

East Africa: Is an Offensive Plausible in DR Congo?  
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29 April 2013

**Is it necessary?** On March 28, the UNSC approved Resolution 2098 which authorised deployment of an intervention brigade which will target armed groups in eastern DR Congo.

A seemingly ominous looming move by Tanzania to contribute troops to a newly-formed UN Intervention Brigade, under the UN Mission in DR Congo, or Monusco, among others, is raising eyebrows within the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), even though few lawmakers in the bloc's Assembly seem inclined to openly chastise the 'mighty' Jamhuri ya Muungano wa Tanzania.

On March 28, the UN Security Council approved Monusco's new mandate. Changes, here, include deployment of an "intervention brigade," or a special force of battalions, to be based in Goma, headquarters of the DR Congo's North Kivu Province, to carry out offensive operations against armed groups and to neutralise and disarm them.

Numerous armed groups, including the M23 will, supposedly, be targeted. However, there are concerns that the brigade is a result of a dangerous misreading of conflict realities and could degenerate into a war with disastrous and unwarranted consequences for the region. This situation, it is feared, could suffocate the peace talks between Kinshasa and the M23 rebels in the Ugandan capital Kampala.

There are also allegations that only the M23 is 'prime target.' Reports indicate that the M23 movement has asked Tanzania and South Africa to scrap plans to contribute troops to the 3,000-plus strong UN Brigade.

Some EALA lawmakers who spoke to The New Times on the sidelines of the just-concluded two-week EALA session in Kigali, expressed fear that the brigade would most likely wreck havoc than bring peace, and that, in the first place, it is not intended to bring peace.

MP Fred Mukasa Mbidde (Uganda), a member of EALA's Committee on Regional Affairs and Conflict Resolution, fears that only M23, which he says are "not criminals" compared to the FDLR-remnants of the masterminds of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi-will be singled out.

Mbidde's other worry is that Tanzania, an EAC partner state, is moving away from a unanimous accord to support the ongoing dialogue between the M23 and Kinshasa, as the only viable way for sustainable peace.

Mbidde says there is a misconception on matters to do with eastern DR Congo. This is partly because the protagonists-the UN, "the pen holders France" and others, are outside actors.

"The misconception is either intended or unintended, but there is a lack of awareness by the actors in terms of what is happening on the ground in eastern DRC and it has resulted in many wrong decisions," Mbidde said, adding, "If they are aware, then it is a concerted effort to annihilate the people of eastern DR Congo, which is not acceptable.

"We have a humanitarian question that must be addressed," the lawmaker adds, pointing to the FDLR, who he says "continued with a genocide campaign against the Tutsi communities in DR Congo.

"There is currently no difference between the FDLR and the army of DR Congo. Their operations are intended, one, to annihilate the Tutsi there who are indigenous DRC citizens. Secondly, FDLR still has a plan to return to Rwanda and complete their genocidal agenda."

### **Giving FDLR a highway to Rwanda:**

In effect, what the UN Brigade will become, Mbidde warns, is "a raw material" for the FDLR which wishes "to orchestrate genocide" because the group's aspirations had started to diminish but they lately got a new lifeline.

"Congo does not have a substantive army. The brigade will either be reinforcing FDLR or creating a safe haven for FDLR, and in fact, thereby establishing a highway for the FDLR to Rwanda," he argued.

A December 2012 resolution of EALA on the security situation in eastern DR Congo and EAC neighbours, proposed by Mbidde and MP Christophe Bazivamo (Rwanda), welcomed initiatives and resolutions of the Heads of State and Governments of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) on the security situation in eastern DRC, at their three summits in Kampala.

The resolution also reiterated the importance of regional dialogues to find lasting solutions to the crisis and urged EAC partner states, the DRC and the international community to deepen their analysis of the root causes of the volatile situation in DR Congo for sustainable solutions to peace and security in the EAC region.

Tanzanian MP Charles Makongoro Nyerere shares Mbidde's sentiments on the latest developments.

Nyerere said when the Dodoma government mooted the idea, Parliament thought it was about peacekeeping, not offensive operations.

"If this happens that way, these UN Force will be seen by the people as an occupation Force-and these guys [M23] are going to have a sympathy with the people who have been affected by criminals and it is going to be a disaster! It is going to be a disaster because these rebels will be given food and assistance."

Tanzania is obliged to follow that EALA resolution and I continue to urge the Government of the Republic of Tanzania to revisit its decision, Mbidde said.

"Secondly, all those that are in favour of the brigade should rethink and consider putting such a decision in abeyance because it is not intended to bring peace. It's chaotic; it's a recipe for war.

"Three, there is a volatile humanitarian situation between DRC, Rwanda and Uganda in terms of refugees. We are still administering staggering economies that would want all human beings to be termed as labour and not consumers in refugee camps."

In certain terms, international actors should be told to give a chance for homegrown solutions to problems facing Africans. The M23 are "not a group of drama actors" and, they are definitely going to defend themselves and that will cause unwarranted deaths, the legislator said.

He also said the civil society in DR Congo want the peace talks to continue.

### **M23 not similar to FDLR:**

Mbidde argues that there is a deliberate ploy to create a similar description of M23 and other militia such as the FDLR. He contends that M23 should be looked at differently.

"M23 are persons who have originally had agreements with Kinshasa. No government signs agreements with criminals. These are partners. Those agreements have been breached. The M23 are substantially a different force that can't be equated to FDLR. In fact, you cannot have a uniform solution to this. M23 are part of the DRC. FDLR are part of the criminals that left Rwanda after perpetrating a genocide."

Mbidde stressed that the problem is that issues of eastern DRC and Genocide have not been given "the due public relations requirement" that they deserve but handed over to external actors, and "spin doctors" who instead, malign the ideology of Genocide.

"The same thing applies to M23. Their voices are not heard. In fact, we'll propose a substantial international conference for them to be heard. These are not bandits," he said.

Mbidde said the M23 are aggrieved intellectuals that includes a legislator, Roger Lumbala, a former representative of the Rally of Congolese Democrats and Nationalists in the DR Congo parliament, who quit to join the M23 and is now one of their lead negotiators in the Kampala talks.

**Tanzanian lawmaker: Crazy strategy, no God's blessing:**

MP Charles Makongoro Nyerere (Tanzania) said he knew of his countrymen's imminent deployment, but was not aware that they would engage in what he now calls a "wrong strategy" for peace, or better still, a move that "will never be blessed by God."

"Let me be frank and honest here; I didn't know that they are going to fight rebels. If this is it, I think the strategy is wrong," Nyerere, a former army officer, said, appearing bewildered by the notion that his compatriots would be deployed to fight M23 and protect Congolese government soldiers, who he is convinced are raping people.

"It is a wrong move! This move will never be blessed by God. If the [DRC] soldiers admit to the atrocities they committed, why is the UN not taking them to an international tribunal rather than bring in a brigade to fight the wrong people? This is crazy!"

The MP said the Kinshasa-M23 Kampala talks was the right approach. He also believes Western corporations are fueling the myriad of conflicts in DR Congo and that the vast resource-rich country's problems have nothing to do with Rwanda as UN alleged.

"Big western companies fuel the conflict as they maintain ties with the militia in the region. The problems of Congo have been there for more than 80 years and, one could say that the biggest founder of these problems are the Belgians. But the Belgians are no longer there. It is big European and American companies that are there."

**EALA Speaker: We should address root causes instead:**

EALA Speaker Margaret Zziwa said because DR Congo is outside EAC, it becomes a bit difficult for the regional parliament to get directly involved beyond the EAC borders.

But one of the things the bloc's legislative organ has done is supporting the ICGLR peace process, she said.

"We have actually extended our solid support to the measures they have taken to make sure that conflicts in DRC subside," Zziwa said. "It is one thing to suppress the conflict but if you don't deal with causes, then you are not sure that they will not recur or manifest, either in another area or another form."

The Speaker, like other EALA members, is firm on the House's support of a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

MP Nancy Lung'ahi (Kenya) said there is need to look at the root causes of what makes people rise up against their governments.

"Those people who are being referred to as rebels, aren't they also human beings? Don't they also have rights? Have they been heard?" Lung'ahi asked, pointing to how the Kenyan government has managed the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a separatist organisation at the coastal town of Mombasa.

"They [MRC] wanted to secede and said Kenya is a republic without the coastal region. But I think they were just reacting because they wanted to be heard. They had concerns. But was it enough for government to send people to go and beat them up? The government sent delegations of people to go and talk to them, find out their concerns and find out how these problems can be addressed. I think that is where we need to go. We need to find peaceful solutions and not create opportunity for war.

"We don't want it to turn out like Somalia. I think war, and fighting, is never a solution. And it will never be a solution. If you are sending peace missions, it is different from going to reinforce the war."

She said it would be more feasible for the region to take a stand and see how they can bring the warring factions together and resolve the conflict amicably.

Lung'ahi said military confrontation will only worsen the humanitarian situation in eastern DR Congo.

### **DR Congo debacle fuelled by Western interests:**

The new intervention brigade of about 3,069 troops with troops from Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa likely to form its bulk, is expected to be deployed by June or July. Under command of a Tanzanian general, it will operate within the existing 20,000 strong Monusco operation, which, despite being one of the UN's largest and most costly peacekeeping forces, has for long failed to address the conflict.

The brigade raises suspicions of hidden social, political and economic agendas. Energy-strapped South Africa is intent on accessing around 2,600 megawatts of power from the Inga Dam hydro-electric projects, among others, according to reports.

From the plunder of its rubber and ivory by Belgium's King Leopold II to the West's Cold War relationship with Mobutu Sese Seko, the history of DRC is largely a tale of abuse by Western powers.

For example, in October 2002, UN experts accused more than 80 OECD-based companies of violating the guidelines for their direct or indirect roles in the illegal exploitation of natural resources in DRC. It was claimed that elite networks of political and military elites and businesspersons fuelled the conflict in order to retain their control over the country's vast natural resources.

Belgian sociologist Ludo de Witte, in his book, *The Assassination of Lumumba*, provided evidence that Western interests in the Cold War and Belgian resentment condemned the DRC's first premier, Patrice Lumumba, to death.

On September 19, 1961, a plane flying UN chief Dag Hammarskjöld to Ndola, Zambia, for peace talks with the Katanga leaders was shot down, raising suspicion that he was assassinated to curtail his decolonisation efforts as well as maintain Western interest in African riches.