

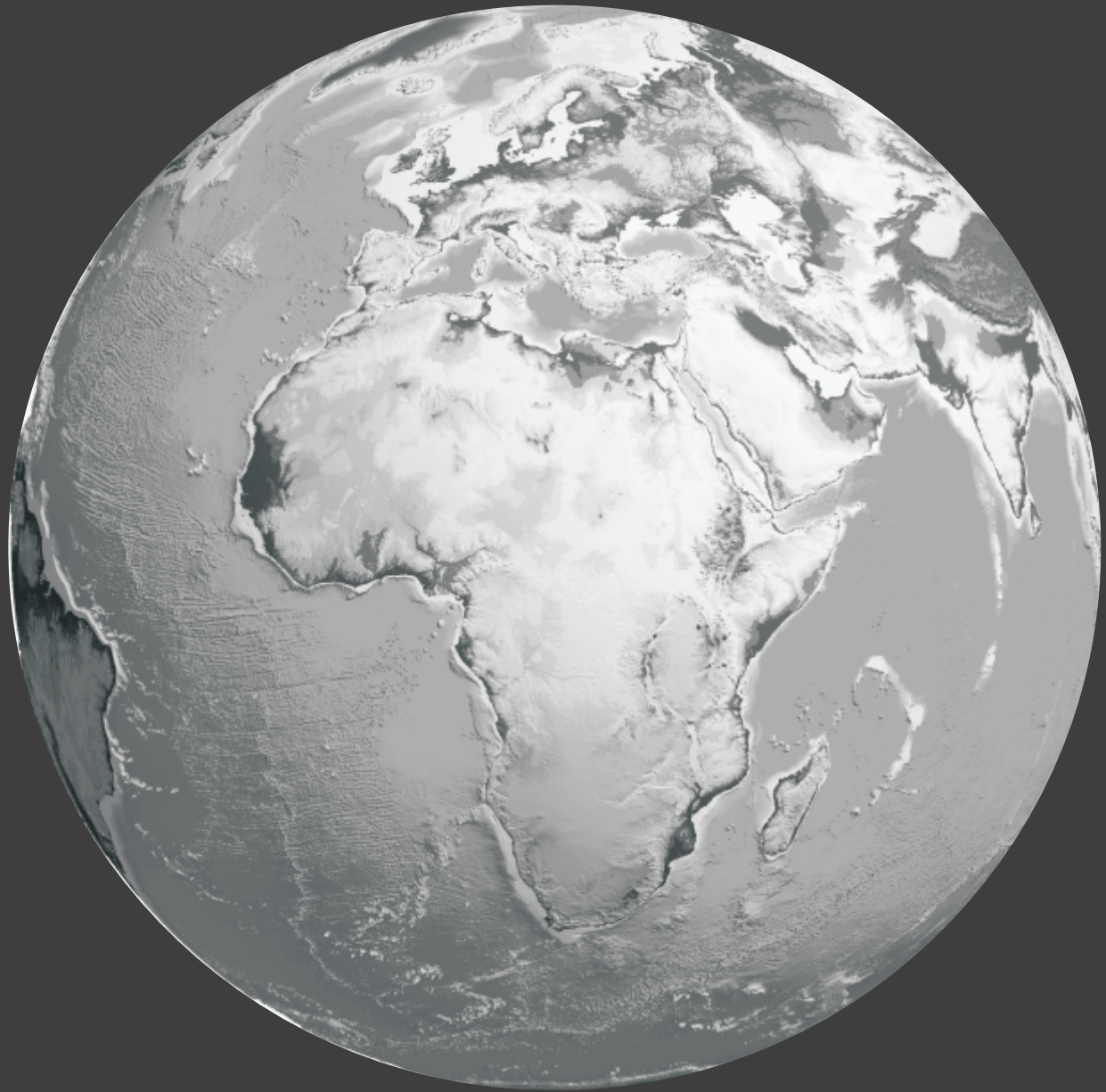
# Africa Trends

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## Editor's Note

Even as the international community is still dealing with the ramifications of the Ukraine crisis, the African continent continues to face a plethora of security challenges. This issue of Africa Trends chronicles these array of security threats and political trends shaping the continent.

In the cover story, Mr. Prabhat Jawla provides an assessment of the outcomes and significance of the US-Africa Leaders' Summit held in December 2022. In the first commentary, Ms. Bulbul Prakash analyses the complexities and limitations of implementing Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes for 'Child Soldiers' in Africa. In the next, Mr. Aayush Maniktalia gives an overview of Ethiopia's Tigray War with an insight into its historical backdrop. In the viewpoint, Wg. Cdr. Swaim Prakash Singh examines in detail the challenges facing the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the way forward. Ms. Mayuri Banerjee reviews Daniel Large's "China and Africa: The New Era" which decodes the trajectory of China-Africa relations under Xi Jinping.

We welcome your feedback!

## Cover Story

### 2022 US-AFRICA LEADERS' SUMMIT: DIPLOMATIC NICETIES WITH NO SUBSTANCE

The United States hosted the U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit attended by 49 African states and the Commissioner of the African Union (AU). The Summit successfully gathered leaders from the African continent that vary in size, political systems, religion, ideologies, and respective challenges they face. However, the agenda of the Summit was broad and vague. Although diplomatically wholesome, the Summit lacked substance.

**Prabhat Jawla\***

From 13-15 December 2022, the United States (US) hosted the United States–Africa Leaders' Summit, an international conference attended by 49 African states and the Commissioner of the African Union (AU).<sup>1</sup> Broadly, the Summit aimed to deepen and expand the “long-term US-Africa partnership” advancing “shared priorities” and “amplifying African voices to collaboratively meet this era’s defining challenges.”<sup>2</sup> The Summit is the successor to the ‘United States–Africa Leaders Summit’ of 2014, organised by President Barak Obama.

#### Outcomes

The Summit resulted in massive financial commitments by the US, many of which would require approval from Congress. The notable areas were infrastructure, digital transformation, increasing access to electricity and providing humanitarian support. In service of Africa Union’s *Agenda 2063*,<sup>3</sup> the US announced a commitment of US\$ 55 billion over the next three years.<sup>4</sup> Under the Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA) initiative, the administration promised to invest US\$ 350 million to prompt the development of digital infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> In addition, US\$ 10 million in funding was announced in direct investment for the Health Electrification and

**The Summit resulted in massive financial commitments by the US...**

\* Mr. Prabhat Jawla is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for West Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is also a Non-Resident Researcher at the Middle East Institute, New Delhi (MEI@ND).

Telecommunication Alliance (HETA) to improve and develop access to electricity and internet to public health facilities in the Sub-Sahara region.<sup>6</sup> The administration declared US\$ 2.5 billion in emergency aid in the field of food security on the continent.<sup>7</sup>

Besides, there were commitments in terms of multilateralism. The US called for implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) under its US-Africa Food Security Framework.<sup>8</sup> There was also support for the longstanding demand of the AU to become a permanent member of the G20 grouping.<sup>9</sup> In addition, commitments were made to expand support and modernise the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), enabling African nations in the sub-Sahara to avail duty-free access to the US markets. This would help “translate opportunity into concrete benefits for the African people.”<sup>10</sup>

### Appraisal

The Summit successfully gathered leaders from the African continent that vary in size, political systems, religion, ideologies, and respective challenges they face. However, the agenda of the Summit was broad and vague. Such multilateral initiatives are laudatory, but as the previous edition of the Summit aptly demonstrates, there is no one size fits all initiatives and strategies to help the countries. Against such a backdrop, three broad observations about the 2022 Summit can be made.

1. Although diplomatically wholesome, the Summit lacked substance.

It has been a more significant problem in US investments over the years, where the announcements overshadow the results. The diplomatic niceties and photo-ops capture the public imagination and increase expectations. However, in the end, the deliverables are far from the hype. During the Summit, the Biden administration announced several major investment initiatives and trade promises in infrastructure, trade, technology, health and food security. However, no comments were made about the specifics of such investments, such as where these investments would be based and the duration of payoffs from these investments.

**...significant problem in US investments over the years, where the announcements overshadow the results.**

This is familiar in diplomatic meetings where commitments are made with no follow-ups. However, in this case, there is a veritable example to compare – Obama’s 2014 US-Africa Summit. In all senses of the term, the 2014 Summit was more anticipated, given Obama’s African ancestry and his popularity. Needless to say, President Biden struggled to bring similar excitement to the Summit. However, even Obama-era commitments have fallen short of achieving tangible success. In other words, the failure to tell whether or how successful such initiatives and commitments made by the administration would be five years down the line undermines the fanfare that the Summit (and others like it) takes up.



The fact that there were no talks on the progression of initiatives announced in the previous Summit highlights the limited success of such mega-diplomatic events. Take another example, the Biden administration's 'Summit for Democracy' held in December 2021. During the Summit, the administration declared US\$ 165 million "to support elections and good governance in Africa in 2023."<sup>11</sup> However, what remained the outcomes of such announcements were not discussed by the administration even after a year. Besides, the US presidential elections are drawing close, making it hard for such grand promises to materialise since such significant investments require congressional approval.

2. Biden administration would not call a spade a spade.

Although the Biden administration emphasised throughout the Summit that it has nothing to do with China, the priority sectors that the Summit focused on clearly demonstrated that China was part of the equation. The critics of the administration forward that the shame of imperialism drives the US approach towards Africa. At the same time, supporters of the administration argue that the US approach is consistent with Biden's inclusive and diverse approach. However, what needs to be understood here is that the US insistence on being more "proactive" in Africa has nothing to do with shame or inclusivity but just old-fashioned self-interest. Nevertheless, the administration's insistence on political correctness prevents the administration from calling a spade a spade.

Over the last decade, Washington's two major geopolitical rivals (China and Russia) have been deepening their influence in Africa in nearly every sector, including security, infrastructure, trade, economy, and cultural cooperation. This remains undeniable that China has taken over the US position in the continent as the largest trade partner. Chinese investments in African markets are not beyond controversy, but Beijing commands an overwhelming presence in the region. There is an unfolding geopolitical (and even ideological) competition between the US and China, which both endeavour to make a case for themselves. However, if the US seeks to regain its former presence in Africa, it needs to be honest about its resources, priorities, and intention to invest those resources.

**...US needs to confront the reality of its presence in the region.**

During the Summit, the US repeatedly mentioned its humanitarian assistance to Africa. However, regarding investments in Africa, the US needs to catch up as China and even Russia have emerged as critical investors. The fact is that the US needs to confront the reality of its presence in the region.

**Table 1: Africa+1 Summits and their frequency**

	<b>Total Meeting</b>	<b>Recent Meeting</b>	<b>Place of Recent Meeting</b>
Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)	8	2021	Dakar, Senegal
US-Africa Leaders Summit	2	2022	Washington DC
Tokyo International Conferences on African Development (TICAD)	8	2022	Tunis, Tunisia
India-Africa Forum Summits	3	2015	NewDelh, India

*Source:* Compiled by Author from official websites of the Summits.

If organising the summits was to be an indicator of close and successful relations, the US would still need to catch up in the race. All four major 'Africa+1' summits with Africa occurred way before the US came up with its first edition of the US-Africa Leaders' Summit. The Chinese initiative 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)' started in 2000 had finished eight editions in 2021. Japan-led Tokyo International Conferences on African Development (TICAD) has been organising conferences since 1993 in collaboration with the United Nations. TICAD also concluded its eighth edition in 2020. There are also summits between European countries and Africa. Notable are Africa-France Summits, Russia-Africa Summits, UK-Africa Investment Summits, Germany's Compact with Africa Conferences, and AU-EU Summits.

Meanwhile, India, Turkey and Egypt organised such summit meetings within the developing country category. 'Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit' and Egypt's 'Investment for Africa Forum' remain smaller yet veritable examples of African importance in these countries' vision. Nonetheless, given the low frequency and low participation numbers, their summits do not attract such widespread attention. India's Forum Summits with Africa commenced in 2008, although the participation remained low (limited to 13-14 states). However, in the third summit, the participation increased sharply as 41 states participated.

Similarly, when it comes to large-scale investments, other countries organising these Africa+1 summits have announced massive amounts in investments. Japan's TICAD 8 pledged US\$ 30 billion in investments, which were surpassed by the Chinese announcement of US\$40 billion during the 2021 FOCAC.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the US-Africa Summit only arranged for bilateral meetings between African heads of state and various offices of the Biden administration. Not all the leaders were able to get an audience with President Biden, which stands in contrast to Chinese FOCAC, where President Xi Jinping holds bilateral with each attending member. Washington may not have planned this, but such optics are crucial in diplomacy and fare poorly on the image Washington is trying to project in its courting of African leaders. Furthermore, the joke by President Biden visiting Africa as a poor relative and eating their food during his speech at dinner with African leaders was not in good taste either.

### 3. Lesson for India

India has organised three India-Africa Forum Summits (see table 2). The recent US-Africa Leaders Summits (like several other summits) must prompt India on how not to organise a summit. The grand promises, if undelivered, severely undermine the country's credibility. Ideally, the gap between the two editions of a conference must be long enough that the outcomes of the previous conference are visible. However, nothing substantial came out of the Obama administration's Summit. India can learn not to make such vast promises.

**Table 2: India-Africa Forum Summits**

Summit	Location	Year	Participation
First India-Africa Forum Summit	New Delhi	4-8 April 2008	14
Second India-Africa Forum Summit	Addis Ababa	24-25 May 2011	15
Third India-Africa Forum Summit	New Delhi	26-30 October 2015	41

*Source:* Compiled by the Author from several news outlets, including *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* and *The Economic Times*.

India announced US\$ 10 billion in Line of Credit for developmental projects for a period of five years, besides US\$ 600 million in grant assistance. The grant assistance would include India-Africa Development Fund (US\$ 100 million) and an India-Africa Health Fund (US\$ 10 million). Now, before India convenes the next edition of the Summit (which is likely outside

**...before India convenes the next edition of the Summit, the onus must be on ensuring that promises made in the earlier edition are fulfilled.**

India), the onus must be on ensuring that promises made in the earlier edition are fulfilled. This would also allow a more genuine pretext for the newer edition since there would be better clarity on the ability to deliver. The second thing India can learn from the US-Africa Summit is to be upfront about its realities, priorities and capacities. In other words, India should be cognizant of where it stands, its priorities, and how much it can deliver. If need be, the strategic competition with China must be acknowledged in its conduct of relations with Africa. Only after this would the objectives India has set vis-à-vis Africa to be achieved.

In other words, merely organising the summits should not mistake for the attainment of the summit's agenda.

<sup>1</sup> "Statement by President Biden on the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit", *The White House - Press Release*, July 20, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/07/20/statement-by-president-biden-on-the-u-s-africa-leaders-summit/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)

- <sup>2</sup> “Background Press Call on the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 8, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/12/08/background-press-call-on-the-u-s-africa-leaders-summit/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>3</sup> “Goals & Priority Areas of Agenda 2063”, *Official Website of the African Union (AU)*, <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/goals> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>4</sup> “U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit: Strengthening Partnerships to Meet Shared Priorities”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 15, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/u-s-africa-leaders-summit-strengthening-partnerships-to-meet-shared-priorities/#:~:text=The%20Biden%2DHarris%20Administration%20plans,years%2C%20working%20closely%20with%20Congress> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>5</sup> “FACT SHEET: New Initiative on Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA)”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 14, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/14/fact-sheet-new-initiative-on-digital-transformation-with-africa-dta/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>6</sup> “FACT SHEET: U.S.-Africa Partnership in Supporting Conservation, Climate Adaptation and a Just Energy Transition”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 13, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/13/fact-sheet-u-s-africa-partnership-in-supporting-conservation-climate-adaptation-and-a-just-energy-transition/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>7</sup> “FACT SHEET: US- Africa Partnership to Promote Food Security and Resilient Food Systems”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 15, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/fact-sheet-u-s-africa-partnership-to-promote-food-security-and-resilient-food-systems/>, (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>8</sup> “U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit: Joint Statement on Food Security”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 15, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/u-s-africa-leaders-summit-joint-statement-on-food-security/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>9</sup> “Remarks by President Biden at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit Closing Session on Promoting Food Security and Food Systems Resilience”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 15, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/12/15/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-u-s-africa-leaders-summit-closing-session-on-promoting-food-security-and-food-systems-resilience/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>10</sup> “Readout of the African Growth and Opportunity Act Ministerial During the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit”, *Office of the United States Trade Representative – Press Release*, December 13, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/fact-sheet-u-s-africa-partnership-to-promote-food-security-and-resilient-food-systems/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>11</sup> “Readout of Meeting Between President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. and the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone”, *The White House – Press Release*, December 15, 2022, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/readout-of-meeting-between-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-and-the-presidents-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-gabon-liberia-madagascar-nigeria-and-sierra-leone/> (Accessed March 22, 2023)
- <sup>12</sup> Zainab Usman, Juliette Ovidia, and Aline Abayo, “The U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit Marks a Seismic Shift in Relations with the Continent”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 22, 2022, at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/22/u.s.-africa-leaders-summit-marks-seismic-shift-in-relations-with-continent-pub-88692> (Accessed March 22, 2023)

## Commentary

### COMPLEXITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF DDR IMPLEMENTATION FOR 'CHILD SOLDIERS' IN AFRICA

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes for child soldiers in the African continent have come under criticism for a variety of reasons, including the difficulty of successfully reintegrating ex-combatants and ensuring economic security in post-conflict environments. One significant problem is that the current design of DDR programmes often excludes many children or hinders their ability to address their unique needs. It is crucial to acknowledge that international efforts to prevent child soldier recruitment have been unsuccessful. As such, extensive research is required to understand why these efforts have failed and how they can be improved to avoid child soldier recruitment worldwide.

**Bulbul Prakash\***

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes for child soldiers in the African continent have come under criticism for a variety of reasons, including the difficulty of successfully reintegrating ex-combatants and ensuring economic security in post-conflict environments. In light of these challenges, it is crucial to examine the challenges and problems that come with DDR implementation in the region. One significant problem is that the current design of DDR programmes often excludes many children or hinders their ability to address their unique needs. Lack of flexibility in programme structure increases discrimination and marginalisation of certain groups, making sustainable reintegration difficult to adapt to the various conditions in which children are recruited and used.

#### Introduction

The available literature on child soldiers reveals an inconsistent use on the definition of "child soldier." Some are addressed as combatants, belligerents, fighters, troopers etc. Due to the sheer variety of roles they perform within the armed forces and groups, the Cape Town principles<sup>1</sup> (1997) attributed them as "soldiers," whereas the recent Paris principles<sup>2</sup> (2007)

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\* Ms. Bulbul Prakash is a Research Intern at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.



referred to them as “children associated with an armed group.” The Paris principles define a child soldier as “any person, 18 years of age or younger, who is or has been recruited or used by an armed group in any capacity including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.”<sup>3</sup> Focusing on a global definition for a ‘child soldier’, international humanitarian agencies have advocated for the demobilisation and disarmament of combatants younger than 18 years and also punitive measures for armed groups and military leaders who recruit children into their forces.

One of the major issues in the study of child soldiering commences from the definition of child soldier itself. A child is defined under Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as “any human being under the age of 18 years.” Most of the international legal instruments including the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of Child modelled a child as one who needs special care and protection until the age of 18.<sup>4</sup> This is considered to be a western notion of childhood that does not take into account the variation in narrative across different countries and cultures. For example, when a Bambuti boy in the Congo region kills his first animal, he is honoured as a leader, as good hunters become leaders in the community.<sup>5</sup> Children who have grown up surrounded by violence, in a culture where they are awarded for being as violent as possible, are likely to develop differently from those spared such violence.

**One of the major issues in the study of child soldiering commences from the definition of child soldier itself.**

### **Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes**

The DDR programme is a post conflict recovery plan to bring ex-combatants into civilian life.<sup>6</sup> It targets combatants in their community, providing them with security, peace, sustainable environment and an enabling space for development. In the disarmament phase, physical removal of the tools of violence from former combatants along with development of responsible arms management programmes is carried out, whereas demobilisation aims at disbanding of the armed groups. Reinsertion is a short phase extending up to one year where material or financial assistance is offered to former belligerents to meet their immediate needs. The phase of reintegration assimilates former fighters in civilian society in order to minimise the chance of armed conflict resurgence.

Originally designed to target adults, DDR programmes have also been developed for the reintegration of child soldiers. However, in many cases, children are either excluded or included in underfunded and unsuitable DDR programmes.<sup>7</sup> This is due to the fact that they are not considered a significant threat to the post-conflict environment, and because they cannot be legally recruited, child-centred DDR programme elements were not considered a dominant part of peace-making. Despite the fact that a high number of children were involved in the civil war in Sierra Leone, only \$34 million out of \$965,000 was spent on DDR programmes for children.<sup>8</sup> There have been few attempts to

**...children are either excluded or included in underfunded and unsuitable DDR programmes.**

connect the concerns of child soldiering with the effectiveness of child-centred DDR. Often, how the difference in child-centred DDR programmes affects the success of the DDR programme is hardly addressed.

### Challenges in DDR implementation

Incomplete peace processes can lead to renewed violence, whereas successful programmes can guarantee long-term peace and stability. However, for the DDR programme to be successful, several challenges must also be addressed. Oftentimes, the disarmament and demobilisation component receive greater emphasis, leaving fewer financial resources for reinsertion and reintegration. This can have a long-term impact on post-conflict reconstruction efforts. In the case of child soldiers, the challenges in locating self-demobilized child combatants, tracing the families of former child soldiers, overcoming stigma, and other challenges are tough to be implemented. It is important to overcome the obstacles at each stage to create an effective DDR programme. Let's take a closer look at each one individually.

#### (a) Issues with Disarmament

There are no specific weapons used by combatants in civil war, and any kind of weapons (kitchen knife, stones, wooden tools, agricultural tools, hardware tools, etc.) can be used during the conflict. However, throughout the disarmament process, practitioners have a specific list of weapons to collect from the combatants. When child soldiers surrender weapons that are not on this specified list, they are side-lined or are denied DDR benefits, compelling them to re-join the rebel forces. Similarly, female soldiers who were recruited as domestic helpers or sexual slaves, and not given a weapon are unable to participate in the screening procedure.<sup>9</sup> These children, who lacked arms training, were screened and labelled as "separated children" rather than "child soldiers" at the camps, and as a consequence, they were reunited with their immediate or extended families without receiving the support and benefits that are usually given to demobilized child soldiers.

Age verification measures, such as physical tests or dental examinations, are never considered in the screening process. Hence children, who were recruited at an early age may not even recall their age.<sup>10</sup> Another group is purposefully misinformed by the commanders about the eligibility process, as the latter believe special courts will convict them for recruiting children. In the case of girl soldiers, there is a fear of stigmatization and rejection by society once their identity as a former combatant is exposed. This fear often prevents them from participating in DDR programmes. Disarming child soldiers must also address the wider regional issues of combatant cross-border migration, re-recruitment, and weapon proliferation. Otherwise, the procedure will be counterproductive in the long run.

### (b) Issues with Demobilisation

Demobilisation can be understood as a process of transition of combatants from military units to civilian life.<sup>11</sup> The procedure also entails dissolving combatants' ties to their former organisations, distributing combatants to their societies, and limiting the symbols and ideological systems that legitimise the use of armed forces and the honour connected with it.

Following demobilisation, the child soldiers lose their weapons and are compelled to behave as obedient youngsters who respect the traditional values of community, they were previously terrified of. This poses a major difficulty when the demobilisation programme design does not take into consideration the length of time they spent as a child soldier, their individual experiences or the condition in the homeland of these individuals. Amnesty International's 2004 report on "Child soldiers - the challenge of demobilisation" from Burundi reveals that certain demobilisation camps maintain a military character even after being formally demobilised – placing young soldiers on a march.<sup>12</sup> In Kinshasa, the Defense Minister refused to extend independent experts a role in identifying or selecting the criteria for choosing the children to be demobilised. Some observers suspected that the army just exploited the practice to rid of ill-disciplined children. Military officials intimidated several NGO employees participating in demobilisation for speaking out about young soldiers, weakening their vital role even more. Additionally, demobilization programs often do not devote enough attention to the unique needs of demobilised girl soldiers who were also dealing with the physical and psychological effects of rape or sexual exploitation as combatants.

### (c) Issues with Reintegration

Reintegration is defined as the return of ex-combatants into the society after the end of conflict or after the conclusion of the peace process. Virginia Gamba highlighted lack of sufficient resources catering to the needs of the child soldiers as one of the major reintegration challenges in the case of child soldiers.<sup>13</sup> According to the report provided to the Security Council, at least 25% of all children released are unable to participate in reintegration programmes owing to a shortage of resources, even for basic reintegration packages. As a result, re-recruitment becomes a possibility for some and a certainty for others. Another challenge in the reintegration process is psycho social reintegration of child soldiers. Unfortunately, the health sector sometimes does not collaborate well with psychological services and psychosocial supports. Too much of the DDR planning comes down to the priorities of the lead agencies doing the planning and even to key individuals.<sup>14</sup> This lack of accountability requires a more holistic, consistent approach to the needs assessment, which should look at both physical and psychological aspects and then organize holistic, multi-sectoral supports accordingly.

**...at least 25% of all children released are unable to participate in reintegration programmes owing to a shortage of resources,...**



The reintegration programmes designed for child soldiers are planned and implemented by the adults without considering the perspectives of former child combatants. At a time when young people need to have the capacity to enforce their rights and their well-being, they are side-lined. Also, when child soldiers are offered extensive reintegration support, it leads to social division amongst other children who have not been recruited into rebel groups (but victims of the long-term conflict) and this might lead to a lack of solidarity and unity within the community. Community outreach and its next phase-community engagement-are keys for the social acceptance and reintegration of former child soldiers. However, the outreach is sometimes done too carelessly by the agencies, such as preparing the community for the 'reinsertion' of the former child soldier without sufficient attention given to community fears, desires for revenge or needs for restorative justice. Also, the outreach needs to follow cultural scripts and employ cultural processes such as traditional cleansing, song, dance, etc. that enable harmony between the children and community people.

Lastly, the reintegration of child soldiers' processes and tactics requires sustainable funding and the national government's political will. The weak security situation tends to impede child soldiers' reintegration. In regions not controlled by the government, the reintegration programme is never actively implemented for children. The national governments, therefore, also have a primary responsibility to ensure that these children are successfully reintegrated.

**The weak security situation tends to impede child soldiers' reintegration.**

## Conclusion

There is a disturbing tendency to adopt a Westernized and one-size-fits-all approach for solving the problem of child soldiers. However, culture is crucial in determining people's identities, how they respond to adversity, what resources are useful in addressing the needs of previously recruited children, and so forth. Hence, DDR programming needs to become much more culturally attuned. A revision is required to remove the Straight-18 definition of a 'child soldier' while still addressing the issue of young people serving in the armed groups in general, which deserves attention and support throughout many areas of the world. The combination of programmes for disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration that worked in one situation may not work in another, requiring DDR practitioners to have alternatives. A separate DDR programme for child and adult combatants is needed, with the former commencing before the conflict ends rather than after the peace process begins. More consideration should be given to the perspectives of children who are not recruited by rebel groups. It is also essential to compare the experiences of former child soldiers who have undergone DDR programs and those who have not. It is crucial to acknowledge that international efforts to prevent child soldier recruitment have been unsuccessful. As such, extensive research is required to understand why these efforts have failed and how they can be improved to avoid child soldier recruitment worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> To prevent child soldier recruitment, demobilisation, and reintegration, the UNICEF-aided Cape Town Principles were created in 1997. It has become an important instrument in terms of global standards and policy shifts at the national, regional, and global levels.

- <sup>2</sup> The Paris Commitments, agreed upon in February 2007 as part of a review conference undertaken by UNICEF in Paris was to minimise child recruitment and to emphasise the actions that nations may and should do to safeguard children impacted by conflict. For children who have previously been connected with armed forces and organisations, the Paris Principles provide practical guidelines for their long-term integration back into civilian life and society.
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## Commentary

### ETHIOPIA'S TIGRAY WAR

The conflict in Tigray, a province of Ethiopia, began on November 3, 2020, when the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) attacked the central government forces stationed in the region in what they described as a pre-emptive strike. One of the deadliest conflicts of the 21st Century, the manner of implementation of the peace deal struck in November 2022 will remain crucial for the future of the region. The war may have been over, but Ethiopia is by no means at peace.

**Aayush Maniktalia\***

The conflict in Tigray, a province of Ethiopia, began on November 3, 2020, when the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) attacked the central government forces stationed in the region in what they described as a pre-emptive strike. The conflict lasted for two years and became one of the deadliest conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The EU representative of Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, stated that between 600,000 and 800,000 people were killed due to the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

#### Origins of the War

The roots of the Tigray war go back to the 1970s, when the TPLF and its allies, including the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), fought against the Derg regime in Ethiopia. The two insurgent forces defeated the military junta in 1991, and TPLF eventually came to power in Ethiopia. However, though the two insurgent forces had fought together, they had complex and sometimes hostile relations due to differing ideologies.<sup>2</sup> The EPLF aimed for a single Eritrean identity, while the TPLF envisioned a multi-ethnic Ethiopian state. The EPLF was wary of ethnic minorities following the TPLF's example. During the 1984-85 famine, the EPLF denied the TPLF access through Eritrea to relief supplies in Sudan, exacerbating tensions.

The TPLF established a federal state in Ethiopia with ethnic-based provinces and formed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF coalition), which ruled for three decades, aiming to empower marginalized ethnic communities. However, the EPRDF's

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\* Mr. Aayush Maniktalia is a Research Intern at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

rule was far from democratic. Despite this, the EPRDF regime successfully steered Ethiopia towards liberalization and significant economic growth, with a consistent 10 per cent growth over the next 15 years. As a result, a considerable portion of the population transitioned from poverty to the middle class.

Unlike the regime in neighbouring Ethiopia, Eritrea never saw the kind of economic growth seen in Ethiopia. Tensions with the EPRDF regime in Ethiopia meant that the relations and trade remained minuscule between the two countries. The fact that Ethiopia was a landlocked country and that Eritrea had an extensive coastline on the Red sea that Ethiopia could have used for its increasing trade could have easily led to a knock-on economic boom. Moreover, Eritrea and Ethiopia engaged in a devastating war from 1998-2000 over a disputed border. Ethiopia ultimately achieved a decisive military victory under Meles Zenawi's leadership and occupied the contested territories. However, the boundary dispute remained and continued to poison relations between the two states.

In 2005, the EPRDF committed to a free and fair election, expecting to win. As the ruling coalition realised that victory may not be guaranteed, it resorted to electoral manipulation, followed by political repression. Similarly skewed elections followed in 2010 and 2015 and contributed to increasing resentment among the populace of the regime's authoritarian tendencies. In 2012, Meles Zenawi died while in office and was succeeded by his deputy, Hailemariam Desalegn.

In 2016, protests emerged in Oromia over the expansion of the capital city of Addis Ababa as it was feared that the plan would unduly displace Oromia people. When the TPLF established the EPRDF regime in 1991 and created provinces based on ethnicity, areas historically dominated by the Amhara ethnic group were incorporated into Tigray. As a federal system based on ethnicity, the Amhara in the disputed territories claim to have suffered from broad forms of discrimination, been barred from speaking in Amharic and been urged to act and live like Tigrayans. The Welkait Amhara Identity Committee was formed to demand the inclusion of the disputed territories in Amhara. When police forces were sent to the city of Gondar to arrest the members of this Committee in August 2016, massive protests erupted. The unrest in Gondar and Addis Ababa made the now fragile coalition's elites realise that the old status quo was not sustainable and that political change was inevitable.<sup>3</sup> As the nationwide struggle against the EPRDF regime continued, in 2018 Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned. The move baffled the TPLF leadership, who were taken by surprise.

Abiy Ahmed, an ethnic Oromo and former intelligence officer, became Prime Minister with Amhara coalition's support in the EPRDF. He implemented political and social reforms, such as opening the political system to other parties, releasing political prisoners, and loosening media censorship. He also achieved peace with Eritrea and was awarded the Nobel peace prize. Abiy Ahmed confronted the privileges of TPLF elites, causing the TPLF's influence

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to dwindle and isolate themselves in Mekele. In 2019, the non-TPLF coalition partners merged to form the Prosperity Party (PP), which the TPLF accused of wanting to dismantle the federal arrangement. In addition, the Abiy administration blamed the TPLF for supporting ethnic militias nationwide since 2018. In 2020, the federal government postponed provincial elections in Tigray due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The TPLF, who were in power in Tigray, refused to recognize the postponement and held their own elections, which they won. Abiy was unhappy with this and refused to recognize the legitimacy of the newly elected Tigray administration.

In late 2020, the TPLF trained special paramilitary forces and limited the movement of the federal military in Tigray. The federal government launched probes into TPLF-linked companies and withdrew government resources from former TPLF officials. Despite calls for military intervention, Abiy ruled it out over the election impasse. The federal government refused to pass funds to the unrecognized Tigray administration, while the TPLF called for Abiy to step down and for a caretaker government to replace him.

However, on November 3, 2020, the TPLF attacked the federal military's positions in Tigray.

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They argued that the federal troops were about to close in on the region and the strike was a preemptive attempt at self-defence. Federal units had been withdrawn from several parts of Southern Ethiopia prior to the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>4</sup> Whether that was to deter an attack, prepare for it or initiate it remains unknown. Abiy Ahmed, in a televised address, told citizens that the country had been attacked and vowed to

retaliate with a counteroffensive, which he termed a "law enforcement operation". The war had begun.

## The War

### *The fall of Mekelle*

Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, a telecommunication shutdown and a blockade were imposed on Tigray by the federal government. The Northern Command of the Ethiopian military, based in Mekelle, was its most formidable fighting force. It comprised more than half of the armed force's total personnel and mechanised divisions and had a significant presence of Tigrayan soldiers. Many of them switched sides and decided to fight for the TPLF instead.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding that, the fighting in the first few months of the conflict resulted in the TPLF taking huge losses. It was routed from several positions and forced to retreat. Militias from neighbouring Amhara assisted the federal forces as they attacked the TPLF. The Amhara militias were especially active in the disputed territories. The TPLF was wholly routed from Western Tigray, and its land access to Sudan closed in the early days of the conflict. This was to prove decisive later. The federal forces had taken Mekelle by November 28, 2020 and declared victory over the TPLF. The commemoration was short-lived.



*Eritrean Presence*

Reports from early in the conflict emerged of Eritrean soldiers fighting alongside federal troops against the TPLF.<sup>6</sup> The Eritrean involvement in the conflict did not come as a surprise to observers.<sup>7</sup> President Isaias Afwerki would have loved to see the TPLF routed, which he saw as an existential threat, and the Eritrean government's rhetoric before the outbreak of hostilities is testimony to that. In 2018, Issaias said that the changes in Ethiopia at the time were 'game over' for the TPLF.<sup>8</sup> The Eritrean government issued an official statement on October 31, 2020 which said that the TPLF was on its 'deathbed' and won't reverse the 'course of history'.<sup>9</sup> The Ethiopian government denied that it was fighting in tandem with the Eritreans up until March 2021. At this point, Abiy said the Eritreans were fighting alongside the federal military but would soon be sent home. That did not happen.

*Back to the Bush*

The TPLF were down but not out. Its remaining troops once again moved to the countryside and began to wage a guerrilla war against forces. The TPLF had considerable support among the population before the outbreak of hostilities. By April 2021, the conflict had reached a stalemate with the TPLF consolidating its presence in central and southern Tigray, while the Amhara regional forces, Ethiopian government, and Eritrean Army controlled other areas of Tigray.<sup>10</sup>

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*The Blockade*

As the TPLF resorted to guerrilla warfare, the federal government blockaded the food supply to the region, aiming to starve the insurgents into submission. Despite the persistent calls by the international community to allow the delivery of essential aid, the federal government did little to ease the blockade. Tigray had lost access to the only border with a country it was not fighting against, Sudan, earlier in the war, which exacerbated the blockade's impact. All this led to an acute food crisis in the region, as a result of which thousands may have starved to death throughout the war. Eritrean forces also allegedly burnt grain stores to starve the population.<sup>11</sup> In early 2021, the UN estimated that 4.5 million of the 6 million inhabitants were in need of food aid.<sup>12</sup> The complete blockade also led to a shortage of essential medicine in the region, further aggravating the population's suffering.

*TPLF pushes back*

In June, the TPLF launched Operation 'Aluha'<sup>13</sup> and routed the federal forces from Mekelle. The federal government declared a unilateral cease-fire as a face-saver and argued that they had retreated from Mekelle as a goodwill gesture on their part. By July, the TPLF was well outside Tigray's borders, pushing into the Afar state towards Djibouti and Addis Ababa. The TPLF also pushed towards Western Tigray.<sup>14</sup>

By November, the TPLF was approaching Addis Ababa and came within 160 kilometres of the capital.<sup>15</sup> There were fears that the capital may again fall to the TPLF as it did three decades ago. Abiy declared a federal emergency and mobilised the civilian population<sup>16</sup> in an all-out effort to halt the TPLF's advance. Many Ethiopians, fearing a return to TPLF rule, took up arms.<sup>17</sup> By December 2021, the TPLF forces were on the back foot and chased out of almost all of Amhara and Afar.

The move towards Djibouti may have been an attempt by the TPLF to cut Ethiopia's access to the sea, which is critical to its economy. In retrospect, it overextended itself as its supply lanes grew thinner and the terrain harsher<sup>18</sup>. A more pragmatic approach would have been to aim for the lower-hanging fruit of opening up the land route to Sudan by expelling the federal forces and Amhara militias from the region with a more concentrated campaign. This would also have been helpful as the war had heightened tensions between Khartoum and Addis Ababa over a disputed border. Consequently, the Sudanese were likely to have helped or at least turn a blind eye to the Tigrayians supplying themselves through their country.<sup>19</sup>

#### *TPLF on the Back-foot again*

Despite battlefield successes, the federal forces decided not to chase the TPLF back into Tigray, having learnt from their previous experience. A stalemate ensued, and in March 2022, the federal government declared an 'indefinite humanitarian truce', which the TPLF accepted. However, there were disagreements over implementation; the TPLF wanted supplies to flow before retreating, while the federal government wanted the TPLF to pull out of all non-Tigray territory first. This led to limited aid reaching Tigray, and both sides prepared for future hostilities. Observers suspected that the government's real aim for declaring the truce was to buy time while starving off the threat of American sanctions.<sup>20</sup> In January, the United States had already suspended duty-free access of Ethiopian goods to its domestic market over the country's human rights abuses, which was a big blow to its economy.<sup>21</sup>

The truce, ineffective as it was, was broken on August 24 as fighting resumed. By October, the federal forces and Eritreans had routed the TPLF from significant towns and cities except for the capital, Mekelle.

#### *Human Rights Violations*

The manner in which the war was fought warrants special mention. In the first month of the conflict, reports emerged from the town of Mai Kadra in Tigray of hundreds of civilians being slaughtered by the militias allied to the TPLF. Multiple instances of such killings and counter-killings followed for the course of the war.<sup>22</sup> In April 2022, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch released a report titled "We will erase you from this land" which documented widespread instances of of looting, ethnically motivated killings, rapes and

ethnic cleansing by all the belligerents in the conflict. Among all the forces, the conduct of the Eritrean troops stood out as extraordinarily brutal<sup>23</sup>.

### *The Peace talks*

The peace talks led by Olusegun Obasanjo, the African Union's envoy to the horn of Africa region and former Nigerian President, were to begin by early October 2022 in Pretoria but were delayed ostensibly due to logistical issues<sup>24</sup>. In the meantime, the federal forces continued to make considerable advances on the battlefield. The talks finally begin on October 25.<sup>25</sup> On November 2, the peace deal was stuck. According to the deal, the federal troops were to return to Mekelle, and the TPLF was to demobilise within 30 days. An interim government was to be set up, and most importantly, the blockade was to be lifted. One of the most contested issues for the TPLF, the future of the disputed territories, was to be decided by 'constitutional provision'. Interestingly, there was no mention of the third player in the conflict, Eritrea.

### **Conclusion**

The peace deal, remarkable and surprising as it may seem, was not the result of goodwill, generosity and compromise on the part of the belligerent parties. Though pressure by the international community may have contributed to its signing,<sup>26</sup> it was a victor's peace. The deal reflected the battlefield's situation wherein the federal forces had routed the TPLF and was in the brink of military defeat, at least from Mekelle. The TPLF had to choose between returning to waging a guerrilla insurgency, with a dilapidated force that had little chance of capturing Tigray and was likely to simmer away in the background or returning to the table as a political party. In choosing the latter, the TPLF leadership showed pragmatism.

Throughout the war, both the TPLF and the federal government maintained an excessively uncompromising stance. They never showed amenability in their respective positions to give dialogue a chance. The security dilemma escalated, and inevitably the two clashed like trains approaching one another on the same track. The conflict only ended when the federal government had achieved all its desired objectives, and the TPLF was in no position to do so.

**Throughout the war, both the TPLF and the federal government maintained an excessively uncompromising stance.**

The peace deal is only the beginning, however. The manner of its implementation will remain crucial for the future of the region. The Eritrean troops are still in Tigray, though there are reports that they may have repositioned themselves close to the border.<sup>27</sup> The Eritrean President would have liked to see the TPLF crushed, once and for all, and may not be particularly pleased about the Pretoria agreement. He may become a spoiler to the peace.<sup>28</sup> Aid, food and people begin to move to and from the region, albeit slowly. The telecommunication services were restored. The demobilisation of the TPLF began in January 2023.<sup>29</sup>



The war displaced millions inside the country who needed to be cared for and resettled. A civil conflict of such brutality is a fertile breeding ground for future conflicts. Serious reconciliation efforts need to be made, including but not limited to the repatriation of the refugees. The federal government must convey to the Tigrayians that it does not see them as enemies. Its conduct in the war says otherwise. Many TPLF fighters will return to their homes. If alienated, it won't be long before the TPLF or some other faction representing the Tigrayians emerges to challenge the state's legitimacy through violence or terrorism.

The government should bring to justice those who have indulged in war crimes and crimes against humanity. At the moment, this seems unlikely. Abiy would certainly not be eager to antagonise the Ethiopian army, considering the fragile nature of the Ethiopian state and the ongoing insurgency in Oromia. More importantly, the federal strategy of starving the Tigrayians to submission has led to international criticism.<sup>30</sup> It appears that accountability and justice are not on the cards. That being said, from an altogether realist perspective, it would do well for Abiy to establish an inquiry commission; however, teeth-less, as it will

provide a semblance of justice, which will be helpful for the reconciliation and peace-building process.

**Central to the peace-building process is resolving the Ahmara-Tigray territorial dispute, which actors in both states consider of paramount interest.**

Central to the peace-building process is resolving the Ahmara-Tigray territorial dispute, which actors in both states consider of paramount interest. It is rather far-fetched to expect the government to declare the territories part of Tigray and risk estranging the Amharas. One plausible solution would be to declare the disputed areas autonomous zones under federal control, with cultural

and linguistic rights guaranteed to all groups. Then there is also the issue of integrating the TPLF fighters into the Ethiopian defence forces.

Lastly, the war may have been over, but Ethiopia is by no means at peace. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), bought back from exile by Abiy himself, is come to bite him back and is fighting the federal forces in Oromia. It has also indulged in ethnic pogroms against other ethnicities in Oromo-majority areas. As a cause and a consequence of it, other ethnic militias are targeting the Oromo population in what appears to be an increasingly bloody cycle of violence.

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## Viewpoint

### REPOSING FAITH IN MONUSCO

The survival of MONUSCO is becoming questionable. To avoid this, the UNSC should continue to support MONUSCO with more resources. Improving MONUSCO's working environment by equipping it with more technology will also necessitate the Security Council directly addressing the problem posed by neighbouring nations' backing for DRC rebels. Additionally, MONUSCO's mandate may be extended for at least two years to consolidate the efforts initiated and help assist in forming a new government. MONUSCO has continued to offer operational, logistical, and tactical support to the Armed Forces of the DRC and the Congolese National Police in their attempts to face armed groups in the east, regardless of the current situation.

**Swaim Prakash Singh\***

#### Introduction

During India's presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in December 2022, a briefing note was prepared to address the deteriorating security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which claimed the lives of two Indian peacekeepers in July 2022. The M23 group, a rebel organisation crushed in 2013, has recently recaptured vast swaths of territory in the eastern DRC.<sup>1</sup> Earlier in September 2022, the Presidents of DRC and Rwanda addressed the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) with accusations against each other about the resumption of conflict in eastern Congo.<sup>2</sup>

Rwanda's Permanent Representative to the UN, Claver Gatete, told the UNSC that "the fight between the M23 and the DRC government is an 'internal affair' and that its eastern neighbour Rwanda should neither be a scapegoat nor equated with M23."<sup>3</sup> Gatete also accused the international community of remaining quiet regarding potential ties between the DRC administration and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a militia group whose leaders participated in the Rwandan massacre of 1994. The US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, also discussed the subject, urging all armed groups in the region to lay down their weapons and urging Rwanda to discontinue its support for M23. In addition, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in DRC Bintou Keita

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\* Wing Commander Swaim Prakash Singh, MSc, MPhil, psc+ is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), New Delhi. He is currently pursuing PhD (thesis submitted) in Defence and Strategic Studies, University of Madras.

informed the UNSC that “the security situation in eastern DRC had dramatically deteriorated in recent weeks and that the M23 had extended its authority to the province of North Kivu.”<sup>4</sup> This is despite efforts by the DRC and Rwanda to pursue a “de-escalation process” and a ceasefire agreement signed by M23. In October 2022, though, combat broke out between M23 and DRC soldiers, reigniting worries of a proxy conflict. The M23 and the FDLR are responsible for some of the region’s most heinous crimes, including human rights violations and the exploitation of natural resources.<sup>5</sup>

**The M23 and the FDLR are responsible for some of the region's most heinous crimes,...**

Since the early 2000s, the Indian Peacekeepers in the DRC have been a constituent of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Its mission is to combat M23 and other armed groups. Their major responsibility is to assist in protecting civilians from the violence that is ravaging villages in the eastern half of the nation. Unfortunately, it has proven to be a fight uphill.<sup>6</sup> In July, anti-MONUSCO rallies erupted in the eastern region of the DRC. At least 36 people, including four peacekeepers, were killed in the attacks, and more than 170 were critically injured.<sup>7</sup>

### Roots of the 1994 Genocide

The continued crises in the DRC and the rise of the M23 have caused Rwanda and the DRC to play the blame game. In 1994, about 8 lakh members of the Tutsi minority group, as well as some liberal Twa and Hutu, were murdered by armed militants during the Rwandan genocide. Despite being a minority, the Tutsis comprised the upper class of Rwanda. Historically, the Hutus, which is an ethnic majority constituting over 80 per cent of the Rwandan populace, belonged to the lower classes. The 1994 events were thus not merely the outcome of racial and class tensions.

**The continued crises in the DRC and the rise of the M23 have caused Rwanda and the DRC to play the blame game.**

In the eastern regions of the DRC, where more than 120 militias and armed groups are active, attacks by armed groups and periodic inter-communal violence continue to endanger local residents. Despite the military offensives conducted by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), the government’s armed forces, with backing from MONUSCO, violence has risen due to a resurgence in activity by groups such as the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO) and M23. Different armed organisations have used the weakening of official authority to launch assaults against people for nearly three decades. Armed organisations have increased due to widespread impunity and the struggle to control lucrative natural resources. Deadly violence in eastern DRC exemplifies the difficulty of establishing efficient governance and stability. Combined with inter-communal tensions, the number of attacks is straining the FARDC and MONUSCO’s ability to provide effective protection. Moreover, FARDC offensives typically generate violent reprisals targeting civilians. The revival of M23 has also often exacerbated regional tensions, particularly between the governments of DRC and Rwanda.<sup>8</sup>



## Has the Peacekeeping Mission failed?

MONUSCO has come under heavy criticism from all walks of life, including the government machinery and the local populace. Some observers think the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission has failed since the war-torn country still lacks peace. In the resource-rich eastern regions, rebels vie for influence. In addition, observers claim that the Blue Helmets' alliance with the Congolese army has earned the local populace's mistrust because the military frequently commits atrocities against civilians.<sup>9</sup>

**MONUSCO has come under heavy criticism from all walks of life, including the government machinery and the local populace.**

Armed conflicts on the continent are largely addressed by peace keeping operations conducted under the United Nations banner. Nevertheless, despite having superior weapons compared to the dispersed armed groups in Africa, these UN operations have continuously failed in carrying out their missions.<sup>10</sup> There are several reasons why such missions are ineffective. For example, in nations such as the DRC, Mali, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, peacekeepers are frequently confronted with political and cultural issues they do not comprehend. Additionally, there are vested interests that often operate against the UN mandate.

According to Phil Clark,<sup>11</sup> a peace and conflict studies expert, "MONUSCO has been a slow learner, and it has taken the United Nations a considerable amount of time to figure out how to conduct peacekeeping in Congo."<sup>12</sup> Further, he implies that "it has struggled to maintain cordial relations with the government in Kinshasa and has instead carefully aligned itself with the Congolese army, even if the army has committed atrocities against civilians."<sup>13</sup> Such relations between the Congolese government and peacekeepers have engendered hatred among the local populace, which does not view MONUSCO as a neutral actor in an unstable environment.

David Zounmenou,<sup>14</sup> another expert, reaches a similar conclusion from his extensive research on Congo. He states, "The UN mission is there to engage with the Congolese people and the government to bring security to the country."<sup>15</sup> The difficulty, however, is that most of the DRC's political elite were generated by rebel organisations. "Many still maintain close ties with their previous groups to exert political pressure."<sup>16</sup> The residents do not view the UN peacekeepers as impartial actors whose mission is to protect the interests of the populace. The new wave of protests reflects the discontent of the people. Widespread reports indicate that the militias have close ties to political groups and even the army; they are deeply rooted in Congolese society, making it difficult for MONUSCO to eradicate rebels while safeguarding civilians.<sup>17</sup>

The intricacies of violence in eastern Congo are complicated. The ethnic rivalry over the control of natural resources; competition among elites, comprising politicians, military officials, state officials, and armed groups for economic and political power; the abusive behaviour of the Congolese security forces; and the

**The intricacies of violence in eastern Congo are complicated.**

interventions of neighbouring countries pursuing strategic and commercial interests. For an extended period, foreign governments and corporations have also intervened in the Congo for political and material benefit, particularly access to vital mineral resources.<sup>18</sup> After the riots, DRC President Félix Tshisekedi sought a meeting with the mission to reevaluate the drawdown plan. However, no decision was made to speed it up. The authorities also dismissed the MONUSCO spokesperson, claiming that his remarks regarding the mission's limited capacity to combat the M23 had contributed to the escalation of violence.<sup>19</sup>

### Peace Building Initiatives

Numerous foreign countries have attempted to end the region's endemic bloodshed. In addition, more than a dozen UN envoys and special representatives, as well as special representatives from other countries and organisations, have attempted to find solutions. The United Nations, the International Conference of the Great Lakes, the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and, more recently, the East African Community (EAC) have developed frameworks, agreements, action plans, and road maps. These efforts have brought about short periods of relative peace but have not ended the bloodshed.<sup>20</sup>

**Numerous foreign countries have attempted to end the region's endemic bloodshed.**

As anticipated, the UNSC voted for Resolution 2666 (2022) on December 20, 2021, extending MONUSCO's mandate for another year. It emphasised that "the Government of the DRC bears the primary responsibility to protect civilians within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction, including from international crimes, recognising the persistent security challenge threatening civilians, also underlining the importance of national efforts to restore State authority in all parts of the country to overcome the threats posed by armed groups."<sup>21</sup> To make this happen the UN has mandated that "the MONUSCO's authorised troop ceiling will comprise 13,500 military personnel, 660 military observers and staff officers, 591 police personnel, and 1,410 personnel of formed police units, and consider further reduction of MONUSCO's level of military deployment, in line with the joint strategy on the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO."<sup>22</sup> Earlier, on April 21, 2022, the EAC, which the DRC had joined just the previous month, agreed to build a regional military force to confront conflict in the east. In June 2022, the EAC agreed to dispatch troops to combat M23's revival.

In addition to the military operation of the EAC, diplomatic exertions are being made to alleviate tensions in eastern DRC. President Joao Lourenco of Angola visited Rwanda and the DRC. In November 2022, the former president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, also visited the capital of the DRC for discussions. As a result, the leaders of the East African Community decided to establish a regional military force to restore peace in the DRC. At the same time, in November 2022, the Kenyan parliament authorised the deployment of approximately 900 troops to the DRC as part of an East African Community Military Force (EACMF).

President Évariste Ndayishimiye of Burundi, the current chair of the EAC, hosted a high-level consultative meeting of EAC Heads of State in November in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. The EAC has been employing a two-pronged strategy, called the Nairobi process, to address

the condition in the Eastern DRC. The Security Council report elucidates that “it is to facilitate political dialogue between the Congolese government and armed groups and deploy a regional force against those who refuse to participate in the dialogue process.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, they assessed the deployment of the EAC regional force in the eastern DRC, with its headquarters in Goma. Participants underlined in the communiqué that “Burundian, Kenyan, and Ugandan troops had already been deployed on the ground and urged South Sudan to speed up the deployment of its troops.”<sup>24</sup> This force is now operating under the command of Kenya.<sup>25</sup> In November 2022, Kenyan soldiers arrived in the city of Goma as part of a regional military operation against rebels in the region.

**The EAC has been employing a two-pronged strategy,...**

### Should MONUSCO be disbanded?

In light of these circumstances, against the rising voices, the survival of MONUSCO is becoming questionable. To avoid this, the UNSC should continue to support MONUSCO with more resources. The emphasis should be on assisting the mission in performing its duties in a progressively challenging environment and achieving more of the transition plan’s yardsticks so that drawdown planning can commence in earnest. Improving MONUSCO’s working environment by equipping it with more technology will also necessitate the Security Council directly addressing the problem posed by neighbouring nations’ backing for DRC rebels. Unfortunately, Kinshasa’s attempts to enhance its governance have yet to help the security situation in Eastern Congo. Therefore, it would be prudent to wait until the upcoming elections in early 2024 and anticipate a regime change. In the meantime, the UNGA may consider expanding the concept of an African solution to the situation. It should assist Africans in pursuing ‘African solutions to African problems’ with the whole of EAC approach to end the generational animosity spread over three decades. Additionally, MONUSCO’s mandate may be extended for at least two years to consolidate the efforts initiated and help assist in forming a new government. MONUSCO has continued to offer operational, logistical, and tactical support to the Armed Forces of the DRC and the Congolese National Police in their attempts to face armed groups in the east, regardless of the current situation.

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- <sup>11</sup> Phil Clark is a Professor of International Politics at SOAS University of London. He specialises in conflict and post-conflict issues, including transitional justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation after mass atrocity in Rwanda, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.
- <sup>12</sup> Isaac Mugabi, no.10
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> David Zounmenou is a senior researcher for West Africa in the Africa Conflict Prevention Program (ACPP) at Institute of Security Studies in Pretoria, South Africa (ISS). He is a graduate from the Ecole Nationale d’Administration (ENA-BENIN) - option Diplomacy and International Relations. His areas of interest include Foreign Policy Analysis, Contemporary Development Issues, Democracy and Good Governance, Armed Conflicts and Human Security.
- <sup>15</sup> Isaac Mugabi, no.10
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## Book Review

Daniel Large, *China and Africa: The New Era*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2021, pp. 255. INR 1,766.

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**Mayuri Banerjee\***

Since the inception of People's Republic of China, the political leadership has considered engagement with Africa as one of the key focus areas. During Mao's Era, despite facing economic challenges, Beijing extended aid and infrastructural support to various African countries. Thereafter, in a bid to emphasize Africa's importance, China established a tradition where the Chinese foreign minister would commence each year's overseas trip with a visit to Africa. Over the years the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has worked through multiple channels to deepen political, diplomatic, economic and security ties with African countries. At present China is Africa's largest trading partner, important source of credit and infrastructure investment, and one of the top arms exporters. In this context, the primary drivers of China's foreign policy have been a matter of considerable debate and discussion within the scholarly community.

Daniel Large in his book *China and Africa: The New Era*, focusing on China-Africa relations under Xi Jinping, argues that politics is the primary driving factor in present bilateral ties. Although economic interests are important, they are rooted in Beijing's political ambition of emerging as a global power. Tracing the development of China-Africa relations, Large contends that politics have always mattered in Sino-African ties. Although, around 1996, economics became the main association between the two; with ascendance of Xi Jinping in 2012, political considerations again came to the forefront. He emphasizes that this reorientation towards politics is linked to Xi Jinping's vision of China's national rejuvenation. Accordingly, engagement with African countries is seen as a major platform for advancing China's centrality in world affairs.

Centering on this theme the book explores and elaborates on various related aspects. Divided into six main chapters, the first chapter offers a background reviewing the historical, political, and institutional dynamics in China's present engagement with Africa and how African

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\* Ms. Mayuri Banerjee is a Research Analyst at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

protagonists engage with China. Here, Large makes three key points, first is that Beijing while engaging with Africa endeavours to project an identity of being a different power citing absence of colonial record and past engagements. Second, implementation of China's Africa policy involves diversity of actors, agendas and internal politics than revealed by the Party. Third, engagement with China is a politicised issue in African domestic politics and finally in the light of various asymmetries the African actors' engagement with China demonstrates a combination on agency and dependency. The second chapter delves into the importance and role that China and Africa hold in each other's foreign policy and global engagement. Large argues that Africa is politically important for China in global terms as the support of African governments is significant in China's foreign policy, engagement with existing multilateral institutions centered on the United Nations (UN) and creation of its own multilateral institutions. Further, the continent has become a platform for Beijing to showcase its credentials as a responsible power to the international community. Similarly, while the African states have sought to use their growing economic ties with China to enhance their political autonomy at the international stage, there has also been simultaneous attempts to diversify external partners to offset excessive dependence on China.

Moving on to economic and governance issues, the third and the fourth chapter examines China's economic relations with Africa in the New Era and Beijing's promotion of a New Era version of the China model. On the economic front, the author highlights that different Chinese business engagements are rapidly expanding in Africa. Also, China is increasingly trying to connect Africa's industrial development with China's industrial upgrading, focusing on infrastructure construction and manufacturing. However, CCP's claims of instituting a transformative change in Africa's economic status is severely restrained by the intractable challenges facing the different African countries. Besides, the enormous structural and political challenges which plague African economies, mounting debt to China has also emerged as a high-profile economic concern in recent years. Large asserts that as rising debt demonstrates Africa's growing dependence on China, Beijing's response will be reshaping its political relations with Africa. Converging with China's expanding economic ties, Beijing is also promoting the China model, that is, the authoritarian single-party state capitalism. Interesting to note is that Beijing is using various indirect means like education, training, media and party contacts to this end. While China recognizes that the African countries might tailor the China model to suit their domestic circumstances, at best the propaganda drive will create community of African politicians sympathetic to the CCP.

Highlighting China's salience in Africa's domestic politics, the fifth chapter looks into micro-level concerns like people-to people relations and cross-migration between China and the African continent. Referring to debates within Africa regarding Chinese migration, Large considers them as indication of broader concerns about China's role and political influence in Africa. Moreover, rising crimes against Chinese and African nationals in certain African countries and China respectively has emerged as a major security challenge for governments on both sides. The final chapter analyses the role of both traditional and non-traditional security engagement in China's Africa relations. Beginning with China's establishment of military base in Djibouti to peacekeeping operations, joint training and counter-piracy drills

among others, security engagement has become a major pillar of China-Africa relations. More importantly, these contacts reflect China's status as an established power in the continent.

Along with analysing how politics is interspersed with institutional, economic, security and micro-level engagements, the book also brings to fore the asymmetries, divergences and challenges in bilateral ties. For instance, in the concluding section, the author underscores the mismatch between the language of solidarity, equality, mutual respect and win-win development which the Chinese government uses to frame its Africa relations and the present state of ties with different African countries. Large notes that several issues like mounting debt, deepening political and economic asymmetries, market access and protectionism, and Chinese influence on African governing institutions that lay underneath the official rhetoric point to deep inequalities, divergences and potential challenges in China-Africa ties.

The book is an important contribution to the ongoing debate about China's position and role in Africa, especially as the West views China's engagement only through the economic lens. Thus, challenging the conventional wisdom, Large takes a broader political economic approach and draws out the nuances obscured from plain view.

However, a major question that the book leaves undecided for its readers is how global structural changes condition China and Africa's politics of engagement. Considering how global geopolitical currents impact foreign policy approaches in both the geographies, this question needs to be analysed deeply as China and Africa's engagement expand and become more multifaceted. In that case this book will be an important text for future research in this domain.

## Call for Contributions

MP-IDSA invites articles, commentaries and book reviews for publication in *Africa Trends*, a biannual magazine on Africa. Submissions can focus on security, political and economic issues relating to African countries. Articles may focus on analysing bilateral, regional and multilateral developments of strategic significance to India's engagement with African countries.

Articles could be of approximately 2000 words. Commentaries can range between 1,000-1,500 words (excluding footnotes) and book reviews between 600-1,000 words. Guidelines for contributors may be found at: <http://www.idsa.in/africatrends>. Submissions may be emailed to the Editor at [idsa.africatrends@gmail.com](mailto:idsa.africatrends@gmail.com).

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The Centre's research focus includes understanding developments in the African region and analysing various hotspots like Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and the Indian Ocean Region. It also focuses on bilateral, regional as well as multilateral engagements between India and the countries of Africa. The Centre also endeavours to analyse India's engagement with Latin American countries, particularly in forums such as the IBSA and BRICS.

In addition, the Centre carries out research on the broader theme of India and the United Nations. It deals with important topics that come up in the Security Council and those that have relevance and significance for India's foreign policy.

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**Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses**

No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg,

Delhi Cantt., New Delhi - 110 010

Tel.: (91-11) 2671-7983 Fax: (91-11) 2615 4191

Website: <http://www.idsa.in>