

2003

Creating chaos: US' policies in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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University of Northern Iowa

**Creating Chaos: US' Policies in the
Democratic Republic of the Congo**

An undergraduate thesis presented to the University of
Northern Iowa Presidential Scholars' Program

By
Kelly Shell

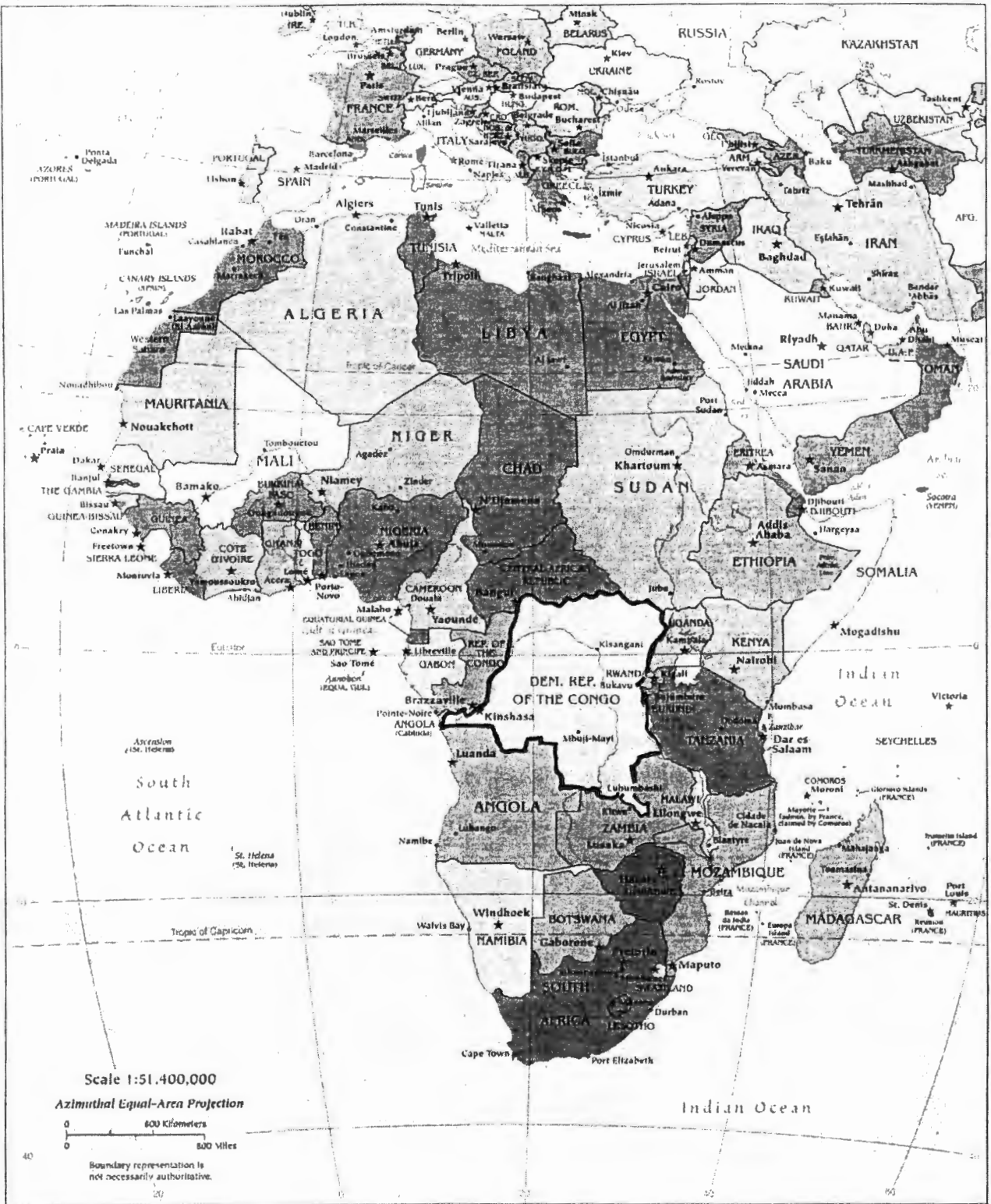
Cedar Falls, Iowa

April, 2003

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AFRICA



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United States. Central Intelligence Agency.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abako	Alliance des Bakongo
AFDL	Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo
AIC	Association internationale pour le Congo
ANC	Armée Nationale Congolaise
APL	Armée Populaire de Libération
CFS	Congo Free State
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNL	Conseil National de Libération
CNS	Conférence Nationale Souveraine
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FAR	Forces Armées Rwandaises
FLNC	Front de Libération Nationale Congolais
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCR-PT	Haut-Conseil de la République – Parlement de Transition
IMET	International Military and Education Training
MLC	Mouvement de Libération Congolais
MNC	Mouvement National Congolais
ONUC	United Nations Mission in the Congo
RCD	Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army
UDPS	Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social
UMHK	Union Minière du Haut-Katanga
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

U.S policy . . . was rationalized on the grounds of fighting “communism” and Soviet influence in Africa, but the U.S. was clearly more concerned with securing its own interests in the region than helping foster a stable, secure, and peaceful future for the people of Central Africa. Lying at the center of the continent, Zaire could provide the U.S. with access to important resources, transportation routes, and political favors. Over the years, U.S. rhetoric changed slightly . . . but in reality policy continued to focus on promoting narrowly defined U.S. economic and strategic interests.¹

Introduction

Lying at the heart of the African continent, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly known as Zaire, is a vast wonderland of rich mineral and natural resources. Yet despite the undisputed economic potential of the country, the Congolese people have suffered through a century of repression and poverty and today remain among the poorest of the world’s poor. The exploitation of the DRC, first by Belgium and later by internal and external forces, many backed by the United States, has effectively rendered this nation a land of chaos and death.

¹ William D. Hartung and Bridget Moix, Arms Trade Resource Center. *Deadly Legacy: U.S. Arms to Africa and the Congo War*. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/congo.htm>; Internet; accessed February 28, 2003.

Since 1885, when the United States' government became the first to officially recognize King Léopold's claim to the Congo, the United States has continuously undermined the democratic attempts and economic prosperity of the Congolese population. Throughout the DRC's political history the United States has successfully used covert operations under the guise of the United Nations, clandestine CIA maneuvers, and/or the pretense of humanitarian relief to control American interests in the Great Lakes Region. Although other western nations have used their own means to advance their interests in the Congo, this paper will focus on the US' role in the Congo. Through an historical account of events that shaped the DRC and through an analysis of the United States' actions during distinct periods in Congolese political history, this paper will show how the US undermined the dreams of the Congolese people for the security of its own national interests and how the US has now denied responsibility in the current Congolese crisis and deserted the dying nation in its time of greatest need.

Birth of the Belgian Congo

Contemporary Congolese repression at the hands of the West began with the creation of the Congo Free State under the sovereign rule of King Léopold of Belgium in 1885. Prior to European imperialism the central portion of Africa was politically comprised of kingdoms and empires loosely controlling smaller tribes. Contact with the Europeans was officially made in 1482 when Portugal's Diego Cão arrived at the mouth of the Congo River, but it was not until the travels of journalist Henry Morton Stanley from 1874 until 1877 that the Congo became a region of serious colonial interest. Though Stanley originally scouted the territory for his native Great Britain, the British showed little interest in the Congo Basin, and Belgium's King Léopold

quickly hired him to claim the vast territory for the Belgian crown. To establish legitimacy for his interests, Léopold created the Association Internationale pour le Congo in 1879. The AIC seemingly represented a coalition of humanitarian agencies fighting against the Arabic slave trade in Africa, but in actuality a consortium of bankers financed the AIC.² While Stanley returned to the Congo to chart the land area and obtain treaties with various tribal leaders, European powers continued to claim land in their “scramble for Africa.” Culminating in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, the European powers had earlier begun to divide Africa according to their imperialistic desires. To avoid fighting between the powers the Berlin Conference was arranged to peacefully partition the continent.

Though a young and relatively minor nation at the end of the Nineteenth Century, it was the United States who first recognized King Léopold’s right to an African playground. On April 22, 1884, the American Secretary of State declared the US’ recognition of Léopold’s claim to the Congo. Although not a recipient of any African territory, the United States was also a party to the Berlin Conference and engaged in discussion regarding the partitioning of the continent and the availability of free trade and transportation in the Congo River Basin. Following the conference King Léopold formally recognized the Congo Free State (CFS).

King Léopold ran the Congo Free State as his personal possession until 1908, when international criticism forced him to transfer control to the Belgian Parliament. His exceptionally repressive and inhumane treatment of the population in order to attain rubber and ivory had caused an outcry among human rights advocates. To fulfill his paramount goal of increased capital, “the cruel logic of the revenue imperative left Leopold with no other option than to transform his nascent administrative system into an infernal machine designed to extract

² Sandra W. Meditz and Tim Merrill, eds., *Zaire: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), 13.

a maximum output of labour and natural resources from the land.”³ Unfortunately for the Congolese the system of rule under the Parliament did not substantially improve their situation. Though the Belgian legislature was not as brutal in their execution of economic objectives, “the irreducible tendency to treat Africans as childlike creatures and a firm commitment to political control and compulsion” characterized Belgian Parliamentary paternalism.⁴

The Congolese Independence Movement

The rise of Pan-Africanism, international support of African independence, liberal criticism of imperialism and a variety of internal factors among the African nations led to the mass decolonization of Africa throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s. In the Congo the repressive Belgian rule that focused on continued economic exploitation of mineral resources had created a divided class society amongst the Congolese. While the vast majority of the population remained outside the sphere of economic improvement, a class of petty bourgeoisie rose in the Congo consisting of educated Africans and African white-collar workers. Several of these *évolués* had earned the distinction of honorary Europeans when the new status of matriculation was introduced in 1952. Despite the superficial recognition of these accomplishments by Belgium and the West, it became increasingly clear to the *évolués* that they were regarded as sub-standard beings due to their heritage and skin color. A history of racism, instigated by King Léopold and instituted by the Belgian Parliament, had permanently cemented black inferiority in the eyes of the Europeans.⁵ Eventually the petty bourgeoisie joined the mass movement already

³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Zaire.”

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo From Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 41.

taking place amongst the working class and the lumpenproletariat to form the democratic opposition that would ultimately bring down Belgian rule. In the Belgian Congo, as elsewhere in Africa, the passion of the masses and the education of the *évolués* created an inescapable force.

The Congolese independence movement arose in this complex time of decolonization and fermented politically in the form of two preeminent political parties. While Joseph Kasa-Vubu led the Alliance des Bakongo (Abako), Patrice Emery Lumumba headed the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC). By 1958, a multitude of political parties existed, but these two were the primary catalysts of change. While Abako was a regionally supported party, Lumumba's MNC can be categorized as the only truly national party with a broad base of support.⁶ It was Kasa-Vubu who first called for *indépendance immédiate*, in response to a plan proposed by Belgian professor A.A.J Van Bilsen outlining a thirty-year transition period leading to Congo's independence.⁷ It was Lumumba's speech at the All-African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana; however, that outlined his basic tenets on independence, the same tenets that would characterize the Congolese independence movement for decades to follow. In his talk Lumumba stressed the importance of national unity, economic independence, and Pan-African solidarity.⁸ Following his return from Accra, Lumumba held a mass rally on December 28, 1958, and called for total independence from Belgium. In turn Abako planned their own political rally for January 4, 1959. Though thousands of people showed up in Kinshasa for the Abako rally, Kasa-Vubu was forced to reschedule it due to bureaucratic complications, and he instructed the people to reconvene in two weeks. The announcement agitated the already emotional masses, and the atmosphere exploded into an anti-Belgian street riot. Crowds threw rocks at police and white motorists and destroyed any visible sign of white colonial power, including European shops.

⁶ Carlene J. Edie, *Politics in Africa: A New Beginning?* (n.p.: Wadsworth/Thomas Learning, 2003), 55.

⁷ Meditz and Merrill, 23.

⁸ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 84.

Official Belgian statistics reported nearly fifty deaths and three hundred people injured, though it is probable that the actual figures are much higher.⁹ The fourth of January is now celebrated in the Congo as International Martyr's Day.

Shocked by the unexpected violence of a presumably controllable populace, Belgium quickly restructured its plan for decolonization. Following the riot the Congo became increasingly ungovernable, and the people openly dismissed Belgian authority.

Belgian officials hosted the Round Table Conference in Brussels from January 20 to February 20, 1960, in order to discuss liberation with representative Congolese party leaders. The Round Table succeeded in finalizing the date of June 30, 1960, for complete Congolese independence.

Although Patrice Lumumba had been jailed prior to the conference for his involvement in a deadly riot in Stanleyville, he was released as a preemptive condition of the Round Table.

During his absence he was represented by his friend and follower Joseph Mobutu.¹⁰ A second Round Table Conference was held in April of 1960 dealing with the economic conditions of the power transfer. However, only one prominent Congolese politician, Moïse Tshombe, showed up for the conference, a critical mistake on the part of the leadership that would haunt the country for decades. It was at this economic forum that Belgium successfully transferred state portfolios of companies to Belgium through privatization while leaving the Congo with virtually all the colony's public debt.¹¹

The Belgian-Congolese arrangements for power transfer included national elections in May of 1960 to fill the bicameral parliament and executive posts. Lumumba's MNC won a slim majority of seats in both chambers due to an alliance with smaller parties, and therefore Patrice

⁹ Maurice N. Hennessy, *The Congo: A Brief History and Appraisal* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1961), 73.

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica Online. s.v. "Mobutu Sese Seko." <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=75531>; Internet ; accessed February 5, 2003.

¹¹ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 88.

Lumumba became the Congo's first Prime Minister. Because Kasa-Vubu's Abako won numerous seats in the Parliament as well, he became the first Congolese president, a largely ceremonial position. The first national elections had gone relatively smoothly and on June 30, 1960, the Democratic Republic of Congo was recognized as a sovereign nation.

Throughout the first wave of African decolonization the United States was publicly supportive of African independence movements and respected the right of self-determination. Privately, however, the US had a number of covert interests in the region and had reasonable cause to worry about the possible outcomes of decolonization. Although the United States had few official ties with Africa in the form of direct land holdings, the US economic and political interests in the continent were diverse and substantial. Given the vacuum in economic control following the exit of the colonial masters, the US had an immense opportunity to engage the newly independent countries. American economic goals coupled with the huge resource potential of Central Africa demanded that the US strengthen its foothold in the Congolese economy. Already minerals from the Congo had proved immensely important to US security. The uranium used in the first atomic bombs came from Congolese mines.¹² The US was well aware that natural resources in the Congo included "cobalt, copper, cadmium, petroleum, industrial and gem diamonds, gold, silver, zinc, manganese, tin, germanium, uranium, radium, bauxite, iron ore, coal, hydropower, timber"¹³ and that in 1959 "the Congo produced 9 percent of the "Free World's" copper, 49 percent of its cobalt, 69 percent of its industrial diamonds . . . as well as a number of specialized metals used in the nuclear and electrical industry."¹⁴ Even absent economic interests the Congo was still of immense importance to the US as it was the

¹²Ibid., 29.

¹³ Central Intelligence Agency. *World Factbook 2002*, s.v. "Congo, Democratic Republic of the." <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/cg.html>; Internet; accessed January 28, 2003.

¹⁴ Stephen R. Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo 1960-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 29.

geopolitical key to central Africa; a giant bordering nine nations and two of the world's five largest lakes. Due to the realities of the Cold War, the DRC was automatically thrown into the mayhem of the Capitalist vs. Socialist and pro-West vs. pro-Communist international system.

Political Unrest following Congolese Independence

Internal strife and external manipulation began to dismantle the Congolese government immediately after the Democratic Republic of Congo was declared. On July 5, 1960, only five days after independence, chaos erupted when Congolese soldiers in the military, formerly the Force Publique, mutinied against their Belgian officers. The Belgian generals had told the soldiers that nothing would change in the military following independence and that Belgian officers would remain in posts of command. Because Prime Minister Lumumba had previously promised the soldiers that military training would be available to allow for eventual promotion of the Congolese, the Belgians' announcement led the men to believe that they would be "denied the fruits of independence."¹⁵ To appease the mutineers Prime Minister Lumumba appointed a native Congolese as the new leader of the military, the Armée Nationale Congolaise (ANC). At this time he also appointed his friend Joseph Mobutu as the military Chief of Staff. Despite these efforts the mutiny continued, spreading throughout the country, and the loss of law and order led to the panicked flight of Belgian nationals across the river to Brazzaville.

Days after the mutiny began two other crises exploded in the DRC. The disorder resulting from the army mutiny led to the arrival of Belgian soldiers on July 10. The Belgian military officially came to intervene on behalf of the Belgian nationals whose lives were threatened by the bedlam, but the Congolese government interpreted this as an overt act of

¹⁵ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 98.

aggression. On July 11, the situation further deteriorated when Moïse Tshombé announced the secession of Katanga province from the rest of the DRC. This large province covering the entire southeastern corner of the country was the main source of mineral exports and was of crucial interest to many international parties. On July 12, the fledgling Congolese government asked the United Nations to dispatch troops to help the country fight external aggression and to restore its territorial integrity. Thus began the “largest, most complex, and most costly operation ever carried out by the United Nations” until that point.¹⁶ This request for aid played directly into the hands of the US government, which would use the cover of UN action to promote its own national interests.

The same internal and external factors working to undermine stability in the DRC were also working to remove Prime Minister Lumumba from his post. One of Lumumba’s primary goals was to reunify the Congo; and in order to put down the Katanga secession, the ANC had to march through South Kasai province, where an ethnic bloodbath, also begun shortly after independence, was raging. Lumumba made the grave mistake of telling the ANC to put down the South Kasai crisis en route to Katanga. This order tragically led to the mass killings of unarmed civilians in the region by ANC soldiers. Under the pretext that Lumumba had sponsored these murders, President Kasa-Vubu dismissed the Prime Minister from his post on September 5. The Parliament refuted this action as unconstitutional, but neither did it allow for Kasa-Vubu to be dismissed by Lumumba. To restore order amongst the two feuding sides General Joseph Mobutu staged his first military coup on September 14, 1960, in order to “neutralize” the leaders. Lumumba was placed under house arrest while representative delegations on behalf of Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu went to the United Nations and allowed for

¹⁶ Robert D. Calkins, introduction to *Crisis in the Congo: A United Nations Force in Action* by Ernest W. Lefever (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1965), vii.

the UN to decide the fate of the leadership. The UN General Assembly declared Kasa-Vubu as the legitimate power, and Lumumba was kept detained in the Congo. In late November he fled towards Stanleyville, his central hold of power, but was captured on December 1 and imprisoned. The former Prime Minister was later taken to the Katanga province where an execution squad assassinated him on January 17, 1961.

The United States involvement in the events following the DRC's independence began under the umbrella of the United Nations' peacekeeping mission. Already the West viewed Prime Minister Lumumba negatively because he was an emotional leader whose nationalist views threatened western control. Lumumba was a democratically elected leader who, instead of being accountable to the West for his power, was accountable to his own people. These background conflicts came to a head when Lumumba requested UN troop support. The UN created the United Nations Mission in the Congo (ONUC) whose mandate was to facilitate the withdrawal of Belgian troops, put down the Katanga secession, and restore law and order in the country.¹⁷ However, then Secretary-General Hammarskjöld and Lumumba had varying interpretations of what the mandate ordered and how to go about the removal of Belgian troops, resulting in "but one of the many situations which arose and which turned the United Nations itself into a political playground for the internal contestants as well as for those external ones who also wished to influence the course of events."¹⁸ Because Lumumba felt that the UN was not providing the security the country needed, he looked elsewhere for international support. He received this support from the Soviet Union.

When Patrice Lumumba accepted military aid and weapons from the Soviet Union the United States' Cold War security interests were immediately threatened. Though Lumumba had

¹⁷ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 113.

¹⁸ Hennessy, 99.

declared himself and the DRC to be non-aligned, his overt agreement with the USSR prompted the US to order his removal as head of state. Documented by Senator Frank Church in his 1976 report to the US Senate, President Eisenhower gave the Central Intelligence Agency the go ahead to remove Lumumba. CIA Director Allan Dulles gave instructions for a head scientist to create a poison made from cobra venom that would kill the Prime Minister. However, this particular method was aborted once it became clear that the US could use Congolese opposition to secure Lumumba's removal. American Andrew Cordier, temporarily in control of the ONUC mission for the UN, "threw the weight and the prestige of the UN behind the western demand that Kasa-Vubu dismiss Lumumba." As stated above Lumumba was dismissed, and the UN ended his tenure with their recognition of the Kasa-Vubu government.¹⁹

Yet the Lumumba threat continued for the Americans once it was clear that his base of support remained strong. The eastern half of the DRC was Lumumba's stronghold, and had his escape attempt succeeded he likely would have risen to power on the shoulders of the masses. Backed by US support the UN did not intervene or offer protection for Lumumba when he was arrested, nor when he was severely beaten on his plane ride to Katanga. Even in prison the popular support loyal to Lumumba threatened the US and Belgium. On January 17, 1961, it was Belgium who was ultimately directly responsible for the assassination of Lumumba.²⁰ The death of Lumumba resulted in the "shock and anger of most developing nations in the face of the cold-blooded murder of the man who best symbolized the struggle of African nationalism against the

¹⁹ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 108.

²⁰Ibid., 112.

forces of neo-colonialism.”²¹ However, according to the US Department of State, “Prime Minister Lumumba died under mysterious circumstances”; there is no mention of assassination.²²

The removal of Lumumba left Washington with a clearer path to economic integration but not necessarily an easy one. The first move by the West was to fill the vacant Prime Minister position with Cyrille Adoula, a pro-western moderate. Though mass support for Lumumbists remained strong, the violent political climate eventually led to the self-imposed exile of many of Lumumba’s followers. They regrouped across the river in Congo-Brazzaville and continued their fight externally through the creation of the Conseil National de Libération (CNL) political party.

In September 1962 and January 1963, the secession efforts of South Kasai and Katanga were ended through the force of UN troops. The leader of the Katangan secession, Moïse Tshombe, left the Congo following the defeat of his secession and resided in Spain for seventeen months until his return to the DRC. Unrest continued to simmer in the country as political and social turmoil continued. Parliament was dismissed, senior executive officers were exiled or imprisoned, and pro-Lumumbists revolts continued throughout the country. In January 1964, opposition forces under Pierre Mulele commenced an all out guerilla war in the eastern part of the country; and in April the CNL joined in the fight. The pro-Lumumbists forces combined to create the Armée Populaire de Libération (APL); and on August 4, they captured the Congo’s second largest city. The CNL created a government and declared the People’s Republic of the Congo in Stanleyville under President Christophe Gbenye on September 5.

The resurgence of nationalist, pro-Lumumbist power in the Congo again propelled the United States to action. However, this time the removal of United Nations troops in June 1964

²¹ Meditz and Merrill, 36.

²²United States Department of State. Bureau of African Affaris. “Background Note: Democratic Republic of Congo.” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2823.htm>; Internet; accessed March 5, 2003.

forced the United States to act without the umbrella of a UN mandate. To put down the insurgency in the east, the “CIA had since early 1964 started to conduct a major paramilitary campaign against the Kwilu and eastern insurrections. Since the CNL received support from Nasser’s Egypt and the Eastern bloc countries, the counter-insurgency was led by the United States.”²³ Efforts culminated in the US led Operation Red Dragon, a counterinsurgency orchestrated by the CIA and Belgian paratroopers. American President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the operation in the name of rescuing white settlers who were being held hostage by a rebel group. However, this operation was scheduled to coincide with the arrival of Tshombe’s Katangan gendarmes. It was due to the assistance of US paratroopers and air support that Stanleyville fell and the eastern rebellion was crushed.²⁴ Tshombe had returned in July of 1964 and had replaced Adoula as Prime Minister. His troops successfully helped the US quell the rebellion whereas the ANC had repeatedly failed in this task.

As shown through Operation Red Dragon, the US was determined to maintain its interests in the DRC but knew that endless military operations were not the most efficient, cost effective, or politically justifiable route to resource exploitation. The US needed a strong power on the inside of the country that could maintain control while remaining friendly to the West.

The Kleptocracy of Joseph Mobutu

The US’ key to stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo lay in finding a strong, centralized power center that was beholden to western backers and not to a popular constituency. For the United States, ANC Chief of Staff Joseph Mobutu perfectly filled this role. The United

²³Nzongola-Ntalaja, 136.

²⁴ Meditz and Merrill, 42.

States had been supporting Mobutu since the late 1950's when the young man was studying in Brussels. Although originally believed to be a follower and friend of Lumumba, Mobutu's connections to the West undermined any possibility of loyalty to Lumumba. This became clear during Mobutu's first military coup in 1960 and through his acquiescence to the assassination plot against the Prime Minister.²⁵ Following Lumumba's death Mobutu became the leader of the Binza Group, the moderate coalition of government leaders whose unitarist beliefs outweighed those of the moderate federalists in the central government. Mobutu was politically active as military Chief of Staff throughout the first half of the 1960's, but he primarily exercised his power behind the scenes. This covert control ended with his second coup d'état on November 24, 1964, wherein he began his reign over the country that would end nearly thirty-three years later.

The United States supported the coup of General Mobutu although it effectively replaced the Prime Ministership of Moise Tshombe, whom the US had also backed, because Tshombe ended up to be more difficult to manipulate than previously thought. President Kasa-Vubu dismissed Tshombe from office in 1965, and the US did not step in to secure his post. Tshombe, a moderate federalist in opposition to the Binza Group, had accepted a new constitution in 1964 and had presided over national elections in May of 1965. The elections went relatively well, and a parliamentary democracy appeared to be progressing. However, "in spite of this and other encouraging signs of political maturity, a parliamentary regime was deemed incapable of maintaining peace and protecting Western interests in such a potentially turbulent country."²⁶ Ironically the US did not secure the interests of President Kasa-Vubu because his dismissal of Tshombe proved to them that he leaned too far to the left.

²⁵Ibid., 144.

²⁶Ibid., 145.

As opposed to Congolese leaders whom the US supported and dismissed according to circumstances, American support of Mobutu leading up to the coup had been continuous. In May of 1963, Mobutu had visited President Kennedy at the White House and had been praised for his efforts to battle communism. Over the years Mobutu had stayed in continuous contact with CIA Station Chief Lawrence Devlin, and it was speculation within the administration that Mobutu would eventually come to power through a coup.²⁷

From 1965 to 1990, the uncontested dictatorship of Joseph Mobutu took on a seemingly dual nature. During certain periods of rule the leader appeared to be publicly anti-West. Privately, however, Mobutu remained a staunch western ally throughout his reign. The first few years of Mobutu's rule seemed advantageous to all. The Congolese people, "exhausted from the unending strife and repeated crises . . . enthusiastically welcomed the new regime and the respite it promised."²⁸ Mobutu successfully hid his pro-western tendencies from the population and appeared to them as a nationalistic leader who was making concentrated efforts to work with non-Binza moderates and student movement leaders. This façade quickly fell, and the General's tyrannical ways soon became evident.

The horrors committed by Mobutu and enacted upon the Congolese people are well documented and internationally condemned. His reign consisted of a globally recognized kleptocracy in which he used the immense natural wealth of the Congo for personal gain. Mobutu used the national bank as his personal account and siphoned millions of Congolese dollars to foreign banks and offshore accounts. As one scholar notes:

²⁷ Michael G. Schatzberg, *Mobutu or Chaos? The United States and Zaire, 1960-1990* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 62.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 31.

Mindful of the attention he received from the West, Mobutu took care to be accompanied on his trips abroad by one of the managing directors of state mining companies and/or by the governor of the central bank. These officials were expected to draw on the numerous accounts their organization maintained in foreign banks for any cash that the Congolese dictator might need for lavish entertainment, expensive gifts for influential friends and other forms of political corruption.²⁹

This continuous draining of the Congolese' money by the autocrat explains why "while his country's per capita income hovered below \$200 from 1967 to 1990, Mobutu emerged as one of the world's wealthiest leaders, with an estimated fortune of several billions."³⁰

During Mobutu's tenure international aid going to the country was used for political patronage and clientilism and rarely for the social or economic relief of the people. Mobutu used his power to "help associates profit from clandestine trade, avoid taxation, and explore new rackets in activities that made use of state regulatory power such as passport sales, money laundering, and drug trafficking."³¹

External loans were used by Mobutu to finance massive industrial projects that ultimately failed to reach projected outputs. The Maluku steel plant, designed to reduce imported steel expenditures, operated at 10 percent capacity from its completion in 1975 to its shutdown in 1980. The massive Inga-Shaba power line, partially financed by the US Export-Import Bank, took four years longer than expected to construct and eight years after completion was still producing at 14 percent of total capacity.³² By 1970, the DRC's external debt had reached \$5 billion dollars; a considerable amount for a country well endowed with natural resources.³³ With

²⁹ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 150.

³⁰ Edie, 80.

³¹ Ibid., 82.

³² Meditz and Merrill, 154-155.

³³ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 149.

all of the state's legitimate earnings from mining going to the personal spending habits of the state bourgeoisie or to white elephant projects, the Congolese people saw little improvement in their daily lives. The DRC experienced a relatively strong economic period in the late 1960's and early 1970's due to increased foreign investment and a high world copper demand, but in terms of per capita GDP, Zaire remained among the poorest of African countries. The breakdown in infrastructure that resulted in the DRC was immense. Given the already poor quality of most Congolese schools and health facilities, the virtual abandonment of these institutions by the government led to their complete collapse. The standard of living in the already destitute nation began to decrease in 1975, culminating in a nation that was economically and socially better off during the colonial period.³⁴ The International Monetary Fund attempted to reverse the downward spiral of the economy and introduced seven stabilization plans between 1976 and 1986. However, "the bottom line was that Mobutu had mortgaged Zaire's future and had to contract new loans merely to service the already existing debt."³⁵

A social representation of Mobutu's dictatorial ways was his unilateral changing of the Congo's name to Zaire on October 27, 1971. This policy of "authenticity" also included the changing of city and village names, the outlawing of Christian or western names for the people, and the banning of western dress such as suits for men and dresses or trousers for women. In accordance with these laws the General changed his own name from Joseph Mobutu to Mobutu Sese Seko.

Though the United States and the international community were aware of Mobutu's repressive autocratic rule, the US continued its military, economic and political support of his

³⁴ Ibid., 151.

³⁵ Schatzberg, 40.

reign. In a report on US arms sales in Africa, the involvement of the American military in Zaire is detailed:

Despite continued reports of widespread corruption and human rights abuses in Zaire, the U.S. helped build Mobutu's arsenal with a fleet of C-130 transport aircraft and a steady supply of rifles, ammunition, trucks, jeeps, patrol boats, and communication equipment. By the time the dictator was ousted in 1997, the U.S. had delivered more than \$300 million in military hardware to Mobutu's regime. . . The U.S. also trained 1,350 of Mobutu's soldiers at a cost of more than \$100 million.³⁶

The US continuously supported Mobutu's Zaire in defense against Soviet aggression in Africa and used American International Military Education and Training (IMET) to conduct bilateral training sessions with the ANC. The US justified their policy by asserting that loyalty in the face of the communist threat was paramount to security. African nations needed to depend on the US as a constant, and this would assure that these same nations would remain loyal to the US. Reciprocity was key during the bi-polar era. Underlying military expenditures and loyalty; however, was also the assumption that American interests would be protected in the economic zone.

Though Western powers had aided each other when their interests aligned, private national interests eventually outweighed loyalty to previous alliances. The United States needed to break Belgium's economic control of the Congo. To help the US penetrate the Congolese economy, Mobutu took two steps. In 1966, Mobutu passed the Bakajika Law that recognized the state's claim on all land and mineral rights in the country. In January 1967, he nationalized Belgians giant mining company, Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK). This enormous economic powerhouse had controlled the majority of Katangan minerals since its inception in

³⁶ Hartung and Moix.

1906. Belgium responded to these measures by placing an embargo on Congolese copper. The US mediated between the two countries to resolve the dispute. Though the situation was portrayed to the Congolese people as a victory in the face of western economic power, the true victory was for the West and the quickly growing Congolese bourgeoisie.³⁷

Politically the United States kept close ties with Mobutu by constantly referring to Zaire as a close friend and ally in the fight against communism. Although American leaders were aware of human rights abuses taking place in Zaire, these allegations were overlooked as long as Mobutu remained trustworthy. Tensions surfaced; however, when Mobutu's "authenticity" directive led to "Zairianization" or privatization of foreign-owned enterprises. As expected the US was upset by this unforeseen move. By 1975, however, both sides were in agreement on the civil war in Angola and tensions ceased. The Carter Administration, whose foreign policy objectives heralded human rights improvements, was not as accepting of Mobutu as his predecessors had been. Carter refused to send military aid to help Zaire in the first Shaba War (formerly Katanga province) and put pressure on the regime to improve its human rights record. Carter relinquished, sent military aid during the second Shaba War, and put pressure on the Senate not to cut military aid to the country. With the changing of the guard in the US and the eruption of conflict in the Middle East in 1980, American-Congolese relations soon normalized, and both the Reagan and Bush administrations heralded Mobutu as a strong ally.³⁸

³⁷ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 47.

³⁸ Meditz and Merrill, 258.

Resistance Continues in Mobutu's Zaire

While political opposition under Mobutu was systematically repressed, pockets of resistance occasionally arose to reinforce the notion that dissent can never be completely eradicated. Internal opposition under Mobutu's reign had been confined to criticism of specific policies, and rarely was the actual legitimacy of the government called into question. External opposition, however, remained alive throughout the 1970's and 1980's, finding a source of strength in the Front de Libération Nationale Congolais (FLNC). The FLNC, based in neighboring Angola, waged the first and second Shaba Wars, in 1977 and 1978 respectively. Both wars failed to secure the objective of economically strangling the regime while allowing the masses to revolt and take power. As previously mentioned, following the first Shaba War United States President Jimmy Carter pressured Mobutu for political reform. In response to US pressure Mobutu allowed Parliamentary elections in 1977 that led to a slight increase in political freedoms; nevertheless, Mobutu won the election unopposed. The Group of 13, a coalition of anti-Mobutist legislators, formed in 1980 and demanded reforms in the government. The group wrote a letter to the president severely criticizing his actions. Though the group was originally condemned to death they were subsequently internally exiled, and many were arbitrarily jailed multiple times in the following decade.³⁹

In 1990, two and a half decades of political oppression and economic decline led to the first real threat to Mobutu's power. Previously in 1988, a mass rally of the Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS), the political party founded by the former Group of 13, had symbolized the increasing weakness of the Mobutu's strength. Under intense internal pressure Mobutu officially ended the one-party state on April 24, 1990; a move that directly led

³⁹ Schatzberg, 49.

to the creation of multiple political parties and the convening of a national conference in August of 1991. Mobutu attempted to quell the rising popular sentiment against him by appointing Etienne Tshisekedi, a vocal opponent and popular national hero, to the post of Prime Minister in July of 1991. Though many viewed Tshisekedi as Mobutu's largest political threat, Tshisekedi initially accepted the post. Immediate pressure from the Congolese masses forced Tshisekedi to reverse his decision.

The pressure to reform the government did not end with the dismissal of the one-party system. On August 7, 1991, the Conférence Nationale Soveraine (CNS) convened in Kinshasa with nearly three thousand delegates representing all walks of Congolese life. The mission of the CNS was to critically analyze the historic problems of Zaire, draft a new constitution, and outline policies for a transitional government that would ensure a democratic future. While the logistics of the conference went smoothly, Mobutu remained adamantly opposed to the proceedings because of his fear that the CNS would strip him of his power. In July of 1992, the US began negotiations outside of the CNS to develop a power-sharing agreement between Mobutu and his opposition. The CNS delegates were unaware of these background maneuvers as they continued openly debating and voting on policies. The *Compromis Politique Global* (Comprehensive Political Compromise) eventually mediated by the US was introduced to the CNS in August of 1992 as a *fait accompli*, and delegates were instructed to incorporate it into the CNS charter.⁴⁰ The compromise provide for a two-year transition period under a government that was accountable to a provisional parliament, both elected by the CNS. Mobutu would remain in power during the transitional period as the ceremonial president of Zaire. The CNS, forced to adopt this resolution, held the parliamentary and government elections on August 14 and 15,

⁴⁰ Nzongola-Ntalaja, 193.

1992. Etienne Tshisekedi was elected Prime Minister, and this time the masses accepted his position enthusiastically.

The successes of the national conference and the multi-party elections were quickly crushed on December 1, 1992, when Mobutu led his third coup d'état. He closed the CNS five days later and removed Tshisekedi from his post in December of 1993. While the US offered tough talk in international circles they did not move to intervene on behalf of the democratically elected prime minister. The US' solution was to return to the drawing board and attempt another slow set of negotiations.

Negotiations between the two sides resulted in an immensely confusing political atmosphere wherein both Mobutu's and Tshisekedi's government were running within the country. In 1994, this dual authority ended when Mobutu combined his former parliament and the CNS elected parliament into one national assembly of over seven hundred members, the HCR-PT. One fundamental law was promulgated in April of 1994, and Léon Kengo was sworn in as Prime Minister on July 6. Kengo had been Prime Minister under Mobutu's original one party state, and his first reign had ended in 1990. The US supported Kengo because he was believed to be an efficient technocrat with a strong hand in economics. Though Kengo's new government was superficially established as a transitional government, the parliament was composed of Mobutu's cronies, the independent electoral commission was sabotaged by Kengo, and the elections to be held in July of 1995 were postponed for two more years.⁴¹ As the months of "transition" passed it became clear that Mobutu had no intention of giving up power and that drastic measures were needed to prevent another thirty-year reign. A guerilla army under Laurent Kabila responded to this challenge and unequivocally forced Mobutu into exile on May 16, 1997.

⁴¹ Ibid., 206.

From the inception of multi-party politics in Zaire until the day of Mobutu's exile, it was clear that his power was in decline. In addition to internal resistance battling his clearly illegitimate regime, international allies had begun to minimize their support for him. Following the end of the Cold War and the victory of democracy over communism, protecting Africa from the Soviet Union was no longer of paramount importance to the United States. Serious problems in the Middle East and Asia switched the focus of US attention away from the Congo. Although economic interests were still important to the US, it was becoming more difficult to explain American support of Mobutu in the face of overwhelming evidence of human rights violations. Although the US government delivered more than \$4.5 million to Mobutu in 1991 in military hardware, later that year Congress suspended all direct economic assistance to the Congo.⁴² The US officially recognized Tshisekedi's government in 1992 and encouraged Mobutu to endorse the democratic transition. Once again, however, the US did nothing to prevent or destabilize his third coup. The US still believed in the importance of a strong Zairian leader. Eventually US' declining support for Mobutu in that particular role culminated with the US' failure to assist Mobutu in the face of Kabila's imminent threat and its immediate recognition of Kabila's government.

Renewed Crisis in the Congo

The forced exile of Mobutu Sese Seko and the subsequent end to his autocratic rule did not succeed in pacifying Congolese strife. Beginning shortly after Laurent Kabila's takeover and continuing to the present, a new conflict is ripping through the heart of Africa. While the political and tribal issues underlying this war can be traced back to the colonial period, the first

⁴² Hartung and Moix.

major event directly relating to the war occurred in 1994. In 1994, in neighboring Rwanda, ongoing political and military tension between the ethnic Hutu's and Tutsi's resulted in the mass genocide of over five hundred thousand Tutsi soldiers and civilians by the Hutu controlled Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR).⁴³ When the Tutsi government regained effective control, millions of Hutu's fled into the Congo, including the FAR soldiers and Hutu extremists referred to as Interhamwe. Regrouping on the Rwandan-Zairian border, FAR and Interhamwe conducted raids into Rwanda, many of which were perpetrated on unarmed civilians. The Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) launched its own raids into Zaire in October 1996 that coincided with a growing internal Congolese turmoil.

Internal dissent in Zaire was strong in the mid-1990's and particularly strong in the east, where Lumumbist sentiment had survived and where many rebel groups had successfully hidden from Mobutu. The particular crisis in the east began in 1981 when the Zairian parliament stripped Zairian Tutsi's, collectively known as Banyamulenge, of their Zairian citizenship. In April of 1995, the transitional parliament moved to deny all refugees citizen status, thereby permanently excluding the Banyamulenge. Violence commenced between the Zairian army and local tribes and exploded in September of 1996.⁴⁴ By October of 1996, a coalition group of anti-Mobutists had formed under the banner of Alliances des Forces Democratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL). Although this was not a particularly strong military force, backing from the Rwandan military and Congolese Tutsi's trained in Rwanda provided the strength behind the front. The ADFL under Laurent Désire Kabila and backed by the Rwandan and Ugandan militaries successfully marched across Zaire from late 1996 to May of 1997. This force was

⁴³ Human Rights Watch. "Context: Background to the Conflict," *The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo* (Human Rights Watch, 2002) <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602-03.htm>; Internet; accessed January 11, 2003.

⁴⁴ George Wright, "Mobutu was Chaos," *Zmagazine*, June 1997, <http://www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/junc97wright.htm>; Internet; accessed February 5, 2003.

virtually unchallenged by Mobutu's army, which consisted of poorly paid and inadequately kept soldiers with no will to serve a dying regime. When Kabila's forces reached Kinshasa Mobutu fled into exile. He died of prostate cancer only three months later in Morocco, abandoned by western support.

The Congolese masses embraced the figure of Laurent Kabila, who in the eyes of many had delivered them from the decades of repression and poverty. One of Kabila's first political moves was to reinstate the nation's former title of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At Kabila's first mass rally after declaring himself President, he promised to hold presidential and legislative elections in April of 1999. However, Kabila's popularity was short-lived. The ADFL banned all political parties before the end of the year, arrested opposition activists on multiple occasions, and failed to curb human rights abuses perpetrated by its soldiers.⁴⁵ The hero that had replaced the enemy was quickly turning into the Congolese' recurring nightmare.

The relative military stability that ended 1997 could not sustain itself in the following year. Stark differences between Kabila and his Rwandan and Ugandan backers led to a political and military split in late July. While Rwanda and Uganda expected to establish economic spheres and buffer zones in the eastern portion of the Congo, Kabila felt that the time had come to rule the nation independent of foreign troops. Kabila moved to dismantle Rwandan control from the military, and on July 27 he demanded the removal of all foreign troops from the country. The cleavage that resulted prompted Rwanda and Uganda to support a new rebel group in eastern Congo, the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD). More troops arrived from Rwanda and Uganda, and several forces flew to Bas-Congo with the intention of capturing Kinshasa and ousting Kabila. However, Kabila enlisted troops and military support

⁴⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica Online. s.v. "Kabila, Laurent." <http://search.eb.com/eb/print?eu=368100>; Internet; accessed February 5, 2003.

from Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia and successfully defended Kinshasa. The Rwandans and the RCD retreated to the east where they successfully captured a large portion of the country. Chad also gave initial support to Kabila but pulled out within the year. The situation was further complicated in 1999 when economic disputes between Uganda and Rwanda resulted in battles between the two allies and subsequently the split of the RCD into the RCD-Goma, backed by Rwanda, and the RCD-Mouvement de Libération, backed by Uganda. On July 10, 1999, parties from the rebel groups, the Rwandan and Ugandan governments, and the Congolese government signed the Lusaka Peace Accord which called for an immediate ceasefire and the commencement of an inter-Congolese dialogue between the Congolese government, the rebel groups, unarmed political opposition and civil society organizations.

Unfortunately parties to the Lusaka Accord did not uphold the ceasefire agreement. By 2000, a prolonged stalemate had been established that pitted Congolese Tutsi rebels, backed by Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, against Congolese and refugee Hutu, and the Congolese army, backed by troops from Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia. Added to the numerous forces were locally based groups known as Mai-Mai who were initially engaged in battle to protect their native lands and villages. However, the “Mai-Mai had “no central command or uniform regulations. Some cooperate loosely with others but . . . sometimes even engage in combat with other Mai-Mai.”⁴⁶ Amongst the various groups fighting has severely affected the North and South Kivu provinces that border Uganda and Rwanda. Quite literally the war had become a melting pot of accusations, ethnic hostilities, personal revenge, and greed that by January of 2001 had resulted in the loss of over two million lives.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Context: Background to the Conflict.”

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch. *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002: Democratic Republic of Congo*. <http://hr.org/w2k2/africa3.html>; Internet; accessed March 13, 2003.

The assassination of Laurent Kabila and the transfer of power to his son Joseph dramatically altered the internal political situation in the DRC. Laurent Kabila was murdered on January 16, 2001, and Joseph immediately took control. Joseph reversed many of his father's negative policies. Since his rule began he has allowed legally registered political parties to operate relatively freely, has created a legislative assembly to draft a new constitution, has held several rounds of talks with rebel groups and civic society organizations, and has allowed UN deployment to previously restricted areas of the country.⁴⁸ However, Joseph Kabila still exercises complete executive, legislative and judicial authority; and human rights abuses continue to plague both government officials and the Congolese military. While political activity has been liberalized, journalists and opposition members are frequently arrested for their views.⁴⁹

Within the last year some positive actions have commenced that could aid in securing lasting peace in the DRC. In February of 2002, an inter-Congolese dialogue was held and several parties reached a tenuous cease-fire and power-sharing agreement. Angola and Zimbabwe withdrew the overwhelming majority of their troops from the Congo, as did Uganda and Burundi. Rwanda withdrew many of its troops but refuses to completely vacate. Unfortunately five years of war fought in the bush by guerilla combatants and organized by rebel factions cannot be easily concluded. Battles and daily massacres continue in eastern Congo and at the time of writing the political and military situation remains fluid.

⁴⁸ United States Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. "Congo Democratic Republic of the." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2002*. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18177pf.htm>; Internet; accessed April 2, 2003.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

A Humanitarian Emergency in the Congo

Due to five years of armed conflict, the refugee situation in eastern Congo and the surrounding Great Lakes region is undeniably among the worst in the world. Given the already destitute conditions of the country's infrastructure due to Mobutu's thirty-year kleptocracy, the war has completely destroyed any remaining education and health facilities. Oxfam, a human rights organization out of Britain, has recorded the following statistics:

- More than two million people are internally displaced . . . more than one million of the displaced have received absolutely no outside assistance
- At least 37 percent of the population have no access to any kind of formal health care
- 2.5 million people in Kinshasa live on less than US \$1 per day. In some parts of eastern DRC, people are living on US \$0.18 per day
- Only 45 percent of people have access to safe drinking water
- Up to 2.5 million people in the DRC have died since the outbreak of the war, many from preventable disease⁵⁰

As mentioned above, diseases that had been previously controlled by medical care have caused many of the deaths in the DRC. Families are continuously forced to live in the bush due to fear of attacks on villages or private homes. The traditionally poor farming sector of society has been decimated because families do not remain in one place long enough to grow crops. Both the rebel groups and the government recruit boys under the age of twelve as soldiers. Truly the situation is a daily hell for millions of Congolese.

In the DRC, as in many war-torn nations, women and children have suffered disproportionately from the brutal aspects of battle. Congolese women have traditionally been

⁵⁰ Oxfam. *No End in Sight: The Human Tragedy of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. <http://www.oxfam.org/uk/policy/papers/drc/drc2.htm>; Internet; accessed February 23, 2003.

treated as second-class citizens according to the Congolese Family Code but are now barely treated as humans. Human Rights Watch released a comprehensive report on the situation in the Great Lakes that documented the horrors and human rights abuses suffered daily in the region. The report points out that parties on all sides of the conflict are carrying out a war of sexual violence against civilian women and children. Specifically sexual violence is used as a weapon of war and “soldiers and combatants raped and otherwise abused women and girls as part of their effort to win and maintain control over civilians and the territory they inhabited. They attacked women and girls as representative of their communities, intending their injury and humiliation to terrorize.”⁵¹ The unchecked occurrences of rape have also led to an outbreak of AIDS; the complete extent of which will only be known in years to come. Approximately 60 percent of rebel soldiers are carrying the HIV virus and are spreading it rapidly to the civilian population.⁵²

The refugee situation is further exasperated because virtually all crimes in the war areas go unpunished, and many are unreported. The current situation is one of lawlessness where impunity for crimes is the norm. Violence has no negative repercussions on the perpetrator and now civilians not involved in the war have begun pillaging and raping simply because they know their actions will go unpunished.

Given the immense scale of tragedy and suffering the current crisis in the Congo has caused, it is shameful to see the how weakly the international community has reacted to the war. The lack of American commitment to the DRC is particularly heinous given the hand the US had

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch. “Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War.” *The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo*. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602-04.htm>; Internet; accessed January 11, 2003.

⁵² Human Rights Watch. “The Aftermath of Rape and other Forms of Sexual Violence.” *The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo*. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602-06.htm>; Internet; accessed January 11, 2003.

in the deprivation of the Congolese in the thirty years following independence and the hand it played in arming the major parties to the existing war.

To begin the United States now places restrictive conditions on the availability of aid to the DRC. Following the ascension of Laurent Kabila to power, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that international support and aid relied on Kabila's willingness to establish a democracy.⁵³ After two months of relative stability in the Congo, Albright announced a US pledge of \$10 million dollars to be meted out through a World Bank trust fund. Her speech to the Organization of African Unity promised US support for those African nations willing to undertake economic reforms to strengthen their industries and markets. In 2002, the US Department of State introduced the policy of sovereign credit ratings that will help African nations "signal to the international community their readiness to participate in the global economy by opening their books to public scrutiny."⁵⁴ Washington's check writing ability turns on whether or not the Congo will open its doors to imported western values.

Additionally the validity of American political intervention in the Congo has been severely questioned. Given the unwavering US support of Mobutu and the close military relations between the US and Rwanda and Uganda, many Congolese believe the US was or is backing the rebels.⁵⁵ The United States has frequently supported Rwanda and Uganda in exchange for helping the US battle the Islamic threat from Sudan,⁵⁶ and the US has been globally criticized for their unconditional support of the Rwandan and Ugandan presidents in the face of blatant rights abuses. The US did make minor attempts to reconcile the three countries after the

⁵³ Steven Lee Myers, "Changeover in Africa: In Washington; U.S. Accepts Kabila, but Cautions on Democracy." *New York Times*, May 20, 1997.

⁵⁴ United States Department of State. Bureau of African Affairs. "Sovereign Credit Ratings for Sub-Saharan Africa." <http://www.state.gov/p/af/scr/>; Internet; accessed April 5, 2003.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch. *Human Rights Watch World Report 1998: Democratic Republic of Congo*. <http://hr.org/worldreport/Africa-04.htm>; Internet; accessed March 13, 2003.

⁵⁶ Wright.

war initially broke out. The US sent Deputy Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice on numerous trips around the continent to help mediate the crisis, but the US was simultaneously continuing to transfer arms to the countries involved. The US lost credibility to play the peacemaker role and eventually stopped trying.⁵⁷

The Bush administration came to power in the US just as the assassination of Laurent Kabila caused Joseph to take the controls. American President Bush also called for an end to the war and put heavier pressure on Rwanda and Uganda to comply with Lusaka, but there was no significant shift of US policy in the region. Although American aid tripled to \$80 million in 2001, the events of September 11 in the United States immediately overshadowed difficulties in Africa.⁵⁸ The Bush administration has followed a narrowly focused policy since September 11 that has not included room for the Congolese crisis.

Not only has the United States offered inadequate political and monetary support to end the crisis in the Congo, it is also responsible for supplying many of the warring sides with the weapons used in battle. The military contributions of the US government to Mobutu's regime have been previously discussed; however, it is important to note that many of the weapons given to the Congolese military at that time have since been transferred to other parties. Corruption within Mobutu's army led many officers and soldiers to sell weapons for a profit, regardless of the recipient. Despite knowledge that illegal arms sales were taking place in the DRC, immediately after Kabila came to power, the US State Department called for a resumption of IMET training. The war broke out in 1998 before any action was commenced.

It is demonstrably not merely the sales of arms to the Congo that have fueled the current battles. In 1998:

⁵⁷ Hartung and Moix.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch. *Human Rights Watch World Report 2002: Democratic Republic of Congo*.

U.S. weapons to Africa totaled \$12.5 million including substantial deliveries to Chad, Namibia, and Zimbabwe . . . Uganda received nearly \$1.5 million in weaponry over the past two years, and Rwanda was importing U.S. weapons as late as 1993. U.S. military transfers . . . and IMET training to the states directly involved has totaled more than \$125 million since the end of the Cold War. All told, the U.S. has helped build the arsenals of eight of the nine governments directly involved in the Congo war.⁵⁹

While weapons do not in themselves create political havoc in the Congo, the availability and quality of weapons can determine the severity and longevity of the violence. So long as the US continues arms sales in the region, rebel factions will find the means to continue the war.

From 1997 to the present the US government's role in the Congo has significantly changed from that of an external backer to that of one whose money and support have almost completely disappeared. Private interests undoubtedly remain concerned about the economic viability of the country, but negligible efforts have been taken to actually end the fighting. Stuck in the shadows of September 11 and "falling outside of the media spotlight . . . the population of the DRC has been largely abandoned to struggle for their own survival."⁶⁰

Conclusion

The same truth holds for the Democratic Republic of Congo as for any nation on Earth - political, economic, and military struggles are undeniably a consequence of a variety of factors. No single cause can pinpoint where or when something goes irretrievably wrong. Poor decisions on the part of the DRC's leaders have taken a major toll on the country, beginning with the

⁵⁹ Hartung and Moix.

⁶⁰ Oxfam. *A Forgotten War – A Forgotten Emergency: The Democratic Republic of Congo*. <http://www.osfam.org.uk/policy/papers/drc/drc.htm>; Internet; accessed February 23, 2003.

overly rushed independence drive from Belgium and continuing to current impunity for human rights abuses. By no means have the political leaders of the Congo risen above the neocolonialist presumption of corruption and cronyism and allowed their people the “fruits of independence.”

On the several occasions where Congolese leaders have answered the call of the people; however, international forces, many led by the United States, came into play to subvert their attempts. Although an assortment of nations have played a large role in creating the Central African crisis, the United States is undeniably a guilty party in the creation of a poverty-stricken Congo. The American recognition of King Leopold’s right to a private African playground, the CIA backed plot to assassinate a democratically elected leader, military support of a corrupt and merciless despot, and now deprivation of proportional humanitarian and political aid have all shaped and continue to shape the daily lives of the Congolese. The United States has continuously maintained a relationship with the Congo that while ensuring economic access for the US, has condemned the Congolese people to lives of abject poverty and daily hopelessness. The US continues to encourage peace and development in the DRC but has refused to actively participate in ensuring these aspirations.

Despite its demonstrable goal in planting the seeds of this conflict, the U.S. has done little to acknowledge its complicity or help create a viable resolution. Official tours of the region and impressive rhetoric will not be enough to contribute to lasting peace, democratic stability, and economic development in Africa.⁶¹

⁶¹ Hartung and Moix.

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