

**Conflict Management Mechanism In Africa: A Critical Analysis Of Uganda's
Involvement In The Conflict Of Democratic Republic Of Congo**

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Abstract

Africa as a continent has been affected by several conflicts. Some of them have been classified as protracted conflicts. In East Africa, the conflict in DRC has been the deadliest one concerning the loss of lives and properties. The conflict in DRC has devastating and painful effects which included but were not limited to displacements, loss of innocent lives and destruction of infrastructures. Uganda is one of the neighbouring countries to the DRC, there are roles that Uganda has undertaken towards the resolution of the conflict. The persistent occurrence of conflicts in Africa warrants the existence of a mechanism aimed at resolving conflicts by the application of different measures. African Union has developed mechanisms within its system to deal with conflict in its members by involving its member states. African Union under certain circumstances triggers regional cooperation bodies to be involved in the resolution of the conflicts in terms of peace initiatives, military forces etc. Uganda, which is the case of this paper has been involved in the resolution of the conflict in DRC. The paper seeks to critically analyse the involvement of Uganda by referring to the mandate given by mechanisms developed by the African Union and East African Community.

Key words: DRC, Conflict, Uganda, East African Community

Introduction

Africa has long been affected by both internal and external conflicts. East Africa, in particular, has faced various types of violence, instability, and armed conflicts, both within and beyond its borders. This region is rich in natural resources, such as oil, gold, and diverse flora and fauna, which contribute to its economic growth in the industrial and agricultural sectors (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2021). However, the abundance of resources, coupled with high youth unemployment and corruption, has made East Africa a hotspot for armed conflicts, violence, and instability. Among the most affected countries is the Democratic

Republic of Congo (DRC), which has experienced recurring conflicts that hinder its development. The conflict in the DRC has had devastating effects, including the displacement of people, loss of lives, and destruction of infrastructure. Uganda, one of the DRC's immediate neighbors, has been identified by many researchers as playing a crucial role in conflict resolution in the region.

The persistent occurrence of conflicts in Africa necessitates a mechanism to manage and mitigate such situations. Conflict management demands a holistic approach aimed at addressing the root causes of these conflicts. This paper critically analyzes Uganda's involvement in the DRC conflict, focusing on the mechanisms developed by the African Union (AU) and the East African Community (EAC) for conflict management and resolution.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to:

1. Explore the nature of Uganda's involvement in the conflict in the DRC.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the African Union's and East African Community's conflict management mechanisms.
3. Provide recommendations for improving regional approaches to conflict resolution.

Methodology

This study employs a secondary data analysis approach to understand the conflicts in East Africa and the role of Uganda in conflict resolution. The research begins with an extensive review of existing literature on conflict management, regional conflicts in East Africa, and Uganda's involvement in conflict resolution. This literature review draws from academic journals, books, and reputable reports. Following this, the study involves the examination of historical documents, government reports, and publications from international organizations to gather comprehensive data on the causes, development, and management of conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and surrounding regions.

The data is compiled from various secondary sources, including reports from the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks. This aggregated data is then subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns, providing a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflicts, the effectiveness of conflict management

strategies, and the implications of Uganda's interventions. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the complex dynamics of conflicts in East Africa and offers insights into more effective conflict management and resolution strategies.

Literature Review

Conflict management in Africa has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis. Burton (1991) introduced the concept of human needs theory, which argues that conflicts arise when fundamental human needs—such as security, identity, and recognition—are unmet. He posits that sustainable peace can only be achieved by addressing these needs. Thakore (2013) aligns with this view, emphasizing that conflict management is synonymous with conflict resolution, which involves addressing and removing the root causes of conflict. This holistic approach is crucial in regions like East Africa, where historical grievances and socio-economic disparities are prevalent.

Hirbe (2016) highlights the role of political marginalization and ethnic tensions as significant sources of intra-state conflicts, particularly in East Africa. Shaw (2017) underscores the importance of good governance, peacebuilding, and regional integration in conflict management. These elements are essential to addressing the root causes of conflicts and ensuring sustainable peace. The African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 outlines aspirations for a peaceful and secure Africa, with mechanisms like the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) aimed at preventing and resolving conflicts. The APSA represents a comprehensive framework designed to address conflicts through early warning systems, preventive diplomacy, and peace support operations (African Union, 2015). Similarly, the East African Community (EAC) has explored both diplomatic and military approaches to address conflicts, as evidenced by its recent involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The DRC presents a critical case study in understanding conflict dynamics in East Africa. Despite its vast human capital and resource wealth, the DRC has been unable to achieve lasting peace and security. The Centre for Preventive Action (2023) reports that the eastern DRC is a hotspot for ethnic conflicts and violent resource competition involving ethnic militias, Congolese security forces, UN troops, and external actors. These conflicts are closely linked to the political developments in neighboring countries. Rwanda's involvement in the DRC, following the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) victory against the genocidal Rwandan government, is a prime example. Rwanda justified its military campaigns in the DRC by

arguing that Hutu groups in eastern DRC posed a threat to the Tutsi population. With the support of Uganda, Angola, and Burundi, Rwandan troops overthrew the Mobutu regime and installed Laurent Kabila as president. However, the relationship between Rwanda and Kabila's government deteriorated, leading to the Second Congo War in 1998. This war drew in multiple countries and resulted in an estimated three million deaths by 2004 (Curtis, 2005).

In the aftermath of the Second Congo War, peace agreements were implemented, leading to a transitional government in Kinshasa under Joseph Kabila. Despite these efforts, unrest continued in eastern DRC, with several rebel groups emerging. The March 23 Movement (M23), a Tutsi rebel group, significantly impacted relations between Rwanda and the DRC. The UN authorized an offensive brigade under the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) to support the Congolese army, which forced M23 to call off its campaign in 2013. However, Rwanda's backing of M23 damaged its relations with Kinshasa (Shepherd, 2018). International interventions in the DRC have had mixed results. The 1999 Lusaka Accord aimed to address the needs of major governmental parties but failed to hold countries like Uganda accountable for their troops' abuses. Despite some progress in peacebuilding efforts, local conflicts and instability persist, particularly in areas like Bunia and Butembo, where community leaders have sought to halt violence. Effective implementation of local peace agreements requires re-establishing civilian administration and creating a rule of law. The role of external actors and international organizations has been pivotal in both exacerbating and mitigating conflicts. External interventions, while aimed at stabilizing the region, often ignore local dynamics and grievances (Maswanku, 2022). The failure to address these local conflicts and the broader geopolitical interests of neighboring countries have prolonged the instability in the DRC. This highlights the need for comprehensive conflict management strategies that address both local and regional dynamics.

This review underscores the complexity of conflicts in East Africa and the multifaceted approach required for effective conflict management and resolution. The involvement of multiple actors, both internal and external, necessitates a coordinated effort to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the region.

Findings

The United Nations Security Council as a Global Actor

The United Nations Security Council initially focused on demanding the withdrawal of unnamed foreign troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). However, after Uganda and Rwanda engaged in intense fighting in Kisangani in June 2000, killing and wounding hundreds of civilians, the Security Council became more critical. In resolutions 1304 and 1332, the Council called for the immediate withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan forces and demanded reparations for the loss of life and property caused by the conflict. Despite international condemnation and statements from the U.N. Secretary-General, both governments remained unresponsive, failing to acknowledge their responsibility for civilian casualties and violations of the Geneva Conventions. The Security Council and the international community have yet to take meaningful actions to hold them accountable for their actions in Kisangani and other areas of the DRC.

In November 1999, the Security Council established the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) to monitor compliance with the Lusaka Agreement. The deployment of MONUC was hampered by the refusal of the conflicting parties to cease hostilities, but the Security Council extended its mandate in December 2000, enhancing its responsibilities for protecting human rights. By early 2001, MONUC had deployed 201 officers and military observers across Congo, including at the headquarters of various rebel movements in Bunia, Gbadolite, and Goma. Despite these efforts, MONUC's military observers and human rights monitors often failed to effectively mitigate local conflicts. Nevertheless, there were instances of successful interventions, such as in September 2000 when Ambassador Kamel Morjane, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, intervened in Bunia. Morjane convinced the commander of the Usalama Battalion to leave the MONUC compound, thus preventing further violence. Additionally, MONUC's civilian staff focused on child protection and humanitarian coordination played a role in raising awareness about the plight of civilians among U.N. decision-makers.

With the installation of a new president in Congo, the Secretary-General requested a smaller, more rapidly deployable force from the Security Council on February 12, 2001. The Council reduced the number of troops from 5,537 to 2,300, limiting their responsibilities to the protection of 550 U.N. military observers. This new mandate reflected a shift in international focus toward military disengagement, as the force was primarily tasked with monitoring cease-fires and troop withdrawals rather than protecting civilians. The Secretary-General emphasized that while the force would safeguard U.N. facilities and supplies, they would not be equipped

to extract U.N. personnel in danger, accompany humanitarian convoys, or extend protection to local populations. MONUC, which became MONUSCO in 2010, has faced significant criticism due to documented cases of abuse, including sexual exploitation and violence perpetrated by both military and civilian personnel associated with the mission. These incidents have sparked protests among civilians in the DRC. According to a CNN report, dozens were killed during anti-UN protests in the DRC in July 2023 (Liakos, 2023). Authorities claimed that the protests disrupted public order, leading to security interventions. As tensions escalated, clashes broke out between protesters and security forces, highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by MONUSCO and the urgent need for accountability and reform in the mission's operations.

African Union as A Continental Actor

The African Union has initiated different units aimed at promoting peace on the continent. It created the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to ensure stability in Africa. The African Union (AU) has a comprehensive mechanism developed to deal with conflicts on the continent. It has a proactive component which puts efforts into preventing conflicts. According to Agenda 2063 of the AU, The African Union leads policy-making and implementation of decisions aimed at ensuring that Africa achieves Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 which aspires for “A peaceful and secure Africa” through the use of mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centered approach to conflict prevention and resolution of conflicts and establishing of a culture of peace and tolerance nurtured in Africa’s children and youth through peace education. The Agenda 2063 flagship initiative of Silencing the Guns by 2020 is at the core of activities being put in place to ensure Africa is a more peaceful and stable continent (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

By the above principle, the AU has developed the Peace & Security Council as an organ that specifically deals with all aspects of the conflicts. The website reads the definition of the framework for this organ as follows. The key AU Organ for promoting peace and security on the continent is the Peace & Security Council (PSC) which is the standing decision-making organ of the AU for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. It is a collective security and early warning arrangement intended to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflict and crises in Africa. It is also the key pillar of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which is the framework for promoting peace, security, and stability in Africa (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

There are several pillars of APSA such as the Continental Early Warning System, Panel of the Wise, African Standby Force and the Peace Fund. The main pillar is the Peace and Security Council which has subsidiary committees that are Military Staff Committee and Committee of Experts (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). It has been observed that the AU has put in place a mechanism that has several organs. Theoretically, the mechanism seems to be well-established. However, the biggest debate now lies in the efficacy of the African Union in its attempt to promote peace as it argued that the underlying premise of the argument is that peace efforts, whether by the African Union or regional economic communities, are fundamentally flawed because they assume that the colonial or neo-colonial state and economy were established through violent processes of conquest, colonization, and domination. Specifically, they envision peace without dismantling the underlying logic of coloniality and its endorsement of violence that is repeated and perpetual. Consequently, under neo-colonial arrangements that were initially established at independence, the legacy of structural violence persists, making the progress made in peacebuilding reversible and fragile (Zondi, 2017).

It is on record that the African Union has intervened in several conflicts to forge ways for long-lasting peace on the continent, for example in Burundi, Somalia, and Sudan. AU has deployed thousands of uniformed personnel (troops, police, and military observers) in these interventions. These troops have been provided by a handful of countries rather than many. In this sense, the developed mechanism has failed to attract contributions from other selected member countries of the PSC. Besides lacking military support from member countries, the PSC has limited access to funds allocated to its operations (Williams, 2009). Uganda has been one of the supporting countries in terms of providing necessary assistance to the kinds of interventions in the conflict areas. One of the conflicts that Uganda has been very actively involved in the management of is the one in Somalia under the AU Atmis (formerly known as Amisom) mission. Uganda has been on the frontline in the war against Al Shabab and it is one of the most affected countries in terms of casualties. The political regime in Uganda has been actively participating in conflict areas in its neighboring countries. This participation has raised several questions about the motives of intervention, legitimacy of intervention and pull factors of intervention. It has also attracted criticism over violations of human rights in deployed areas.

The Role of the East African Community in Conflict Resolution

The East African Community (EAC) has a notable history of struggle in conflict resolution, even though it is regarded as Africa's most successful regional integration bloc. For instance,

in 2008, the EAC chose not to intervene in the post-election violence in Kenya. Additionally, its mediation attempts during the Burundi crisis highlighted its shortcomings in addressing regional conflicts, as differing interests among partner states and a lack of political commitment led to unproductive outcomes (Adogo, 2022). Unrest and instability continue in the area despite efforts to put an end to the violence in the eastern Congo by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the UN peacekeeping operation (MONUSCO), and the Congolese government. When DRC joined the EAC in late March 2022, it brought about the possibility of resolving the conflict through the efforts of EAC member countries. This was because Felix Tshisekedi made a promise to join the bloc and lay the foundation for promoting sustainable economic growth, good governance, and durable peace and security throughout the region by the treaty establishing EAC.

The EAC, an umbrella organization for East African countries, is one of the better avenues through which conflicts would be resolved by member states. This has been observed practically in some attempts put forward by the bloc to curb continuous violence in the DRC. The heads of each member state agreed to call off the continuous conflicts in DRC and provide long-lasting peace in the country. This could be done through the use of force but the records of force in the region could not favor the stopping of the conflicts (Walle, 2022). Eventually, the EAC members agreed to use both diplomatic and military means to curb persisting conflict in DRC. A regional force was to be formed by member states. However, Rwanda was requested to be excluded from the military regiment based on major political disagreements between Rwanda and DRC. This would become the first-ever military attempt by EAC towards conflict resolution in the region. The regiment comprised of troops from member countries, namely Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi. At the time of writing this, it should be noted that making a comprehensive analysis of this initiative would be too early. The willingness and readiness of this bloc to deploy military manpower earn significant credit, indicating that it will not tolerate any insurgencies and conflicts in the region.

Uganda's Position in Conflict Management Mechanism

Uganda is one of the countries in Africa known to have been involved in the DRC conflict. These involvements have been sometimes as a party to the conflict and sometimes as an actor contributing to its resolution. To begin with the latter, Uganda has played a major role in conflict resolution in Somalia. It also became part of the conflict in the DRC in the 1990s while fighting against military groups housed there. Uganda's foreign policy has been supportive of

creating peace and security in the region. Some reasons have been attributed to political motives, while others are ethnic. Uganda has been known for its interference in neighboring countries, which is sometimes interpreted negatively (Clark, 2001).

Clark (2001) also puts forward arguments pointing to the basis upon which Uganda intervened in the DRC conflict, the most prominent being the conspiracy theory that explains why Uganda used to work hand in hand with Rwanda to try to resolve the conflict in the DRC through violent means. It's worth noting that the DRC is very rich in mineral resources. This explains why there have been continuous conflicts over natural resources between Uganda and the DRC. As a result, the DRC filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) over allegations of looting natural resources and illegally extracting minerals like gold, diamonds, and timber from the eastern region, which has caused environmental degradation and instability.

Following Uganda's involvement in the conflict, there were reports of human rights violations by the Ugandan military. The Ugandan army has seldom faced consequences for their actions while engaged in military intervention in the DRC between 1998 and 2003. The International Court of Justice ruled in 2005 that the Ugandan army had violated international humanitarian and human rights law during this time, primarily through killing and torturing civilians as well as by destroying villages. As a result of this ruling, Uganda was fined \$325 million as compensation for the losses caused by the war (Aljazeera, 2022).

Although Uganda's involvement in the DRC conflict has harmed relations between the two countries, the recent attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Uganda have brought the DRC and Uganda together in the fight against militia groups in the DRC. This development paved the way for Uganda's recent military intervention named 'Operation Shujaa'. This occurred shortly before the DRC acceded to the EAC. As a result, the relationship between the two countries has been partly restored. This is one of the reasons why the deployment of the regional force of the EAC in the DRC has been looked upon favorably.

Conclusion

The East African Community's (EAC) efforts towards conflict resolution in the region have been limited. These efforts have primarily centered on mediation processes. One notable example is the crisis in Burundi that began in 2015. Although the EAC was tasked with

mediating the Burundi crisis, the conflict persisted for several years due to ongoing animosity among its members. Despite these challenges, the situation in Burundi has largely stabilized, but the underlying tensions between member states, such as Rwanda and Burundi, remain a concern. Rwanda and Burundi's already strained relations are further strained by the discovery in a UN report from December 2018 that Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda are now arming and training Rwandan rebels (Nantulya, 2019).

Although EAC peace initiatives have been constrained due to several facts. There is optimism among political leaders and people of the region. Given the fact that DRC has finally joined the bloc efforts by members towards resolution of the conflict in DRC is expected to increase. This will tremendously contribute to strengthening principles which are peace-related set out by regional, continental and global organisations.

Recommendations

To achieve the establishment of peace and security in the region at an ideal level, the EAC should address several issues. Leaders in member states should uphold the collective position of the bloc while engaging in conflict resolution in the region, rather than pursuing personal initiatives. This collective approach will foster unity and coherence in the EAC's peace efforts. Additionally, it is crucial to develop a robust conflict resolution mechanism within the EAC. This mechanism should be well-funded and technically established to effectively address conflicts. With the expansion of the EAC to eight members, it is necessary to revisit and possibly restructure the EAC's administrative organs to fill any existing gaps and enhance operational efficiency. Given that some member states are still suffering from conflicts, the EAC must ensure that the conflict resolution process is sensitive to the effects of these conflicts on neighboring countries. The role of Uganda in peace initiatives is paramount, as the country hosts the majority of refugees from member countries. The perception of Uganda's involvement in conflict areas may have negative effects on its relations with other member countries. Additionally, the burden of hosting refugees could become unbearable for the government and its citizens. Therefore, it is essential to provide adequate support to Uganda and other refugee-hosting countries within the EAC. By addressing these issues, the EAC can strengthen its conflict resolution capabilities and contribute to lasting peace and security in the region.

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