers-recenses-par-le-p. (Accessed: 15 March 2025).

mediation was judged too selective from the very beginning due to the composition of its participants and the political agenda defined. From April to December 2022, the exclusion of certain key actors in the Congolese conflicts, particularly the most active armed groups like the March 23 Movement commonly referred to as M23, was resounding and immediately served to undermine the smooth progress of the process. This exclusion, officially justified by the Congolese government as a refusal to legitimize a group considered "terrorist" and composed of what it termed "Rwanda's puppets",[3] gave rise to a paradox: dialoguing for peace, yes, but while sidelining one of the major protagonists of the ongoing violence.

Exploiting this weakness circumscribed by the Congolese government itself, the mediation fell heavily under the sway of certain countries in the sub-region, which have been repeatedly cited for supporting armed groups in eastern DRC. Uganda and Rwanda, whose roles in the crisis cannot be entirely dismissed, largely took advantage of the mediation framework, particularly that of Nairobi to stall broader participation of concerned actors and gradually fuel mistrust among local communities regarding the relevance of the said mediation.[4]

All this seems evident when Samia Chabouni,[5] seeking to understand the motivations driving Rwanda and Uganda's activism in the DRC and especially the impact of their interactions on the instability affecting the eastern part of the country, highlighted that implementation of strategies on both sides inspired by a security reflex and this included arrogating "the right of pursuit" of their respective enemies on Congolese soil (the Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces (“ADF”) and the Rwandan Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (“FDLR”).

Yet, behind all these maneuvers hides a desire in each case for nourishing space (Nährraum) to use Friedrich Ratzel’s terminology,[6] so as to emancipate oneself from their rival and/or allied neighbor. In late June 2021, for example - and this would constitute a flashpoint stoking the rivalry - two mining contracts were signed between Rwanda and the DRC (by both presidents). The very first stipulates that gold produced by Sakima (a Congolese mining company) will be refined in Rwanda by a virtually unknown local company named Dither Ltd. This deal was allegedly surrounded by certain guarantees regarding the securing of cargo (gold) leaving the DRC for Rwanda by the loyalist forces of both countries. Alongside the first, the second

[3] Krone Zeitung (2025), ‘Rebel advance Congo: President calls on people to resist’, 30 January. Félix Tshisekedi on the M23: "The M23 fighters are "puppets of Kigali", Available at: https://www.krone.at/3672532 (Accessed on April 24, 2025).

[4] Some community leaders, having participated in the Nairobi meetings on more than one occasion, have at times confirmed that regional diplomatic initiatives are largely driven by neighboring states, leaving relatively little room for representatives of communities directly affected by the violence. This has led some to doubt the relevance of the negotiations underway. Similarly, The International Crisis Group had already warned in 2019 that the crisis in eastern DRC was heavily influenced by regional rivalries and the indirect involvement of neighboring states, which could complicate diplomatic initiatives and peace processes. The report, now published, emphasizes in particular that some countries in the region have sometimes used armed groups as instruments of regional politics, thus undermining stabilization efforts (International Crisis Group (2019), A New Approach for the UN to Stabilize the DR Congo. Africa Briefing No. 148. Nairobi, New York and Brussels: International Crisis Group, pp. 3–4.)

[5] Chabouni, S. (2013), Le Rwanda et l’Ouganda : alliés ou rivaux ? Le contentieux rwando-ougandais source de déstabilisation de la région. Thinking Africa, Report No. 01-12, 12 February.

[6] The concept of the nurturing space to which the German Ratzel had added that of the “vital space” (Lebensraum), and which is now perceived as the foundation of modern geopolitics, explains the territorial expansion of powers by asserting that a state, in order to survive and develop, must be able to access a productive space proportionate to its demographic, economic and military needs. See Ratzel, F. (1897), Politische Geographie. Munich and Leipzig: R. Oldenbourg.

contract negotiated and signed between the two companies (Dither Ltd and Sakima) stipulated that Dither Ltd would provide funding to Sakima to enable it to initiate extraction operations.

Uganda, a major player in gold exploitation in East Africa, with exports valued at an estimated $2.24 billion in 2021, a large portion of which originates from the DRC[7] was hardly thrilled by this new deal between Kinshasa and Kigali. The deal raised threats regarding a possible reduction of its access to Congolese gold, thereby threatening its export revenues and its economic influence in the region. Furthermore, the Congolese government demonstrated a certain lack of transparency during the signing of these agreements, notably refusing to publish their details. It is this posture that reportedly sparked concerns on the Ugandan side, narrowing its strategic terrain and exposing the region to an exacerbation of tensions between the two countries (Rwanda and Uganda).

On the other side of the discord, the issue of expelling the deployed EAC troops from the East continues to weigh heavily on Kinshasa. To Kinshasa's accusation regarding the operational inefficiency of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), the EAC responded by arguing that within a 12-month span, its presence had successfully persuaded at least 53 rebel groups operating in North Kivu to embrace a ceasefire, and furthermore, that the M23 had not launched an attack for 8 months. The deployment of the Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) to replace the EACRF also contributed to exacerbating rivalries between neighboring EAC member states, revealing an unexpressed current of confusion and opposition in relations between Kinshasa and its EAC neighbors. Thus, despite its regional scope, the Nairobi process proved selective and limited, incapable of producing an inclusive and durable peace.

The Luanda Process: Angola's experimentation with frustration

Launched on November 23, 2022, under the aegis of Angolan President João Lourenço, the designated facilitator for the African Union "AU", the Angolan mediation of Luanda differs from Nairobi's by primarily aiming to ease political and diplomatic tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. It placed its emphasis on resolving broader issues linked to the conflict, particularly the questions of the resurgence of the M23 and the FDLR. In terms of actors, the Luanda peace process involved the governments of the DRC and Rwanda, with the support and accompaniment of the AU, Southern African Development Community ("SADC"), and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region ("ICGLR"). This process is thus distinguished by its inter-state orientation, aiming to ease diplomatic tensions between several countries.

[7] Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2021), 'Gold rush: How illicit gold from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo flows through Uganda', Risk Bulletin, No. 17. Available at: https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/esa-obs-017/04-gold-rush-how-illicit-gold-flows-through-uganda.html.

In terms of results, the Luanda process led to a ceasefire that theoretically entered into force in November 2022. It was supposed to be followed by an agreement for the withdrawal of the M23 from occupied zones and the neutralisation of foreign armed groups, particularly the FDLR, who were to be repatriated to Rwanda.[8] The signing of this agreement took place on August 29 and 30, 2024, in Rubavu, Rwanda. The Rubavu agreement revolves around three main axles: the neutralisation of the FDLR, the withdrawal of Rwandan forces from the DRC, and the potential participation of Rwandan forces in military operations against the FDLR. It is on the basis of this last element that an ad-hoc monitoring structure was to be established. The latter would be composed of three Rwandan officers, three Congolese officers, and 18 Angolan officers, and would be led by Angolan Lieutenant General João Nassone.[9]

Philippe Asanzi and Remadji Hoinathy, who analysed the implementation mechanism of this agreement,[10] conditioned its success on resolving several major political and security challenges. Among these were the obligation of the Congolese government to engage in direct negotiations with the AFC/M23 due to its internal Congolese roots, which these researchers argue would help address the root causes of the conflicts, in accordance with the 2013 Addis Ababa Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. It was difficult for DRC to make concessions, as the reversal by the AFC/M23 fighters significantly undermined the effectiveness of the compromise and, by extension, the peace process as a whole. At the same time, Rwanda, while continuing to deny support for the AFC/M23 coalition despite multiple reports to the contrary, appeared to maintain a posture of calculated ambiguity within the sub-region.[11]

In parallel, the DRC is blamed for its refusal to disarm elements of the FDLR an armed group of Rwandan Hutu origin considered an existential threat by President Paul Kagame's regime due to its historical ties to the 1994 genocidaires.[12] Furthermore, procrastinations within the mediation calendar systematically undermined the credibility of the process and revealed the deep mutual mistrust between the parties, as well as their reluctance to make the concessions necessary for the accords to work. Faced with this diplomatic inertia, Angola, in its role as mediator, showed growing frustration: the once-proactive rhetoric of President Lourenço shifted into diplomatic silence, marking a form of symbolic withdrawal from the process.[13]

Behind the Angolan mediation of Luanda, has always stood the support of the Republic of South Africa, which has never wanted to see

[8] Asanzi, P. and Hoinathy, R. (2024), 'The revived Luanda Process – inching towards peace in east DRC?', ISS Today, 21 October. Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/the-revived-luanda-process-inching-towards-peace-in-east-drc.

[9] Ibid

[10] Ibid

[11] BBC (2025), ''Fierce fighting as DR Congo rebels seek to make further advances' 31 January, United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo Report (2024), "Between 3,000 and 4,000 Rwanda forces are deployed in neighboring eastern Congo, operating alongside the M23 rebel group which has been making major advances in the Congolese territories of Nyiragongo, Rutshuru and Masisi. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj91yy023dxo

[12] In an interview with Jeune Afrique published on April 3, 2026, Rwandan President Paul Kagame stated that Rwanda will not withdraw its "defensive measures" from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) until the security threats against his country are addressed. Kagame defended Rwanda's presence as "defensive measures," arguing that removing troops without addressing security threats along the border "makes no sense." Cited in Business Insider Africa Report, available at https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=957710060077558

[13] In a statement issued by the Angolan presidency on March 24, 2025, Angola announced its withdrawal from mediation efforts for peace in the DRC, citing Rwanda's absence from certain meetings and the DRC's rejection of certain proposals, such as engaging in direct dialogue with the M23 as a logical continuation of the Nairobi process. See Embaixada de Angola nos Estados Unidos da América (2025), 24 March. 'Angola Withdraws from Mediation of the Conflict Between the DRC and Rwanda', https://angola.org/fr/noticias/angola-retira-se-da-mediacao-do-conflito-entre-a-rdc-e-o-rwanda. Accessed on March 24, 2025.

conflicts emerge between Rwanda and the DRC due to its significant economic interests in the DRC. This is particularly true in the mining, banking, energy, and telecommunications sectors dominated by several of its companies, such as African Rainbow Minerals (ARM), Anglo Gold Ashanti (AGA), Standard Bank, Shoprite Holdings, or Vodacom. Beyond these economic considerations, the South African position in the crisis between the DRC and Rwanda fits into a logic of diplomatic and strategic rivalry with Rwanda. For several years, bilateral relations between South Africa and Rwanda have been strained, notably following the 2014 assassination of Patrick Karegeya the former Rwandan intelligence chief, political refugee, and fierce critic of President Paul Kagame, who was found dead in Johannesburg. This episode deeply deteriorated relations between the two countries, leading to mutual diplomatic expulsions.[14]

Qatari mediation and its discrete role:

The appeal to Qatari mediation on March 18, 2025, sounded during a turbulent period of the conflict, precisely at the moment when M23 fighters were closing in on the center of Walikale in North Kivu, a zone that is strategic on both military and economic fronts. Militarily, Walikale is located between Bukavu and Lubutu on National Road 3 (RN3), in the Lowa River valley, roughly 185 kilometers west of the city of Goma. It presents itself as an ideal-typical terrain for guerrilla tactics, ambushes, and the concealment of weapon caches or troops. Economically, this locality, rich in diamonds, wolframite, coltan, casserite gold, and other strategic minerals like tin, momentarily fell under rebel control on March 19, 2025.

Two weeks before its fall, the rebel positioning at the gates of Walikale where the main site of the company Alphamin Bisie Mining (ABM) is erected, whose global tin production averages nearly 18,000 tonnes annually, representing 4% of the world's production of this raw material vital to the electronics industry, new alloy technologies, and plastics, became increasingly worrying for the DRC government. In addition to dozens of other strategic zones fallen into rebel hands, the fall of Walikale to the AFC/M23 would have constituted a severe blow for Kinshasa due to its symbolic weight and its direct impact on Congolese economic interests. This must have contributed to altering the balance of power on the ground, ultimately persuading Kinshasa to accept, without its usual prevarications, Qatar's entry into the game as a mediator.

Under the mediation of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Doha negotiations brought together face-to-face for the first time since the intensification of the conflict in January 2025, Presidents Félix Tshisekedi and Paul Kagame, leaders of DRC and Rwanda respectively.[15] These talks took place after AFC/M23 representatives withdrew from a meeting scheduled with the DRC government in Luanda almost on the eve, following the EU's imposition of sanctions on certain high-ranking members of the AFC/M23, including its leader Bertrand

[14] Fabricius, P. (2026), 'SA and Rwanda sidestep disputes and move to "normalise" troubled relations', Daily Maverick, 18 June. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2026-06-18-sa-and-rwanda-move-to-normalise-their-troubled-relations/.

[15] Amiri Diwan (2025), 'HH The Amir Holds Meeting with Presidents of Rwanda and Democratic Republic of the Congo', 18 March. Available at: https://www.diwan.gov.qa/ar-qa/briefing-room/news/receiving-guests/2025/march/18/hh-the-amir-holds-meeting-with-president-of-rwanda-and-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo?sc_lang=en.

Bisimwa.[16]

To achieve this, the two leaders reportedly made concessions around an immediate and unconditional ceasefire of fighting troops on the ground, reaffirming their commitment to the Luanda and Nairobi peace processes, which were now merged under the aegis of the EAC and SADC. To this effect, President Félix Tshisekedi of the DRC reportedly promised to initiate direct dialogues with the political branch of the AFC/M23,[18] while insisting on the effort his neighbor should make in sincerely opening a humanitarian corridor.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame, for his part, reportedly conditioned any lasting ceasefire on the eradication of the FDLR, asking his Congolese counterpart to take drastic measures to disarm, neutralize, and extrapolate the cadres and fighters of the FDLR. In addition to this, he reportedly requested from the Emir of Qatar the implementation of a tripartite monitoring mechanism involving a neutral third party (under Qatari, regional, or UN supervision) to monitor military movements along the border between the DRC and Rwanda. This requirement rests on accusations that the FARDC maintains certain armed groups as "proxies" to destabilize Rwanda's tranquility.

Curiously, relying on a strategic approach aimed at preserving Qatar's neutrality and avoiding any perception of bias in the peace process, the mediator reportedly backed away quietly in the face of underlying unsaid issues. The first concerned the Congolese government, which appeared to avoid placing significant emphasis on the practical modalities for implementing the proposed ceasefire. The second related to Rwanda's position, which focused primarily on guaranteeing the DRC's security and addressing the FDLR issue, without expressly prioritising a ceasefire. In this sort of diplomatic dissonance, these unsaid issues reflected the distinct priorities of the major nations involved and ipso facto complicated the building of mutual trust.

Qatar in its desire to facilitate peace soon found itself compelled to lean quietly towards hidden American intentions present from the very start. The transfer of diplomatic oversight from Doha to Washington, officialised on April 30, 2025, during a joint meeting between representatives of the two capitals, reflects a reorientation in the distribution of strategic roles: Qatar remains to ensure the neutrality of the initial framework and particularly to listen to the AFC/M23 coalition,[19] while the United States of America takes over by mobilising its political and economic weight to

[16] On March 17, 2025, the EU imposed sanctions on several Rwandan military commanders and leaders of the AFC/M23 operating in eastern DRC with the support of the Rwandan army. On the rebel side (AFC/M23), the sanctions targeted Bertrand Bisimwa, head of the armed group's political wing, who was already under UN sanctions; Jean Bahati Musanga, the Alliance-appointed governor of North Kivu; Désiré Rukomera, head of recruitment and propaganda; and Jean-Bosco Nzabonimpa, the group's deputy finance chief. These measures include a travel ban to the EU and a freeze on the assets of these individuals and entities within the Schengen Area. See Euronews (2025), 'M23 rebels withdraw from DR Congo peace talks as EU imposes sanctions', 18 March. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2025/03/18/m23-rebels-withdraw-from-dr-congo-peace-talks-as-eu-imposes-sanctions

[17] Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2025), 'Le conflit en RDC entre dans une nouvelle phase encore plus dangereuse', 26 February.

[18] Following the Angolan presidency's announcement of the start of direct negotiations between the Congolese government and the leaders of the AFC/M23, then scheduled for March 18, 2025, Tina Salama, spokesperson for the Congolese head of state, while reaffirming the President of the Republic's commitment to the Resolution 2773 The UN Security Council acknowledged this initiative, while recalling that there is indeed a pre-established framework that can accommodate these negotiations, which is the Nairobi process. See Reuters (2025). 'Congo, M23 rebels to begin direct peace talks on March 18, Angola says' 12 March . Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-m23-rebels-begin-direct-peace-talks-march-18-angola-says-2025-03-12/

[19] The text of the Doha Framework Agreement was signed on November 15, 2025 between the government of Kinshasa and the AFC/M23 coalition. Of the eight protocols negotiated at the time of the agreement's signing, two had already been adopted: the protocol on the release and/or exchange of prisoners and detainees, and the protocol on the ceasefire monitoring mechanism. The other six concern, respectively, humanitarian access and judicial protection; the restoration of state authority with an emphasis on governance reforms; transitional security arrangements and the DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) of local armed groups and the neutralization of foreign armed groups; identity, citizenship, and the return and resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees; economic and social recovery; and the establishment of a transitional justice mechanism (truth, justice, and reconciliation). See Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Alliance Fleuve Congo/March 23 Movement (AFC/M23) (2025), The Doha Framework for a Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Alliance Fleuve Congo/March 23 Movement (AFC/M23), 15 November. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/45656-doc-2025.11.15 - SIGNED Framework Peace Agreement EN.pdf.

guarantee the implementation of commitments agreed upon through seasons of peace rendezvous.

The United States of America: a global mediator in a fortuitous context?

The entry of the United States of America into the crisis between the DRC and Rwanda illustrates a multidimensional strategy. Far from being the original promoter of the mediation processes launched until then, Washington capitalized on the momentum generated by the Qatari mediation within a fortuitous context where African mechanisms (Luanda, Nairobi) had nearly run out of steam due to the actors' strategies. This involvement fits into a broader American strategy of diplomatic recalibration in Africa, driven by the desire to counter the growing influence of competing powers (notably China and Russia) while securing supply chains for strategic resources.

This did not go unnoticed by Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi, who early-on saw the return of Donald Trump to the stage as an opportunity, creating a vast $3 trillion partnership project to be allocated to mining companies both internal to the DRC and external to the United States.[20]

This ambitious project is intended to make full sense as a structured response mechanism to Chinese hegemony in the African mining sector. It will not just be about securing raw materials for American industry, but also about regaining a foothold in an economic space where Chinese influence has become virtually monopolistic and where Russian military posturing cannot be ruled out.

To proceed with execution, Washington designated Massad Boulos as Special Advisor to President Trump for Africa. Becoming the new accredited negotiator for American markets in Africa, Massad was to begin by recycling pre-existing economic cooperation agreements with other states in the region. First and foremost, the one concluded with Rwanda under Angola's mediation in September 2024. The aforementioned September 2024 agreement planned to regulate the management and exploitation of mining resources in eastern DRC within the framework of the peace process initiated in Luanda. It aimed to formalise supply chains for strategic minerals such as coltan, cobalt, and copper, with a view to reinforcing transparency, ensuring effective traceability, and combating the illicit trafficking of these resources. Negotiated and signed in a past dynamic of regional economic integration, in collaboration with organizations such as the ICGLR, COMESA, and the EAC, this agreement opened the way for political and economic transformation for countries aspiring to turn the page on endemic conflicts.

Unfortunately, this hope for peace would soon be undermined by the AFC/M23 cadres, who denounced repeated ceasefire violations by the FARDC and threatened to take measures aimed at protecting civilian populations within areas under their control.

[20] Fayol, C. and Liffran, O. (2025), 'Deal avec Washington : les secrets du coup de poker de Félix Tshisekedi', Africa Intelligence, 21 May. Available at: https://www.africaintelligence.fr/afrique-centrale/2025/05/21/deal-avec-washington--les-secrets-du-coup-de-poker-de-felix-tshisekedi,110453380-ge0. (Accessed: 25 May 2025).

Furthermore, in this new American deal, the risks for the Congolese government remain threefold:

Firstly, its growing dependency on American support, particularly in a context where local capital is insufficient and public institutions remain fragile. Over time, this imbalance could place the DRC in a position where it has limited bargaining power against Washington, notably regarding contractual clauses, fiscal policies, or the governance of value chains.

Secondly, by aligning itself visibly with American interests, the DRC exposes itself publicly to the anger of other influential powers in the region. Such a shift could fuel geopolitical rivalry on Congolese soil, transforming the DRC into the theater of a proxy clash between major powers.

Finally, while the massive influx of investments and the restructuring of mining industries could constantly generate tangible benefits for local communities (jobs, infrastructure, social services), if Congolese authorities fail to secure balanced contractual conditions, the regime (Tshisekedi) will face unparalleled delegitimisation. This could lead to the birth of new social protest movements alongside those already existing and strengthened. This would further complicate peacebuilding.

In addition to strategic minerals like coltan, cassiterite, tin, or cobalt, which have always made the DRC a coveted country at the heart of the African continent, world powers like the United States, covet the Congo Basin, the world's second-largest "green lung" after the Amazon, constituting a natural carbon sink that plays an essential role in regulating the global climate. In the context of the ecological transition and multilateral commitments, Western states seek to secure their influence over this environmental heritage, often through conditional climate funding and carbon compensation mechanisms. Likewise, the hydro-electric potential of the Congo River, estimated at over 100,000 MW, attracts numerous Western investors wishing to support projects like Inga III, capable of providing energy to energy-intensive technological industries. This is all without forgetting the case of Albertine hydrocarbons, where the exploratory market on the Congolese side is the work of the French company Total Energies, which is also the main investor and operator of the Tilenga project on the Ugandan side.

Thus, on June 27, 2025 the day the agreement between Rwanda and the DRC was solemnly signed,[21] the Congolese government appeared to have been persuaded by the facilitators to move away from its original demand for the immediate withdrawal of Rwandan troops fighting alongside the AFC/M23. Instead, it accepted a phased withdrawal process linked to actions targeting the FDLR. Despite extensive media attention, the June 27 agreement has so far largely remained an abstract diplomatic showcase for Kinshasa.

This Agreement has raised concerns among observers who fear that it could facilitate the

[21 United States Department of State (2025), Peace Agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda, signed in Washington, D.C., 27 June. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/usdos/2025/150300. (Accessed: 15 April 2026).

exploitation of Congolese natural resources. These concerns stem from provisions promoting bilateral integration and expanded cooperation in areas such as the management of national parks, the de-risking of mineral supply chains, and the joint management of resources in Lake Kivu, among others.[22]

Similarly, if the parties merely use the latest agreement as a means of buying time while legitimising their respective diplomatic positions, the traumas endured throughout successive cycles of violence will continue to fuel resentment, while public cynicism toward the peace process is likely to deepen. Moreover, the regionalisation of the conflict risks reviving memories of the interstate rivalries that characterised the late 1990s. For this reason, the success of the Washington Agreement will depend on the establishment of an inclusive national dialogue, not one driven solely by the type of transactional diplomacy associated with the Doha process, where peace risks being reduced to disproportionate political bargaining.

As part of renewed efforts toward peace, the DRC government must also avoid downplaying the contributions already made by local and transnational actors. In this regard, mediation initiatives led by figures such as former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo deserve renewed attention and strategic reappropriation, particularly given the lessons drawn from his 2008 engagement in Goma, which had already exposed the fragile negotiating position of rebel delegations vis-à-vis the legitimate government.

Furthermore, the DRC should not disregard the strategically drawing from steps taken by the National Council for the FollowupFollow-up of the Agreement and the Electoral Process (“CNSA)”) under the presidency of Joseph Olengankoy, including its suggestion of ng a descent to Goma to initiate an inclusive national dialogue between the Head of State, the opposition (notably Joseph Kabila and , Corneille Nangaa), and civil society organisations, in order to reinforce national cohesion and counter a "silent balkaniszation" in Ituri and North and South Kivu. , should not be disregarded by Kinshasa. RatherOn the contrary, the process could begin with a “local listening” approach before progressing to the presidential level, thereby strengthening the national legitimacy of any subsequent dialogue.

Moving beyond security dependency: The local bet

On the international stage, the DRC exemplifies a state whose security sovereignty remains constrained by competing interests and external pressures. The central challenge therefore lies in the gradual reappropriation of its sovereign security institutions (FARDC, PNC, ANR, DGM, etc.), which remains a sine qua non condition for escaping the cycle of perpetual security dependence. Beyond this reappropriation, the Congolese government must also recenter peacebuilding efforts around local actors. Such an approach would depart from the predominantly top-down

[22] Ibid

models that have often proven ineffective. At the heart of this proposal is the strengthening of local capacities for resilience, mediation, and community-based peacebuilding.

It is about valuing local actors such as customary chiefs, religious leaders, and women and youth leaders and equipping them with the tools necessary for non-violent conflict resolution. This undoubtedly presupposes the reinforcement of community structures for conflict management, such as ancient customary courts.[23] Furthermore, since the Congolese social fabric is intensely fragmented by armed conflicts, forced displacements and identity cleavages, it is necessary to engage in organising inter-ethnic dialogues in sensitive areas. In this line of thought, a socialisation mechanism should be established as a vector of peace and cohesion from an early age. This work of reconstituting living together (vivre-ensemble) must be conducted in parallel with an inclusive community security policy, integrating citizens into the definition and implementation of local security responses through early warning mechanisms, vigilance committees, and forms of community policing.

In the same way as with local groups, to meet the challenges posed by foreign armed groups that have become, to some extent, transboundary, such as the ADF or the FDLR, solutions should be anchored in local realities while connecting them to transboundary life arrangements. In examining the example of the Anamongo cluster in the DRC, Banyaku Luape[24] argues that the integration of peoples, grounded in deep cultural and social solidarities, constitutes the essential foundation for the integration of states. Thus, the first avenue consists of mobilizing transboundary communities as actors of vigilance, early warning, and informal mediation. These communities often share historical, ethnic, or economic ties that cross national borders. By integrating them into transboundary community security mechanisms, it becomes possible to limit the subversive mobility of armed groups, disrupt their supply networks, and weaken their local roots.

The second avenue involves making Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration ('DDR') an approach that will not be limited to a formal collection of weapons by government or intergovernmental programs established, but rather the creation of spaces for community dialogue allowing also for the reduction of mistrust between fighters of armed groups and between them and local populations. Thus, calls for disarmament must be negotiated at the local and regional scale, taking into account the specific motivations of armed groups, which are often linked to marginalization or the absence of economic opportunities.

The final avenue concerns the implementation of transitional justice favouring symbolic and community reparations, rather than solely sanctions imposed by modern courts. This can include pardon ceremonies, the performance of

[23] Maliaka Sefu ST, and, Mbuna Dhedonga H. (2024), '*Réformes de la justice en RDC. Un facteur de la récurrence des violences armées dans la Province de l'Ituri'*, Research note no. 208, Thinking Africa. Available at https://www.thinkingafrica.org/V2/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Reformes-de-la-justice-en-RDC-un-facteur-de-la-recurrence-des-violences-armees-dans-la-Province-de-lIturi.pdf

[24] Banyaku Luape (2023), *Pléiade des Anomongo : mythe et réalité.* Democratic Republic of the Congo: L'Harmattan RDC.

community work by ex-combatants, or the collective reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure. These concrete actions can rebuild ties between victims and repentant perpetrators, restore the dignity of survivors, and give a tangible meaning to justice. In certain contexts, traditional mechanisms of compensation (land, cattle, service) can be mobilised if they are perceived as just and inclusive.

Conclusion

Faced with the impasse of de-escalating solutions and the exhaustion of classic mediation frameworks from Nairobi to Washington, passing through Luanda and Doha, it becomes imperative to reconsider peace as an endogenous process, anchored in community dynamics. Another way to heal these scars rests on local resilience and the legitimization of proximity governance.

Such an orientation implies recognizing that peace is not decreed in foreign capitals at the risk of being contested there. Peace is built on the margins, where populations invent every day concrete forms of cohabitation, negotiation, and survival. Thus, peace in the DRC can only impose itself durably if it emanates from a shared Congolese will, supported by a measured international accompaniment that respects local dynamics.

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