

Opening Statement of Ethan Tan

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House Committee on Foreign Affairs “Advancing President Trump’s Washington Accords – Part II”

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the United States' efforts to further peace between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, the underlying factors behind the conflict, and the responses of the United States and the international community.

My name is Ethan Tan, and I serve as Policy Analyst on the American Security team at the America First Policy Institute.

Since the 1990s, armed conflict has burdened the eastern regions of the DRC, and repeated efforts to resolve the conflict have failed, stalling economic growth and allowing hostile actors to exploit the region's vast natural resources—all while blocking the United States from entering critical mineral supply chains. The United States recognizes the implications of these longstanding conflicts and, as a result, has led the movement towards a more holistic approach.

The United States has long played a role in supporting peace efforts across Africa through its diplomatic efforts, and the Washington Accords are no different. The framework mediates beyond the scope of past deals, working in tandem with the Doha framework signed last November, and involves oversight from regional partners in the African Union.

Integrating each element into the Accords begins a new chapter for the conflict—one with genuine hope for a peaceful resolution for the first time in decades.

Peace is fragile, and fighting persists in the east, most notably in South Kivu and the city of Uvira. Coordination with civil societies in the DRC and Rwanda, as well as partners in the African Union, is paramount to the Accords' future success.

Nonetheless, in the two months since the signing of the Accords, there have already been multiple wins, including regular meetings between officials from the DRC and Rwanda, implementation of African Union oversight teams along the eastern border, the creation of a framework for future joint infrastructure projects, and an acknowledgement from the Rwandan government that they have been engaged in security coordination with M23.

U.S. diplomatic efforts have worked; U.S. officials have been credited with successfully pressuring Rwanda and M23 to withdraw from their positions in Uvira reinforcing their commitment to helping the DRC retain its territorial integrity. Subsequent aggressions will not be tolerated, and the State Department has been vocal about pursuing sanctions should they continue.

These developments reduce the risks to U.S. interests in critical minerals from Africa, encapsulating a key tenet of an America First foreign policy—delivering tangible benefits to the American people. Stabilizing this region—a region that today contains over 70% of global cobalt as well as proven reserves of coltan, copper, gold, lithium, and diamonds—secures American defense and manufacturing supply chains and reduces import reliance from countries such as China.

Investments from the United States into the DRC and Rwanda are not a side effect but, a welcomed and even central aspect of enduring peace. Officials from both countries have approached the U.S., citing the U.S.' ability to integrate them within a larger regional framework and connect them to open markets in the West. And the deepening of the cooperation between the United States and both countries on this issue means that our adversaries have a diminished presence.

Agreements also lay the groundwork for future U.S. investment and infrastructure in projects such as the Sakania-Lobito Corridor and the Banana deep-water port. These projects also seek to incorporate involvement from neighboring countries, namely, Burundi and Uganda.

The inclusion of the rest of the Great Lakes region will enable greater accountability and create continuity across the region's economic landscape. Furthermore, long-term stability in the region allows for diverting taxpayer resources away from never-ending peacekeeping missions and back towards the American people.

I want to thank each of you for your attention to this important issue and for the subcommittee's efforts in supporting prosperity in Africa. While signing the Washington Accords is a monumental moment in the conflict's history, it is more than a formal declaration; it is an urgent appeal for action. Thank you for allowing me to share my perspectives with you today. I look forward to your questions.