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## **Geopolitics of Conflict Minerals: A case study of Rwanda and Uganda from a Realist perspective**

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# GEOPOLITICS OF CONFLICT MINERALS

*A case study of Rwanda and Uganda from a Realist perspective*

## Master's Thesis

Master of Arts in International Relations  
Specialisation Global Conflict in the Modern Era  
Universiteit Leiden, The Netherlands

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## Abstract

This thesis conducts a comparative case study analysis of the differing strategies of Rwanda and Uganda in managing conflict minerals from the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the objective to contribute to a nuanced understanding of power dynamics and security imperatives in the African Great Lakes Region. By applying a realist theoretical International Relations framework, this study analyses how the respective strategies of Rwanda and Uganda reflect their economic, security, and geopolitical interests, as well as the implications for regional stability. The methodology of this thesis relies on a systematic document analysis of UNSC Group of Experts reports, complemented with research reports by NGOs and think tanks. This thesis reveals that Rwanda's policies combine centralised and confrontational strategies with its historical security narrative, whereas Uganda's policies focus on maintaining entrenched smuggling networks and strategic use of minerals to boost its economy and regional significance. The comparative analysis illustrates how both countries use conflict minerals to enhance their geopolitical position in the region, thereby contributing to regional instability and a security dilemma.

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## List of Acronyms

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AFDL	Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire
AGLR	African Great Lakes Region
ASM	Artisanal and small-scale mining
ASGM	Artisanal and small-scale gold mining
AU	African Union
CAHRA	Conflict-affected and high-risk areas
CNDP	National Congress for the Defence of the People
CODECO	Cooperative for Development of the Congo
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IR	International Relations
ITSCI	International Tin Supply Chain Initiative
KPCS	Kimberley Process Certification Scheme
MONUC	United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
M23	March 23 Movement / Congolese Revolutionary Army
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RDF	Rwanda Defence Force
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SADC	South African Development Community
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
US	United States
3T	Tin, Tantalum and Tungsten
3TG	Tin, Tantalum, Tungsten and Gold

## Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the second-largest country in Africa and is endowed with natural resources, particularly a wide range of minerals. However, for decades the DRC is plagued by violent conflict, political instability, and extreme poverty. The government fails to effectively restrain the numerous armed rebel groups in the eastern provinces of the DRC. For the past twenty years, so-called conflict minerals, namely tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold (3TG), have gained international attention for their role in financing armed groups and perpetuating violence in the DRC. This scenario has created a compelling and sensitive context for neighbouring states, especially Rwanda and Uganda, to become entangled in the DRC's affairs, driven by the magnetic pull of its mineral wealth and further complicated by historical ethnical tensions and power balances.

International efforts aimed at regulating and challenging the illegal trade in conflict minerals have included initiatives such as the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation (2017) and the Dodd-Frank Act Wall Street Reform & Consumer Protection Section 1502 (2010). However, according to a multitude of critical assessments (Stoop et al., 2018; Stork, 2016; Partzsch, 2018; Okowa, 2020), including a recent study by PAX/IPIS (Hoex et al., 2023), one can generally conclude that these efforts have so far proved ineffective. The trade and regulation of conflict minerals from the Democratic Republic of Congo thus present a complex issue, intertwining global economics, regional politics, human rights concerns, and violence. Therefore, this research aims to untangle part of these threads, focusing on the differing strategies adopted by Rwanda and Uganda in their engagement with the DRC's conflict minerals. It seeks to investigate why these two border-states have diverged in their approach to exploiting and regulating these resources. The relevance of this inquiry from a realist International Relations (IR) perspective is grounded in the theory's emphasis on the state as the central actor in the international system, driven by competitive self-interest to ensure its survival and enhance its power. This thesis will therefore address the following questions: How do Rwanda and Uganda's differing strategies in managing conflict minerals from the DRC reflect their respective national interests in power and security, and what are the strategic geopolitical implications of these approaches for regional stability from a realist perspective in International Relations?



Existing literature has so far overlooked the differing strategies of Rwanda and Uganda in managing conflict minerals. What are their roles, interests, and strategies in either perpetuating or mitigating regional instability? By exploring how their national interests in power and security shape approaches to the DRC's mineral wealth, as well as their implications for regional stability, this thesis shifts the focus from international regulatory efforts to the geopolitical interests of these regional actors. The analysis of this research attempts to provide a nuanced understanding of the conflict mineral trade dynamics in the African Great Lakes Region. In addition, this study enriches the current international relations discourse through the application of key structural realist concepts to analyse state behaviour. Therefore, this thesis will particularly be of interests for students and scholars in the disciplines of international relations, conflict studies, and African political studies, as well as international policymakers.

The structure of this thesis aims to systematically explore the differing strategic dynamics surrounding Rwanda and Uganda's role in managing conflict minerals from the DRC. For the purpose of clarity, it has been structured as follows: First, the literature review, theoretical framework, conceptual framework, and methodological section establish a comprehensive foundation to guide the research process. Subsequently, chapter one provides a contextual analysis, delving into the historical background of conflict in the DRC and the extent of its mineral wealth. Next, chapter Two and Three present detailed case studies of respectively Rwanda and Uganda's historical and contemporary engagements with conflict minerals from the DRC, particularly highlighting their policies regarding regulation, security, international reputation, and economic interests. Moreover, these chapters contain an in-depth analysis of evidence of the role of Rwanda and Uganda in eastern DRC in the period between 2019 and 2023, as provided by the Group of Experts of the United Nations Security Council.<sup>1</sup> These can Then, chapter Four conducts a comparative analysis while applying a realist International Relations perspective to assess and discuss the geopolitical implications of the differing strategies of Rwanda and Uganda. Finally, the conclusion recapitulates the findings that emerge from the comparative case study analyses and stipulates the relevance of this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Additionally, appendices A – G provide an elaborated version of the conducted in-depth analyses, as well as complementary information that contributes to the necessary contextual understanding of the topics discussed.

# Literature Review

## International attention and regulatory initiatives

The issue of conflict minerals has increasingly captured both public and academic attention, yet substantial academic literature on this topic has been limited since the turn of the century. Initially, academic focus regarding the link between conflict and natural resources particularly dealt with the issue of blood diamonds, a notion that became significantly popular since the 1990s (Samset, 2002). However, the growing relevance of minerals essential for electronic devices, and the publication of United Nations (UN) reports that highlighted the illegal trade in natural resources from the DRC (UNSC, 2001a), shifted the focus to the broader concept of conflict minerals. In recent years, the discourse on conflict minerals has not only continued but also grown in intensity and relevance, particularly with the establishment of a multitude of regulatory initiatives (IISS, 2024).

Whereas the global attention for the issue is welcomed, implementation of these efforts often falls short. Criticism of Western legislative efforts and attempts to regulate the trade in conflict minerals, referring to initiatives such as the Dodd-Frank Act Section 1502 (2010) and the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation (2017), argues mainly that such initiatives do not consider the localised dynamics, consequences nor the actual needs of the people in conflict areas. By imposing solutions that do not align with the on-ground realities, such initiatives often fall short, thus failing to mitigate the conflict as intended (Matthyssen et al., 2013). This critique is essential as it highlights the disconnect between international policies and their practical impacts on conflict zones. Nevertheless, there are also certain studies that evaluate the international intervention more optimistically and believe that cutting off the supply chain through regulation can contribute to more sustainable management of resources in the DRC (Taka, 2016). These theorists tend to move away from the so-called ‘curse theorists’, as part of an academic debate about natural resources being a ‘curse’ or ‘blessing’ for developing and conflict countries, and suggest that, under the right condition, they could indeed become a ‘blessing’ (van der Ploeg, 2011; Frankel, 2012).

This heightened focus not only reflects the critical role of minerals as a catalyst for conflict, but also their economic significance and direct link to global markets. Although there is

consensus among scholars about a clear link between conflict (violence) and natural resources (minerals), there is yet an ongoing debate about its underlying mechanisms, motivations, and the scope of its role in conflict in the DRC.

### Natural resources: drivers of conflict?

Le Billon (2001) fundamentally argues that in regions such as the DRC, armed conflicts are frequently motivated by the control over natural resources, which are also crucial in funding these conflicts. He asserts that such resource integration exacerbates economic dependencies and shifts social structures, thereby intensifying conflicts (Le Billon, 2001; 2014). Expanding on this, Humphreys (2005) in his data-informed study suggests that the likelihood of conflict is more tightly linked to past natural resource production than to future prospects. This observation points to the predominance of "weak states" (i.e., states with limited ability to govern effectively) rather than "rebel greed" (i.e., conflict driven by rebels their desire for economic gain) as a key driver of conflict. However, somewhat contradictory, Humphreys also highlights that the influence of natural resources on conflicts transcends state strength, with external actors frequently rushing to military interventions to safeguard their economic interests, often at the expense of local well-being (Humphreys, 2005). Arguably, this situation underscores the urgent need for careful discussions concerning international involvement in conflicts over resources.

Autesserre (2012) challenges the dominant perspectives that often attribute the ongoing violence in eastern DRC solely to the illicit exploitation of natural resources. She argues that this reductionist view overlooks critical socio-economic and political factors such as land disputes, systemic poverty, endemic corruption, and volatile state-citizen relations, which are equally important in driving the region's instability (Autesserre, 2012). This broadens the discourse beyond mineral wealth, suggesting that the complexity of local conflicts is often simplified in international narratives. Furthering this viewpoint, Simpson (2013) emphasises that in Eastern Congo, societal survival relies on informal economic networks and often predatory military entrepreneurialism, that use minerals not merely for control but as essential responses to ongoing instability. Nonetheless, while Autesserre effectively critiques the oversimplification of attributing violence solely to conflict minerals, and Simpson indicates an essential local perspective, their arguments risk to underplay or overlook the central role that

the political and economic agendas of neighbouring countries, particularly Rwanda and Uganda, play in both fuelling the conflict through their pursuit of control over mineral resources and in shaping regional dynamics and international intervention strategies.

Adding another layer to understanding the complexities of conflict, specifically rebel dynamics, Fjelde & Nilsson (2012) discuss why rebel groups not only fight against governments but also engage in conflicts with each other. They suggest that violence between rebel groups is a strategic move to secure material resources and political leverage, which are crucial for sustaining their campaigns against state forces (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012). This intra-rebel violence is an essential factor in the broader conflict landscape, highlighting the multifaceted nature of warfare in resource-rich areas. Moreover, this type of literature refers to the debate about where the cause of resource-related conflict lies. An interesting contribution to the debate was raised by Marie Lamensch, pointing out the “misconception that the cycle of violence in the DRC is caused by conflict minerals” (Lamensch, 2014). Instead, she argues, illegal mineral exploitation is a consequence of the war. However, this research analysis will demonstrate that the context in the DRC is too complex to rely on causal ambiguities and requires a more sophisticated approach to understanding conflict minerals.

'The Geopolitics of Resource Wars' edited by Le Billon (2005) offers explanations of the geopolitical underpinnings that could influence the strategies of Rwanda and Uganda regarding the DRC's conflict minerals. The book argues that the political and economic vulnerabilities associated with resource-dependency play a significant role in shaping the actions of these countries. It outlines how the geopolitics of resource competition, intertwined with factors like history, identity formation, and the political economy of resource exploitation, crucially impacts the strategies that nations adopt in resource-rich conflict zones. By highlighting these dimensions, the authors of the edited book provide a broader geopolitical context that helps explain why Rwanda and Uganda might pursue different regulatory and exploitation strategies in response to their specific vulnerabilities and strategic interests (Le Billon (ed.), 2005, pp.1-28). Thus, this perspective complements existing discussions on local dynamics and international interventions, enriching the analysis of how these nations' policies are reflections of their broader national interests within the complex geopolitical landscape of the African Great Lakes Region (AGLR).

## Research Gap

Arguably, one of the most notable contributions to the available research on the issue of conflict minerals in the DRC is a study by Kazuyo Hanai (2021), a PhD graduate at the University of Tokyo. Hanai studies the impact of conflict mineral regulation (specifically due diligence) on the behaviours and interests of actors, including Rwanda and Uganda, related to conflict mineral trade in the DRC. Her analysis investigates whether approaches of the international community towards regulating this issue have caused any changes to the mechanisms connecting resources and conflicts (Hanai, 2021). More specifically, Hanai examines possible changes in the behaviour ('mechanisms', derived from political economy studies) of actors (particular armed groups and governments, but also companies), distinguished by respectively motivation and means as variables, to explain both the outbreak and continuation of conflict. In essence, her study provides valuable insights into how international regulatory frameworks (do not) impact regional mineral politics. Besides, her work contextualises the complexity of regulatory impacts, thereby offering a critical understanding of the environment in which Rwanda and Uganda operate and how this might influence strategic policy choices.

Notably, Hanai assesses the so-called "greedy outsiders mechanism," at which natural resources incentivise third parties (states and corporations) to engage in or foster civil conflicts (Hanai, 2021, p.4). Additionally, her study outlines several allegations of external (neighbouring) interference related to conflict minerals in the DRC, concluding that external actors play a role in the conflict related to the DRC's minerals to a "certain extent" (idem, p. 9). This aligns with my research, which specifically focuses on the engagements of Rwanda and Uganda with the DRC's minerals. However, Hanai's study refrains from specifying the interests and the associated potential considerations for these actions, although underlining its significance. In contrast, my research explores these states' actions through a strategic (realist) lens that recognises the intricate interplay of geopolitical interests and conflict.

The existing literature on conflict minerals in the DRC has made significant progress in understanding the effect of international regulatory initiatives on the trade of conflict minerals and the occurrence of conflict. However, there is a notable lack of recent academic literature specifically addressing the evolving dynamics and contemporary strategies of external states, such as Uganda and Rwanda, in the DRC's conflict mineral trade. Most of the available

literature tends to emphasise the direct relationship between conflict and mineral trade, while overlooking the broader geopolitical context and national motivations that drive these neighbouring states' actions in the region. In addition, the majority of studies have, justifiably, examined the intricate dynamics within the DRC itself. However, an analysis limited to one state does not fully capture the likewise intricate regional context and influential interplay of geopolitical interests. Hence, to gain a more holistic understanding of the multifaceted issues surrounding conflict minerals in the AGLR, it is beneficial to add a comprehensive analysis that transcends national boundaries. Thus, by addressing this identified research gap, this study can contribute to understanding contemporary and future manoeuvres of Rwanda and Uganda, and potentially other involving actors, in navigating the complex issue of conflict minerals.

The diverse interpretations discussed in this literature review underline the complexity of the conflict-mineral nexus in the region and challenge simplistic explanations. Accordingly, this research emphatically recognises that any effective approach to understanding or intervening in the issue of conflict minerals, must consider a myriad of factors, including local economic practices and inter-rebel dynamics, as well as broader geopolitical and historical contexts. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is deliberately narrowed to critically examine the differing political strategies of Rwanda and Uganda regarding their engagement with the DRC's conflict minerals. Thus, this focused approach attempts to avoid simplistic or incomplete explanations and does not claim to cover the entire range of issues surrounding conflict minerals in the region but aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of one part of the larger narrative. Specifically, it examines examining the critical role of political agendas from external, regional actors in the exploitation and (lack of) regulation of resources from the DRC.

## Theoretical Framework

This study employs a realist framework to analyse how Rwanda and Uganda manage conflict minerals from the DRC, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the strategic motivations behind their involvement in the DRC as well as the strategic implications for regional stability.

### Structural Realism

An examination of conflict minerals from the DRC and the differing approaches adopted by Rwanda and Uganda in managing these resources provide a critical case study for International Relations (IR) theory, as it highlights how states navigate complex geopolitical and economic landscapes. In addition, little academic literature is devoted to scrutinising conflict minerals and its associated considerations and imperatives from an IR theory perspective. The increasing global focus on renewable energy sources escalates the demand for specific minerals, many of which available in the DRC, emphasising the need to examine how such resources influence international relations and state behaviour in a multipolar world (de Ridder, 2013). By utilising a realist perspective to examine the various policies, this thesis aims to reveal the underlying power dynamics and security imperatives that guide state behaviour in the AGLR.

As arguably the most dominant theory in the field of International Relations, realism emphasises the competitive and conflictual nature of international politics. Central to realism is the assumption that states are the primary actors in an anarchic international system, where the absence of an overarching authority leads states to prioritise their own security and power (Dunne et al., 2001, p.72). Underpinning this view is the belief that the international system is characterised by a constant power struggle among states, driven by the need to ensure their own survival and maintain sovereignty. Thus, this power-centric perspective views international relations as a zero-sum game in which the gain of one state often implies the loss of another, driving states towards actions that enhance their own power at the expense of others (Waltz, 1979, p.70).

This study utilises the structural realist (or neorealist) narrative which particularly focuses on the structure and characteristics of the international system that forces states to pursue power, rather than human nature, as suggested by classical realists such as Hans Morgenthau (1948). Structural realism thus argues that it is not the aggressive tendencies of statesmen, types of regimes or national ethos that dictate state behaviour, but foremost the anarchic order of the international system that forces states to act in a power-seeking manner (Dunne et al., 2001, 72). Moreover, the structural realist framework can be distinguished into two main currents: defensive realism and offensive realism. Defensive realism posits that states are primarily concerned with maintaining a balance of power to secure their position and avoid conflict, focusing on ‘appropriate’ self-preservation rather than expansion (Waltz, 1979, p. 109, 126). Offensive realism, on the other hand, argues that states inherently seek to maximise their power and influence to achieve regional or global hegemony as a means of security, driven by the uncertain intents of other states (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 31). For example, while the defensive realist narrative may suggest that both Rwanda and Uganda engage with minerals from the DRC to secure their borders or prevent adversaries from gaining strength (i.e., balance of power), offensive realism might interpret their actions as a strategy to enhance their own power and regional dominance. This dual-framework analysis thus enables a comprehensive exploration of the motivations and strategies behind Rwanda and Uganda's involvement in the DRC, crucial for understanding the broader geopolitical implications of their actions on regional security and international diplomacy.

## Critique

Nevertheless, it is also important to spotlight and nuance some of the legitimate critiques on realism, particularly its simplification of highly complex international interactions to mere power dynamics. As (neo)liberal theorists such as Keohane and Nye (2012)<sup>2</sup> have pointed out, realism may not sufficiently account for the roles and impacts of non-state actors, internal factors, or the multitude of transnational interactions that shape international relations. By focusing too much on the state as a solid unit, realism thus tends to overlook other actors (e.g., rebel groups) and variable forces (e.g., economics, environment) that are not directly linked to the survival of the state (Antunes & Camisão, 2017, p. 17). Moreover, Keohane and Nye argue

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<sup>2</sup> Their book *Power and Interdependence* was first published in 1977 by Little, Brown, and Company (Boston, USA). This thesis used the fourth edition (2012).



that in a system that is characterised or governed by complex interdependence, issues are not arranged in a consistent hierarchy, stating, “this absence of hierarchy among issues means, among other things, that military security does not consistently dominate the agenda.” (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p.20). However, the hierarchical emphasis on security goals within realism is somewhat nuanced by Mearsheimer, who argues that states can also pursue non-security goals, “as long as the requisite behaviour does not conflict with balance-of-power logic”, which would often be the case (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 25). Essentially, realism does address other aspects outside the security paradigm. Economics are inherently linked to survival in an anarchic international system, as economic capabilities are considered crucial for maintaining and enhancing military power (Waltz, 1979, p.94). Further expanding this view, Robin Gilpin explicitly links economic factors with state power, while describing how economic wealth is sought to ensure security, and examining the interplay between economic change, political stability, and military conflict (Gilpin, 1998).

The critiques of realism therefore provide a platform for its evolution, incorporating broader issues that influence state behaviour. Nils Gleditsch (1998) addresses the topic of resource scarcity and environmental degradation in relation to conflict from a realist perspective. He emphasises how these issues intersect with state interests and power dynamics in international relations. Additionally, an article by Travis Sharp on resource conflicts provides a more topical extension to the role of resources within the realist school of thought, likewise laying emphasis on the strategic and economic significance of natural resources. In his argument, Sharp states that the control of mineral wealth is crucial not only for enhancing national power but also for maintaining state security and advancing broader geopolitical objectives; it serves as a fundamental element in the power strategies of states within the anarchic international system (Sharp, 2007). Thus, by also considering both economic and environmental factors as integral components of strategic state behaviour, this nuanced approach to realism offers a comprehensive and interesting framework for analysing the geopolitics of conflict minerals.

### Alternative schools of thought in International Relations

Of course, there are also alternative, more optimistic theories to apply to an analysis of conflict mineral dynamics in the AGLR. Liberalism in IR argues that states can achieve more through cooperation and (economic) interdependence than through conflict, while highlighting

the importance of international institutions and (democratic) norms in regulating state behaviour and promoting peace (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Meiser, 2017, p. 22). With its emphasis on restraints of (military) power, liberalism is considered the opposite of realism. Liberalism provides a valuable framework for assessing the international initiatives, such as due diligence policies, and the commitments made by Rwanda and Uganda in challenging the trade in conflict minerals. However, most of the established regulatory frameworks have proven to be ineffective to date (Stoop et al., 2018; Stork, 2016; Partzsch, 2018; Okowa, 2020), or are yet to be critically assessed due to a lack of data results, although prospects are disappointing (Hoex et al., 2023). In addition, the reality of state behaviour in the region is multifaceted and particularly characterised by conflict tensions, resource competition, a lack of cooperation and often bypassing international liberal (democratic) norms. Hence, this context underscores the relevance of a realist approach to these case studies.

As a third dominant school of thought in International Relations, constructivism emphatically rejects the dominant focus on the state. Constructivists argue that the study of international relations should emphasise the ideas and beliefs that shape the actions of individual actors, as well as the shared understandings (collectively ideational factors) that influence the socially constructed world politics (Jackson & Sørensen, 2010, p. 209). In other words, social and political constructs (identities), rather than material conditions (e.g., military power), would primarily shape international relations. Consequently, constructivism suggests that reality is always under construction, allowing for changes in the international system as the ideas and beliefs of actors evolve (Theys, 2017, p. 37). Alexander Wendt interestingly encapsulates this by stating that “anarchy is what states make of it,” indicating that the state of anarchy in international relations varies based on the meaning states ascribe to their interactions and relationships (Wendt, 1992, p. 394). Constructivism thus offers valuable insights into how identity and normative factors shape regional dynamics. For instance, it can provide a deeper understanding of how historical relations and cultural contexts shape the strategic approaches to conflicts and policy decisions.<sup>3</sup> However, while there exists extensive research on historical conflicts within the region, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific policy strategies states employ regarding the regulation and exploitation of conflict minerals; policies

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<sup>3</sup> Besides, a comprehensive analysis through a constructivist perspective would arguably require resources for field research and access to necessary qualitative literature and data to collect subjective perceptions (i.e., ideas and beliefs) of the various local actors. Hence, the lack of existing research and limited access to the region prevents the author of this study from such research.

that are inherently linked to economy and security (Vogel, 2022, p. 15) Therefore, while acknowledging the significance of other perspectives, this research argues that a realist approach best aligns with the material focused policies concerning conflict minerals from the DRC. Realism offers a structured framework and state-centric approach for examining the strategies of Rwanda and Uganda in navigating the (geo)politics of conflict minerals in the region.

## Realpolitik

*Realpolitik* originates from 19<sup>th</sup> century German politics and stresses a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. Its strong emphasis on state power and national interests therefore contrasts with moral and ideological concerns, aspects that are arguably more accepted within strands of constructivism and liberalism. Realpolitik however closely aligns with structural realism in IR, emphasising the objective of states to pursue power and security due to the anarchic character of the international system (Waltz, 1979, p. 117). This alignment underscores how states navigate system constraints through Realpolitik, actively shaping their power-seeking behaviours to reflect immediate and strategic priorities. Thus, whereas structural realism provides a theoretical framework to explain state behaviour, realpolitik is more like a pragmatic approach or method in power dynamics, defined by rationality. Although it can be helpful to elucidate particular actions taken by Rwanda and Uganda to exploit and utilise conflict minerals from the DRC, its primary use in this thesis will be to assess whether the strategies of Rwanda and Uganda are driven by short-term or long-term motivations. Hence, it serves as a lens to distinguish between immediate gains versus strategic, enduring interests, complementing the structural realist perspective by adding a layer of analysis that scrutinises the temporal nature of their actions.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this thesis provides a structured lens through which the intricate dynamics of conflict minerals are investigated. The following theoretical constructs help guide the analysis of how conflict minerals impact regional stability and governance, as well as international relations. This paradigm clarifies the strategic intentions and behaviours of state actors, in this case Rwanda and Uganda, within the contextual concept of conflict minerals from the DRC by utilising realist perspectives. Understanding these concepts is crucial if one is to comprehend the larger effects of conflict mineral exploitation on a regional and international level.

### Conflict minerals

The issue of conflict minerals gained international prominence in the early 2000s, during the Second Congo War, when UN reports provided evidence and clear indications that the trade in minerals from the DRC contributed to the financing and sustaining of armed groups and instability in the region (UNSC, 2001a). Although the conflict in the DRC brought the issue to the forefront, the involvement of armed forces in mining in Congo can be traced back to colonial occupation. Various actors in conflict, driven by both the need to fund wars and the opportunity for profit, have turned to trading conflict minerals as part of a broader range of revenue-generating strategies (Vogel, 2022, p.3). Since then, the illegal exploitation and trade of minerals became a significant concern to international organisations and corporations, prompting NGOs and UN investigations to highlight these activities (Global Witness, 2009a), aligning with the scholarly hypotheses of 'resource wars' (Le Billon, 2005).

Conflict minerals are specifically defined as tin (cassiterite), tantalum (coltan), tungsten (wolframite), and gold, collectively known as 3TG.<sup>4</sup> These raw materials are highlighted due to their association with the co-funding of armed groups in conflict-affected and high-risk areas (CAHRAs).<sup>5</sup> The US Dodd-Frank Act Section 1502 (2010) was the first regulatory framework

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<sup>4</sup> 'Conflict minerals,' as determined by Article 2(a) of Regulation (EU) 2017/821 (European Union, 2017). See Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> CAHRAs as defined by the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation (adopted in 2017, in force from 2021), article 2(f): "areas in a state of armed conflict or fragile post-conflict as well as areas witnessing weak or non-existent governance and security, such as failed states, and widespread and systematic violations of international law, including human rights abuses."

to address the issue of conflict minerals. It required US companies to carry out due diligence on minerals from particularly the DRC and its neighbouring states (i.e., AGLR). Similarly, the most recent regulatory initiative concerning conflict minerals, the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation (2017) seeks to restrain the trade of 3TG, which can be used to fund conflicts, forced labour, human rights abuses, corruption, and money laundering in politically unstable regions. These initiatives are part of broader efforts, such as the OECD guidelines, to ensure ethical supply chain management from conflict-affected and high-risk areas (OECD, 2016). Consequently, the concept of conflict minerals has evolved into a global concern, guiding multinational companies to implement strict due diligence procedures to reduce associated risks and encourage ethical sourcing. To ensure consistency with the most recently established international regulatory frameworks, this thesis will utilise the definition as provided by the European Commission (EU, 2017; European Commission, n.d.).

It is important to delineate the scope of conflict minerals, as there are many ambiguities and inaccuracies around this topic, with cobalt, copper, and diamonds being subsumed under the heading of conflict minerals paradigm. Initially, the report by the Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the DRC concluded that the Second Congo War “has become mainly about access, control, and trade of five key mineral resources: coltan, diamonds, copper, cobalt and gold” (UNSC, 2001a). Diamonds, although historically linked to conflicts and known as ‘blood diamonds,’ are regulated under the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, a separate international initiative aimed at challenging the trade in conflict diamonds. As of today cobalt, copper, and diamonds are not formally included in regulatory frameworks concerning the link between conflict and minerals, despite its significance in the global market.<sup>6</sup> After the formal end of the Second Congo War (1998-2003), rebel groups reportedly supported by Rwanda and Uganda withdrew from the south-eastern Katanga region, where most of the DRC’s cobalt and copper reserves are located (Kavanagh, 2023). Moreover, the UNSC Group of Experts on the DRC today only reports on 3TG in their analyses of the conflict situation, as these are mined in the Kivu regions in eastern DRC where the most violence related to conflict occurs (UNSC, 2023). Therefore, other

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<sup>6</sup> With estimates ranging between approximately 60 and 70 percent of the world's cobalt reserves, which is crucial for lithium-ion batteries used in electric vehicles and renewable energy systems, the DRC is essential for the transition to a green and sustainable future (Wambua, 2024). Additionally, the country is the fourth largest producer of industrial diamonds (2022) and a leading producer of high-quality copper, which is integral to for example electronic and construction industries, thereby driving economic growth and export revenues (International Trade Administration, 2024).

minerals are formally not considered a conflict mineral because of the less evident link with armed groups, despite strong evidence of human rights abuses and child labour (Amnesty International, 2023). Nevertheless, there is an ongoing debate about including cobalt and copper in the conflict minerals framework, with proponents pointing out the abuses related to the exploitation of these minerals, and opponents pointing out the (unintended) negative consequences for the Congolese population (Hönke & Skender, 2022; Wolfe, 2015). These distinctions highlight the intricacy and evolving nature of policies concerned with mineral trade, encapsulating economic stakes, regional power plays, and international regulatory pressures.

## Realist Concepts

The following concepts provide a relevant and strong analytical basis for understanding the strategic motivations behind the actions and policies of Rwanda and Uganda in navigating the conflict minerals issue in the region.

### *State sovereignty and rational behaviour*

According to structural realists, states are the main actors in an anarchic international system. All states are sovereign and act rationally to maximise their ultimate objective of survival and interests. State sovereignty refers to the principle that each state has authority and independence to govern itself without external interference. This implies that states decide independently how to address internal and external issues, but also whether to seek assistance and thereby limit its freedom (Waltz, 1979, p. 96). This rational behaviour includes making decisions to ensure security and power in the competitive international arena. For this thesis, it is relevant to understand how Rwanda and Uganda exercise their sovereignty, translated by their strategies related to conflict minerals from the DRC, and what implications these choices have for the relational context in the region.

### *National Interest*

National interest involves the strategic goals and short-term objectives that a state pursues to ensure its survival and well-being within the international system (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.18). These (self-) interests often include economic prosperity, security, and power. In the context of

this thesis, examining how Rwanda and Uganda's exploitation and regulation of conflict minerals align with their national interests will provide insights into their motivations.

### *Power*

Structural realists explain power in international relations as the ability of a state to influence others and control outcomes to achieve its national interests. The common relational definition of power, at which power is equated with control, omits consideration of how acts and relations are affected by the structure of action. According to Kenneth Waltz this is misleading, as "measuring power by compliance would rule unintended effects out of consideration, and that takes much of the politics" (Waltz, 1979, p.191). Power is typically measured in terms of military capability, economic strength, and political influence. For answering the questions of this thesis, it is important to understand how Rwanda and Uganda leverage their power in the region and to what degree, as it affects and determines their strategic position vis-à-vis others and approach to issues of (dis)interest, such as conflict minerals.

### *Security Dilemma*

The security dilemma describes a situation where the efforts of one state to enhance its security, lead to insecurity in other states. Uncertain of the intention of others, states then often respond by enhancing their security, thereby setting a vicious circle in motion. An arms race or conflict are exemplary consequences of this phenomenon (Jervis, 1978, p. 169, Waltz, 1979, p. 188). In the case of this thesis, this concept is relevant as the actions of Rwanda or Uganda, may trigger security concerns in neighbouring states, thereby influencing policy and stability. The concept of the security dilemma will contribute to understanding how strategies to control minerals, affect international relations and the existing (tense) context.

### *Balance of Power*

Lastly, the balance of power theory posits that states can essentially choose from two options to survive in an anarchic world. They can either 'balance' (i.e., self-strengthening or forming alliances) to prevent any other state from becoming too powerful and threatening the system's stability, or, in contrast, they can choose to 'bandwagon' (i.e., to align with the foreign threat itself) (McKnight, 2015, p. 24). "Safety for all states, one may conclude, depends on the

maintenance of a balance among them (Waltz, 1979, p. 132).” This concept will be applied in the analysis of this thesis to assess whether the actions of Rwanda and Uganda lead to a stable distribution of power, or rather provoke imbalances and thereby perpetuation of the conflict minerals issue.



## Methodology

This thesis conducts a comparative case study analysis to scrutinise the differing strategies of Rwanda and Uganda in managing conflict minerals from the DRC, approached from a realist International Relations (IR) theory perspective. The term 'differing' is used deliberately to highlight the variations in both countries' approaches without implying that these strategies are entirely unique or unrelated. This choice emphasises the comparative nature of the analysis, which focuses on how each country navigates its strategic objectives within a similar context of regional instability and geopolitical competition. The realist approach allows for a detailed examination of how each country's actions reflect their respective national interests in power and security, as well as the strategic implications for regional stability.

Rwanda and Uganda are specifically chosen as case studies for several compelling reasons. Firstly, they are the states most frequently associated with the trade of conflict minerals from the DRC. Unlike Burundi, which is also involved but to a lesser extent and predominantly in French literature, Rwanda and Uganda have extensive and well-documented involvement in this illicit trade. Historically, Rwanda has been the main point of export for Congolese 3T minerals, while recent years have seen Rwanda and Uganda competing to become the primary gateway for Congolese gold to the global market (Matthysen, 2024). Additionally, the long-standing leadership of President Paul Kagame in Rwanda and President Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, both of whom have been in power since the Congo Wars, provides a consistent backdrop for analysing the development of strategic policies and contextual shifts over the years.

This research will utilise both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include research reports of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Group of Experts, speeches and statements by government officials and administrations, research reports from NGOs and think tanks, and official policy documents. These were obtained mainly through online databases, such as the UN Official Document System and, where possible, official government websites, and official websites of NGOs and think tanks, to ensure the authenticity of the data.<sup>7</sup> The primary sources of this study form the foundation for the analysis, as it provides factual

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<sup>7</sup> UN Official Document System, see <https://documents.un.org>

substantiation of the reasoned strategies in this thesis. The secondary sources include theoretical books, academic and journal articles, research reports by think tanks, and news articles.<sup>8</sup>

A notable and reliable tool for contextualisation in this analysis is research by the International Peace Information Service (IPIS), whose interactive maps monitors artisanal and small-scale mining activities linked to armed groups in (conflict) mineral exploitation and trade. These sources help to contextualise, interpret, and substantiate the evidence from primary data. Moreover, the research conducts a primarily document analysis, including a systematic analysis of UNSC reports. This method is complemented by detailed case studies of Rwanda and Uganda, facilitating an in-depth exploration of each country's approach to conflict minerals.

The study discusses the developments in policy from the publication of the first UNSC Panel of Experts report (UNSC, 2001a) to provide a historical context to the dynamics and motivations behind Rwanda and Uganda's engagement with the DRC's conflict minerals. However, the primary focus of this study analyses the specific period over the last five years (2019-2023), to contribute to the most up-to-date understanding contemporary strategies of the countries involved. The choice of a comparative case study analysis and document analysis is motivated by the nature of the multifaceted research issue, which requires a deep and context-sensitive investigation of each country's strategies. The multitude of actors involved in the issue of conflict minerals, asks for more than an analysis of one country in isolation. Moreover, it is relevant how the regional dynamics and political context, influenced by politics, economy, and international relations, affect the respective countries differently. These methodologies enable for the identification of trends and contrasts in how Rwanda and Uganda manage and benefit from conflict minerals, spotlighting unique strategies and shared practices.

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<sup>8</sup> These were obtained mainly through Leiden University library systems and other online academic repositories (e.g., JSTOR).

## Chapter I: Contextual analysis and background

The Congolese Wars are among the most destructive wars in African history. This chapter delves into the historical context of the dynamics in the African Great Lakes Region, specifically the relations between the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda. Subsequently, it will identify the extent of mineral wealth in the respective countries. Finally, the relevant scholarly literature available on respectively Rwanda and Uganda will be discussed in the context of this research.

### Historical Context: The Congolese Wars

The Congolese Wars, encompassing the First Congo War (1996-1997) and the Second Congo War (1998-2003), are among the most devastating conflicts in African history. The wars took place in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and involved numerous African states and a multitude of armed groups. Rwanda and Uganda were one of the states that played a significant role in these conflicts. During the First Congo War, both countries were involved through their support of Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebel forces, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) to overthrow President Mobutu Sese Seko's regime, who was in power in the Republic of Zaire (now DRC) between 1965 and 1997.<sup>9</sup> Rwanda's involvement was mainly driven by the goal of prosecuting the *génocidaires*<sup>10</sup> and minimise threats from the eastern border with Zaire (Longman, 2002, p. 131), whereas Uganda was a close ally of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and shared the interests in establishing a security zone at the border (Reyntjens, 2009, p.60). Moreover, it could rely on international support, particularly from the United States (US) who showed a great deal of understanding for their security concerns (idem., p. 66). However, an internationally less recognised interest and important factor in the war was natural resources. Mineral wealth helped to uphold the Mobutu regime long after it had lost Congolese public support (Longman, 2002, p.136), and similarly Kabila could successfully sustain support to the ADFL in the First Congo War through making concessions of natural resources from the Congo (Zaire) to international corporations (French,

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<sup>9</sup> Between 1971 and 1997 the Democratic Republic of Congo was named the Republic of Zaire.

<sup>10</sup> The term “*génocidaires*” means ‘those who commit genocide’, referring to Rwandans who are guilty of genocide due to their involvement in the mass killings that occurred during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Many of the Hutu *génocidaires* took refuge in refugee camps in eastern Zaire, which led to security concerns among the Tutsi-led government in Rwanda. (Reyntjens, 2009, pp. 45-79).

1998). For Rwanda and Uganda, smaller countries with significantly less mineral wealth than their large neighbour, the war moreover provided a means to finance their involvement in the war and notably opportunity to exert influence over the resource-rich regions in Congo (Zaire). The First Congo War ended in May 1997 when Kabila took power and reorganised the nation as the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A little more than a year later, in August 1998, the Second Congo War erupted. In the aftermath of the First Congo War, countries had continued their military presence in the DRC under the pretext of security. This situation, along with continuing domestic dissatisfaction and instability over slow economic and political reforms in the country, drove President Laurent-Désiré Kabila to assert independence from his former Rwandan and Ugandan allies, who subsequently mobilised an anti-Kabila front. Meanwhile, economic interests became significant for many actors participating in the conflict, as early victory was unlikely whilst military campaigns needed financing, and involvement with (foreign) militias deployed in the DRC implied lucrative opportunities (Nest et al., 2006, p.31). Besides, the war also involved direct military confrontations between Rwandan and Ugandan forces. Despite their initial alliance, personal clashes between major actors (under which later President Paul Kagame and president Yoweri Museveni), strategic disagreements about dealing with a liberated Congo, and zero-sum economic conflicts of interests (McKnight, 2015). Incidentally, Rwanda was cautious of admitting their extraterritorial intervention in the DRC, as it clearly was in violation of international law and their international legitimacy of standing up for democracy and humanitarian rights was somewhat tarnished considering Kagame's authoritarian rule in Rwanda and a less clear ethnic security threat compared to the First Congo War (Longman, 2002, pp.129-131). These dynamics highlight the sensitive, complex, and competitive nature of the engagement of Rwanda and Uganda in the DRC, while exemplifying considerations related to balance of power theory.

After the assassination of President Laurent-Désiré Kabila in January 2001, his son Joseph Kabila assumed the presidency. Under his rule, there were tentative signs of de-escalation and diplomatic relations with regional actors slowly improved. In the same period, a UNSC panel of experts presented conclusions of a report on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the DRC, indicating looting and exploitation activities by Rwanda and Uganda at "alarming rate" (UNSC, 2001a). This led to closer scrutiny by the international community on the role of foreign actors in the conflict in the DRC. A series of peace

agreements, under which the Pretoria Accord and Sun City agreement, led to the gradual withdrawal of Ugandan and Rwandan troops from the frontline in the DRC, the formation of a transitional government, and the formal end of the Second Congo War in 2003 (Fisher, 2001). The aftermath of these wars saw the DRC deeply destabilised, with weakened state structures and a proliferation of armed groups competing for control of mineral-rich areas. The continuing external influence facilitated widespread illegal mineral exploitation and smuggling, particularly by actors from Rwanda and Uganda, who continued to benefit from the DRC's mineral wealth long after formal war hostilities had ended (Autesserre, 2010, p.64). The legacy of these conflicts thus set the stage for ongoing struggles over resource control, impacting regional stability and international relations.

### Thematic Context: Mineral wealth

The 3TG minerals, namely tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold, play a significant role in the economies of the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda, albeit with varying degrees of abundance and global significance. The DRC is renowned for its vast reserves of coltan, a mineral from which tantalum is derived, as well as substantial amounts of cassiterite and wolframite. These minerals are particularly essential for the global electronics industry. The eastern regions of the DRC, specifically North- and South-Kivu and Ituri, are the most important centres of production of these raw materials, but mining also takes place in surrounding provinces. 3TG minerals are predominantly extracted through artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) operations. Figure 1 below provides an overview of ASM sites in the DRC, to illustrate where 3TG minerals are located in the country.

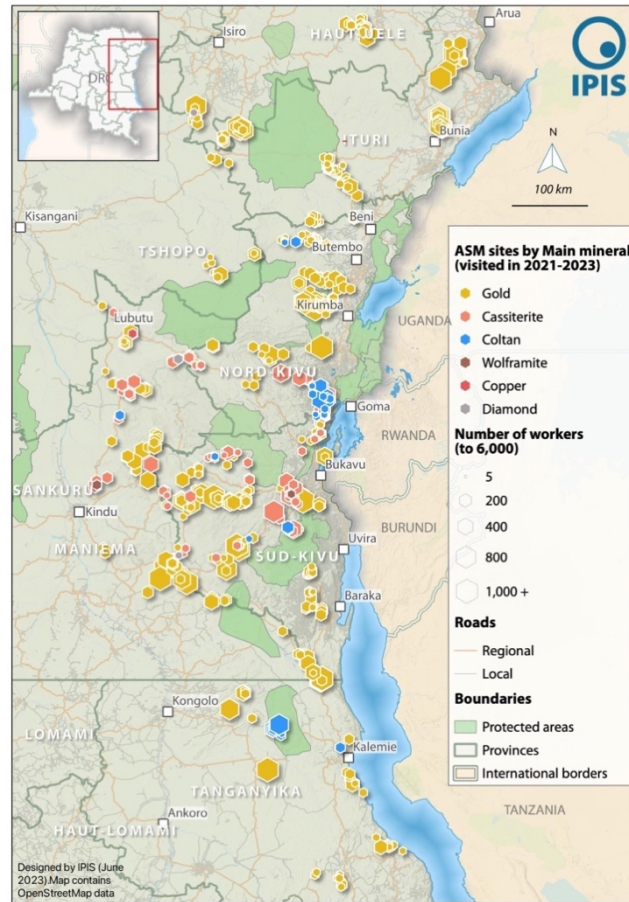


Figure 1: Map of mining sites visited by IPIS in eastern DRC between 2021 and 2023. (Leysen et al., 2023); see Appendix B for original (larger) size.

It is crucial to understand the different degrees of mineral significance in the region, as mineral wealth determines and drives economic interests, influences political and security dynamics, and shapes international relations (Clark, 2001). Moreover, the dynamics are further complicated by the volatile conditions in the region, where potential and reality often clash. Hence, it is difficult to obtain reliable data. The majority of all mining activities in the region are informal and therefore difficult to track. Additionally, conflict, technical limitations, corruption, political interests, and a lack of resources and infrastructure all contribute to an incomplete and sometimes distorted overview. Nevertheless, the data below attempts to offer a brief overview into the production ratios in the region.

- **Tin (cassiterite)**

The DRC is ranked as the 6<sup>th</sup> producer of tin globally with a production of 19,000 metric tonnes, whereas Rwanda is ranked 13<sup>th</sup> with 3,800 metric tonnes. (USGS, 2024). Uganda

produced less than 1,000 metric tonnes in 2023 but is expected to grow significantly in the coming years with new deposits found and the opening of a new tin smelting factory (ITA, 2024).

- ***Tantalum (coltan)***

The DRC is the largest producer of coltan, with its reserves producing approximately 980 metric tonnes in 2023. Rwanda, a significantly smaller country, follows next with a production of 520 metric tonnes in the same year. Uganda has no significant tantalum mining industry (USGS, 2024, p.177).

- ***Tungsten (wolframite)***

Rwanda is the top exporter of tungsten globally, exporting worth \$52,7 million in 2022. (OEC, n.d.). The annual production of Rwanda was 1,400 metric tonnes, being the 6<sup>th</sup> largest producer globally (USGS, 2024, P.191). The number of tungsten mining sites in the DRC has decreased in the past decade (IPIS Research, n.d.). In the absence of production data available, export quantities of 112.8 metric tonnes from DRC and 40.3 metric tonnes from Uganda provide the best available indications for the respective countries' tungsten industries (WITS, 2021; WITS, 2020).

- ***Gold***

In 2022, the gold production in the DRC was reported at 43,000 kilograms, in Rwanda at 2,900 kilograms, and Uganda 3,200 kilograms (CEIC Data, n.d.). However, it should be noted that Uganda has seen a tenfold increase in gold export in 2023, which can be explained by significant (foreign) investments in processors (Reuters, 2024), as well as newly discovered gold deposits of approximately 31 million tonnes (Barber, 2024). Uganda is thus becoming a significant player in the gold industry.

Despite this mineral wealth, the region and specifically the DRC experiences profound economic, security, political, and geopolitical impacts due to these conflict minerals. Economically, illegal exploitation and smuggling activities threaten the DRC's high dependence on mineral exports, resulting in large losses in state revenue and little economic gains for local populations, while armed groups and foreign actors take advantage (Nest et al., 2006, p.32). Concerning security, the trade in conflict minerals supports different armed groups, which feeds violence and instability, especially in the eastern areas, endangering national

security and leading to grave violations of human rights, displacement, and humanitarian emergencies (Global Witness, 2022)<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, with regard to politics, the illicit mineral trade rouses internal power conflicts and worsens corruption, thereby impeding efficient government and development initiatives (U.S. GAO, 2022). Lastly, the mineral conflict attracts international attention, prompting regulatory initiatives to stabilise the area and encourage responsible sourcing. However, these initiatives frequently encounter major implementation obstacles and have unintended consequences. For example, as part of risk mitigation in response to due diligence policies, the demand for minerals from the DRC decreases (Diemel & Hilhorst, 2019, p. 464). Thus, the significant mineral wealth of the DRC continues to be a two-edged sword, on the one hand providing enormous economic potential, and on the other hand contributing to conflict, insecurity and instability in the region.<sup>12</sup>

### Scholarly Context: Rwanda

The strategies of both Rwanda and Uganda in managing conflict minerals are crucial to understanding its broader geopolitical and economic manoeuvres in the region. Nevertheless, literature about these cases is remarkably limited. Available literature regarding the Rwandan case mainly focuses on the trade in coltan, the mineral ore from which tantalum is extracted. Bleischwitz, Dittrich, and Pierdicca (2012) offer an in-depth analysis of the international coltan trade, particularly highlighting Rwanda's significant role as a transit hub in the illicit trade of the mineral, as well as the challenges this poses to certification initiatives aimed at curbing conflict financing. The economic benefits derived from this trade, coupled with the difficulty in establishing traceability and accountability, suggest that Rwanda's engagement in the mineral sector is influenced by both economic incentives and the practical challenges of governance and regional cooperation (Bleischwitz et al., 2012).

This background sets the stage for a deeper examination of Rwanda's domestic mining strategies, as explored by Perks (2013; 2016). In her short paper from 2013, Perks reflects on Rwanda's historical mineral policies, illustrating how past mismanagement of informal mining and smuggling shaped the country's approach to contemporary mineral regulation. She mainly

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<sup>11</sup> Appendix C provides an overview of the armed groups interfering at ASM sites during the period 2021-2023 (829 sites). It should be noted that M23 and ADF are excluded this overview, yet Appendix G will provide an insight to their activity. Research conducted by IPIS. (Leysen et al., 2023):

<sup>12</sup> Appendix D provides an overview of the armed forces active in eastern DRC, while describing their signature and alliances.



highlights the pitfalls of focusing primarily on security-driven trade regulations, such as conflict mineral free due diligence initiatives, that often overlook the fundamental economic role of mining in local communities. Her analysis points to the need for reforms that go beyond merely controlling illicit flows to genuinely bolstering the domestic mining sector its contribution to Rwanda's national development. This narrative is expanded in her 2016 analysis, where Perks assesses the post-conflict mineral mining reform agenda in Rwanda, questioning the effectiveness and genuine intentions behind these policy reforms; whether they truly aim at socio-economic development or primarily serve to solidify state control and attract foreign investment. These studies are relevant as they exemplify the complexity of Rwanda's post-genocide mineral strategy, which navigates between addressing international certification challenges and advancing internal economic strategies.

### Scholarly Context: Uganda

While news media have frequently addressed the issue of conflict mineral trade related to the Ugandan case (Schipani, 2022; Tampa, 2021; Monitor Uganda, 2021; Reid & Holland, 2020; EIU, 2019), academic scrutiny remains virtually absent. Available research focuses on the historical military strategies and economic motivations of Uganda regarding conflict minerals during the First and Second Congo Wars, such as Vlassenroot, Perrot, and Cuvelier (2012). Their paper illustrates the exploitation of mineral resources from the DRC by Uganda, while specifically spotlighting the historical relation between military entrepreneurialism and the Ugandan government. This reflects a pattern at which military operations facilitate access to valuable minerals, aligning with national economic strategies. In addition, a report by the Congo Research Group & Ebuteli Research Institute (2022) discusses a case of Ugandan military intervention in the DRC at which Uganda's geopolitical and economic motives are critically scrutinised. The report suggests that behind the frame of a security operation lay significant economic and geopolitical interests related to natural resources and critical trade infrastructure.

Moreover, research on minerals from Uganda is predominantly limited to gold, as the country has emerged as a major hub of gold trade in the region (Reuters, 2024). This focus is further justified as Grynberg and Singogo (2021) highlight how Uganda has become a strategic passageway for the smuggling of gold from DRC, a process that would be driven by ongoing

conflict and weak governance in the region since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. To complement this view, Fisher et al. (2020) explore the nationalism as it relates to gold within Uganda, which is considered as a national treasure driving development. The authors critique the formalisation efforts in the gold sector as part of the so-called resource nationalism. This is particularly relevant for this research as it reviews the development of a national policy regarding the debated relation between minerals and Uganda in the region. Collectively, these studies reveal a complex image of Uganda's strategies in the DRC, driven by a combination of economic opportunism facilitated through military interventions and a regulatory environment that struggles to balance national interests with regional stability and, thus arguably, ethical governance.

Thus, this chapter outlined the historical, thematic, and scholarly contexts related to this research, indicating respectively the various historical stakes in the region, the extent and impact of mineral wealth in the region, as well as the existing academic (case-specific) understanding about the issue of conflict minerals. It provides the necessary background information for our in-depth case study analysis that will be conducted in the subsequent two chapters.

## Chapter II: A case study of Rwanda's approach to conflict minerals from the DRC

Both Rwanda and Uganda have been accused of engaging in the illicit trade and transportation of conflict minerals from the DRC. According to various UNSC and NGO (Global Witness, 2004) reports, armed groups in the DRC have profited from the illicit mineral trade, frequently with the tacit yet active support of these neighbouring countries. For our understanding of the differing policies of Rwanda and Uganda, it is therefore important to set out the existing allegations and evidence relating to the respective countries, to start with Rwanda.

### International attention

The ground-breaking UNSC report by the Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the DRC (2001a), revealed evidence of the involvement of Rwanda in the illicit trade of minerals from the DRC. It appeared that Rwanda's military operations in the DRC were closely intertwined with economic interests, uncovering the link between illegal exploitation and the funding of armed groups. In order to maintain control over mining rich areas, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) conducted 'security operations' surrounding coltan mines, often leading to skirmishes with for instance local Mai-Mai forces, particularly coinciding with periods in which coltan extraction activities had just been completed (UNSC, 2001a, par. 177). Moreover, Rwanda's official statistics displayed inconsistencies between production and export figures. Remarkably, when the AFDL, backed by Rwanda, came to power in Kinshasa in 1997, the production of both gold and coltan in Rwanda suddenly increased significantly (*idem.*, par. 104). In addition, evidence of the RPA's stakes in the coltan business was further strengthened by exposing the link between the Rwandan military and business community (such as Rwanda Metals, Grand Lacs Metals) who operated on DRC territory (*idem.* par. 129). Illicit trade and smuggling were facilitated by administrative structures and various routes and modes of transportation (infrastructure) established by the government of Rwanda (*idem.* par. 72). This indicated that Rwandan military was benefitting directly, and the Rwandan government indirectly, from the conflict in the DRC by exploiting its neighbour's mineral wealth. Nevertheless, Rwanda denied the allegations, criticised the methodology of the research, and claimed it had acted in accordance with

international trade rules and complied with the 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (Reuters, 2001; UNSC, 2001b). It should be pointed out, however, that the report covered the period between 1995 and 2000, making the latter defence largely invalid. Also, a subsequent report further exposed the involvement of Rwanda in specifically mining areas (UNSC, 2002, par. 16), and Rwanda was unable to provide solid rebuttal (UNSC, 2003).

In the years that followed the official end of the Second Congo War in 2003 and withdrawal of foreign troops, reports continued to establish that armed groups have maintained the structure of illegal extraction and minerals trade in the DRC (Global Witness, 2009b). Meanwhile, Rwanda remained the preferred route for illicit trade of minerals financing conflict parties. Despite diplomatic efforts, through the Tripartite Plus One Commission, relations between the DRC and Rwanda remained tense due to the continuing conflict between Tutsi and Hutu armed groups in the DRC. While Kagame pointed out the DRC's inability to facilitate security in eastern Congo (Al Jazeera, 2007), Kabila accused Rwanda of using the conflict as an excuse for 'criminal adventures,' aimed at exploiting the eastern provinces and maintaining political and economic control in the region after the war (VOA, 2009). Subsequently, the insurgency of M23, a rebel group composed largely of former CNDP fighters<sup>13</sup>, in 2012 implied not only an increase of violence and conflict in the eastern provinces, but also a deterioration of the relations between the DRC and Rwanda, thereby hindering efforts towards peace in the region. By securing mining sites and establishing smuggling routes to Rwanda, M23 facilitated the illicit trade of conflict minerals, which financed their operations and arguably prolonged the state of conflict in the DRC. The international community meanwhile established due diligence frameworks, such as the Dodd-Frank Act 1502 and the OECD guidelines. This initially halted the exports in tin, tantalum, and tungsten (3T) by the DRC in that period, whereas smuggling into Rwanda was on the rise (UNSC, 2012).

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<sup>13</sup> The National Congress for the Defence of People (CNDP), a former Congolese rebel group consisting of ethnic Tutsi, integrated into the FARDC and became a political party following a peace agreement on March 23, 2009. In 2012, a new rebel group, named M23, was established out of dissatisfaction over the implementation of that peace agreement. The rise of M23 was eventually stopped through a ceasefire and a peace-deal, after which many combatants fled to Rwanda and to a lesser extent Uganda (UNSC, 2012, par. 3-5).

## Persistent denial, despite an abundance of evidence

The installation of Félix Tshisekedi as Joseph Kabila's successor and President of the DRC in 2019 initially somewhat stabilised the relations between Rwanda and the DRC.<sup>14</sup> However, the resurrection of M23 with several attacks in North Kivu, eastern DRC, in 2022 escalated the tensions. An extensive analysis, conducted by this thesis, of UN Security Council reports issued by the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo between 2019 and 2023, provides a substantial body of evidence and points to the continuing role of Rwanda in the exploitation, smuggling and trade of conflict minerals, as well as the continuation of conflict and instability in eastern DRC. These consecutive reports confirm a widely presumed suspicion of a facilitating role by Rwanda in the conflict minerals issue.

The presented evidence reveals smuggling links between Congolese depots and Rwanda, reinforced by discrepancies in export statistics, indicating significant economic motivation and gains on the Rwandan side (UNSC, 2019a, paras. 182-183). Coltan and cassiterite are among the most intercepted smuggled minerals to Rwanda. For example, Rwandan authorities reported seizing 155 kg of coltan smuggled from the DRC, along with hundreds of kilos of other untagged wolframite and cassiterite minerals (UNSC, 2020a, par. 106). This exemplifies the enormous scale of illicit trade of these minerals across the porous borders, despite Rwandan efforts to improve monitoring and considering smuggling of minerals a 'security risk' to Rwanda (UNSC, 2020a, par. 106). Nevertheless, the series of reports point out military presence and intervention by means of the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF), as well as complicity with armed groups like M23, who facilitate mineral smuggling and perpetuate violence for mutual benefit in the region (UNSC, 2022a, par. 76; UNSC, 2023a, p. 2, par. 43). These indications undermine the regional stability and have exacerbated tensions, challenging peace, supply chain integrity, and security efforts in eastern DRC. Thus, arguably, Rwanda's actions suggest a geopolitical strategy aimed at regional influence and control over resource-rich areas. Moreover, Rwanda's categorical denials of involvement, despite substantial evidence, reflect a political strategy to avoid international condemnation (UNSC, 2022a, par. 67; UNSC, 2023a, par. 53).

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<sup>14</sup> The two countries even signed three bilateral agreements regarding investment, double tax avoidance and gold mining cooperation (Mpoyo, 2021).

A detailed overview of the conclusions made by the UNSC Group of Experts between 2019 and 2023 can be found in Appendix E.

### Rwanda's policy strategy

Thus, Rwanda's approach to conflict minerals has been a subject of extensive international scrutiny. A critical look at the development of the various conclusions provided by the UNSC Group of Experts between 2019 and 2023, observes that the presented evidence concerning Rwanda has shifted from an emphasis on predominantly mineral trade towards an emphasis on conflict-related developments. From a positive understanding this could mean that Rwanda has successfully implemented mechanisms to challenge the issue of conflict minerals in the supply chain. From a negative, yet more comprehensive understanding, this indicates an escalation of the conflict while the illicit mineral trade still takes place, be it tacitly. Towards drawing conclusions, let us first examine Rwanda's strategies concerned with curbing conflict minerals in Rwandan supply chains.

#### *Regulatory efforts*

Despite critique on the evident role of Rwanda as a transit country for conflict minerals, throughout the years the country has made efforts to formalise its mining sector with the aim to challenge the illicit trade of minerals (IGF, 2017). Following the international response to conflict minerals through due diligence mechanisms, Rwanda, as a Member State, adopted the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Regional Certification Mechanism, which was formally implemented in 2019 (ICGLR, 2019). This certification scheme aims to guarantee conflict-free mineral supply chains, emphasising requirements at which illegal taxing, support of non-state armed groups and illegal control over mining sites and transportation routes are excluded. However, as of today, all of these requirements are not met according to the UNSC Group of Experts reports (UNSC, 2021a, 2022a, 2023a). Another hopeful regulatory framework implemented by Rwanda was the International Tin Supply Chain Initiative (ITSCI).<sup>15</sup> The International Tin Association (ITA) developed the ITSCI initiative to enhance due diligence, governance, and traceability of tin (cassiterite) in Rwanda. In conjunction with Rwanda's Natural Resources Authority, it expanded its scope to other

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<sup>15</sup> Formerly known as ITRI.

minerals and regions that were also affected by the US Dodd-Frank Act 1502, also known as ‘conflict minerals bill’ (RMB, n.d.a). By actively participating in international forums and adopting global due diligence frameworks, such as the OECD guidelines and the ICGLR Regional Certification Mechanism, Rwanda seeks to present itself as a responsible actor committed to ethical practices in the mineral trade.

However, the ITSCI effort confronts severe challenges. According to a Global Witness report (2022), the ITSCI system is being exploited to launder minerals from unconfirmed and conflict-affected mines in the DRC. These minerals are subsequently imported into Rwanda and falsely branded as conflict-free. This systematic issue affects the credibility of the traceability and due diligence efforts that are intended to be guaranteed by the ITSCI framework. The report concludes that substantial quantities of minerals from the DRC, controlled by armed groups, have been smuggled into Rwanda and integrated into the ITSCI system, thereby contaminating the supply chain with conflict minerals (Global Witness, 2022, p. 16). In addition, the system has been criticised for lacking monitoring and transparency, with claims of bribery and collusion among authorities responsible for conducting the traceability mechanisms (idem. p. 11). Besides, these minerals are often re-labeled as originating from Rwanda to facilitate their entry into international markets, bypassing regulations aimed at curbing conflict mineral trade (UNSC, 2020a, par. 94). The reports reveal that armed groups in the DRC collaborate with Rwandan traders to move minerals across the border, providing substantial revenue for both the armed groups and the intermediaries involved. Thus, although Rwanda's formalisation and regulatory efforts are notable, the effectiveness of these activities is hindered by persistent illicit activity and the challenges in enforcement and governance. However, to attract international investment on the long-term, conflict-free minerals certification must be completed (Lezhnev & Prendergast, 2013, p. 4; Postma et al., 2021).

#### *Security narrative and international reputation*

Rwanda's policies related to conflict in the DRC reflect a consistent emphasis on the necessity of robust security measures to protect Rwanda from external threats. Despite the evidence of Rwandan support to armed groups such as M23, President Paul Kagame maintains that its stance is defensive and has the objective of stabilising the region (MINAFFET, 2024). Instead of acknowledging involvement, it rather derives attention to the presence of the FDLR, allegedly backed by FARDC, that would pose a serious security threat to Rwanda (Kagame,

2022; UNSC, 2022b, par. 70). This narrative silences dissent and increasingly reinforces a legacy in which a second genocide is imminent, this time targeting not only Tutsi living in Rwanda, but also those across the border in the DRC (Wrong, 2023; UNSC, 2023a, par. 98). Meanwhile, Kagame has calculated that his position as a crucial ally to Western nations, who have invested heavily in Rwanda post-genocide and view it as a successful model of development, shields him from significant international punitive measures (Marks & Munshi, 2024). The balancing act of his administration is evident as the EU recently agreed to source critical minerals from Rwanda (EU, 2024). Simultaneously, the EU urges Kigali to halt its support for armed groups (M23) in the DRC (Council of the EU, 2024). This dual strategy reinforces Rwanda's international legitimacy while attracting foreign investment. Besides, effective governance and contributions to UN peacekeeping bolster Rwanda's international reputation, despite accusations from NGOs and research institutes regarding human rights abuses, illicit trade, and perpetuating conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2023; UNSC, 2023a).

#### *Economic strategic interests*

Nevertheless, it is important not to overlook the economic strategic interests of Rwanda in the DRC. Rwanda's presumed economic strategic interests in conflict minerals from the DRC are underscored by President Paul Kagame's consistent denial of accusations that Rwanda profits from the illicit trade. In a 2022 speech in Kigali, Kagame refuted claims by DRC Finance Minister Kazadi that Rwanda annually profits approximately \$1 billion from the smuggling of gold and coltan from the DRC. Remarkably, he argued that these minerals are merely transited through Rwanda to the rest of the world, and thus are not stolen (Kagame, 2022). Arguably, this is not the most convincing defence against discrepancies in export statistics (Wilson & Schipani, 2023). Meanwhile, reports from local Congolese officials indicate increased smuggling activities, particularly since the M23 rebel group seized key export routes from the Rubaya mine, North Kivu's largest coltan producer (Marks & Munshi, 2024). It is exemplary for the strategic interest in maintaining control over lucrative mineral trade routes and capitalising the international demand for raw materials. Also, it confirms yet again that armed groups are inextricably connected to economic interests in mineral trade networks in the DRC.

Simultaneously, gold is an important factor in the geopolitical competition in the region. Both formal and informal trade in gold is flourishing between the DRC and Rwanda, with gold being a major source of foreign currency for Kigali and a significant portion originates from



eastern DRC (Schikowski, 2024; UNSC, 2019a). Despite its domestic mining sector, Rwanda depends on regional minerals to reduce its trade deficits. In addition, the contemporary context provides incentive for Rwanda to consider the DRC as part of its sphere of influence, as well as for actors to circumvent the formal economy and engage in illicit cross-border trade. (Lezhnev & Prendergast, 2013, pp. 3–4). Hence, this ambiguity of Rwanda's diplomatic stance and the reality on the ground illustrates the intricate economic motivations behind Rwanda's involvement in the DRC. International deals, such as the EU's agreement with Rwanda to develop sustainable mineral value chains, rather than sanctions in a context of ongoing conflicts, can therefore be considered a legitimisation of Rwanda's role in the mineral trade (Wilson & Schipani, 2023).

In conclusion, Rwanda's foreign policy is characterised by a dual narrative. On the one hand, it promotes progressive policy initiatives designed to mitigate the presence of conflict minerals within its supply chain. On the other hand, Rwanda denies any allegations of involvement or actions instigating conflict dynamics through military activities in eastern DRC, yet steadfastly maintaining its historical discourse centred around security threats. This strategy aims to disguise the link between armed groups and its economic interests, thereby carefully navigating international scrutiny and criticism.

## Chapter III: A case study of Uganda's approach to conflict minerals from the DRC

Despite the cooperation between Rwanda and Uganda during the First Congo War, these countries have since taken a different path in their engagement with the DRC. In this chapter we analyse the policies of Uganda on conflict minerals within the context of regional security dynamics.

### Armies of business

The publication of the UNSC Group of Experts report in 2001 marked a turning point in the international awareness about resource exploitation taking place in the DRC. As in the case of Rwanda, Uganda was also accused of systematically exploiting the mineral reserves of the DRC, being involved in a multitude of illegal activities that violate the sovereignty of its neighbour according to international law (UNSC, 2001a, paras. 6–7). The Group reported about exploitation that included direct extraction and confiscation under lead of Ugandan military commanders of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) and businessmen, indicating the lucrative potential of the war for these actors. They were directly involved in establishing networks for channelling extracted resources and engaging in commercial activities in the DRC (*idem.*, paras. 25, 27, 56). Additionally, these political elites and military were involved in strategically manipulating local rebel groups, which were played out against each other, thereby allowing UPDF to secure control of gold-rich and potentially coltan-rich areas (*idem.* par. 180). Testimonies from key witnesses described the goal to occupy areas rich in gold, outlining a conscious strategy that was most likely discussed with the Ugandan government: "In some cases, the level of production of mineral resources would have alerted any government, such as those of gold" (*idem.*, par. 45). Besides, the conclusions argue that President Museveni must have had clear understanding and role in shaping the policies regarding exploitation and providing protection for illegal activities (*idem.* paras. 201-203).

Moreover, the 2001 report highlighted substantial discrepancies between Uganda's official production and export figures for minerals like gold, suggesting that the gap originated from the exploitation of resources from the DRC. The Central Bank of Uganda even acknowledged to IMF officials that the volume of Ugandan gold exports did not reflect the country's

production levels, indicating that some exports might be "leaking over the borders" from the DRC (*idem.*, paras. 95-97). The Ugandan economic policy concerning minerals from the DRC was characterised by stimulating decentralisation on Congolese soil, while creating a re-exportation economy in Uganda. Subsequently, minerals from the conflict-affected areas in the DRC were repackaged or sealed as Ugandan products, and then re-exported. This practice improved the balance of payments significantly, whereas additional taxes also provided substantial revenue for the Ugandan treasury, allowing for increased defence spending, and sustaining its military presence in the DRC (*idem.*, paras. 125-138). Arguably, the minerals trade and taxation on transborder activity were collectively the primary sources of funding for both rebels and national state militaries involved in Congo's internationalised civil war (Raeymaekers, 2010, p. 569). Rwanda had similar practices, but applied a more subtle, systemic approach to dealing with conflict minerals during the Congo Wars. In the case of Uganda, however, the government played an active role in establishing administrative structures that facilitated the exploitation of minerals on Congolese ground, thereby contributing to and benefitting from continuation of conflict and instability in the region (*idem.* 71, 85; Global Witness, 2004). Uganda responded to the report by denying its institutional involvement in resource exploitation in the DRC and criticising its flawed definition of illegality and unreliable evidence. Yet, it also emphasised that it would investigate the allegations regarding the role of its military by an independent commission (UNSC, 2001b).

Despite concerns and condemnations by the international community, no sanctions were imposed against Uganda following the revealing reports. Concurrently, the relations between the DRC and Uganda evolved through legal adjudications and diplomatic engagements. Incidentally, the DRC took its grievances to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1999 already and filed a case against Uganda for the illegal occupation of DRC's territory and armed aggression against its citizens. This led to a 2005 ruling that Uganda had violated international law by occupying parts of the DRC and supporting rebel groups involved in atrocities and plundering of natural resources (ICJ, 2005). After prolonged negotiations the ICJ in 2022 finally ordered Uganda to pay \$325 million in reparations, with payments structured over five annual instalments (ICJ, 2022). The DRC had demanded \$11 billion. Despite Uganda's dissatisfaction with the ruling, it began complying with the payments as part of its international obligations (Al Jazeera, 2022).

## Entrenched smuggling networks

Over the past two decades, relations between Uganda and the DRC were characterised by both conflict and cooperation, driven by security concerns, economic interests, and obviously historical tensions. The continued presence of rebel groups such as the Islamist Allied Democratic Force (ADF) in the border region and the consequential refugee flows into Uganda causes both countries to seek dialogue. In addition, economic ties were strengthened through increased trade and infrastructure projects, while diplomatic visits and bilateral agreements aimed at enhancing cooperation, primarily concerning security. Thus, relations have progressed particularly since the end of the Second Congo War, although challenges such as the earlier mentioned legal disputes over reparations as well as occasional territorial incidents persisted. Yet, to gain a profound understanding of the contemporary relations and context, one should critically analyse the contemporary actions taken by Uganda in the DRC. A comprehensive analysis, conducted by this thesis, of UN Security Council reports issued by the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo between 2019 and 2023 will reveal that past patterns of mineral smuggling, particularly through the smuggling of gold, have continued despite cooperative strides to stabilise the region.

The 2019 report highlights the smuggling of large volumes of gold from Ituri province to Uganda, facilitated by widespread corruption among smugglers and border officials (UNSC, 2019a, paras. 180, 183). Despite efforts by some Ugandan authorities to improve transparency, cross-border smuggling has continued via long-established trading routes. The Group of Experts estimates that over 95% of Uganda's gold exports were of non-Ugandan origin, indicating the scale of smuggling activities (UNSC, 2020a, para. 91). The situation worsened during the COVID-19 period, with increased gold smuggling from Ituri to Uganda, the primary destination in the region (UNSC, 2020b, Annex 27). Research by the Institute for Security Studies & Interpol endorses these findings and reaches similar conclusions (ISS & Interpol, 2021). Remarkably, the Bank of Uganda recorded gold imports from thirteen different countries but not from the DRC (UNSC, 2021a, Annex 97). Considering the vast amounts of gold reserves in the DRC and the abundance of evidence of gold being smuggled into Uganda, this arguably indicates a tacit strategy similar to Rwanda with regard to conflict minerals. Compared to the conclusions of the Panel of Experts in 2001, there are no indications of direct military support to the extraction of conflict minerals in the DRC.

The reports also indicate the presence of illicit trade routes and smuggling operations that involved collaboration with armed groups and local militias, but mostly with Congolese factions of the FARDC or rebel group CODECO (Idem., paras. 95 – 100; UNSC, 2022b, par. 3). Other sources, however, do suggest a connection between government and military officials and smugglers. Throughout the years the findings from UNSC reports focused less on Uganda's role in the exploitation and trade of minerals from the DRC, and increasingly on the cooperation on common security threats coming from (terrorist) rebel groups (UNSC, 2023a, par. 12; UNSC, 2023b, par. 17). It reflects an improvement of the relations between both countries. It seems that Uganda does not directly engage with exploitation process of minerals from the DRC. However, the UNSC expert reports emphatically indicate ongoing gold smuggling facilitated by corruption and illicit trade networks that can be linked to Uganda's tacit strategies to benefit from the instability in the region.

A detailed overview of the conclusions made by the UNSC Group of Experts between 2019 and 2023 can be found in Appendix F.

## Uganda's policy strategy

### *Regulatory efforts*

Uganda has an attractive market environment for illicit gold trade due to the convenient movement and trading of gold, as well as the presence of many well-funded buyers who are interested in purchasing gold at competitive prices. In addition, insufficient export royalties also enhance the overall profit margin. And lastly, the presence of instability in eastern DRC renders Uganda an appealing destination for illicitly transported gold from its neighbour (Global Initiative, n.d.). Nevertheless, Museveni's administration has made attempts to formalise its mining sector and ensure the traceability and transparency of its mineral supply chains. An important step forward in improving regulatory frameworks to challenge conflict minerals was the adoption of the ICGLR Certification Mechanism. However, the UNSC Group of Experts urged the Ugandan government in 2019 to expand its national legislation to comply with ICGLR standards. Currently, inadequate enforcement mechanisms allow for fraud and undermine the integrity of the regional supply chain (UNSC, 2019b, paras. 52-55). No

significant improvements have been documented since. Thus, significant challenges remain to change a system that is actually beneficial for Uganda.

Actors involved in the ASM of minerals in the region exploit the disparities in regulatory frameworks to maximise their profits and enhance their purchasing power. High taxation on gold production in some countries drives smuggling to neighbouring nations with lower taxes, as is the case with Uganda. For instance, the cumulative taxes on gold production in the DRC reach 13 percent, compared to 6 percent in Rwanda, and 0 percent in Uganda. As a consequence, this fiscal burden prevents gold buyers from operating legally and making a profit. Besides, gold which is traded through legal channels is reportedly subject to double taxed: “working in the formal sector often means being taxed twice, officially and informally” (ISS & Interpol, 2021, p. 24). Consequently, smuggling becomes a more attractive option, undermining efforts to establish a legal and transparent gold trade. In another attempt to regulate the sector more effectively, or rather increase revenue, Uganda raised taxes on processed gold in 2021. It aimed to curb smuggling and ensure more transparent documentation and taxation of Ugandan gold exports. However, this led to a halt in gold export, as traders protested against the new levy. Meanwhile, illicit activities have persisted, notably with armed groups like CODECO continuing to exploit gold in the Ituri region (UNSC, 2022a, par. 151; Okafor, 2023). Eventually, the government suspended the taxation in 2022. The next year, Uganda’s gold exports surged to \$2.3 billion in 2023, compared to a \$300 million in 2022. This illustrates how Uganda has become dependent of its gold industry.

### *Economic interests*

Uganda has no history of large-scale gold mining. The industry is largely focused on informal artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) and the gold trade that transits through Uganda (Weigand & Gallien, 2022). However, the Ugandan government increasingly frames gold as a national Ugandan treasure and one of the main engines for development transformation (Fisher et al., 2020). Thus, the recent efforts to regulate the trade in gold as well as the analysis of UNSC reports between 2019 and 2023 seem to indicate a shift away from the tacit role regarding conflict minerals that Uganda had long sustained. Firstly, this can be explained by the newly discovered gold reserves in Uganda worth \$12 trillion, making the country less dependent on foreign gold imports. Secondly, President Museveni has directed its focus to becoming a regional gold hub. For example, in 2015 Uganda imposed a ban on the

export of raw (unprocessed) minerals, including gold and tin ores, to stimulate local industry, create employment opportunities, and increase revenues through value addition (Mbanga, 2023). In addition, based in Entebbe, Uganda launched the biggest gold refinery in East and Central Africa and there have been significant improvements of the country's infrastructure. Thus, these formalisation dynamics reflect Uganda's protectionist economic strategy embedded in a context of global competition in mineral resources. As a result, it is becoming increasingly less dependent of the DRC's mineral sources, while continuing turmoil and conflict as well as a lack of refining capacity in the DRC, will ensure that Uganda remains an evident passageway for contraband trade (Grynberg & Singogo, 2021).

### *Security and international reputation*

As a hotspot for smuggled conflict minerals, Uganda's security interests and international reputation are closely tied to its activities and policies in the eastern DRC. Armed groups, particularly the ADF, operate with near impunity in the region. With its origins in Uganda, where moreover a lot of its members are recruited, the ADF should be considered a shared matter. The Congolese government invited Ugandan armed forces into the country, as the ADF has been attacking and looting both Congolese and Ugandan villages.<sup>16</sup> The objective of this military cooperation agreement is to defeat the Islamist rebel group (Atuhaire, 2021; UNSC, 2021a, annex 18; UNSC, 2023a, par. 12). In addition to security concerns, Operation Shujaa should arguably also be considered in the context of political and economic interests.<sup>17</sup> The involvement of the UPDF on Congolese soil is accompanied with the construction of roads, which will be executed by a Ugandan company (Congo Research Group & Ebuteli, 2022). Yet again, this illustrates how the military, business and politics are entangled in Uganda. The improved infrastructure moreover aligns with Uganda's interest in establishing improved and formalised trade routes between both countries. A bolstered trade network is particularly relevant since the DRC joined the East African Community (EAC) in 2022.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the cooperation also aims to create a situation in which both Uganda and the DRC benefit, namely by improving regional security, economic prospects,

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<sup>16</sup> Appendix G provides an overview of violent events between 2021-2022 and indicates the involvement of ADF. In the DRC, the ADF are notably present in North-Kivu and Ituri provinces, regions rich in mineral reserves.

<sup>17</sup> Not directly applicable to 3TG but still interesting in the context of my research is that Uganda also aims to secure oil projects around Lake Albert, at which ADF insurgencies threaten multi-billion investments.

and mutual bilateral relations, underscored by President Museveni at the inauguration of re-elected Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi: I wish to reassure you of Uganda's commitment to continue partnering with DRC in advancing regional and continental agenda through the East African Community, African Union and other multilateral platforms. Our bilateral cooperation will score tremendous achievements.” (Museveni, 2024; Blanshe, 2021). Thus, the cooperation expands Uganda's sphere of influence in the region.

In conclusion, despite cooperative strides to stabilise the region, Uganda, remains a hotspot for particularly gold smuggling from the DRC, driven by entrenched corruption, economic interests, and longstanding smuggling networks throughout the system. Uganda's attempts to formalise its mining sector and improve transparency have seen limited success so far, as illicit trade continues. Also, economic interests and security concerns are intertwined, at which Uganda leverages its strategic position to benefit from instability in the DRC.



## Chapter IV: Comparative analysis

The previous chapters analysed both Rwanda and Uganda's respective roles, interests, and strategies in managing conflict minerals from the DRC. This chapter conducts a comparative case study analysis, examining the strategies of Rwanda and Uganda through a realist lens. While highlighting differences and similarities, this analysis will evaluate how each state's strategy reflects its national interests and what implications it has for regional stability. Thus, by employing the realist concepts of state sovereignty and rational behaviour, national interest, power, security dilemma, and balance of power, this chapter contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics related to conflict minerals in the AGLR.

### *State sovereignty and rational behaviour*

Rwanda's behaviour in managing conflict minerals from the DRC is characterised by a strong assertion of state sovereignty and rational behaviour, aimed at maximising national security and economic benefits. Although Rwanda is for a large part dependent on mineral resources from its neighbour, it has strategically leveraged its control over mineral-rich areas in the DRC by facilitating the trade through both formal and informal channels (Schikowski, 2024; UNSC, 2019a, paras. 182-184). There is a multitude of evidence of the Rwandan government supporting rebel groups in the DRC. First, clearly pronounced, to contain its major security threat in the region, the FDLR. In February 2022, President Kagame assured that, "as we are a very small country, our current doctrine is to go and fight at its origin [...] We will wage war where it started, where there is enough space to wage war. We do what we must do, with or without the consent of others" (International Crisis Group, 2022). Secondly, denied yet tacitly conducted, to maintain control over mining areas in order to guarantee a steady flow of mineral resources into Rwanda. Despite attempts of regulatory intervention by the international community and condemnation of Rwanda's involvement in conflict in the DRC, President Kagame's denials and continued illegal exploitation and interference demonstrate that it decides independently and makes its own trade-offs to ensure its security and power in the region. Meanwhile, Rwanda has not faced any sanctions. Hence, this aligns with the realist perspective that states act rational to maximise their competitive power and security in an anarchic international system.

Meanwhile, Uganda's approach to conflict minerals from the DRC also reflects a strong assertion of sovereignty, with similar trade strategies as Rwanda. The evidence provided by the UNSC Group of Experts indicates the entrenched involvement of Uganda in the illicit trade in minerals. With its frame of gold as a Ugandan national treasure, it emphatically aligns with the ideas of radiating sovereignty, despite its factual long-standing dependence on (smuggled) imported minerals. Furthermore, rational behaviour is reflected by its cooperation with the DRC in fighting the ADF in Eastern Congo, thereby seeking security assistance as well as extending its competitive influence in the region. Uganda's policies focus on facilitating trade routes that integrate minerals from the DRC into its economy, often through re-exportation strategies that maximise economic gain while keeping up appearances of legality. Arguably, this is similar to the laundering processes in Rwandan trade networks, at which minerals from the DRC are re-labelled as being from Rwandan origins before export (UNSC, 2020a).

Nevertheless, despite their corresponding behaviour of maximising state sovereignty and pursuing economic gain in the context, there are notable differences compared to its southern neighbour. Rwanda has a more centralised approach, at which its military is clearly involved in both the exploitation and trade in conflict minerals, whereas Uganda employs a more decentralised strategy, leveraging local and regional networks but no direct military involvement with the mineral trade. Consequently, Uganda reduces direct state culpability, enabling flexibility and independence, whereas Rwanda is confronted with more resistance. Moreover, these respective strategies reflect the development of relations with the DRC, at which Rwanda seeks significantly more confrontation than Uganda.

### *National Interest*

Rwanda's national interest in the DRC is reflected by a dual strategy. The control over conflict minerals allows Rwanda to support both its national economy and military operations, thereby enhancing its security. To counter the influence of hostile groups, such as the FDLR, that operate in the border regions of the DRC, Rwanda supports other rebel groups, such as M23. To guarantee its own security, it thus influences the security situation in the DRC. Moreover, this narrative of a security threat legitimises Rwanda's actions in the region, silences dissent and reinforces credibility of its international reputation. Meanwhile, Rwanda has become dependent on the illicit trade in conflict minerals to reduce trade deficits and capitalise

the international demand for 3TG. A continuation of the flow of minerals into the country is therefore crucial for maintaining its competitive position in the AGLR.

Meanwhile, Uganda's national interest similarly includes economic benefits from the illicit trade of minerals, in particular gold. Uganda's strategies reflect an economic opportunism that also strengthens its international position. The illicit trade routes facilitate Uganda's economic growth and notably its significance as a major (gold) hub in the EAC. Additionally, Uganda's involvement in the DRC aims to counteract security threats from rebel groups such as the ADF. Simultaneously, Uganda benefits from instability in the DRC, as it reinforces ties and cooperation while also providing opportunity to extend its influence and maintain the illicit smuggling and trade networks to Uganda.

Thus, both states prioritise economic benefits and regional security. However, Rwanda's strategies appear more intertwined with exerting regional influence to maintain internal security, while Uganda emphatically demonstrates economic opportunism. Also, Rwanda's approach is more comprehensive, integrating economic, military, and geopolitical strategies, while Uganda's focus is predominantly on immediate economic gains to bolster its mineral industry and significance as a mineral (gold) hub in the region.

### *Power*

Clearly, Rwanda demonstrates its power capabilities by its military presence in the DRC. Also, by supporting M23, it influences the stability situation in the DRC and thereby providing opportunity for illegal exploitation and smuggling of conflict minerals. Despite being a small country relative to the DRC and Uganda, Rwanda profiles itself as a strong military power and is internationally recognised as one of the top contributors to UN peacekeeping forces (UN Peacekeeping, 2020). Additionally, Rwanda has a respected reputation in the international realm, is generally considered as a model for development and has, due to its sensitive history, accumulated much credibility regarding security concerns (Marks & Munshi, 2024). Meanwhile, conflict minerals have become an important part of Rwanda's economy to play a significant role in competing with its larger neighbours.

Based on the indications suggested in this study, Uganda its power strategy does not necessarily aim to gain direct military influence in the region. Rather, it focuses on gaining economic leverage in line with its political agenda of becoming a dominant power in the region (Murray et al., 2016). Nevertheless, its military cooperation is an important aspect of its strategic use of power, considering the dual purpose of improving security for both countries, as well as improving infrastructure for the (presumed) benefit of both countries, despite both taking place within Congolese borders. Arguably, with these short-term gains through informal smuggling, Uganda paves the way for its long-term goal: being the established hub through which most regional minerals are formally refined and transited, thereby becoming more independent. This win-win cooperation thus reflects the ability of Uganda to draft strategic gains out of a situation it influences.

Both cases exemplify the argument made by Waltz that measuring power by compliance alone is insufficient (Waltz, 1979, p.191). The strategic military, economic, and political actions of both Rwanda and Uganda have broader, sometimes unintended, effects, such as scrutiny by the international community or rising enmity between Rwanda and Uganda over economic rivalry (Matthysen, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2023). Meanwhile, both states affect stability in the region and they both pursue power enhancement through economic exploitation of DRC's minerals. However, Rwanda's strategy includes direct military confrontational involvement and control over resource-rich areas, while, in contrast, Uganda leverages its economic gains to support military and political objectives indirectly.

### *Security Dilemma*

The case study of Rwanda's involvement in the DRC is a highly relevant example of a security dilemma, as it perpetuates both conflict and instability, and closely aligns with realist military strategy. The continued presence of *génocidaires* as part of the FDLR rebels in eastern DRC, establishes a continuous threat to Rwanda. In response, Rwanda's support for rebel groups like M23 exacerbates tensions, leading to increased insecurity and subsequently militarisation in the region (UNSC, 2023a, par. 48). Thus, Rwanda's actions create a perception

of threat among its neighbours, prompting them to enhance their security measures, which in turn fuels a vicious cycle of insecurity and escalation of the conflict.<sup>18</sup>

In turn, Uganda's security cooperation with the DRC similarly contributes to the security dilemma. The construction of trade routes as part of the cooperation agreement are located near the Rwandan border, which is considered a provocation within the sphere of influence of Rwanda (International Crisis Group, 2023). Thus, the security concerns are particularly reinforced by economic concerns, thereby indirectly contributing to the security dilemma. Moreover, by sustaining illicit smuggling and trade networks in the DRC, Uganda provides opportunity for armed groups to sustain their presence. As a consequence, the region continues to be militarised, exemplifying a vicious circle of instability.

Hence, Rwanda and Uganda both exacerbate the regional security dilemma through their actions in the DRC. Rwanda's direct support for armed groups has a more pronounced destabilising effect, while, compared to the latter, Uganda's economic strategies indirectly perpetuate instability. Arguably, the actions of both countries create a mutual suspicion and escalation of conflict in the region, undermining efforts for peace and stability.

### *Balance of Power*

Arguably, the balance of power can be a response to the security dilemma. When states perceive a threat from a more powerful state, they may form alliances and build up their own capabilities to balance against the potential hegemon. This balancing act is intended to prevent any one state from becoming too dominant, which would make other states feel insecure. As such, the DRC's vast resources would potentially make it one of the richest countries in the world, thereby posing a threat to neighbouring countries, be it economically or military. Looking at the case study from this perspective, it is clear that Rwanda opts for the balancing strategy, which is strengthening its position by forming alliances with M23. Moreover, through its military involvement, it claims dominance over mineral trade routes, which in turn contribute

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<sup>18</sup> The UNSC Group of Experts report (S/2001/357) highlighted an exemplary case of how Uganda applied strategies to sustain a vicious circle of war and exploitation in the region. A conflict between the Hema and Lendu people in the DRC was exacerbated through the influence of UPDF top commanders, who manipulated both groups to fight each other while simultaneously providing military training to both. This way, the UPDF could continue to exert its influence over the gold-rich areas. (UNSC, 2001, par. 180).

to bolstering the economy. The extensive evidence of Rwanda's role in the exploitation, smuggling and trade of conflict minerals reflects an economic strategy of self-strengthening.

In contrast, the cooperation agreement between Uganda and the DRC reflects an opposite strategy and partly aligns with the bandwagon strategy, which means aligning with the foreign dominant power itself. Uganda currently cooperates in fighting its security threat, the ADF. Nevertheless, its main power strategy focuses on economic growth, which emphatically benefits from instability in the DRC. By investing significantly in its gold industry, such as refineries and a favourable tax environment, it seeks to counterbalance dominance of neighbouring rivals (ISS & Interpol, 2021, p. 24). This economic rhetoric in turn aligns better with the balancing strategy as described by the structural realist framework.

Fearing the DRC's potential dominance, Rwanda and Uganda are considerably successful in maintaining the regional power distribution. Arguably, the First Congo War is exemplary for how Rwanda and Uganda joined forces to balance against the power of the DRC under Mobutu. Since then, the two states have pursued their own strategic agendas and became mutual rivals that challenge the regional balance of power. Today, both states utilise conflict minerals to bolster their mineral industries, seeking to become respectively a regional value addition- and gold hub (Global Initiative, n.d.; 2023; RMB, n.d.b). This way, instead of becoming dependent of its potentially neighbouring hegemon, they attempt to safeguard their independence.

Strategies of both Rwanda and Uganda are considerably pragmatic. However, Rwanda has a more disruptive strategy compared to Uganda, as it challenges its rivals on military, economic, and geopolitical fronts. The latter is articulated through its active role in international diplomacy and military intervention missions (Rahman, 2023; Donelli, 2022). This disruptive strategy is useful for its short-term objectives, such as security and economic gains. On the long-term, arguably, diplomatic dominance and international recognition are critical for international investment flows into the small state (Lezhnev & Prendergast, 2013, p. 4; Postma et al., 2021). Thus, Kagame's administration employs a combination of military, economic, and diplomatic strategies to navigate international scrutiny and criticism, aiming to bolster Rwanda's image on the global stage while securing its strategic interests in the region. Uganda, by contrast, currently applies a less evident disruptive approach to conflict minerals from the DRC, limiting its interests to particularly gold without military and geopolitical confrontation, but with emphatic opportunism.

### *Defensive and Offensive Realism*

Defensive realism posits that states are primarily concerned with maintaining a balance of power to secure their position and avoid conflict, focusing on ‘appropriate’ self-preservation rather than expansion (Waltz, 1979, p. 109, 126). From this perspective, Rwanda’s engagement with conflict minerals from the DRC is foremost a defensive strategy to secure its borders and prevent the FDLR from gaining strength. Its actions to support rebel groups like M23 and control mining areas can be interpreted as measures to counteract threats from the FDLR. Similarly, Uganda’s cooperation with the DRC to fight the ADF and maintain trade routes reflects an effort to secure its own borders and prevent spill over of instability across the border (UNSC, 2022a, par. 20; UNSC, 2022b, par. 53).

On the other hand, offensive realism argues that states inherently seek to maximise their power and influence to achieve regional or global hegemony as a means of security, driven by the uncertain intents of other states (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 31). Rwanda’s direct military involvement and support of rebel groups and exerting control over resource-rich areas in the DRC can be interpreted as an offensive strategy to enhance its regional dominance and economic power. Uganda’s economic strategies, including its investments in the gold industry and re-exportation of minerals, can also be considered an offensive approach to maximise its economic leverage and establish itself as a dominant power in the region. Arguably, Rwanda and Uganda’s strategies are motivated by a mix of both offensive and defensive realist rhetoric, underscoring the interrelatedness of interests in the region.

### *Strategic Implications for Regional Stability*

From a realist perspective, these strategies reflect rational state behaviour with the objective of maximising power and security. However, these competitive approaches also highlight the inherent challenges in achieving long-term stability in the region. Since 1996, the conflicts in the DRC have led to approximately six million deaths and persisting economic and humanitarian crises (Center for Preventive Action, 2024; UNSC, 2023a; UNSC, 2020a). Arguably, the Congo Wars have continued in the form of proxy wars in eastern DRC (Sematumba, 2024). Rwanda’s economic interests in conflict minerals do not seem to be the

main obstacle towards peace negotiations. Rather, engagement in conflict with the DRC reflects zero-sum security interests, which is continuously raised a rational strategy of the security dilemma (Lezhnev & Prendergast, 2013, p.5) Meanwhile, the continued exploitation of mineral wealth undermines the development of stable government structures in the DRC. Subsequently, mismanagement and corruption prevent the local communities from benefiting from the mineral trade, and consequently enabling armed groups. Lastly, competition over the DRC's resources fuels tensions between Rwanda and Uganda (Zikomangane, 2022). As long as these vicious circles are not addressed, stability will not be established.

## Discussion

In conclusion, the strategies and national interests discussed in the case studies reflect emphatically the core concepts of structural realism focusing on maximising power and security. Rwanda adopts a more centralised and confrontational approach, leveraging military involvement and alliances with rebel groups to secure mineral resources and counter security threats. Uganda, on the other hand, employs a decentralised strategy, focusing on economic gains and indirect influence without direct military intervention in the mineral trade. Despite these distinct strategies, both states perpetuate regional instability and a security dilemma, highlighting the complex dynamics and interrelated interests in the AGLR. The findings from this analysis illustrate that Rwanda's approach is more disruptive due to its multifaceted (security, economic, and geopolitical) interests, whereas Uganda's more subtle strategy reflects emphatic economic opportunism. Ultimately, these competitive strategies, driven by realist rhetoric of power and security, pose significant challenges to achieving long-term stability in the region.

The findings of this study are limited to the scope of the research question. The focus on Rwanda and Uganda implies that other relevant actors, such as the specific motivations of the Congolese government, the various local armed groups, and other neighbouring countries (e.g., Burundi) are not (fully) addressed in this research. Moreover, while this study provides a detailed analysis of the power dimensions of conflict minerals, it does not cover the socio-economic and humanitarian implications of the issue. Also, the study could not include the frames of strategy as posed by the respective governments, due to a lack of published data as



well as the exhausted scope of this research. Lastly, as the conflicts, regulatory frameworks, interests, and scrutiny related to conflict minerals are constantly evolving, this study might not capture the most recent developments. Nevertheless, this analysis still provides a profound understanding of the contemporary geopolitics surrounding conflict minerals, thereby establishing a nuanced foundation for future developments and analysis.

## Conclusion

This thesis addressed the following research question: "How do Rwanda and Uganda's differing strategies in managing conflict minerals from the DRC reflect their respective national interests in power and security, and what are the strategic geopolitical implications of these approaches for regional stability from a realist perspective in International Relations?". Based on the findings drawn from the comparative case study analysis with a realist approach, it concludes that both Rwanda and Uganda's strategies are deeply rooted in their pursuit of national interests, primarily power and security, shaped by the anarchic international system they operate in.

Rwanda adopts a centralised, confrontational strategy in managing conflict minerals from the DRC. It leverages military involvement and forms alliances with rebel groups, specifically M23, to foremost counter security threats posed by the FDLR in eastern DRC. Additionally, this strategy allows Rwanda to maintain access and control over resource-rich areas. Its military involvement underscores a direct link between on one end the state's administration, and on the other end the exploitation of conflict minerals and facilitation of illicit trade networks into Rwanda. Lastly, Rwanda carefully balances its geopolitical interests through its constructive engagements with the international community, while regionally exerting power to secure its status quo sphere of influence. Uganda, in contrast, adopts a more decentralised, cooperative approach, at which it focuses primarily on economic gains and indirect influence without direct military involvement in managing conflict minerals. Its strategy includes leveraging and maintaining local and regional smuggling networks and positioning itself as the major gold hub in the region. In addition, Uganda implements international regulatory frameworks and cooperates with the DRC for mutual security interests, which simultaneously provide opportunity for strengthening its trade networks. As a result, Uganda positions itself as an important actor within an unstable context, at which economic opportunism characterises its core strategy. Thus, both Rwanda and Uganda, though to varying degrees, perpetuate regional instability and a security dilemma, at which efforts to enhance their own security and power prompt further escalation of the conflict as well as opportunities regarding the mineral trade.

In conclusion, the realist approach to this case study analysis illustrated that, in the absence of effective international regulatory frameworks and sanctions from the international

community, states take opportunity to exert power to ensure their national interests, which is leveraging conflict minerals to bolster Rwanda's economic, security, and geopolitical interests, and Uganda's economic interests. Moreover, the regional dynamics highlight the competitive nature of international relations, exemplified by military involvement and economic opportunism to enhance respective power standings in the region, often sustaining a vicious circle of instability. Besides, the realist framework reflected how states can either balance (Rwanda's alliance with M23) or bandwagon (Uganda's cooperation agreement with the DRC to fight the mutual threat posed by the ADF) in response to threats. Hence, the realist lens contributes to the understanding of how material interests and security concerns drive state behaviour in the context of conflict minerals, while it highlighted the power dynamics and strategic motivations of both Rwanda and Uganda.

This nuanced analysis could be considered an addition to existing literature on conflict minerals and the regional dynamics in the African Great Lakes Region, illustrating how strategic policies of states driven by realist imperatives can exacerbate instability. Future studies could expand on this research by exploring the issue from an alternative international relations perspective, such as constructivism. This could enhance the understanding of the conflict minerals issue in the region as ideational factors, such as African agency, might explain the motivations behind long-term goals of states.

Ultimately, this study underscores that there is a need for more effective international regulation to challenge the free rein of conflict minerals in the international supply chain, to mitigate economic opportunity and power incentives for neighbouring states. However, as Perks (2013) emphasised, here it is crucial for the highly dependent local mining communities that regulatory efforts do not directly disrupt the entire supply chain from these countries. Rather, sanctions should target the political elites whose strategies, driven by realist rhetoric, perpetuate instability in the region.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

Definitions as established by Article 2 of the EU Conflict Minerals Regulations 2017 (2021), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017R0821>

#### **REGULATION (EU) 2017/821 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL**

**of 17 May 2017**

**laying down supply chain due diligence obligations for Union importers of tin, tantalum and tungsten, their ores, and gold originating from conflict-affected and high-risk areas**

[...]

*Article 2*

#### **Definitions**

For the purpose of this Regulation, the following definitions apply:

(a) ‘minerals’ means the following, as listed in Part A of Annex I:

- ores and concentrates containing tin, tantalum or tungsten, and
- gold;

(b) ‘metals’ means metals containing or consisting of tin, tantalum, tungsten or gold, as listed in Part B of Annex I;

(c) ‘mineral supply chain’ means the system of activities, organisations, actors, technology, information, resources and services involved in moving and processing the minerals from the extraction site to their incorporation in the final product;

(d) ‘supply chain due diligence’ means the obligations of Union importers of tin, tantalum and tungsten, their ores, and gold in relation to their management systems, risk management, independent third-party audits and disclosure of information with a view to identifying and addressing actual and potential risks linked to conflict-affected and high-risk areas to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts associated with their sourcing activities;

(e) ‘chain of custody or supply chain traceability system’ means a record of the sequence of economic operators which have custody of minerals and metals as they move through a supply chain;

(f) ‘conflict-affected and high-risk areas’ means areas in a state of armed conflict or fragile post-conflict as well as areas witnessing weak or non-existent governance and security, such as

failed states, and widespread and systematic violations of international law, including human rights abuses;

(g) ‘armed groups and security forces’ means groups referred to in Annex II to the OECD Due Diligence Guidance;

(h) ‘smelter and refiner’ means any natural or legal person performing forms of extractive metallurgy involving processing steps with the aim to produce a metal from a mineral;

(i) ‘global responsible smelters and refiners’ means smelters and refiners located inside or outside the Union that are deemed to fulfil the requirements of this Regulation;

(j) ‘upstream’ means the mineral supply chain from the extraction sites to the smelters and refiners, inclusive;

(k) ‘downstream’ means the metal supply chain from the stage following the smelters and refiners to the final product;

(l) ‘Union importer’ means any natural or legal person declaring minerals or metals for release for free circulation

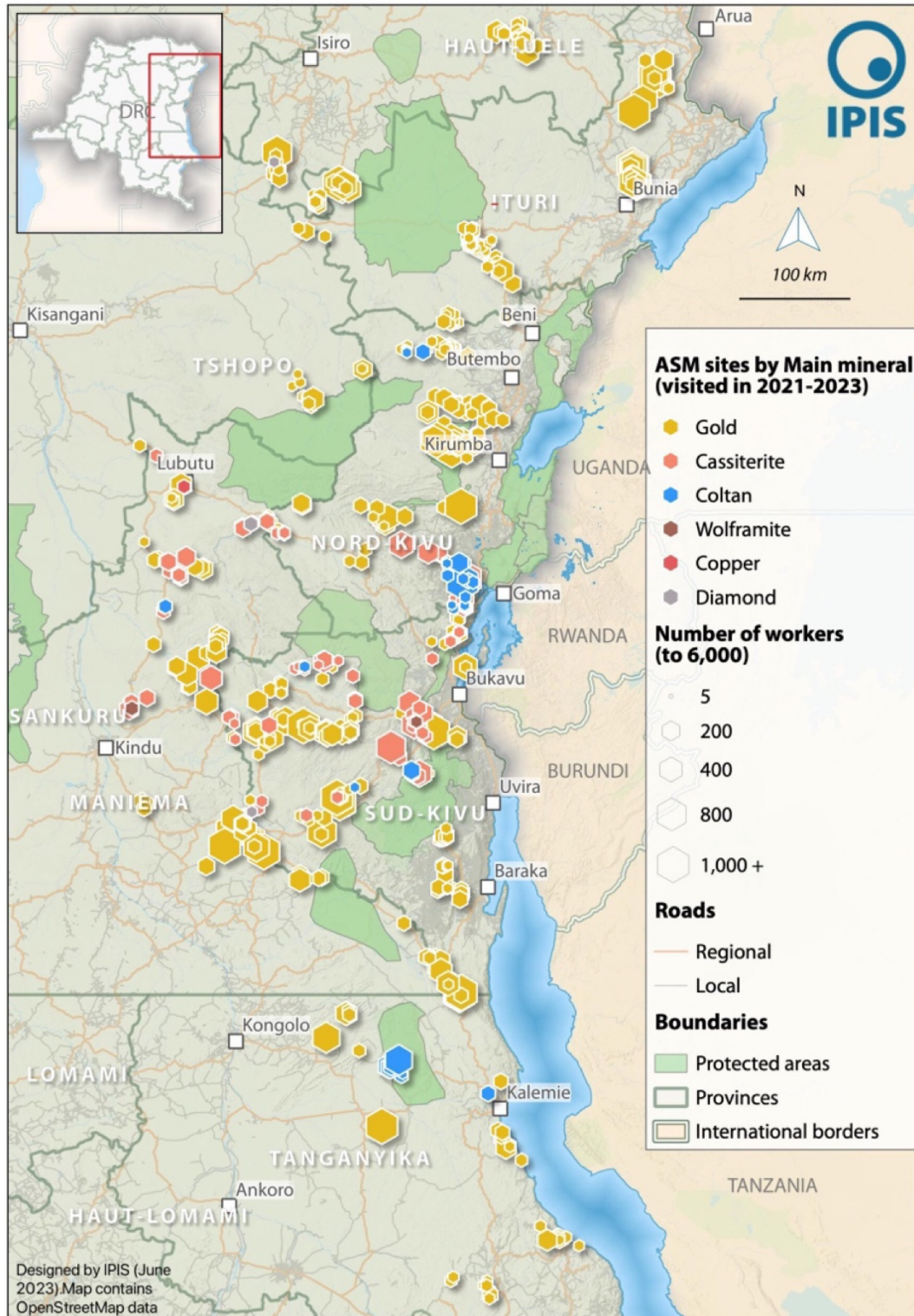
within the meaning of Article 201 of Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council (1) or any natural or legal person on whose behalf such declaration is made, as indicated in data elements 3/15 and 3/16 in accordance with Annex B to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2446 (2);

(m) ‘supply chain due diligence scheme’ or ‘due diligence scheme’ means a combination of voluntary supply chain due diligence procedures, tools and mechanisms, including independent third-party audits, developed and overseen by governments, industry associations or groupings of interested organisations;

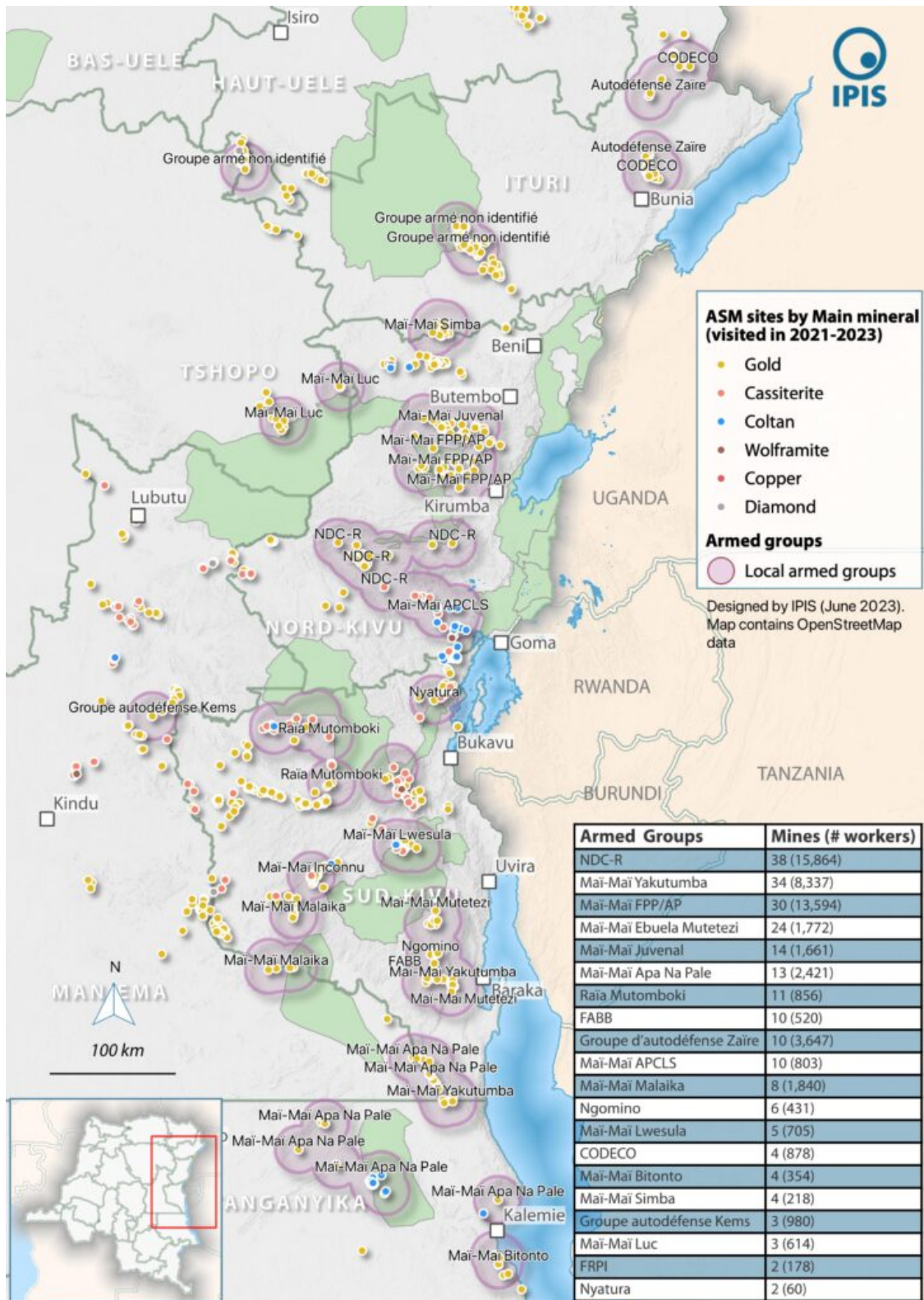
(n) ‘Member State competent authorities’ means authorities designated by Member States in accordance with Article 10 with expertise as regards raw materials, industrial processes and auditing;

Appendix B

Map of mining sites visited by IPIS in eastern DRC between 2021 and 2023 (Leysen et al., 2023):



**Map of armed groups interfering at ASM sites, 2021-2023 (829 sites) (Leysen et al., 2023):**



## Appendix D

### An overview of some of the dominant armed groups (in)active in the DRC:

Armed Group	Full name	Operations	Supported by
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Active	DRC's government
RDF	Rwanda Defence Force	Active	Republic of Rwanda's government
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force	Active	Uganda's government
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front	Ruling political party in Rwanda since 1994.	Republic of Rwanda
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army	Wing army force of the RPF	RPF (Republic of Rwanda)
M23	March 23 Movement or Congolese Revolutionary Army	2012, 2017, 2022 – present. Consists of primarily ethnic Tutsi.	Republic of Rwanda
CODECO	Cooperation for the Development of the Congo	Armed rebel group with its origins in agriculture	Rebel factions
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda	2000 – present. Consists primarily of ethnic Hutu	Democratic Republic of Congo
Mai-Mai	Mai-Mai	Community-based militia groups	Local communities, tribes, war lords, resistance fighters
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces	1996 – present. Islamist rebel group in Uganda and DRC.	Alliances with Islamist armed groups
<i>AFDL</i>	<i>Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire</i>	<i>Fell apart in 1998.</i>	<i>Uganda, Rwanda</i>
<i>RCD</i>	<i>Rally for Congolese Democracy</i>	<i>Became a political party in 2003</i>	<i>Rwanda during Second Congo War</i>

## Appendix E

### Overview of relevant conclusions concerning Rwanda from the UNSC Group of Experts on the DRC reports between 2019 and 2023:

Report/document	Conclusion
S/2019/469	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence of smuggle link between Congolese depots and Rwanda. (par. 152, 159)</li> <li>▪ Discrepancies in the statistics provided by the DRC, transit countries and the United Arab Emirates, which suggest a pattern of smuggling. Rwanda declared gold exports of 2,163 kg, while the United Arab Emirates officially imported 12,539 kg from Rwanda during the first nine</li> <li>▪ months of 2018 (paras. 182-183).</li> </ul>
S/2019/974	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence of continued smuggling across the Rwandan border (p.3)</li> <li>▪ Regional gold export statistics do not reflect trading on the ground, given the volumes of minerals being smuggled through neighbouring countries. Whereas disaggregated export data for coltan, cassiterite and wolframite are published by the National Bank of Rwanda, while gold export figures are not published (par. 53).</li> </ul>
S/2020/482	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Although smuggling activities continue to take place through the country, Rwandan officials stated that they considered cross-border mineral smuggling a security risk and would increase monitoring and interception activities along the border (par. 106).</li> </ul>
S/2020/1283	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rwandan authorities showed the UN Group of Experts 155 kg of coltan seized on 23 January 2020, smuggled from the DRC. They also seized untagged minerals such as cassiterite, wolframite, and coltan, emphasising the illegality of untagged mineral transit through Rwanda (par. 106).</li> <li>▪ Criminal networks were involved in the smuggling of tin, tantalum and tungsten originating from mine sites under armed group occupation. Tantalum was the most confiscated of the three minerals at the DRC-Rwanda border between January and September 2020 (p.2).</li> <li>▪ Untagged tantalum mined from sites in the DRC was smuggled to Goma via smuggling route that were identified by earlier UNSC Group of Experts reports and are subsequently smuggled into Rwanda (see S/2020/482, par. 106). Rwandan authorities charged with mineral fraud prevention stated that they had not recorded any case of mineral smuggling related to the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the beginning of 2020 (see S/2020/482, par. 106). (42).</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Members of the Rwanda Defence Force were present and conducted operations in North Kivu from late 2019 to early October 2020 in violation of the sanction's regime. (paras. d36-41).</li> </ul>

S/2021/560	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gold from areas controlled by armed groups like Mai-Mai Yakutumba was smuggled through Rwanda to international markets. For instance, gold from South Kivu was exported via Rwanda to Dubai and Hong Kong (paras. 166-168).</li> <li>▪ Several cases of fraud involving untagged coltan and cassiterite being smuggled from North and South Kivu, across Lake Kivu, into Rwanda (paras. 72-74).</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The report highlights that the cross-border smuggling of minerals often involved collaboration with armed groups and local militias, who controlled mining areas and taxed the minerals (paras. 169-171).</li> <li>▪ Also, there are detailed accounts of cross-concession mineral fraud involving armed groups and smuggling networks, indicating systemic issues in the region's mining sector (paras. 67-68, 74).</li> <li>▪ Armed groups continued to operate with near impunity in eastern DRC during the reporting period.</li> </ul>
S/2021/1104	<p><i>The Group of Experts did not issue a report for this evaluation deadline: “Group did not have adequate time to conduct investigations sufficient to reach findings that would satisfy its methodology” (S/2021/1104).</i></p>
S/2022/479	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mining authorities reported that illicit cross-border trading in untagged coltan 79 from mines in Masisi territory into Rwanda had increased. This was confirmed by the International Tin Association (ITA) (par. 78).</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The armed/security forces of the DRC reported the presence of “individuals wearing uniforms of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) in M23 camps” located in the DRC. This was confirmed by aerial footage and photographic evidence. However, the Government of Rwanda categorically denied either active or passive RDF support to M23 (par. 67).</li> <li>▪ The Group recommends that Governments of States neighbouring the DRC, including Rwanda and Uganda, prevent the cross-border movement, and the recruitment in their respective territories, of M23 combatants (par. 205).</li> </ul>
S/2022/967	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The increase in conflict in North Kivu since May 2022, and the subsequent worsening of relations between the DRC and Rwanda, led the Heads of State of the East African Community to start mediation and request the immediate creation and deployment of a regional military force to combat armed groups operating in the eastern DRC. Additionally, they aimed to encourage these armed groups to participate in the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Recovery, and Stabilization Programme (p. 2).</li> <li>▪ The Rwandan Defence Force directly intervened in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, either to provide support to M23 (see par.</li> </ul>

	<p>48 for evidence) or to engage in military actions against the FDLR (p.2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ M23 alone or jointly with the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF), significantly expanded the area under its control, covering strategic towns, roads (par. 30).</li> <li>▪ RDF conducted operations against FDLR positions in the DRC. RDF, either unilaterally or jointly with M23 combatants, also engaged in military operations against FARDC positions. Moreover, RDF provided troop reinforcements to M23 for specific operations (par. 49).</li> <li>▪ Rwanda denied allegations of recruitment, facilitation or support of M23 by Rwandan Defence Force or government (par. 51).</li> </ul>
<b>S/2023/431</b>	<p><b><i>Mineral-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ M23 also continued to operate and develop its parallel administration and to tax civilians and economic actors in territories under its control (par. 43).</li> <li>▪ The Group of Experts was informed that while production was still going on in Rubaya, the traceability procedure had been put on hold, making all minerals taken out of the region unfit for the global market. The minerals were allegedly being trafficked into South Kivu Province and Rwanda, where they were being labeled and laundered through several mining sites (par. 97).</li> <li>▪ According to multiple sources who spoke with the Group of Experts, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's increased controls over people and goods crossing the border had caused the ongoing tensions between Rwanda and the DRC to interfere with the Rwandan gold smuggling route. Smugglers have consequently shifted the illegal transfer of gold to Burundi, which has already been established as a transit hub for gold illegally traded from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These smugglers include those connected to armed groups controlling gold production sites in Uvira and Fizi territories (par. 177).</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Conflict-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Group of Experts obtained further evidence of direct interventions by the RDF on DRC territory, either to reinforce M23 combatants or to conduct military operations against the FDLR and local armed groups. The Group identified several RDF commanders and officials coordinating RDF operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (p. 2).</li> <li>▪ Several Member States and the European Union urged Rwanda to cease its support for M23, despite the Rwandan government's persistent denials, including in response to information requests from the Group of Experts (53).</li> </ul>
<b>S/2023/990</b>	<p><b><i>Mineral-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Conflict-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In North-Kivu, all parties to the conflict breached a ceasefire agreement. A resurgence of violence was caused by the recently formed and government-backed armed group coalition Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie (VDP). The RDF-backed M23 and the</li> </ul>



	<p>FARDC, backed by the VDP, FDLR, private armed firms, and Force de défense nationale du Burundi (FDNB) troops, triggered a flareup of violence (p. 2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The Government of Rwanda continued to claim that “Rwanda does not support M23 and does not have troops in the Democratic Republic of the Congo”. Yet, the Group obtained (again) further sound evidence and was confirmed by surrendered M23 combatants (par. 29).</li></ul>
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## Appendix F

### Overview of relevant conclusions concerning Uganda from the UNSC Group of Experts on the DRC reports between 2019 and 2023:

Report / document	Conclusion
S/2019/469	<p><b><i>Mineral-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Persistent smuggling of large volumes of gold from Ituri province in the DRC to Uganda. Based on interviews with mining authorities, private sector members, and miners, the document concludes that gold smuggling routes to Uganda were consistently used. Widespread corruption facilitates arrangements between smugglers and border officials (par. 180).</li> <li>▪ Uganda declared gold exports of 12,000 kg, but the United Arab Emirates reported receiving 21,044 kg from Uganda, suggesting significant quantities of gold smuggled from the DRC (par. 183).</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Conflict-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>
S/2019/974	<p><b><i>Mineral-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Group is aware of efforts by some government authorities in Uganda to improve the transparency of gold refiners and service providers (par. 52).</li> <li>▪ Six traders and multiple officials in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces confirmed to the Group that cross-border mineral smuggling, including the smuggling of gold, had continued along established trading routes (par. 53).</li> <li>▪ Encourage Uganda to adopt legislation in line with the 2010 Lusaka Declaration implementing the compulsory use of ICGLR certificates. At the same time, cross-border smuggling and attempts to use forged ICGLR certificates continued to undermine the integrity of Congolese and regional supply chains (par. 55).</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Conflict-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>
S/2020/482	<p><b><i>Mineral-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recorded artisanal production for countries in the region was low relative to their gold exports. The Group estimated, using information published by the Ugandan authorities, that over 95 per cent of gold exports from Uganda were of non-Ugandan origin for 2019 (par. 91).</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Conflict-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>
S/2020/1283	<p><b><i>Mineral-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Authorities and traders confirmed that cross-border gold smuggling to Uganda remained high and had increased especially during the COVID-19 period. Uganda remains the primary destination for the Ituri's gold (Annex 27).</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Conflict-related:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>
S/2021/560	<p><b><i>Mineral-related:</i></b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Documented continued smuggling of large volumes of gold from Ituri province in the DRC to Uganda. The discrepancy in Uganda's gold import data highlights the scale of smuggling. In 2019, Uganda recorded gold imports from 13 countries but not from the DRC, despite significant gold flows from the DRC to Uganda. The Bank of Uganda recorded preliminary gold exports of almost 36 tonnes in 2020, up from 27.7 tonnes in 2019, suggesting a significant volume of smuggled gold (Annex 97). <b>Conflict-related:</b></li> <li>▪ Illicit trade routes and smuggling activities often involved collaboration with armed groups and local militias, under which factions of the FARDC, who controlled mining areas and taxed the minerals. There is evidence of involvement by Ugandan nationals and entities in supporting these networks through the purchase and transport of smuggled minerals, though there is no indication for direct military support (paras. 95-100).</li> <li>▪ Armed groups continued to operate with near impunity in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo during the reporting period. Among them the ADF, who actively recruits in Uganda. Also reports of looting, but not directly related to minerals (Annex 18).</li> </ul>
S/2021/1104	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>The Group of Experts did not issue a report for this evaluation deadline: “Group did not have adequate time to conduct investigations sufficient to reach findings that would satisfy its methodology” (S/2021/1104).</i></li> </ul>
S/2022/479	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gold exports out of Uganda ceased until December 2021 following the introduction of new gold export taxes by the Ugandan government (par. 151).</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In mid-April 2021, a military cooperation agreement (‘operation Shujaa’) was signed between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. The agreement was intended to defeat ADF and to secure rehabilitation works (par. 20).</li> <li>▪ The Group recommends that Governments of States neighbouring the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including Rwanda and Uganda, prevent the cross-border movement, and the recruitment in their respective territories, of M23 combatants (par. 205).</li> </ul>
S/2022/967	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Factions of CODECO continued to fight over, and benefit from, gold exploitation and gold trade in the Ituri region. Also, certain FARDC elements continued collaborating with armed groups and benefited from gold-mining activities (p. 3).</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Uganda stated that it did not tolerate or approve any of Uganda’s territory to be used to destabilize any country, in response to indications of M23 presence in Ugandan refugee camps (par. 53).</li> </ul>
S/2023/431	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Even though the combined military operations caused the ADF to somewhat slow down at the end of 2022, the armed group persevered and showed that it was still capable of carrying out lethal strikes, one of which took place in Uganda (par. 12).</li> </ul>
S/2023/990	<p><b>Mineral-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict-related:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ADF combatants have, since December 2022, regularly infiltrated Uganda, where they have conducted at least five deadly attacks (par. 17).</li> </ul>

## Appendix G

### Overview of violent incidents and clashes between 2021 and 2022 in the DRC (ACLED, 2023).

