

# SKIMMING THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY REGIONAL FORCE IN THE KIVU: ANOTHER TEST CASE OF 'AFRICAN SOLUTIONS TO AFRICAN PROBLEMS'

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## Introduction

Regional integration is premised on the principle of subsidiarity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations Organisation which empowers regional bodies to resolve conflicts in their jurisdictions (Chapter 8, Article 52). It implies cooperation among states sharing a geographic proximity. In Africa, such regional organisations include the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Common Market for East Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), and Southern African Development Community (SADC) to name but a few. However, the end of the Cold War witnessed the rise of intrastate conflicts worldwide, which many analysts associated with donor fatigue toward aid-dependent states (Thomas and Mazrui 1992; Bayart 2009; Bates 2008; Solomon 2015). These new wars of the 1990s were more pronounced in resource-rich countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kaldor 2006; Collier 2008). As a result, many economic communities established relevant protocols to boost regional integration and foster peace on the African continent: ECCAS Protocol of Peace and Security; ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security (1999); SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security (2001); EAC Protocol on Peace and Security (2013).

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Of particular interest in this paper is the East African Community (EAC). The leaders of newly independent countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania first met in Kampala and agreed to revive the then British protectorate with the establishment of EAC on June 6, 1967. Ten years later, however, this noble initiative collapsed for several reasons, and at the end of the Cold War, the trio states revitalised it with the ratification of its Treaty on November 30, 1993. The following year, the Great Lakes Region of Africa (GLR) plunged into chaos as a result of the genocide in Rwanda. Many survivors of the Tutsi/Hutu saga sought refuge in neighbouring countries. In particular, the influx of Hutu refugees in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the ensuing manhunt of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Force quickly transformed refugee camps into slaughterhouses (Meredith 2006; Stearns 2011). Driven by economic interests in the mineral-rich Kivu provinces, invading troops from Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda engaged the loyalist forces and allies (Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe) in what became the African World War between 1996 and 2001, leaving behind a myriad of armed groups to fuel the war economy and terrorize local population (Coleman 2007; Bates 2008; Prunier 2009).

In the GLR, the geo-strategic position of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) places it at the crossroad of regional communities. The process of integration began with the creation of the Central Bank for Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi in 1927 by the Belgian colonial authority, after Germany's defeat in World War I. On September 20, 1976, in Gisenyi (Rwanda), the tripartite renamed this colonial project the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (ECGLC). In 1983, DRC became a member of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Searching for strong allies to fight the war of aggression imposed by its eastern neighbours, it turned south and joined the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in February 1998. It is worth noting that the DRC was also instrumental in the creation of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in 2003 to find African solutions to armed conflicts in the region, in collaboration with the United Nations (UN). ICGLR is made up of the DRC's neighbouring countries, namely Angola, Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania.

Following the admission of Rwanda and Burundi into the EAC on July 1, 2007, ECGLC became redundant, and as a result, the DRC turned out to be a choice destination for external armed opposition crossing its eastern border. It is observed that "neighbouring Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi pursued their enemies and their economic interests in the restive region, taking advantage of its enormous natural resources" (Sawyer 2022). On its

part, Kinshasa continuously condemned Kigali for being the brain behind insecurity in the region through the illegal exploitation of natural resources at gunpoint for more than three decades, a claim refuted by the latter but largely supported by UN experts as well as the US and the EU. Repeatedly, Kigali justified the presence of Rwandese troops as a pre-emptive attack against the Democratic Force for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) that had supposedly found a haven in the Kivu region since 1994 (ICG 2020).

Meanwhile, an intervention force serving under the United Nations Organization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) that later became the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has been largely stationed in the conflict zone (Ituri, North, and South Kivu) since 2001, with the Security Council mandate to stabilize the country. This impressive multinational force comprises more than 17,000 armed personnel and has an annual budget exceeding one billion US dollars (UN 2010). In 2013, it teamed up with the Special Brigade set up by the African Union, operating under the commands of Tanzania, to dislodge the remnants of National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP). Defeated, many CNDP fighters retreated to Rwanda and Uganda before reappearing in November 2021 as the M23 rebellion. The nickname refers to March 23, 2009, a day when secret deals were reached between these aggressed forces and the Kabila government. According to the Mapping Report of the UN and subsequent fieldwork accounts of various international bodies, the proliferation of armed groups operating in DRC has been orchestrated in particular by Rwanda and Uganda (UNHCR 2010).

Despite the presence of multinational forces in the region, particularly MONUSCO, the M23 fighters continue to defy the international community's call for a ceasefire, seizing chunks of the territory and threatening to invade the commercial hub of Goma (van de Walle 2020; Russo 2022). It is within this context of mounting mistrust among regional leaders that the DRC applied to join the East African Community, aspiring to benefit from the Common Market. On April 8, 2022, Congolese President Felix-Antoine Tshisekedi signed the EAC Treaty at the State House in Nairobi, Kenya, in the presence of President Uhuru Kenyatta (Chair), Ugandan President Kaguta Yoweri Museveni, and Rwandan President Paul Kagame. At face value, the DRC's membership in EAC is another attempt to find "African solutions to African problems" (Figuremariam 2017). It is particularly interesting as it raises several questions. Does economic integration necessarily espouse collective security? Why does the protracted armed conflict in eastern DRC defy regional and international initiatives for peace? What is the way forward in the pacification of the Great Lakes region of Africa?

Guided by the Dependency Theory of Integration, this paper attempts to address these research questions by adopting the content analysis approach around the EAC Treaty and Protocols and unveiling some counterforce to regional integration. The argumentation is organised around five sections. After a brief background on the perennial instability in the Great Lakes Region of Africa stemming from the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the study adopts the theoretical framework of integration to lay the ground for the analysis of the EAC Treaty and Protocol in view of appreciating the contribution of regional economic communities in resolving conflicts. Against the backdrop of finding 'African solutions to African problems', the paper proceeds with an evaluation of the East African Community Regional Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study's findings are discussed in detail before reaching a modest conclusion.

## Theoretical framework

In the field of International Relations (IR), competing theories explain the behaviour of state actors in the international system. For instance, Realism stresses the anarchical nature of the international system in which the unfettered pursuit of self-interest by autonomous states makes interstate conflicts unavoidable (Bull 2012; Dune and Schmidt 2011). On the other hand, integration theorists, under different labels, challenge the realist assumption of bellicose states being the sole actors in IR and paint a more sophisticated picture of contemporary global politics around the concepts of interdependence, cooperation, integration, functionalism, and intergovernmentalism, among others (Garza 2006). In particular, International Integration is premised on interdependence and cooperation among states in their joint efforts to avoid unhealthy competition that is likely to result in a military confrontation. However, this study makes use of the Dependency theory to highlight the dysfunction of regional integration stemming from the perennial power imbalance which characterises the relationship between rich and poor nations (Munro 2023).

The Dependency theory, propounded by Raul Prebisch and his colleagues in the 1950s, explains the situation of inequality existing between the rich and poor countries, which the neoclassical model has engendered. In this model, usually known as "trickle-down" economics, the poor countries are latecomers and their people are often blamed for being lazybones. Theorists of Dependency in IR contend that economic interdependence among nations is a forced integration that is designed to benefit the centre to the detriment

of the periphery. According to them, the widening gap between rich and poor nations is not due to the latter not being integrated into the world system, or not 'fully' integrated, as is often argued by free-market economists, but because of the way they are integrated into the system (Garza 2006). They should embark on massive programmes of import substitution and self-reliance construed as a policy of controlled interaction with the world economy (Ferraro 2008). Like individual spokes in a bicycle tire, poor states converge to the hub and make it strong, but once detached from the periphery, the centre falls apart (Adedeji 2002). That is why any attempt coming from peripheral nations to resist this interdependency results in economic sanctions, military invasion, and control, coming from the centre (Garza 2006).

Even though there is no consensus as to what Dependency theory means, theorists converge on at least three core arguments:

1. dependency characterises the international system as comprised of two sets of states, described with the binaries dominant/dependent, centre/periphery, or metropolitan/satellite;
2. external forces (multinational corporations, international commodity markets, foreign assistance, communications, and the likes) are of singular importance to the economic activities within the dependent states;
3. the relations between dominant and dependent states are dynamic because the interactions between the two sets of states tend to not only reinforce but also intensify the unequal patterns (Ferraro 2008).

In short, an overt imbalance characterises this two-way dependency between the centre and the periphery: poor nations supply raw materials and cheap labour; they serve as a repository for outdated technology and maintain open markets for manufactured goods. The profits from these goods contribute to the economies of wealthy nations, enabling them to sustain the standard of living they currently enjoy. Such a Marxist theory of forced integration remains valid as long as the mainstream lexicon is yet to discard the divisive paradigms of rich and poor, developed and developing, core and periphery, north and south. It begs the question as to whether the integration of rich nations carries the seeds of division among poor nations. How far does the politics of hub and spokes influence the EAC in particular, as far as the promotion of peace and security in the Great Lakes region of Africa is concerned? These and similar questions are addressed afterwards, but before it is important to establish the connection between economic communities

and resolution of international conflicts by skimming the EAC Treaty and Protocol.

## Analysing the EAC Treaty and Protocol

The East African Community traces its beginning back to the construction, under the British colonial authority, of the Kenya-Uganda Railway (1897-1901), the establishment of the East African Currency (1905) and of the Customs Union between Kenya and Uganda in 1917, among other things. The project of regional integration expanded when the German colony of Tanganyika was turned over to Great Britain after the First World War. As independent nations and bona fide members of the United Nations, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania advanced the cause of economic cooperation with the creation in 1967 of East African Cooperation in the light of the 1945 UN Charter, especially in Chapter 8, article 52. But for a decade, this economic cooperation suffered a setback as a result of political meddling in internal matters of member states, notably the Uganda-Tanzania War that led to the overthrow of President Idi Amin in 1979 and the accession to power of warlord Yoweri Museveni on January 26, 1986 (Meredith 2006). The dissimilarity in political economy amongst the pro-capitalist Kenya, socialist Tanzania and militarist Uganda made economic cooperation obsolete (Muenda 2010).

However, the end of the Cold War ushered in a new area of cooperation, beginning with the signing of the Agreement for the Establishment of the Permanent Tripartite Commission for East African Co-operation, on November 30, 1993 in Kampala. Since then, important milestones along the way to regional integration have been registered: the launching of EAC Secretariat in Arusha, Tanzania (1996); the introduction of a draft document for the Establishment of the EAC Treaty; and a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Defense Matters (April 30, 1998). Signed on November 30, 1999, the Treaty entered into force on July 7, 2000. The following year, at the first EAC summit, the EAC was formally launched at the Sheikh Amri Abeid Stadium in Arusha on January 15, 2001. The same day also witnessed the signing of Protocols which defined Rules of Procedure for the Summit of Heads of State and Rules of Procedure for the Admission of other countries to the East African Community.

The expansion of EAC materialised with the admission of Rwanda and Burundi on July 1, 2007. They both joined the Customs Union five days later. At the tenth Anniversary celebration (November 20, 2009), EAC

partner states signed a Common Market Protocol which entered in force after ratification by all the parties on July 1, 2010. The Republic of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo officially joined the EAC on September 5, 2016 and April 8, 2022 respectively (EAC 2022). Visibly, economic cooperation constitutes the backbone of the EAC. As it is stated in the Treaty Preamble:

Member states are determined to strengthen their economic, social, cultural, political, technological and other ties for their fast balanced and sustainable development by the establishment of an East African Community, with an East African Customs Union and a Common Market as transitional stages to and integral parts thereof, subsequently a Monetary Union and ultimately a Political Federation (EAC 2006).

Divided into 29 Chapters and 153 Articles, the 2001 Treaty, whose duration is perpetual, (Article 144) aims at promoting regional cooperation in all areas of common interests, including: Trade Liberalisation; Investment and Industrial Development; Monetary and Financial Cooperation; Infrastructure and Services; Human Resources, Science and Technology; Free Movement of Persons, Labour, Services, Rights of Establishment and Residence; Agriculture and Food Security, Environment and Natural Resources; Health, Social and Cultural Activities; and Political Affairs. Of particular interest in this study is the clause of Consensus contained in the decision-making process, whether at the Council of Ministers or at the Summit of Heads of State and Government (Articles 12.3 and 15.4). It means that important decisions must be made by the unanimity of votes rather than a majority vote or a decision of a selected group of people.

As far as the cooperation in Political Affairs is concerned, the adoption of common foreign and security policies (art. 123.2) suggests the implementation of collective security within EAC has the vocation to becoming a Political Federation. However, given some vested interests among community members, it can be cumbersome to arrive at a consensus regarding the withdrawal, suspension and expulsion of a member (art. 145, 146, 147) even though the views of penalised parties are not considered during deliberation (art. 148). What is also problematic in this chapter of political cooperation is the lack of an enforcement mechanism through which partner states relinquish some prerogatives (sovereignty) for the attainment of a truly Political Federation.



It is also important to glance at the Protocol on Peace and Security, which Ministers of Partner States signed on February 15, 2013, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (EAC 2013). In its preamble, peace, security and strong political relations are spelled out and they constitute the foundation stones for regional cooperation, which is the catchword that runs through the 2013 Protocol in various areas of common interest, including:

- (a) conflict prevention, management and resolution (art. 4);
- (b) prevention of genocide (art. 5);
- (c) combating terrorism (art. 6);
- (e) peace support operations (art. 8);
- (g) management of refugees (art. 10);
- (h) control of proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons (art. 11);
- (i) combating transnational and cross-border crimes; including drug and human trafficking, illegal migration, money laundering, cybercrime and motor vehicle theft (art. 12).

Even though the Protocol provides for cooperation whenever a Partner State is victim of external aggression (art. 3), such an intervention package collides with the principles of respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of Partner States bequeathed from the UN Charter and the AU Constitutive Act. As of 2017, according to the Chair of EAC Council of Ministers, not all Partner States have ratified the Protocol. Consequently, the Community records a delay in setting up the EAC Security Council, the Stand-by Force, the Panel of the Wise and related institutional capacities and structures. More importantly, the question as to what must be done in case of non-compliance to the agreed Protocol by any Partner State is not clearly spelt out. In short, both EAC Treaty and Protocols lack internal enforcement mechanisms to deal with defaulters, especially with regards to the resolution of conflicts within the Community. In the next section, the adhesion of the Democratic Republic of Congo into the EAC is worth considering in order to make sense of the disconnect between economic integration and collective security.

## Democratic Republic of Congo in EAC: another false start?

The stability of the DRC remains fragile despite the country's accession to various regional communities. In particular, the perennial armed



conflict in the eastern part of the country constitutes a thorn in the flesh of the GLR. The ratification of the EAC Treaty in Nairobi, Kenya, by President F.A. Tshisekedi in 2021 marked a step in the direction of finding lasting solutions to security problems, in addition to economic gains stemming from the Customs Union. Having passed the admission test, the new Partner State (DRC) would share the vision of founding fathers to establish an economic community that is expected to transmute into a political federation in the near future. According to the then Kenyan President, the DRC has satisfied all the conditions under Articles 3 and 4 of the EAC Treaty and “To get to this point, it has taken strong leadership, commitment to the ideals of the EAC integration agenda and a clear understanding of the shared benefits that come with working together” (Owaka 2022). In the same vein, President Museveni of Uganda reminded the audience of the three tenets of regional integration, namely “prosperity for people and their families through bigger markets; strategic security and brotherhood among the people of the region” (Owaka 2022). The same scholar reports that President Kagame of Rwanda, who was eager to witness the enlargement of the Community, urged his counterparts “to get down to implementing the commitments they have made so far to enable the bloc to realise its objectives.” On July 11, 2022, DRC became the seventh full-fledged member of EAC, but the news of Rwanda-backed M23 in the DRC continued to make headlines while EAC partner states kept silent.

During several summits and diplomatic trips abroad, the Congolese President has sounded the same clarion call for action against the regime of Paul Kagame of Rwanda, but here and there his rhetoric seems to fall on deaf ears. The latter enjoys special relationships with Great Britain, France and the European Union, especially in the area of military support and development aid. Whether at the African Union summits in Addis Ababa or similar regional organisations to which DRC is a member (Economic Community of Central Africa, Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Southern African Development Community), the implication of the hub-and-spokes policy is such that no country has openly condemned the presence of the Rwandan troops in Eastern Congo. Instead, in a bid to fashion African solutions to African problems, regional leaders are busy calling the DRC to dialogue with the terrorist M23.

The international community warmed to the appointment of Angolan President João Lourenço of Angola as mediator and the Luanda talk on July 6, 2022, brought Tshisekedi and Kagame face to face. It produced a roadmap for the pacification of eastern DRC which includes among other things: establishment of a climate of confidence between the states of the Great Lakes Region; immediate cessation of hostilities; immediate withdrawal of the positions

occupied by M23 movement on Congolese territory in accordance with the Nairobi final communique; creation of conditions for the return of refugees and establishment of regional mechanisms to combat the illegal exploitation of natural resources. At the 77th UN General Assembly on September 20, 2022, President Tshisekedi sought once again the condemnation of Rwanda by openly accusing the latter of repeatedly masterminding rebellions in eastern DRC since 1996 in order to loot natural resources at a higher cost of destruction of civilian populations and their livelihoods. He supported his claim with credible reports of UN Experts and NGOs in the region (UN 2022).

Meanwhile, the Luanda talks moved to Nairobi on November 28, 2022. According to Hoinathy (2023), "The two initiatives have different but complementary formats. While Nairobi focuses on armed groups, Luanda addresses the DRC-Rwanda political dimensions – a reminder of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region, which has not been implemented." In Bujumbura, under the rotational presidency of Mr Evarist Ndayishimiye, EAC Partner States agreed to individually contribute combat troops to be deployed in the DRC with an offensive mandate, alongside MONUSCO and the Force Intervention Brigade it absorbed in 2013. As one analyst observes, "this is the first time the EAC is sending troops to a member state. It will be a litmus test of the bloc's ability to handle complex political and security challenges" (Sawyer 2022). The six-month mandate of East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) has been extended to September 2023 but the M23 fighters continue to defy the AU solemn Declaration of "Silencing the Guns" by the year 2020 (AU 2016).

In the face of a military stalemate, foreign fighters are still occupying several localities in North Kivu, brutally murdering hapless population on their way and under the watch of the said international forces. For the conflict-affected DRC, whose membership in regional economic communities is multiple, the display of inaction by the EACRF raises doubts about the legitimacy of an economic community to resolve conflicts, keeping in mind the problematic composition of the force itself. It seems to suggest that the adhesion of DRC to EAC is another false start after decades of the UN Stabilisation Mission in the country. To make sense of the bystander's attitude of external actors is the focus of the discussion below.

## Discussion of findings

The foregoing has shed light on a number of pressing issues stemming from the question why the multiple membership of DRC in regional economic communities does not adequately address its main challenge of peace and security deficit, particularly in the East. Focusing on the East African community, the study has found that the consensus-based decision-making process not only impinges on the EAC progress toward a political federation but also keeps the doors of regional economic communities open to external engineering and control, strategic partnership, regional mistrust, and lack of political will, among other things. First, **external meddling and control** over poor countries have outlived colonisation and rendered regional integration redundant. The unification of post-war nations in Europe (one flag, one currency, common market and immigration policies) does not translate into the unity of Africa even though it may have inspired post-independent leaders to form regional communities.

In particular, the creation of the African Union, formerly the Organisation of African Unity (1963) was designed to bring post-colonial entities together and constitute a common front in the negotiation processes with sister organisations. Since then, however, the metropolises have left the umbilical cord uncut. In other words, donor countries hold the control of regional organisations in Africa by way of bankrolling projects and shouldering annual budgets. As goes the saying, he who pays the piper calls the tune. Stapel and Soderbaum (2020) map out external funding to these organisations in the field of security and governance, which comes mostly from the EU, USA and China. They argue that this increasing financial support to Regional Organisations reflects geostrategic interests and it should not be seen as neutral. As they point out in their concluding paragraphs, “a growing body of literature alludes to potentially problematic effects, with excessive donor dependence resulting in diminished Regional Organisations’ effectiveness, implementation gaps and the failure of member states to comply with decisions and budget targets.”

Close to three decades, the presence of foreign troops in eastern DRC has placed Rwanda and Uganda in the position of middlemen in the global market. Behind these countries operate multinational companies interested in strategic minerals that are found mainly in the Kivu provinces (OCHA 2001). As reported by Carroll (2001), “A scramble for gold, diamonds, cobalt and copper by army officers, government officials and entrepreneurs from Congo and neighbouring African countries had generated billions of dollars

which found its way to mining companies and financial institutions.” Therefore, to keep the war economy flourishing is good for the suppliers of raw materials and multinational corporations. Whether at the local, national and regional level, any initiative to break the supply chain is bound to fail, given the hub-and-spokes relationship that ties poor and rich nations together and therefore turns regional economic cooperation into cosmetics.

Second, maintaining **special partnerships** between powerful nations and individual member states of regional organisations (ROs) is a stumbling block for effective integration. Yesterday, Ugandan President, Y. Museveni was the darling of Western capitals and sponsor of many rebellions in the region that culminated in regime changes in Rwanda (1994) and Zaire (Bayart 2009). After the genocide, Paul Kagame of Rwanda earned the sympathy of donor countries that rallied around to fund 40% of the national budget (CNN 2004). Since then, the landlocked country in Central Africa has remained the major beneficiary of military and development aid for decades, the highest donor aid per capita in East Africa. Even though the United States and the European Union have issued official statements to condemn the ignoble aggression of DRC by a neighbouring country, they fall short of formulating disciplinary sanctions against Kigali. Instead, the Biden administration continues to honour its strategic partnership with Kagame (US 2022). As many critics contend, the guilty conscience has blinded mature democracies (USA, France and Britain) to the obvious descent into dictatorship of the Kagame regime, thus sacrificing human rights and freedoms on the altar of infrastructural development.

Recently, the EU decided to reinforce the military capability of Rwanda in maintaining peace in the region to the tune of 20 million Euro, thus compromising its credibility in the stability of the DRC. The same destabilising effect of strategic partnership in Africa can be found in the decision of the then British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, in April 2022 to illegally repatriate unsuccessful asylum-seekers to Rwanda in exchange for £120 million in funding to the Kagame regime, without considering the fact that this poor nation is in dire need of land for its teeming population. As one observer contends, “With France and the UK closely embedded in Kagame’s regime and not applying diplomatic pressure on its new ally, the hope for peace in eastern DRC remains unlikely” (Realfonzo 2022). Not only does the overt backing of donor countries to Rwanda send a strong message to African leaders to keep mute if they want to remain recipients of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) but it also undermines the credibility of Western countries toward sustainable peace in the region. Instead of sanctioning the M23 fighters and their sponsors, the international community, AU and

regional leaders amount pressures on the Congolese government to open political dialogue with the enemy even though such dialogue witnessed, in the recent past, the proliferation of armed groups in the Kivu provinces and a high level of infiltration of foreign fighters in the civil service, the army and police.

Third is the prevailing climate of **regional mistrust**. The three founding states of the EAC (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) were former British colonies and are presently Commonwealth nations. With the admission of Rwanda and South Sudan in this international grouping (EAC), a strong faultline has been created within the Community and it was later reinforced by the accession of Rwanda into the Commonwealth at the November 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad and Tobago (Dyar 2010). Consequently, within EAC, five Anglophone members out of seven share common bonds with London. With former Belgian colonies (Burundi and DRC) out of the Commonwealth of nations, the ensuing outcome is that unwritten laws may apply from the centre (Westminster) to peripheries. If the heads of States and government gathered around the then Prince of Wales between June 20 and 25, 2022, in Kigali (close to the conflict zone), ignore the ongoing violent conflict in the Kivu region, which has continued to claim thousands of deaths across the Rwandan border, it is unlikely that a single member of the Commonwealth, and in particular EAC as a whole, would, on its own terms, speak openly against the aggression of Rwandan patriotic force (RPF), being accused of perpetrating atrocities in the Kivu (CHOGM 2022).

The prevalent climate of mistrust among EAC political leaders undermines the emergence of a political federation that rests on mutually-beneficial cooperation. For instance, in 2000, both Uganda and Rwanda displayed rival interests over the pillage of natural resources in a six-day war in Ituri that claimed thousands of civilian deaths and the destruction of local communities (Stearns 2011). In a war of words, the position of Tanzania to lead a Multi-national Joint Task Force into the DRC set Dodoma against Kigali, whose troops were accused of perpetuating the mineral conflict in the Kivu region as far back as 2013. On her part, Rwanda accused Burundi of sheltering the genocidaires, while Bujumbura blamed Kigali for masterminding the 2015 failed coup (Genet 2013). Some analysts have observed an entrenched *modus vivendi* in the GLR whereby “Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi all have resorted to supporting armed groups operating in Eastern DRC as a means to fight via proxies and track their respective enemies” (Verweijen and Vogel 2023). Recently, in a press conference on April 17, 2023 in Cotonou (Benin), Mr Kagame made his expansionist ambition known by stating that the M23 issue

was related to the claiming of Rwandan heritage by the Congolese government. As he puts it: "The borders drawn by colonisation divided the people, with one part of Rwanda given to the East of the DRC and the other to the South of Uganda" (APA 2023). This is an African way of finding a solution to an African problem that has the potential to engulf the entire continent into protracted border conflicts, but it is "a doctrine close to Rwandan President Paul Kagame's heart" (ICG 2023).

Fourth, the **lack of political will** is apparent in most African initiatives. Regional actors are divided on critical issues such as sovereignty, democracy, good governance, human rights and freedom. As far as EAC is concerned, it is unlikely that leaders that came to power through military coups and elongated their terms in office by changing constitutions would accept to share sovereignty. The Expert Report on the EAC Political Federation reveals that one of the most manifest challenges is the issue of sovereignty and the attendant notions of loss of national identity, political power, decision-making and loss of flexibility in exercising power. Other pressing issues include the bitter experience of the collapse of the former EAC, which still influences people's attitude and raises apprehension about political integration; the disparities in the practice of democracy, good governance, human rights, constitutionalism and the rule of law that generate concerns on how to prevent conflicts, embark on political reform and achieve social justice between the partner states, among other things (Harelimana 2011). For a constituted authority to open up to the enemies of the Republic (M23 terrorists) and eventually share power in the logic of "African solutions to African problems" amounts to the violation of the DRC Supreme law.

Regional communities are established with the purpose of economic cooperation rather than fighting interstate wars. The membership of many communities overlaps and, at the same time, exposes African countries to endemic conflicts of interest, but the 1945 UN Charter explicitly prohibits the transformation of economic communities into peace enforcement instruments: "No enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council" (Chapter 8, art. 53). Following the decision to deploy EACRF in eastern DRC, Kenya was the first country to dispatch a Defense Force (KDF) in Goma on November 16, 2022. It was later joined by troops from Burundi, Uganda and South Sudan. But more than a year after their arrival, the M23 terrorists and ADF still control many localities in North Kivu and Ituri, under the EAC watch (Russo 2022). Noticeable is the lackadaisical attitude of the Force Commandant to walk the talk in line with what both the Luanda and Nairobi peace roadmap raises. Meanwhile, the reality on the ground is such that:

The EAC force has been unable to break the political impasse, even though the main objective of its military deployment has been to facilitate political solutions. Despite Kinshasa's repeated requests, the force has refused to militarily engage the M23 in order not to antagonize Rwanda, an EAC member (Verweijen and Vogel 2023).

Obviously, the EACRF has adopted the double principle of neutrality and impartiality that has been guiding the MONUC for decades and, behind the veil of inaction, is hidden the principle of promoting national interests involving a supreme sacrifice on the parts of the military personnel. Except for hired fighters who are ready to die for profit (mercenaries), the principle states that soldiers are not expected to fall on the battlefield in pursuing other objectives rather than the defence of national interests, be it at home and abroad (McFate 2019; Gross 2008). Simply put, the supreme sacrifice of regular army personnel does not accommodate humanitarian intervention. Granted that fighters will not willingly lay down their weapons and embrace peace unless they are overpowered and coerced, the deployment of foreign troops in conflict zones can be interpreted as window dressing strategy to dissuade the enemy. That is why the mandate of intervention forces is constantly renewed and modified to conceal logistic errors.

It is worth mentioning that SADC leaders gathered at the May 19, 2023 Summit in Windhoek (Namibia) decried the friendly approach of EACRF toward M23/RPF fighters and agreed to deploy an offensive Force equipped with attack helicopters and artillery, to enforce peace and security within the framework of the SADC Standby Force in support of a member state (DRC). Whether the decision of SADC will see the light of the day and overrun EACRF in the near future remains to be seen (Fabricus 2022). In the past, the success of ECOWAS in stabilising Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone can be attributed to the creation of the Nigeria-led ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), presently the ECOWAS Standing Force (ESF). Faced with the rise of military takeover in West Africa (Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry and now in Niger), ECOWAS has resorted to economic and financial sanctions. It remains to be seen if this economic community, already fractured, will enforce democracy in a member state (the Republic of Niger) as the Abuja meeting suggests an intervention force (Olafusi 2023). As one analyst contends:



No matter how popular the phrase 'African solutions to African problems' may be, the fact of the matter is that Africa's states, RECs, sub-regional and regional organisations are currently not able to conduct any sustained or long-term peace support operations on the continent without the requisite economic, logistical and political commitment and technological capacity of external donors, such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the European Union (Solomon 2015, 69).

The failure of regional communities to enforce peace in conflict zones reflects the dictate of rich nations on the poor ones. It is therefore politically incorrect for regional economic communities to migrate into multinational forces when the political will of member states is in short supply. In the absence of a standby force in the likeness of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation that guarantees the security of member states, the maintenance of peace and security remains the prerogative of individual Partner States in conformity to the mainstream tradition of power politics (NATO 2018).

## Conclusion

The *raison d'être* of regional integration is for countries to pool their resources together and address common challenges, such as infrastructural development, free movement of people, goods and services facilitated by the Customs Union and Common Market, among other things. Like fruits that grow on a tree, the many benefits of economic communities are rooted in the provision of Peace and Security within the region. This paper has skimmed the EAC Treaty and Protocol, aiming to make sense of the correlation between economic cooperation and resolution of conflicts. In the light of the Dependency Theory, it is argued that international cooperation does not translate into a level-playing ground which is beneficial for the poor nations to break the traps of dependency. Instead, the dominant hub and spokes' relationship that has outlived the colonial policy of divide and rule impacts negatively on regional initiatives in Africa. Consequently, the protracted armed conflict in eastern DRC is relegated to internal matters, even though various reports of the UN have named Rwanda and Uganda as major sponsors of armed groups. The study has found that the consensus-based decision-making process impinges on the EAC progress toward a political federation. The lackadaisical attitude of intervening troops in DRC veils a number of things: bilateral mistrust, external funding and coercion, strategic partnerships with powerful nations, and conflicting foreign policies being perceived as a lack

of political will, among other things. The *déjà-vu* call for a political dialogue with armed non-state actors (M23) appears to be the only game in town, but it amounts to a violation of the country's Supreme Law. Whether SADC has the political will to overrun the EASTRF in eastern Congo remains to be seen in the coming months. All things considered, the maintenance of peace and security remains a state-bound initiative and it is contingent on the capacity of national armies to defend the territorial integrity of their respective countries in the self-help world of power politics.

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## ABSTRACT

The end of the Cold War witnessed the decline in interstate conflicts but it also caused many poor countries to fall from within. Even though many economic communities were established to boost regional integration and foster peace on the African continent, externally-backed armed conflicts have continued to defy regional initiatives for peace and security. This desk study is concerned with the perennial conflict in the Great Lakes Region, going back to the 1994 Rwandan genocide as it affected many countries, particularly the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It intends to address the question as to whether the adhesion of DRC into the East African Community (EAC) will improve the country's relationships with its eastern neighbours and support peace in the sub-region or if it is another false start. Using the theoretical framework of international cooperation, the paper adopts a content analysis method of available documents (EAC Treaty and Protocols) to make sense of this regional community's disposition to mutate into an intervention force. It has been found that the consensus-based decision-making process and the absence of enforcement mechanisms constitute major stumbling blocks to the political federation and they reflect the traditional hub-and-spoke relationship between rich and poor nations. Given that economic integration does not imply the silencing of guns within the community, each member state must strengthen its defence system against aggression.

## KEYWORDS

Integration. Dependency. Force. Intervention. East Africa. M23.

*Received on September 27, 2023*

*Accepted on December 7, 2023<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> How to cite: Mbombo, Jean-Marie Kasonga. 2023. "Skimming the East African Community regional force in the Kivu: another test case of 'african solutions to african problems'". *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 8 (16), 133-153. <https://doi.org/10.22456/2448-3923.135812>.