

**DRC rebels warn SA of 'massacre'**  
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M23 forces have mocked 'old' and 'corrupt' South African troops ahead of a United Nations deployment.

South African troops and rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are preparing for war in the northeast of that country, a war that may determine whether the United Nations sticks to a more robust form of intervention in regional conflicts.

And although peace talks between M23 rebels and the DRC government resumed in Uganda's capital Kampala last Sunday, indications are that the rebels may attack South African forces in that country pre-emptively, as preparations to get -battle-ready are still taking place.

South African troops in the region's main and strategic town of Goma are moving into South Africa's Munigi base on the outskirts of Goma to build a "super-base" in anticipation of such an attack by M23 rebels, according to South African National Defence Force sources in the Congolese town.

M23, meanwhile, has dropped hints of coming attacks and has been trying to call in reinforcements.

"M23 received [rebel] troops from Rwanda and Uganda on Friday via Bunagana, a border between DRC and Uganda," said a source monitoring the region. "They are planning to be in Goma by the 15th of this month."

In a flurry of preparatory propaganda, M23 warned South Africa's Parliament in an open letter that it would not be responsible for a "mutual massacre" when attacked on its home turf. Using Twitter, it warned that UN forces, which will likely have South African troops on the front lines, would face "continuous deadly combat". It also mocked the South African forces as "corrupt" and "old".

### **Intervention brigade**

According to a source in the DRC, South African troops are being withdrawn from other bases in that country to concentrate forces and firepower at Munigi, which is strategically positioned to protect Goma from a rebel advance. The base came under heavy fire last November when it was overrun by rebels who temporarily took Goma.

South African military intelligence has apparently been warned that M23 plans to launch attacks on the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (Monusco) before a new intervention brigade confronts M23 head on. Both the intervention brigade, which is expected to start operating in coming weeks, and the main Monusco force include a significant number of South African soldiers.

Monusco, which has been operational in the DRC in various guises since 1999, is mandated to shoot back only when attacked. The intervention brigade, however, has been described as a peace-enforcement rather than a peacekeeping group and is intended to pacify the rebels.

The UN has traditionally stayed out of such forceful intervention, leaving it up to regional blocs or intergovernmental military alliances such as Nato. The African Union, with South Africa at the forefront, campaigned against the use of European forces in the intervention brigade, leaving South Africa to supply some – possibly most – of the troops who will be at the sharp end of the fighting.

But it remains unclear how many troops South Africa will commit to the action, or whether they will be better armed and supplied than their compatriots who recently faced rebels in Bangui, the capital of the

Central African Republic (CAR), in a battle in which 13 South African soldiers were killed. The SANDF continues to refuse to provide information on operational deployment or equipment. But this week rumours swirled in the defence force that Rooivalk helicopters, dispatched to within striking range of Bangui in recent weeks, had been withdrawn.

Soldiers involved in the battle of Bangui said that air support, even in the form of a single, well-armed Rooivalk, could have prevented most of the deaths in the CAR.

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