

Uganda's Operation Shujaa in the DRC

Fighting the ADF or Securing Economic Interests?





The [Congo Research Group \(CRG\)](#) was founded in 2015 to promote rigorous, independent research into the violence that affects millions of Congolese. This requires a broad approach. For us, the roots of this violence can be found in a history of predatory governance that dates back to the colonial period and that connects the hillsides of the Kivus with political intrigue and corruption in Kinshasa, as well as in the capitals of Europe, China, and North America. Today, CRG's research aims to explain the complicated interplay among politics, violence, and political economy in the Congo to a wide audience.

[Ebuteli](#) is a Congolese research institute and partner of the Congo Research Group. Our analyses focus on politics, governance and violence. Ebuteli's mission is to promote, through rigorous research, an informed debate to find solutions to the challenges the DRC is facing. In an environment that is often clouded by easily spread rumors, we hope that our work will contribute to an informed de-bate on issues of great national importance.

Cover photo: May 3, 2022. FARDC led by Constant Ndima, military governor of North Kivu, and the Ugandan army represented by Major General Kayanja Muhanga, commander of Ugandan troops (UPDF) on Congolese soil visiting the Congolese-Ugandan border of Kasindi-Lubiriha in Beni territory. © Sébastien Kitsa Musayi



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Executive summary

Once again, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is in turmoil. In November 2021, the *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23) rebellion began launching attacks against the Congolese government in the area just west of the Ugandan and Rwandan borders. These attacks escalated in May, when the rebellion captured Rumangabo, the largest army camp in North Kivu, and advanced toward Goma. By the end of May, 61,000 people had been displaced, while credible indications surfaced suggesting the Rwandan government was backing the M23 offensive.

This report focuses on one of several factors that brought about this situation: the deployment of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) to conduct operations with the Congolese army in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. According to the Ugandan government, these operations were launched in order to dismantle the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a reclusive and extremely brutal Islamist armed group. But was that the only reason? We focus on understanding the range of other economic, geopolitical, and security motives involved. In particular, the paper will argue how the military operation likely also aimed to protect Uganda's oil deposits and infrastructure around Lake Albert; and to build roads to expand the market for Ugandan goods.

Both the Ugandan government and private business stand to benefit from the military operations. They allow Dott Services, a Ugandan construction company, and TotalEnergies, a French oil company, to further their interests. President Yoweri Museveni has made trade and oil the cornerstone of his economic and political strategy: with a rapidly growing youth population and the declining popularity of his government, economic growth is critical for his government.

The Ugandan intervention has already had far-reaching geopolitical repercussions. The operation has rankled Rwanda and was one of the reasons for the reemergence of the M23 rebellion.

Introduction

On November 16, 2021, three suicide bombers attacked Kampala, killing at least four other people, and wounding 37, of whom 27 were police officers. A fourth bomber was hunted down and shot. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said later that day that the attackers were tied to the ADF, who emerged in Uganda in the early 1990s and have been based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1995.¹ The Islamic State, to which the ADF pledged allegiance in July 2019,² claimed the attacks in a communiqué the same day.³ It also had claimed responsibility for a range of bomb attacks in the preceding weeks, including one against a police station and another against a pork restaurant.⁴

Soon after the attack, Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi and President Museveni agreed to launch joint operations in northeastern Congo with a focus on dismantling the ADF.⁵ This political agreement was formalized in a defense and security agreement between Uganda and the Congo signed on December 9.⁶

Little is known about the military progress of the operation. Although General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, Museveni's son and commander of the Ugandan land forces, communicates often and enthusiastically about the operation on social media, neither army has provided much concrete information.

This report is primarily based on interviews in Kinshasa and Kampala in January and February 2022, and follow-up online interviews with a variety of actors: intelligence analysts, diplomats, journalists, and civil society leaders, for a total of 47 interviews. Given the sensitivity of much of the information, most of these sources are not named.



Operation Shujaa⁷

Since military operations were launched, the Ugandan government has portrayed them as a success. There have been a series of embedded media reports largely portraying the heroism of the UPDF.⁸ Perhaps the most vociferous supporter of the operations has been the President Museveni's son Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who claimed on Twitter that a thousand ADF rebels had been killed and that the UPDF had “dropped 30 tons of ammunition on them as they slept” on November 30, 2021.¹⁰

Similarly, FARDC spokesperson Major General Kasonga asserted on March 27, 2022, “all ADF sanctuaries, headquarters and strongholds have been destroyed, and the surrounding areas pacified.”¹¹ Those remaining are a few “criminals,” who managed to escape the strikes, “looking for food and medicine for their survival.” On March 7, 2022, the FARDC announced that it had freed at least 72 hostages, captured 98 fighters, killed several others, and recovered 197 weapons.¹²

However, none of these claims have been substantiated by third parties. The operation has been using heavy artillery against the ADF, which has pushed the group away from its historical bases in the “Triangle of Death” to the northeast of Beni town and fragmenting it into three to four clusters.¹³ Some of these groups have moved westwards toward Mambasa, which has increased the number of attacks there. Whereas during the first few months of the operation, ADF attacks decreased, violence has ticked upward again since February 2022. According to the Kivu Security Tracker, at least 119 civilians were killed by the ADF in March 2022, which is higher than the average for the eight months preceding the operation.¹⁴

Second, it does not appear that the ADF has been structurally weakened by the operation. A diplomat who follows the operations closely compared its strategy to “trying to kill a mosquito with a hammer”; another portrayed it as “a lot of dust and noise,” which affected ADF military operations and capacity, but whose long term impact on the group is questionable. Analysts also argue that with the number of UPDF troops involved—somewhere between 2000 and 4000—that the operation lacks the capacity to make much of a dent:¹⁵ Given the difficult and vast terrain in which they operate, the UPDF is probably limited to pushing ADF combatants into more remote locations.¹⁶ Moreover, the current military strategy neglects the hybrid nature of the group, as the ADF is both a regional actor—with networks across eastern Africa¹⁷—as much as it is a local group, embedded in local struggles and dynamics.¹⁸

Finally, according to interviews with sources close to the UPDF, a major aim of the military operation seems to have been the creation of a buffer zone along the border.¹⁹ However, the ADF have instead returned to the border area, to places such as Watalinga chiefdom and adjacent areas. These areas were spared from ADF violence in recent years but had constituted the ADF's base in the late 1990s, from where it launched attacks into Uganda. For example, several recent attacks occurred in the town of Nobili, on Congolese side of the border. This was the first time in several years that this location, an important trade hub and the main entry point for the UPDF into Congo for Operation Shujaa, had been targeted by the group.²⁰ The operations thus appear paradoxically to have made the border less secure than before.

Road infrastructure and Uganda-Congo relations

In the years preceding Operation Shujaa there were a series of meetings between Tshisekedi and Museveni regarding the construction of roads in eastern Congo. During a visit to Uganda by Congolese president on November 9-10, 2019, it was agreed that “that the two countries would implement certain strategic infrastructure projects, including the construction and upgrading of 1,182 kilometers of main roads network connecting the two countries.”²¹ This was further developed on February 21, 2020,²² when they agreed on the immediate reconstruction of 223 kilometers of priority roads.²³

These priority roads are estimated to cost 335 million USD.²⁴ It was agreed that both countries would contribute 20 percent to these costs. In October 2020, the Ugandan government approved 66 million USD for the project.²⁵ The remaining 60 percent of the total cost—201 million USD—would be paid by the implementing company Dott Services.²⁶ However, for now, it is only Uganda that has formally approved funding;²⁷ no official Congolese communication has been issued in this regard and the 2021 and 2022 Congolese budgets do not provide funding for the project.²⁸ After signing an official agreement for the road construction, the project was officially launched by the two presidents on June 16, 2021.²⁹

These roadworks are linked to Operation Shujaa in various ways.



First, they have broader economic and political ramifications: On March 29, 2022, Congo became a member of the East African Community (EAC), potentially positioning itself as an even more important business partner for the region, and for Uganda in particular.³⁰ There has always been important cross-border trade between Uganda and Congo. In 2019, for example, formal exports from Uganda to its neighbor were worth 156 million USD; informal exports were even greater, worth 330 million USD, of which the majority were industrial goods.³¹ That makes Congo the largest export market for Ugandan informal exports, making up 62 percent of all informal exports.³² Mpondwe border station, the starting point of the new roads, is a particularly important trading point.³³ Congo's integration into the EAC will further expand this market for Ugandan products. Congo has a much weaker manufacturing sector and imports many agricultural goods from Uganda.³⁴ All of this is politically important for the Museveni regime: Uganda's population is growing rapidly and the regime faces increased dissent, making economic growth important to shore up Museveni's legitimacy.³⁵

However, for the road construction and economic integration to succeed, military protection is needed. In communications from the Ugandan government and army, roads and security have been presented as closely interlinked.³⁶ Even the timeline of the operations and road construction have been connected: the UPDF officially initiated attacks against the ADF on November 30, 2021; road construction started just a few days later, on December 3, 2021, with an official ceremony involving the two respective ministers, and during which the Congolese government officially "handed over crucial sites" over to the company.³⁷

Particularly interesting in this context is how in October 2021, before the Kampala bombings or the current operations, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Kinshasa and Kampala on "targeted concerted operations for infrastructure works" in Congo.³⁸ The MoU—which is a defense decree and hence classified—was signed between the chiefs of staff of the respective armies, and contained a troop ceiling for the deployment with additional technical staff for the roads.³⁹ Only one public mention can be found of this MoU, in a speech by Christophe Lutundula, Congolese minister of foreign affairs, to the diplomatic corps in Kinshasa, on the occasion of the launch of the joint UPDF-FARDC operations.⁴⁰

To be clear, this is not to argue that the Kampala bombings were contrived to provide a pretext for military intervention, but rather to highlight how central military protection is for the road construction which is planned to last for about two years.⁴¹ This time horizon might ex-

plain why the UPDF remains vague about its intended stay in DRC, instead announcing it aims to review the operation every two months.⁴²

The second link between Operation Shujaa and roadworks has to do with Dott Services, the company which will implement the construction projects. According to the Ugandan minister of works and transport, the company was chosen and contracted by Congolese government.⁴³ A few things are noteworthy about the company.

(i) There was criticism of the choice of Dott Services for this road contract in the Ugandan parliament due to the quality of its past work.⁴⁴ Dott Services has had a long-standing conflict with the Uganda National Road Authority and has engaged in a series of legal battles related to the quality of its work. (See [Annex 1](#) for a more detailed overview of this.)

(ii) Very little criticism of the firm has emerged in the Ugandan press. Two Ugandan online journalists who had written about Dott Services' Congo road contract were arrested and detained for three weeks in May-June 2021, risking up to two years in prison, on accusations of criminal libel and defamation related to Dott Services.⁴⁵ The case was eventually dropped in December 2021, with the journalists receiving support from international human rights NGOs.⁴⁶ However, since then, no articles in the Ugandan press have critically analyzed this road contract.⁴⁷

(iii) The company is seen as an illustration of the importance of political connections in Uganda's business sector in general.⁴⁸ Dott Services is seen as particularly connected: some reports situate the company close to the first family;⁴⁹ other analysts in Kampala told us that the company is close to both the first family and other political-economic elites and that it has been pushing for the road project for a number of years.⁵⁰

(iv) In a further illustration of the importance of this company in the relations between the two countries, in December 2020, Dott Services signed a mining contract with Congolese state-owned mining company Sakima (Société Aurifère du Kivu et du Maniema), acquiring important mining sites in Maniema province.⁵¹ This will be explained in more detail below.

The road construction work is one part of complicated relations between the two countries. From the beginning of his mandate, President Tshisekedi has invested heavily in trying to establish better relations with his neighbors, especially Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.⁵² He also ex-



pressed his intention for a plan in which these countries would conduct military operations under the supervision of his army against the various insurgencies in Congo.⁵³ Similarly, Museveni had been working to improve ties with the Tshisekedi government; for example, by inviting a delegation of Congolese bishops to discuss the ADF insurgency in July 2019,⁵⁴ or by organizing a Uganda-Congo business forum in November 2019.⁵⁵

Yet, this mistrust has not disappeared, as highlighted by a source⁵⁶ close to the Congolese army.⁵⁷ A number of FARDC officers feel uncomfortable with the presence of the UPDF in Congolese territory, given their past invasions in Congo.⁵⁸ Moreover, the recent verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is also a stark reminder of their tense history. In February 2022, the ICJ ruled that Uganda should pay its neighbor 325 million USD for its role in the 1996-2003 Congo wars.⁵⁹ Among the Congolese public, there is also much distrust about the extent to which the roads will benefit their country.⁶⁰ This will depend on the extent to which the trade—which is largely informal at the moment—will be formal and taxed. Moreover, it is unclear who will benefit from the proposed road toll, although one press report suggested that this will be Dott Services, as a “return on investment.”⁶¹

The military operations and escalating tensions with Rwanda

In all these dynamics, it is important to emphasize the growing isolation of Rwanda and its tensions with Uganda.

Around the same time as Ugandan troops entered Congo, the Congolese government also turned a blind eye to the entry of Burundian troops to carry out targeted operations against the Burundian RED-Tabara rebels.⁶² This started in December 2021 and continued into 2022, with an estimated 380 soldiers.⁶³ In contrast, while both Uganda and Burundi have been allowed to conduct military operations in Congo, this is not the case for Rwanda.⁶⁴ As a result, Rwanda has become increasingly marginalized and has even perceived its neighbor’s interventions as a threat. President Kagame has on numerous occasions expressed his concern and disappointment at not being included in the military operation against the ADF.⁶⁵ He has emphasized the need for collaboration, arguing there is a direct link between the ADF, the FDLR, and other armed groups.⁶⁶ He also said that his country was considering “various mechanisms” to resolve the securi-

ty problems in eastern Congo,⁶⁷ which was understood by some as a veiled threat of military intervention.⁶⁸ In the words of a diplomat in the region, “Kigali sees the openness in Kinshasa towards Uganda and Burundi; and they feel surrounded by hostile regimes, making them increasingly isolated in the region.”⁶⁹

The recent announcement at the Nairobi summit in April 2022 can be seen as a way to engage with these tensions. In a joint statement, Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya announced political negotiations as well as military action against armed groups in Congo and demanded that “all foreign armed groups in the DRC must disarm and return unconditionally and immediately to their respective countries of origin.”⁷⁰

The tensions between Rwanda and Uganda date back to the two wars the countries fought against each other on Congolese soil in 1999 and 2000. Although there has been a recent rapprochement, with the re-opening of the Gatuna border crossing in late January 2022,⁷¹ the state of relations between Kigali and Kampala remains hard to gauge. Recent statements by Kagame such as, “We wish everybody in the region peace, but anyone who wishes us a war, we give it to him,”⁷² make clear that conflict is still possible. While General Abel Kandiho, whom Rwandan officials have accused of backing their enemies, was removed from Uganda’s powerful Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI), this conciliatory move was quickly followed by his appointment as the Joint Chief of Staff of the Ugandan police.⁷³

The road construction projects, in particular the road from Rutshuru to Goma, is similarly believed to pose a threat to Rwanda’s sphere of influence in eastern DRC. A number of diplomats and analysts told us that this road is seen as a red line by Rwandan officials, something that they have made clear to both Kinshasa and Kampala.⁷⁴

A similar distrust exists on the Ugandan side. Officials there have also suspected Rwanda of supporting the ADF.⁷⁵ The recent shuttle diplomacy of Uganda’s first son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, to Kigali can be understood as an attempt to attenuate these tensions. In the words of a diplomat, “The First Son did a lot to communicate the message: we’re not coming for you guys. We know the road is coming to your doorstep, and that this can be perceived as a provocation, but we’re not out there for a conflict.”



The resurgence of M23 and regional tensions

The M23 rebellion was defeated by a joint United Nations-FARDC offensive in November 2013, with the remaining troops fleeing to Rwanda and Uganda. Beginning in 2017, the M23 began launching isolated attacks against the Congolese army in the area around the Mount Sabinyo volcano. These attacks ramped up in November 2021, when the group staged several raids around the town of Rutshuru which further escalated in late March 2022, when M23 took over key areas in Rutshuru territory.⁷⁶

On the one hand, a number of observers argue that these attacks were the initiative of the M23, intended to force negotiations with the Congolese government, particularly in light of the recent launch of the P-DDRCS program (*Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery and Stabilization Program*).⁷⁷ The unilateral declaration of a ceasefire by M23 could be an indication of this, as it was intended to open dialogue with the government.⁷⁸

On the other hand, others interpret the M23's resurgence as a reaction by Kigali to Uganda's increasing influence and presence in eastern Congo.⁷⁹ Rwanda's backing of the M23 during 2012-2013 has been amply documented.⁸⁰ In several interviews, diplomats and analysts expressed suspicion that some kind of Rwandan support, triggered by tensions with Uganda, has also played a role in the renewed M23 activity.⁸¹ A few days before a large M23 attack on March 23, 2022, UPDF General Kayanja Muhanga gave a speech at the official launch of the Kasindi-Beni-Butembo road construction. He emphasized that they would not only build the Kasindi road, but the Rutshuru-Goma road.⁸² A number of sources point out that this speech was seen as a provocation by Rwanda.⁸³ Underscoring the links between the roads and military operations, the UPDF then intervened to protect Dott Services equipment in Bunagana during the M23 attack that followed that speech.⁸⁴

Access to Congo's minerals and regional tensions

Eastern Congo is an important source of minerals for both Uganda and Rwanda. The two countries have historically competed for access to minerals in eastern Congo; this competition has returned to the fore in recent years.

In November 2020, Dott Services signed a contract with the Congolese public sector mining company Sakima

(*Société Aurifère du Kivu et du Maniema*), through which it acquired strategically important mining sites in Maniema province that are rich in tin, tantalum, and tungsten, as well as gold.⁸⁵ In order to do so, it established the joint venture Punia Kasese Mining (PKM), in which Dott Services owns 70 percent of the shares.⁸⁶ The remaining 30 percent are owned by Sakima.⁸⁷ The contract also stipulates the creation of a processing factory for minerals and precious metals permission for the joint venture to launch infrastructure projects in the region, as well as the rehabilitation and development of hydroelectric assets.⁸⁸

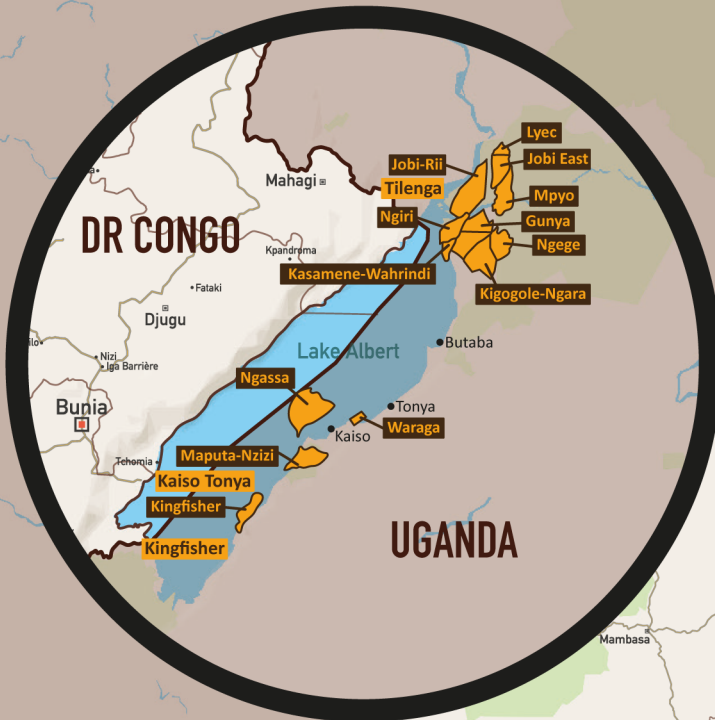
Given the sensitivity of involving neighboring countries in the exploitation of Congolese natural resources, this contract and the information about it has been tightly controlled by the presidency, which has fostered suspicion. Some civil society activists doubt whether the joint venture will really start, or fear Congolese will be on the losing end of the projects.⁸⁹

Not long after this, in late June 2021, a series of mining contracts were also signed between Rwanda and Congo. The first was signed between the countries' presidents, stipulating that gold produced by Sakima will be refined in Rwanda by the relatively unknown local company Dither Ltd. Moreover, according to one source, the shipments of gold would be secured by the armies of both countries, which could, as the source suggested, give the Rwandan Defense Forces "considerable scope to secure the mining supply chain in the DRC's eastern provinces."⁹⁰ Another contract, signed between Dither and Sakima in the same period, states that Dither will provide financing for "the beginning of mining operations."⁹¹

The Congolese presidency, instead of the mining ministry, was also reportedly involved in the negotiations over this latter contract, suggesting that officials see this as part of the rapprochement between the two countries.⁹²

This contract—the final version of which has not been made publicly available—led to serious concerns in both Congo and Kampala.⁹³ Gold constitutes a main source of Uganda's export earnings: in 2021, gold was Uganda's most important export product, worth 2.24 billion USD.⁹⁴ Most of this gold comes from Congo and a decline in access to Congolese gold would have major economic consequences.⁹⁵

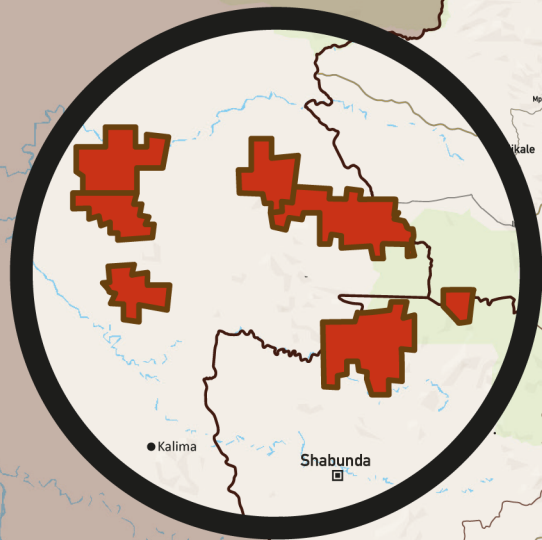
SUD SUDAN



OIL FIELDS

PIPELINE

**DOTT SERVICES
MINING CONCESSIONS**

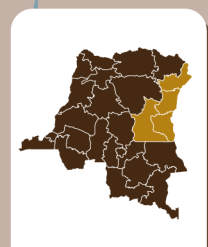


ROADS TO BE BUILT

**UPDF
MILITARY
OPERATIONS IN DRC**

18 miles
NORTH 18 kilometres

SOURCE: MAPBOX
© OPENSTREETMAP
CONTRIBUTORS



Sources
For mining concessions, these are approximate locations. The source is Congolese mining cadastre (<http://drcliences.cami.cd/>). For the oil fields in Uganda, the source is Ian Cloke, Shane Cowley and Robin Rindfuss, "Hydrocarbon Exploration History of Uganda," *GeoExPro*, Vol 15, No 5, 2018. For the UPDF operations, this is based on CRG/Ebuteli sources. For the roads, this is based on CRG/Ebuteli sources and "Le Groupe Dott Services, Constructeur Des Routes RDC-Ouganda A Acquis Des Sites Miniers Dans Le Maniema," *Congo Virtuel*, June 30, 2021.



Oil, Total, and France

Oil, TotalEnergies and a sense of urgency

There are major oil deposits on both the Congolese and Ugandan shores of Lake Albert. Based on interviews with sources in Uganda and Congo, we argue that providing security for the oil fields constitutes an important reason for the ongoing military operation. The multi-billion-dollar investments are a cornerstone of Museveni's economic and political strategy.

On February 1, 2022, in the midst of the Operation Shujaa, an investment deal worth over 10 billion USD was finalized on the oil project by President Museveni, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and TotalEnergies.⁹⁶ The Lake Albert region is estimated to hold between 1 and 1.4 billion barrels, making Uganda the country with the fifth largest reserves in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁷ The region hosts the Tilenga project, operated by TotalEnergies, and Kingfisher by CNOOC.

The upcoming 2026 elections in Uganda create a sense of urgency for this project, with oil supposed to start flowing in 2025. This in turn may be a major influence on the Ugandan military intervention.

This urgency is also present for TotalEnergies, which is the main investor for Tilenga⁹⁸ and for the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) that will transport the oil through a 1,443 kilometer pipeline to the Tanzanian port of Tanga.⁹⁹ Total is under pressure, as this project takes place in a context of increasing criticism of fossil fuel investments, and particularly of new oil investments, due to the climate crisis.¹⁰⁰ At COP26 in Glasgow, the French government, whose support is particularly important for TotalEnergies, made promises to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, becoming a member of the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance. As part of this move, France pledged to phase out all oil and gas exploration and production on its mainland and overseas territories by 2040.¹⁰¹ Moreover, TotalEnergies is under pressure from its shareholders to re-orient itself toward more sustainable energies.¹⁰²

This context has already impacted the funding of the project. In March and April 2021, a range of financial backers—the African Development Bank, 11 commercial banks (including Barclays and BNP Paribas)—and three insurance companies¹⁰³ pulled their support from EACOP after pressure and criticism from the international coalition StopEACOP.

There has also been strident criticism of the human rights impact of the project: TotalEnergies is being sued in France by six NGOs for failing to adequately assess the Tilenga project's threat to human rights and the environment.¹⁰⁴ TotalEnergies' engagement with the Museveni regime has also been criticized as activists, journalists, and civil society representatives working on these issues in Uganda have been intimidated and harassed, an issue which has been raised by four separate special UN representatives.¹⁰⁵ In November 2021, a European diplomatic mission was also abruptly expelled from the area.¹⁰⁶

This does not mean TotalEnergies will pull out. On the contrary, Tilenga is important to the company strategy, as it needs new projects to compensate for the dwindling deposits it holds in other African countries such as Gabon or Angola.¹⁰⁷ However, it does increase pressure to begin extracting oil soon.

After having progressed very slowly for a long time, the process has accelerated considerably in recent years. In 2020, the Ugandan government allowed the resolution of a longstanding tax dispute in TotalEnergies' advantage, allowing the company to buy Tullow Oil's assets in the country. The legislative and regulatory framework has also been modified to favor oil exploitation.¹⁰⁸ One report by an industry publication even claimed that the Ugandan authorities have "conceded to all of the demands" of Total, and that the company has been given "carte blanche."¹⁰⁹

This acceleration was particularly noticeable during the last year. On April 11, 2021, a series of agreements were signed between Uganda, Tanzania, and Total for the construction of the 3.5 billion USD pipeline.¹¹⁰ In September 2021, the Ugandan government introduced a law—the EACOP Act—to set out the fiscal and economic regulations for the pipeline, including a series of tax exemptions.¹¹¹ This act was passed into law by parliament in December 2021.¹¹²

These massive investments require security. Both the Ugandan government and TotalEnergies want to avoid a scenario like that in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, where an insurgency put TotalEnergies' multi-billion-dollar investment on hold.¹¹³ As one analyst told us: "Investors are particularly nervous about the prospect of attacks on oil infrastructure; there is a multi-billion investment on the line (...) A pipeline attack would be catastrophic, as would be *force majeure* on wells."¹¹⁴

For this reason, the oil-rich area has become increasingly militarized, including by the French government.¹¹⁵ Since



2016, the French military has been training Ugandan troops in mountain warfare and in 2019 the new Mountain Brigade was officially inaugurated.¹¹⁶ The protection of oil was explicitly acknowledged as a central reason for its existence: in 2018, the Chief of Defense Forces General David Muhoozi said that the Albertine region “needs serious protection for the young oil industry to thrive,”¹¹⁷ regarding French-Uganda military collaboration. This might explain why Operation Shujaa is expanding its operations into Ituri province and has been engaging with armed groups other than the ADF. On February 11, 2022, the UPDF and FARDC, for example, clashed with *Force Patriotique et Intégrationniste du Congo* (FPIC) rebels as they were trying to loot cattle.¹¹⁸ A traditional chief in this area expressed his gratitude toward the UPDF for not only engaging with the ADF, but also with the CODECO armed group.¹¹⁹

Lastly, it also is worth mentioning that there are oil blocks on the Congolese side of Lake Albert. Pumping oil from there, in addition to the Ugandan side, would increase the cost effectiveness of the expensive EACOP pipeline. Although TotalEnergies sold its shares in this particular oil block in 2019,¹²⁰ it still is considered to be the only serious contender: given its activities on the other side of the Lake, the relative investment would be lower.¹²¹

France, TotalEnergies, and support for the ongoing military operations

France has played an important role in supporting these military operations. Both the Ugandan and Congolese troops involved in the current operations have received training from the French army. The UPDF in Congo are mostly members of the Mountain Brigade, trained by the French, while some Congolese troops participating in Operation Shujaa have been trained in jungle combat. A first FARDC battalion was trained in 2021 by the French (in Gabon) in jungle combat,¹²² and a second battalion is currently undergoing training.¹²³

Reporting by NGOs has also highlighted the support by the French government for TotalEnergies.¹²⁴ This manifests itself in Uganda, where French diplomats are increasingly considered an outlier by fellow European countries, given their strong emphasis on economic interests with less attention paid to democracy and governance.¹²⁵

An illustration of this is the strong message of support from French President Emmanuel Macron to President

Museveni shortly after the controversial 2021 elections in Uganda, hoping to “deepen the friendship between our two countries, and to develop a relationship of trust in all areas of mutual interest, both political and economic.”¹²⁶ Other western diplomats considered this odd, as they questioned the legitimacy of the 2021 elections given the use of extreme violence by state security forces, including the 54 people killed during two days of protests in November 2021, as well as electoral irregularities.¹²⁷ A journalist argued “Macron’s message went significantly beyond other diplomatic messages in the same period (...) the tone and content of the message was considered inappropriate by many.” Oil played an important role, as was made explicit in Macron’s letter. He stated he wanted to “fast-track the construction of the EACOP Oil pipeline saying it will be a major opportunity to intensify trade between the two countries and to further expand their cooperation.”¹²⁸ Tellingly, the letter was made public by the Ugandan presidency, not by France.

There is a parallel with the Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, where TotalEnergies also has a liquified natural gas project, and where the Rwandan army has been conducting operations since July 2021. Shortly before the operations were launched, Macron met with Kagame and issued a statement supporting military operations in Mozambique.¹²⁹ Some analysts suspect that France is financing these operations through an increase in their development aid to Rwanda, which is denied by Kigali.¹³⁰ Sources point out that more recently, France has been putting pressure on the EU to finance Rwandan operations in the area.¹³¹

Conclusions

Seven months after the launch of Operation Shujaa by the UPDF in the eastern Congo, it is clear the military operations are not the success they are portrayed to be in the Ugandan press. While the operation did succeed in creating isolated pockets of security, it has not managed to structurally weaken the ADF. It is also questionable whether the UPDF have the capacity to do so, given the vast terrain and the limited ambitions of the Ugandan government. Similar dynamics have played out in previous military operations against the ADF. Since the first such operations in 1996, by the UPDF, FARDC, and UN peacekeepers, the ADF has proven resilient, mobile, and adaptive.¹³²



This paper describes the political and economic interests behind these operations. Overall, in addition to security interests, the Ugandan government is focused on securing its oil investments and bolstering trade networks, imperatives driven by the declining legitimacy of the regime.

On the one hand, the military operations will allow the construction of roads, which is being carried out by a politically connected company. These roads will serve Uganda's trade policies: given Congo's recent joining of the East African Community, this infrastructure will strengthen trade with Congo, particularly the export of Ugandan products.

On the other hand, the military operations also aim at securing oil projects around Lake Albert. There is a particular sense of urgency here: TotalEnergies is under significant time pressure, as is President Museveni, who would like to have oil flowing before the end of his term in 2026. Both actors want to avoid a "Cabo Delgado" scenario, in which insurgents threaten a multi-billion investment. The Ugandan government has been pushing to enter Congo for some years, given that it would serve many of the above purposes. The bombings provided the necessary impetus for this. This does not mean—as some conspiracy theories suggest—that the Kampala bombings were a setup, or that the ongoing operations do not serve any military purpose. Instead, we argue that these military objectives are intertwined with a range of other goals and that by emphasizing the "extraordinary military success," attention is taken away from these other purposes.

Lastly, Ugandan intervention has also created a potentially explosive regional situation with Kigali. The current military operation takes place in a context of already tense relations between Uganda and Rwanda, driven by security concerns and access to minerals in eastern Congo. The operations and the road infrastructure expand Uganda's sphere of influence in the region and could potentially lead to a further escalation of these tensions.



Annex: Dott Services

Dott Services has a contested history in Uganda. As early as 2012, Uganda parliament's Physical Infrastructure Committee had "urged the government to stop Dott Services Limited from accessing government contracts due to the road construction company's dismal performance," as it had "failed to complete most of its assignments" and "lacked the capacity to do quality work."¹³³

In 2015, Dott Services signed a contract for the rehabilitation of a 102 kilometer road (between Nakalama-Tirinyi-Mbale), but this was terminated by the Uganda National Road Authority (UNRA), citing major delays in the execution of the project.¹³⁴

Dott Services has been in an almost constant legal battle with UNRA for the last fifteen years. For example, one case began in 2016 concerning a project that from 2010, in which UNRA had sued Dott Services for 21 billion Ugandan shillings. This case led to a string of suits filed in the High Court and also involved a petition to the parliament—where the company's directors appeared before the Committee on Commissions, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (COSASE) in November 2016.¹³⁵ The case was eventually dismissed in 2021.¹³⁶ In 2018, Dott Services then sued UNRA for additional payments of \$10.2 billion for the reconstruction of the Mbale-Soroti road.¹³⁷

A 2016 UNRA commission of inquiry accused Dott Services of poor planning, an excessive revision of time and costs, as well as lacking adequate personnel and equipment, all of which led to financial loss for UNRA. The commission of inquiry recommended the company be blacklisted. The company contested this and a January 2017 High Court decision nullified the findings and recommendations of the commission of inquiry.¹³⁸ However, shortly after this, in April 2017, President Museveni decided to blacklist the company, arguing that he had "received several credible information relating to fraudulent dealings by Dott Services that are not acceptable," and stating that the company had "exploited weakness in our judicial systems to quash the portion of the report that relates to them."¹³⁹

However, a few months later, in November 2017, Museveni reversed this decision and lifted the ban. He argued that the war on corruption was important but supporting local companies—in this case, Dott Services—was more important. "I advise you to follow my method/advice to this war of corruption but also creating a base for our children and grandchildren to be employed. This is why I have at least once pardoned Ugandan companies when they make mistakes."¹⁴⁰ (Although, as one site pointed out, the principal owners of Dott Services are of Indian origin.)¹⁴¹

In September 2022, the Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development summoned Dott Services over delayed works.¹⁴²



Endnotes

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