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## Profile: Laurent Kabila

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# A mercenary for free marketeers

by Linda de Hoyos

It came as no surprise for Zaireans when Laurent Kabila, head of the "Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation" in Zaire, held a press conference to vow his commitment to "reform the Zairean government and to install a free-market economy."

Kabila also announced that his forces would not seize any mineral concessions held in Zaire by foreign companies. To the contrary, Kabila's adviser Jean Kabongo told the press Dec. 5, "Those companies will be able to operate as normal. Just as long as they pay their taxes to us, the taxation will not affect their operations. We do not want them to leave, we need them to operate the mines." Kabongo said that the Alliance is also eager to open up more diamond mines to foreign interests. "In Kasai, more diamonds must be mined, the country's mineral wealth exploited. We are going to try and throw the area open to government-sponsored mining licenses in Kasai in areas that have not yet been explored."

These pronouncements have confirmed the view of many Zaireans that Kabila is no more than a mercenary for foreign mining interests in eastern Zaire, specifically for interests such as Barrick Gold, Anglo American, and Société Générale of Belgium.

Although Kabila for years dubbed himself a Marxist, he has taken the "Damascus Road" to embrace the "magic of the marketplace," in the same fashion as his longtime associate, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. As Kabila's spokesman in Belgium, Gaetan Kakudji, explained to a reporter for *La Libre Belgique* on Nov. 5, "Our Marxism dates back to the Cold War: You had to adopt a political color according to whichever bloc was helping you. . . . The [Berlin] Wall has fallen. The important thing is to rebuild the economy. Our social project is based on a market economy."

Kakudji's admission that "political color" is secondary to whoever is "helping you," is the key to Kabila's long-standing career as a mercenary. Born in Manono in North Shaba province in Zaire, Kabila first went into action as a mercenary for the renegade Independent State of Katanga, established on July 11, 1960, by Moïse Tshombe, on behalf of Belgian mining interests. The chief instigator of the Katanga uprising was the Union Minière du Haut Katanga, which was then the world's third largest producer of copper, and the world's chief producer of cobalt. Belgian profits from Union Minière were

in excess of 3.5 billion Belgian francs in 1959. Belgium was naturally anxious that this profit not revert to any independent Congo government. The export duties paid to the Congolese government in 1959 by the Belgian company constituted 50% of the government's revenue. Once the Independent State of Katanga was established, this money went to Tshombe, to pay his mercenary forces, which included Kabila.

Later, Kabila fought the Zairean central government in the Mulele uprising in eastern Zaire in the 1960s, alongside fellow gun-for-hire Che Gueverra. As the province most rich in mineral wealth in Zaire, Shaba province has long been a target for secession. Kabila has participated in each bid—first in 1960-61; then in "Shaba I" and "Shaba II," in 1977 and 1978, respectively, when mercenaries attacked Shaba from Angola; and again in the mid-1980s. Between times, Kabila also worked as a mercenary in Angola. Among his mercenary bosses has been the famous Belgian mercenary Bob Denard.

### Nyerere 'kindergartner'

However, the reason that Kabila has been tapped again for this latest venture is because of his strong ties to the British Commonwealth countries in Africa, say well-informed Zairean sources. Kabila is a member of the "Nyerere Kindergarten," having received his political training in Tanzania under the tutelage of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, along with Ugandan President Museveni and John Garang, head of the marauding Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Even today, Kabila is known to travel on a Tanzania passport.

Kabila spent years of exile in Rwanda, Zambia, and Tanzania. After Museveni came to power in Uganda in 1986—with the help of Nyerere—Kabila was a frequent visitor to Kampala.

Sometimes the mercenary business is slow. According to various sources, during the 1970s and 1980s, Kabila would organize some "help" for himself from Moscow, by staging fake uprisings and mercenary operations in outposts in Uganda, photographing the staged incidents and placing the photos in his own ragtag newspaper for publicity.

Now, Kabila has been picked up as the "commander" for the invasion of Zaire by forces from Rwanda and Uganda. To the extent his forces have anything to do with Zaire, they are composed of Banyamulenge, who are Tutsis from Rwanda who have lived in Zaire, and *who returned to Rwanda* in 1994, to join the Rwandan Patriotic Front takeover of the country from Uganda. According to even British sources, Kabila's troops speak Kinyarwanda (the language of Rwanda), or English with Ugandan or Rwandan accents. Military discipline is supposedly modeled on that of Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Army. As the *Washington Post* noted on Nov. 2, Kagame admitted that some of his soldiers had joined the "rebel" troops in Zaire. In short, Kabila is the "Zairean" face for the Rwandan-Ugandan force that invaded Zaire in mid-October.