

The M23 rebel group has retaken control of the towns of Kishishe and Bambo in the restive Rutshuru territory, North Kivu province, following fierce clashes with local armed factions, sources confirmed on Wednesday, May 14, 2025.

According to local residents and community leaders, the recapture comes after intense battles with Wazalendo fighters, who were ultimately dislodged from the area. The two towns, once held by M23 before their voluntary withdrawal over a year ago, had since become strongholds for other militias who reportedly launched repeated ambushes and attacks on M23 positions.

“The resurgence of the M23 in this region is largely due to the growing strength of these armed groups that had filled the vacuum left after their departure,” one resident explained, citing escalating insecurity and militant activity as factors contributing to the rebel group’s return.

Fears of renewed violence remain high, as Wazalendo fighters are said to have retreated only a short distance from the now M23-controlled towns. Sporadic gunfire continued to echo in parts of Bambo on Thursday, May 15, although the area has seen a fragile calm settle over it, according to local sources.

The humanitarian toll of the fighting has been severe. Thousands of civilians have been forced to flee their homes amid heavy shelling and ground combat. A local elder reported that two civilians were injured in Kishishe and several businesses in Bambo were looted during the clashes.

“The population has remained largely confined indoors,” the elder said, describing the use of heavy weapons during the confrontations. The volatile security situation has significantly worsened living conditions for residents already affected by years of conflict.

Observers describe the Kishishe-Bambo axis as a strategically vital corridor, linking key routes between Masisi and Rutshuru that are often used for the movement of armed groups and military reinforcements.

In a further escalation, reports indicate that since the beginning of the week, M23 forces have launched additional offensives against Wazalendo fighters in Bundasi and Nushababwe, located in the Tongo group, as well as against FDLR elements hiding in the Mozambican sector of the Virunga National Park.

In a parallel development, Massad Boulos, U.S. President Donald Trump's senior adviser for Africa, said he held discussions with Presidents Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Félix Tshisekedi of the DRC on Thursday, May 15, 2025.

Boulos said the talks focused on advancing a draft peace agreement aimed at resolving the protracted conflict in eastern Congo. The United States, in collaboration with Qatar and the African Union, is facilitating these negotiations, seeking feedback from both nations on the draft with hopes for a finalized accord in the coming weeks.

Boulos emphasized the necessity for Rwanda to cease all military support for the M23 rebels and to withdraw its troops from Congolese territory.

He also highlighted the importance of addressing threats posed by other armed groups, such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), to ensure a comprehensive peace.

The proposed peace agreement is part of a broader initiative to stabilize the mineral-rich region and attract significant Western investment.

The DRC and Rwanda have submitted a draft peace proposal, with plans for U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to host further talks in Washington. The negotiations aim to finalize the agreement by mid-June, potentially leading to a signing ceremony at the White House.

The situation remains fluid, with fears that the ongoing militarization of the area could trigger a new cycle of violence in the already volatile eastern DRC.