

EIRFeature

U.S. Policy Debacle Brings Death to Millions in Congo

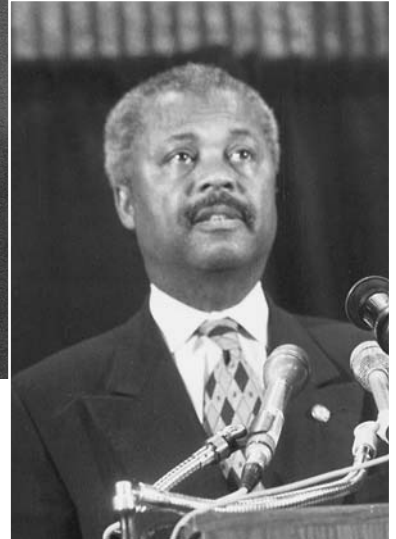
by Linda de Hoyos

For the third time in a year, hostilities broke out again in the city of Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.) between the armed forces of Rwanda and Uganda on June 6. In six days of fighting, the two militaries levelled the Congolese city of Kisangani, killing more than 500 Congolese civilians.

The fighting between the two former allies is the most lurid sign to date that the post-Cold War policy for Africa architected by British intelligence and allied American interests, is in ruins. Since 1990, when Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni sponsored the invasion of Rwanda by Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front, the militaries of Rwanda and Uganda have allied to invade the Congo twice. First in 1996-97, to impose Laurent Kabila as President, and again in August 1998, to seize the eastern Congo as their own zone of interest and to loot the Congo of its diamonds, gold, and timber on behalf of their British Commonwealth financial sponsors. This invasion has been backed by the so-called donor community, diplomatically led by the United States. In Washington, the chief enforcers for this policy to annex eastern Congo to Rwanda and Uganda have been Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice, Rep. Donald Payne (D-N.J.) of the House Africa Subcommittee, and Payne contributor Roger Winter of the U.S. Committee for Refugees. Now, Museveni and Kagame are locked in bitter battle over the division of the spoils, fighting for Kisangani, the diamond and gold depot of the region, completely out of anyone's political control. The London-Washington policy for Africa, centered on the Uganda-Rwanda partnership, is a debacle.

The IRC Report: 1.7 Million 'Excess' Deaths

This debacle has brought death to millions of Congolese people. On June 8, as the battles between the Rwandan and Ugandan militaries were raging in Kisangani, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a long-standing relief agency that operates under contract from the U.S. government, reported the results of a mortality



Among the architects of the U.S. policy disaster, left to right: U.S. Ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice, and Rep. Donald Payne (D-N.J.)

survey it had conducted in eastern Congo. The survey showed that there have been 1.7 million *excess* deaths in the eastern Congo provinces since August 1998, when Rwanda and Uganda invaded the country. (See below for excerpts.) This is a conservative estimate; it does not take into account the millions of Congolese who have left the region and are living in terrible conditions in refugee camps in Tanzania, Zambia, and the Central African Republic. The IRC survey, led by epidemiologist Dr. Les Roberts from April 18 to May 27 of this year, visited 1,011 households containing 7,339 residents, who reported 606 deaths of members of their families since Jan. 1, 1999. “We were dumbfounded to find that fully 7% of these people’s families had died in the last six months,” said Dr. Roberts. “The loss of life in the Congo has been staggering,” said IRC president Reynold Levy. “It’s as if the entire population of Houston was wiped off the face of the earth in a matter of months.” The survey found that the “displacements and economic hardships induced by armed combatants [in the region] play either a direct or an indirect role in all of the excess deaths described.”

The information gathered by the IRC survey showed that:

- 1.7 million *excess* deaths or more have occurred in the last 22 months as a result of the fighting in the D.R.C. This equates to 77,000 deaths per month.
- Women and children constituted 47% of the violent deaths reported.
- The overall mortality rate during the year 2000 is higher

than it was in 1999.

“Thus,” the IRC survey concludes, “the monthly death toll of 77,000 attributed to this war shows no sign of declining. An estimated 34%, or 26,000, of these monthly fatalities are children younger than five years of age. *The acceptance of the status quo in D.R.C., or the tolerance of slow diplomatic solutions, implies an acceptance of these ongoing deaths*” (emphasis added).

The IRC report has been largely hidden from public view, despite a report having been filed on the survey by Associated Press. The lack of political attention to this exposure of a holocaust in the Congo is yet further proof of the “acceptance of these deaths,” and many millions more to come—under the current policy guidelines emanating from the U.S. State Department.

The Lusaka Hoax

In response to the wanton destruction of Kisangani, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan on June 13 asked the Security Council to impose sanctions on both Uganda and Rwanda if they do not pull their troops out of the Congo immediately. Annan’s demand contravenes the Lusaka Accords, which were signed in July 1999. Under those accords, which were midwived by U.S. diplomats, Uganda and Rwanda are permitted to remain in the Congo, until their “security concerns” are met. The accords called for a United Nations peacekeeping force and a Joint Military Commission

FIGURE 1

The Great Lakes region



composed of the armies of Uganda, Rwanda, the D.R.C., and those armies that were defending the Kabila government, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia, to militarily disarm any insurgencies in the region. Only after these groups have been militarily neutralized—that is, defeated—would Rwanda and Uganda be expected to remove their troops from eastern Congo. Numbers of the groups on the list of non-signers who are to be disarmed, are not even in the Congo!

In reality, the Lusaka Accord put the donor community imprimatur on the continuing annexation of eastern Congo and its looting at the hands of the Ugandan, Rwandan, and Burundian militaries. The Lusaka hoax continued to be perpetrated even after Rwanda and Ugandan troops began fighting for Kisangani last August—an event which blared the fact that the major purpose of the invasion was not “security,” but the seizure of the Congo’s gold, diamonds, and timber!

The latest round of bloodshed in Kisangani forestalled the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force to the region, to be composed largely of South African troops.

Annan’s call for the immediate withdrawal of Rwanda and Uganda was long overdue, but was met with stalling and obfuscation by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke. In his remarks to the Security Council on June 15, Holbrooke, as reported by the U.S. Department of State on June 19, said:

“The withdrawal of all foreign forces from D.R.C. is

still mandatory;

“There is an urgent need for all parties to abandon support to all non-signatories of the Lusaka Accord, especially the ex-FAR Interhamwe [misnomer for Rwandan Hutus who oppose the Kagame regime];

“Discussing the withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan forces does not lessen the D.R.C.’s obligation to participate in the national dialogue;

“Rwanda and Uganda have legitimate security concerns.”

In short, he repeated the mantra of the Lusaka hoax, thus showing the world that the United States stands fully behind the continuing terrorist occupation of eastern Congo by Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. The security of the 20 million Congolese living in this occupied area is of no concern.

In his speech, Holbrooke also paid direct tribute to the British UN Security Council chairman in December, Sir Jeremy Greenstock and Ambassador Eldon, in starting this process.

Thus, the United States and Britain succeeded in forestalling the sanctions the UN Secretary General called for—even in the face of the news that 1.7 million Congolese have died under the last 22 months of Rwandan-Ugandan occupation! The Security Council resolution of June 16 on the Congo repeats the content of the Lusaka agreement, demands the withdrawal of all forces from Kisangani, and states that the withdrawal of Ugandan and Rwandan troops from the Congo must be “reciprocated by the other parties in conformity with the timetable.” The deployment of the peacekeeping force is put forward as an option, but its immediate deployment appears to be destroyed by the fighting in Kisangani and by the blocking in the U.S. Congress of the funds for it.

Unless the international community forces the withdrawal of the invaders—Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi—from the Congo, the war can be expected to continue.

That Ugandan-Rwandan war against the Congolese people continues to be financed by the Western “donor community.” On May 3, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank approved Uganda as the first African nation to win immediate debt relief in a package that will give the country \$1.3 billion in debt forgiveness. The same day, the Italian government announced another \$99 million in debt forgiveness for Kampala. Only two weeks before, President Museveni was reported by the Nairobi *East African* on April 24 to be shopping for multi-rocket launchers, tanks, and anti-aircraft rockets in Belarus. According to a British weapons analyst Andrew McLean, Britain has been selling arms to Uganda, some of which are suspected as being used in the Congo, since there is no surveillance of the British end-user certificates.

And within eastern Congo itself, the British Commonwealth financial interests of Banro Resources, Barrick Gold, and Lonrho are directly present in the funnelling of the region’s vast mineral wealth out of Africa through the smuggling operations of the Rwandan and Ugandan militaries—