

La diplomacia militar ruandesa: un modelo de éxito securitario y económico

Resumen:

Ruanda ha aprovechado las capacidades de su aparato militar como herramienta política para ganar mayor visibilidad internacional e influencia continental, y ha ampliado el alcance de sus compromisos militares más allá de las intervenciones multilaterales. Su estrategia militar ha desafiado la tradicional dinámica descendente del liderazgo de la seguridad mundial, en la que los países poderosos dirigen la diplomacia militar e intervienen en Estados más pequeños. La diplomacia militar ruandesa ha permitido además vincular hábilmente los acuerdos de seguridad a otros también de naturaleza económica y comercial, consiguiendo así desligar las tasas de desarrollo y crecimiento económico del país de la inversión y la ayuda extranjera. Por otro lado, la exitosa diplomacia militar le ha permitido al presidente ruandés, Paul Kagame, el beneficio de que la comunidad internacional en general, y Occidente en particular, haya pasado por alto en muchas ocasiones la naturaleza autoritaria de su régimen y su intervención en el conflicto de la República Democrática del Congo.

Palabras clave:

Ruanda, Paul Kagame, República Centroafricana, Mozambique, República Democrática del Congo, diplomacia militar, coltán.

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Introduction

When members of the Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) stormed into Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique to fight Islamist insurgents, it came as a surprise to regional and international observers. For a small state of 13.6 million people¹ from the Great Lakes region of East Africa to deploy its army in the heart of Southern Africa was unprecedented. Within months, the Rwandan military quietened much of Cabo Delgado and agreed to train contingents of the Mozambique army. This intervention in Mozambique had been preceded by similar actions in the Central African Republic, a country that is geographically closer to Rwanda but does not share borders with it.

In the Central African Republic, Rwandan troops advanced against anti-government insurgents as part of a UN-sponsored mission, MINUSCA, but subsequently also began operating outside the UN mandate, based on a bilateral agreement between the presidents of Rwanda and the Central African Republic.

Moreover, Rwandan military diplomacy appears set on extending to West Africa as well. Since 2023, the Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Beninese President Patrice Talon have been in talks on a military agreement that may include joint monitoring, training, education and deployment of troops to deal with jihadist attacks in the regions of Benin bordering Burkina Faso².

Paul Kagame, who has been in power since 2000, has succeeded in projecting his country as a promoter of security in sub-Saharan Africa. In his statements and speeches, the Rwandan president argues that Rwanda's participation in multilateral missions and its subsequent bilateral deployments are part of an innovative and uniquely Rwandan concept based on the principle of the responsibility to protect (R2P)³. According to Kagame, Rwanda has an obligation to intervene in crises such as those in the Central African Republic, Mozambique or the Democratic Republic of Congo, and this moral mandate derives, firstly, from the natural solidarity shared by the continent's states through their pan-African ties, and secondly, from Rwanda's terrible experiences during

¹ *The World Factbook, Rwanda*. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/rwanda/factsheets/#people-and-society>

Note: All hyperlinks are active as of 5th February 2025.

² "Rwanda, Benin talk military cooperation over border security", *Africa News*. Published on 13 August 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/04/16/rwanda-benin-talk-military-cooperation-over-border-security/>

³ GOVERNMENT OF RWANDA. *Rwanda Deploys Joint Force to Mozambique*. Published on 9 July 2021. <https://www.gov.rw/blog-detail/rwanda-deploys-joint-force-to-mozambique>

the 1994 genocide. This vision is based on the search for African solutions to African problems. Solutions imported or dictated from outside Africa are no longer acceptable⁴.

Unlike many other African nations, Rwanda has an actual foreign policy strategy. Kagame seeks to promote the country as the "Singapore of Africa", as a leading African nation in innovation and new technologies, as a centre for conferences and major sporting events - it is set to host the World Cycling Championships in September 2025 - and as a leading ecotourism destination. Due to sponsorship agreements, the tagline "Visit Rwanda" may be read on the shirts of European football teams such as Arsenal, Paris Saint Germain or Bayern Munich. Kagame has also pushed for the country's presence in global organisations. In 2009, it became a member of the Commonwealth and also hosted its 2022 summit; the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* is headed by a former minister and yet another is the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission⁵.



Figure 1. Promotional poster of the "Visit Rwanda" campaign

Its military strategy is also reversing the traditional top-down dynamics of global security leadership, where powerful countries are leaders in military diplomacy and intervene in smaller states. Smaller actors rarely have the necessary capabilities. Some African regional powers such as South Africa have attempted to adopt forms of military diplomacy. However, these attempts have often been met with suspicion by other African countries⁶.

⁴ CANNON, Brendon and DONELLI, Federico. "Rwanda's Military Deployments in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Neoclassical Realist Account", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 58. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2022.2132046>

⁵ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE. "Rwanda: Small nation with influence beyond its borders", Published on 14 July 2024. <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/757764>

⁶ "Rwanda's military support to other countries is part of a strategy to boost its reputation", *The conversation*. Published on 24 June 2024. <https://theconversation.com/rwandas-military-support-to-other-countries-is-part-of-a-strategy-to-boost-its-reputation-231957>

Kagame is accused of authoritarian rule and of muzzling the media and political opposition, but the image of leadership he has forged was demonstrated by the controversial and abortive deal to take in migrants and asylum seekers deported by the UK. The interest was essentially financial, but it also served to project Rwanda's image as a peaceful and safe country in which to host refugees⁷ and one that Western countries could count on. Unlike many African nations, Rwanda's image is associated with effective security and governance, and Kagame is generally regarded across the continent as a competent head of state⁸.



Figure 2. Rwanda Defence Forces. Source: Rwanda Defence Forces

The Rwanda Defence Forces: effectiveness and international prestige

How has this mini-state⁹, scarcely bigger than the Spanish province of Badajoz, built one of the best prepared and most effective armies in Africa? The Rwanda Defence Forces

⁷ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE. "Rwanda: Small nation with influence beyond its borders". Published on 14 July 2024. <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/757764>

⁸ HANDY, Paul-Simon. "Rwanda: the emergence of an African 'smart power'", *Institute for Security Studies*. Published on 27 September 2021. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/rwanda-the-emergence-of-an-african-smart-power>

⁹In terms of size, it is 46th of a total of 54 in the *ranking* of African states. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_African_countries_by_area

(RDF) as an institution possesses certain unique traits compared to other African armies. For example, the RDF does not have its roots in colonial-era military structures as is the case for the armed forces of most of its neighbours. They are a professional, highly trained and well-equipped army. From 2005 onwards, the need to re-establish broken political ties, increase Rwanda's prestige and overcome the country's economic isolation, prompted Kagame to actively participate in peacekeeping operations in conflict zones. Within a short period of time, Rwandan troops received much praise, especially for their prowess in transnational mediations and operations in civil war contexts. The RDF's expertise and discipline has attracted attention and stands in stark contrast to that of other peacekeeping contingents. More specifically, Rwandan peacekeepers have never been implicated in the abuses that have marred other UN missions in Africa¹⁰.

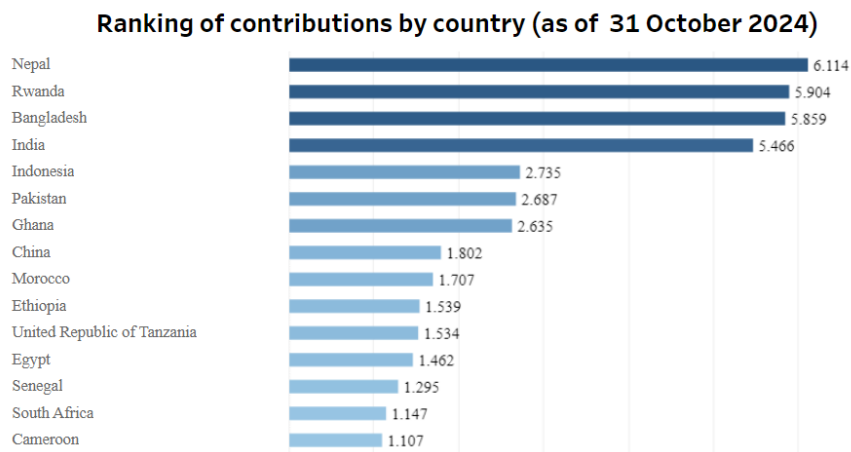


Figure 3. Ranking of country contributions. Source: *Troop and police contributors*. United Nations Peacekeeping. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

Today Rwanda is the world's second largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, and the first in Africa, with nearly six thousand military personnel deployed in five different missions¹¹.

Having made a name for himself through his military contributions to UN operations in conflict zones, Kagame has gone a step further and implemented a military diplomacy

¹⁰ DONNELLI, Federico. *Rwanda's Military Diplomacy*. Notes de l'Ifri, Institut français des relations internationales. Published in April 2022. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/donelli_rwanda_military_diplomacy_2022.pdf

¹¹ UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING. *Troop and police contributors*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

approach at the bilateral level as well, thus becoming an African security provider for the continent outside UN or African multilateral bodies. In this way, Rwanda has harnessed the capabilities of its military apparatus as a political tool to gain greater international visibility and continental influence and has expanded the scope of its military engagements beyond multilateral interventions.

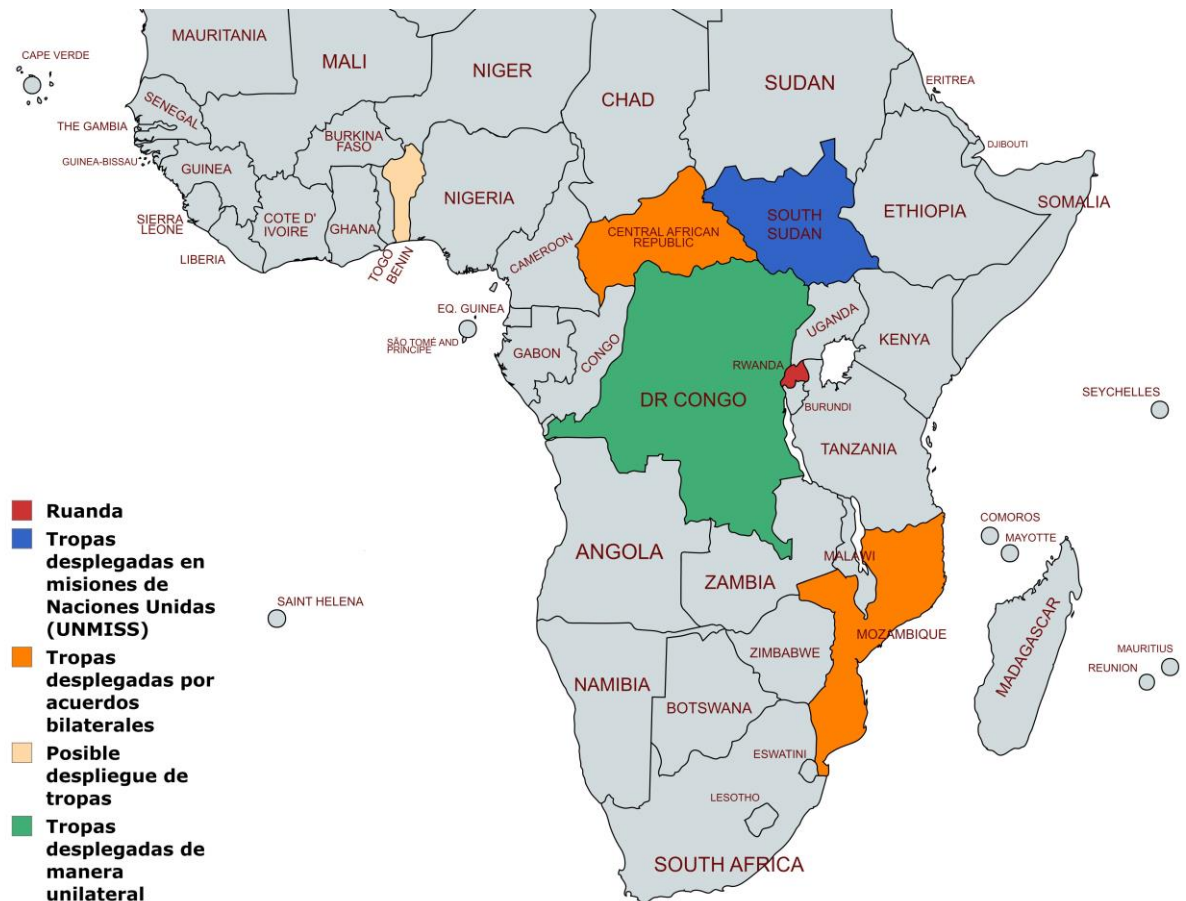


Figure 4. Rwandan troops deployed in sub-Saharan Africa. Source: author's own

There are two major advantages to Rwanda's bilateral security arrangements. First, unlike multilateral peacekeeping forces, which require complicated permissions and bureaucratic mechanisms, Rwanda is able to deploy troops quickly. Secondly, the participation of Rwandan troops within the framework of a bilateral agreement appears to be easier to manage than that of a multinational army within the framework of a regional or global organisation¹².

¹² "Rwanda's military support to other countries is part of a strategy to boost its reputation", *The conversation*. Published on 24 June 2024. <https://theconversation.com/rwandas-military-support-to-other-countries-is-part-of-a-strategy-to-boost-its-reputation-231957>

Rwandan action in the Central African Republic and Mozambique

The shift in Rwandan foreign policy from local and multilateral to continental and bilateral was demonstrated in November 2020, when Rwanda signed bilateral agreements with the Central African Republic or Rwandan troops, in addition to those already operating under a UN mandate, to provide security against rebels ahead of the presidential elections. Since then, Rwandan troops have continued to operate in CAR as part of the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA), to which Rwanda is the largest contributor with more than 2,800 troops¹³, but also under the aforementioned agreements.

Bilateral agreements have enabled the deployment of Rwanda Defence Force contingents that operate autonomously and are not subject to the UN mission's rules of engagement, resulting in autonomy of action and greater discretion in the use of force. At the same time, relations between the two states have grown closer and Rwanda is also providing training to reform the CAR's security and defence sectors. Additionally, the country's president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, offered concessions to Rwandan companies in the mining sector. Soon afterwards, Rwandair, the Rwandan national airline, commenced flights between Kigali and Bangui¹⁴.



Figure 5. Faustin-Archange Touadéra and Paul Kagame. Figure 6. Filipe Nyusi and Paul Kagame.

The actions and results achieved by Rwandan troops deployed in the Central African Republic, as well as Kagame's willingness to deploy the Rwanda Defence Forces outside the Great Lakes region on a non-multilateral basis, caught the attention of Filipe Nyusi, who was President of Mozambique until January 2025.

¹³ UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING. *Troop and police contributors*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

¹⁴ CANNON, Brendon and DONELLI, Federico. "Rwanda's Military Deployments in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Neoclassical Realist Account", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 58. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2022.2132046>

Nyusi paid a secret visit to Rwanda in late April 2021 and within months Kagame responded to the Mozambican leader's request with a rapid deployment of the Rwanda Defence Forces. Nyusi requested Kagame to take armed action against the Islamist group Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah (ASWJ) in Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado. Islamists had operated with impunity since 2016 and by March 2021 had overrun the coastal city of Palma. Previous attempts to quell the insurgency by the Mozambican army had ended in defeat at the hands of the terrorists. Kagame first sent small contingents for intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance, before deploying more than 1,000 troops in early July 2021. This figure has increased over the next three years.

In parallel, Nyusi was urged to also accept the presence and action of troops from its partners and neighbours in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). SADC, led by South Africa, had long sought to launch a multinational mission to avoid the risk of instability spilling into the area, and approved the activation of what was called the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) with some 3,000 troops from several member states. The mission was officially launched in July 2021¹⁵.

Missions involving Rwandan troops, the Mozambican army and SADC troops reduced the insurgency's 2,500-strong force to 300 fighters and recaptured areas that had fallen under Islamist control¹⁶.

Despite an increase in the number of terrorist actions by AWSJ Islamists in Cabo Delgado during 2024, SADC decided to withdraw its troops from Mozambique in July 2024, while Rwanda has reaffirmed its commitment to stability in the region, increasing the number of troops deployed in Mozambique by around two thousand, adding to the 2,500 troops that are already present¹⁷.

South Africa, the undisputed regional power in southern Africa, has taken issue with Rwandan activism in Mozambique as it considers it to be inside its sphere of influence. Additionally, South Africans and Rwandans support different sides in the conflict in the

¹⁵ GARRIDO GUIJARRO, Óscar. "The conflict in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique: Jihad, Marginalisation and Gas", *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2024*. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. Published on 31 January 2025. <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/panorama-geopol%C3%ADtico-de-los-conflictos-2024>

¹⁶ GALE, Alexander. "Rwanda is Becoming Africa's Most Active Security Provider", *Modern Diplomacy*. Published on 29 October 2023. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/10/29/rwanda-is-becoming-africas-most-active-security-provider/>

¹⁷ OGANDA, Ondiro and HILLA, Matthew. "Rwanda deploys 2000 more troops to gas rich Mozambique region", *Bloomberg*. Published on 28 May 2024. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-05-28/rwanda-deploys-2-000-more-troops-to-gas-rich-mozambique-region>

Democratic Republic of Congo¹⁸. The origins of the confrontation between the South African and Rwandan governments may be found in the death of dissident Patrick Karegeya in Johannesburg on 1 January 2014, attributed to the Rwandan secret services¹⁹.

Controversial Rwandan action in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The current conflict involving Rwanda in the Democratic Republic of Congo dates back to the genocide and the Rwandan government's belief that the DRC government continues to provide safe haven to some of its perpetrators. It also has to do with the centre-periphery dynamics within the Congolese state and its weakness in the Kivu provinces, which are far from the capital Kinshasa and bordering Rwanda²⁰.

In recent times, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda have been at loggerheads since late 2021 over Rwandan support for the March 23 Movement (M23) armed group. The DRC accuses its neighbour of inciting instability in the east of the country and supporting the Tutsi-led M23 by deploying Rwandan troops on its territory. Asked on several occasions about the issue, Kagame has not explicitly denied the presence of Rwandan forces in the DRC, and has accused the Kinshasa government of allowing the "persecution" of the Tutsi minority and fostering the risk of instability on the Rwandan border. "By nature, Rwanda's security posture has always been defensive, not offensive. We only act when trouble is brought on us," declared the Rwandan president in July 2024²¹.

Kagame is allegedly behind the support for M23, with the goal of combating the activities of the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda - FDLR). The FDLR is an armed movement, founded in 2000 by leaders of the 1994 genocide and exiled Rwandans, which aims to regain political power

¹⁸ GARRIDO GUIJARRO, Óscar. "The conflict in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique: Jihad, Marginalisation and Gas", *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2024*. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. Published on 31 January 2025. <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/panorama-geopol%C3%ADtico-de-los-conflictos-2024>

¹⁹ «Asesinado el exjefe de los espías de Ruanda en un hotel de Johanesburgo». Published on 2 January 2014. https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/01/02/actualidad/1388664708_908729.html

²⁰ CANNON, Brendon and DONELLI, Federico. "Rwanda's Military Deployments in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Neoclassical Realist Account", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 58. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2022.2132046>

²¹ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE. "Rwanda: Small nation with influence beyond its borders". Published on 14 July 2024. <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/757764>

in Rwanda. The group is composed of ethnic Hutus, including several individuals accused of perpetrating the genocide²².

In July 2024, a UN Security Council panel of experts published a report arguing that between 3,000 and 4,000 Rwandan troops were fighting alongside M23 rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and that Rwanda had "de facto control" of the group's operations. In response to the UN report, Rwanda defended itself by accusing the DRC of funding and fighting alongside the Hutu rebel group, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which has attacked Tutsis in both countries. "The DRC has all the power to de-escalate the situation if they want to, but until then Rwanda will continue to defend itself," said Rwandan government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo²³.

The conflict between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda escalated on 26 January 2025 when, after several days of fighting on the outskirts, M23 rebels and Rwandan soldiers entered Goma, the main city in eastern DRC and capital of North Kivu province²⁴. According to the United Nations, at least 700 people were reportedly killed and 2,800 injured in Goma during the first week of the conflict and the rebels are now moving towards Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province²⁵.



Figure 7. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c78xvqv172o>

²² «Al menos 700 muertos en Goma por los combates entre el Ejército congoleño y el M23», *Agencia EFE*. Published on 1 February 2025. <https://efe.com/mundo/2025-02-01/conflicto-republica-democratica-del-congo-goma-m23-muertos/>

²³ "Uganda backed M23 in DRC, Rwanda's 'de facto control' on group: UN experts", *Aljazeera*. Published on 9 July 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/9/uganda-backed-m23-in-drc-rwandas-de-facto-control-on-group-un-experts>

²⁴ RICH, David. «RD Congo - Ruanda: tres décadas de tensión e inestabilidad crónica», *France 24*. Published on 28 January 2025. <https://www.france24.com/es/%C3%A1frica/20250128-rd-congo-ruanda-tres-d%C3%A9cadas-de-tensi%C3%B3n-e-inestabilidad-cr%C3%B3nica>

²⁵ JAROSLAW, Lukiv. "At least 700 killed in DR Congo fighting since Sunday - UN", *BBC News*. Published on 1 February 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c78xvqv172o>

Additionally, thirteen South African soldiers of the mission contingent approved by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and deployed to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have lost their lives. Faced with accusations holding the M23 and the Rwandan army responsible, Kagame was forced to come forward in a statement on the social network X in which he assured that the South African president himself, Cyril Ramaphosa, had confirmed to him that the South African soldiers were killed by fire from the Congolese armed forces. Kagame also accused the SADC mission of not being "a peacekeeping force, and it has no place in this situation. It was authorized by SADC as a belligerent force engaging in offensive combat operations to help the DRC Government fight against its own people, working alongside genocidal armed groups like FDLR which target Rwanda"²⁶.

The fruits of military diplomacy: contracts for Rwandan companies

As noted above, Rwanda is a small, landlocked country. Its economic growth and development rates over the past two decades have been fuelled by foreign investment and aid. This dependency is an obstacle to the country's political ambitions. Kagame views increased cooperation with other African states as the solution to overcome these weaknesses, and he has deftly linked security agreements to economic and trade agreements as well.

The country aims to become a regional centre for the value-added processing of mineral resources. Currently, the mining sector is second only to the tourism sector in the country's economy, with revenues of USD 852 million in the first nine months (January-September 2023), compared to USD 584.8 million in 2022. In 2023, there was a significant increase in the production of tin, tantalum, tungsten, tungsten, gold, lithium and gemstones, leading to a significant increase in mineral export revenues. In the words of the prime minister, Édouard Ngirente, the target for 2024 was for the mining sector to become a \$1.5 billion industry²⁷.

²⁶ SOCIAL NETWORK X, Paul Kagame.

https://x.com/PaulKagame/status/1884711263327887849?utm_source=stack&utm_medium=email

²⁷ SABIITI, Daniel. "Rwanda Mining Industry Eyes \$1.5 billion Target by 2024", *KT Press*. Published on 5 December 2023. <https://www.ktpress.rw/2023/12/rwanda-mining-industry-eyes-1-5-billion-target-by-2024/>

According to Erik Kennes, an analyst at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, Rwanda's intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo provides the country with access to new sources of minerals, and part of the minerals exported would be from Congolese mines. While Rwandan economic actors were previously able to buy gold and coltan smuggled into the DRC without problems, the current conflict would have opened up direct access²⁸.

Along these lines, a report by the UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo, dated 21 May 2024, claims that in 2023, Rwanda recorded an unprecedented increase in coltan exports and that minerals extracted from the coltan-rich Congolese mines of Rubaya (Kivu) are being smuggled across the Rwandan border²⁹.

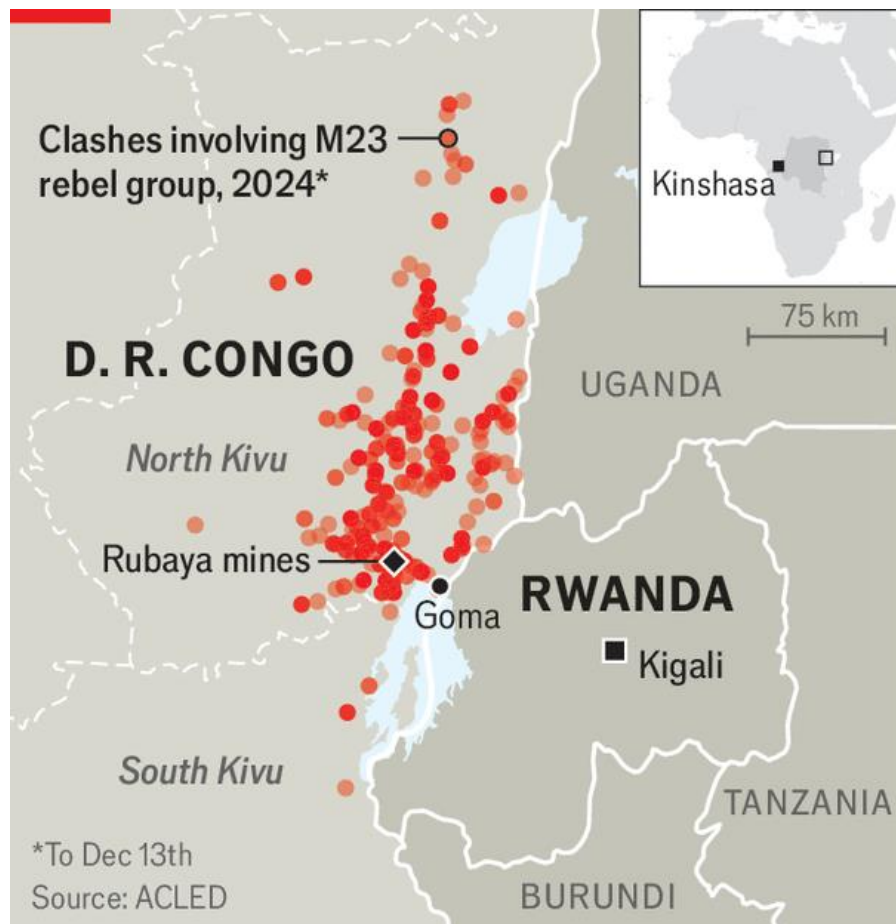


Figure 8. Rubaya coltan mines on the DRC-Rwanda border

²⁸ KENNES, Erick. "What does Rwanda want in the DRC?", *Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations*. Published on 19 July 2024. <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/what-does-rwanda-want-in-the-drc/>

²⁹ Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations. Published on 4 June 2024. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/118/80/pdf/n2411880.pdf>

The report *Mining and illicit trading of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, published in March 2022 by ENACT, an initiative to combat transnational organised crime in Africa, highlights Rwanda as the main route for the illicit coltan trade. Rwanda does not tax mineral exports, and allows imported products to be reclassified as *Made in Rwanda* as long as they are processed in Rwanda with at least 30% value added³⁰.

The Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda are the world's leading suppliers of coltan, a key mineral for the manufacturing of computers and *smartphones*. Between 2014 and 2023, the sum of exports of this mineral from both countries totalled 32,702 tonnes. Coltan exports from the Democratic Republic of Congo reached 1,918 tonnes in 2023, compared to 2,070 tonnes from Rwanda. Coltan is largely mined by artisanal methods, especially in the Congolese regions of North and South Kivu, where the presence of armed groups and corruption make controls difficult. Smuggling is also encouraged by multinationals that turn a blind eye to the origins of the coltan they source³¹.

In the cases of the Central African Republic and Mozambique, Rwanda's military involvement has facilitated economic access to companies affiliated with Crystal Ventures, a *holding company* that acts as the investment arm of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front party. In countries where Rwandan troops have intervened, Crystal Ventures has invested in mining and other projects. It is also expanding its investment portfolio to new continental markets and has negotiated trade agreements including economic development plans, or security sector and infrastructure reforms³².

In the Central African Republic, Rwanda's influence is boosted by a series of agreements between Bangui and Kigali that seek to improve the Central African state's governing capabilities. These agreements include measures to modernise the public administration and improve the security sector, but the agreements also grant Rwandan companies

³⁰ OJEWALE, Oluwole. *Mining and illicit trading of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. ENACT. Published in March 2022. <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2022-05-03-research-paper-29-rev.pdf>

³¹ «Le Rwanda devance la RDC comme premier exportateur mondial de coltan pour la 5e fois en 10 ans», *Mining and Business*. Published on 12 April 2024. <https://miningandbusiness.com/2024/04/12/le-rwanda-devance-la-rdc-comme-premier-exportateur-mondial-de-coltan-pour-la-5e-fois-en-10-ans/>

³² "Rwanda's military support to other countries is part of a strategy to boost its reputation", *The conversation*. Published on 24 June 2024. <https://theconversation.com/rwandas-military-support-to-other-countries-is-part-of-a-strategy-to-boost-its-reputation-231957>

privileged trade access to the country³³. Over 100 Rwandan companies are registered in the Central African Republic, up from around 20 in 2019³⁴.

Vogueroc, a company linked to Crystal Ventures and the Rwandan government, which was set up in 2021 by a Rwandan businessman of Central African nationality, was granted 25-year concessions on five mines in 2022. Also in 2022, another Rwandan national founded Afrika Oko, at the time the only company in the Central African Republic authorised to operate the entire mining production chain, from prospecting to export. The company is also authorised to trade in gold, diamonds and petroleum products³⁵.

In the case of Mozambique, security cooperation agreements were a prelude to economic and trade agreements. Through the Rwanda Development Board and the Investment and Export Promotion Agency of Mozambique, the two countries signed a memorandum paving the way for Rwandan activity in Mozambique's private sector. In addition to the energy sector, the main areas of interest for Rwandan investment are the agricultural sector and infrastructure³⁶.

When Mozambique's President requested the intervention of the Rwandan army, he charged it with securing the gas processing plant operated by the French company TotalEnergies in Afungi (Cabo Delgado). Mainly due to the French connection, the European Union provided some 20 million euros in 2022 to fund Rwanda's military operations in Mozambique³⁷. Subsequently, in July 2024, a security company backed by the Rwandan government has been engaged to guard TotalEnergies' Cabo Delgado gas project³⁸.

³³ GALE, Alexander. "Rwanda is Becoming Africa's Most Active Security Provider", *Modern Diplomacy*. Published on 29 October 2023. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/10/29/rwanda-is-becoming-africas-most-active-security-provider/>

³⁴ "Rwanda wants to be Africa's new cop on the beat", *The Economist*. Published on 10 October 2023.

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/10/10/rwanda-wants-to-be-africas-bobby-on-the-beat>

³⁵ "Rwanda's Growing Role in the Central African Republic", *International Crisis Group*. Published on 7 July 2023.

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic-rwanda/b191-rwandas-growing-role-central-african-republic>

³⁶ DONNELLI, Federico. *Rwanda's Military Diplomacy*. Notes de l'Ifri, Institut français des relations internationales. Published in April 2022.

https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/donelli_rwanda_military_diplomacy_2022.pdf

³⁷ FABRICIUS, Peter. "Is the world finally growing weary of Kagame's excesses?", *Institute for Security Studies*.

Published on 19 July 2024. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/is-the-world-finally-growing-weary-of-kagame-s-excesses>

³⁸ "TotalEnergies hires state-linked Rwandan firms for Mozambique LNG project", *Club of Mozambique*. Published on 18 July 2024. <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/totalenergies-hires-state-linked-rwandan-firms-for-mozambique-lng-project-262088/>

Furthermore, when Rwanda came to the rescue of Mozambique and TotalEnergies, France announced a 500 million euro aid package for Rwanda, to be disbursed over four years³⁹.

Finally, and to conclude this discussion on the economic benefits associated with Rwandan military diplomacy, it should be noted that the United Nations reimburses states that contribute troops for its missions to the tune of 1,428 dollars per month per soldier, which means that Rwanda would be receiving more than 100 million dollars per year⁴⁰.

The fruits of military diplomacy: Rwanda's appeal to the West



Figure 9. Paul Kagame. Source: <https://magazinedelafrique.com/interview/paul-kagame-apprenez-des-autres-mais-soyez-fiers-detre-africains/>

President Kagame, who has been in power for a quarter of a century, has managed to generate economic growth and successfully establish order and public security. However, these results have had a domestic socio-political cost. He has erased any possibility of

³⁹ "Rwanda wants to be Africa's new cop on the beat", *The Economist*. Published on 10 October 2023.

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/10/10/rwanda-wants-to-be-africas-bobby-on-the-beat>

⁴⁰ AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE. "Rwanda: Small nation with influence beyond its borders". Published on 14 July 2024. <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/757764>

internal opposition to his government and silenced all criticism, thus creating an authoritarian state. Despite muzzling internal dissent, Kagame has launched successful infrastructure and development initiatives throughout the country. Rwanda is considered to be one of the most technologically connected and advanced societies in sub-Saharan Africa and is often used as an example of growth and development. However, like many hybrid or authoritarian regimes, Kagame has used development projects to increase state power and extend his political control over society⁴¹.

Rwanda is using its peacekeeping contributions to influence international donors. On several occasions, Western donors have threatened to cut off or reduce aid due to the curtailment of domestic freedoms and rights and Rwandan intervention supporting rebel groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo. On such occasions, Kagame has threatened to withdraw his troops from multilateral operations. In short, the Rwandan president is aware that Western actors are unwilling to get involved in African conflicts and therefore he employs Rwanda's role as a reliable partner in crises to reduce external criticism and divert attention from internal issues.

Many foreign powers have appreciated Kagame's ability to transform post-genocide Rwanda into an effective state worth sacrificing democracy and freedom for. The Rwandan leader has used this international approval to become a dependable partner, especially with the West. For example, NATO members have provided the Rwandan army with access to training and equipment⁴².

Although relations between Rwanda and Russia are good, Europeans and Americans also value Rwandan capabilities as a way to mitigate Russia's influence on the African continent. Thus, for example, Rwanda's intervention in the Central African Republic has displaced the leading role once played by the Wagner Group in the country. It is worth noting that Russian mercenaries were also present in Mozambique, but withdrew in 2019 when they failed to drive out insurgents in Cabo Delgado⁴³.

⁴¹ CANNON, Brendon and DONELLI, Federico. "Rwanda's Military Deployments in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Neoclassical Realist Account", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 58. 2023.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2022.2132046>

⁴² "Rwanda wants to be Africa's new cop on the beat", *The Economist*. Published on 10 October 2023.
<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/10/10/rwanda-wants-to-be-africas-bobby-on-the-beat>

⁴³ RUMPE, William. "What Is Russia's Wagner Group Doing in Africa?", *Council on Foreign Relations*. Published on 23 May 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-russias-wagner-group-doing-africa>

Moreover, a hypothetical troop deployment in Benin would make Rwanda a valuable ally in helping the West to maintain its influence in West Africa and to mitigate Russia's growing expansion from the Sahel towards the Gulf of Guinea.

Although ultimately not implemented, it is worth recalling the UK-Rwanda migration deal that linked financial incentives of up to £120 million in exchange for Rwanda to host migrants and refugees unwanted by the British. The agreement was a demonstration of the privileged relations between Kagame and prominent Western leaders.

Other reasons that make Rwanda an attractive partner in the eyes of Europe and America are coltan and the recent discovery of hydrocarbons in Lake Kivu. On 15 January 2025, the Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board published a communiqué stating that oil and gas exploration in the Lake Kivu basin had identified thirteen pockets and potential drilling locations to confirm the presence and nature of hydrocarbons. The most interesting part however was at the end of the communiqué: RMB is pitching for relevant potential actors to participate in further stages of exploration, development and production of oil and gas of Lake Kivu basin⁴⁴.

Conclusion

Rwanda's military deployments at the invitation of other states, outside its immediate surroundings, are a novel element if one examines trends in the conflicts that have risen in post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa. The fact that a small, landlocked country with limited resources has achieved remarkable military and security results has attracted considerable attention from the international community.

Kagame is demonstrating that it is possible to build an indigenous African security architecture, in which states and interests play decisive roles, rather than supranational organisations of a global or regional nature.

Moreover, the Rwandan president has successfully mobilised his main assets - military professionalism, political stability and the "Rwanda brand" - to diversify his economy and

⁴⁴ *Update on the oil and gas exploration in Lake Kivu*. Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board. Published on 15 January 2025.

<https://www.rmb.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=115823&token=ba42e8820cb147cbf29dc4ef8de830efd5c0b770>

increase self-sufficiency, and also for the benefit of a foreign policy that allows him to present himself as a reliable, serious and effective partner who meets his commitments.

On the other hand, successful military diplomacy has also allowed Kagame the benefit of the international community in general, and the West in particular, often overlooking the authoritarian nature of his regime and its role in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is, therefore, a true model of success.

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