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Self-Defense in the Face of Genocide:

A Comparative Study of the Rwandan Patriotic Front and the March 23 Movement.

Frank Okyere Osei & Samuel Budo

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Abstract

This paper examines the narratives underpinning two cases of self-defense in response to the threat or occurrence of genocide. It delves into the nuances of two movements: the Rwandan Patriotic Front in Rwanda (RPF) and the March 23 Movement (M23) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Both movements emerged in response to perceived genocidal threats and adopted self-defense narratives to justify their actions. The paper traces the historical contexts, key actors, and agendas that shaped these movements, highlighting the RPF's evolution from a military group into a dominant political force in Rwanda, and the M23's role in protecting Tutsi communities in eastern Congo. Through this analysis, the paper reveals the continuity of self-defense tactics and narratives from the RPF to the M23, underscoring their shared motivations and strategies. However, it also underscores the complexity of disentangling self-defense claims from other contentious agendas, such as aggressive territorial expansion, human rights abuses, and the pursuit of economic interests, which often raise questions about the legitimacy of these claims. The findings suggest that while the self-defense narratives of the RPF and M23 are rooted in legitimate concerns for ethnic survival, their actions raise ethical questions, particularly regarding the humanitarian consequences and the intertwining of self-defense with personal and political agendas.

Introduction

Self-defense, particularly within the context of genocide, plays a critical role in preventing atrocities and safeguarding human life. When state institutions falter in protecting vulnerable populations, individuals and groups often resort to self-defense as a means of survival, employing a spectrum of strategies from nonviolent resistance to armed conflict.¹ It involves efforts to shield oneself and others from the intentional and systematic extermination of a specific group based on ethnicity, nationality, religion, or other distinguishing factors. By empowering individuals and communities to take control of their safety and security, self-defense transforms them from passive victims into active agents, shaping their destinies and defending their rights.

In this paper, we undertake a comparative analysis of self-defense in the context of the threat or occurrence of genocide, with a specific focus on the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in Rwanda and the March 23 Movement (M23) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Both movements emerged in response to complex perceived genocidal threats within broader political contexts. The scope of the paper examines the RPF's actions, which are confined to its establishment in 1987 until it assumed power in 1994 and beyond; while the analysis of the M23 spans from its inception in 2012 to the present era. Through an analysis of the involved actors, their actions, supporting agencies, and agendas, the paper portrays how the self-defense narrative has been a central feature of the RPF and M23 struggles and overlaps with other interests and motives. The study reveals that despite operating in distinct eras and geopolitical contexts, both the RPF and M23 continue to employ self-defense narratives, sharing historical ties, common

¹ Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria Stephan. 2011. "The Success of Nonviolent Resistance Campaigns." In *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. Columbia University Press; Kopel, David, Paul Gallant, and Joanne Eisen. 2006. "Is Resisting Genocide a Human Right." *Notre Dame Law Review* 81: 1275.

motivations, and strategies. Thus, we argue that the M23 can, in many respects, be seen as a resurgence, if not continuation, of the RPF's longstanding policy.

Self-Defense and Genocide Prevention: A Normative Framework

Jens Ohlin discusses a normative basis for the doctrine of legitimate defense by demonstrating how the right to be free from genocide and the right to self-defense derive from a fundamental right, which could be termed as the right to exist. This right, he argues, extends not only to formal States but also to nations and peoples. The universally recognized right to be free from genocide logically implies that non-state entities are protected by existing international law.² Historically, self-defense has been employed in several instances to justify group actions. For instance, the Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N) in the Nuba Mountains highlight organized armed resistance against systematic extermination and genocide.³ The Warsaw Ghetto resistance opposed the Nazi regime's atrocities, while the SPLA-N aimed to protect Nuba civilians from the Sudanese government's genocidal policies. These cases demonstrate self-defense in response to existential threats, emphasizing the fundamental human rights to life and dignity.

The intersection of self-defense and genocide prevention derives theoretically from principles integrating Just War traditions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Humanitarian Law.⁴ In this framework, self-defense emerges as both morally justifiable and legally permissible in response to imminent threats or occurrences of genocide,

² Ohlin, Jens David. 2015. "The Doctrine of Legitimate Defense." *International Law Studies* 91: 119.

³ Bauer, Yehuda. 2001. *Rethinking the Holocaust*. Yale University Press; Flint, Julie, and Alex De Waal. 2008. *Darfur: A New History of a Long War*. Zed Books.

⁴ Sassòli, Marco, and Antoine Bouvier. 2017. *How Does Law Protect in War?* International Committee of the Red Cross.; Kopel, David B., Paul Gallant, and Joanne D. Eisen. 2006. "Is Resisting Genocide a Human Right?" *Notre Dame Law Review* 81: 1275.

rooted in principles of justice and human rights, and emphasizing the importance of proportionality and precaution in minimizing harm to civilians.⁵ In addition to affirming individual rights to self-defense and of resistance, they provide a normative basis for gauging the moral legitimacy of self-defense actions taken by both states and non-state actors.⁶ Through these principles, actors involved in self-defense crusades, such as the RPF and M23, can be evaluated in terms of their adherence to ethical standards and commitment to protecting populations from atrocities.

Background of the Rwandan Patriotic Front

The RPF was founded in 1987 by Tutsi exiles with the aim of overthrowing the Hutu-dominated regime in Rwanda and ending discrimination against Tutsis. It comprised both Tutsi refugees who had fled previous waves of violence in Rwanda and moderate Hutus disillusioned with the government's policies of exclusion and repression.⁷ The RPF's formation was a response to decades of ethnic tension and political instability in Rwanda, culminating in the genocide against the Tutsi minority in 1994. The RPF's military campaign began in 1990 with an invasion from Uganda, where many Tutsi exiles had sought refuge. The invasion triggered a civil war that lasted until 1994, marked by intense fighting, atrocities, and mass displacement of civilians.⁸ In July 1994, the RPF achieved a decisive military victory, capturing Kigali and overthrowing the Hutu regime responsible for the genocide. From 1996 to 2003, the RPF became involved in the Congo Wars, supporting rebel groups in the DRC against the government of Mobutu Sese Seko, and taking measures to secure its borders and eliminate the Hutu threats in the region.⁹ The 2000 report of the

⁵ Bellamy, Alex. 2009. *Just Wars: From Cicero to Iraq*. John Wiley & Sons.; Dinstein, Yoram. 2005. *The Conduct of Hostilities under the Law of International Armed Conflict*. Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Orend, Brian. 2000. *War and International Justice: A Kantian Perspective*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

⁷ Mamdani, Mahmood. 2002. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton University Press.

⁸ Prunier, Gérard. 1995. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. Columbia University Press.

⁹ Center for Preventive Action. 2024. "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo." Accessed April 17, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo#>

International Panel of Eminent Personalities (IPEP), established by the Organization of African Unity in 1998, aptly describes what underpins the RPF's policy, "When the crunch came, first in the genocide itself, then in disarming the Hutu Power in the Kivu refugee camps, the world failed to act. Each time, the RPF was on its own. That reality has now been transformed into a virtual doctrine of RPF policy: their unilateral right to eliminate the threat of Hutu Power, wherever it exists, wherever it must be pursued. This includes anywhere in Africa..."¹⁰ Since the 2000s, the RPF has transformed into a political party known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front-Inkotanyi (RPF–Inkotanyi) and has been the dominant political force in Rwanda. Paul Kagame, a former RPF military leader, has been serving as the country's president since 2000. Despite facing criticism for human rights abuses and authoritarian tendencies, the RPF's role in ending the genocide and stabilizing Rwanda has earned it both domestic support and international recognition as a legitimate political actor.¹¹

Overview of the M23 Movement

The March 23 Movement emerged as a significant rebel group in the DRC in 2012. Comprised mainly of ethnic Tutsis, the M23 was formed by former Congolese army officers who defected due to dissatisfaction with the government's failure to address their grievances.¹² The group's military chief is Colonel Sultani Makenga, an ethnic Tutsi born in Rutshuru in eastern DRC and raised in the hills of the South Kivu region. The movement is named after a peace agreement signed on March 23, 2009. This agreement integrated former rebels from the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), led by Laurent Nkunda, into the Congolese army. The CNDP had

¹⁰ African Union. 2000. "Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide." <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/au/2000/en/77155>. Accessed May 14, 2024.

¹¹ Prunier, Gérard. 2018. *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford University Press.

¹² Gervais, Roxanne. 2014. *The Responsibility to Protect: From Promise to Practice*. Brill Nijhoff.

previously controlled a significant portion of the North Kivu province between 2006 and 2008.¹³ However, the M23 accused the Congolese government of violating the agreement by marginalizing Tutsis and failing to provide security and basic services in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu.¹⁴ The M23 aims to protect Tutsi communities in eastern Congo from violence perpetrated by other ethnic groups and the Congolese army. In official statements, the group emphasizes its commitment to stopping genocide committed by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), the Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation de Rwanda (FDLR), and various Mai-Mai and other militia groups.¹⁵

The movement has engaged in armed resistance against the government and rival rebel factions, seizing territory and establishing control over strategic areas. Congolese Tutsi communities support the M23 and similar armed groups in a bid for survival, protection of their property, and pursuit of economic and political interests.¹⁶ However, the M23 has faced accusations of committing atrocities against civilians and illegally exploiting natural resources, which has undermined its legitimacy in the international community. In November 2013, the M23 was defeated by the Congolese army, resulting in the group disarming and demobilizing.¹⁷ It however resurfaced in late 2021, escalating violence and seizing control of significant territories. In March 2022, the M23 shot down a UN aircraft, killing six troops, and took control of large parts

¹³ Gouby, Melanie. 2012. "What Does the M23 Want?" Newsweek, December 3.

¹⁴ Bundervoet, Tom, Leah Maiyo, and Amruta Sanghi. 2017. *Living Conditions in Congo: Evidence from a Consumer Expenditure Survey*. The World Bank.

¹⁵ Mouvement Du 23 Mars. 2022. *The M23 Movement's Official Communique*. August 16. Posted on X by @LawrenceKanyuka.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch. 2007. "Renewed Crisis in North Kivu." October 23. Accessed March 22, 2024. https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/10/24/renewed-crisis-north-kivu#_ftn12.

¹⁷ Hastings, Alun. 2013. *M23 Rebels and State Reform in the Congo*. International Peace Institute.

of Rutshuru, intensifying the conflict and prompting the imposition of sanctions by the United States and the UN for human rights abuses.¹⁸

Analysis of the Self-defense Claims of the RPF and M23

Actors

Tutsi exiles founded the RPF to overthrow Rwanda's Hutu-dominated regime and end discrimination against Tutsis.¹⁹ In 1979, Tutsi exiles in Uganda formed the Rwandan Alliance for National Unity (RANU), which later evolved into the RPF in 1987.²⁰ The RPF functioned as a self-defense group, aiming to protect Tutsi refugees from attacks by Rwanda's Hutu-dominated government and military, advocating for their return to Rwanda.²¹ The historical record supports the RPF's depiction of Tutsis as victims of Hutu genocide, as evidenced by numerous documented incidents of Hutu massacres of Tutsis in the early 1960s, 1972-73, and 1994.²² However, the RPF's record of human rights abuse and destabilizing role in the Great Lakes region have called into question the extent to which its current actions fulfill self-defense claims.

In contrast, the emergence of the M23 Movement can be understood as a direct response to perceived threats against Congolese Tutsis who were dissatisfied with the Congolese government's failure to address their grievances.²³ The movement purported to advocate for the interests of the marginalized Tutsi community, which has long endured discrimination and

¹⁸ Sabbe, Brian. 2023. *Why M23 is Not Your Average Rebel Group*. IPIS Briefing, February 6.

¹⁹ Mamdani, Mahmood. 2002. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton University Press.

²⁰ Golooba-Mutebi, Frederick. 2008. *Collapse, war and reconstruction in Rwanda: An analytical narrative on state-making*. London, UK: Crisis States Research Centre.

²¹ Kuperman, Alan J. 2004. "Provoking genocide: a revised history of the Rwandan Patriotic Front." *Journal of Genocide Research* 6, no. 1: 61-84.

²² African Union. 2000. "Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide." July.

<https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/au/2000/en/77155>. Accessed May 14, 2024.

²³ Gervais, Roxanne. 2014. *The Responsibility to Protect: From Promise to Practice*. Brill Nijhoff.

violence in the region. Given the historical context and the particular vulnerability of Tutsis in the DRC, including attacks by Congolese forces and the FDLR, the M23 framed its campaign within the context of preventing further victimization of Tutsis.²⁴ This included safeguarding Tutsi communities from genocidal violence and addressing their grievances, such as the repatriation of Congolese Tutsi refugees from Rwanda camps and the uncertainty surrounding their citizenship status within the DRC.

However, the armed group's actions often resulted in capturing and expanding territorial control, leading to the displacement of populations in North Kivu Province and exacerbating a severe humanitarian crisis. Further, the M23's alliances, notably with Twirwaneho, a Banyamulenge Congolese Tutsi self-defense armed group, aimed to establish a presence in South Kivu.²⁵ While the Rwandan government has denied UN accusations of providing logistical support and deploying Rwandan troops to reinforce or fight alongside the M23 within Congolese territory,²⁶ President Paul Kagame has repeatedly asserted that the M23 rebels are engaged in a struggle to protect the minority Tutsis, citing perceived injustices faced by this community.²⁷ When we contrast these narratives of grievance and injustice with the evidence of aggressive territorial expansion and the resulting deaths and displacement of Congolese populations, several critical questions arise about M23's claims of Tutsi victimhood within the context of self-defense.

Actions

²⁴ Shepherd, Ben. 2018. "Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study." . Stabilisation Unit: UK Government.

²⁵ Davey, Christopher P. 2023. "DRC: rising Twirwaneho rebel group highlights the unending volatility of the country's east." *The Conversation*, August 28.

²⁶ United Nations. 2023. *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. United Nations.

²⁷ Kagame, Paul. 2024. Interview by Sophie Mokoena. "One-on-one with Rwandan President Paul Kagame on DRC conflict." *SABC News*. April 5.

In terms of self-defense actions, both the RPF and M23 Movement engaged in armed resistance, oppressive regimes, and hostile groups threatening their communities. In Rwanda, the RPF initiated a military offensive in 1990, sparking a civil war that eventually led to the genocide against the Tutsi minority in 1994.²⁸ Unlike the M23, which faced accusations of committing atrocities against civilians, the RPF maintained a relatively disciplined and organized fighting force, prioritizing the protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance.²⁹ The RPF engaged in an intense guerrilla war against government forces for three years, resulting in the signing of the Arusha Accords in 1993, aimed at ending the conflict and establishing power-sharing between the RPF and the government.³⁰ However, the assassination of Rwandan President Habyarimana in April 1994 triggered the Rwandan Genocide, prompting the RPF to resume its military campaign.³¹ From 1994 to 1999, the RPF focused on stabilizing Rwanda, repatriating refugees, and rebuilding the country, although there were allegations of human rights abuses and reprisal killings by RPF forces during this period. Reports from the UN, United States, and DRC government suggest Rwanda's direct military support for the M23, including recruits, weapons, and ammunition, indicating potential collaboration between the two groups.³² Additionally, the reports allege that M23 leader Bosco Ntaganda received orders from senior Rwandan military officials.³³ These reports highlight Rwanda's contested association with M23 and the similarities between their actions.

²⁸ Prunier, Gérard. 2018. *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Reyntjens, Filip. 2013. *Political Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ Stettenheim, Joel. 2000. "The Arusha accords and the failure of international intervention in Rwanda." In *Words over War: Mediation and Arbitration to Prevent Deadly Conflict*, 213-236.

³¹ Bienvenu, Fiacre. 2022. "On Rwanda's Civil War (October 1, 1990–April 6, 1994)." In *Civil Wars in Africa*, 193.

³² Nangini, Cathy, Mainak Jas, Hugo L. Fernandes, and Robert Muggah. 2014. "Visualizing armed groups: The Democratic Republic of the Congo's M23 in focus." *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 3, no. 1: 1-8.

³³ Muleefu, Alphonse. 2013. "Beyond the Single Story: Rwanda's Support to the March 23 Movement (M23)." *Amsterdam LF* 5: 106.

Conversely, the M23 engaged in military and political actions to protect vulnerable populations and secure their interests amid perceived genocide threats. Militarily, they clashed with various armed groups, including the FDLR and the Congolese government, seizing territory and challenging government and military authority in the eastern DRC.³⁴ Politically, they represented Rwandophone communities, negotiating with the government to address grievances like nationality and refugee returns. In some instances, it has taken strategic actions to enhance its legitimacy among the local population and bargaining power on the regional front, including giving up previously captured territory such as Kibumba in Rutshuru territory.³⁵ These actions stemmed from a combination of concerns for the safety of Tutsi communities and self-interest, as M23 leaders and combatants sought to exploit the Congolese government's weaknesses to assert or extend their control over land, mining sites, and trade routes. Melanie Gouby, a journalist based in Goma, has raised questions about whether the M23's claims of fighting for the improvement of living conditions are merely deceitful or reflect a naive idealism oblivious to the realities of eastern Congo. She argues that the M23's political leadership appears insensitive to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the armed group, resulting in deaths and displacements across the region.³⁶ This intricate mix of motives and outcomes presents challenges in making definitive assessments of the extent to which the M23's actions align with claims of self-defense.

Agencies

Before the 1994 genocide, the RPF, through diplomatic channels and media campaigns, highlighted the plight of Tutsis in Rwanda and advocated for intervention to end discrimination

³⁴ Gouby, Melanie. 2012. "What Does the M23 Want?" Newsweek, December 3.

³⁵ Sabbe, Brian. 2023. "Why M23 is Not Your Average Rebel Group." IPIS Briefing, February 6.

³⁶ Gouby, Melanie. *op. cit.*

and violence.³⁷ Similarly, the M23 has largely justified its actions in response to perceived threats of genocide against the Congolese Tutsi community and other Rwandophone populations in eastern DRC, reflecting a historical RPF ideology and struggle to project Tutsi identity. By engaging in advocacy efforts, both groups demonstrated agency in influencing global perceptions and mobilizing support for genocide prevention. Davey notes that the tradition of self-defense was integral to the RPF's international campaign in the 1980s, which aimed to raise funds and recruit fighters for the Rwandan civil war.³⁸ Thus, the narrative of self-defense adopted by the M23 can be traced back to a longstanding tradition of Tutsi resistance, evident through movements such as the RPF, Twirwaneho, and the M23. In the context of genocide prevention, both the RPF and the M23 movement demonstrated agency through various actions aimed at protecting vulnerable populations. The RPF took measures to protect Tutsis and other vulnerable populations from discrimination and violence. Similarly, M23 has asserted its agency by positioning itself as a protector of the Tutsi community in eastern Congo. This involves establishing safe zones and providing physical security for civilians at risk of violence from other armed groups and militias. Both groups intervened militarily to stop attacks on civilians, with RPF fighting against the Hutu regime in Rwanda, and M23 engaging in conflict with Congolese government forces. These actions demonstrated their agency in directly confronting threats to populations and taking steps at preventing atrocities.

Moreover, the RPF and M23 utilized their platforms to advocate for international intervention and raise awareness about the risk of genocide. The M23, with the covert support of the Rwandan government, has lobbied regional governments and international organizations,

³⁷ Des Forges, Alison. 1999. *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. Human Rights Watch.

³⁸ Davey, Christopher P. 2023. "DRC: rising Twirwaneho rebel group highlights the unending volatility of the country's east." *The Conversation*, August 28.

including ‘co-operating’ with the East African peacekeeping force,³⁹ in its efforts to protect Congolese Tutsis from attacks by other armed groups. The M23 has a very active social media presence, even though this is largely seen as part of its propaganda efforts.

Agendas

The analysis of the RPF and M23 movement's agendas reveals a complex interplay of overlapping motives in the context of self-defense. Firstly, the RPF has historically employed self-defense tactics to safeguard Tutsis and dismantle the Hutu-dominated regime in Rwanda.⁴⁰ Ideologically, both movements share a commitment to defending their communities from genocide and achieving greater political representation and security for ethnic minorities in the region. The RPF's apparent use of the M23 as proxy to protect its territory, maintain power, and exploit DRC's vast natural resources suggests that the current agenda of both movements is driven by a common concern of the threat of genocide.⁴¹ A significant factor behind this is the concentration of rebel groups along the DRC border, many of which are predominantly Hutu. The RPF's alleged use of the M23 is aimed at preventing these rebel groups from entering Rwanda and causing instability.

The RPF's post-genocide agenda bears striking similarities to the M23's current positioning. Deploying its troops across the border into DRC in 1996 to forestall any possible attack, Rwandan soldiers, alongside their Congolese Tutsi allies, attacked the camps, resulting in casualties.⁴² Since then, various iterations of now M23, along with other Tutsi-based self-defense groups, have been fighting to dismantle the FDLR, which has continued to reorganize its forces in

³⁹ Dube, Mqondisi. 2023. "DRC President Accuses East African Forces of 'Cohabiting' With M23 Rebels." May 10. Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com/a/drc-president-accuses-east-african-forces-of-co-habitiating-with-m23-rebels-/7087283.html>.

⁴⁰ Prunier, Gérard. 1995. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. Columbia University Press.

⁴¹ Gouby, Melanie. 2012. "What Does the M23 Want?" Newsweek, December 3.

⁴² Human Rights Watch. 2007. "Renewed Crisis in North Kivu." October 23. Accessed March 22, 2024. https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/10/24/renewed-crisis-north-kivu#_ftn12.

eastern Congo. Thus, the M23's agenda can arguably be viewed as a continuation of the decades-old Tutsi struggle for survival, political representation, and control. However, within the M23 movement, there are factions driven by self-serving motives to exploit weaknesses in the Congolese government to gain control over resources such as land, mining sites, and trade routes. For these individuals, self-defense is intertwined with personal gain, power, and the interests of local and regional supporters, particularly Rwanda. This segment aimed to expand their influence and exploit the region's instability for their benefit. While initially united by a fear of relocation from their eastern DRC power base, the group eventually fragmented, with some factions open to compromises with the Congolese government, while others remained steadfast in their original agendas.⁴³ This highlights the complex nature of self-defense agendas, with intertwined historical, political, ethnic and personal motivations shaping the actions of both the RPF and M23.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown two movements inspired by a shared history of perceived threats against vulnerable populations, particularly the Tutsis. The RPF fought against the Hutu-dominated regime to protect Tutsis and secure political representation, while the M23's actions seem to echo the RPF's policy agenda. Both movements exhibited agency in protecting their communities, but the legitimacy of their actions becomes questionable when viewed through the lens of self-defense. The aggressive territorial expansion of the M23 and the resulting displacements and humanitarian crises cast doubt on its claims of self-defense. Similarly, the RPF's involvement in armed conflicts in the region, despite its historical struggle for Tutsi survival, raises questions about the ethical basis of its current actions. Moreover, both movements have been accused of pursuing economic

⁴³ Eriksson Baaz, Maria, and Judith Verweijen. 2013. "The Volatility of a Half-Cooked Bouillabaisse: Rebel-Military Integration and Conflict Dynamics in the Eastern DRC." *African Affairs* 112, no. 449: 563–582.

interests, with factions within the M23 seeking to exploit the Congolese government's weaknesses for personal gain and the RPF allegedly using the M23 as a proxy to maintain power and exploit natural resources. Thus, while the M23's agency and agenda appear to be a continuation of the RPF's, the legitimacy of their actions as acts of self-defense is clouded by their pursuit of economic interests and the humanitarian consequences of their actions.