

Imposing Peace Through Power in the International Arena: A Critical Insight into the Peace Agreement Between the DRC and Rwanda Under U.S. Mediation

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Abstract

This article offers a critical investigation of the peace agreement signed on June 27, 2025, between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda under United States mediation, analyzing it not as a breakthrough in reconciliation but as a case of strategically engineered peace. Despite being hailed as a diplomatic success, developments between June and September 2025—during which the UN reported 1,087 deaths in the conflict zone—reveal the persistence of violence and cast doubt on the durability of this externally imposed settlement. Drawing on structural realism, smart power theory, coercive diplomacy, and postcolonial political economy, the study argues that the United States did not act as a neutral mediator but as a geopolitical entrepreneur seeking to secure mineral supply chains and counter Chinese influence. The mediation succeeded not through mutual confidence-building but through a calibrated combination of diplomatic pressure, economic inducements, and implicit security guarantees. Its effectiveness relied on a moment of strategic convergence: Rwanda's growing international isolation and the Congolese government's domestic vulnerability. The article demonstrates that the agreement's apparent success is rooted in power asymmetry, strategic dependency, and conditional compliance rather than genuine reconciliation. It highlights the tension between imposed peace—designed to stabilize extractive corridors—and sustainable peace, which requires local legitimacy and structural transformation. By exposing the agreement as a case of humanitarian imperialism disguised as conflict resolution, the article questions the legitimacy of Western-led peacebuilding models in postcolonial contexts. Finally, it proposes policy recommendations urging international mediators to move beyond coercive stabilization toward equitable partnership frameworks, while calling on African states to develop autonomous mediation architectures capable of resisting neocolonial forms of diplomatic tutelage.

Keywords: Great Lakes Region, Mediation, Smart Power, DRC–Rwanda Conflict, U.S. Foreign Policy

1. Introduction

The Great Lakes region of Africa, located at the heart of Central and Eastern Africa, remains one of the most complex and unstable areas on the African continent (Ogutu-Ohwayo, Heck, Cohen & Kaufman, 1997; Young, 2006; Baregu, 2011; Cohen, Kaufman & Ogutu-Ohwayo, 2019). It encompasses several countries—most notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and Tanzania—interconnected by a history of fragile cooperation, recurring violence, and competition over strategic resources (Reyntjens, 2009; Autesserre, 2010). This structural instability is part of a broader context of colonial legacy and incomplete postcolonial state-building, where the artificial borders imposed by European colonization continue to generate identity and territorial tensions (Mamdani, 2001a, 2001b; Mbembe, 2006a, 2006b; Mbembe, Mongin & al., 2006).

Since the 1990s, the region has been marked by a near-permanent cycle of conflict, fueled by ethnic divisions, governance challenges, and the global demand for critical minerals such as coltan, cobalt, and gold—minerals that feed both war economies and international supply chains for electronics and energy transition (Stearns, 2011; Titeca & De Herdt, 2019). This situation illustrates what Achille Mbembe (2005) describes as the “postcolony,” where African states remain caught in networks of economic exploitation and political dependence that reproduce colonial logics in new forms.

This structural instability is exacerbated by porous borders, the proliferation of transnational armed groups, and weak state institutions, all of which undermine effective conflict prevention and response mechanisms (Ajayi, 2014; Mucuuthi, 2020). As postcolonial theory points out, this state fragility is not accidental but results from colonial structures that deliberately weakened local institutions and created extractive states geared toward the export of raw materials rather than endogenous development (Rodney, 1972a, 1972b; Amin, 1973).

The situation is particularly concerning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose eastern provinces have been plagued by chronic instability for over three decades (Denisova & Kostelyanets, 2023). One of the most emblematic antagonisms in the region is the long-standing conflictual relationship between the DRC and Rwanda (Chilunjika, 2024). Since the 1994 Rwandan genocide, this relationship has been characterized by deep mistrust, diplomatic tensions, and mutual accusations (Vlassenroot & Huggins, 2005). Kigali reproaches Kinshasa for harboring the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), considered descendants of the genocidal Hutu militias (Holda, 2016). In return, Kinshasa accuses Rwanda of actively supporting Congolese rebel groups—most notably the March 23 Movement (M23) and the Alliance du Fleuve Congo (AFC)—to pursue its own security and economic interests in the Kivu region (Stearns, 2011; UN, 2010; Nzobakenga, 2024; Perowanowitsch, 2025; Afriyie, 2025; Kiyiremba, 2025).

These antagonisms led to two major regional conflicts: The First Congo War (1996–1997) and the Second Congo War (1998–2003), the latter often referred to as “Africa’s World War,” which caused nearly six million deaths according to United Nations estimates (UN, 2010; Onyango, 2010; Lomami, 2024). Despite the signing of multiple peace agreements—Lusaka, Sun City, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Luanda—tensions remain high, particularly in North Kivu, Ituri, and South Kivu, where dozens of armed groups continue to proliferate in the absence of a fully functioning state (Ekyamba, 2022; Afriyie, 2025; Gibb, 2025). Mutual distrust between Kigali and Kinshasa has hindered any form of sustainable military or diplomatic cooperation, transforming their rivalry into a veritable regional cold war (Azizah & Ahmadi, 2024; Donais, 2025).

In this prolonged deadlock, the announcements of April 25 and June 27, 2025—regarding a Declaration of Principles for Peace and Economic Development in the Great Lakes Region, followed by a peace agreement signed in Washington under U.S. mediation between the DRC and Rwanda—sent a shockwave through the diplomatic community. For the first time in thirty years, both adversarial states agreed, under direct international supervision, to engage in a process of diplomatic and security normalization. This new dynamic marks a break not only in the way the conflict is managed but also in the evolving role of foreign powers (particularly the United States) in African conflict resolution.

This American initiative comes in an international context where great powers are redefining their spheres of influence in Africa. It reflects a growing global competition that Makengo (2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2021a, 2021b) characterizes as a struggle between “conservative” forces—those seeking to preserve geopolitical, security, and economic hegemony—and “progressive” forces, which aim to reshape global power balances. This conservative-progressive rivalry between old and emerging power poles finds one of its major battlegrounds in Africa, particularly in resource-rich regions like the DRC. In this light, the United States and China appear as the two principal protagonists of opposing geopolitical blocs, each mobilizing its network of allies to consolidate strategic influence (Layne, 2020; Makengo et al., 2023, 2022; Makengo & Omoyajowo, 2021).

The DRC exemplifies this rivalry: while China has expanded its footprint through structural partnerships such as the Sicomines deal, the United States is seeking to rebalance the equation by revitalizing its diplomatic, security, and economic presence in the region (Makengo et al., 2023, 2022; Makengo & Mimbale, 2021). The global transition to clean energy, which depends heavily on critical minerals like lithium and cobalt, adds urgency to this strategic competition (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019).

The central question guiding this study is therefore as follows: **How did U.S. power manage to bring the DRC and Rwanda to the negotiation table to sign a peace agreement after three decades of persistent tensions? And why now?**

The scholarly literature on conflicts in the Great Lakes has extensively examined issues of identity-based violence, state fragility, war economies, and protracted insecurity (Reyntjens, 2009; Autesserre, 2010; Stearns, 2011; Luambano, 2017; Kazeneza, 2023; Kasherwa, 2020). Other researchers have explored the limitations of African-led mediation and regional peace initiatives (Mokolo, 2022; Lule, 2023; Ndlovu, 2018; Deleglise, 2024; Minko, 2024). However, few studies have focused in depth on the role of U.S. power as a coercive or strategic mediator in Central African conflicts. The recent Washington Agreement thus offers a pivotal opportunity to analyze how a superpower can potentially impose peace by leveraging its full arsenal of diplomatic, financial, symbolic, and military tools within a highly polarized context.

The central hypothesis of this study is that the apparent success of the United States in imposing peace between the DRC and Rwanda did not result from neutral mediation or moral persuasion, but from a strategically calculated combination of coercion and incentives activated at a precise geopolitical moment. Washington managed to bring both parties to the negotiation table by exploiting a rare convergence of vulnerabilities—international isolation on the Rwandan side and mounting internal pressure on the Congolese side—while mobilizing its structural superiority in finance, diplomacy, and security. This mediation relied simultaneously on diplomatic pressure, particularly through the implicit threat of targeted sanctions, on economic inducements in the form of promised investments and reconstruction support, and on security guarantees presented as stabilization commitments but fundamentally aimed at securing access to critical mining zones. Such an approach became possible *now* because three major strategic imperatives converged: the intensification of U.S.–China competition over African mineral corridors, the need for Washington to reassert moral and geopolitical legitimacy after the retrenchment of the Trump era, and the exhaustion of African-led mediation frameworks, which unintentionally paved the way for a hegemonic form of “last-resort diplomacy.” In this sense, the 2025 agreement appears less as a negotiated reconciliation than as an engineered alignment under conditional dependency.

The main objective of this article is to analyze, in depth, the logic, tools, and impacts of this U.S.-led mediation. It aims to show how state power—in its various forms (hard power, soft power, smart power)—can be strategically deployed to establish apparent or lasting peace in a region characterized by chronic conflict.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, strategic, and inductive approach. It combines documentary analysis (reports from international organizations, diplomatic notes, official speeches, specialized media) with free interviews conducted with regional diplomats, security analysts, and experts on China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The theoretical framework draws from structural realism (Waltz, 1979), smart power (Nye, 2004), and coercive diplomacy (George, 1991), while incorporating postcolonial and critical political economy perspectives for enabling a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between systemic constraints, influence mechanisms, and diplomatic leverage.

Aside from this introduction, the article is structured into seven complementary sections. The first establishes the theoretical framework by examining various forms of power—hard, soft, smart, and structural—while situating mediation within coercive and postcolonial perspectives. The second retraces the historical evolution of the DRC–Rwanda conflict, highlighting both its colonial roots and the repeated failures of previous peace attempts. The third analyzes why the United States emerged as the decisive mediator at this particular moment, detailing the tools it mobilized and the different phases of its intervention. The fourth dissects the content of the 2025 peace agreement, emphasizing its institutional innovations and its embedded mechanisms of control. The fifth identifies the key determinants behind the apparent success of the mediation, from power asymmetry to convergence of strategic interests. The sixth discusses the structural limitations of this peace architecture, pointing to the risks of selective compliance and renewed instability. Finally, the seventh section offers a critical synthesis and formulates recommendations for international mediators, African states, and scholars interested in coercive diplomacy and imposed peace processes.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 *Power in International Relations: From Realist Instrumentality to Postcolonial Critique*

Power is traditionally defined in international relations as the ability of one actor to influence the behavior of another through coercion, persuasion, or attraction (Dahl, 1957; Nye, 2004; Waltz, 1979). Within classical realism, this influence is primarily a function of material capabilities and strategic necessity. States act under the imperative of survival within an anarchic international system, seeking to maximize their interests and security relative to rivals (Mearsheimer, 2001). In this perspective, power is primarily instrumental and competitive—an asset used to dominate or deter.

However, this seemingly neutral conception conceals the historical legacies that shape power relations. Postcolonial scholars challenge the assumption that international interactions occur between equal sovereign entities, arguing instead that current hierarchies reflect the continuity of imperial domination under new forms (Spivak, 1988). Drawing on Gramsci’s (1971) idea of cultural hegemony, they contend that domination is exercised not only through military or economic force but also through control of discourse, norms, and knowledge systems. In Africa, Western powers often justify intervention by invoking narratives of African fragility or incapacity, perpetuating a logic of civilizing tutelage (Mudimbe, 1988; Mamdani, 2001a).

Thus, power must be understood not only as a material resource but as an epistemic and symbolic apparatus. The challenge is to move beyond definitions that treat power as static possession, and instead analyze it as a

relational structure produced through historical asymmetries. In doing so, one shifts from viewing mediation as a neutral process to examining how it may reproduce hierarchies under the guise of cooperation.

2.2 Power Modalities: Hard, Soft, Smart, and Structural Dynamics

Joseph Nye's typology of hard, soft, and smart power has long served as a dominant framework to analyze foreign policy strategies (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2011). Hard power relies on military threats or economic sanctions; soft power depends on the attractiveness of values or institutions; smart power strategically combines both to maximize effectiveness. In the 2025 DRC–Rwanda mediation, the United States deployed a sophisticated form of smart power through diplomatic pressure, multilateral resolutions, economic incentives such as AGOA access, and promises of reconstruction assistance.

Yet this typology does not fully capture the deeper mechanisms at play. Scholars like Susan Strange (1988) and Robert Cox (1981) introduce the concept of structural power, referring to the capacity to shape the rules, institutions, and belief systems through which other actors must operate. In the DRC case, U.S. mediation was not merely about influencing decisions—it was about setting the normative and financial parameters within which decisions could be made. IMF conditionalities, World Bank loan guidelines, and mineral traceability regimes functioned as invisible architecture structuring acceptable behavior.

Such structural mechanisms embed African states within asymmetric global value chains, where compliance is framed as partnership but enforced through dependency. As a result, what appears as voluntary cooperation often masks coerced alignment. Structural power, more than coercive pressure, explains why weaker states internalize external priorities as their own.

2.3 Mediation as Coercive Diplomacy and Limited Sovereignty

Classical mediation theory distinguishes between facilitation, arbitration, and imposition (Zartman, 1985). The 2025 U.S.-led process clearly falls within the third category, as the United States used both incentives and threats to discipline the negotiating space. Unlike African-led mediation attempts, which often lack enforceability, U.S. involvement introduced binding consequences for non-compliance. Sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and conditional aid created a form of coercive diplomacy that narrowed the range of acceptable outcomes.

However, scholars such as Mamdani (2001a) warn that externally imposed resolution models risk reviving colonial patterns of indirect rule, where external powers govern through compliant elites rather than through explicit occupation. Krasner's (1999) concept of organized hypocrisy and limited sovereignty underscores this paradox: states maintain formal independence while relinquishing key decision-making powers under external supervision. Mediation, in this view, becomes a tool of governance rather than conflict resolution.

The central question, therefore, is whether such mediation empowers conflict parties or subordinates them. If peace is achieved through compulsion rather than negotiation, it may remain externally stable yet internally contested. What is presented as reconciliation may in fact be strategic submission.

2.4 Humanitarian Imperialism and Neocolonial Peacebuilding

To fully understand U.S. mediation, it is necessary to apply the lens of humanitarian imperialism (Bricmont, 2006; Mamdani, 2009). This concept illustrates how moral rhetoric—such as the defense of human rights or civilian protection—can serve to justify interventions driven by geopolitical or economic objectives. Such interventions often follow a recognizable pattern: conflicts are framed in binary moral terms (“aggressor” vs “victim”); urgency is manufactured to bypass local deliberation; political choices are depoliticized as technical necessities; and endogenous peace initiatives are sidelined as insufficiently credible.

The 2025 DRC–Rwanda agreement thus operates not only as a peace initiative but as a regime of ordering. It stabilizes conflict zones while preserving access to strategic resources, particularly minerals vital to global supply chains. Peace, in this configuration, is less a product of mutual reconciliation than a condition for managed extractivism. Stability is not pursued as an end in itself but as a means of securing strategic continuity.

This does not negate the possibility of positive outcomes, but it questions the ownership and orientation of the peace achieved. If peace is externally designed and conditionally granted, it remains fundamentally neocolonial—durable only insofar as it serves external interests. The task of critical theory is not to dismiss such peace but to interrogate whose peace it truly is.

3. Historical and Geopolitical Context of the DRC–Rwanda Conflict

3.1 Colonial Legacies, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Militarization of Refugee Movements

Although the 1994 Rwandan genocide is commonly presented as the immediate spark of the DRC–Rwanda

conflict, its roots lie deeper in colonial engineering. Belgian rule in Rwanda and the Congo did not merely register existing social identities—it invented rigid ethnic categories of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, embedding them into administrative, educational, and political structures (Mamdani, 2001a, 2001b; Vansina, 2004). These codified hierarchies were later reappropriated by post-independence elites, transforming fluid identities into fixed antagonisms. As such, when violence erupted in 1994, it unfolded along boundaries first drawn by colonial power, revealing the long-term consequences of racialized governance.

The genocide itself triggered a seismic regional reconfiguration. Over two million Hutu refugees—among whom were *génocidaires*—fled into eastern Zaire (now DRC), settling in massive camps that soon became militarized strongholds controlled by the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) (Stearns, 2011). These camps did not merely provide humanitarian relief; they became *de facto* military bases used to launch attacks into Rwanda, creating a security dilemma that Kigali invoked to justify cross-border intervention. Thus, displacement evolved into a weaponized phenomenon, blurring the line between humanitarianism and militarization.

Rwanda's 1996 intervention, framed as pre-emptive self-defense, escalated into the First Congo War and later into the Second Congo War (1998–2003), often dubbed “Africa’s World War” due to the involvement of nine states and dozens of militias. While Kigali and Kampala pursued armed groups, they were simultaneously accused of systematically exploiting Congolese minerals (Reyntjens, 2009; UN Group of Experts, 2019). From that point onward, security narratives and economic interests became inseparable, embedding the conflict within a dual logic of protection and extraction. What began as a refugee crisis became the foundation for a regional system of militarized accumulation.

3.2 African Regional Organizations: Aspirations, Constraints, and Fragmented Mediation

African regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC) have each attempted to mediate the DRC–Rwanda conflict. Despite demonstrating normative ambition, these institutions operate within structural limitations. The AU’s Peace and Security Council provides a continental mandate, yet its operational autonomy remains constrained by financial dependence—over 70% of its budget relies on external donors (Stapel & Söderbaum, 2019). Moreover, its foundational principle of non-interference often inhibits decisive intervention, reinforcing a paradox between continental sovereignty and practical helplessness.

The ICGLR has introduced technical tools such as the Regional Certification Mechanism (RCM) for mineral traceability and early warning systems. However, these frameworks, while innovative on paper, are frequently bypassed by informal smuggling networks and political collusion. Meanwhile, SADC—long aligned with Kinshasa—opted for a more muscular approach by deploying the SAMIDRC Intervention Brigade in 2023. Yet, its mission exposed new dilemmas regarding mandate clarity, logistical coordination with MONUSCO, and accusations of partisan involvement in local power struggles.

The East African Community (EAC), which launched the Nairobi Process in 2022 and deployed the EAC Regional Force (EACRF), initially projected African solidarity. However, its credibility quickly eroded when Kinshasa accused it of shielding M23 positions and favoring certain factions. This perception of bias was amplified by the fact that key contributors—Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya—were themselves parties to the geopolitical rivalry. The withdrawal of the EAC force in late 2023 symbolized not only operational failure but the deeper fragmentation of African regionalism, which remains characterized by competing spheres of alignment rather than coordinated governance.

3.3 Recurrent Failure of Peace Agreements: Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Luanda

Over the last two decades, successive peace frameworks—including the 2007 Nairobi Agreement, the 2013 Addis Ababa Framework, and the 2022 Luanda Agreements—have sought to stabilize the DRC–Rwanda conflict. Yet, despite recurrent declarations of “breakthrough,” each agreement has quickly unraveled due to weak enforcement, divergent threat perceptions, and continual reliance on proxy forces (ICG, 2023). Mediation efforts often faltered not because of flawed diplomacy but because parties lacked the incentive structure necessary for sustained compliance.

One structural weakness lies in the tendency to prioritize disarmament and territorial control over deep-rooted grievances such as land dispossession, ethnic exclusion, and the political economy of mining. Agreements that addressed symptoms rather than causes merely pushed conflict actors into dormancy rather than transformation. As a result, armed groups such as M23 and FDLR resurfaced in cyclical waves, often rebranded but

fundamentally unchanged in logic and strategy.

External actors further complicated peace implementation. While international sponsors provided diplomatic pressure, they also pursued conflicting agendas, enabling selective compliance. Agreements became tactical tools rather than binding commitments—used to gain time, reposition militarily, or unlock external aid. In this sense, peace frameworks often froze conflicts rather than resolving them, revealing the limits of diplomacy in an environment where war remains a strategy of governance.

3.4 Border Insecurity, Mineral Competition, and External Power Rivalries

The DRC–Rwanda conflict is anchored in overlapping dynamics of territory, resources, and geopolitics. Eastern DRC’s porous borders allow continuous circulation of armed groups, traders, and smugglers across kinship-based transborder communities such as the Hutu, Tutsi, and Nande (Kivu Security Tracker, 2023). These informal networks, rooted in both survival and profit, undermine formal state control and reinforce localized sovereignties that operate parallel to official borders.

Simultaneously, the region holds some of the world’s largest deposits of coltan, cassiterite, cobalt, and gold—minerals essential to global supply chains. Rwanda is frequently accused of re-exporting Congolese resources through covert commercial routes (UN Group of Experts, 2019). Thus, conflict is not merely territorial—it is extractive. The battlefield is also a marketplace, where violence and commerce intersect.

Beyond the bilateral confrontation, the conflict now functions as a theater of great power rivalry. China’s extensive investments—exemplified by the Sicomines agreement (Makengo et al., 2023; Tull, 2020b; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019)—have compelled the United States to re-enter the arena through mineral diplomacy and security guarantees. Meanwhile, Russia seeks influence through paramilitary agreements and anti-Western narratives. MONUSCO’s prolonged presence has failed to alter this equilibrium, provoking public anger over its perceived passivity. Today, the DRC–Rwanda conflict is no longer a localized struggle—it is a nodal point in global competition over sovereignty, supply chains, and strategic supremacy.

4. Critical Analysis of the Role of the United States: Contradictions and Geostrategic Motivations

4.1 Rhetoric vs. Geostrategy: Human Rights Discourse as Strategic Instrument

The United States officially justified its mediation in the DRC–Rwanda conflict through the language of human rights, peacebuilding, and democratic responsibility. However, American foreign policy in Africa has long been marked by strategic hypocrisy—defending democracy rhetorically while supporting authoritarian partners when they serve U.S. interests. Paul Kagame, often praised in Washington as a “stability guarantor,” governs Rwanda under an increasingly repressive system that scores 21/100 on political freedoms according to Freedom House (2024), comparable to China. As Herman (1988) argues, U.S. diplomacy consistently distinguishes between “worthy” and “unworthy” victims depending on geopolitical alignment rather than moral criteria. In this framework, Rwandan abuses are minimized while Congolese instability is amplified to justify intervention.

This double standard is reinforced through coercive legal tools presented as instruments of justice yet used primarily for leverage. The United States imposed unilateral sanctions in 2024–2025 under the Global Magnitsky Act and Section 7031(c), targeting M23-linked figures and regional elites accused of corruption and mineral trafficking. Although officially framed as measures to promote accountability, these sanctions were implemented without consultation with the African Union or ICGLR, exemplifying what Chimni (2006) calls “American legal exceptionalism”—the use of international law as a one-way mechanism applied to others but never binding the hegemon. Rather than serving universal justice, such measures reinforce U.S. bargaining power while delegitimizing African diplomatic autonomy.

Ultimately, humanitarian discourse functions less as a normative commitment than as a strategic narrative device aimed at legitimizing geopolitical positioning. By presenting itself as a “neutral mediator” acting on moral grounds, Washington obscures the asymmetrical nature of its involvement. The contradiction between proclaimed values and practical alliances reveals that American mediation is not an altruistic intervention but a calibrated strategy of influence cloaked in ethical language. As Bricmont (2006) warns, this “humanitarian imperialism” instrumentalizes suffering not to resolve it but to reorder power hierarchies under humanitarian cover.

4.2 Strategic Motivations: Minerals, Security, and the U.S.–China Rivalry

American engagement in the 2025 mediation cannot be divorced from the broader geopolitical competition with China for control over Africa’s mineral value chains. The DRC holds approximately 70% of the world’s cobalt, 60% of coltan, and vast lithium reserves, yet over 80% of their refinement is controlled by Chinese companies

(Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019; Tull, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Washington interpreted renewed conflict in eastern DRC not merely as a humanitarian crisis but as a threat to Western access to strategic inputs essential for electric vehicles, renewable infrastructure, and defense technologies. The peace agreement was thus framed not only as a diplomatic achievement but as the groundwork for securing supply chains and loosening Beijing's grip over critical minerals.

Security concerns also played a decisive role. The resurgence of M23/AFC and persistent FDLR and ADF activity in 2022–2023 threatened to reignite a regional war, undermining broader U.S. counterterrorism architecture in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, even after the June 2025 agreement, violence continued, with 1,087 people killed between June and September 2025 according to UN reports—a stark reminder that the U.S. objective was less to eliminate instability than to contain it at a manageable level. In realist terms, Washington sought not peace as an end in itself but stability sufficient to protect its strategic corridors and safeguard extractive operations.

Finally, U.S. mediation must be situated within a narrative battle for international legitimacy. After years of fluctuating engagement under the Trump presidency, Washington needed a flagship initiative to demonstrate its relevance in the new multipolar order. By orchestrating a high-profile peace signing at the White House, it projected itself as a benevolent global leader while simultaneously reinforcing dependency structures. In reality, the mediation was less a conflict resolution exercise than a geopolitical repositioning maneuver—anchoring U.S. presence in Central Africa ahead of a deeper mineral and security reconfiguration.

4.3 Instruments and Phases of Coercive Mediation

The United States deployed a carefully sequenced strategy combining coercion, inducements, and symbolic authority. Diplomatically, Washington led intensive shuttle missions through the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and Special Envoys, delivering firm ultimatums to Kigali and Kinshasa: engage or face diplomatic marginalization. Unlike African-led initiatives, which relied primarily on persuasion, U.S. mediation introduced “credible consequences” for refusal, transforming dialogue into a calculated power bargain rather than neutral facilitation.

Economic tools reinforced this leverage. A conditional investment program worth USD 3.5 billion, financed by the DFC and USAID, was proposed as an incentive to stabilize the situation after the agreement was concluded, targeting infrastructure, mine rehabilitation, and the reintegration of former combatants. While portrayed as development assistance, such aid was tightly linked to compliance with U.S.-defined governance and traceability standards. Simultaneously, threats of sanctions remained active in the background—ready to be enacted should negotiations falter. The coexistence of promise and punishment embodied what Nye (2011) would term “smart power,” yet applied here not as balanced diplomacy but as strategic asymmetry.

These instruments unfolded in a meticulously staged chronology: discreet preparatory talks in Nairobi, New York, and Kigali (2023–2024); formal launch at the AU Summit in Addis Ababa (February 2025); negotiation rounds at Washington and Camp David (March–April 2025); White House Declaration of Principles (April 25, 2025); and final agreement (June 27, 2025). However, rather than reflecting a natural reconciliation process, this timeline underscores a U.S.-controlled script—with African actors more as respondents than co-authors. The mediation was less a platform for sovereign negotiation than a calibrated exercise in engineered consent.

4.4 Architecture of Intervention: Institutional and Military Apparatus

The orchestration of the peace process involved the full spectrum of the U.S. foreign policy machine. The White House and National Security Council set strategic priorities, aligning mineral security, counterterrorism, and geopolitical optics within a unified agenda. The State Department, through the Bureau of African Affairs and Special Envoys, conducted the diplomatic negotiations, while USAID designed post-conflict programs that, while framed as reconstruction, consolidated long-term economic influence.

Meanwhile, AFRICOM provided discreet but crucial logistical support, including reconnaissance drones, surveillance intelligence, and capacity-building for Congolese security forces. Though never officially declared as active combat involvement, these military contributions reinforced a de facto security architecture centered around U.S. coordination. Rather than building autonomous African capacity, this arrangement institutionalized dependency—ensuring that Kigali and Kinshasa alike remained tethered to American strategic guarantees.

International law and multilateral frameworks were mobilized selectively to legitimate this intervention. References to Article 33 of the UN Charter, counterterrorism doctrine, and Sustainable Development Goal 16 were deployed not as binding obligations but as rhetorical scaffolding. As with previous interventions in Iraq, Libya, or Somalia, legality functioned less as constraint and more as narrative. In this sense, the mediation was

not only diplomatic—it was performative, projecting the United States as peacemaker while consolidating its role as gatekeeper of mineral access and regional security.

5. The DRC–Rwanda Peace Agreement under U.S. Mediation

5.1 Content Analysis: Objectives, Mutual Commitments, and Implementation Timeline

The peace agreement signed on June 27, 2025, in Washington under U.S. auspices represents a diplomatic milestone, yet its effective impact on DRC–Rwanda relations remains uncertain. Building on the April 25, 2025 Declaration of Principles, it formalizes commitments toward ending hostilities, restoring bilateral cooperation, and laying the groundwork for durable peace based on sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regional interdependence (DRC–Rwanda Agreement, 2025). However, while the document emphasizes reconciliation, it also codifies a security architecture heavily dependent on external oversight, particularly from Washington and its allies.

Its operational core revolves around five priority objectives: the immediate cessation of hostilities in North Kivu and Ituri; the sequenced and externally verified withdrawal of Rwandan forces operating on Congolese territory; the neutralization of the FDLR and other armed groups via the CONOPS plan of October 31, 2024; the establishment of a Joint Security Coordination Mechanism (JSCM) charged with monitoring security measures; and the launch of a Regional Economic Integration Framework to support post-conflict reconstruction and transparency in mining revenues. By embedding economic cooperation within the security agenda, the agreement blurs the line between peacebuilding and resource governance.

To ensure progressive stabilization, the roadmap is divided into three phases. Phase I (July–September 2025) focuses on troop disengagement and the institutionalization of the JSCM. Phase II (October–December 2025) mandates the withdrawal of Rwandan units through designated corridors and initiates refugee repatriation. Phase III (January–June 2026) centers on conditional demobilization and reintegration of combatants, alongside administrative normalization and sustained security coordination. Whether these timelines are realistic, however, remains questionable given the volatile situation on the ground.

5.2 Diplomatic Innovations: Transparency Clauses, Verification, Phased Withdrawal

One of the agreement's most notable features lies in its procedural innovations, particularly regarding accountability and transparency. Unlike previous peace frameworks—often criticized for their opacity—the 2025 accord mandates monthly reporting on troop deployments, mineral flows, and compliance commitments under the JSCM. The inclusion of external observers, notably from the United States and Qatar, adds a layer of international supervision that enhances credibility but also reinforces perceptions of external tutelage.

The agreement further distinguishes itself through its structured withdrawal protocols. Instead of vague pledges of disengagement, Rwandan troop redeployments must follow specific logistical routes under bilateral and multilateral monitoring. This attempt to render military maneuvers traceable is strategically aimed at limiting clandestine redeployments or rebranding of forces under proxy militias. Yet, its success depends on the JSCM's technical capacity and the political will of both parties to submit to intrusive verification procedures.

Moreover, the publication of previously confidential technical annexes—particularly those addressing economic cooperation and mineral supply chain monitoring—marks a departure from past secrecy. For the first time, value chain oversight from extraction to export is codified in a bilateral security agreement (DRC–Rwanda Agreement, JSCM Annex, 2025). However, critics warn that transparency without equity risks institutionalizing asymmetrical control over Congolese resources under the guise of accountability.

5.3 Distribution of Concessions: Between Strategic Trade-Offs and Asymmetric Gains

The agreement rests on what appears to be a reciprocal concession structure, yet a closer analysis reveals uneven compromises shaped by power asymmetries. On the Congolese side, Kinshasa pledges to dismantle the FDLR, facilitate refugee return, and tolerate partial supervision of strategic territories. These commitments have sparked domestic controversy, particularly among nationalist factions who view them as infringements on sovereignty. However, in exchange, the DRC secures substantial international financial backing and promises of infrastructure rehabilitation, particularly via the Lobito Corridor and Lake Kivu joint management initiatives.

For Rwanda, the core concession lies in renouncing support for armed proxies and formally recognizing the territorial integrity of the DRC. This move is less a strategic sacrifice than a reputational investment, designed to repair Kigali's image amid growing international scrutiny. Discreetly, Rwanda stands to gain access to regulated economic corridors and preferential cooperation zones under AfCFTA frameworks, ensuring continued economic leverage even amid security concessions.

Though presented as a balanced compromise, the agreement risks institutionalizing a trade-off between sovereignty and stability. Security is exchanged for access, and concessions are calibrated not solely on justice but on geopolitical utility. If not accompanied by robust accountability mechanisms and domestic ownership, this architecture may reproduce dependency rather than genuine reconciliation.

5.4 Regional and International Reactions: Endorsement, Ambiguity, and Strategic Realignment

The agreement elicited mixed but predominantly supportive reactions across regional and international institutions. The African Union hailed it as a “model of hybrid diplomacy,” emphasizing its combined African and Western mediation footprint, with Angola’s President João Lourenço maintaining a symbolic anchor in the process (AU, 2025). The AU has deployed an observation mission since July 2025, though its role remains largely consultative rather than directive, reflecting its limited enforcement capacity.

The European Union swiftly backed the accord with a €450 million pledge targeting reintegration and cross-border economic development. China, meanwhile, adopted a cautious posture. Although officially supportive of stability, Beijing views the U.S.-led mediation as a strategic encroachment that may threaten its economic concessions, especially the Sicomines joint venture currently undergoing multilateral review (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019; Makengo et al., 2023). Rather than openly contesting the agreement, China is recalibrating through quiet diplomacy and increased bilateral coordination with Kinshasa.

The United Nations endorsed the process through Security Council Resolutions 2773 (February 2025) and 2781 (July 2025), mandating MONUSCO’s transition from traditional peacekeeping to technical verification and DDR support. However, the UN’s legitimacy in eastern Congo has eroded due to years of perceived ineffectiveness. As such, while multilateral approval strengthens the agreement institutionally, its acceptance among local populations remains fragile. Whether international endorsement can translate into local legitimacy is now the central challenge.

6. Factors Behind the Apparent Success of U.S. Mediation

6.1 Power Asymmetry and Coercive Leverage

The apparent success of U.S. mediation rests fundamentally on a profound power asymmetry between Washington and the negotiating parties. As the world’s largest economy with a defense budget exceeding USD 886 billion in 2024—more than the combined military expenditures of the next ten countries (SIPRI, 2024)—the United States possesses unmatched coercive and diplomatic capacity, enabling it to impose negotiation frameworks that neither the DRC nor Rwanda could realistically reject. This aligns with dependency theory as articulated by Frank (1966) and Amin (1973), which argues that unequal power relations are structurally embedded in the global system rather than circumstantial. In this sense, the 2025 agreement does not transcend historical hierarchies—it repackages them within a security-development discourse.

Financial leverage was particularly decisive. With 17% voting power at both the IMF and the World Bank—almost three times that of China and more than the entire African bloc combined (World Bank Governance Report, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c)—Washington exerts direct influence over external financing flows toward heavily indebted countries such as the DRC, whose debt surpassed USD 8.2 billion in 2024, representing 46% of GDP (World Bank, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). Such control over credit and aid constitutes what Nkrumah (1965) termed “neocolonialism”—domination not through territorial occupation but through economic surveillance. U.S. mediation was less an act of benevolence than an exercise in calibrated pressure.

Diplomatic leverage further reinforced this asymmetry. Washington successfully aligned European and Gulf actors—France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Qatar—through coordinated joint statements and synchronized travel advisories. Parallel efforts at the UN Security Council dissuaded alternative mediation formats under the African Union or SADC. The implicit threat of targeted sanctions, particularly under the Global Magnitsky Act, against Rwandan and Congolese generals already under international scrutiny, served as a deterrent mechanism. The agreement’s acceptance, therefore, reflects less consensus than constrained compliance.

6.2 Convergence of Strategic Interests: Regional Stability, Strategic Minerals, Sino-American Rivalry

Beyond peace rhetoric, the convergence of interests underpinning the 2025 mediation was fundamentally strategic and material. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is not merely a conflict zone—it is a geological superpower. Its subsoil contains some of the world’s most indispensable minerals for the global energy transition, from cobalt to coltan and lithium. In 2023, the DRC supplied 69.1% of global cobalt output and 51% of coltan exports (USGS, 2024). As Ryan and Burman (2025) note, “U.S. engagement in Central Africa can no longer be understood outside the strategic logic of decoupling from China.” Peacebuilding, therefore,

became a function of supply-chain security.

Table 1. Key Strategic Minerals of the DRC: Global Share and Chinese Control (2023–2024)

Mineral	Estimated Share of Global Reserves (DRC)	Share of Global Production (DRC)	Estimated Exports Routed to China	Main Uses
Cobalt	49% (USGS, 2024)	69.1% (USGS, 2024)	Around 73% of DRC cobalt is refined by Chinese-owned companies (IEA, 2024)	Electric vehicle batteries
Coltan (Tantalum)	47% (UN Comtrade, 2023)	51% (UN Comtrade, 2023)	Around 60% exported via Rwanda to Chinese smelters (UN GoE, 2023)	Electronics & defense tech
Copper	8% (USGS, 2024)	15% (USGS, 2024)	Around 45% processed by Chinese joint ventures (S&P Global, 2023)	Power grids & renewable energy
Lithium (Pegmatites in Manono)	Emerging – est. 3%-4%	Pilot production phase	Around 80% of current off-take agreements linked to Chinese firms (Benchmark Minerals, 2024)	Battery-grade lithium carbonate

Source: Compiled by author from USGS (2024), UN Group of Experts on the DRC (2023), IEA (2024), S&P Global (2023), Benchmark Minerals (2024).

This table illustrates the central dilemma of U.S. strategy: the DRC is indispensable to clean energy technologies, yet Chinese firms control a majority of refining capacity and logistical corridors. The U.S. therefore approached mediation less as conflict resolution than geoeconomic repositioning. Rather than dislodging China directly, Washington sought to redirect future mineral flows through Western-aligned infrastructure and certification systems.

The Lobito Corridor Initiative embodies this strategy. Backed jointly by the U.S., EU, and African Development Bank, it mobilizes USD 2.7 billion to connect Kolwezi to the Atlantic port of Lobito, bypassing China-dominated routes through Tanzania and South Africa (Afreximbank, 2024). By integrating peacebuilding into corridor development, the United States effectively securitized infrastructure diplomacy, turning mediation into trade geography redesign.

For Rwanda, alignment with U.S. strategy offered reputational rehabilitation after years of international condemnation for its involvement in eastern Congo. Yet Kigali’s objective was not rupture but continuity: while projecting compliance, it continued to benefit from informal mineral circuits worth an estimated USD 400 million annually (UN Experts Panel, 2023). The agreement thus represents not a break with past practices but a strategic recalibration under external arbitration.

6.3 Favorable Political Timing: Domestic Pressures in the DRC, Economic Needs in Rwanda

The timing of the mediation proved crucial. In the DRC, President Tshisekedi faced escalating public discontent over persistent insecurity in the east. Failure to deliver results threatened the erosion of political legitimacy ahead of the 2026 electoral calendar. Surveys by the Congo Research Group (2024) indicated that 68% of respondents perceived the government as having “failed to restore peace in the Kivus,” while 54% supported “direct foreign involvement if national forces proved insufficient.” Accepting U.S. mediation thus became a political necessity rather than an act of strategic choice.

In Rwanda, international isolation—following UN reports on M23 support—coincided with economic slowdown, as foreign aid decreased by an estimated 15% between 2022 and 2024 (OECD Aid Tracker, 2024) and GDP growth fell from 8.2% in 2022 to 6.3% in 2024 (IMF, 2024). Kagame’s administration sought to preempt mounting pressure by adopting a controlled concession strategy. Diplomatic reengagement provided access to new investment streams while projecting the narrative of constructive leadership.

Mutual vulnerability created a transient equilibrium of incentives. Washington seized this window to frame mediation not merely as arbitration but as structured crisis management with high political returns. In this sense, timing functioned as an accelerant, transforming latent pressures into binding commitments.

6.4 Role of Economic Levers: Investments, Conditionality, Access to U.S. Markets

Economic incentives were the backbone of U.S. mediation strategy. Washington deployed a four-pronged

package combining direct investment, preferential trade access, aid conditionality, and technical assistance. The DFC pledged USD 2.3 billion toward infrastructure, electrification, and special economic zones in eastern DRC (DFC, 2025), while USAID allocated USD 580 million for post-conflict stabilization, DDR, and social development programs. These funds were not merely supportive—they were binding mechanisms of compliance.

Conditionality was strategically embedded in access to AGOA privileges for both Rwanda and the DRC. Continued eligibility was tied to human rights adherence, transparency clauses, and cooperation in mineral traceability systems. Technical support via the Digital Integrated Certification Mechanism (DICM)—expected to become operational by late 2025—gave Washington indirect control over mineral export governance. Economic leverage thus served not only to incentivize cooperation but also to institutionalize long-term oversight.

By making non-compliance economically prohibitive, the United States converted soft incentives into hard enforcement. Peace was therefore not just negotiated—it was financially engineered. Whether such externally constructed stability can endure without internal ownership remains the defining test of this model.

7. Limitations and Vulnerabilities of the Agreement

7.1 The Fundamental Contradiction between Imposed Peace and Lasting Peace

The Washington Agreement epitomizes the conceptual tension between imposed peace and sustainable peace in postcolonial African contexts. While the accord succeeds in halting open hostilities at the elite diplomatic level, it remains a framework engineered from above, primarily by external actors. Postcolonial theorists argue that peace cannot be reduced to the suspension of violence; rather, it requires the restoration of epistemic and institutional autonomy. As Edward Said (1993) suggests in *Culture and Imperialism*, true peace demands a “decolonization of the mind,” where African states regain control over narratives and decision-making processes—a dimension absent from the Washington framework.

Instead of dismantling colonial-era asymmetries, the agreement risks perpetuating them under updated administrative veneers. The mechanisms of international monitoring, financial conditionality, and mineral traceability, while justified in the name of transparency, also function as instruments of surveillance that reproduce dependency. The illusion of sovereignty is maintained rhetorically while substantive power remains governed by external guarantors. In this sense, the agreement echoes what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) called “the continuation of colonialism through consent rather than conquest.”

Thus, the core paradox lies in attempting to achieve durable peace through the very logics of control that contributed to the conflict. If peace is experienced not as liberation but as external constraint, local actors are likely to comply superficially while resisting structurally. Without integrating grassroots agency, local justice mechanisms, and historical reconciliation, the agreement risks institutionalizing pacification, not peacebuilding.

7.2 Risks of Strategic Withdrawal or Bad Faith

Despite the formal commitments made under U.S. supervision (White House, 2025a, 2025b), the risk of selective compliance or strategic withdrawal remains high. Historical precedents across Africa—and even within the DRC–Rwanda dyad—show that peace agreements are often treated as tactical instruments rather than binding contracts. Jean-François Bayart's (1989) notion of *la politique du ventre* illuminates how elites instrumentalize external agreements to secure rents, consolidate power, or deflect pressure while avoiding meaningful structural reforms.

Both Kinshasa and Kigali have previously demonstrated agility in navigating external oversight. Rwanda has repeatedly leveraged military cooperation frameworks to maintain covert influence through proxy militias, while the DRC has a long record of fragmented implementation, where concessions are enacted unevenly across provinces. Without sustained international monitoring, each side may retreat from obligations once immediate political or economic gains are secured.

The trajectory of previous accords—such as Lusaka (1999) and Addis Ababa (2013)—shows that agreements can devolve into “paper peace” when local power dynamics reassert themselves. The challenge lies not in signing but in sustained enforcement. Without binding consequences for non-compliance and inclusive oversight involving civil society, churches, and traditional authorities, the Washington Agreement risks becoming another formal victory with informal erosion.

7.3 Implementation Challenges: Residual Armed Groups and Communal Tensions

The cessation of hostilities at the state level does not equate to territorial pacification. Over 120 armed groups remain active in eastern DRC, operating autonomous war economies and community-based militias (Kivu

Security Tracker, 2024). Their allegiances do not necessarily align with national directives, rendering top-down agreements ineffective on the ground. Continued violence in Rutshuru and Djugu between June and September 2025—resulting in over 500 deaths according to UNOCHA—demonstrates the fragility of the security transition.

Table 2. Post-agreement Developments (June–October 2025)

Period	Security incidents	Civilian casualties	Newly displaced persons
June 2025	45	287	85 000
July 2025	52	334	110 000
August 2025	38	298	75 000
September 2025	41	168	92 000

Source: OCHA RDC; Kivu Security Tracker, October 2025.

Beyond armed actors, deep-seated communal tensions—among Hutu, Tutsi, Nande, Hema, Lendu, and Banyarwanda populations—persist as drivers of violence. These tensions are fueled by disputes over land, citizenship status, and historical grievances dating back to colonial classifications (Mamdani, 2001a). Without mechanisms for transitional justice, local reconciliation, and equitable development, the agreement risks stabilizing elites while leaving peripheral communities in cycles of retaliation.

7.4 Diplomatic Dependency: Can Peace Be Sustained Without U.S. Oversight?

A central vulnerability of the agreement lies in its dependence on sustained American involvement. While Washington currently acts as guarantor and enforcer, long-term peace cannot rest on external guardianship. The precedent of U.S. withdrawal from South Sudan and Somalia illustrates how strategic recalibration in Washington can abruptly halt engagement. If geopolitical priorities shift—toward the Indo-Pacific or domestic contention—the DRC–Rwanda framework may lose its stabilizing backbone.

To mitigate dependency, regional institutions such as the ICGLR, African Union, and East African Community (EAC) must progressively assume greater oversight roles. However, these institutions currently lack the resources and mandate to effectively enforce compliance. This creates a structural dilemma: reinforcing U.S. centrality perpetuates dependency, but withdrawing it too rapidly risks collapse.

A sustainable path forward requires domestic consolidation of ownership. Local communities, parliaments, and provincial governments must be integrated as co-enforcers, not passive observers. Early warning systems, cross-border judicial cooperation, and community dialogue forums should transition from externally funded projects to nationally budgeted institutions. Peace that depends on constant supervision is not yet peace—it is managed fragility.

8. Conclusion

The U.S.-brokered settlement between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda marks a decisive shift in the diplomatic architecture of the Great Lakes region. Unlike previous accords negotiated through multilateral facilitation or African-led mediation, this agreement emerged from a form of coercive arbitration led by a single extra-continental actor. Peace was not merely encouraged—it was structured through power. This model, while controversial, signals the rise of a new paradigm in postcolonial conflict management: imposed peace as geostrategic governance.

The analysis conducted in this article reveals three key pillars underpinning this outcome. First, strategic asymmetry enabled Washington to realign the cost-benefit calculations of both Kigali and Kinshasa. Second, a rare convergence of geoeconomic interests—particularly around access to cobalt and logistic corridors—created a transactional space in which peace became a commodity. Third, the timing of mediation, aligned with domestic vulnerability in both capitals, allowed compromise to emerge under constraint rather than persuasion.

Yet such breakthroughs remain inherently fragile. Without community-level anchoring, commitments signed at the top risk evaporating in practice. Moreover, sustainability depends on external variables beyond African control, such as shifts in U.S. strategic priorities or competition from rival powers like China or Russia. In its current form, the agreement risks institutionalizing dependency rather than sovereignty.

Policy Recommendations

For African regional institutions (AU, ICGLR, SADC, EAC): 1. Establish African-led permanent mediation mechanisms with binding arbitration powers to avoid external monopolization of peace diplomacy. 2. Develop

joint mineral contracting frameworks to prevent bilateral undercutting and ensure strategic coherence.

For the DRC and Rwanda: 1. Condition all future mining contracts on measurable community benefits (schools, clinics, local employment quotas). 2. Create transparent reconstruction funds audited by independent African institutions—not solely Western donors. 3. Institutionalize permanent bilateral monitoring commissions for both security and trade corridors.

For international mediators (U.S., EU, UN): 1. Balance conditionality with transfer of mediation capacity rather than perpetual oversight. 2. Integrate local community representation into monitoring mechanisms to prevent elite-driven peace.

Ethical Considerations

This research acknowledges the ethical dilemmas inherent in studying a peace process heavily influenced by external powers, particularly Western actors whose strategic interests often shape both policy and knowledge production. A growing body of postcolonial scholarship warns against *epistemic extraction*, whereby academic research reproduces the logic of intervention by framing African conflicts through paradigms designed in Western institutions (Spivak, 1988; Mbembe, 2005). In highly sensitive contexts such as the DRC–Rwanda mediation, field access, archival material, and policy data are frequently mediated through organizations directly or indirectly aligned with donor agendas. Such reliance risks reinforcing narratives that legitimize external dominance rather than centering local agency and historical accountability.

To mitigate this epistemic asymmetry, the present article adopts a position of critical reflexivity toward Western-sourced documentation, triangulating it with African scholarly work, local media, and civil society statements wherever possible. Furthermore, it explicitly avoids valorizing external interventions as inherently rational or benevolent, instead subjecting them to the same degree of scrutiny applied to African actors.

Conflict of Interest Declaration.

The author declares no institutional affiliation or financial support from any Western government, donor agency, or strategic policy institution directly involved in the 2025 DRC–Rwanda mediation process. No research funding was received from institutions that could influence the direction or conclusions of this study. The analysis presented here is conducted in full academic independence and is not intended to serve the diplomatic narratives of any state or organization. This commitment to intellectual autonomy is essential in postcolonial research landscapes where knowledge often risks becoming an accessory to power.

Future Research Directions

Two analytical pathways emerge from this case. First, comparative inquiry should be undertaken between this agreement and other coercive mediation models—such as France’s diplomacy in Mali or China’s role in South Sudan—to test the replicability of power-based peace frameworks. Second, longitudinal studies are needed to measure whether imposed peace evolves into genuine normalization or merely freezes conflict. Only sustained observation over time will determine whether the Washington Agreement represents a turning point or a temporary geopolitical arrangement.

In the final analysis, peace in the Great Lakes will only become durable when external enforcement evolves into endogenous legitimacy. Power may compel signatures—but only participation can sustain peace.

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