

# DR Congo breaks relations with Rwanda as Rwandan-backed M23 militia seizes Goma

Alejandro López  
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On Monday, Goma, the largest city in the mineral-rich northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire), fell to the Rwandan-backed M23 militia. Situated near the Rwandan border, Goma serves as a key transport hub within a critical mining region.

According to AFP, between 500 and 1,000 Rwandan special forces reinforced M23 near Goma, while other sources estimate up to 4,000 troops. Despite support from mercenaries, Burundian troops, 12,000 UN peacekeepers who have reportedly avoided joining in the fighting, and a military mission of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the DRC has been unable to halt the M23 offensive. Congolese forces are retreating, and AFP stated that 'more than 1,200 Congolese soldiers have surrendered and are confined to the [UN base] at the airport' in Goma.

Tens of thousands of people are fleeing Goma, home to approximately 1 million people. Earlier this month, about 400,000 people fled fighting elsewhere in the region and headed toward Goma, joining about 7 million internally displaced people across DRC. Goma hospitals are overwhelmed by hundreds of casualties, and bodies lay on the streets. The Red Cross has warned that the unrest in Goma could lead to the spread of diseases, including the deadly Ebola virus.

The conflict between Rwanda and the DRC risks spiraling into full-scale war. Kinshasa has broken relations with Kigali, and DRC Foreign Minister Thérèse Kayikwamba Wagner accused Rwanda of 'frontal aggression, a declaration of war' at Sunday's UN Security Council meeting. Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi has already threatened to go to war with Kigali, with Rwandan President Kagame responding: "We are ready to fight."

Rwanda and the M23 militia now control nearly all of North Kivu province, a region rich in strategic minerals such as coltan, cassiterite (tin ore), gold, and wolframite,

which are essential for manufacturing mobile phones, laptops, electric vehicle batteries, and advanced weaponry. The economic and strategic stakes are very high, particularly after Donald Trump's re-election as US president, amid surging US-China competition for access to key raw materials and for strategic influence, particularly in Africa, and growing displeasure in Washington at China's ties with the DRC.

Kagame has framed Rwandan actions in DRC as protecting Congolese Tutsis from the Democratic Liberation Front of Rwanda (FDLR), which emerged in the eastern DRC from remnants of forces that committed the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda. However, the International Crisis Group states: "the goal appears less to root out the FDLR than long-term territorial expansion including grabbing mineral-rich regions. The M23 and Rwandan troops have remade areas under their de facto control by embedding their own administrations and pushing out local civilian leaders who oppose them."

Rwanda has illicitly benefited from the plundering of DRC mineral wealth for decades, particularly coltan and gold, via smuggling. Analysts estimate that Rwanda's mineral exports, which surpass \$1 billion annually, include a significant portion of resources illicitly sourced from the DRC. M23 is facilitating the smuggling of coltan and gold into Rwanda, where these minerals are then exported as Rwandan products. Jason Stearns, a DRC expert told Reuters that Rwanda's mineral exports had doubled over the past two years, saying "a fair chunk of that is from the DRC."

The fighting today threatens to ignite a Third Congo War. The First Congo War (1996–1997) began when US-backed Rwanda and Uganda supported Laurent-Désiré Kabila in toppling the French-backed dictator of Zaire, Mobutu Sese Seko. Mobutu had provided refuge to former Hutu-extremist Rwandan officials, ex-Rwandan army soldiers, and members of the Interahamwe militia

responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which claimed 900,000 lives. After a brief truce, a Second Congo War (1998-2003) erupted, drawing in African nations including Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

These two Congo wars, sometimes dubbed “Africa’s World War,” left over 5 million dead, mostly through starvation and disease.

Two decades later, these conflicts are not developing as a proxy war between US and French imperialism, but as the imperialist powers seek to counter the growing commercial and industrial weight of China in Africa. This context makes the conflict particularly explosive, as it comes together with rising US-China rivalry and the threats of military aggression from the second Trump administration. Trump has called to annex the Panama Canal, Greenland and Canada and demanded Europe double its military spending in exchange for continued US “protection.”

Over the past decade, China has deepened its economic ties with the DRC, primarily through extensive investment in mining, particularly cobalt and copper. Chinese companies, such as CMOC Group and Zijin Mining, have major stakes in Congolese mines. The 2008 Sino-Congolese infrastructure-for-minerals deal, renegotiated in 2023, remains a cornerstone of the relationship, involving Chinese-built roads, hospitals, and other infrastructure in exchange for mining rights. China remains DRC’s largest trading partner and a key financier of infrastructure projects.

Influential voices within the US establishment are calling on Trump to crush Chinese influence in Africa and specifically in the DRC, using military force. Michael Rubin, a senior fellow at the influential American Enterprise Institute think-tank penned an article titled “If Trump Is Serious About China, He Can’t Ignore Africa.” Rubin wrote:

The Democratic Republic of Congo’s cobalt will be to the economy of the coming decades what Saudi Arabia’s oil was to the late 20th century. Cobalt is essential for the lithium-ion batteries that power the technology upon which the modern, industrialized world depends. The DRC also has tantalum necessary for everything from mobile phones and televisions to inkjet printers, digital cameras, and medical devices, and the germanium essential for the semiconductor

industry. Add rare earths, such as copper, gold, diamonds, and uranium, into the mix, and the true possible wealth of the DRC becomes obvious. The DRC is home to almost \$24 trillion in resources, much of it untapped.

Nor is the DRC alone. Somaliland, the Western-oriented democracy seeking international recognition of its statehood, has gas, oil, and rare earths. Mozambique’s liquefied natural gas discovery catapults the southern African country above Iraq, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, and the Republic of Congo are also resource rich.

Simply put, the defeat of China on the continent begins with wresting away the DRC. While the State Department praised DRC President Felix Tshisekedi as a democrat during Trump’s first term, he is a dictator and a stooge for China.

The European imperialist powers are also being drawn into war. Last year, the European Union signed the Critical Raw Materials Partnership with Kigali, a strategic agreement aimed at securing Rwanda’s supply of critical minerals—such as tantalum, tin, tungsten, and rare earth elements—many plundered from DRC, for the EU’s green and digital transition. The agreement explicitly aims to reduce dependence on China for critical raw materials.

Halting the downward spiral of war requires unifying the working class across the African continent in struggle against imperialist war and imperialism’s accelerating turn towards neocolonial military aggression. This requires building an international socialist movement in the working class against imperialism and African bourgeois nationalism, including the corrupt regimes that emerged from the formal independence of African countries from imperialism in the 20th century.



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