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The New Paradigm of U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changing Global Order The DR Congo–Rwanda Agreement³

The article examines the transformation of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa through the lens of the June 2025 peace agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, brokered by the United States, and backed by Qatar. It argues that the agreement exemplifies a pragmatic and overtly transactional turn in U.S. engagement, privileging strategic and economic interests – most notably access to critical mineral resources – over the aid-centric and normatively framed approaches that have traditionally characterised Western, including U.S. policy in the region. Situating the agreement within the historical context of colonial legacies, protracted regional conflicts, and the enduring volatility of Congolese–Rwandan relations, the article highlights the persistent role of armed actors, particularly the M23 movement, in undermining earlier peace initiatives such as the Luanda and Nairobi processes. The analysis further situates the U.S.-brokered accord within a broader recalibration of the Africa policy of the USA, driven by concerns over regional stability and intensifying geopolitical competition, especially with the People’s Republic of China. While the agreement signals a significant strategic pivot in U.S. engagement with Central Africa, the article concludes that its long-term efficacy remains uncertain, as enduring insecurity and unresolved structural drivers of conflict continue to cast doubt on the prospects for sustainable peace in the eastern DRC.

Keywords: United States of America, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, foreign policy, agreement

Introduction

The transformation of the global world order has been accompanied by the intensification, escalation, or re-emergence of numerous local-regional conflicts, bearing in mind that in a non-hegemonic structure there are (more) opportunities to resolve territorial-ethnic (or other types of) disputes. The conflict between the Democratic Republic of the

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³ This study is a revised and expanded version of an analysis that appeared at the John Lukacs Institute’s series ‘Analyses on Global Affairs.’

Congo (DRC, DR Congo) and Rwanda is also a long-standing issue, but it escalated to an unprecedented level in January 2025 – an event that many hoped could be concluded by a peace agreement mediated by the United States (and Qatar) during the course of 2025. The agreement, not only its content but also the identity of the mediator, transcends the logic of traditional peace settlements, as it anticipates the logic and dynamics of a post-hegemonic, orderless world system. It becomes evident how value- and order-based approaches are being replaced by a more pragmatic economic perspective, effectively described by the term transactionalism, which prioritises American interest – highlighted within the National Security Strategy of the U.S. published to describe the foreign policy thinking of Donald Trump’s second administration.

This new strategic document, published in November 2025, highlights a major shift not just within the global presence of the U.S., but towards Africa as well (although on its last page [29] in three short paragraphs) – moving away from the so-called aid-driven approach towards a transactionalist–realist understanding of relations with the continent, towards a “paradigm capable of harnessing Africa’s abundant natural resources and latent economic potential”.⁴

The DR Congo–Rwanda deal was the first sign of this shifting foreign policy approach of Washington in Africa, having further geopolitical consequences as well in a region where Chinese presence has been considerably more dominant than the American.

This analytical paper looks at the conflict in a historical context and deals with the actions of different stakeholders, including the East African Community (EAC) as regional economic integration, the African Union (AU) and several of the external actors. It locates all these within the framework of a changing global order with its implications for possible upcoming scenarios. First, it summarises the origins of the conflict, then, addresses the numerous (failed) attempts to solve it. Third, an overview of the changing Africa-policy of the U.S. will be provided, followed by the circumstances of the agreement, as well as the U.S.-brokered agreement itself. All put into a China–U.S. rivalry perspective, then, finally, critically viewed from the aspect of its importance for a better understanding of both the new U.S. foreign policy paradigm and the changing global landscape.

A conflict originating in the past

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the fourth most populous country in Africa, with a population of around 110 million, and a median age of less than 16 years. While it is considered one of the continent’s richest areas in terms of raw materials, the country is also among the poorest in the world: according to Focus Economics,⁵ it is the tenth poorest by 2025. Armed conflicts fuelled by the competition for minerals have devastated its already poor infrastructure over the years, causing the deaths of millions of people and forcing them to leave their homes. One of the focal territories of conflict is the eastern

⁴ The White House: *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. [online], The White House, 11.2025. Source: whitehouse.gov [27.12.2025].

⁵ Casanovas, Marta: *Top 20 Poorest Countries in the World in 2025*. [online], Focus Economics, 06.12.2024. Source: focus-economics.com [05.07.2025]

Congolese region, which is part of the Great Lakes macro-region of East Africa and is extremely rich in valuable minerals. Among other things, it accounts for 30% of the world's coltan production, which is essential for the manufacturing of high-tech electronic devices. In addition to coltan, other raw materials maintain the interest of regional and external actors: tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold deposits can be mined in the area, often through artisanal mining. Extensive corruption, which can also be observed in the mining sector, emerges as an additional problem.

The history of the region is significantly shaped by the legacy of conflict left behind by the actors of European colonisation. At the beginning of the “Scramble for Africa”⁶ process, at the end of the 19th century, these powers were still uncertain about which ethnic group to rely on for establishing their colonial rule. At the end of the century, the then Kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi (Kinyarwanda and Kirundi) first came under German control as part of German East Africa, and then, following World War I, became a League of Nations mandate territory under Belgian administration, which also controlled Belgian Congo in the west. From 1925, the Belgians administratively attached Ruanda-Urundi to the Belgian Congo, but while the Belgian Congo was governed from Brussels, Ruanda-Urundi was left in the hands of the Tutsi aristocracy – exercising indirect rule. From the late 1950s onwards, the Belgians continuously replaced Tutsi chiefs with Hutu leaders, “who immediately began to persecute the former clientele in order to establish their own”.⁷ The consequences of the 1994 Rwandan genocide – which was preceded by a similarly bloody but smaller-scale massacre in Burundi in the summer of 1972 – include numerous waves of refugees and Rwandan military intervention. All these processes and events have long-lasting regional dynamics that “continue to define the nature of conflicts in eastern Congo to this day”⁸.

The eastern Congolese Kivu region, which borders Rwanda geographically, has always been difficult to supervise from the capital Kinshasa, located approximately 2,600 km to the southwest, and almost impossible to keep under control. Here, from the second half of the 1960s, numerous armed groups competed with each other for land, as well as with the central authorities for power and control over the region's potential mineral wealth. The constant instability had a devastating impact on neighbouring countries as well – this was particularly evident in the 1990s, when two massive conflicts, the so-called “African World Wars”, caused the deaths of millions of people.⁹

In the (north-)eastern Congolese region, the ethnic tensions that gradually intensified from the 1940s and were further exacerbated by President Mobutu Sese Seko from the

⁶ Thomas Pakenham places this period between 1876 and 1912, during which years the European colonising forces focused on establishing their lasting colonial rule. See Pakenham, Thomas (1991): *The Scramble for Africa*. London: Abacus, xxvii. and Tarrósy, István – Vörös, Zoltán (2024): *Instabilitás és állami sérülékenység a Száhel-övezetben* [Instability and State Vulnerability in the Sahel Region]. *Nemzet és Biztonság*, 17(3), 7.

⁷ T. Horváth, Attila (2004): *Ruanda '94: egy krízis történelmi háttere*. *Kül-Világ*, 1(2), 12.

⁸ Biedermann, Zsuzsánna (2015): *Genocídium és destabilizáció az afrikai Nagy Tavak régióban. A konfliktusok gazdasági vetülete* [Genocide and Destabilization in the African Great Lakes Region. The Economic Aspect of the Conflicts]. Pécs: Publikon, 125.

⁹ Zane, Damian – Chibelushi, Wedaeli: *What's the Fighting in DR Congo All About?*. [online], BBC, 05.12.2025. Source: [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com) [06.07.2025].

late 1960s turned into sharpened interethnic struggles by the 1990s. In the background, the conflict between the so-called ‘indigenous’ population and even the Rwandans settled by the Belgians is clearly mentioned, which Mobutu exacerbated by consolidating his regional power with the help of the Tutsi community from Kivu. The “influx of refugees following the 1994 genocide [into Congo, then called Zaire] included a large number of Hutu perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, who wanted to establish their new military base in Zaire from where they could launch guerrilla attacks against the new Kigali government”.¹⁰ In the First Congo War, from October 1996 to May 1997, the regional destabilising effects of the 1994 genocide actually escalated, significantly contributed to by the “kleptocracy” carried out by the Mobutu dictatorship, which completely shattered Congolese society and economy, as well as the “nepotistic rule balancing between East and West that impoverished the country to the extreme”.¹¹ The anti-Mobutu coalition led by Rwanda included Uganda, Burundi, Angola, and Eritrea, and the power that was overthrown by the coup was seized by Laurent-Désiré Kabila. The Second Congo War broke out because Kabila turned against his former Rwandan and Ugandan supporters; the toll of this ‘African World War’ was at least 3 million dead and 2 million refugees, and, of course, the conflict minerals were once again at the forefront.

The fighting escalated again this year when the rebel group M23 made significant advances in the eastern Congo region. The M23 (March 23 Movement) movement was formed in 2012 as a new Tutsi rebel group and quickly gained strength with significant Ugandan and Rwandan support. From the beginning, the M23’s demands included “the departure of the Kinshasa government, the cessation of discrimination against Congolese Tutsis, and the perennial demand for the future allocation of positions in the government army for former and newly integrated members”.¹² The M23 did not occupy the strategically important cities of Kivu for the first time, as the actions of January 2025 were preceded by the capture of Goma in November 2012 – the central government could do nothing about it, just as the UN mission (MONUSCO) remained passive. The events at the end of January resulted in the reoccupation of Goma and the capture of Bukavu in the south.

The M23’s primary goal is to protect the Tutsi ethnic group in Eastern Congo, particularly against militias (such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, FDLR) that are supported by Kinshasa.

Failed attempts at a solution

Numerous initiatives have been established earlier to resolve the situation in Eastern Congo, but they have not been successful in resolving the conflict or in engaging the parties in continuing and maintaining dialogue. However, the agreement signed in June

¹⁰ Biedermann 2015: 125.

¹¹ Búr, Gábor (2011): *A szubszaharai Afrika története* [The History of the Sub-Saharan Africa]. Budapest: Kossuth, 118.

¹² Nagy, Sándor (2015): Aktív fegyveres csoportok a Kongói Demokratikus Köztársaságban [Active Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo]. In Kiss, Álmos Péter (ed.): *Afrikai terrorista- és szakadárszervezetek* [African Terrorist and Separatist Organizations]. Budapest: HVTK–NKE, 415–416.

2025 did not occur in a vacuum, and the agreement not only refers to the spirit of one of the previous initiatives, the Luanda Process, but also mentions the roles of the African Union and the UN, although in the latter case, it primarily refers to the Congolese peace mission, MONUSCO.

MONUSCO took over the tasks of the previous UN peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), on 1 July 2010. This was done in accordance with Security Council resolution 1925¹³ of 28 May 2010, to reflect the changes that had occurred in the country. The new mission has been authorised to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate, which includes the protection of civilians, humanitarian aid workers, and human rights activists at direct risk of physical violence, as well as supporting the stabilisation and peacekeeping efforts of the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹⁴

The African Union (AU) was a supporter of rapprochement attempts, striving to find and propose solutions based on its diplomatic weight. The AU supported both the Luanda and Nairobi processes (although it officially initiated only the Luanda process) – however, the attempts at resolution were weakened by the fact that the organisation did not have a credible enforcement mechanism behind it. Thus, while it drew the parties' attention to the importance of resolving the conflict and the significance of sovereignty,¹⁵ it was unable to bring the conflict to a resolution.

The Nairobi Process¹⁶ began in April 2022, primarily involving the East African Community as a regional integration and specifically Kenya's role. Following the negotiations in Nairobi, the EAC also sent a military contingent to Eastern Congo at the end of the year, but the soldiers left the country just under a year later. The process faced dual criticism: initially, the EAC did not involve the M23 in the negotiations, and on-site, the soldiers were accused of not engaging in combat against the M23.¹⁷

The Luanda Process,¹⁸ not far in time from the Nairobi Process, began in the summer of 2022, with an Angolan offer – here with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the background. Its main goal was to reduce tensions between the two parties and provide a roadmap for achieving peace. The negotiations here also ended in failure, but in 2024 they gained momentum again and eventually a plan was developed, which the parties discussed in several rounds. This plan was eventually included in the contract now signed, as its first annex.

¹³ Resolution 1925 (2010) / adopted by the Security Council at its 6324th meeting, on 28 May 2010. [online], United Nations, 2010. Source: digitallibrary.un.org [15.07.2025].

¹⁴ UN Peacekeeping: *MONUSCO Fact sheet*. [online], UN Peacekeeping, 2010. Source: peacekeeping.un.org [05.07.2025].

¹⁵ African Union: *Communiqué of the 1261st Meeting of the Peace and Security Council, Held on 14 February 2025 at the Level of Heads of State and Government, on the Situation in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)*. [online], 18.02.2025. Source: peaceau.org [05.07.2025].

¹⁶ EAC: *The EAC-LED Nairobi Process on Restoration of Peace and Security in Eastern DRC*. [online], East African Community, s. a. Source: eac.int [15.07.2025].

¹⁷ France24: *East African Regional Force Starts Withdrawing from DRC*. [online], France24, 03.12.2023. Source: france24.com [05.07.2025].

¹⁸ Kalembe, Josephine: *What Has the Luanda Peace Process Achieved?*. [online], The Great Lakes Eye, 24.12.2024. Source: thegreatlakeseye.com [15.07.2025].

Although their number has significantly decreased by the 21st century, armed conflicts in Africa have not ceased on the continent. By the end of the 20th century, all African countries had gained independence, and their new form of cooperation within the AU framework focused on formulating and providing their own African solutions ('African solutions to African problems'). While the Organization of African Unity (OAU) prioritised the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, the African Union takes a stand against non-indifference.¹⁹

One area where "Africa has strived for self-sufficiency is peace and security. The AU not only adopted a legal framework for its implementation but also established institutions and introduced mechanisms to respond to threats to regional peace and security."²⁰ Further political will and capacity development are inevitable in the coming years to ensure that the AU, Africa itself, becomes capable of resolving its own regional conflicts and is not continually dependent on external actors to broker a 'peace deal'.

The changing Africa policy of the United States

In contrast to the Chinese's extremely successful Africa policy, which the Asians have been building and continuously fine-tuning since the 1990s, the United States pursued a kind of 'neglect policy'²¹ towards Africa for much of the same decade. This changed with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which simultaneously made it necessary "to find an alternative to Middle Eastern oil, which was potentially at risk from the so-called Muslim fundamentalism."²² From the beginning of Bill Clinton's first presidential term, Africa became 'important' to the United States – how much, to what extent, and in which areas, however, has been viewed differently by many experts. We can think, for example, of the USFORSOM (United States Forces, Somalia) special military unit, which was created to support the UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II). Despite numerous successful operations, the incident of 3–4 October 1993 in Mogadishu – which is referred to in American circles as one of the bloodiest and most violent urban firefights since the Vietnam War – led President Clinton to withdraw U.S. troops from Somalia at the end of March 1994.²³ After this fiasco, the United States did not intervene to stop the Rwandan genocide in April 1994. In economic terms, however, Clinton brought about a fundamental change

¹⁹ Kasajja, Phillip Apuuli (2013): *The African Union (AU), the Libya Crisis and the Notion of 'African Solutions to African Problems'*. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 31(1), 117–138.

²⁰ Marsai, Viktor (2019): *Csodás barátságok kezdete. A kelet-afrikai regionális biztonssági komplexum átalakulása a 21. században* [The Beginning of Wonderful Friendships. The transformation of the East African Regional Security Complex in the 21st Century]. *Afrika Tanulmányok / Hungarian Journal of African Studies*, 13(1–2), 75–100.

²¹ Carmody, Pádraig R. – Owusu, Francis Y. (2007): *Competing Hegemons? Chinese versus American Geo-Economic Strategies in Africa*. *Political Geography*, 26(5), 504–524.

²² Nugent, Paul (2004): *Africa Since Independence. A Comparative History*. Houndmills – New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 433.

²³ In American circles, the term "mission creep" spread through the Somali incident, which essentially means that a military mission can easily lose its focus, making its presence seemingly endless. Accordingly, (responsible) American leaders always think about an "exit strategy", the lack of which they later felt in Iraq (2003–2011) and Afghanistan (2001–2021). See French, Peter A. (2010): 'Mission Creep'. In French, Peter A. (ed.): *War and Moral Dissonance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 293–334.

in the United States' sub-Saharan Africa policy when he signed the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) on 18 May 2000. The goal of AGOA was to support African efforts towards democratic governance and economic development, while also encouraging light industry production on the continent, thereby contributing to job creation, poverty reduction, and greater industrialisation.²⁴ The programme provided duty-free access to the U.S. market for more than 1,800 products from eligible sub-Saharan African countries, but it was tied to strict conditions and stringent eligibility requirements. Participating countries had to commit to a market economy, the rule of law, political pluralism, anti-corruption efforts, and the right to due process, and they had to make continuous progress in achieving these goals.²⁵

“President George W. Bush came into office in 2000 without any great interest in Africa and certainly with no conviction that the region was important to the United States. His ties to an evangelical Christian base, combined with pressures from Congress and advocates for Africa, pushed him to respond to the situation in southern Sudan and the AIDS crisis, and to increase aid to the region. But the dictates of political realism, which has always devalued Africa as a foreign policy concern for the United States, have continued to restrict U.S. engagement with the region.”²⁶

Several critical voices have pointed out that in the meantime, the global war on terror inspired by neoconservative thinking and self-interested concerns related to oil imports have jeopardised efforts to implement a fairer and more just Africa policy.

Barack Obama delivered a convincing speech in the Ghanaian parliament in 2009 and promised that the USA would be there for every African step that concerns Africa's own development, as a “partner and friend”,²⁷ “seemed to be placing the USA-Africa relations on a new foundation.”²⁸ Although he launched several promising programmes, such as the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI)²⁹ in 2010 and the Power Africa Initiative³⁰ in 2013, these did not progress, resulting in no substantial advancement beyond rhetoric and political theatrics, which made the Obama administration appear as rather talkers without being backed by real actions.³¹ The USA published a six-page document on the

²⁴ Schneidman, Witney – Lewis, Zenia: *The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA): Looking Back, Looking Forward*. [online], Brookings, 05.06.2012. Source: brookings.edu [05.07.2025].

²⁵ Marsai, Viktor (2025): From the Periphery to the Periphery: The Prospects for Change in US Africa Policy. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 24(1–2), 255.

²⁶ Copson, Raymond W. (2007): *The United States in Africa. Bush Policy and Beyond*. London – New York: Zed Books, 16.

²⁷ The White House: *Remarks by the President to the Ghanaian Parliament*. [online], The White House, 11.07.2009. Source: obamawhitehouse.archives.gov [05.07.2025].

²⁸ Marsai, Viktor – Szijj, Dóra: Az Egyesült Államok Afrika-politikája az Obama-adminisztráció alatt [The United States' Africa Policy under the Obama Administration]. *Szakmai Szemle*, (3–4), 87–112.

²⁹ U.S. Department of State: *President's Young African Leaders Initiative*. [online], U.S. Department of State, s. a. Source: 2009-2017.state.gov [15.07.2025].

³⁰ The White House: *Fact Sheet: Power Africa*. [online], The White House, 2015.07.25. Source: obamawhitehouse.archives.gov [15.07.2025].

³¹ Tarrósy, István: *U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit from A Trans-Atlantic-European View*. [online], AFKInsider, 31.07.2014. Source: moguldom.com [05.07.2025].

American strategy for sub-Saharan Africa relatively belatedly, on June 14, 2012 (thus not a strategy for the entire African continent).³²

In a speech at the National Defense University on 23 May 2013, President Obama highlighted that foreign aid is considered “one of the least popular expenditures” in the United States – despite the fact that it did not exceed 1% of the federal budget at that time. President Obama clearly stated that “foreign assistance cannot be viewed as charity. It is fundamental to our national security. And it’s fundamental to any sensible long-term strategy [and therefore] it has to be part of our strategy.”³³ Therefore, every American engagement on the African continent must serve national security and simultaneously promote the global values that America believes in – we read at that time. As we have already highlighted in the Introduction, the American approach had a 180-degree turn.

American diplomacy did not extend its activities to high-level summits with Africans until 2014. This sharply contrasted with China’s approach, which has held the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) every three years since 2000 – one time in China, another time at an African location, then, back in China, followed by yet another African location. Barack Obama hosted leaders from 47 African countries at a landmark summit, the U.S.–Africa Leaders Summit, in Washington on 5–6 August 2014. However, its continuation only took place during President Biden’s term, eight years later, from 13–15 December 2022.

“We must be cautious, however, regarding the statement that the United States is ‘behind’ its global (competitors): on one hand, regardless of the system of summits, American diplomacy has significantly increased its activities on the African continent since the turn of the millennium, and on the other hand, the governmental and economic resources available to Washington – if there is political will – could quickly make up for this disadvantage.”³⁴

The second Africa summit in Washington was preceded by the announcement of the new U.S. strategy for sub-Saharan Africa. This strategy sought to articulate a new vision of how, with whom, and in what areas the USA maintains relationships across Africa. It welcomed and reaffirmed the importance of the role of African actors and emphasised the essence of the further strengthening of the African agency role. Among other things, he recognised the region’s youth as the driving force of entrepreneurship and innovation, and emphasised the enduring and historical ties between the American and African peoples.³⁵ According to the Biden administration, 21st-century American Africa policy should focus on the United States needing to reset “its relations with African counterparts,

³² The White House: *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*. [online], The White House, 06.2012. Source: 2009-2017. state.gov [05.07.2025].

³³ The White House: *Remarks by the President at the National Defense University*. [online], The White House, 23.05.2013. Source: obamawhitehouse.archives.gov [05.07.2025].

³⁴ Marsai, Viktor (2014): *Az első USA–Afrika-csúcstalálkozó értékelése* [Evaluation of the First USA–Africa Summit]. *Nemzet és Biztonság*, (5), 3–14.

³⁵ The White House: *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*. [online], The White House, 08.2022. Source: bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov [05.07.2025].

listen to diverse local voices, and widen the circle of engagement to advance its strategic objectives to the benefit of both Africans and Americans.”³⁶

During his first presidency at the end of 2018, Donald Trump launched an Africa policy that aimed at both prioritisation and partnership on the continent – partially continuing the Americans’ efforts towards partnership, but focusing particularly on promoting American business activities. John Bolton, the National Security Advisor from 2018 to 2019, set the tone for the administration in a speech when he urged African governments to choose the United States over China and Russia in their trade, security, and political relations.³⁷

During Biden’s presidency, there was also a kind of progress, primarily in the form of a response to China’s BRI (Belt and Road Initiative):³⁸ the plan is an economic corridor that connects Zambia’s northeastern, resource-rich region with the Lobito port on the Atlantic coast of Angola. The plan, known as the Lobito Corridor, is backed by Washington, the G7, the EU, and the African Development Bank.³⁹

It is evident that the Africa policy of the second Trump administration continues to be shaped by security issues, driven by the fact that several regions of the continent, including the Sahel and the macro-region of East Africa, remain hotspots for terrorism and the activities of violent extreme organisations (VEO). Airstrikes carried out against Boko Haram in Nigeria on Christmas Day 2025 only confirm this fact – although the attack was likely aimed more at the American Christian community, which was anxiously watching Boko Haram’s attacks on Christian communities.

By the end of the first year of the second administration, the White House published the new National Security Strategy of the U.S., highlighting the new foreign policy directions and the new paradigm – towards Africa as well. This presence, which was previously driven primarily by aid but at least supported by it, has been replaced by a much more market-oriented paradigm that focuses on primary economic benefits. The document highlights raw materials and their importance in several instances: “An immediate area for U.S. investment in Africa, with prospects for a good return on investment, include the energy sector and critical mineral development.”⁴⁰

The agreement and its circumstances

The DRC and Rwanda signed a peace agreement in the United States on 27 June 2025 by their foreign ministers, later on strengthened by DRC’s President Felix Tshisekedi and Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame together with U.S. President Donald Trump on

³⁶ The White House 2022.

³⁷ Schneidman, Witney – Signé, Landry: *The Trump Administration’s Africa Strategy: Primacy or Partnership? Brookings Commentary*. [online], Brookings, 20.12.2018. Source: brookings.edu [05.07.2025].

³⁸ Eszterhai, Viktor (2016): Az Új Selyemút terv [The New Silk-Road Plan]. *Eszmélet*, 28(109), 116–131.

³⁹ Fillingham, Zachary: *The Lobito Corridor: Washington’s Answer to Belt and Road in Africa*. [online], Geopolitical Monitor, 13.11.2024. Source: geopoliticalmonitor.com [15.07.2025]; EC: *Connecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, and Angola to Global Markets through the Lobito Corridor*. [online], European Commission, 24.10.2023. Source: international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu [15.07.2025].

⁴⁰ The White House 2025.

4 December 2025 – since both sides were critical about the others' violating the peace agreement.⁴¹

The document was brokered by Washington with the backing of Qatar. According to the agreement, later on called the Washington Accords, the parties were to establish a joint security coordination mechanism within 30 days, and a regional economic integration framework three months later.⁴² While the purpose of the security mechanism was to establish operational procedures and reporting mechanisms for transparency, the economic integration framework was a structure that, building on existing economic integration structures (AfCFTA, ICGLR, COMESA, EAC), primarily highlighted the establishment of economic relations, particularly those focused on mineral resources. Within the Accords it was mentioned that

“the Parties shall use this framework to expand foreign trade and investment derived from regional critical mineral supply chains and introduce greater transparency, which shall ensure illicit economic pathways are blocked and both Parties derive greater prosperity – especially for the region's population – from the region's natural resources through mutually beneficial partnerships and investment opportunities”⁴³

Due to the approach and the highlighting of mineral resources to such an extent, the suspicion arose that the American interest behind the peace agreement is more related to mining than to regional peace and prosperity. This assumption was further strengthened by the fact that the Congolese proposal for American mining rights emerged as early as March 2025, in which the Congolese president hoped that Washington could thus become interested in resolving the conflict, but the new National Security Strategy published late 2025 also supports this suspicion.

The question after the June 2025 talks was whether, following the previous, not particularly successful negotiations, a sustainable and stable peace agreement had finally been reached. In certain respects, it would still be too early to envision the failure of the agreement, but in December 2025 a new round of agreements were required and still the fighting within the DRC is not over.⁴⁴

The original contract already contained logical loopholes that caused concern for many local residents:⁴⁵

- The agreement was signed by the foreign representatives of the two states, and the document is based on the negotiations between the DRC and the M23 organisation – which is interesting in that Rwanda has never admitted to directly supporting

⁴¹ Le Monde – AFP: *Combat Resumes between Congolese Army and M23 Rebels Despite Peace Treaty*. [online], Le Monde, 12.08.2025. Source: lemonde.fr [27.12.2025].

⁴² U.S. Department of State: *Peace Agreement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda*. [online], U.S. Department of State 27.06.2025a. Source: state.gov [05.07.2025].

⁴³ U.S. Department of State 2025a.

⁴⁴ Lawal, Shola: *'Peace Prospects Dire': More Tensions as M23 Fights on in DRC Despite Deal*. [online], Al Jazeera, 23.12.2025. Source: aljazeera.com [27.12.2025].

⁴⁵ Wanneburg, Gershwin: *Turning Point or Pointless Turn: Will DR Congo-Rwanda Deal Bring Peace?*. [online], Al Jazeera, 01.07.2025. Source: aljazeera.com [05.07.2025].

the M23 – although there are allegedly already UN reports on this.⁴⁶ This will still have significance in the future, as the M23 has also emphasised that they do not consider the agreements between DR Congo and Rwanda binding on their part.⁴⁷ Although, as we will see, by the end of the year, the Presidents have signed the Treaty as well, there were no changes related to the relation in between the Rwandan government and M23 – as it is highlighted in the next bullet point as well.

- In the subsection on territorial integrity, using the plan resulting from the Luanda Process (1.i.) Rwanda agrees to disarm its forces and terminate the protective measures, but interestingly, the M23 is not mentioned in this point. This part of the agreement, which is also based on the second point (1.ii.) of the Luanda Process, names the Hutu FDLR, whose support Congo must cease. Seemingly, therefore, both parties must cease their activities that are directed against the territorial integrity of the other party, while the relationship between the M23 organisation and the Rwandan state is not elaborated in the agreement, which could lead to misunderstandings in the future. This is attempted to be addressed by the first sub-point of the second point of the contract (2.i.), which states: “The Parties shall immediately and unconditionally cease any state support to non-state armed groups except as necessary to facilitate implementation of this Agreement.”⁴⁸
- Finally, an important issue is that although the Agreement sets a deadline for the establishment of security and economic mechanisms, it does not provide a timeline for the withdrawal of M23 soldiers.

Fighting continued after the agreement, so these issues and logical gaps were awaiting further negotiations between the parties. It was certain that, in the opinion of M23, the Washington Accords did not address the issues and did not take care of the communities they are trying to protect from the Congolese government and the militias it supports.⁴⁹ At that time, even Paul Kagame, the Rwandan president, was not very optimistic about the agreement,⁵⁰ but U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio already in June 2025 indicated that another round of presidential consultations will take place in Washington to formally conclude the process,⁵¹ while Qatar, which is taking on operational tasks behind the scenes, was organising direct negotiations between Congo and the M23.⁵²

⁴⁶ Nichols, Michelle: *Exclusive: Rwanda Exercises Command and Control over M23 Rebels, Say UN Experts*. [online], Reuters, 02.07.2025. Source: reuters.com [05.07.2025].

⁴⁷ Newuh, Mimi Mefo – Mahachi, Josephine: *DR Congo-Rwanda Peace Deal Met with Skepticism*. [online], DW, 04.07.2025. Source: dw.com [05.07.2025].

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State 2025a.

⁴⁹ Newuh–Mahachi 2025.

⁵⁰ News Agencies: *Rwanda President Unsure If DRC Peace Deal Will Hold, Warns against ‘Tricks’*. [online], Al Jazeera, 04.07.2025. Source:aljazeera.com [05.07.2025].

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State: *Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Signing of the DRC-Rwanda Peace Agreement*. [online], U.S. Department of State, 27.06.2025b. Source: state.gov [05.07.2025].

⁵² Reuters: *Congo, M23 Rebels Plan Return to Qatar Talks amid Trump Pressure*. [online], 04.07.2025. Source: monitor.co.ug [05.07.2025].

The second round occurred in Washington early December 2025 and before that on November 15, Qatar was also successful with a ceasefire deal struck with M23.⁵³

By December, everything seemed to work, the ceasefire, the Presidents of DRC and Rwanda, a venue, the freshly named Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace in Washington, an American President proudly counting the conflicts he put an end to and also Presidents William Ruto of Kenya, João Lourenço of Angola, Évariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi, Faure Gnassingbé of Togo, and Vice President Jessica Alupo of Uganda – highlighting the historical continuation of the Washington Accords and the regional approach to the conflict.

The document the two Presidents signed together with Donald Trump was a Declaration about continuing with the Accords. In addition to the Washington Accords, the following bilateral instruments were signed, hosted by Secretary Rubio: Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Concerning an Expanded Security Partnership, and the U.S.–Rwanda Framework for Shared Economic Prosperity.⁵⁴

While everything seemed to work, and by December Paul Kagame was also more optimistic,⁵⁵ a few days later M23 launched yet another offensive and temporarily seized the strategic city of Uvira.⁵⁶

What will happen in the DRC is currently a question for the future, and it is not certain that the American approach, which focuses specifically on raw materials, can offer a real solution. In any case, it seems that the M23 is still focused on strengthening and stabilising its role in the occupied areas and does not seem likely to give them up.

The retreat of Chinese interests?

Although the People's Republic of China did not even play a mediating role in the creation of the contract, it must be mentioned that in recent years it has become one of the most significant external actors on the African continent. The paper cannot undertake to present China's role across the entire African continent, but it is worth mentioning in a nutshell that the country has been Africa's largest trading partner for more than a decade and a half, and is also one of the most significant lenders and investors.⁵⁷ Beijing is present across the entire continent, but in terms of its diverse role, we must highlight raw material mining – especially in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one

⁵³ Lawal 2025.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State: *Signing of the Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity Between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda*. [online], U.S. Department of State, 04.12.2025c. Source: state.gov [27.12.2025].

⁵⁵ Makumeno, Emery et al.: *Trump Hails 'Historic' Peace Deal between DR Congo and Rwanda*. [online], BBC, 05.12.2025. Source: bbc.com [27.12.2025].

⁵⁶ Lawal 2025.

⁵⁷ Zhang, Yiyi: *China Remains Africa's Top Trade Partner for 16th Year, Cooperation in Various Areas Continues to Expand: Official*. [online], Global Times, 21.05.2025. Source: globaltimes.cn [10.07.2025]; Furthermore, it provides insights for interpreting the Sino-African relationship within a broader Afro-Asian context: Tarrósy, István (2016): *Afro-ázsiai dinamikák: tanulmányok ázsiai államok afrikai szerepvállalásairól* [Afro-Asian Dynamics: Studies on the African Engagements of Asian States]. Pécs: Publikon.

of the richest African countries in terms of natural resources. Although Sino-Congolese relations, like those of many other African countries, began during the decolonisation processes of the 1960s, a true breakthrough had to wait until Joseph Kabila's presidency:⁵⁸ lacking Western resources, Kabila began to approach China in preparation for the 2011 elections, seeing Beijing's significant involvement in Angola, and reached an agreement that provided Chinese companies with mining opportunities for copper and cobalt.⁵⁹ Joseph Kabila already stated at the beginning of his first presidential term in 2006: "For me, Congo is the China of tomorrow, and until 2011, the Asian countries, the so-called 'dragons,' will be my role models."⁶⁰

In the past two decades, China has become the most dominant mining player in Congo. At the same time, Beijing provided military training to Congolese soldiers and offered security assistance to Chinese companies in the region.⁶¹ China does not directly intervene in African crises, but it significantly contributes to UN peacekeeping operations. In recent years, it has contributed more money to the peacekeeping budget and sent more personnel to peacekeeping operations than any other permanent member of the Security Council.⁶²

The ongoing conflict in the region is particularly important for Beijing, primarily due to the Chinese companies operating in the mining sector – however, despite the weight of Chinese diplomacy in Congo, it did not play a role in the resolution.

The significance of the agreement in the changing world order – concluding thoughts

The previous value-based American stance towards Africa (and beyond) gives way to a transactional, or rather transactionalist method.⁶³ This approach, however, emphasises not only the primacy of economic interests but also the dismantling of those institutions and elements of the post-World War II world order that are not beneficial to Washington. One example of the new foreign policy approach can thus be seen in the support for the agreement, where "maintaining certain trade partnerships and defense alliances was not beneficial for Americans, as some countries [...] were taking advantage of the liberal institutions established by the United States"⁶⁴

The United States' Africa policy, observed in the context of the transforming world order, may therefore represent a more pragmatic approach from Washington, and the

⁵⁸ Joseph Kabila, son of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, took power after a successful assassination attempt against his father, ended the Second Congo War, and consolidated his power through elections in 2006 and 2011.

⁵⁹ Shirambere, Philippe Tunamsifu (2020): *The Democratic Republic of the Congo – China's Deals on Construction of Roads in Exchange of Mines*. *Afrika Focus*, 33(2), 79–94.

⁶⁰ Marsaud, Olivia: *Les chantiers de Kabila*. [online], rfi, 12.05.2006. Source: rfi.fr [15.07.2025].

⁶¹ Bociaga, Robert: *Minerals and China's Military Assistance in the DR Congo*. [online], The Diplomat, 31.10.2022. Source: thediplomat.com [15.07.2025].

⁶² Vörös, Zoltán – Tarrósy, István (2020): China as a Peacekeeper: The Case of MINURSO. *Journal of International Studies*, 13(4), 143–154.

⁶³ Csizmazia, Gábor et al.: *The Impact of Trump 2.0 on Europe's Position in the Transforming World Order*. [online], John Lukacs Analyses on Global Affairs, 2025/1. Source: uni-nke.hu [05.07.2025].

⁶⁴ Csizmazia Gábor et al. 2025: 2.

political-military power and its application could make the country attractive to African states as well. This way, it can quickly establish its political-economic presence and begin to make up for its disadvantages, for example, against China, which, in purely economic terms, due to the presence, activity, and capacities of its state-owned enterprises (primarily in the construction-infrastructure sector), will continue to be difficult to ignore. Just as in Southeast Asia,⁶⁵ American foreign policy here doesn't offer much either; in fact, as we have seen, Washington would even place the responsibility for combating terrorist organisations on the shoulders of the Africans. At the same time, under these uncertain circumstances, a politically open leadership willing to apply globally outstanding military capacities, and the potential inherent in the American economy (or even the possibility of avoiding tariff pressures) can still represent a good American offer for African actors.

The escalation of the eastern Congolese conflict itself, as well as the attempts to resolve it, clearly demonstrate the characteristics of the transforming world order and the functioning of the post-hegemonic structure, where the United States remains the most significant international actor, but its interests are now even more evidently defined by its central role, security, and trade considerations. This clearly does not depict a rules-based world order, which allows for the escalation of local conflicts: Washington will not be there to establish peace or intervene unilaterally, so local-regional disputes, including territorial disputes, can more easily flare up into armed actions (which we can also observe in other parts of the world). The current orderless world order, however, also visibly creates opportunities for the United States: thanks to its political-military capacities and its willingness to engage in unilateral interventions (see: Iran), the parties involved in the conflict may be interested in Washington's approach, potentially with such trade-economic offers. This transformation is also interesting because China, which is dependent on multipolarity and currently refrains from direct military interventions, could find itself behind Washington on a continent where it is much more active in political and economic terms, and where Beijing's foreign policy eagerly emphasises its diplomatic strength. Thus, depending on the success of the peace agreement, the United States has indicated that it is capable of defining significant international, even global, processes in a region where many had already considered the competition and China's dominance to be settled.

Conflict management and peace agreements, however, may have harmful consequences due to this more pragmatic and non-value-based approach, which will be worth monitoring in the future: we cannot speak of principles, practices, or a defined set of requirements either, as the United States' support can be obtained by the actor who can offer more in terms of representing its interests from the perspectives that Washington considers important for itself, and not for the international community or the liberal world order, outlining the expected functioning of a non-rule-based (or orderless) world order. These transformations, however, may also be significant for other international actors: on one hand, the number of local-level conflicts may increase, and on the other

⁶⁵ Eszterhai, Viktor – Druhalóczy, Éva Dóra: *The Promise of Two Worlds: China's Spring Diplomacy and the U.S. Response in Southeast Asia*. [online], John Lukacs Analyses on Global Affairs, 2025/7. Source: uni-nke.hu [05.07.2025]

hand, the establishment of the multipolar structure desired by many emerging actors may become more difficult. The American steps, which often aim to prevent the increase of China's international significance, as well as the Congolese agreement, can be particularly instructive for Beijing: in order to protect its economic and trade interests and presence, it may become necessary for it to employ hard power reinforced not only by economic but even military means.

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