

London's warlords launch war to grab Congo—again

by Linda de Hoyos

Less than 16 months since the combined military forces of Rwanda and Uganda marched the career guerrilla-fighter Laurent Kabila into power in Kinshasa, the two neighbors have again invaded the Democratic Republic of Congo. On Aug. 4, days after Kabila had ordered the expulsion of Rwandan troops from Congo-Zaire, Rwandan troops crossed back into the Kivu provinces, with the proclaimed mission of aiding a rebellion of Banyamulenge (ethnic Tutsis) in eastern Congo. On Aug. 8, two columns of Ugandan troops crossed over into Kivu, with tanks, armored personnel carriers, and trucks. Troops against Kabila were also airlifted to the west coast oil region, where they are working to challenge Kabila directly in Kinshasa.

As of Aug. 13, the Rwandan-Ugandan offensive in the east, after seizing the key airport of Kisangani on Aug. 4, has been forced out of that strategic city, which Kabila's Congolese forces require if they have any hopes of retaking the Kivus. Although Ugandan troops are moving toward the town of Bunia in northeastern Congo, the airport in the border city of Bukavu is now under siege by the Congolese.

The war marks the break-up of what many East Africans derisively called the "KKK empire," the empire of Kaguta (referring to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's middle name), Rwandan Defense Minister Paul Kagame, and Kabila. Along with the outbreak of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia in June, it marks the end of the myth of the "new breed" of African leaders, patched together by London and designed to grease the skids for the British Commonwealth's financial recolonization of East and Central Africa.

The Rwandan-Ugandan assault is an effort to realize London's primary goal in the first war by Rwanda and Uganda against Congo (Zaire) in 1996-97: the clearing of the way in Congo for the full exploitation of its mineral and oil resources by British Commonwealth extractors, in the context of the obliteration of Congo's national sovereignty and any remnants of a government; and to attach eastern Congo and, likely, Katanga, by far the country's richest region, to Kampala (Uganda) and Kigali (Rwanda).

Although Kabila emerged as the head of the Alliance of Democratic Liberation Forces only because Rwandan Defense Minister Kagame and Ugandan President Museveni put him there, once in power, Kabila proved vulnerable to pressures coming from the Congolese, particularly the long-stand-

ing political opposition to deposed President Mobutu Sese Seko, to get rid of "the Tutsis"—that is, the Rwandans—who had installed him in Kinshasa. Under further counterpressures from both Rwanda and United Nations investigators into the massacres of 200,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees, Kabila became uncooperative with U.S. and British interests. In a seminar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington in June, outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Congo Donald Simpson signalled that the gauntlet had been thrown down to Kabila. Simpson shrugged off reports of Kabila's tightening dictatorship and massive human rights violations, but bitterly complained that the Kabila regime did not adequately protect minority Tutsis in the eastern provinces, and proclaimed as "unacceptable" Kabila's offer of a piddling \$1.5 million on a \$20 million payment due to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on June 15.

In mid-July, Kabila made a decisive move against the Rwandan domination of his regime, ousting the Ugandan-Rwandan James Kaberere as chief of staff, and replacing him with Celestin Kifwa, a former general of the Katangese Tigers and an officer in the Angolan Army until 1997 and his return to Congo. According to Congolese sources, the response from the Rwandans and their allies was to move toward a military coup against Kabila, taking advantage of Kabila's subsequent visit to Cuba. The coup, however, was reported, and Kabila, upon his return from Havana on July 30, ordered the remaining Rwandan troops in Congo back across the border.

On Aug. 4, Rwandan troops crossed back into Congo, quickly seizing the key border towns of Goma and Bukavu. Ugandan troops had earlier moved into North Kivu in July, allegedly on a mission to rout Ugandan insurgents from a haven in Congo. This, it is clear, was part of the overall invasion plan against Congo itself.

Rwanda has denied any involvement in the war; however, Congo has asked the United Nations Security Council to take action against the invasion. Kabila government spokesman Didier Mumenge warned that Congo would "extend the war into Rwanda" if no action were taken, a statement seconded by Justice Minister Mwenze Kongolo on Aug. 6. "This war started in Rwanda and it is going to end in Rwanda," Kongolo said. In an ominous sign of things to come, if there is no serious peace initiative for the Great Lakes Region, troops and police under Kabila's control have spent the last days

hunting down any Tutsis in the capital city, incarcerating them, and often murdering them, in revenge for their attempts to dominate Congo.

The regional conflagration

It is not expected that the Rwandan-Ugandan offensive will yield the kind of blitzkrieg victory this coalition won in its 1997 war to violently overthrow the regime of then-President Mobutu. "It will be a long war," said one well-informed Congolese.

Given Congo's strategic location in the center of Africa and its borders with nine countries, the war is already generating powerful centrifugal forces. In the eastern provinces, are combined forces from **Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi**.

In the west, there are 1,000 troops from **Angola** in Kinshasa, and it is expected that they will move to defend Kabila, as the Congo again takes its place at the center of the impending renewal of civil war in Angola between Jonas Savimbi's UNITA and the Angolan government. Troops have also arrived in Kinshasa from **Congo-Brazzaville**, whose Sassou-Nguesso government came to power last year with the aid of Angola.

Zimbabwe, the *Financial Gazette* of Harare has reported, has sent a reconnaissance team to Kinshasa, to see how the Zimbabwe Armed Forces can help Kabila. It quotes Zimbabwean Defense Minister Moven Mahachi as confirming that Kabila had sought military assistance from Zimbabwe. "We have agreed in principle to help them, although logistics to assess how this will be implemented are still to be carried out," he said.

Filthy deals

The other force on the scene are remnants of the regime of former President Mobutu, who are reportedly now taking their turn riding the Rwandan bronco to power in Kinshasa. According to several Rwandan and Congolese sources, the chief of the rebellion in the Kivu provinces, Arthur N'Zaidi Ngoma, is simply the front-man for a gang of the most powerful and most hated members of the Mobutu government led by former Prime Minister Kengo wa Dongo. These forces have joined hands with Kabila's former Foreign Minister Bizimu Karaha and former Presidential Minister Deogratias Bugera, both of Rwandan extraction, to provide the political face for "rebellion"; the military might comes from Kigali and Kampala.

It would seem a strange group to find itself allied with Rwanda, but there are ties. Kengo, born of a Tutsi mother, was a leader among numbers of Tutsis living in Kinshasa who helped fund the Rwandan Patriotic Front's drive to power. Further, Kengo, a loyalist to the dictates of the IMF, enjoyed the same kind of support in Mobutu's Zaire, from London, Paris, and circles in Washington, as have been enjoyed by Kigali and Kampala.

In the last six weeks, Kengo has travelled from Kigali to

Washington to Paris, back to Kigali, and most recently he visited Kampala. Kengo's visit to Washington, where he met with private persons, was reportedly preceded by the clandestine visit to the United States of Mobutu's politically active son, Nzanga Mobutu. It would appear that the backing for the current war against Congo thus comes not only from London, but also circles in Paris and the United States. It also reportedly has the support of mining concerns eager to get their hands on Congo's wealth.

The French magazine *Le Canard Enchaîné* has reported that Jacques Foccart, who handles African affairs for French President Jacques Chirac, met with N'Zaidi Ngoma in Paris in 1996, and otherwise implies that Paris has given its approval for N'Zaidi's position as the head of the rebellion against Kabila. However, other well-informed sources point to the roles played by Ugandan President Museveni and by Chad President Hissan Habre in brokering the marriage of convenience between Rwanda and Mobutu's inner circles. These sources say that Museveni has again presented Washington with a *fait accompli*, just as he did in the case of Kabila—as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations noted in May and June 1996, that he might as well talk to Museveni and Kagame directly, since they were clearly handing down the orders to Kabila.

Others of this group around Kengo, currently believed to be in the environs of Kigali, include: Pai Pai, former chairman of the Zairean Federal Bank; Ngambue Muamba, former Finance Minister under Kengo; Baramoto, former head of the secret police under Mobutu; and Nzimbi, former head of Mobutu's once-powerful Presidential Guard (DSP). Troops of the DSP are believed to be ensconced in Gabon, Chad, and Congo-Brazzaville.

The political grotesquerie patched together for the Rwandan-Ugandan invasion cannot be expected to boost the support of Rwanda and Uganda in the region or in Congo. The Congolese people, whom Kabila is now trying to mobilize in a national war against invasion, will not willingly accept the worst of the Mobutu regime which had been so oppressive. The Angolan government also will not relish the prospect of the return of those forces that sustained Savimbi's UNITA.

Left out of the equation are the patriots of Congo, notably including former Foreign Minister Kamanda wa Kamanda, former Prime Minister Etienne Tshesikedi (who had been maneuvered out previously by Kengo's overseas friends), and other forces in the military in exile who want democracy in Congo and the opportunity for economic development. Tshesikedi declared that the new war against Congo signified a "palace revolution," a falling-out of thieves, that will not change the determination of the Congolese people to remain as one nation and to fight for democratic rule. But war, carried out by constantly shifting partners and coalitions, is the order of the day from European capitals and complicit circles in Washington.