



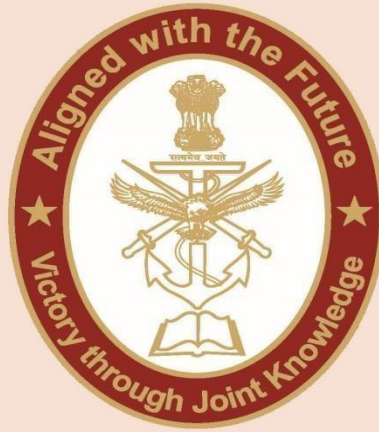
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INDIA'S CRUCIAL ROLE IN BRINGING PEACE TO THE DRC: MEDIATING AMID GLOBAL TENSIONS AND MINERAL INTERESTS

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India's Crucial Role in Bringing Peace to the DRC: Mediating Amid Global Tensions and Mineral Interests



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Abstract

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) stands at a crucial intersection where geopolitics, natural resources, and regional conflicts converge. President Felix Tshisekedi's recent proposal to the United States and Europe—offering direct access to the DRC's vast mineral wealth in exchange for intervention to end the ongoing violence—highlights the complexity of the crisis. While this move underscores the country's desperate need for stability, it also raises critical questions about sovereignty, foreign influence, and long-term regional security. This article delves into the intricate dynamics of the conflict, the geopolitical chessboard, and the potential pathways forward.

Background: The Persistent Crisis in Eastern Congo

The DRC, endowed with some of the world's richest deposits of cobalt, lithium, tantalum, and other critical minerals, has long been plagued by conflict. The eastern region, in particular, has suffered decades of violence, fuelled by ethnic tensions, competition over resources, and external interventions. One of the most notorious armed groups in the region is the March 23 Movement (M23), a rebel faction composed mainly of ethnic Tutsis that has, in recent years, intensified its operations.ⁱ M23, reportedly backed by Rwanda, has captured key towns in the North Kivu province, including the strategic city of Goma. The group's advances have displaced millions, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile, accusations of Rwanda's direct military involvement have heightened regional tensions, with Kinshasa calling for international intervention.

The Role of External Players

The conflict in eastern Congo is not merely a local struggle; it is deeply entangled with broader geopolitical interests. The United States, China, and the European Union are all vying for control over the region's lucrative mineral resources.

- **China's Position:** China currently enjoys significant influence over Congo's mining sector through long-term contracts and infrastructure investments. Beijing's dominance in cobalt and lithium extraction has given it an edge in the global supply chain for electric vehicles and renewable energy technologies.ⁱⁱ
- **Western Interests:** The US and Europe, recognizing the strategic importance of Congo's resources, have recently increased efforts to secure direct mineral supplies.ⁱⁱⁱ The Biden administration's push for supply chain diversification, aimed at reducing dependency on China, aligns with Tshisekedi's proposition.
- **Rwanda and the EU:** The European Union has also been engaging with Rwanda for mineral procurement, despite allegations that Kigali is benefiting from illegally smuggled Congolese resources.^{iv}

Tshisekedi's Gambit: Minerals for Peace

In an unprecedented diplomatic manoeuvre, President Tshisekedi has openly suggested that the West bypass Rwanda and engage directly with Congo for mineral trade. The rationale behind this move is twofold:

1. **Breaking Rwanda's Grip:** By cutting off illicit supply routes, Kinshasa aims to weaken M23's financial and logistical support.
2. **Encouraging Western Engagement:** Tshisekedi believes that direct US and European involvement could deter further Rwandan aggression while fostering economic stability.

Presidential spokesperson Tina Salama underscored this strategy, urging Western buyers to source minerals transparently from the DRC rather than purchasing "looted" resources via Rwanda^v. The proposal carries significant geopolitical implications, as it forces Western nations to take a clear stance in the conflict.

Recent Developments: Reactions of Global Powers

US Sanctions and Policy Shifts

Last week, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on James Kabarebe, a top Rwandan military figure accused of coordinating support for M23.^{vi} This marks a notable shift in Washington's stance, signalling increased pressure on Kigali. However, beyond sanctions, the US has yet to outline a concrete intervention strategy. While Washington has expressed concerns over the conflict, its broader focus on countering Chinese influence in Africa might shape future actions.

The European Dilemma

EU foreign ministers recently debated potential sanctions against Rwanda, but internal divisions have prevented immediate action. The bloc has, however, hinted at reassessing its mineral agreements with Kigali. Notably, Belgium, the DRC's former colonial ruler, signed a deal with Kinshasa in 2023 as part of Europe's strategy to secure critical mineral supplies.^{vii} Yet, concerns remain over the EU's willingness to confront Rwanda directly, given Kigali's role as a strategic ally in counterterrorism and regional stability efforts.

Russia's Stand on the Issue

Russia has taken a firm diplomatic stance against the M23 insurgency, positioning itself as a stabilizing force in the region. Russian Permanent Representative to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, strongly condemned the actions of M23, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a withdrawal of rebel forces from occupied territories.^{viii} Unlike the West, Russia has not been directly accused of backing any faction in the conflict, allowing it to present itself as a neutral mediator.

Moscow's emphasis on diplomatic negotiations aligns with its broader strategy in Africa—expanding influence through non-military engagements while challenging Western dominance. Russia has urged external actors to cease their support for M23 and restart Angola-mediated peace talks. By positioning itself as a potential peace broker, Russia is signalling its growing interest in African geopolitics, particularly in countering Western influence.

Security and Military Analysis: Can Stability Be Achieved?

The prospects for peace in eastern Congo remain uncertain. Despite Tshisekedi's diplomatic outreach, M23 continues to strengthen its foothold.^{ix} Military operations by the Congolese army, backed by regional forces, have achieved limited success in reclaiming lost territory. The possibility of direct Western military intervention remains slim. Instead, diplomatic mediation, economic pressure, and regional peacekeeping efforts appear to be the most viable approaches. Key concerns include:

- **The Strength of M23:** The group has demonstrated resilience, and without decisive action, it may continue to threaten stability.
- **Rwanda's Calculations:** Kigali denies involvement, but geopolitical pressure could alter its strategic calculus.
- **The Role of the African Union:** Greater engagement from African leaders, beyond mere rhetoric, is needed to de-escalate tensions.

The Way Forward

The situation in the DRC remains volatile, but recent developments indicate that Africa might witness an unprecedented collaboration between the US and Russia in deploying joint peacekeeping forces. This prospect stems from the evolving relationship between former US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, both of whom share strategic interests in Africa.

With growing concerns over the effectiveness of traditional UN peacekeeping missions, there is speculation that leading mercenary groups—such as Russia’s Wagner Group and US-based private military contractors—could be deployed as an alternative peacekeeping force. This unconventional approach could represent a paradigm shift in conflict resolution, combining military capabilities with strategic diplomacy to stabilize the region. If executed correctly, such a joint initiative could serve as a model for future peacekeeping efforts in conflict-ridden regions. However, challenges remain, including coordination between two historically adversarial powers and ensuring that the interests of the Congolese people remain at the forefront.

Strengthening Regional Diplomacy

A more assertive diplomatic effort must be undertaken by the African Union, East African Community, and United Nations. Engaging Rwanda and the DRC in direct negotiations can help de-escalate tensions and facilitate confidence-building measures. Mediation efforts should focus on ensuring that Kigali halts support for M23 while Kinshasa commits to addressing governance issues that exacerbate instability.^x

Enhancing Economic Transparency

The illicit mineral trade fuels conflict and undermines governance in the DRC. Western nations must establish more stringent mechanisms to prevent the purchase of conflict minerals. This includes enforcing rigorous supply chain transparency laws and strengthening oversight bodies to ensure ethical sourcing of Congolese resources.

Supporting Security Sector Reforms

Kinshasa must prioritize security sector reform to strengthen its ability to counter insurgencies. International partners should assist in modernizing the Congolese army, providing training, intelligence-sharing, and logistical support. Addressing corruption within the security apparatus will also be crucial to ensuring long-term stability.

Encouraging Direct Western Investment in Congo's Mining Sector

A long-term strategy should involve increased investment from US and European companies in Congo's mining sector. This would not only create employment opportunities but also reduce dependence on Chinese companies that currently dominate the industry. Infrastructure projects and sustainable mining initiatives can drive economic growth while reinforcing the DRC's sovereignty over its resources.

A Broader Diplomatic Horizon: Can India Step In?

As regional peace efforts in the DRC continue to falter, a critical question emerges: Can a new actor, untainted by past colonial baggage and geopolitical rivalries, step in to bridge the divide? Enter India—a nation that has long maintained strong diplomatic and peacekeeping ties with Africa but has so far remained on the sidelines of the ongoing crisis.

India's engagement in Africa is not new. With deep-rooted historical ties, a growing economic footprint, and a legacy of non-alignment, India has positioned itself as a trusted partner rather than an opportunistic player. But beyond trade and investment, there lies a diplomatic role waiting to be played.

A Case for Indian Mediation

The African continent has always been a key pillar of India's foreign policy, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's '10 Guiding Principles for India's Africa engagement'^{xi} emphasizing sustainable development, security cooperation, and regional stability.

While India has traditionally avoided direct political intervention in African conflicts, its history of peacekeeping under the United Nations suggests otherwise. Indian troops have been among the largest contributors to UN missions in Africa, including in the DRC itself.

With the EAC and SADC struggling to bring conflicting parties to the table, India could leverage its position as a non-threatening actor to initiate fresh dialogue^{xii}. Unlike Western nations, which are often viewed with skepticism due to their historical interventions, and China, whose economic dominance raises concerns, India enjoys goodwill across Africa. A peace process facilitated by New Delhi could offer a credible alternative to the current diplomatic impasse.

India initiating an unlikely Partnership: The US and Russia solving the African crisis?

As the DRC conflict increasingly draws in external powers, India finds itself in a unique position to engage both Washington and Moscow—two nations with starkly opposing worldviews but a shared interest in Africa’s stability. With the United States imposing sanctions on Rwandan military figures and Russia positioning itself as a neutral mediator, there is room for an unprecedented trilateral effort.

India’s diplomatic balancing act—maintaining close ties with both the US and Russia—positions it as a potential bridge between two geopolitical heavyweights. A coordinated mediation effort, backed by India’s credibility, Russia’s diplomatic weight, and the US’s economic leverage, could shift the tide towards a sustainable ceasefire.

Moreover, as the conflict is intricately linked to mineral resources—critical for global supply chains—India’s growing interest in securing access to key minerals like cobalt and lithium provides an added incentive for New Delhi to play a more proactive role. A peace-driven approach, rather than a transactional one, could ensure that Congo’s vast resources are managed in a way that benefits its people rather than fueling further conflict.

Conclusion: A Defining Moment for India's Africa Policy

The DRC's mineral wealth has long been both a blessing and a curse, attracting external interests while fueling internal conflicts. Tshisekedi's proposal presents a unique opportunity for the West to engage more directly in stabilizing the region, but it also risks further entrenching foreign involvement in African affairs. Meanwhile, Russia's positioning as a mediator and the potential for US-Russia cooperation in peacekeeping efforts could redefine power dynamics in Africa. As global powers navigate this complex terrain, the fate of millions in the DRC hangs in the balance, awaiting a sustainable resolution to a conflict that has persisted for decades.

President Tshisekedi's offer represents a turning point in the DRC's struggle for peace and sovereignty. By leveraging its immense mineral wealth, Congo seeks not just economic partnerships but a strategic realignment that could reshape regional power dynamics.

The coming months will be critical. Will the West seize this opportunity to support Congo's sovereignty? Or will geopolitical hesitations allow the cycle of violence to persist? The fate of millions hangs in the balance, and the decisions made today will shape the future of Central Africa for generations to come. DRC's crisis is not just an African problem—it is a test of the international community's commitment to peace. With traditional mediators struggling to contain the violence, fresh voices must step in. For India, this presents a defining moment: Will it continue its largely economic engagement with Africa, or will it embrace a greater diplomatic role in shaping the continent's future? The answer lies not in grand statements but in action. If India, alongside the US and Russia, can carve out a meaningful mediation process, it will not only help stabilize a conflict-ridden region but also solidify its standing as a responsible global power.

DISCLAIMER

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Endnotes

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