

Congo Resource Wars

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This report examines the current war and genocide in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which started in the mid-1990s, placing emphasis on the roles of Western covert operations, corporations and the plundering of resources that has resulted.

War in the Congo

King Leopold's War for Rubber

Nearly 125 years ago, during the beginning of the European 'Scramble for Africa', European empires competed with each other to take over Africa and plunder it for its resources. The King of Belgium at the time, King Leopold II, sought to take control over the Congo, as during the time,  "the demand for rubber increased dramatically," and the "Congo contained wild rubber trees which could be harvested immediately to meet the spiraling demand." [1] This was achieved by forcing African males to work by taking "their families hostage until a certain amount of rubber was harvested," and they would, "chop off the hands of Africans who failed to meet their quotas or who resisted European demands for more rubber." All of this resulted in "up to 10 million people [who] died through a combination of murder, starvation, exhaustion, disease and a plummeting birth rate." [2]

The Congo Civil War: 1996-1998

In 1996, two years after the massive killings in Rwanda, a new conflict arose, which today is still ongoing, and has in the last 12 years resulted in millions of deaths. The Congo, which before went by the name Zaire, was invaded in 1996 by Rwandan troops under the orders of Tutsi President Paul Kagame. He argued "that the Hutus across the border posed a threat to Rwandan security." [3] Kagame's army, "massacred thousands of Hutu noncombatants who had taken refuge in The Congo when Kagame came to power" in Rwanda. Burundi, which also had a Tutsi government, and Uganda sent troops in 1997 to aid a Congolese rebel group under Laurent Kabila, who was attempting to overthrow Zaire's dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko." [4]

Installing a New Puppet

It was in 1997 that Mobutu was overthrown, which led to Kabila, a staunch US ally, being the new iron-fisted leader. In 1998, Kabila had Rwandan and Ugandan troops leave the Congo, however, Rwanda "again invaded, claiming that it needed to pursue Hutus threatening its security," and Uganda, too, invaded under the auspices of fighting Ugandan rebel groups which were based in the Congo. [5] Uganda and Rwanda wanted to control the Eastern Congo area along the borders of their countries, while Kabila looked to other African nations to aid in taking control of the entire country.

The West and the War

Financing Both Sides

It was at this time that the United States began funding both sides of the conflict, giving money to both President Kabila's Congolese Army and the rival Congolese Rally for Democracy. Increased conflict destabilized the country and has made it more susceptible to foreign influence and control.[6]

Covert Western Military Involvement

US Special Forces that had trained Kagame and the RPF, had, since 1994, taken on the task of training Kagame's "Rwandan Patriotic Army" (RPA), in such tactics as, "counterinsurgency, combat, psychological operations, and instructions about how to fight in Zaire." [7] It was revealed that, "In August, before ordering the 1996 invasion, Kagame visited the Pentagon to get US approval," and that, "Rwandan and Ugandan troops who were trained at Fort Bragg [in the United States] participated in the 1996-97 invasions to topple Mobutu." [8] It was even reported that, "U.S. soldiers (probably Special Forces) were sighted in the company of Rwandan troops in Congo on July 23 and 24, 1998 - about a week before the "official" [second] Rwandan invasion of Congo." [9]

King Leopold, Inc.

During King Leopold's plunder of the Congo, "rubber-agents", acting on behalf of both the Belgian Empire and rubber interests, actively engaged in the mass murder, torture and abuse of Africans.[10] Modern day rubber-agents still exist. "Military contractor [Kellogg] Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, reportedly built a military base on the Congolese/Rwandan border, where the Rwandan army has trained. Likewise, The Bechtel Corporation provided satellite maps and reconnaissance photos to Kabila so that he could "monitor the movements of Mobutu's troops."

Bechtel is a very secretive contractor with individuals such as Reagan's Secretary of State George Schultz on its board of directors, and as a legal counsel, former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger.[11] It should be noted, that during this time, Dick Cheney was the CEO of Halliburton, which owned KBR. It was further corroborated by an independent human rights investigator that, "the Pentagon was directly involved, 1996-1998, along with the private U.S. military companies Military Professional Resources Incorporated, and Kellogg, Brown and Root (Halliburton)" [12]

Plundering the Resources

Profiting from Genocide

The Congo is extremely rich in natural resources. Rwanda, Uganda, and the West, have all struggled to profit from the Country's wealth in part through destabilization campaigns.

Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni's brother, Salim Saleh, leased three airlines "to the Ugandan military to fly troops and supplies into Congo. With the cooperation of Ugandan army officers, Congolese rebel groups, and private entrepreneurs, Saleh ensured that the planes returned to Uganda loaded with gold, timber, and coffee." During the same time, though Rwanda had no diamond mines, "its diamond exports increased from 166 carats in

1998 to 30,500 in 2000.”[13]

Courting Corporations

Congolese rebel leader Kabila, before becoming President, “sent a representative to Toronto early in 1997 to speak to mining companies about ‘investment opportunities’,” and, “In May 1997, American Mineral Fields (AMF) cut a \$1 billion deal with Kabila immediately after his forces captured Goma.” The negotiations were undertaken by “Kabila’s US-trained finance minister,” who gave “AMF exclusive exploration rights to zinc, copper, and cobalt mines in the area. Mike McMurrough, a friend of US President Bill Clinton, was the chair of AMF.”[14] Another large Western mining interest is Barrick Gold Corporation, a Canadian mining company, whose board of directors includes such individuals as former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Clinton adviser Vernon Jordan and had as an adviser to the company, George Herbert Walker Bush.[15]

Other corporate beneficiaries include Canada’s Heritage Oil and Gas, which “arrived with the Ugandan and Rwandan militaries when they invaded Congo in 1998,” Citibank NY gave a \$5 million loan to “the financial arm of RCD-Goma (the Congolese militia allied with Rwanda),” and, “As Rwanda and Uganda continued to enrich themselves with the plunder, they received praise from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for increasing their gross domestic product.”[16]

The Congo also has extensive petroleum reserves, as the first oil refinery in the Congo had its crude oil supplied by, “Shell, Mobil, Petrofina and Texaco,” and, “Recent onshore exploitation near the refinery involves Total, Pan Ocean Energy (UK) and Addax Petroleum (Canada).”[17]

Genocide in the Congo

Keith Harmon Snow, an independent human rights investigator and war correspondent for Survivors Rights International, Genocide Watch and the United Nations, recently reported that in October 1996 there were at least 1.5 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees in eastern Zaire [Congo]. The full-scale invasion began more formally when the Rwandan Patriotic Army and Ugandan Patriotic Defense proxy forces shelled the refugee camps, killing hundreds of thousands in a “clear case of genocide.”[18]

The same report also noted that the death toll in the Congo has reached heights matching the numbers of Belgian King Leopold’s genocide in the Congo over 100 years ago, with “more than 10 million dead in Congo since 1996, and millions more in Uganda and Rwanda.” It attributed the deaths as being “the products of the Bush-Clinton-Bush administrations.”[19]

Concluding Remarks

In April of 2001, Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney held a hearing on Western involvement in the plunder of Africa, in which she stated, “at the heart of Africa’s suffering is the West’s, and most notably the United States’, desire to access Africa’s diamonds, oil, natural gas, and other precious resources . . . the West, and most notably the United States, has set in motion a policy of oppression, destabilization and tempered, not by moral principle, but by a ruthless desire to enrich itself on Africa’s fabulous wealth.”[20] It would appear King Leopold II is back in the Congo, or did he ever leave?

Notes

[1] Robert O'Brien and Marc Williams, Global Political Economy: Evolution and Dynamics. Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2007: page 94

[2] Ibid, page 95

[3] Steven Hiatt, ed., A Game As Old As Empire: The Secret World of Economic Hit Men and the Web of Global Corruption. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc: 2007, page 94

[4-5] Ibid

[6] Ibid, page 98

[7-9] Ibid, page 99

[10] Robert O'Brien and Marc Williams, Global Political Economy: Evolution and Dynamics. Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2007: pages 94-95

[11] Steven Hiatt, Op cit, page 99

[12] Keith Harmon Snow, The War that did not make the Headlines: Over Five Million Dead in Congo? Global Research: January 31, 2008:
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=7957>

[13] Steven Hiatt, Op cit, page 95

[14] Ibid, page 99

[15] Ibid, pages 99-100

[16] Ibid, page 100

[17-19] Keith Harmon Snow, Op cit.

[20] John Perkins, The Secret History of the American Empire. Penguin Group: New York, 2007: page 257-258

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