

II. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)

Introduction

Located in East Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the world's nineteenth most populated Member State and the largest by size in sub-Saharan Africa.¹ The United Nations (UN) has remained in the region for many decades due to ongoing ethnic and resource tensions.² DRC is known for its abundant natural resources, such as cobalt, gold, tin, and copper.³ Tensions have persisted over profits, ownership, and distribution as the varying ethnic groups of the Great Lakes Region of Africa have in recent history been characterized by tensions over these resources and other ethnic divisions linked to the effects of war, corruption, and exploitation.⁴

The First Congo War (1996-1997) and The Second Congo War (1998-2003)

The First Congo War resulted from the fallout from multiple events, including the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the immense amount of refugees and armed rebel groups moving into DRC.⁵ During the three-month duration of genocide, over 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and Hutu moderates were killed.⁶ Following the genocide, more than two million people entered neighboring Eastern DRC, some as refugees and others as former perpetrators of genocide.⁷ The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported nearly 30,000 of the two million refugees in DRC participated in the genocide.⁸ As a result, several armed groups were formed from the genocide perpetrators that crossed into the DRC, introducing years of lasting regional conflict and eventually leading to a partial collapse of the Congolese government.⁹

After the Rwandan genocide, Hutu militants launched multiple attacks on the remaining Tutsi population from across the border of DRC into Rwanda.¹⁰ Rwanda believed the governing administration of DRC violated their territorial integrity and launched a military campaign.¹¹ DRC denounced the intervention but lacked political and military capabilities to resist.¹² The war escalated to involve neighboring Member States.¹³ Uganda and Rwanda invaded the DRC in 1996, trying to capture perpetrators of the genocide and dismantle the militant groups that had found refuge within the DRC's borders.¹⁴ Hundreds of thousands were killed during the first Congo War, and the ethnic violence continued.¹⁵

¹ Eastern Congo Initiative, "Did You Know?" 2023, <https://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/did-you-know/>, (accessed May 16, 2023).

² United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, "UNSDG | UN in Action - Democratic Republic of the Congo," United Nations, 2023, <https://unsdg.un.org/un-in-action/democratic-republic-congo>, (accessed April 1, 2023).

³ UNEP, "Can the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Mineral Resources Provide a Pathway to Peace?" UNEP, September 20, 2022, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/can-democratic-republic-congos-mineral-resources-provide-pathway-peace>, (accessed May 16, 2023).

⁴ UNEP, "Can the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Mineral Resources Provide a Pathway to Peace?"

⁵ Eastern Congo Initiative, "History of the Conflict." Eastern Congo Initiative, 2023 <https://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/history-of-the-conflict/>, (accessed April 1, 2023).

⁶ Eastern Congo Initiative, "History of the Conflict."

⁷ Eastern Congo Initiative, "History of the Conflict."

⁸ Eastern Congo Initiative, "History of the Conflict."

⁹ Williams, Christopher. "Explaining the Great War in Africa: How Conflict in the Congo Became a Continental Crisis." *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 37, no. 2 (2013): 81–100. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45289589>. (accessed June 20, 2023).

¹⁰ Guild, History. "Africa's World War: The Congo War." History Guild, May 13, 2021. <https://historyguild.org/africas-world-war-the-congo-war/>. (accessed March 20, 2023).

¹¹ Eastern Congo Initiative, "History of the Conflict."

¹² History Guild, "Africa's World War: The Congo War."

¹³ History Guild, "Africa's World War: The Congo War."

¹⁴ Eastern Congo Initiative, "History of the Conflict," 2023, <https://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/history-of-the-conflict/#:~:text=The%20Second%20Congo%20War>, (accessed April 3, 2023).

¹⁵ Guild, History. "Africa's World War: The Congo War." History Guild, May 13, 2021. <https://historyguild.org/africas-world-war-the-congo-war/>. (accessed March 20, 2023).

The Second Congo War started in 1998.¹⁶ Ties between the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda remained unresolved following the end of the First Congo War.¹⁷ Rwanda invaded the DRC amid reports of violence towards Tutsis in Eastern DRC in 1998.¹⁸ Several African Member States with strong opposition to Rwanda assisted the DRC against the invasion, leading to a stalemate in August 1998.¹⁹ The Congolese military supported Hutu militias, while Congolese Tutsis were supported both by Rwanda and Uganda.²⁰ In 2001, President Laurent Désiré Kabila of DRC was assassinated, and his son Joseph Kabila took over as president.²¹ Joseph Kabila helped to end the Second Congo War by increasing aid to the Member States.²² Rwanda conceded to peace talks in South Africa in 2002.²³ The Second Congo War was the second deadliest conflict since World War II.²⁴ The war caused over five million deaths, mainly due to malnutrition and diseases like malaria and pneumonia.²⁵ An additional two million were internally displaced and sought refuge in neighboring Member States.²⁶

United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)

In 1999, the Member States reached an agreement known as the Lusaka ceasefire.²⁷ However, several rebel militant groups refused to comply with the terms of the agreement.²⁸ Uganda and Rwanda withdrew from the Lusaka ceasefire, leading to rebel groups engaging in a conflict within the DRC.²⁹ Due to the failed ceasefire, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) called for a peacekeeping mission to be deployed. The UNSC passed S/RES/1279 on November 30, 1999, creating the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).³⁰ MONUC has remained in the DRC since 1999, attempting to stall and prevent tensions between military and political forces.³¹

In 2010, the UNSC passed S/RES/1925, replacing MONUC with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).³² In the aftermath of the First and Second Congo Wars, the mandate needed to be expanded to effectively provide a complete response to better operational outcomes of the peacekeeping mission.³³ MONUSCO's new mandate included providing humanitarian assistance and critical governance capacity-building measures, such as effective economic and security apparatuses and inclusive and transparent involvement in legislative elections.³⁴ The mission of MONUSCO is to ensure government stabilization and peace consolidation through peacekeeping and military operations, as well as an intervention brigade, which has

¹⁶Angela Thompsell, "The Second Congo War: Its Origins and Initial Stages," January 26, 2019. <https://www.thoughtco.com/second-congo-war-43698>, (accessed March 18, 2023).

¹⁷ Angela Thompsell, "The Second Congo War: Its Origins and Initial Stages."

¹⁸ Angela Thompsell, "The Second Congo War: Its Origins and Initial Stages."

¹⁹ Angela Thompsell, "The Second Congo War: Its Origins and Initial Stages."

²⁰ Angela Thompsell, "The Second Congo War: Its Origins and Initial Stages."

²¹ Angela Thompsell, "History of the Second Congo War." ThoughtCo, February 21, 2019. <https://www.thoughtco.com/second-congo-war-battle-for-resources-43696>, (accessed April 8, 2023).

²² Angela Thompsell, "History of the Second Congo War."

²³ Angela Thompsell, "History of the Second Congo War."

²⁴ Joe Bavier, "Congo War-Driven Crisis Kills 45,000 a Month: Study," *Reuters*, January 22, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-democratic-death-idUSL2280201220080122>, (accessed April 5, 2023).

²⁵ Joe Bavier, "Congo War-Driven Crisis Kills 45,000 a Month: Study."

²⁶ Caritas, "Six Million Dead in Congo's War," February 24, 2010, <https://www.caritas.org/2010/02/six-million-dead-in-congos-war/>, (accessed April 1, 2023).

²⁷ United Nations, "Ceasefire Agreement (Lusaka Agreement)," 2023, <https://peacemaker.un.org/drc-lusaka-agreement99>, (accessed May 12, 2023).

²⁸ United Nations, "Ceasefire Agreement (Lusaka Agreement)."

²⁹ Angela Thompsell, "History of the Second Congo War."

³⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1279 (1999), *The Situation Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/RES/1279 (1999), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/384901?ln=en>.

³¹ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Rwanda and the DRC at Risk of War as New M23 Rebellion Emerges: An Explainer - Democratic Republic of the Congo," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, June 29, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/rwanda-and-drc-risk-war-new-m23-rebellion-emerges-explainer>.

³² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1925 (2010), *Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/RES/1924 (2010). <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/380/13/PDF/N1038013.pdf?OpenElement>.

³³ MONUSCO, "Background," UN Missions, February 19, 2016, <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/background>. (accessed May 15, 2023).

³⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2666 (2022), *The Situation Concerning Democratic Republic of the Congo*, (MONUSCO), S/RES/ 2666 (2022). https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/resolution_2666_2022_0.pdf.

achieved significant progress in stabilization, especially in the Eastern half of the DRC.³⁵ In 2012, the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Regions was signed by the UN and several regional bodies to highlight critical objectives in the UN mandate. This Framework provided regional cooperation within the DRC. Additionally, the Framework was used to achieve sovereignty, humanitarian assistance, and political and security confidence building.³⁶ Even with significant efforts to enforce the mandate of MONUSCO, there has also been reported dissatisfaction among government officials and civilians with peacekeeping operations in DRC over recent years.³⁷ In 2015, a rebel group from Uganda killed two Tanzanian peacekeepers.³⁸ Fourteen additional peacekeepers were then killed in December 2017.³⁹ These backlashes resulted from the UN's inability to help internally displaced people and alleviate attacks from armed militant groups like the March 23 Movement (M23).⁴⁰ In August 2022, with ongoing attacks from armed groups and an increased number of displaced individuals, the Congolese government called to end MONUSCO earlier than its intended withdrawal date due to anti-UN peacekeeping protests becoming deadly, killing six people, including peacekeepers.⁴¹

Recent Developments and Conclusion

While ethnic tensions remain from the previous decades, several states in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, such as Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are engaged in proxy warfare over natural resources in the DRC.⁴² The DRC's abundant natural resources have remained a key factor in underlying tension between states and militant groups.⁴³ For many years following the Congo Wars, natural resources have been exploited through unregulated mining and mismanaged through governance, leading to community displacement and further conflict.⁴⁴ As a result, there are higher levels of involvement with militant groups and interstate competition for access to economic and political influence.⁴⁵ Numerous rebel groups exist in Eastern DRC from spillover effects caused by both the 1994 genocide and the Congo Wars.⁴⁶ Fighting continues despite the Congolese government's and the UN's efforts to transition away from conflict through peacekeeping and governance building.⁴⁷

³⁵ MONUSCO, "Background," UN Missions, February 19, 2016, <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/background>. (accessed May 15, 2023).

³⁶ Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, "The Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region First Progress Report Final," United Nations 2014, https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/first_progress_report_on_the_peace_security_and_cooperation_framework_agreement.pdf.

³⁷ United Nations Press, "Despite Peacekeeping Mission's Efforts, Security Situation Worsening in Democratic Republic of Congo, Special Representative Tells Security Council," December 9, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15135.doc.htm>, (accessed March 6, 2023).

³⁸ "UN Peacekeepers Killed in DRC," Deutsche Welle, May 6, 2015, <https://www.dw.com/en/un-tanzanian-peacekeepers-ambushed-and-killed-in-democratic-republic-of-congo/a-1843070>, (accessed May 16, 2023).

³⁹ UN Operational Support, "UN Honours 14 Peacekeepers Killed in Eastern DR Congo," United Nations, 2022, <https://operationalsupport.un.org/en/un-honours-14-peacekeepers-killed-eastern-dr-congo#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20UN%20Operations>, (accessed May 18, 2023).

⁴⁰ Reuters, "Congo to Reassess U.N. Withdrawal Plan after Deadly Protests," August 2, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-reassess-un-withdrawal-plan-after-deadly-protests-2022-08-02/>, (accessed March 6, 2023).

⁴¹ Reuters, "Congo to Reassess U.N. Withdrawal Plan after Deadly Protests."

⁴² Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Rwanda and the DRC at Risk of War as New M23 Rebellion Emerges: An Explainer," June 29, 2022, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/rwanda-drc-risk-of-war-new-m23-rebellion-emerges-explainer/>, (accessed March 20, 2023).

⁴³ UNEP, "Can the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Mineral Resources Provide a Pathway to Peace?" UNEP, September 20, 2022, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/can-democratic-republic-congos-mineral-resources-provide-pathway-peace>, (accessed June 19, 2023).

⁴⁴ UNEP, "Can the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Mineral Resources Provide a Pathway to Peace?"

⁴⁵ UNEP, "Can the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Mineral Resources Provide a Pathway to Peace?"

⁴⁶ "M23 March 23 Movement," Global Security, 2023, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/m23.htm>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁴⁷ Angela Thompsell, "History of the Second Congo War." ThoughtCo, February 21, 2019. <https://www.thoughtco.com/second-congo-war-battle-for-resources-43696>,

Among the groups, the M23, or Congolese Revolutionary Army, plays a particular role in the recent uprising of insurgent groups within DRC.⁴⁸ The group was named after the March 23, 2009, peace settlement between the Congolese Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) and the Congolese government.⁴⁹ M23 was formed in 2012 by a former member of the CNDP, aiming to rebel against the Congolese Government to complete the March 23 peace settlement and political representation for Tutsis in DRC.⁵⁰ The M23 group has launched multiple insurgencies since its founding. In 2013, intense fighting and M23 mobilization led to the December 2013 Nairobi Declaration between the government of DRC and the M23 group, addressing some of M23's concerns and decreasing M23's presence.⁵¹ In 2021, M23 launched an insurgency to address ongoing historical and ethnic grievances. The CNDP and militant groups were unable to negotiate the integration of fighters into the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and to address economic and political prejudices among Congolese Tutsis.⁵² These failed negotiations resulted in attacks against FARDC and MONUSCO in the North-Western portion of the Kivu Province near the DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda border.⁵³ Through its insurgencies, the M23 has displaced one million people since March of 2022.⁵⁴ In March 2023, M23 leaders called for a ceasefire and negotiations with the Congolese government for political progress, though many civilian attacks in May and June would continue.⁵⁵ In May 2023, the East African Community (EAC) stated it would deploy troops to ensure a withdrawal of M23 and a ceasefire.⁵⁶

Despite the M23's powerful resurgence, in August 2022, MONUSCO reported the mission was ready to assess the complete withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission from the DRC.⁵⁷ Preparations for MONUSCO's withdrawal have been underway since 2018, as the mandate was initially set to expire in 2020 but has been extended through 2024 to help with governance-building efforts and delivering aid to citizens.⁵⁸ While underway, dealing with current uncertainties and the resurgence of M23 has made some UNSC Member States question how DRC will handle the continuous threats.⁵⁹ UNSC Member States have proposed a further reduction of troops to facilitate the transition of the mission out of the DRC, suggesting the UN mandate should be taken over by the EAC to promote the development of bilateral initiatives throughout the continent.⁶⁰ As of September 2023, there has been no official agreement in UNSC on what MONUSCO's withdrawal will look like, nor has MONUSCO's official withdrawal date been changed.⁶¹

⁴⁸ "M23 March 23 Movement," Global Security, 2023, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/m23.htm>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁴⁹ "M23 March 23 Movement," Global Security.

⁵⁰ "M23 March 23 Movement," Global Security.

⁵¹ DRC Signs Peace Deal with M23," Deutsche Welle, December 12, 2013. <https://www.dw.com/en/congo-signs-peace-deal-with-m23-rebels-in-nairobi/a-17292474>, (accessed June 17, 2023).

⁵² Ladd Serwat, "Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement (M23)." ACLED, March 23, 2023. <https://acleddata.com/2023/03/23/actor-profile-m23-drc/>, (accessed June 21, 2023)

⁵³ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Rwanda and the DRC at Risk of War as New M23 Rebellion Emerges: An Explainer - Democratic Republic of the Congo," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, June 29, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/rwanda-and-drc-risk-war-new-m23-rebellion-emerges-explainer>, (accessed May 21, 2023).

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Killings, Rapes by Rwanda-Backed M23 Rebels," Human Rights Watch, June 13, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/13/dr-congo-killings-rapes-rwanda-backed-m23-rebels>, (accessed June 21, 2023).

⁵⁵ James Tasamba, "M23 Rebels Declare Immediate Cease-Fire with Government in Congo," Anadolu Agency, March 7, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/m23-rebels-declare-immediate-cease-fire-with-government-in-congo/2839403>, (accessed June 19, 2023).

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Killings, Rapes by Rwanda-Backed M23 Rebels."

⁵⁷ United Nations, "New Strategy for Mission Withdrawal from Democratic Republic of Congo Tailored to Provinces' Security Needs, Special Representative Tells Security Council," United Nations, December 7, 2020, <https://press.un.org/en/2020/sc14374.doc.htm>, (accessed May 15, 2023).

⁵⁸ MONUSCO, "Mandate," United Nations, February 19, 2016, <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/mandate>, (accessed March 5, 2023).

⁵⁹ United Nations, "New Strategy for Mission Withdrawal from Democratic Republic of Congo Tailored to Provinces' Security Needs, Special Representative Tells Security Council."

⁶⁰ Security Council Report, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Vote on MONUSCO Mandate Renewal and the 1533 Sanctions Regime," December 19, 2022, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2022/12/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-vote-on-monusco-mandate-renewal-and-the-1533-sanctions-regime.php>, (accessed June 20, 2023).

⁶¹ Presse, AFP-Agence France, "Too Early to Withdraw UN Forces in DRC, US Warns," Barrons, June 26, 2023, <https://www.barrons.com/news/too-early-to-withdraw-un-forces-in-drc-us-warns-864257ff>, (accessed September 27, 2023).