

Uganda Plays All Sides in the Eastern DRC

Uganda's role in the DRC's M23 Conflict



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Data Cutoff: April 29, 2025, 10:00 a.m.

Summary

Uganda is working with actors on multiple sides of the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to protect its sphere of influence. Ugandan meddling perpetuates conflict in the eastern DRC, including rebellions such as M23, by proliferating the number of armed actors, injecting regional competition into local conflicts, and complicating peace efforts.

Key Actors

[click here](#) to see a network chart of Uganda and other key actors in the eastern DRC

Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC):

- Uganda and the FARDC have conducted combined operations against IS Central Africa Province—known locally as the Allied Democratic Forces—under Operation Shujaa in the eastern DRC since 2021.

M23 and Rwanda

- Uganda separately maintains ties to the Rwandan-backed M23 rebel movement, which has captured significant portions of the eastern DRC. Uganda permits M23 to recruit fighters and hold meetings in Uganda and move across the DRC-Uganda border.

Ugandan Proxy Groups

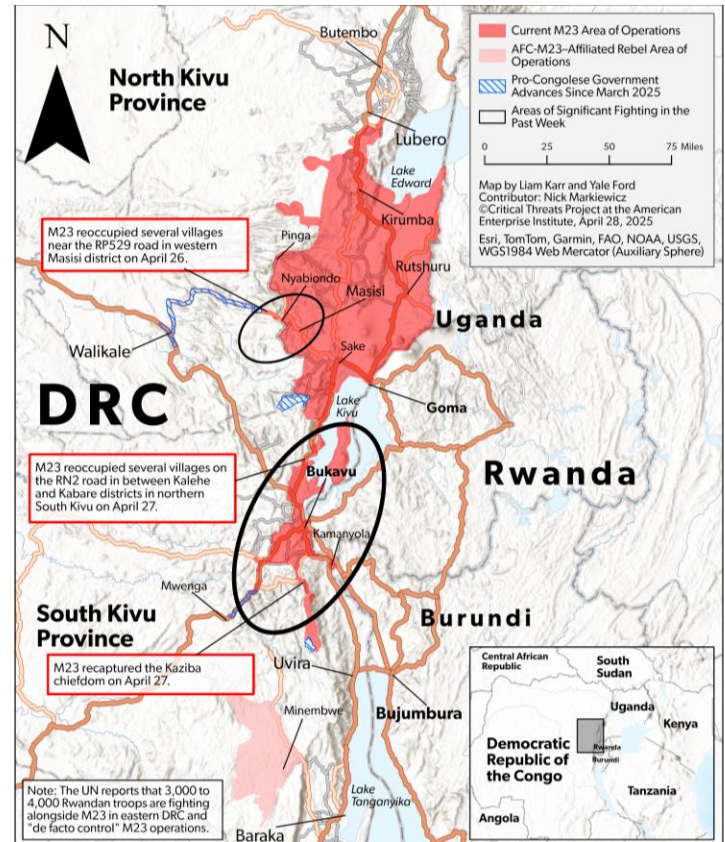
- Uganda mobilized its own proxy groups in the eastern DRC in 2025. Thomas Lubanga launched the Convention pour la Revolution populaire (CRP), and Innocent Kaina launched the Coalition Nationale pour la Libération du Congo (CNLC). Lubanga and Kaina are both sanctioned war criminals with longstanding ties to Uganda and M23.

Objectives

- Economic:** Strengthen Uganda's economic sphere of influence in the eastern DRC, which supports Ugandan exports to the DRC and Ugandan smuggling from the DRC.
- Military:** Target anti-Ugandan armed groups that threaten Uganda and its sphere of influence through partnerships with FARDC and Ugandan proxies.
- Contain Rwandan Influence:** Dilute Rwandan domination of M23 and other rebel networks in the eastern DRC.
- Influence Peace Negotiations:** Utilize proxy groups to promote Ugandan interests in Congolese negotiations on the eastern DRC.

M23 Advances in Eastern DRC

As of April 28, 2025



Implications

- Regional Risk:** Rwanda's and Uganda's proxy competition in the eastern DRC contributes to the perpetual violence in the eastern DRC. The jockeying proliferates armed actors in the eastern DRC and adds regional interests to already complex local conflicts. This rivalry has led to common conflict between Rwandan and Ugandan proxies since the Second Congo War and even between Rwandan and Ugandan forces in rare instances.
- Peace Efforts:** Uganda will be able to influence negotiations regarding the M23 conflict and potential restructuring of power in the DRC due to its ties with M23 and other armed groups in the DRC.
- Humanitarian Outlook:** Ugandan-linked actors who are convicted of war crimes are remobilizing in the eastern DRC.