

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (EAC) SECURITY COOPERATION MECHANISMS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF ARMED CONFLICTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE

MIREINE LOBANGA YAOMBITI^{1&2*}, MWAYILA TSHIYEMBE³, KADIEBWE MULONDA³ & AGENONGA CHOB AIR³

¹Learner in the D.E.S. program at the University of Kisangani,

²Teacher-researcher at the Higher Institute of Medical Techniques of Kisangani

³University of Kisangani, Democratic Republic of Congo

<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJREHC.2026.7328>

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of the East African Community's (EAC) security cooperation mechanisms in managing armed conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Through a documentary analysis and the observation of regional security dynamics, the research evaluates the performance of the EAC Regional Force (EACRF) and the Nairobi Process in stabilizing eastern Congo. The results show that despite occasional progress, including the achievement of a de facto ceasefire around Goma, security cooperation mechanisms have been hampered by the lack of common political will, financial constraints, and divergence of Member States' strategic interests. The study reveals that the lack of clarification of the mandate, the lack of operational coordination and the allegations of connivance with certain armed groups have undermined the credibility of the EACRF in the eyes of the Congolese population. The article concludes on the need for a profound reform of regional security architectures, based on an integrated approach combining political mediation and coordinated security action.

Keywords: Security cooperation, EAC Regional Force (EACRF), Nairobi Process, armed conflicts, stabilization, security governance, DRC.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The management of armed conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the most complex security challenges on the African continent. With more than 120 non-state armed groups operating in its eastern provinces, the DRC faces a multifaceted security crisis that simultaneously engages local, regional and international actors (Stearns, 2011, pp. 45-48). In response, the East African Community has deployed a range of security cooperation mechanisms aimed at stabilizing the region and promoting a collective approach to crisis management.

The DRC's accession to the EAC in March 2022 marked a turning point in the regional commitment to the stabilization of eastern Congo. For the first time since its creation in 1999, the organisation deployed a regional military force, the EACRF, in November 2022, and initiated the Nairobi Process under the mediation of former Kenyan President Hur Kenyatta

(ACCORD, 2024, pp. 3-5). These initiatives represented a significant advance in the EAC's ability to manage security crises affecting its members.

However, the results of these mechanisms remain mixed. The withdrawal of the EACRF in December 2023, at the request of the Congolese government, and the persistence of armed violence, including the M23 offensive on Goma and Bukavu in January 2025, call into question the real effectiveness of regional security cooperation. It is in this context that this study analyzes the performance and limitations of the EAC's security cooperation mechanisms in the DRC (United Nations, 2024, S/2024/432).

2.0 CONTEXT AND MECHANISMS FOR SECURITY COOPERATION

Security cooperation within the EAC is based on a legal and institutional framework defined by the Constitutive Treaty and its protocols. Article 124 of the Treaty provides for cooperation in the fields of defence, conflict prevention and peacekeeping, while the Protocol on Defence Cooperation sets out the modalities of such cooperation (EAC, 1999).

2.1 The Nairobi Process

The Nairobi Process, initiated in April 2022, is the political path for the EAC's intervention in the DRC. Led by former Kenyan President Hur Kenyatta as EAC mediator, this process aimed to facilitate negotiations between the Congolese government, local communities and the various armed groups operating in eastern DRC. It emphasized inclusiveness, regional leadership, and ownership by Congolese stakeholders (EAC, 2022b).

Regular dialogue forums in Nairobi provided a platform to voice grievances, negotiate ceasefires, and encourage voluntary disarmament. However, this process has been limited by the absence of some parties to the conflict and by the difficulty of translating verbal commitments into concrete actions on the ground. The EAC's policy framework has led to significant advances, including the adoption of roadmaps for peace, but these advances have been constantly challenged by military dynamics on the ground (Lisakafu, 2025, p. 8).

2.2 The EAC Regional Force (EACRF)

The EAC Regional Force (EACRF) was deployed in November 2022 amid a rapidly deteriorating security situation. Composed of contingents from Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and South Sudan, with logistical and political support from other member states, the EACRF was mandated to support the Congolese army in restoring peace, protecting civilians, securing liberated areas and neutralising armed groups (United Nations, 2024, S/2024/482).

The EACRF secured a de facto ceasefire around Goma, creating a buffer zone between the FARDC and the M23 in several territories surrounding the city. This achievement was politically, diplomatically and security-significant: it reduced pressure on the Congolese government, protected Goma from a direct threat, and eased the diplomatic crisis between the DRC and Rwanda (ACCORD, 2024, pp. 7-9).

3.0 PERFORMANCE AND LIMITATIONS ANALYSIS

3.1 The achievements of the EACRF

The evaluation of the EACRF's performance reveals a mixed picture. On the one hand, the force has succeeded in containing the M23's advance towards Goma, reducing the frequency of sporadic confrontations between armed groups and creating an environment conducive to diplomatic negotiations. The presence of the EACRF has deterred some rebel groups from attacking the M23, reducing violence in the territories of Rutshuru, Masisi, and Walikale (ACCORD, 2024, p. 10).

On the other hand, these successes must be nuanced. The coexistence between the EACRF and the M23 in the areas occupied by the latter has been interpreted by some as a sign of cooperation between the regional force and the rebels in the exploitation of natural resources. In addition, the EACRF has not been operationally present in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituni, where the M23 does not operate, thus limiting its geographical impact (CIVIC, 2024, pp. 5-7).

3.2 Challenges and constraints

Several challenges have limited the effectiveness of the EAC's security cooperation. The first challenge lies in the ambiguity of the mandate. The EACRF was supposed to facilitate the implementation of the Nairobi and Luanda frameworks by the main parties to the conflict, mainly the government and the M23. However, the Congolese government and local communities expected the EACRF to use military force against the M23 and reconquer the occupied territories. This divergence in perception of the mandate became the main reason why the DRC opposed the continuation of the EACRF (ACCORD, 2024, pp. 12-14).

The second challenge concerns the lack of coordination and trust between the Member States. Diplomatic relations between the DRC and Rwanda had deteriorated after the resurgence of the M23, with the DRC accusing Rwanda of supporting the rebels, while Rwanda accused the DRC of supporting the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Rwanda's inclusion in the regional force raised suspicions from the Congolese government and local communities who saw Rwanda as part of the problem (CIVIC, 2024, pp. 8-10).

The third challenge is financial and logistical. The EACRF faced significant budgetary constraints, with Member States having to bear a large part of the deployment costs. The lack of modern equipment, including aerial surveillance and transport assets, has limited the operational capability of the force. These constraints have been compounded by delays in receiving equipment from the AU Continental Logistics Base in Cameroon (United Nations, 2024, S/2024/482).

3.3 The perception of the civilian population

The perception of the Congolese civilian population towards the EACRF has been largely negative. According to a study by CIVIC (2024), the vast majority of civilians surveyed (95%) did not feel that the deployment of the EACRF had improved their safety. Only 5% felt that EACRF actions or proximity to their bases had positive impacts on their personal safety.

Congolese civilians did not perceive the EACRF troops in a uniform way. Several participants praised the efforts of Burundian troops to intervene in M23 attacks and observed that their

bases, troops, and patrols were more integrated in high-risk areas. In contrast, the Kenyan contingent's approach of political engagement and negotiations with the M23 without a fight has aroused discontent and suspicion among many civilians (CIVIC, 2024, pp. 12-15).

Many civilians equated the inaction of EACRF troops with complicity in violence. Some concluded, based on the EACRF's inaction, that there was collusion between the regional force's troops and the M23 rebels, making accusations that EACRF troops were extracting resources from the DRC for their personal gain. These perspectives are rooted in decades of intervention by regional actors in the DRC to advance their financial and geopolitical interests (CIVIC, 2024, p. 16).

4.0 PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the EAC's security cooperation mechanisms in the DRC makes it possible to identify several recommendations for the future. First, it is essential to clarify the mandate of future regional forces and to ensure a shared understanding among all actors. The mandate should clearly specify whether the objective is political facilitation, military neutralization, or a combination of the two approaches (Lisakafu, 2025, pp. 18-20).

Secondly, trust between Member States must be strengthened through transparency and accountability mechanisms. Allegations of support for armed groups must be impartially investigated and accountability established. The EAC should also establish a more effective intelligence-sharing mechanism to coordinate security actions (International Crisis Group, 2023, pp. 22-25).

Thirdly, sustainable funding for regional peace missions must be ensured. The experience of the EACRF demonstrates that the lack of resources severely limits operational capacity. The EAC should explore innovative financing mechanisms, including contributions from the international community and support from the African Union (United Nations, 2024, S/2024/482).

Fourthly, the commitment of local communities must be strengthened. The experience of the EACRF shows that the lack of communication and consultation with the population limits the acceptability and effectiveness of security interventions. Future missions should incorporate an explicit protection of civilians component and community participation mechanisms (CIVIC, 2024, pp. 20-22).

5.0 CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the EAC's security cooperation mechanisms in the management of armed conflicts in the DRC reveals a mixed record. While the EAC has demonstrated an ability to initiate political processes and deploy a regional force, the effectiveness of these mechanisms has been limited by major structural and operational challenges.

The EACRF succeeded in securing a de facto ceasefire and creating favourable conditions for the political process, but these gains were not sustainable in the absence of common political will and effective coordination among member states. The premature withdrawal of the force

in December 2023 illustrates the limits of a security approach that fails to reconcile the divergent interests of regional actors.

The future of security cooperation in East Africa depends on the EAC's ability to reform its security governance architectures. This reform must be based on a clarification of mandates, a strengthening of inter-state trust, adequate funding and better consideration of the perspectives of local populations. Without these conditions, the East African Community risks continuing to face the paradox of regional integration that struggles to produce the collective security it promotes.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1. ACCORD. (2024). The East African Community Regional Force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Successes, Challenges and Prospects. *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.14426/ajcr.v24i1.105>
2. Balassa, B. (1961). *The Theory of Economic Intégration*. Richard D. Irwin, Inc. ISBN 978-0-415-68124-7, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6435.1961.tb02365.x>
3. Bar, J. (2023). Accession of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the East African Community: A Threat to Regional Security or an Opportunity for the Peacebuilding Process? *Polish Political Science Review*, 11(1), 102-115. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2023-0007>
4. Buzan, B., & Waever, O. (2003). *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-89111-0, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511491250>
5. Centre pour le Dialogue Humanitaire (HD). (2024). *The Nairobi Process: An Assessment of EAC-Led Mediation in Eastern DRC*. HD Centre Report.
6. CIVIC. (2024). *Civilian Perspectives on Regional Security Efforts to Address Violence in the DRC*. Center for Civilians in Conflict, Washington DC.
7. EAC. (1999). *Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community*. East African Community Secretariat, Arusha, Tanzania.
8. EAC. (2022a). *Communique of the 22nd Ordinary Summit of the EAC Heads of State*. Arusha, 22 July 2022.
9. EAC. (2022b). *Nairobi Process on Peace and Security in Eastern DRC: Framework Agreement*.
10. Haas, E. B. (1958). *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950-1957*. Stanford University Press. ISBN 978-0-8047-0189-7
11. Handy, P.-S. (2025a). *Anatomy of SADC's Failure in Eastern DRC*. ISS Today, Institute for Security Studies, 20 March 2025.
12. International Crisis Group. (2023). *The M23 and the Crisis in Eastern DRC: A Call for Regional Solutions*. Africa Report N°320.
13. Lisakafu, D. (2025). *Beyond Borders: Evaluating EAC and SADC Roles in the DRC Conflict*. UNU-WIDER Working Paper 2025/06. ISBN 978-92-9267-601-3.
14. United Nations. (2024). *Report of the Secretary-General on MONUSCO (S/2024/482)*. United Nations Security Council.
15. United Nations. (2024). *Final Report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2024/432)*. United Nations Security Council.

16. Osman, G. U., & Mwea, C. W. (2025). Regional Security Dynamics and Implications in the Intégration of the Democratic Republic of Congo into East African Community. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, 9(11), 68-80. ISSN 2523-6725.
17. Prunier, G. (2009). *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-537420-9
18. Stearns, J. K. (2011). *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*. PublicAffairs. ISBN 978-1-58648-929-8
19. Warner, Z. (2011). Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(12), 2269-2271. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2011.645705>