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SHIFTING THE PEACE TALKS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO FROM AFRICA TO THE MIDDLE EAST

Despite the lack of tangible results on the ground, there has been growing international involvement in peace efforts aimed at ending the violent and bloody conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Following the capture of two major cities – Goma and Bukavu in Eastern DRC by the M23 rebel movement in January 2025, this protracted conflict has drawn renewed attention both within Africa and beyond the continent.

Following the withdrawal of the Angolan President João Lourenço from his role as a mediator on behalf of the African Union, Qatar has offered to assume the role of a new mediator. This move has shifted the peace process from Africa to the Middle East, and is likely to carry diplomatic and geopolitical implications.

The Eastern DRC faces challenges from the numerous armed groups that have been exploiting the absence or weaknesses of the government in the region. With over 120 armed groups operating in the North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces, the region has experienced widespread violence, massive displacement of people, and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, primarily affecting civilians. The renewed hostilities by the M23 rebel movement have further deteriorated living conditions for the population.



According to the [United Nation High Commission for Refugees](#) (UNHCR), the escalation of violence has increased the number of internally displaced people to a staggering 7.3 million, while tens of thousands more have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Angola.

Peace Initiatives and the Deadlock

There have been numerous attempts to reach a peaceful settlement to the conflict taking place in the DRC. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have been fruitless. The current war opposing the DRC Armed Forces (FARDC) against the M23 movement, which is believed to get support from the Rwandan government, has been the most devastating.

Africa-based initiatives to resolve the DRC crisis have primarily focused on peace efforts known as the [Nairobi and Luanda processes](#). The Nairobi Process suggests the creation of a dialogue platform where the government of the DRC can engage in negotiations with all Congolese armed groups that are willing to disarm and join the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process. While most armed groups have agreed to the

ceasefire, the M23 has remained defiant and continues to engage in combat, thereby derailing the Nairobi Process.

The second initiative, known as the Luanda Process, focuses on resolving the diplomatic dispute between the DRC and Rwandan governments. This has a serious political and security dimension. On the one hand, the government in [Kinshasa accuses Rwanda](#) of offering financial, logistical, and intelligence support to the M23 movement, which Kigali denies, despite evidence collected by [UN group of experts](#). On the other hand, the Rwandan government accuses Kinshasa of harbouring people who committed genocide in Rwanda, and who established a rebel group known as the FDLR.

The mediation, led by the Angolan government, was focused on diffusing tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. However, this process came to an abrupt end when President Lourenço of Angola withdrew from his role as mediator. The failure of this process could be explained by the regional realignment and the incompatibility between the interests of the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Shifting the Peace Talks to Qatar: What Implications for the Process?

The shift of the DRC peace talks from Nairobi and Luanda to Doha, Qatar, marks a significant change in the diplomatic approach to resolving the protracted conflict. However, this decision has both positive and negative implications for the peace process, and for Africa as a continent seeking to find **“African solutions to African problems.”**

The involvement of Qatar in the DRC peace talks is considered a fresh approach to the process. It follows several failed attempts of negotiations that were initiated by various regional blocs, particularly the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community. Qatar has managed to leverage its diplomatic influence and economic ties in Africa and has succeeded in bringing the warring parties to a negotiation table. In March 2025, the Gulf nation brokered a **direct meeting between President Félix Tshisekedi and Paul Kagame in Doha.** This meeting was seen as a positive step in the right direction, following months of deadlock due to President Tshisekedi's refusal to meet with the leaders of the M23, whom he considers puppets of the Rwandan government.

Following this initial meeting, rounds of talks between Congolese diplomats and representative of the M23 took place in Doha to discuss the content of a peace deal.

The country's neutral stance has created a conducive environment for dialogue between the belligerents. However, many challenges remain regarding the implementation of the peace agreement, once it is reached.

From an African perspective, shifting DRC peace talks to Qatar has sparked concerns about the principle of African solutions to African problems. While Qatar's involvement in the peace process has brought in new diplomatic momentum, critics argue that shifting the negotiations outside Africa significantly undermines regional peace efforts and African-led diplomacy. Other negative implications include the loss of confidence in African institutions and their ability to solve conflicts. Additionally, African leaders may end up losing control over the peace process as the Qatari diplomatic influence grows. There are also fears of seeing foreign interests being prioritised as a result of the peace process being held outside the continent.

Despite the concern above mentioned, the Qatar-led negotiations have achieved some breakthroughs, especially in bringing the warring parties to the table and developing the draft agreement. Given the track record of failed peace agreements in the DRC, the focus should be now on developing strong and reliable mechanisms for implementation to ensure that the Congolese people can finally enjoy peace dividends.

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