

II. Africa

Fighting in the DR Congo Risks Escalation to a Major War

by Dean Andromidas

Feb. 4—The conflict now raging in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) threatens to become a major war and spill over into other countries in the region. Recent headlines report that the M23, a militia of Congolese who are ethnically Tutsi, has captured the city of Goma in the eastern DRC. It is widely claimed that Rwanda is supporting the militia and even that Rwandan troops are participating in the fighting. The humanitarian crisis that has literally lasted for decades has taken a turn for the worse. Now the M23 has announced it will march on to Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC, and overthrow the government of President Félix Tshisekedi.

The background of this conflict dates back almost three decades to the Wars of the Great Lakes involving Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and the DRC, then called Zaire. Those wars caused first an ethnic Tutsi genocide followed by a Hutu genocide, which brought Paul Kagame to power in Rwanda and led to the overthrow of the Zaire government and the bringing to power of Joseph Kabila with the full support of the Rwandan army. Despite three so-called democratic elections, which saw Joseph Kabila serve two mandates and current president Félix Tshisekedi his first, the eastern DRC has been in a state of almost constant war that many say has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands if not millions of Congolese.

There are reportedly a hundred violent groups in the country, including Ugandan, Burundian, and Rwandan militias opposed to their own governments

who are using the DRC as a base. These groups are supported through illegal mining operations in DRC. In addition, there are peace-keeping forces deployed by the United Nations, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC); the DRC is a member of all three. These forces include troops from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, and Burundi,



UN peacekeepers patrolling in Goma, the largest city in eastern DR Congo, after rebel forces took control of it.

MONUSCO/Aubin Mukoni

who have been dragged into the fighting. South Africa lost some 14 soldiers in the most recent violence. Some 2,000 to 4,000 Rwanda troops are said to be in the DRC fighting alongside the M23.

The entire situation took a major turn last year when DRC politician Corneille Nangaa, the head of the DRC's Independent National Election Commission, stepped into the conflict. The commission he headed had orchestrated the election of President Kabila and the 2018 election of President Tshisekedi. In 2024 Nangaa convened a conference in Nairobi, Kenya of opposition parties and formed what is now the Congo

River Alliance (AFC), of which the M23 is the principal military arm. Nangaa now appears in full military uniform. After the Nairobi conference, the Kenyan government reportedly forced Nangaa to leave the country following protests from the DRC. In a speech at that conference, Nangaa declared that the goal of the AFC is to overthrow the Tshisekedi government and take power to make the DRC “safe for business.”

While the DRC government has announced it is mobilizing to defend the country, the M23 is not only well armed, but is reportedly backed by up to 4,000 well-trained Rwandan troops. The AFC goal of marching to Kinshasa should not be taken lightly.

Calls for Ceasefire, Talks

All major powers, including the regional powers, are calling for a ceasefire and negotiations between the DRC government and the M23 and Rwanda. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio telephoned Rwandan President Paul Kagame Jan. 28 and called for an end to the fighting. Angolan President João Lourenço demanded the immediate withdrawal of Rwandan troops from Congolese territory on Jan. 29, amid fighting with the M23 rebels in Goma. President Lourenço, who is the African Union (AU) mediator between Congo and Rwanda, also urged the resumption of peace talks with the M23 and all other groups operating on Congolese territory.

The East African Community (Jan. 29) and the Southern African Development Community (Jan. 31) both called for a joint summit which would include Presidents Tshisekedi and Kagame in the hope to resolve the conflict through dialogue and negotiations. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova emphasized Jan. 31 the need for immediate peace talks among all parties.

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who



Instagram
Corneille Nangaa (right), a former official in the DRC government, now heads the AFC insurrection to overthrow the DRC government.

chairs the SADC, emphasized the need for a ceasefire and diplomatic engagement and stated that SADC will work with all parties involved. Mnangagwa also stressed the need for a concrete plan for peace and pledged support for the SADC forces in eastern DRC, reiterating that regional security is a shared responsibility.

The call for a summit has been endorsed by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) Moussa Faki Mahamat.



UN Photo/Cia Pak
Rwandan President Paul Kagame oversees the ongoing theft of DR Congo’s minerals for international corporations.

The DRC, located in the center of Africa, is a nation bigger than all of Western Europe. A protracted war would be a catastrophe for the entire continent. As Dr. Kwame Amuah has written, the grabbing of the DRC’s abundant mineral resources by international mining companies is at the root cause of this conflict. It is not only illegal mining that is fueling the militias and terrorists with cash from these international compa-



CC BY 2.5/Alaindg

The Grand Inga Hydroelectric Project will construct a series of dams to generate 40 GW of electricity. Here, the existing Inga I Dam, with the feeding canal for Inga II in the foreground.

project, to be completed over a decade, would generate as much as 40 gigawatts of electricity that could be shared among nine energy-thirsty countries that border the DRC.

The second project is [Transaqua](#), which would replenish Lake Chad by transferring water from tributaries of the Congo River through the building of a canal that would also be capable of carrying river shipping. The project would in fact create a development corridor, including a series of

nies. These sources are small compared to the massive “legitimate” mining that is extracting millions of tons of unprocessed raw materials from throughout Africa. The DRC is well endowed with much sought after raw materials, but these resources do not belong to “anybody” but to the DRC, a sovereign republic. They should be mined, processed, and used for the industrialization of the DRC and Africa, so the continent can become part of the international supply chain, not as a neo-colony but as an industrialized partner.

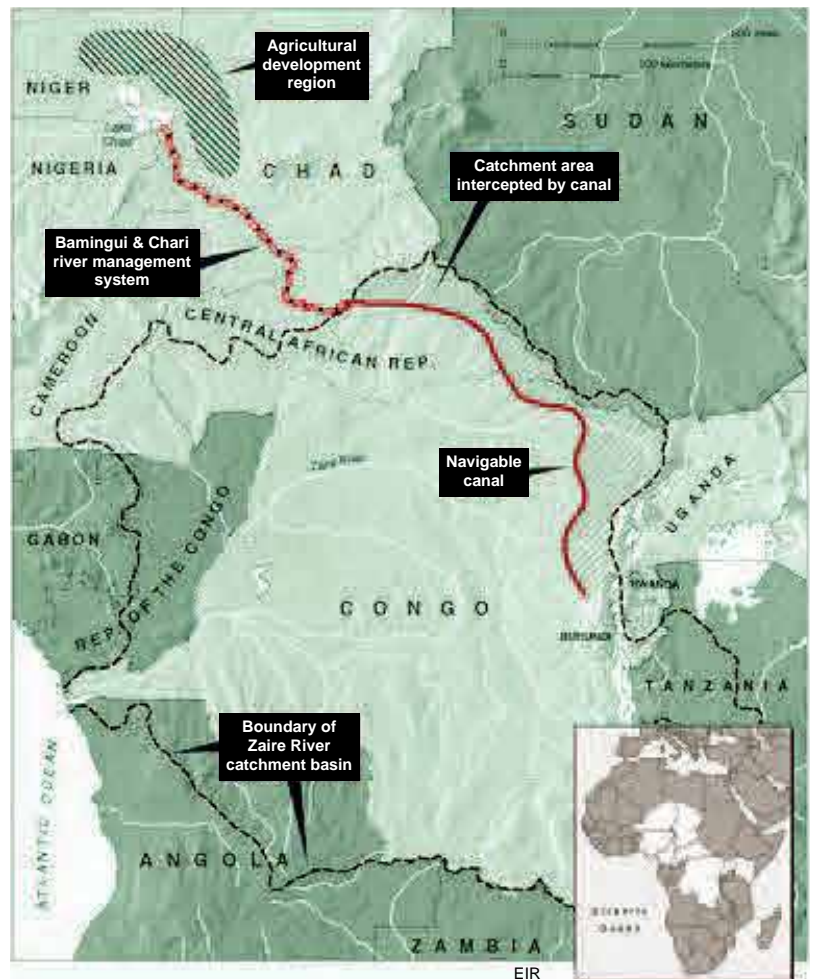
hydroelectric dams on the contributing tributaries.

Congo River Great Projects

As with all nations, the DRC’s most important resource is its youthful population, many of whom are seeking to flee to Europe or America and are willing to risk their lives with criminal migrant traffickers. The Schiller Institute, in its [“Report: Development Drive Means Billions of New Jobs, No Refugees, No War,”](#) singles out the crucial role of the DRC for two crucial “game changer” projects for the development of Africa. They center on the Congo River, the second longest river in Africa after the Nile, and the third largest in the world by discharge volume, following the Amazon and Ganges rivers.

The first of these projects is the [Grand Inga Hydroelectric Project](#), which envisions a series of additional hydroelectric dams near the mouth of the Congo River. The

Transaqua



Transaqua will build a navigable canal as the basis for a development corridor across DR Congo and will replenish Lake Chad via the Bamingui and Chari river management system.