



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The situation in the eastern DRC, HC 792

Monday 17 March 2025

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Members present: Emily Thornberry (Chair); Aphra Brandreth; Richard Foord; Blair McDougall; Abtisam Mohamed; Edward Morello; Sir John Whittingdale.

Questions 1-52

Witnesses

I: Richard Moncrieff, Project Director for the Great Lakes Region, International Crisis Group, and Dr Michela Wrong, author and journalist specialising in sub-Saharan Africa.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Richard Moncrieff and Dr Wrong.

Chair: This is an oral evidence session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. It is a one-off session on the situation in eastern DRC. We are very grateful to have witnesses who are going to help us with what has been happening in the DRC recently. Will you please introduce yourselves, starting with Richard?

Richard Moncrieff: I am Richard Moncrieff, the great lakes director at the International Crisis Group. We are a research and advocacy NGO.

Dr Wrong: I am Michela Wrong, a journalist and book writer. I have written two books, one on Mobutu Sese Seko, the President of Zaire, and most recently "Do Not Disturb", which focuses on the current Rwandan regime; and I am a freelancer.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you for giving us your time today. The issue is of great interest to many people, so this is very timely. Richard, for people who do not know much about the situation in the DRC, would you mind beginning by explaining the background to the conflict in eastern DRC, what has happened, how it ties in with previous conflicts and who the parties are? Just give us an overview, so that we know what we are dealing with.

Richard Moncrieff: The current conflict in the DRC started in late 2021 with the emergence of the M23 insurgents group, which attacked a small outpost of the Congolese Government in November of that year. This was in Virunga national park in North Kivu province.

Q2 **Chair:** But that was not the first time we had heard of them. They were around before, right?

Richard Moncrieff: There is certainly background that goes back before 2021. If you want me to go through that, I can.

M23 is the latest iteration of a number of principally Tutsi-dominated armed insurgencies backed by Rwanda. There have been others backed by Uganda, but some have been backed by Rwanda. They go back to the 1990s civil war, when one such insurgency held a large amount of DRC territory in the middle of the civil and regional war, which was ended in the 2002-03 peace agreements. Following that, there was another insurgency known as the CNDP insurgency, in which a number of previous rebel leaders backed by Rwanda but who had then been integrated into the national Congolese army rebelled from the army and created a new insurgency. That ended with negotiation and in the end dispersed. The leader of that rebellion was put under house arrest in Kigali in Rwanda.

Then, in 2012 and 2013, the M23 re-emerged, again with Rwandan backing. They took over fairly large areas of North Kivu, although not on the scale of what they have currently, and they very briefly—for about 10 days—took over the city of Goma. That period of war, at the end of 2012



and beginning of 2013, was brought to an end by a combination of a special forces operation against the M23 under the UN, largely by South African but also by other southern African countries; and, at the same time, considerable diplomatic pressure, including from the UK Government, on Kigali to withdraw its support for the M23. The M23 then were pulled back and went back to their bases or refugee camps or camps in Uganda and Rwanda, and that brought a close to that period in 2013.

A broad great lakes peace and stability agreement was signed at the end of 2013. It was not particularly well implemented, but at least there was a pause in that kind of fighting for that period. Then, as I said, in 2021 the M23 re-emerged. It did so at a time of increasing rivalry over territorial control in eastern DRC between Rwanda and Uganda, which I believe was the beginning, the origins, of the emergence of the M23. In other words, Rwanda reactivated the M23 in order to place its chess pieces against the Ugandans, who were coming in and building roads and getting a much bigger footprint in eastern DRC—in Ituri and North Kivu provinces.

I could take the story on from November 2021—

Q3 **Chair:** No, it's all right. For people who are coming to this cold, why would a Tutsi group be established in this particular part of the country, next to Rwanda? Is it because after the civil war in Rwanda, after the genocide, Hutus were moving into this eastern part of DRC, too? They were leaders of the other side. Is that right?

Richard Moncrieff: There was evidently the genocide in 1994 in Rwanda, which drew lines between Hutus and Tutsis, and those lines spilled over into DR Congo, but I do not think that explains what is happening at the moment. I think that what is happening at the moment is a strategic move by Rwanda that is not necessarily about countering Hutus, but I guess we will come on to the reasoning and the justification of Rwanda's position later—or I could do so now if you wish.

Q4 **Chair:** You might as well tell us now, because we are trying to understand the background. Again, if I were a member of the public listening to this, I would think, "Why is all this going on?" I think it is probably quite important to understand the dynamics as well.

Richard Moncrieff: Sure. I have to go back to 2021 a little bit. The Rwandans supported the M23 and have done throughout the period from November 2021 until now. For at least the first few years, and arguably today, they have denied that they support the M23. It is arguable whether they really deny it at the moment, but in any case they have some creative ambiguity over that. However, in conversations about eastern DRC, the Rwandan leadership—you can look, for example, at the statements at the UN Security Council or interviews with the President of Rwanda—evoke two key related issues that appear to justify what they call defensive measures or would eventually justify their support for the M23, which they do not admit to but still give justificatory elements to. Those are, one, the supposed persecution of Tutsis in eastern DRC; and two, the presence and threat posed by the FDLR, which is a Hutu group, some of



whose leadership were involved in the genocide in 1994, although, demographics being what they are, that is a declining number, it now being over 30 years since that genocide. Those are the elements that Rwanda puts across.

However, when we look at what Rwanda is doing, I would make two key observations. One is that, by supporting an insurgency in North Kivu, Rwanda is worsening some of the problems that it is purporting to solve, in particular the position of Congolese Tutsis, which is worsened by the actions of the M23. It is difficult to square what the Rwandan leadership says with what it does. If you also take what has happened since the beginning of this year, which is the very rapid expansion of the footprint of the M23—we will come on to that in relation to the current situation—that does not match, in any way I can see, an attempt to protect Congolese Tutsis. The actions do not match what they say.

Q5 **Chair:** You talked about Uganda. What is Uganda doing here?

Richard Moncrieff: Uganda has been involved in a military operation to the north of the M23 area in Ituri province for a number of years—since, I believe, the beginning of 2021, although I would have to confirm the exact date. That has been authorised with the Kinshasa Government in co-operation—reportedly quite good co-operation—with the Congolese army, acting against the ADF Islamist insurgents, who are of Ugandan origin. I know that that is a lot of spaghetti soup, but I am just trying to walk it through.

So the Ugandans have been present in Ituri province. There is a question about whether the Ugandans have supported the re-emergence of the M23. The Rwandans have claimed several times that the M23 in its current form is a product of Ugandan support, and the evidence they present for that is that the main current leadership of the M23 was in exile in Uganda, not in Rwanda, from 2013. The evidence I have been able to gather myself, as well as evidence gathered by the crisis group and other organisations, such as the UN expert panel, indicates that the Ugandan position is somewhat ambivalent. They have given small-scale support to the M23—possibly allowing free passage in their territory and allowing them to recruit in refugee camps in Uganda—but that does not by any means explain the emergence of the M23. There is no evidence to say that Uganda is behind the M23 in any meaningful way at the moment.

Q6 **Chair:** Another important bit of background if you were coming to this cold, which might be difficult for some to appreciate, is just how difficult life is in DRC and how little control the Government have over this huge country with so little infrastructure. Is that right?

Richard Moncrieff: Yes, that is correct. The situation in the east in particular is very bad and has got very much worse since 2021. One of the great worries about the current situation is that it is essentially overturning 20 years of dedicated and extremely expensive—including for the UK taxpayer—peacebuilding in eastern DR Congo, including through an expensive UN mission, as well as through direct bilateral aid to DR Congo.



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The fear is that the current situation is going to set that right back, and effectively take it back to zero, as it were, where all the effort over the last 20 years is wiped out.

Q7 **Chair:** Eastern DRC is such a long way away from the capital—a London to Moscow kind of distance. That is how vast the country is, right?

Richard Moncrieff: That is true, but I would emphasise that people feel Congolese; there is a very strong sense of Congolese nationalism and a very strong sense of Congolese identity. When you are in Goma or North Kivu, there is no mistaking where you are: you are in the Congo. Now, it is certainly true that many people there feel somewhat neglected by Kinshasa.

Q8 **Chair:** You could not drive to Kinshasa very easily; there is not a road network that you would recognise.

Richard Moncrieff: No, that is absolutely one of the great problems that DR Congo faces. There is very weak national infrastructure.

Q9 **Chair:** Good. I hope you do not mind taking us through the basics, but we need to make sure that people watching can come with us in this evidence.

Can I turn to you, Michela? How have the M23 managed to capture Goma, and so much of the area, so quickly? What has changed since 2012? Why have they been able to get such a large amount of land? In 2012 they tried to capture the city, but they were nothing like as successful.

Dr Wrong: I think it is very pertinent to this meeting that in 2012, after they went into Goma, there was a major reaction from the international community. The bilateral donors to Rwanda, who provide a very important part of its Government budget every year, formed a united front and condemned what was going on. There was no hesitation about them making the link between the M23 and Rwanda, and they cut aid. Part of the aid cut was a World Bank funding cut; in effect, that meant that Rwanda could not afford to continue to support the M23, because it saw a direct impact on its budget—its health budget, its education budget. Rwanda is a heavily aid-dependent country—sometimes up to 70% of its Government operating budget is provided by the west—so it responded to that fairly promptly. Miraculously, what was being presented as a local rebel movement protecting the Congolese Tutsi community suddenly dispersed and, as Richard said, went back to Uganda and Rwanda. I think that is one element of why the problem appeared to disappear very rapidly in 2012.

Q10 **Chair:** Are you implying that if the same thing happened again—

Dr Wrong: Yes, I am one of the journalists and analysts who have been saying, “We know this works. We should be doing the same thing.” In my view, we have missed the boat, but we can still apply pressure that will be effective. Rwanda has shown in the past that it responds very promptly to that kind of pressure. It is acutely aware of that kind of pressure.



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You have an extraordinary combination of forces trying to protect Congolese national territory and enforce the border. There is the Congo army. There are sprays of local militias, which are communally known as the Wazalendo. You have also had two regional African peacekeeping forces: the first, an east African one, was replaced by a South Africa-led one, which has just announced that it is withdrawing.

Q11 **Chair:** Again, just for the record, why has it announced that it is withdrawing?

Dr Wrong: Because it was surrounded by the M23 and forced to put down its weapons. It took 14 casualties and could not even get the bodies of its dead peacekeepers out, such was the hold of the M23 on that area.

Q12 **Chair:** There are also UN peacekeepers in the mix.

Dr Wrong: I was going to come to that. MONUSCO, which is one of the longest-running UN peacekeeping operations in history, has been there. They are just sitting in Goma now, taking in Congolese army soldiers who are surrendering. You have an extraordinary combination of forces. The Burundian army has also been active in the area; at one stage, it had 10,000 to 12,000 troops in Congo, with the blessing of the Congolese Government.

One of the reasons that all these forces have been called in to help protect the frontier is that the Congo army is notoriously ill-disciplined, underfunded, badly trained and demoralised, and it has been showing that it is incapable of protecting national territory. There is one group I forgot to mention in that summary. The Congolese Government hired several groups of white mercenaries—military contractors—two separate companies. That situation illuminates quite how incapable Congo is of protecting its own borders, and that is a problem that goes back to the Mobutu era and many previous regimes.

It also highlights the efficiency, the armoury and the sophistication of the force they have been fighting—the M23, backed up by Rwanda, with some very sophisticated weaponry. We are talking about surface-to-air missiles, GPS systems and drone-blocking systems. I am not a defence specialist, but the last UN group of experts report from December goes into detail about the armoury the Rwandan army has at its disposal and how it is being used to support the M23.

We have to stress that the M23 is not just there in a puppet capacity, doing the bidding of Rwanda; by some estimates, Rwanda has between 8,000 and 12,000 troops actually on Congolese territory fighting along the M23. When you talk to people and say, “Were the troops that rolled into the city M23 or Rwandan forces?”, they say, “We can’t tell the difference.” They have the same weapons and uniforms, and behave in the same way. In many cases, the M23 behave like a regular army, not like some sort of disorganised, rag-tag rebel movement. As a journalist, I have spent a long time covering rag-tag rebel movements in Africa. If you look at the pictures of the M23—they are much photographed now—you will see that they look like an army, not a rebel group.



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Q13 **Edward Morello:** How do those numbers compare with the estimates of M23 numbers?

Dr Wrong: I am afraid I do not know what estimates the M23 have been giving. Rwanda has been denying that it has any forces at all inside Congo. When you say “those numbers”, which do you mean?

Edward Morello: You say that there are potentially 8,000 to 12,000 Rwandan troops. I am wondering if that is—

Dr Wrong: Well, I do not think the M23 would ever confirm that, because Rwanda’s position is that it has no troops inside Congo.

Edward Morello: But I am wondering what the size of the M23 is.

Dr Wrong: Okay, sorry. Richard may know better than me. I think the Rwandan army now outstrips the M23 quite considerably.

Richard Moncrieff: I was in Goma last year and talked to some very well-informed sources. Their estimate, which was in line with but a bit above the that of the UN experts, was about 3,000 combatants on the side of the M23, but more from Rwanda. That was the middle of 2024.

The consensus view, which I agree with and think matches the evidence, is that Rwanda significantly increased the number of troops at the end of 2023, in the context of an offensive that the DRC Government was making against the M23, so the number of Rwandan troops went up at the end of 2023. We are already quite a bit out of date with the UN expert report from December—the evidence was finalised in November.

Q14 **Chair:** Is it right that, as the UN group of experts on the DRC said, the Rwanda defence force have “de facto control and direction...over M23 operations”, which renders Rwanda liable for the actions of M23?

Richard Moncrieff: I consider that to be completely right.

Dr Wrong: Something worth mentioning on the numbers of the M23 is that, as it extends its area of control—it is still on the move and still capturing territory—Wazalendo, the local militia, are quite rightly seeing the way things are moving and the momentum behind this force, and either throwing down their weapons or joining the M23. The numbers are changing because it is becoming a bigger force.

Richard Moncrieff: I agree with that. We know for sure that the M23 has been recruiting captured soldiers and Wazalendo to try to swell its own ranks. I am not sure that will be a quick process, because you cannot necessarily control these people on your own side.

For the last few years, there has been a debate about whether Rwanda supports the M23 and so forth, but it seems to me that events have overtaken that debate considerably. Rwanda has simply invaded eastern DRC—absolutely all the evidence points to that very clearly. The M23 is a



tool and leverage in the hands of Kigali. As individuals they have their own agenda. They may seek amnesty; they may seek integration into the army. But to be completely clear, we would not be in this situation without Rwandan initiative. Michela has mentioned the equipment that the Rwandans have used. Surface-to-air missiles and jamming equipment have been critical because they have completely grounded the not significantly large but nevertheless strategically important Congolese air force, including attack drones, and gave the M23 basically a clear run into Goma. We need to be clear where we are at, because we are now in a situation where we are not just looking at the M23 nibbling at some corners of North Kivu; we are looking at, potentially, Rwanda taking a great big chunk out of a very unstable country.

Q15 Chair: What are their war aims? Have you any idea? Are they going to stay in eastern DRC or are they heading for Kinshasa?

Dr Wrong: I wrote about this for *Foreign Affairs* recently. There is an open question about the war aims of Rwandan President Paul Kagame and what he will be satisfied with, but we have to look at it in a historical context. This is a man who in 1997 supported a rebel group that also had a strong Tutsi component to it, which marched all the way to Kinshasa and overturned the regime of President Mobutu Sese Seko. He then, a year later, attempted to do the same thing to the rebel leader he had put in position, Laurent Kabila. He failed in that attempt. This is the fifth time Rwanda has intervened, backing a rebel movement inside Congo. Paul Kagame has form.

I and many analysts noticed that in about 2023 you started to hear a discussion—this was started by Paul Kagame himself when he was on a visit to Benin—about the fact that the Tutsi kingdom, a pre-colonial entity, used to comprise, according to Paul Kagame, a bigger area than the current Rwandan state, that by rights it extended into Uganda, Congo and I believe Burundi as well, and that colonialism had forced upon Rwanda a smaller area than its pre-colonial entity. I think a lot of people looked at that and thought, “Is this a preparation for what he is trying to do again?” That would suggest a kind of Kivu protectorate, which would presumably be controlled by or take directions from Kigali. But there is also, as I mentioned, a track record of attempts, which have been successful at least once, to overturn the leadership of the President in Kinshasa. The question is: how far will he go? One of the problems is that the international community has allowed these ambitions to become bigger and bigger, because there has not been a real brake applied.

Chair: Do you have any follow-up questions at this stage, John?

Q16 Sir John Whittingdale: A lot of it has been covered, but I want to probe a little bit. You are very clear that the M23 are basically being controlled and in large part backed by Rwanda. How do the DRC Government view it? Do they consider themselves to be essentially in a state of war with Rwanda?



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Richard Moncrieff: Absolutely. The position of the DRC Government has been very clear for a number of years: “Our country may have many problems, but the specific problem we are talking about here is an act of international aggression.” That is absolutely clear in the mind of Kinshasa and has been since the second half of 2022.

Q17 **Sir John Whittingdale:** You said Burundi was also supplying troops in the eastern region of DRC in support of the DRC Government. Is this likely to become a Rwanda-Burundi conflict as well?

Richard Moncrieff: It already has been. A large number of the main clashes, and the main deadly clashes, since the beginning of this year were between Rwandan and Burundian troops on Congolese soil. We know that historically countries of the great lakes tend to fight in DR Congo; it seems to be easier than doing it on their own border, so that has happened in the past. We already have that now.

Just for information, the Burundi Government, presumably sensing which way the wind was blowing, has in the last 10 days—I think that is about right—started to make noises of opening towards Kigali and is clearly trying to soften its approach towards Kigali, I think because the Government in Burundi felt that it was under direct threat from the Rwandans. It is a very poor, very fragile Government. Putting troops into the Congo was already very controversial. The Burundian Government were not transparent about how many were there and how many were dying. It was very secretive in military hospitals in Burundi about how they were getting paid.

Burundi put a lot of troops on the side of DR Congo. It really put its eggs in that basket. It was undoubtedly well paid for doing so by Kinshasa, but in the last few weeks, when it has become clear that the DR Congo army has been routed in Goma and was unable to defend Bukavu—which is towards Burundi from Goma—the Burundi Government realised that it needed to rebalance its eggs and put some in the Kigali basket to avoid a potential conflagration on its border with Rwanda.

Q18 **Sir John Whittingdale:** You outlined earlier the reasons that have been given by Rwanda: concern about its own security and territorial integrity, and that the perpetrators of the genocide are over the border in the eastern part of DRC. Do either of you see any legitimacy in these arguments?

Richard Moncrieff: I think that there is a reality to the discourse of Rwanda that it is under threat from Hutu-based organisations who are anti-Tutsi based in DR Congo. Those groups exist. There was a diplomatic process before 2021 that sought to address this. I just highlight that Rwandan special forces were in DR Congo in 2019-20, during which time they killed the historic leader of the FDLR, which is the Hutu group that is the threat to Rwanda that Rwanda often evokes.

Those threats exist. They could be dealt with through diplomacy—and have been dealt with through diplomacy in the past—and could be contained. That has been proven. Those threats, to some degree—and



particularly the issue of the Tutsis in the Congos—have been made worse by what Rwanda has done, and therefore it is difficult to understand its justifications. We also have to take into account that in the last three months, in a way, that whole narrative has just been completely overtaken. The areas that the M23 are pushing into in South Kivu and now west on the axis towards Kisangani are not areas where Tutsis have been persecuted. In fact, there is not adequate evidence that Tutsis have been persecuted in DR Congo. If there was, I am sure the Rwandan Government would supply it, but we have not had that. It does not match events on the ground at all.

Dr Wrong: When I was first writing about the return of the M23, a couple of years ago, I kept asking my analyst friends, “How many FDLR are in eastern Congo?” and they routinely said to me, “Between 600 and 1,000 fighters.” The Rwandan army is one of the most impressive armies in sub-Saharan Africa. It has been extremely well equipped. It is extremely well trained, partly because it sends its fighters to places like Sandhurst and Fort Leavenworth to be trained. It knows exactly what it is doing. It has got the latest equipment. I find it hard to believe that it was not able to deal with 600 or 1,000 rag-tag—and they really were rag-tag—ageing former members of the extremist Hutu groups.

The other thing is that Rwanda is a source of peacekeepers for Africa. Around the continent, the army is regarded as being so impressive, disciplined and well run that it is sent to Central African Republic and Mozambique, it has been to Darfur and South Sudan, and it is probably going to deploy increasingly in western Africa.

Kagame uses the phrase “existential threat” about the FDLR. You kind of go, “You’re representing these people as an existential threat, yet you are sending your incredibly impressive army all around Africa to play the role of peacekeepers. This picture just doesn’t add up.”

Richard Moncrieff: Perhaps I could add a quick rider on that. The support that the Rwandans have given to the M23 started in the beginning of 2022. I am quite sure of that; the evidence is compelling, in my view. The Rwandan Government justifies its position using things such as the growing alliance, in its eyes, between the Congolese army and the FDLR, and the very hostile rhetoric on the part of Congolese politicians towards the Rwandan Government—that was particularly true around the elections in the Congo in 2023. All those things came after Rwanda had taken a strategic decision to support the M23.

Q19 **Aphra Brandreth:** Thank you for the information so far. There have been a number of warnings that the escalating crisis might trigger a wider regional conflict. How seriously should we take those warnings?

Dr Wrong: I think it already is affecting the region. We have already mentioned that Uganda has between 5,000 and 6,000 troops inside Congo. It is not clear, but my impression is that Uganda is hovering on the brink of a more muscular intervention. In the past, Uganda and Rwanda have often intervened in Congo in tandem, but carving out their separate



areas of control. It is possible that we will see a repeat of that. Burundi clearly feels that it is directly in the line of fire and it is responding to that. We already have spreading destabilisation in the great lakes and that has created massive movements of people. We can come to that later, but nobody knows what has happened to up to 800,000 people who were living in displaced camps in Goma that were systematically destroyed by the M23. We are seeing a radiating instability in the region.

Q20 Aphra Brandreth: Richard, do you agree? Do you think it could even spread wider than Burundi and Uganda?

Richard Moncrieff: I think I would nuance it a little bit. Since the fighting in late January and early February, countries that had deployed troops on the side of Kinshasa—southern African countries plus Burundi—have withdrawn their support for Kinshasa. The southern Africans are now licking their wounds and have very recently decided that they have to bow to the inevitable reality that they are not going back into the Congo any time soon.

Q21 Chair: We are told that 13 South African soldiers were killed, that there was increased tension, that the South Africans warned against further attacks and said that would be a declaration of war, and that Paul Kagame said, “If South Africa wants confrontation, Rwanda will deal with the matter in that context any day.” It sounded like there was a bit of squaring up, but you are saying that now the South Africans—

Dr Wrong: The South Africans have blinked and said, “We’re pulling out.” They want a phased withdrawal. They want to be able to remove their military equipment, which is a very considerable part of their own weaponry. They are pulling out of there.

Richard Moncrieff: If we look further ahead, in order to understand where regional politics is going to go, there are a few things to take into account. One is that Kinshasa has been cornered into talking to the M23. That is something that Kinshasa did not want to do. The final brick in the dam, if that is the right analogy, came when the Angolans turned their position and told Kinshasa that they had to talk to the M23. That is an Angolan reading of the rapport de force. In other words, the Angolans are looking at the situation—at the M23 taking over more and more territory in eastern DRC—and going to their Congolese counterparts and saying, “You’ve got to talk to these guys.”

That is a little bit against the Angolan take, because until very recently the Angolans had been leading an international mediation effort that was aimed at getting Rwanda to talk to the Congolese, not the M23. The pieces on the chessboard are moving a little bit in that sense, but this is very dangerous territory. Tshisekedi and his Government have really attached their flag to the mast of anti-Rwanda and anti-M23 sentiment, which is very widely held in DR Congo. It was a mainstay of the election campaign in 2023 and it remains a popular position taken by Tshisekedi and his allies.



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The strength of the M23 could still be expanded. I would expect the M23 to further expand their territory as they talk, because that is what they have done in the past. Even while talking, they will probably take more ground in order to put pressure on Kinshasa in talks in Angola. If that happens, and the M23 continue to push for more and more concessions, which could involve a seat in a Government—they already control a very large bite of the territory, and they have the capacity to control more—then I think we are looking at a significant undermining of the legitimate Government of DR Congo in Kinshasa. If we see that, the regional politics will come back in, because we could anticipate Angola, as it has done in the past, coming back in on the side of Kinshasa, effectively to defend a Government against a widening invasive force.

I will underline that, as we would expect, the opponents to Tshisekedi, including the previous president, President Kabila, who has no love lost with his successor, are lining up—or at least Kabila is, at least publicly—to indicate support for the M23. Kabila, who is usually very silent, recently published an op-ed in a South African newspaper, and if you get the context and you read it, you basically read that he is supporting the M23. That is very dangerous. Kabila has networks in the army, he has a lot of money; he has a lot of influence in DR Congo and in the region.

To sum up, what I am saying is that, at the moment, you see a strategic pause regionally as the M23 and Rwandans push into DR Congo. However, as this becomes more and more of a threat to the stability of DR Congo as a whole—and I anticipate that it will—you could see regional powers coming back in on different sides of the chessboard.

Q22 Edward Morello: Are countries like Uganda, Burundi and Angola just going to go in and make a land grab?

Richard Moncrieff: I would not anticipate that approach from Angola, which has no particular incentive to do that. Angola has been historically supportive of Governments in Kinshasa. Just for background, since 2022 Angola has been leading what I would argue has been a quite honourable but very difficult attempt to mediate between Kinshasa and Kigali. That ran aground in December and has now fully run aground. So I would not anticipate that from Angola, but one could envisage a scenario in which the Angolans are defending a Government in Kinshasa against an advancing M23.

Just to be clear, the M23 has a political umbrella group, the Congo River Alliance, whose stated objective is to overthrow President Tshisekedi and whose strategic objective is to, rather like a snowball, to stick to it—my words are not very good—other opponents, either armed or not armed, and create a snowball effect to eventually unseat the Government in Kinshasa. And they are quite open about that; that is not hidden at all.

Q23 Aphra Brandreth: Given the uncertainty and the several moving pieces that you have talked about, what role, if any, do you think the UK should be playing in trying to stop this wider regional escalation, or as part of the mediation that is going on?



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Richard Moncrieff: I think that the UK needs to talk to its allies in Kigali and say: "Stop. This is enough. What you are doing is highly destructive for the Congo, which is a very fragile country. You will not be able to control the outcome. It is destroying years and years of work and expense that Governments like the UK have put in, and you need to stop this and start to consider, seriously, de-escalation measures." And that needs to come with pressure and in a co-ordinated manner.

Dr Wrong: One of the problems with the UK is that the asylum project under the previous Government was disastrous as far as this situation is concerned. Its impact was enormous because, essentially, Rwanda was promised a huge amount of aid that it was not due to receive up front—it went into a different form—and I think they received over £250 million in the end. The cut to the British aid programme meant they were not due to receive anything like the sum that they ended up receiving.

The situation basically meant that for the years during which that asylum project was being debated, challenged and taken through the courts here, not a single British official—not a single British diplomat; nobody connected with Britain—would express a view on what was happening in Congo and the very obvious support the Rwandans were giving to the M23. Effectively, Rwanda bought Britain's silence on that issue.

Rwanda has done other deals of that kind with France, which has lots of interests that are being protected by Rwanda. America tended to see Rwanda as keeping Islamic jihadism at bay in various African hotspots. There was a range of interests that meant no one wanted to stand up and say to Paul Kagame, "Stop what you're doing."

More recently, I thought David Lammy's announcement was great, and very welcome, but every single one of the measures announced is open to interpretation. For example, when he talks about cutting aid, there is a sort of weasel phrase of, you know—

Richard Moncrieff: "A review".

Dr Wrong: Yes, a review, and aid to the most vulnerable Rwandans will be exempt and guaranteed. Well, most Rwandans outside the elite are vulnerable. I understand that that was an indication that a rural poverty programme that the Brits run will be exempt from aid cuts. What about the poor and the vulnerable in eastern Congo, who are in far, far worse straits than the poor of Rwanda? It is a very strange priority to maintain. If you look at all the measures that David Lammy announced, every single one of them could be enforced in a very impressive way that would, in my view, really have a major impact, but they could also just go by the board.

Basically, the current Government wasted a lot of time. As soon as Keir Starmer came in, the asylum project was scrapped, much to the relief of all the people who thought it was actually illegal, apart from also being morally questionable. But then there was a six-month period in which Britain did not take a view on what was happening in eastern Congo and Rwanda's increasingly obvious support. At that time, the Americans were



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coming out and giving very explicit condemnations of what the M23 was doing, Rwanda's support for the M23 and the fact that Rwanda had troops inside eastern Congo, which was obvious to everybody. But the Brits were largely silent. There is a lot of catching up to do.

Britain has been among many western Governments that have emboldened and encouraged Kagame to feel that he can get away with anything. If you look at his politics, you see that Kagame will do something and wait to see whether there is a reaction. He is acutely sensitive to western responses. He will wait and see, and if nothing happens—if nobody says anything—he will push again. And then he pushes again and again.

I do not know whether the Committee has followed this news, but a couple of hours ago the EU announced sanctions against nine people—from the Rwandan Defence Force, and the leader of the M23 and their head of propaganda—and a gold-processing plant inside Rwanda. It is very interesting to see the Rwandans' immediate response, which has been to expel Belgian diplomats and sever all diplomatic relations, because apparently they blame the Belgians for what the EU has finally announced. Rwanda responds with lightning speed to any attempt to put pressure on it, because it really minds, and it knows that those kinds of initiatives have an impact. It is always worth doing things, because this is not a Government that is immune to pressure—quite the opposite.

Chair: We need to get into the role of minerals. If we are talking about DRC, we have to talk about those, but we might come on to that later.

Q24 **Blair McDougall:** I just had a general question. It is 80 years since the various international apparatuses that are supposed to prevent and punish atrocities were established. For much of the last 30-odd years, the great lakes region has been a byword for the failure of those institutions. What could have been done better at a multilateral level to prevent the atrocities we have seen?

Dr Wrong: You are not talking in reference to the minerals?

Blair McDougall: We will come on to minerals.

Chair: We have a series of questions in a particular order, but given the way the evidence is coming, I am shuffling it around, which is perhaps making it more chaotic than it needs to be.

Dr Wrong: So this is about what could have been done internationally to prevent—

Blair McDougall: To prevent the atrocities we are seeing at the moment.

Dr Wrong: I think that for many years there has been a misreading of what Rwanda is. We saw this during the whole debate over the asylum process. Rwanda is routinely presented as a model of development and a safe, clean and well-ordered place. It is as though what it is doing inside



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Congo is completely separate and not being done by the same Government.

This is a Government runs a very tight ship on its own soil, partly because it is a police state, it is an authoritarian state, and that is what they do. But it is also a Government that intervenes with absolute impunity in neighbouring states and have been doing so now for 30 years. They have been systematically destabilising their much larger and much more resource-rich neighbouring country. And yet, which is the country that has been repeatedly benefiting from aid, from the admiration of development officials around the world, from the fact that the Commonwealth chose to stage CHOGM in Kigali a couple of years ago, from the fact that it was allowed to join the Commonwealth without meeting any of the criteria stipulated by the Commonwealth's founding charter, from that fact that we are seeing endless sports organisations staging their glossy events – one of the poorest countries in the world is sponsoring their football clubs: Arsenal, Paris Saint-Germain, Bayern Munich – the fact that we are discussing Formula 1 maybe staging an event. This general blessing that has been bestowed upon Rwanda as though it is the way we would like all our African development partners to be: I find it absolutely astonishing.

Alongside what Rwanda is doing in Congo, it has a terrible human rights record at home. It has jailed the head of the Opposition, repeatedly not allowed the Opposition leader to run in elections, faked election results, killed journalists, and attempted to kill political rivals to Paul Kagame who fled abroad—even threatening them here on British soil.

Another thing that tends to be ignored is that Rwanda has a really strong track record—one of the most shocking track records of any country—for transnational repression. Back in 2011, the Metropolitan Police warned four Rwandan exiles on British soil that their lives were in danger from the Rwandan embassy. The Rwandan embassy here represents a real threat to the Rwandan community here. The current Rwandan ambassador's accreditation could and should have been challenged. That did not happen, because it coincided with the asylum deal, which was being discussed at the time. This is a man who is on the record as having organised the kidnapping of Rwandan hotelier Paul Rusesabagina, who could have been deported as part of the Magnitsky accord Act, which Britain has signed up for.

We know that the embassy is a hub of monitoring, intimidation and harassment of the community here, and also of harassment of people like me, who stand up and give talks about Rwanda—we get targeted. One of the obvious questions is maybe there should be a few consequences for the Rwandan embassy.

Richard Moncrieff: I agree that we have misunderstood the nature of the Rwandan Government. Many western, including British, officials and politicians have gone to Rwanda and seen that it appeared to function very well and consequently been unable to comprehend in some way that Rwanda might be an aggressive party in a major regional conflagration that has become a major regional war. I think there is what you might call



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cognitive dissonance that people find very difficult to manage, and some interests as well.

I take a slightly different tack on your question, which is about mass atrocity violence. First, some of this prevention work has been going on in the Congo for 20 years, with some success. The absence of communal atrocity violence in the last three or four years, since the M23 has invaded North Kivu, is something to be welcomed. It shows the success of grassroots community peacebuilding with a very strong role for the churches in the Congo and civil society in North Kivu, backed by international partners. I think that is very important.

The important point to make as a follow-up to that is that the best way to prevent atrocity violence is to prevent war, because war so lays the ground within which atrocity violence becomes imaginable and then necessary in the discourse used by people who provoke atrocity violence. The most important thing to prevent atrocity violence is to prevent war, and we come back to the point that Rwanda is the initiator of this situation. The way to prevent atrocity violence is to try to put pressure on Rwanda to pull back and to stop, at the very least, any further escalation.

Q25 Blair McDougall: Coming on to minerals, earlier you spoke eloquently about the historical, ethnic and political drivers of this conflict. A lot of press coverage immediately reaches for minerals to simplify and explain what is going on. How central do you think conflict minerals are to this conflict?

Richard Moncrieff: The first thing I would say is that in these circumstances, warring parties will fight for whatever is there. I do not think the existence of those minerals alone explains a conflict. For example, we see armed groups fighting in the West African Sahel for long periods of time in areas which are extremely resource-poor and, in some cases, armies of different countries crossing borders and so forth. So I do not think conflict minerals explain it.

To some degree, I think that conflict minerals and the money derived from them fuel the extent of this violence, because they undoubtedly fuel armed groups and create one of the incentives for intervention by the Rwandans. Historically, the Ugandans, Rwandans and Burundians have continuously intervened in eastern DR Congo to secure mineral routes. The important point there is that this happens in peacetime.

The question becomes: do countries such as Rwanda—but not limited to Rwanda—stand to gain more money by starting a war and taking over the mineral trade? They do. It is not necessarily easy; it is contested. But I can certainly say, from first-hand evidence I gathered in 2024 in the eastern DRC, that since Rwandans and the M23 expanded significantly at the beginning of that year and took over very significant mining areas, including the Rubaya mining area, the trade in minerals from that area is now directed entirely through M23-controlled areas into Rwanda. That is before the recent expansion in the last few months and has been standing for over a year. That money is important; Rwanda is poor, and despite its

in some ways shiny image of being a conference centre, it has very significant structural and structural financial issues and problems. It is exporting a very large quantity of valuable minerals that are clearly not being mined in Rwanda. That is very clear.

The question then I think becomes somewhat difficult around Kigali's calculations. I would judge that they anticipated most of the aid cuts that they have seen, or the potential aid cuts—as Michela says it is not entirely clear exactly how much will be cut, but they have anticipated that. I would judge that they anticipated the significant reputational damage from what they have done in the last three months. The question then becomes: has Kigali calculated that it will make enough money with minerals to compensate for that? Or, have they calculated that, with the mood of the time, there is a new world on its way, and aid was going to drop anyway; and the idea of great power politics and countries throwing their weight around and taking territory is rather more in the air and atmosphere of the times; and they still have significant unproblematic allies in the Gulf who will take their minerals? I would have thought that that is in the thinking of the Rwandans' leadership.

Q26 Blair McDougall: Can I ask you about that? I think 25 years ago with the second war there, much of the conversation was about international indifference, whereas this time there seems to be a lot of, as you say, great power politics going on. We have a critical minerals deal, which the Trump Administration are also talking about. Is there a risk that this starts to become almost a proxy conflict, with some of those interests coming into play, either directly through the international powers themselves, or as you mentioned, through the role of mercenaries coming in from other countries?

Dr Wrong: It is very interesting that the Tshisekedi Government have recently been attempting to put their mineral riches on the table to persuade Trump to provide some kind of security guarantees—basically kind of echoing the Zelensky-Trump conversation and the Zelensky-Trump deal. It is hard to imagine the Americans getting invested seriously in Congolese security guarantees, given that their entire focus for the last couple of decades has been keeping American soldiers away from Africa.

Q27 Blair McDougall: But they may give permission through silence to people who are backing it and have mineral interests on both sides of this conflict. They may just turn a blind eye because of that to things that they should otherwise be challenging.

Dr Wrong: Well, yes.

Richard Moncrieff: I think the role of minerals in this geopolitical conflict is quite complex.

Q28 Chair: Before you go any further, where are the minerals in DRC?

Richard Moncrieff: That is where I was going to start. First, major industrial mining is in the former Katanga province, which is now split into four provinces. That is really big scale, really important and provides a lot



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of money for the Kinshasa Government—but not enough, as the deals that the Kinshasa Government have are not great—

Q29 **Chair:** I am sorry; I am just trying to work out on the map where that is.

Dr Wrong: It is in the south.

Richard Moncrieff: Directly south—

Chair: Okay, thank you.

Richard Moncrieff: The minerals that are industrially mined are going almost exclusively to the Chinese. The Chinese have an enormous first mover advantage, and indeed western companies including American companies have withdrawn over the past three years from their interests—there are some broadly western interests, for example in Glencore. Even Glencore is financing trade that would then go to China.

Q30 **Chair:** So, south of the capital is a big mining area, and is that mining cobalt or diamonds?

Dr Wrong: Are you talking about Shaba—Katanga?

Chair: Yes. You were just saying that in the south there is a big mining area, and I was just asking what is being mined there.

Dr Wrong: It is everything, really. It is copper. Additionally, what else is there?

Richard Moncrieff: The most important mineral in value terms to be mined out of Katanga is copper, by a large degree. It has 7% of the world's copper production and that is very important. The other minerals are critical minerals, but actually copper is used in greater volume in these industries. That is the most important element of the former production in Katanga.

Q31 **Edward Morello:** There is also the purity issue around this, when it comes to the DRC's minerals. Cobalt and copper—they have a purity that is unrivalled anywhere else in the world. That is their value.

Richard Moncrieff: Yes. Just to continue briefly, the money that Kinshasa is getting from those minerals is a factor here. It allows Kinshasa, however clumsily, to create international alliances, as we are seeing with Washington at the moment. It is not clear quite what the nature of that negotiation might be, given that American firms have largely decided to not go back in. The Americans have actually financed, along with partial funding by the European Union, what is called the Lobito corridor, which is a train network to get minerals out of southern DRC, through Angola and into shipping lanes. But that is not going to prevent those minerals going to China.

So, it is not very clear what might be negotiated. It may be that the Americans might come in and buy some probably quite small amount of critical minerals, but which they consider critical, in return for—well, it is really not clear in return for what. It is possibly in return for greater



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pressure on Rwanda. That would be Kinshasa's first ask certainly, for broad diplomatic support as Kinshasa seeks to push back on negotiations with the M23. That would also be a kind of ask of Kinshasa. However, as you might imagine, it is very unclear who is speaking to who and what that Washington-Kinshasa agreement consists of at the moment.

Q32 **Edward Morello:** Is there a viable military proxy for the US—possibly Angolan?

Richard Moncrieff: That is difficult to answer. Kinshasa has tried allies and tried mercenaries, and they have not worked. Is there a scenario where real equipment, which would probably mean drones, could be really put into effective use by the Kinshasa Government? Well, it is not impossible, but in the past what has happened is that the equipment has come in but the whole command, logistics and operational infrastructure within the Congolese armed forces is not there. Therefore, they are not able to make tactical and strategic use of that equipment. However, it could not be ruled out. Certainly, Kinshasa has a lot of money and throwing money at this problem is the attractive option for Kinshasa, so I cannot rule that out.

Q33 **Chair:** Can I drag you back to the mining, though? Unless I have missed it, you talked about one area of mining. Are we talking about there being lots of mining in eastern DRC as well?

Dr Wrong: Yes, all through the Kivus. There is one of the biggest coltan mines in the world at a place called Rubaya, which is now in M23 control; it has been for a while.

Q34 **Chair:** Sorry, what is it called?

Dr Wrong: Coltan. It is one of those strategic minerals you need to make computers and mobile phones.

There is also a tin mine, which is now coming under pressure from M23. I think that it produces 70% of the world's tin. Suddenly, all production has halted there, because the M23 are approaching it. And there is a huge amount of gold mining that takes place in Kivu. In a way, people have become so obsessed with the whole story of "Your mobile phone was funded by blood money" that they have forgotten that gold is one of the key ores that is being mined and exported as Ugandan and Rwandan gold, but everyone knows that it is actually Congolese gold.

Richard Moncrieff: Just to fill in from that, the tin mine has been closed down, which is very important if you are trading tin on the world market—not that I am, but apparently that is very important.

Broadly speaking, from Katanga minerals are going out in broadly legitimate ways, often through Zambia, with at least some royalties being paid to Kinshasa. In the Kivus, Kinshasa is getting no royalties at all, because it is all being shipped out via neighbouring countries without paying any tax. From there, a lot of the gold is being flown to the middle east.



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The coltan-related minerals, which break down into various critical minerals for electronic supplies, are presumably finding their way to Asian smelters— largely Chinese, but not exclusively.

Dr Wrong: We have not talked about diamonds, which are another big Congolese product, especially around the Kisangani area. They are easier to smuggle and they do not need to be processed in the same way, so they are a great gift to rebel movements around the world.

Q35 **Blair McDougall:** Prior to this conflict, Global Witness had gone to the trading centre in Nzibira and had found that the international due diligence labelling of the three Ts was meaningless. Most of it was actually coming from militia-controlled mines.

Dr Wrong: I think there has been a lot of fakery going on. Global Witness's report exposed that, and so have various authors. A couple of books have been published recently by experts who have said that the whole attempt to tag minerals—blood minerals—backfired.

Q36 **Blair McDougall:** Giving legitimacy to misused minerals.

Dr Wrong: It has not done what was intended.

Richard Moncrieff: There are two slightly separate issues: first, minerals that are mined within an area controlled by armed groups, which are often described as conflict minerals; secondly, an important issue is simply smuggling minerals and not passing through the Congolese customs chain, therefore depriving the Congolese exchequer of money needed for the development of the country. Those are slightly different questions.

Armed groups control large areas of eastern DRC and have done for many years—that is where the conflict mineral issue comes from. The important point about the current crisis, since late 2021, is that before that time it was quite contested. You had a number of Congolese trading houses in Goma, which I talked to last year, and they were legitimately selling some coltan, gold and so forth—it is not up to me to say whether they paid all their tax, but they had an office and were there in a legitimate sense—but now in North Kivu that mining is pretty much completely in the hands of the M23. It is just being shipped out of Rwanda and the Congolese are frozen out of the business.

Q37 **Blair McDougall:** So if you are Apple, Tesla, Samsung or one of those companies that have leant on the certification process—it feels like any certification process coming out of eastern DRC at the moment is pretty meaningless.

Dr Wrong: The Congolese Government are suing Apple at the moment, so they clearly do not feel that it has helped Congo sort out the legitimacy of that trade.

Richard Moncrieff: Unless there is a record of legitimately paid customs dues, Rwanda and Uganda simply cannot export the quantities of minerals they are exporting without them having been smuggled from another country. Whether the areas in that country are subject to the control of



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armed groups or not, the fact is that they are smuggled minerals, and they are not paying due tax.

Q38 Edward Morello: On a practical basis, if I were to go to a mine in a warlord-controlled area and then one in a Government-controlled area, in terms of the experience of workers in that mine, would I be able to tell the difference?

Richard Moncrieff: I have not personally investigated it to that level of detail. I would suspect not very much, if at all. But I cannot say that that is something that I have gone and done myself.

Dr Wrong: What I heard was that 15 years ago you would get mines in which there was a lot a child labour and pretty appalling conditions—artisanal mines—and there would be a Rwandan or Ugandan soldier standing over the mine with a gun in his hand, making sure he got the proceeds to funnel back to his country. The scenario painted to me more recently was that these were Congolese-run mines, and that whatever the conditions were like in those mines, that predatory and pillaging scenario was no longer the same. I do not know how that is changing as we speak, because it has been three years now that the M23 have been controlling some areas where minerals are being extracted.

Richard Moncrieff: I reacted quite quickly to that question, but I would just add that the efforts that international actors, including the UK, have put in with Congolese authorities to try to do some of this will not be possible if Congo does not control that territory, so any possibility of improvements becomes extremely difficult if you are looking at a rebel group that controls half the country. In fact, coming back to my point, what is at risk in the current situation is 20 years of painstaking, difficult and expensive peacebuilding in DR Congo.

Q39 Richard Foord: We saw protests last month in Kinshasa outside some countries' embassies—I think the US, France and Belgium. Why were those countries targeted, and why have we not seen any similar action outside the British embassy in Kinshasa?

Dr Wrong: There is a particular level of fury towards France because the Congolese are very aware that France and Emmanuel Macron have a good working relationship with Paul Kagame and a deal was signed whereby Rwandan troops were deployed around the Total installation in Mozambique. France is absolutely seen as being in bed with the Rwandans. With the Americans, that was probably just knee-jerk anti-westernerism. What I noticed and was shocked by when I was in Kinshasa in 2023 was the rising contempt and anger at the perceived hypocrisy of the west, and that strangely and bizarrely manifests itself as pro-Russia sentiment.

I took part in a panel and at one stage I said something rude about Putin and the whole audience suddenly went, "Hmm." There was a perceptible murmur of disapproval because, although most of them realised that what Putin has done in Ukraine is almost identical to what Kagame is doing in eastern Congo, there is still such a level of exasperation with the west,

which is seen to have been solidly pro-Rwandan for years and decades, that anyone who is seen as being anti-western has become very popular in Kinshasa and, especially, on the streets. The attacks on the embassies come from a level of anti-western feeling, and I believe that Félix Tshisekedi has occasionally said in exasperation, “Does the west want me to turn to Russia?” There have been contacts between Russia and Kinshasa going on, so there is a distinct animosity towards western interests, as expressed at the embassies.

You also have to look at it in the context of Congo’s history, where you had Patrice Lumumba, who was the cold war Prime Minister who ended up being assassinated with the approval of the CIA. He was communist-leaning, had been talking to Moscow and is widely seen in Kinshasa and in Congo as having been murdered at the bidding of the CIA. There is a history of feeling that Congo has been manipulated and used, and is perennially a victim of western cynicism and greed.

Q40 **Richard Foord:** Why might the UK have escaped that sentiment so far?

Dr Wrong: That is a good question; I do not know why.

Richard Moncrieff: First, on that direct question, I would not read too much into that. I agree with my colleague that the French have been very prominent in their support of Rwanda. They have also taken more direct diplomatic initiatives. They hold the pen in New York on UN Security Council resolutions on the great lakes region, so they are generally more in the foreground in those terms. Macron has engaged in diplomacy. He met Tshisekedi, and that did not go particularly well. He tried to get Tshisekedi and Kagame to meet at the Francophonie summit near Paris, but that did not go well, so France has put itself a bit more to the fore, at least in terms of perception.

To add my opinion to what Michela just said, there are deep ties between Congo and the west. Many of the Congolese elite are quite western in their outlook, and many have spent much of their youth in the west, particularly in Belgium. Those ties include deep ties to the Catholic Church.

Countering that, however—agreeing a bit more with Michela—there is a very strong feeling of being either abandoned or exploited. “Balkanisation” is absolutely a recurrent word in Congolese popular politics, and the feeling that external powers are coming in to carve up our country is a constant touchstone of Congolese politics.

Congolese politics—this is very much the opposite of Rwanda—is deeply impacted and affected by the street. Popular politics has a role. Even if the demonstrations were at least partly politically manipulated by the Congolese Government, intending to put pressure on western countries, they would not have worked had they not represented a popular feeling of anger at the west for either abandonment or, more sinisterly, plotting to balkanise their country and steal their wealth.

Dr Wrong: It may boil down to a very simple fact: the British embassy is located in a part of the city that is well away from the city centre. I know it



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well. The Belgian, US and French embassies are much more centrally located. If you are staging a street protest and the Government are giving nudges and hints that they would not object to a little direct action, that is much more easy to organise in the centre of Kinshasa, instead of in Gombe, which is quite a distance from the city centre.

Q41 **Richard Foord:** When it comes to the exploitation of minerals—you used the word “exploited” a moment ago, Richard—is there no difference in feeling about UK policy, as opposed to policy in the US, Belgium or France?

Richard Moncrieff: The UK is not particularly associated with mineral exploitation. This is a bit beyond my competence, but I would have supposed that the UK, having a strong role in world finance, is probably financing a number of these operations, but it is not considered particularly prominent in the minerals trade. To put aside Congolese perception, I would just underline the reality, which is that the main industrial mining is going to China—almost all of it—and we are buying the Chinese products.

Q42 **Richard Foord:** Michela, you talked earlier about Rwanda’s support to regional peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa, and said that Rwanda was even considering new places where it might intervene to support regional conflict resolution. What does Rwanda get from its contributions to peacekeeping missions?

Dr Wrong: It gets a lot of income, apart from anything else. As it so often contributes to UN peacekeeping forces, the Government get an important stream of income. I think Rwanda benefited from \$150 million last year, because of its peacekeeping contributions. Over the years, there has been a series of them. As I said, its troops have been active in Darfur, and it had policemen in Mali. Rwandan forces also went to South Sudan, and they are currently in Mozambique and very much present in the Central African Republic.

What we have seen over the past few years—it is really noticeable if you read the Rwandan newspapers—is a stream of west African leaders going to Kigali and spending long periods behind closed doors having discussions with Paul Kagame. At the moment, western Africa is where we see military coup after military coup, thanks to the impact of various Islamic jihadist rebel forces. Basically, the western African leaders go to Kagame to say, “Can we do a deal? Will you come to prop up our Governments, because we are in danger of being toppled?”

I was at a journalistic conference and heard from my colleagues that Rwandan forces were already present in Guinea and Benin. Often, it will not be obvious that they are there, because they will have donned the local army uniform. So the presidential guard is often made up of Rwandans and not local Béninois or Guinean troops.

Q43 **Richard Foord:** How much has UK policy prioritised Rwanda as a bulwark against Islamism in Africa over other aspects of Rwandan policy?



Dr Wrong: That has been a huge factor, especially for the Americans. As you can see, the French made a very direct, transactional deal that said, "Protect our Total installation, and we will give you aid in return." The Rwandans got a very nice aid package as a result of that.

The EU apparently also accepted that argument. You actually saw this extraordinary situation in which the EU was handing over \$40 million in repeated tranches to support the Rwandan deployment in Mozambique. It is supposed to be non-military aid, but this is still aid that is going to the Rwandan army in Mozambique, at a time when we know that the Rwandan army in Congo is supporting a rebel movement that is seizing larger and larger tracts of land.

This is a complete and total failure of joined-up thinking. Rwanda has been benefiting from its supposed role as the policeman of Africa, but it is quite clearly a predator and a destabilising force in its own backyard. We in the west have been supporting its role as policeman in Africa, but we have not done the joined-up thinking to say, "Well, they are actually behaving like complete vandals in another part of Africa that matters very much to us."

Q44 **Richard Foord:** Is there any scope for squeezing that contribution for Rwandan peacekeepers to the region?

Dr Wrong: I gather that the US has been placing under review the UN's tendency to revert to Rwanda as a go-to option for peacekeeping forces. That is an area, for example, where the British Government could also bring pressure to bear, and there is lobbying work to be done. The EU obviously also needs to stop funding that Rwandan deployment in Mozambique—that seems unconscionable to me. That is an area in which pressure can be applied, because it is an important stream of income.

Richard Foord: Thanks Michela. Richard, did you want to add something?

Richard Moncrieff: The income stream is certainly important. In terms of what Rwanda wants from this, it is important to remember that Rwanda is a military state. Being able to deploy security forces outside its country is a commodity that Rwanda has, and it is something that it can not only sell but offer for influence. It is part of a broader Rwandan strategy of influence across the African continent, which has been pretty effective and comes with a lot of diplomacy. It is very influential in the African Union and various other organisations that have a big footprint in Africa. Michela mentioned that they are present in Mozambique and the Central African Republic. Many African leaders appreciate that influence. African leadership has an ambivalent relationship with Kagame; I think they see his effectiveness but are rather cowed by him as well. That is part of it, so it is part of a broader influence package.

I think the Rwandans are perfectly aware that their deployment in peacekeeping operations in other places gives them leverage over western officials concerning what they do in DR Congo. I generally think they are aware of this, but a very good piece of evidence is that they put pressure on western Governments to bury a report—it is commonly known as the



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Mapping Report, and looks into atrocities committed in DR Congo in the 1990s and early 2000s—with the threat of withdrawing their peacekeepers from the UN mission in Sudan. They are very aware that this deployment gives them political leverage. The conclusion we should draw from that is that those involved in funding, organising and benefiting from peacekeeping in the African context have become overdependent on the Rwandan Government, and there is a cost to that overdependence.

Chair: We are in danger of running over. If we were going to finish at 3 pm, we would have only about six minutes, and we have some quite important issues to get through. If everybody agrees, would it be all right if we ran over to 3.10 pm, because we want to talk about the ODA budget and also atrocities, particularly violence against women and girls? If everybody is all right with that, I will move to Abtisam, who wants to ask about ODA.

Q45 **Abtisam Mohamed:** In relation to the ODA budget, you referenced earlier the rural poverty programme in Rwanda and Congo. In the light of US aid cuts and our own Government reducing their aid budget, where do you think the Government should emphasise their support, particularly in relation to any peacebuilding programmes or governance initiatives?

Dr Wrong: In my view, no areas should be off limits. Kagame's actions in eastern Congo are creating huge floods of displaced people who cannot farm their fields and are living under tarpaulins. The M23 has disbanded all these refugee camps, and these people are now on the move. Some 61,000 of them have ended up in Burundi. They will be living in more refugee camps, just different ones. They will be reliant on World Food Programme rations. They cannot support themselves and they are liable to disease. So I find it strange that we are concerned about the rural poor in Rwanda, which within its own frontiers is a very stable place, but that as donors we do not seem to care at all about the poor of Congo, whose lives have been made much worse. For me, that area should not be off limits or exempted from future cuts.

Richard Moncrieff: We have invested a large amount of ODA money in Rwanda on the basis that it is a stable country and uses that money well. I think we need to put that into a more realistic regional context and take into account Rwanda's destabilising role in DR Congo. I say that in the broader sense that we should have done that for a long time. I very much agree with Michela's point that lifting some people out of poverty in Rwanda, while laudable, should be put in the context of the destruction that this war is wreaking in North Kivu and the fact that the Rwandans are primarily responsible for it.

Q46 **Abtisam Mohamed:** So you think it should have been withdrawn from Rwanda?

Richard Moncrieff: I would make two points about that. First, sanctions of that kind need to come with coherent messaging. That has been a stumbling block for western countries. The messaging needs to be coherent and shared; it needs to be, "We understand that this is an



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international war that you have sparked off in the Congo. We understand that there could be catastrophic consequences to this. We are asking you to stop. We are suspending aid to your country until you stop, with a clear path out of that—in other words, if you do stop, we are prepared to reinstate that aid.” As I am sure you know, the sanctions debate is often about paths out and so forth. That seems to me a position that we should have taken some time ago and should take now.

Dr Wrong: I know they often come from different pots, but this whole M23 operation in Congo is going to end up costing the British Government in terms of aid, because they will end up having to send huge amounts of humanitarian aid. We have seen that build-up over the last three years, and these humanitarian bridges that were being funded by bilateral donors. That comes at a cost. It seems to me that, instead of spending this money in Rwanda, you can make an argument for funnelling it into what will be a hugely costly humanitarian programme, funded no doubt by countries like the British Government.

I also wanted to make a point about aid to Rwanda. Bilateral donor aid has shrunk across the world, because everyone is feeling the pinch in these post-covid, high-inflation times. The biggest donors to Rwanda are the World Bank and IMF. The World Bank had a \$520 million programme back in 2023, and back in 2012, when there was a donor cut-off, which had a massive, very quick impact on the ground, the World Bank was part of it. Bilateral donors and the British Government, among other western Governments, need to look at what the World Bank is up to and make sure that those contradictions are pointed out, because the World Bank’s funding for Rwanda just makes bilateral aid programmes look like chicken feed in comparison.

Q47 **Abtisam Mohamed:** But given that they are the largest funders, will it bother them that the UK might reduce its budget?

Dr Wrong: That is why it is up to the British Government to use its lobbying capacities with the World Bank.

Richard Moncrieff: There is a point I have heard echoed in meetings with officials in various different capitals, which is, “Why suspend aid to Rwanda? They wouldn’t change what they do.” Rwanda are trying very hard to pass that message, by the way; they are trying hard to get across that you can suspend aid, but it won’t make any difference. The hidden subtext to that message is, “Don’t suspend aid, because we won’t change anyway, so you might as well keep spending your aid because that is what you want to do.” I think that shows that the Rwandans know that they are quite vulnerable on this. Their economy is not doing well, and that pressure could make a difference.

I would emphasise it as part of a package. We are looking, broadly, at two scenarios, because I don’t see sufficient pressure coming on Rwanda for them to withdraw in the very near future: we are looking at holding alliances where they are now and trying to negotiate some agreement that is national, but also international, to get us out of this mess; or we are



looking at expansion of the M23/Rwandan positions. As I described earlier, all bets are off for this country, and that is a very serious situation. We need to underline that seriousness.

Once you have taken that position, it seems fairly clear to me that aid is there on the table, as withdrawal of aid is part of that. If you are taking this seriously as a package and a set of messaging, it becomes fairly obvious that you do not want to give money to this Government, or indeed to programmes that this Government is backing—except in perhaps the very worst-case scenarios, but there I would join Michela in saying that the worst cases are on the Congolese side; that is very clear. Once you have that messaging, it seems quite clear that we would not give money.

Dr Wrong: Can I just add—

Chair: I am conscious of time. Abtisam, do you mind if we just have one more question and then move on to another topic?

Q48 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Russia and China are the main importers of the minerals. Will they move into the development space in Congo, or is it just a transactional relationship in relation to minerals?

Dr Wrong: Famously, China is a transactional partner. I have not seen any sign of that. Have you, Richard?

Richard Moncrieff: China give money, but they give it in a way that makes a direct impact and gets direct political support. They support the Governments in place, and then they trade and talk about win-win and ship all the minerals back to China.

Q49 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Very little development?

Richard Moncrieff: Well, it depends how you define development. If you were in Beijing, you would say that this trade is what development should be about.

Dr Wrong: It also has to be said that they had a massive programme with Congo several years back. A \$10 billion deal was signed with the Congolese Government to develop Congo's infrastructure. Some of that programme was delivered, but most of it was not. So we have been down this route before, with China offering Congo huge amounts of infrastructural investment, most of which was not delivered.

Richard Moncrieff: It is another issue but, essentially, the Chinese have deals on Congolese minerals in the Katanga region, which are not very favourable to Kinshasa. They essentially involve the Chinese undertaking to build infrastructure if the price of copper hits a certain ceiling and the volume of copper being shipped out hits a certain ceiling. And in fact, not very much of that infrastructure has been forthcoming.

Q50 **Sir John Whittingdale:** And the UAE?

Richard Moncrieff: The UAE obviously is not pulling out tons of minerals on an industrial level, but it is certainly receiving a huge amount of gold.



Some is illicitly smuggled out, but there has also been—in the not too recent past, but nevertheless—an attempt by Kinshasa to strike deals with the UAE to get a legitimate minerals trade together. But that has fallen apart in the light of recent events.

Q51 **Aphra Brandreth:** There are really very shocking and deeply disturbing reports of gender-based and sexual violence in the region—reports of women being raped and burned alive. Michela, what is your understanding of what is happening out there, and do you have a view on why the atrocities that are happening are not getting publicity and media coverage?

Dr Wrong: This was a favourite subject for journalists about 10 to 15 years ago; you often saw reports of Goma or the DRC being the rape capital of the world. It all got fairly lubricious. It is worth remembering that Bukavu, which is now in the control of the M23, is where there is a hospital run by the Nobel peace prize winner Denis Mukwege, who specialises in—

Aphra Brandreth: Is that the Panzi?

Dr Wrong: Yes, the Panzi hospital. It specialises in dealing with, mending, women who have been gang-raped. It is worth pointing out some of the nastiness that we saw in Goma. We saw a prison break, and it was then discovered that the prisoners breaking out had taken the time to rape the women prisoners and then set fire to the area in which they were kept—horrific stories. We have also seen reports of, I think, 895 rapes in the last two weeks of February, which averages out to 60 rapes a day.¹

It seems to me that, first, you have a rebel movement, the M23, which was years ago being accused of mass rapes and massacres in the area it was seizing control of. It is now presenting itself to the world as, “We have cleaned up Goma. We are retraining the police in Bukavu.” Kigali has been arranging for favourite journalists and analysts—or, in one case, a Belgian senator—to be flown to Goma to do videos showing how peaceful and marvellous it is. They are trying to present themselves as a reliable operation that can instil law and order, but well before they seized power Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch had both published stories, as had lots of journalists, about rape and massacres in the areas they had seized.

Sadly, rape and gender-based violence are what happen when you force people out of the areas they live in. Often men are recruited to militias, they run for their lives or they are killed. Women are on their own. They are suddenly living in tents, and they have to walk for miles to get water and wood. They are deeply vulnerable, and it becomes inevitable that

¹ The witness wished to add the following clarification after the session: “It is worth pointing out some of the nastiness that we saw in Goma — we saw a prison break, and it was then discovered that the prisoners breaking out had taken the time to rape the women prisoners and then set fire to the area in which they were kept — horrific stories — some of it was not committed by the M23.”



there is a very steep rise in this kind of violence. Sadly, I think we can expect more of it.

Q52 Aphra Brandreth: What more can the UK be doing? DRC is one of the worst places to be born a woman. I think that over half of women in DRC will be subject to some kind of violence. I understand that we have been funding some healthcare and hospitals, for example. Is that working?

Dr Wrong: I do not know the details of those. First, you need to find out where these people have gone; 800,000 people have disappeared because these camps were broken up by the M23. We do not know where those people have ended up. They are on the move, which means they are very vulnerable. So the first thing will be to find out where they are. I imagine some of them will be going back to their villages and will presumably try to resettle, but others will end up forming new camps, and that is when you will need those kinds of clinics.

The irony of all this, of course, is that Rwanda is famed for being pro-women. People who go to Kigali often say, "Isn't it marvellous how many women are in the Rwandan Parliament?" You have these extraordinary, horrible stories about violence against women in Congo, which is in part thanks to Rwanda's involvement in the area, yet then you have a country that sells itself, among other things, as a bastion of feminist empowerment.

Richard Moncrieff: The populations of eastern DR Congo are historically traumatised by violence, and that is one of the explanatory factors for the rates of gender-based violence. They have faced waves of predatory armed groups. Historically, there has been a wide responsibility for that, but neighbouring countries, including Rwanda, over the past 30 years, have some responsibility for that, and they are not alone—so do many Congolese nationals, armed groups, armed forces, police and so forth. The responsibility for that is widely shared.

To tackle that situation, there must be the long-term, hard, painstaking work of community reconciliation, education, healthcare, women's empowerment and so forth, and the UK and other donors have supported that. If you have a war situation, first, all the vulnerabilities of women and children rise immediately, as Michela was saying, displacement being the first one. Therefore, you see a rise in gender-based violence.

Secondly, the current situation means that engaging with national and provincial Congolese authorities and others to try to push forward those gender-based violence aspects of peacebuilding becomes difficult, and even impossible. I emphasise that, although it seems very bleak, we should not give up hope that progress can be made with peace on these issues.

Chair: Thank you so much for coming in. It has been horrible to hear the details of some of this, but it has been very instructive for us, and we greatly appreciate it. I hope you found this a good opportunity to explain these matters—we have certainly benefited hugely from having them



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explained to us. So our gratitude is to you. I call this hearing to an end.

Richard Moncrieff: Thank you for inviting us.

Dr Wrong: Thank you.