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WHAT WENT WRONG ?

Joint Deployment of Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) to enhance peace and security In Eastern DR Congo.

POLICY INSIGHT

01 / AUGUST 2024

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BACKGROUND

The Eastern African standby force (EASF) was established in 2007, and reached full operation capacity (FOC) in December 2015. Has broadly ranging membership in terms of geographical location include a number of larger member states (Sudan , Ethiopia and Uganda, a number of coastal countries in the horn of Africa (Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya , two small landlocked central African states (Rwanda and Burundi, and two islands states (Seychelles and Comoros). The Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) is a regional organization whose mandate is to enhance Peace and security in the region. It is one of the five multidimensional force of the African standby force (ASF) comprising of Civillians, Police and Military components.

Further more, the Eastern African Standby Force is the product of several other factors that have defined regional integration in the field of peace and security in the Eastern and horn of Africa. These include longstanding and continuing tensions between countries of the regions and the threats to peace and security, including internal wars, environmental degradation, terrorism and unconstitutional change of governments.

This policy insight seeks to provide a deeper understanding on regional mechanisms to provide capability for rapid development of force to carry out preventive deployment, operations and peace enforcement. Focusing on the EASF readiness to accomplish the mission, But also further to understand the challenges not to neutralize notorious rebel groups in order to meet the expectations of DR Congo Government. The policy insight will evaluate the objectives and motivations of rebel groups in fuelling instabilities and conflicts in the region. It also provides announced and informed analysis on Southern Africa development community (SADC) forces as a replacement, and UN keeping mission (MONUSCO).

Finally, the policy insight seeks to provide recommendations to mitigate the risks of instability and conflicts to promote peace, stability and security.

Regional Mechanisms to Readiness for deployment.

The Eastern African standby force (EASF) since it's formation was built on four structures as foundation pillars to carry out preventive deployment and peace support processes and these includes ; Eastern African standby force secretariat (EASFSEC) Mainly for policy organs, it coordinates the force activities in consultation with relevant authorities in other member states. Planning Element, Serves as multinational and multi-dimensional full time planning for EASF with in the framework of African Standby Force (ASF). It seeks to establish force capable of planning and preparations for complex peace support operations that include; reconnaissance, mounting, deployment and employment of up to brigade size including military police and civilians components in operations to address scenarios within the policy framework. EASF is made up of regional military and civilian staff on the secondment from the member states, it serves as acommand centre for force preparations and operations commands and finally, the logistics base receives personnel, materials and other resources to be maintained and supplied for training and operations of force and coordinates all activities involving loogistics.

Activities

The Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) held series of activities ranging from trainings at different levels in rotational member states to prepare the soldiers to enter into harm's

away and perform physically and mentally demanding tasks at the highest possible levels of proficiency. At their deployment in DR Congo for example, the endorsement came after a number of drills were held in member states on different intervals to ensure there's enough manpower and level of professionalism to take the task a head of them. It was against this background, the facilitator of Nairobi process led by the East African community (EAC) the former President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta, with support from the heads of states in the region announced the full deployment of the joint force.

However, tensions between the Congolese population, civil society organizations, including protests and media campaigns against the letter emerged after discontent was voiced by Congolese faction groups refusing the forces not to be deployed in the region on the grounds Congolese seems not to believe the regional force have the capacity to lead to the total eradication of armed rebel groups. But the force was finally deployed to carry on amidst these contestation efforts agitating to stop the deployment.

Later on, the status agreement for the region force which expired on 8 September was further extended until 8th December 2023. The extension came as a result of the great work done by the joint force from member states in solidarity. At the expiry of the second extension, DR Congo Government and local residents were accusing of the regional force of cohabiting rebels rather than forcing them to lay down forces. In that process the EASF was told to withdraw from the region, this was a big setback to both the Congolese government as a newest country to have joined the bloc with too much hopes in the force that would help to stabilise the region by forceful means to eradicate the rebels, In the other hand the regional force suffered of not fulfilling their mandate at the highest possible level of proficiency to bring cernity in the region.

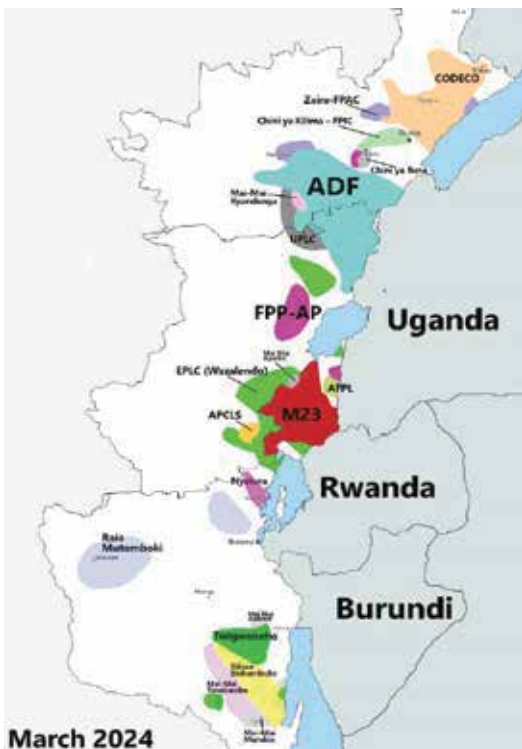
1. <https://www.eac.int/nairobiprocess>,
2. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/majority-congolese-reject-east-african-community-regional-force>
3. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/6/east-africa-leaders-extend-regional-troop-mandate-in-dr-congo>

MANDATE

The overall objective of Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) upon deployment in DR Congo was to stabilize the region and to put an end to terrorist, criminal activities and to promote cooperation, realization of true partnership and beneficial to all. The scope of their work was ranging from combatant operations to some extent work on civilian peace building programmes such as holding peace meetings and awareness to citizens to desist further involvement in acts to destabilize the region as Congo Government continues with empowerment programmes of communities for socio-economic transformation.

4. <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/democratic-republic-congo>

Areas were rebel groups operate.



North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri areas where M23, ADF, LRA and other agitators are operating from in a manner that undermines development and stabilization of the area but also involves extra judicial killings, rapings, total destruction of properties, routing and forceful means to fled many Congolese from their country. It is estimated that the country has registered 5.4 million deaths, at an average of 45000 per month according to findings released by international rescue committee as a result of conflicts.

A population equivalent to the size of Denmark or the state of Colorado have lost their lives principally through diseases, malnutrition and war. DR Congo, remains by far as deadliest in the world. This tells us how urgently the situation in Congo needs serious interventions with collaborative efforts from the African Union (AU), Regional Economic blocs, International bodies and the community in Congo it's self to galvanize their efforts and resolve the situation from getting more escalation.

5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2223004/>

Objectives and motivations of rebel groups.

The country (DRC) had more than 120 militia groups actively operating in different areas, some of these groups are foreign from neighbouring countries and others are locally engineered by fewer Congolese rich people in the expense to expedite natural resources for their selfish interest. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of civilians have paid a big price to some have lost their properties and loved ones and others have permanently suffered mental health complications as a result of escalation of insurgency . The foreign groups includes ; Lord's resistance army (LRA) Which originates from Uganda and actively in DRC north - Eastern province of Orientale. During the intervention of Uganda people's defence forces (UPDF), the group is no longer active and have changed tactics and left the area now operating in central Africa Republic with alliances and support from notorious militia group "ISIS", is asunni jihadist group with particularly violent ideology that calls itself a caliphate and claims religious authority over all Muslims; Democratic forces of the liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) which are present in North and south Kivu ; Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) which also originates from Uganda and is active in North east of North kivu , In recent times, the group used to cross to Uganda and commit crimes and crimes against humanity ; Burundi forces national de liberation (FNL), which has presence in southern areas of south kivu unlike others; M23, the group that rose to prominence over 13 years ago, when

its fighters seized Goma, Eastern Congo largest city on boarder with Rwanda, their objective and motivation are patched at the intersection of local, national and regional interest. UN independent expert, Kinshasa, Paris and Washington have accused Rwanda of expansionism aim, thus backing the Tutsi-led M23 rebel groups, kigali has deliberately denied the accusations Culminating to continuous tensions between the two countries that would escalate more bloodshed and destabilization of the region.

Regularly, these groups perpetrate in widespread of violence and abuses that may amount to crime against humanity and war crime.

Other militias groups their objectives vary depending on what their vision would be, since some where locally engineered and others being foreigners .But the similarities all of them needs financing scheme to support their activities which leads to look for source of funds notably trade in nature resources, ordinary commerce and illegal taxation. Decades of clashes between armed groups, widespread violation of human rights and devastating incidents of gender based violence have caused unprecedented levels of protection needs , displacing millions of people to neighbouring countries , some lost their lives in the country and others seek asylum far beyond Africa .

6. <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

7. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/french-politician-accuses-rwanda-of-expansionist-aims-in-dr-congo-4415584>

Prominence of M23 in Eastern DR Congo.

M23 movement , In April 2012, M23 was an offspring of National Congolese for the defence of the people better known by its french acronym CNDP , arebel group which fought the DRC government between 2006 and 2009. Both groups draw on claims that Congolese Tutsi and other ethenic communities in North and south Kivu are discriminated against. They are considered of " Rwandaphone " one of the consequences of this discrimination is the presence of ten thousands of refugees in the Africa Great lakes region. M23 occupied the city of Goma in Eastern DRC for 10 days in 2012, rapid rise and its links to Rwanda caused alarm and triggered international efforts for ceasefire. Much as the agreements were made and conversations round peace talk were also made by both the Congo Government and the group all these where not implemented by either parties. This was the most disappointing part instead triggering more tensions in the region.

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M23_rebellion

Southern African Development Community Mission In DRC (SAMIDRC)

On December 15, 2023, the force was deployed officially to take over from EAC regional forces under the auspice of the government of Congo. The Deployment came as a result of EASF failure to eradicate M23 and other armed groups due to challenges related to funding, safe guarding civilians and how it will coordinate with the long running UN keeping mission this constitutes claims from the Congolese that regional force was cohabiting with the rebels which contravenes with it's mandate. The deployment of SAMIDRC has registered some little successes so far in the areas of troops coordination and education of civilians to further report and desist to participate in such acts .

This begs the question to whether the SAMIDRC will totally guarantee the restoration of peace in that region or shall we continue experiencing constant threat and disruptors of peace and stability in the region? The SADC had earlier agreed to deploy equivalent of 500 complementary service personnels for the mission to support Congolese army and Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) already in the operation which would have meant a lot for the combination of both regions forces to galvanised their manpower to guarantee the safety of citizens.

Upon the withdrawal of EASF forces had sent a mixed reaction not only to people of this region but also miscalculations made by Congo government for not extending the contract of the EASF upon expiry of one year as the seventh member state. It was also a testing moment to the confidence levels of our leaders in support of regional force. Over decades ago, Congolese army and UN peace keeping mission have constantly operating jointly in pursuit for peace and stability of the Eastern DR Congo, But it hasn't been the case to achieve their main objectives of stability, Instead we had continue to experience extrajudicial killings, rampant rapings of young girls and women, influx of refugees in neighbouring countries and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

9. <https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/deployment-sadc-mission-democratic-republic-congo>

Policy recommendations.

Given to decades of instabilities and conflicts passed by rebel groups in Eastern DR Congo, the African Union, East African community, UN keeping mission and Government of Congo need to take a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address the issue. This could mean a set of policy recommendations aiming at mitigating the risks to instability and conflicts to promote peace and security in the region.

- One policy recommendation is the government in Kinshasa and the government in Kigali need to strengthen their diplomatic relations to address the root cause of interference to each other's territorial area, this can be achieved through regular dialogues aiming to settle out the prolonged political and economic disputes and not pinpointing each other on who backs what that would escalate more conflicts and tensions in the region.
- Another policy recommendation is the Joint force SADC mission as a replacement of Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) alongside

with Congo army and UN peace keeping mission deployed in the area need to widening scope of work not only to intensify maximum operations to total eradication of armed rebel groups but also continuous engagement of civilians in peace building processes through regular meetings. These civilians can as well be used as key informants to report any suspicions in their area to nearby force for intervention.

- Third policy recommendation is the government of DR Congo and its partners need to promote sustainable and inclusive development through empowerment programmes targeting the joblessness people that could be attracted to join rebel groups due to lack of employment opportunities in the area.
- Fourth policy recommendation is the respect of human rights and addressing gender based violence issues that would forcefully attract the affected individuals to join rebel groups as a result of Anger to revenge.

Conclusion

Decades of instability and conflicts in Eastern DR Congo has passed a negative impact on international declaration of human rights, but also continues jeopardizing the socio-economic transformation in the region and poses security threats to the entire region of East Africa. In order to prescribe the right medication of these issues, collective efforts from international bodies, African Union, Eastern African Community and Government of Congo need to come up with long lasting solutions and implementation plans that will guarantee peace, stability and security in Eastern DR Congo.

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