

Congo: Goma Falls to Rwanda

By [Justin Podur](#)

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Global Research, November 26, 2012

[Socialist Project](#) 25 November 2012

Image: M23 rebels

Rebels, called the [M23](#), have taken Goma, the main city of North Kivu, one of the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) (DRC)'s eastern provinces. Their plan is to march to Bukavu, the main city of South Kivu, and from there, they say, across the massive country to Kinshasa, the Congo's capital.

A geographical note is in order. The DRC's principal cities are part of greater urban areas that cross international borders. Look at the capital, Kinshasa, on a map, and you will see Brazzaville, the capital of the other Congo, right next to it. Goma, which the rebels currently control, borders the Rwandan city of Gisenyi.



Bukavu, which the M23 rebels threaten to go to next, borders the Rwandan city of Cyangugu.

The geographical note should be accompanied by an historical note. This military pattern, of a rebellion seizing Goma, then Bukavu, then marching west deeper into the DRC, has happened before. It happened in 1996, when the rebels, who called themselves the AFDL, [overthrew Mobutu Sese Seko](#). The AFDL was militarily and politically subordinate to the Rwandan army, and had help from the Ugandan army as well. They were successful. Mobutu was ousted, Laurent Kabila was installed, and the country was renamed from Zaire to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Splitting the DRC

The same pattern repeated itself in 1998, when the rebels, then called the RCD, took Goma and attempted to get rid of Laurent Kabila. The RCD, like the AFDL, was a creation and an instrument of Rwanda and Uganda. The RCD was not as successful as the AFDL: it was stalemated when Laurent Kabila got military help from Angola and Zimbabwe. The RCD split, with Rwandan and Ugandan controlled factions coming to blows over the spoils of the Congo.

But even though they did not get to impose their will nationally, the Rwandan-sponsored militia groups (the spawn of the RCD) did impose their will in the east. They continued to control the mines, they continued to effectively occupy and rule the Kivus, and eventually, they were incorporated into the Congolese Army through processes called brassage and mixage.

There are nuances to this story, but it can be summarized in one phrase: the eastern Congo is under Rwandan control, and has been since 1996. The DRC's government has tried, since 1998, to re-assert control over the Kivus, and the warfare in the east is over control: of the land, of the people, and of course, of the mines.

Rwanda, of course, denies that it has anything to do with these rebels. But a look at one of M23's commanders, [Bosco 'The Terminator' Ntaganda](#), is indicative. Ntaganda was born in Rwanda, and fought in the Rwandan civil war of 1990, on the side of victorious RPF that took over Rwanda in 1994. When Rwanda invaded the Congo along with its creation, the AFDL, Ntaganda was there, and he stayed. He was part of two other Congolese armed groups, both of which opposed the Congolese government: The Union of Congolese Patriots in Ituri, and the CNDP (National Congress for the Defense of the People), before he joined the M23. Every group Ntaganda has been a part of has committed amply documented war crimes and crimes against humanity. The CNDP, like M23, is abundantly documented to have been supported by Rwanda.

Ntaganda is indicative, but not unique. An examination of other leaders of Congolese rebellions, like James Kabarebe and Laurent Nkunda, reveals similar career paths: from the Rwandan army, into Congolese rebel armies, and sometimes back and forth.

Rwanda's Role

The rebels are supported by Rwanda, but Rwanda is a small country and the DRC is a huge one. Why is Rwanda able to do so much to its giant neighbour? The Rwandan army has been particularly well-organized since the 1990s, and the country's President, Paul Kagame, is a favourite of the U.S. (where he went to military school). Kagame's Rwanda has always looked for military solutions to political problems, because of its disproportionate strength in that arena. Rwanda has also had important diplomatic support from the U.S. and the UK, although a few other European countries have withdrawn diplomatic support and aid after exposures of Rwanda's violent role in the eastern Congo.

Since October 18, Rwanda has been on the United Nations Security Council, which probably provides more diplomatic cover for crimes than it does additional scrutiny, but Rwanda is vulnerable politically. Where it is not dependent on stolen Congolese wealth, it is dependent on international aid – as well as the crucial military and diplomatic support from the United States. A few weeks before this rebel offensive, on October 25, a group of gunmen [attempted to assassinate](#) one of the eastern Congo's most visible activists, Dr. Denis Mukwege, who has done important medical work in Bukavu and important work raising the profile of the DRC and those who are behind the war in the east at the United Nations and other international forums. In every phase of Rwanda's 'rebellions' over the past decades, Congolese and international activists and journalists have been targeted. If these 'rebellions' had the effect of exposing the Rwandan occupation of the east, if Rwanda's own sponsors were unable to control the information about the war in the Congo, Rwanda could be forced to stand down and allow the Congolese a space to breathe, and rebuild. •

Justin Podur visited Bukavu in 2009 and 2011. Justin is the author of *Haiti's New Dictatorship* (Pluto Press 2012) and maintains a blog at killingtrain.com where this article first appeared.

The original source of this article is [Socialist Project](#)
Copyright © [Justin Podur](#), [Socialist Project](#), 2012

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Justin Podur](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca