

# **Sub-regional interventions in Africa: Why EAC intervention fail in DR Congo Conflict Resolution?**

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## **Abstract**

Conflict dynamics in Africa have seen emergence of intra-regional interventions as the most preferred in conflict resolution over the conventional UN-led peacekeeping operations. In recent times, the East African Community became the latest sub-regional organization that has put to a litmus test its peacekeeping capability on the continent following ECOWAS and SADC. Hence, this paper examines EAC's military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo and why it failed to stabilize and resolve the Congolese conflict. Although there is little scientific literature available on EAC conflict resolution approaches, the research relied on twofocus group discussions and interviews with seven regional experts on peace and security issues in EACas well as review of related reports. The findings show that first, the EAC Regional Force mandate was ambiguous. This stemmed misinterpretation that saw DRC exert pressure on the regional force to combat the belligerent groups. Secondly, diverging political interests in the deployment of regional troops portrayed a disjointed intervention as states-centred interests digressed from the bloc's objectives. Thirdly, there was an absence of clear framework for the troops as budget and others were sketchy. Lastly, the EAC's adoption and mainstreaming of Kenya-led Inter-Congolese peace dialogue saw parties' interest to dialogue diminish. This paper, as the first written after EAC troops' withdrawal in the DRC, will exceptionally contribute to the field of peace and security, especially for future researchers interested in EAC peacekeeping. Thus, the findings above offer EAC an inward reflection to avert these hurdles in subsequent peacekeeping missions.

## **Keywords**

Peacekeeping,  
intervention,  
conflict,  
resolution,  
military,  
deployment,  
EACRF,  
EAC,  
stability,  
combat

## Introduction

The field of conflict resolution has evolved to include military interventions as a strategy for addressing conflicts and achieving international peace. And Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter codifies major principles which guide the action or inaction in international relations with regard to existence of any threat to peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression so as to maintain or restore international peace (UN Charter 1945). Further amendments of the Charter later included military interventions in a sovereign state when human rights are violated. However, military intervention continues to be a subject of controversy both when it occurs and when it fails to occur (Ramuhala, 2010). For instance, foreign military interventions in Africa, such as the deployment of French troops to Mali in 2012 and North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011, all sidelined the African Union. This attracted criticism over the continent's inability to intervene, but instead opened its doors for external interest-driven interventions. This coerced the African leaders to reconsider new thought on the idea of "African solutions to African problems," given that the AU has portrayed the capacity to intervene in internal conflict situations (Saunders, 2013).

To internalise continental interventions, the UN and the African Union have pushed forward capable African sub-regional organizations in peacekeeping operations to restore stability in armed conflict situations. The Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and lately East African Community (EAC) have focused on intra-regional peacekeeping in a hunt to restore stability and economic development. Literally, ECOWAS became the first sub-regional organization to provide military leadership on the continent in the member states' political crises. It deployed troops to Liberia 1990, Sierra Leone 1997 and Guinea Bissau 1999. These deployments tamed the instabilities in the affected states in the budding days of the African Union. Presently, rapid

ECOWAS peacekeeping missions have been witnessed in the West African region. In southern Africa, SADC shoulders own political upheavals with military interventions in DRC 2013, Mozambique 2021 and again in DRC 2024. Sub-regional organizations register successes as well as failures in military interventions (Ramuhala, 2010). Nevertheless, not all of them are experienced in peacekeeping like UN. For instance, EAC, which militarily intervened in DRC in 2022, faced serious challenges which this paper centres on. It tries to provide in-depth analysis by answering why EAC failed to restore peace to the eastern DRC.

The East African Community has the oldest Customs Union in Africa and was rated the most integrated Regional Economic Community in 2020 by the African Regional Integration Index (ARII) 2020. This achievement springs from long-term deep economic cooperation among the Partner States. EAC was founded to bolster economic cooperation between Uganda and Kenya in 1917. Tanzania joined in 1927 after Germany gave it up to the British under the Treaty of Versailles signed on 28 June 1919, then making East Africa a full British protectorate (Dougherty, 1966). After individual independence, the three founding members formalized the East African Community in 1967, focusing on common market and customs union tariffs to promote economic growth. A decade later in 1977, the community disintegrated over inequitable distribution of costs and benefits, ideological differences, and personality clashes (Kibua and Tistensen, 2005). Meaning, the troika became embroiled in disagreements leading to crumbling of economic structures amongst themselves. Fortunately, the Community was resuscitated on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2000 after the three initial Partner States ratified the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (1999). Burundi and Rwanda joined in 2007, followed by South Sudan in 2016, the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2022, Somalia in 2024. The bloc currently has eight Partner States with population nearing 350 million and has access to

extensive coastlines from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean.

Given its prowess in economic cooperation, the EAC, on the other hand is an infant in peacekeeping, revealing its partially institutionalised security structures. For instance, the EAC Early Warning regional centre (EACWARN) lacks an intervention mechanism, making the center partially operational. The Community also lacks troops training facility and hardware. Yet the region, not known for its peacekeeping capability drew international attention with the expeditious deployment of East African Community Regional Force or EACRF to DRC in November 2022 to stabilize and sustain regional harmony upon March 23 (M23) resurgence.

This article examines the EAC peacekeeping mission in DRC and reasons why it failed to restore calm yet it envisioned lasting peace through concurrent military and diplomatic intervention approaches. The research centres on interviews and focus group discussions with regional experts on peace and security in EAC as well as secondary data through journals and reports. The work contributes to the limited literature on EAC's peacekeeping endeavors for regional stability by being the initial article to explore the causes of the bloc's unsuccessful mission. Hence, making it the foundation for future research on EAC conflict resolution capability. The structure includes insights on legitimacy of emerging intra-regional interventions, which have recently been the most preferred in international peacekeeping. It also highlights DRC's admission into the EAC, the EAC-led Nairobi Process that laid ground for regional troops deployment to DRC as well as the reasons EAC could not stabilize the security situation, and conclusion.

### **Legitimacy of emerging sub-regional interventions in Africa**

There is an argument that the interventionist policies pursued by the United Nations and donor communities can be seen as reflecting neo-

colonial and imperialist tendencies (Murithi, 2000). This suggests the significance of internal leadership in peace building processes, particularly in Africa. For the AU internal leadership, the African Union Constitutive Act (2000) Article 4 (h) stipulates the specificities under which the Union intervenes in member states to prevent grave violations of human rights when flagged or intervenes for purposes of restoring rule of law. This is, however, true for the African sub-regional organizations to indeed intervene in member states when human rights are violated due to armed conflicts or potential conflict spillover to the region.

That being the case, notably, there is an observed paradigm shift in manner the African states are currently addressing regional instability while mindful of the extolled phrase, 'African Solutions to African Problems.' In principle, African states were initially embedded in the UN peacekeeping missions as the most preferred approach to restore peace in Africa (Katharina, 2011). However, there is an increasing drift from this peacekeeping model as Africans front solution avenues to regional conflicts. This turn has been witnessed at the sub-regional levels in ECOWAS, SADC and recently EAC for taking up ownership of regional conflict matters to seek for solutions. Even so, this does not relegate the UN to the edge, but still remains an important technical and resource asset in the center for the success of the African-led peacekeeping operations. In 2023, the United Nations Security Council passed its Resolution, the UNSCR 2719(2023) on cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations to sub-regional organizations in maintenance of international peace and security. This allows the African Union-led peace support operations authorized by the UN Security Council to access contributions for such operations.

The UNSCR 2719 corresponds to the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's 2011 report that regional and sub-regional organizations possess distinct power, influence, and opportunities to address crisis situations within their specific regions. He further added that creators of the United Nations Charter

demonstrated foresight by envisioning a global security framework that incorporates the involvement of regional arrangements. This collaboration can take the form of leading initiatives, providing support, sharing burdens, deploying forces in a sequential manner, or engaging in joint operations (UN, 2011). In short, a 'division of labour' as Khudaykulova (2023) coins it. Similarly, the involvement of the African sub-regional blocs in peacekeeping is in the spirit of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) which formed the African Peace and Security Architecture or APSA to provide technical and financial support to its sub-regional organizations and to partner on prevention, management and resolution of conflicts (African Union, n.d.)

This approach has particularly gained appraisals for reduced external interventions in African sub-regional affairs. It somewhat presents a clear understanding of the historical, socio-economic and political dynamics of an individual state or region's conflict dynamics. This, undoubtedly, bolsters more confidence and legitimacy of the sub-regional peace interventions (Khudaykulova, 2023). Additionally, sub-regional organisations' proximity to the conflict situation positions them to better anticipate conflicts and manifest greater popular legitimacy in conflict zones than international mediators and peacekeepers (Moolakkattu, 2010). Work of Aning and Atuobi (2009) posits that contemporary strategic partnerships of the UN and to AU trickle down to sub-regional peacekeeping actors, effective responses and collaborations on various crises have demonstrated that when collaboration between the UN and regional organizations is implemented correctly, it fosters success as evidenced in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Burundi peacekeeping operations.

Brosig (2013) noted that before 2003 and after the end of the Cold War, a significant change from UN interventions to non-UN after 2003 was observed. And so concluded that there is a lasting trend of regionalization in peacekeeping in Africa. The UN and the AU are increasingly working with the Regional Economic Communities to

perform operational functions of peacekeeping and relying on the regional security mechanisms for the implementation. Notwithstanding, not all sub-regional organizations are considered experienced in peacekeeping like the UN. However, their efforts are vital in containing some conflicts on the continent (Khudaykulova, 2023).

In contrast, other scholarships argue that sub-regional peacekeeping operations have serious limitations that have seen some missions fail at commencement or become stagnant. Aning & Atuobi (2009) argue that there is an element of political disunity among troops contributing states that limits the extent of the peace and security agenda, highlighting the recognition that involvement in domestic conflicts continues to be a highly delicate and contentious matter for regional peacekeeping actors. They lay emphasis on the tendency to easily manipulate the regional peacekeeping actors by political interests through hegemonic actors in the RECs as this proves failure to champion peaceful conflict resolutions. At the sub-regional level, ECOWAS was confronted in the 1990s with its peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone for siding with the then ruling governments. This according to Coleman (2011) led to the concern raised by Senegal and Guinea about the neutrality and impartiality of the intervention by the bloc, and tendency for frequent hijacking by any member country to serve their political interests.

Coleman further submits that governments recognize that their national or regime interests are at stake, and so signal assistance. This leads to solidarity deployments as deploying and host governments perceive common interests that unite them. On the other hand, impartial regional peacekeeping operations tend to limit the pursuit of national interests beyond regional peace and security. In the end, they offer fewer incentives for extensive participation or sustainable solutions (Coleman 2011). This behaviour, most often, sidelines other parties to conflicts and further complicates peaceful avenues for conflict settlement in member states entangled in wars.

## Admission of DR Congo into East African Community

Despite its long-lived political instability orchestrated by vast natural resources and governance, the Democratic Republic of Congo has had decades of socio-economic contact with five EAC states. It neighbours Rwanda, Uganda, South Sudan, Burundi and Tanzania, making its admission into the Community inevitable. The retired President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta among other regional leaders had earlier persuaded DRC to join the bloc. And in 2019, DRC President Felix Tshisekedi wrote to the then EAC Chair, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, expressing Kinshasa's interest to join the economic bloc as the seventh partner. As of 2021, at the 21st Ordinary Meeting of the East African Community Heads of State, the application of DRC to join the Community was discussed (EAC, 2022). The Summit then made a decision directing the EAC Council of Ministers to conduct a Verification Mission promptly while adhering to the established procedure for admitting new members to the EAC. This step was taken to ensure a thorough assessment and evaluation of the DRC's eligibility and readiness for membership in the EAC.

In January 2022, the negotiations between the DRC and EAC were successfully conducted in Nairobi. During these negotiations, Kinshasa reaffirmed its interest to join the economic community for increased trade, investment, areas of cooperation, and to strengthen and formalise relations with the EAC Partner States (EAC, 2022). In the negotiation phase, delegation from President Tshisekedi's office strongly proposed forming an organ of EAC dubbed East African Natural Resources and Mining to be hosted in Kinshasa according to the 2022 unpublished report of the negotiations. But the bloc had to make it clear that DRC could not determine that since there are Community procedures of forming an organ of the bloc and capacity-assessment of the potential hosting partner state. This remained against the interest of the DRC, and upon official admission in March 2022, President Tshisekedi reverberated that it was DR Congo's inclination to

see creation of new organ of EAC solely riveted on mining, natural resources and energy seated in Kinshasa (EAC Secretariat, 2022). This disposition shows DRC's quest for immediate benefits of integration as the proposed organ would have legitimacy under the regional auspices to manage its rich natural resources and lobby for international markets.

Indeed, DRC presents vast economic benefits to the bloc including 70 percent of the world's cobalt deposits and other abundant natural resources deemed strategic for trade expansion (Centre for Strategic International Studies, 2024). Also, the nearly 100 million DRC population means wider market access for EAC whose combined population nears 350 million inhabitants spanning the continent from the Indian Ocean to Atlantic Ocean. For DRC's admission, EAC was buoyant for the reasons above and its accessibility to the Atlantic Ocean to diversify trade shipping routes to benefit from the ambitious African Continental Free Trade Area or AfCFTA. As the bloc centres on widening and deepening cooperation in all sectors, DRC inclusion is undoubtedly a milestone with potential to significantly contribute to the economic growth and development of the EAC and DRC (Trade Finance Global, 2022).

Then, DRC's admission was criticised by section of Congolese for not fostering immediate gains as Kinshasa anticipated, but rather a 'reckless decision', DR Congo's former Minister of Foreign Affairs Raymond Tshibanda opposed as quoted by (Aljazeera, 2022). Some regional integration commentators also depicted Kinshasa's political instability as yet another burden the community would shoulder alongside South Sudan's after admission in 2016 while the latter grappled with violent conflict. But apart from the economic reasons, security challenges appeared to be paramount reason DRC joined the community for assistance. And so, concerns of exporting conflict to EAC were at all not making sense to the bloc as it sees benefits outweighing the cons. This compelled EAC to bear the responsibility to try forge peace in the eastern part of the DRC.

## The EAC dual-track intervention in DR Congo

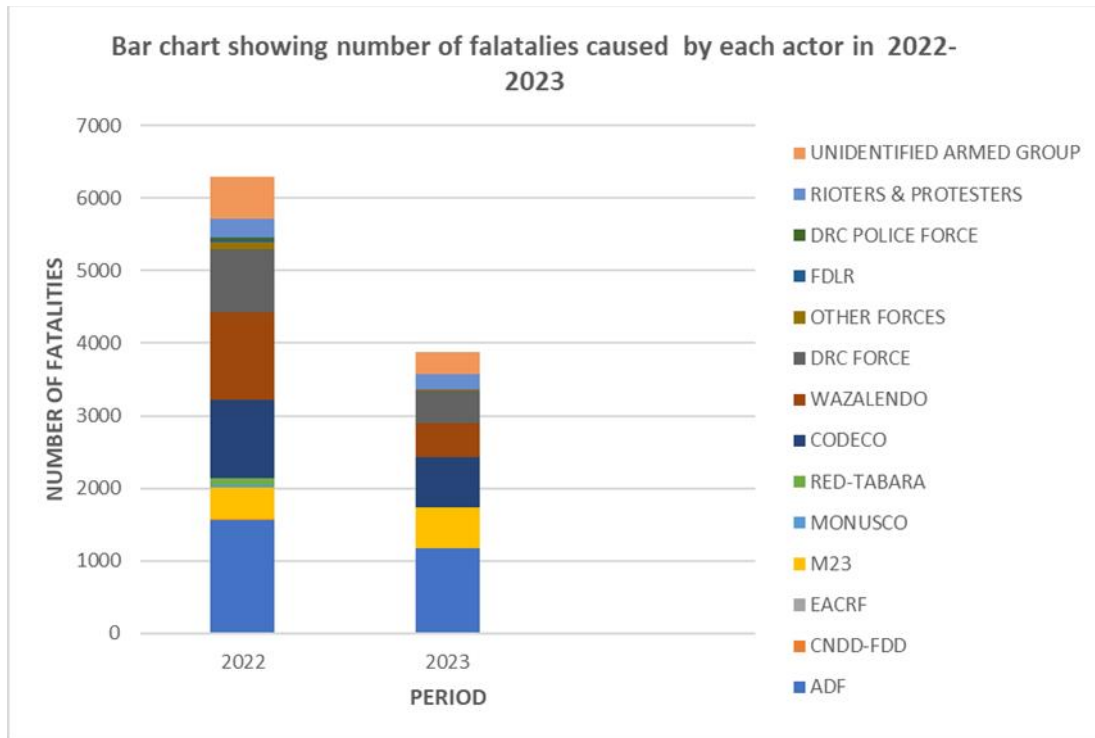
The EAC-led Nairobi process is a pioneering dual-track intervention that simultaneously combines military operations and political dialogue between the DRC government and various armed groups. Its utilization of both military and diplomatic strategies offered a distinctive and constructive intervention model. In order to effectively resolve long-lasting conflicts, Diamond and McDonald (1996) work proposes a multitrack diplomacy system strategy that offers multiple tracks simultaneously - at least two. Their argument states that challenges in one track can be offset by engaging in another complementary track. Drawing on this strategy, the EAC dual-track was a viable approach for the Community to negotiate a sustainable solution to decades of insecurity that has paralysed eastern DRC.

Few weeks after admission in 2022, the Kinshasa administration entered yet another negotiation with EAC having on the table peace restoration interest to its eastern part plagued by more than 120 active armed groups fighting the government in Kinshasa. Earlier, storms of Anti-United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or MONUSCO, protests rocked Kinshasa and Goma cities as Congolese called for the UN peacekeeping mission to leave citing 'ineffectiveness' in meeting citizens' expectations that included civilian protection and restoration of calm (Aljazeera, 2022). The UN peacekeeping mission has been in DRC for nearly three decades since deployment in 1999, but has since failed to

resolve the conflict there putting it at odds with the Congolese interest. Meanwhile, M23 armed group resurgence in 2022, after close to a decade dormancy, was a pain in the neck for the Kinshasa administration. So, Kinshasa saw it wise to terminate the MONUSCO mandate and replace it with its new friend, EAC to restore peace. These raised substantial question about whether the EAC could really solve what the UN could not in decades given the latter's large budget exceeding a billion dollar.

Still, EAC was determined and decided to tackle the issue head-on and absorbed an ongoing Inter-Congolese dialogue (Nairobi I and II) in the third phase to create a dual-track EAC-led Nairobi Process. The EAC Heads of State then appointed the retired President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta as facilitator for the political track while EAC sustained dialogue between the Congolese government, armed groups, and local communities in eastern DRC. With the EAC intervention, President Felix Tshisekedi hoped the mission would be a turnover for his country to focus on socio-economic growth. To actualise this, the EAC-facilitated dialogue aimed at ensuring ceasefire, disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of groups into civilian populations, to expedite return of displaced Congolese to their homes (EAC, 2022). This ambitious intervention first called for a ceasefire between the Kinshasa government and the various armed groups which was fairly effective as there were notable decrease in casualties from both sides in a period from 2022 to 2023 during the EAC intervention.

Figure (I): Graphical representation of the DR Congo conflict showing decrease in fatalities caused by armed groups from 2022 to 2023 during the EAC intervention.



(The analysed data was obtained from ACLED 2022 to 2023 data set. The different community militias (Mayi Mayi..) were collapsed into Wazalendo militias.)

For long-lasting peace, the EAC envisioned disarming, demobilizing, reintegrating and evacuating the many foreign armed groups fighting in the DRC. The presence of these foreign armed groups such as Red-Tabara of Burundi, Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) from Uganda and Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda or FDLR from Rwanda have seen the rise of community militias that claim protection of their communities from foreign armed groups attacking them and looting properties. Politicians have also reportedly taken advantage of the status quo to arm the Wazalendo (community militias) to further their political interests (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2024). This exacerbated the security situation as there were already many actors in the same region. This compelled the EAC political track to centre on taming the belligerent groups through dialogue and confidence-building.

As for the military track, the EAC Chiefs of Defence Forces of the region negotiated the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) later adopted by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Summit of the Heads of State in July 2022. This saw the formation of the East African Community Regional Force or EACRF of more than 4,000 forces contributed from Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda and Burundi for deployment to the eastern DRC. Each Partner State was responsible for battalion's budget and logistics. And in September 2022, President Tshisekedi presided over the signing of the SOFA at his official residence in Kinshasa signalling a greenlight to the regional force deployment to his country. The Status of Forces Agreement delineates the duties and obligations of the EACRF when operating within DRC and the assistance and support that would be accorded by the DRC government in accordance with its constitution and relevant laws (EAC, 2022).

The EACRF mandate was envisioned to ‘contain, defeat and eradicate negative forces.’ This Agreement stipulated six months initial regional force deployment dependent on performance evaluation for renewal or termination. As of November 2022, the regional troops arrived in the DRC in phases with the Kenyan contingent first followed by Uganda and South Sudan. Well, Burundi and Uganda had earlier deployed troops in November and December 2021 respectively though on a bilateral agreement with the DRC. The agreement allowed the duo to crack down on their rebels operating in the eastern DRC. This spurred a contentious issue on whether Uganda and Burundi would remain objective in pursuit of regional goals while pursuing their national interests.

Unfortunately, shortly after the EACRF deployment, Kinshasa was already discontented with the regional troops, accusing them of ‘cohabiting’ with the M23 rebels and failing to militarily engage and defeat them (Voa of America, 2023). EAC categorically denied the accusation stressing its adherence to the mission mandate. Kinshasa, however, acclaimed the Burundian contingent as the most ‘active battalion’ and to the task. This implied that the Burundian battalion, contrarily, launched offensives against the armed groups in the eastern DRC. On the other hand, EACRF changed tone that it was only operating on a non-combative mandate and could not launch offensives on the armed groups. This misinterpretation of the regional force mandate caused divergence between the Kinshasa administration and the Arusha-based regional organization. As the mistrust peaked, DRC refused to renew the regional force mandate, forcing the EAC to withdraw troops by December 2023 despite increasing escalation of violence. For the nine-month operation, EAC boasts of troops’ achievements in civilian security in the Joint Operation Area and dominance patrols, facilitating return of humanitarian agencies and humanitarian access to local population, and reclaiming areas the armed groups had occupied (EAC, 2023). But Congolese have an opposing view, that the regional force was ‘ineffective’.

Again, DRC shifted to SADC for military intervention as a substitute for EAC.

### **Findings/Discussion: EAC failures to restore peace to DR Congo**

The East African Community’s recent focus on incorporating peacekeeping demonstrates Africa’s determination to seek homegrown remedies to conflicts that are holding the continent hostage from attaining economic independence. EAC recognizes that achieving its socio-economic development is a no-win without peace, hence the urge to funnel the meagre resources towards maintaining regional peace and stability. Nevertheless, its praiseworthy effort to address the long-standing conflict in the DRC faced drawbacks, leading to the withdrawal of regional troops and a stalemate in the political track of the Nairobi Process. This paper has examined four primary obstacles that hindered EAC from achieving its objectives in resolving the DRC conflict.

#### ***Ambiguous EACRF mandate***

The ambiguity of regional force’s mandate stirred a serious confusion and divergence between DRC and EAC immediately after troops’ deployment. The EAC Concept of Operations which contains the Status of Forces Agreement(SOFA) and other annexes stated that the EACRF would ‘defeat’ the armed groups and restore lasting peace in the DRC (EAC, 2022). Yet ‘defeat’ in military context denotes combat and overcoming an opponent to surrender by use of force.

Kevin (2020) argues that, “*Defeat is a mission task requiring the friendly force commander to deprive the enemy force and its commander of the means and will to interfere to a significant degree with the actions of the friendly forces and attaining friendly force objectives. Defeat can result from both the use of force or the threat of its use.*”



Even so, when EACRF was dispatched for DRC mission, its mandate abruptly transposed to a non-combative one against Kinshasa's expectation which had already perceived the regional troops as combative force to pursue and defeat the rebels. This became the epicentre for regional troops' withdrawal in the country. Oliveira (2016) argues that the use of force in self-defence is generally accepted without controversy. However, when it comes to using force for implementing a mandate and protecting civilians, the situation becomes much more contentious. He adds that even in intrastate conflicts, the use of force can give rise to challenges regarding impartiality and consent. Indeed, EAC would be partial had it accepted to militarily engage the armed groups. Definitely, the belligerent groups would thwart the complementary political track, the lifeline of the EAC intervention.

What is more, the EACRF mandate had provision of jointly planning and conducting operations with the government's Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) to 'defeat' the armed groups elements in the eastern DRC (EAC, 2022). Nonetheless, the FARDC pursues the groups with an offensive mandate. Yet, it reconcilable to EAC military diplomacy while the armed groups were expected to participate in dialogue with the government through the political track of the Nairobi Process. This was not viable. In the past, joint operations between FARDC and MONUSCO proved to taint UN force's reputation, as the government army committed violations of human rights, contrary to MONUSCO's mandate of protecting civilians (Denis, 2015). Consequently, the same impact would surface in a joint EACRF and FARDC operations.

### ***Absence of clear deployment framework***

The deployment of the regional troops was rushed, as some respondents argue, and that gave very limited time to develop a functional framework detailing sources of funding, types of military hardware to use, and logistical arrangements as well as reparation of soldiers killed or injured in the mission—whether the

EAC or sending Partner States should bear the cost, and how much to be paid. This appeared to ignore the fact that most deploying Partner States are grappling with economic meltdown, and financing the enormous resource-intensive military deployment was far-fetched. Hence, a delay in timely deployment of all contingents was evidenced. Although the UN pledged funding after EAC appealed for a \$250 million annual fund to sustain the troops, it was never disbursed until troops withdrew from DRC in December 2023 (The East African, 2023). While the African Union's generous \$2 million donation fetched from the Peace Fund's Crisis Reserve Facility was insufficient as the EACRF spending stood at \$4 million per month. But since the UN peacekeeping mission termination in DRC, the African Union Peace and Security Council anticipated redirecting portion of the UN Peace Fund to support the EAC, but proved bureaucratic for the urgent matter.

That being so, lack of clear funding avenues or funds insufficiency was largely a cloud of failure hovering over the regional bloc was the mandate renewed. Firstly, hungry soldiers while stationed on mineral-rich lands would not starve but instead turn to illegal mining, hence blurring the distinction between them and the rebel groups. Secondly, the EAC and the funding Partner States would not be able to provide timely military logistics, such as replacing damaged armored vehicles or aircrafts which would ultimately impede the troops' effectiveness.

As a result, the issue of inadequate funding often suggested potential failure and ultimate lack of relevance of EAC in DR Congo. That was if the UN still needed to stay too bureaucratic in disbursing the funds, and also if Kinshasa renewed EACRF mandate. However, not until the troops withdrew did the EAC discuss certain budgetary items in its 12th Joint Sectoral Councils on Cooperation in Defence Affairs, Interstate Security, and Foreign Policy Coordination in April 2024 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Even though the mission initially appeared functional without a clear structure, financial constraints

generally disadvantaged EAC as prolonged deployment was going to be infeasible.

### ***Diverging political interests***

Another downfall of EAC intervention is the presence of political disunity within the identical undertaking. The various interests emanating from Rwanda, DR Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya brought attention to the complex division in the DRC mission. There is consistent bad blood between DRC and Rwanda, likewise between Burundi and Rwanda, which demonstrate potential escalation into a regional conflict. For this reason, DR Congo refused to allow Rwanda to contribute on tinent to EACRF over long-standing accusations of the latter buttressing the M23 rebels. The UN and some international actors also reinforce this claim. In the end, Rwanda decided to closely monitor its borders with the DRC as it provided intelligence to EACRF. On the other hand, Kigali blames Kinshasa for providing weapons and integrating the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) into its army. The FDLR is a remnant group of the Rwandan 1994 genocide composed of Hutu ethnic group who fled to the eastern DRC hoping to regroup and overthrow the Tutsi-led Rwandan government. Similarly, Burundi blames Rwanda of providing training and weapons to the rebel group, Red-Tabara, in order to topple the government in Bujumbura. Often border closures ensue these diplomatic rifts.

In parallel, Uganda and Burundi aim to combat ADF and Red-Tabara, indicating that EAC was divided in command. This confirms Durch and England's assertion on military interventions that when states intervene in conflict resolution, they typically prioritize protecting their own interests or safeguard it. This situation presents a difficult setting for peacekeeping missions, as it can potentially falter teamwork and coordination among the units or organizations taking part. Subsequently, peacekeeping missions may be at risk of being unstable over challenges in setting a defined hierarchy and guaranteeing united actions towards a shared goal (Durch and England, 2009:13).

Furthermore, Tanzania, a member of SADC along with DRC, declined contributing contingent to EACRF despite involvement in the SOFA negotiations. At first, Tanzania deployed a 'submarine' strategy making it difficult to comprehend its position and interest during the negotiations through to troops' deployment. Even so, its behaviour later demonstrated solidarity deployment in the DRC. In a puzzling action, it briskly sent troops to the Southern African Mission in DRC or SAMIDRC in January 2024 following President Tshisekedi's request for intervention to 'eliminate the rebels'(The (East African, 2023)). Worth mentioning, Tanzania conducted a significant bombing campaign against M23 bases in eastern DRC in 2013. That saw the defeat of the rebels and became scattered (the African Defence Review, 2013). But they regrouped in 2022. By far, the Dodoma-based government was interested in a combat mission in DRC under the EAC umbrella. This demonstrate that Tanzania's behaviour presented an interest in solidarity deployment of EAC troops to support the Kinshasa government in defeating the belligerent groups. Yet, it was plunging the Community into early troubles of shutting peaceful resolutions and hijacking of the bloc in favor of President Tshisekedi's government. During its initial deployment, ECOWAS came close to losing credibility over solidarity missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s (Coleman, 2011). The same could more or less affect EAC's objective of sustainable peace restoration while restraining from the use of force. Ianchovichina and Bader (2018) argue that military interventions that are not neutral can be problematic as they can change the outcome of conflicts by providing direct military support or motivating the parties to gather more resources for war, or both. Adding that this amplifies division based on identity, leading to increased hostility between groups and raising the chance of conflict.

Inversely, Nairobi, once considered neutral during President Uhuru Kenyatta's term, became involved in a diplomatic rift with Kinshasa. President William Ruto, who emerged victorious in a democratic election in 2022 following a

tumultuous fall-out with his predecessor Uhuru, likely felt uneasy maintaining the diplomatic relations Uhuru had cultivated with the DRC which had also strategically kept Uhuru influential in the regional affairs through the EAC-led Nairobi Process. Two actions suggest this. Firstly, Kenya was leading EACRF with Major General Jeff Nyagah as the Force Commander who later resigned in April 2023 citing life-threatening letters and activities of foreign mercenaries who placed monitoring devices at his residence in the operation area (Nation, 2023). However, Kenya unilateral replaced him with Major General Alphaxard Muthuri Kiugu and sent him to DRC without consultation with Kinshasa which was deputising Nairobi in forces command. This action disappointed President Tshisekedi and took up campaigns emphasizing evaluation of EACRF (Voice of America, 2023). Secondly, in what seemed intentional for President Ruto, Corneille Nangaa, the former head of DR Congo's electoral body, together with the leader of M23 in December 2023 announced in Nairobi the launch of a new political-military alliance with M23 rebels and other armed groups claiming to restore peace in the DRC (BBC, 2023).

This development upset Kinshasa administration, which reacted by recalling its ambassadors to Kenya and Tanzania, and told Kenya to cease supporting rebel activism in its land. Well, the DRC also recalled the ambassador to Tanzania for questioning because the country hosts the EAC in Arusha. Although Kenya responded it had no hand in DRC internal affairs, its refusal to arrest the Congolese rebel leaders further irritated Kinshasa. DRC later announced that that would attract 'consequences' for Kenya hosting the Congolese rebel leaders on its soil (BBC, 2023). As of December 2023, the bilateral relations between the two countries seriously waned. Literally, this sudden twist of events has a chilling effect on the political track of the EAC-led Nairobi Process, the only remaining track after Kinshasa dislodged its complementing military track in eastern DRC.

On the hand, for reasons not disclosed, Kinshasa failed to honour the SOFA agreement signed tasking it to shoulder administrative costs for the Force Headquarters offices, staff officers' accommodation, civilian staff salaries as well as electricity (African News (2023).

All these diverging political interests pinned the EAC to the wall and incapacitated it from resolving the DRC conflict. So, this uncoordinated approach gave Kinshasa a chance to drift far from possible peaceful intervention as it resorted to Southern African combatant force. In short, EAC'S disunity in resolving DRC instability was a notable limitation in furthering its regional peacekeeping and security agenda.

### ***Mainstreaming into EAC Inter-Congolese dialogue***

The EAC adopted a Kenya-initiated inter-Congolese dialogue that had made positive strides and mainstreamed it into the EAC, cladded as the EAC-led Nairobi Process. Initially, the ex-President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, and the DRC President Felix Tshisekedi forged a strong bond after Uhuru attended Tshisekedi's 2019 inauguration in Kinshasa. Nation Africa reported that Uhuru was the only African Head of State in attendance in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa. Other African Heads of State were reserved following the questionable election outcomes that gave Tshisekedi a win. Barely two weeks into the office, President Tshisekedi made an official two-day visit to Nairobi in what appeared as payback for Uhuru's political goodwill. During their meeting, Uhuru stated that Kenya was committed to helping DRC achieve political stability, having learned valuable lessons from its past political tensions (Nation Africa, 2019). And in April 2022, Kenya hosted the first Inter-Congolese dialogue referred to as Nairobi I, held in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. The dialogue centered on finding a lasting solution to the Congolese conflict by bringing the representatives of the local armed groups in eastern DRC to dialogue with their government. This was conducted

shortly after the DRC signed the Treaty of Accession into the EAC in Nairobi when Uhuru was the Chairperson of the Summit of EAC Heads of State.

A month later, the consultation phase for the dialogue (Nairobi II) was held in the eastern DRC's Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu provinces. Again, it attracted high participation from the government of DRC, representatives of armed groups, and representatives of the local communities (EAC, 2022). Both headed by Kenya, the Nairobi I and II phases of the Inter-Congolese dialogue got a good faith reception by both parties to the conflict, and this elevated hopes that it would usher in sustainable peace in the troubled eastern DRC. Given the above events, Kenya under Uhuru Kenyatta was a firm shoulder for DRC to lean on. While the DRC is already an EAC Partner State, the EAC offered to mainstream the dialogue after Nairobi I and II dialogues were successful under Kenya. Then, Kenya was stainless in the DRC internal affairs at a time DRC's immediate neighbors; Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and South Sudan lost credibility as neutral facilitators to restore peace over accusations of supporting some armed groups operating in the DRC.

Although the intents were clear for EAC taking charge of the process, the initial momentum and interests from the parties to dialogue quickly faded and emerged window of mistrust and suspicion, especially where Rwanda and Uganda under regional auspices now have a direct say in putting the DRC in order. Also remember, the EAC-inherited Inter-Congolese Dialogue was a product of the then flourishing bilateral ties between DRC and Kenya, which later became rocky with the end of Uhuru's presidential term in September 2022. At home, Uhuru faces opposition from President William Ruto, which hampered his facilitator role for the DRC dialogue. This greatly contributed to the lukewarm EAC-led Nairobi Process and the consequential withdrawal of regional troops in the DRC.

## **Conclusion**

The emerging sub-regional interventions in settling African political crises remain a golden development. They not only reduce the AU burden but also present greater potential for reaching lasting solutions when properly strategized and mediated by Africans. The recent EAC sub-regional intervention in DRC is remarkable in the bloc's assumption of new leadership role in regional stability and war diplomacy. However, it was majorly and suddenly confronted by conflicting political interests from Partner States, ambiguity in mandate leading to misinterpretations, parties' loss of trust after EAC mainstreamed the Inter-Congolese dialogue and lack of clear framework for operations. Regardless of the above challenges faced, lessons learned through the experience in the transient troops' deployment are certainly prerequisite to success in subsequent peacekeeping missions if proper efforts are put. Since establishment, EAC had all through focused on attainment of socio-economic development which saw it tops all RECs on the continent as the most integrated bloc in the Africa Integration Index 2020 ranking. Fortunately, its recent realignment to address regional insecurity, proven to retard development, is worthwhile.

The bloc can draw valuable insights from ECOWAS, renowned as the most experienced sub-regional organization in peacekeeping in Africa. Despite its initial military intervention challenges, it succeeded in the subsequent missions. In the 1990s, for the first time, it intervened in Liberia and Sierra Leone but faced a number of obstacles, some similar to EAC's, including conflicting political interests from member states. With admission of Somalia, EAC better irons out current flaws to succeed in peacekeeping and conflict resolution missions as al-Shabaab poses threat to the region. Although it faced hurdles in DRC deployment, EAC's determination to resolve the DRC conflict was brotherly. Throughout its communications, it circumvented referring to the belligerent groups

as rebels or terrorists, but instead as armed groups despite Kinshasa's parallel campaign. This choice of terminology concretely portrayed confidence building while hoping to journey towards a peaceful resolution. Meanwhile, conflicting political interests emanating from Partner States remain a thorn in the flesh, nevertheless, EAC can capitalize on rectifying the impediments encountered in the DRC mission to gain concrete footing. This will pave way forward to strengthen its peace and security structures upon which to hinge on the regional security agenda.

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